

# Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

## Chapter 3

Escorting the Bride from Hale Manor Elowen paused, genuinely bewildered. "What did you say, Your Highness?" Alaric's voice was cold, edged with unmistakable mockery. "Since you've announced your intention to marry my uncle, there's no reason for you to keep clinging to me. That kind of persistence only makes me sick." She froze for a second time-then finally understood. So that was what he thought. In her previous life, moments like this had happened countless times.

She had always known she should explain herself, yet fear held her back-fear of saying the wrong thing, fear that he would only despise her more. So she stayed silent, again and again. But now? She no longer cared. How he saw her no longer mattered at all. Elowen pressed her lips together briefly before speaking. "Your Highness, I have never intended to cling to you. At the family banquet, I made myself very clear to His Majesty. I do not have feelings for you. Not in the slightest." Alaric raised a brow. "Oh?"

Then today-did you simply get lost and wander here by coincidence, only to run into me?" "I was summoned to the palace by Her Majesty," Elowen replied calmly. "Even if you don't believe me, you should at least believe Hilda." Alaric paused, then turned his gaze aside. Hilda stepped forward with a courteous smile. "Her Majesty did indeed summon Lady Elowen." Hilda had served the Queen for many years. There was no reason for her to lie on Elowen's behalf. So Elowen truly hadn't come here for him. A frown creased Alaric's brow, irritation creeping into his chest.

"I will soon be marrying Duke Cassian," Elowen continued evenly. "Her Majesty is overseeing the wedding arrangements. Today, she invited me to the palace to choose the wedding date. If Your Highness still doubts this, you are welcome to go inside and ask Her Majesty yourself." When she finished speaking, Elowen felt unexpectedly light-as though something heavy had finally lifted from her chest. Alaric, however, felt anything but relieved. He stared straight at her. "My uncle has been unconscious for a long time. The physicians say he may never wake in this lifetime.

If you marry him, you'll spend the rest of your life alone." Elowen thought quietly. In my previous life, I married you-and I was alone until the day I died. Her expression didn't change. She even curved her lips into a faint smile. "Thank you for your concern, Your Highness. But as I said before, I have admired Duke Cassian for a long time. As long as I can be by his side, I don't mind whether he's awake or unconscious." Alaric's expression darkened instantly. Elowen turned to Hilda. "Let's go. We shouldn't keep Her Majesty waiting." Alaric stayed where he was, watching her walk away.

For a fleeting moment, another image surfaced before his eyes. Elowen-shy, hesitant, her eyes lowered as she spoke softly: "Your Highness, I'm very happy to be able to marry you." The image rippled, distorted like water-and vanished. A dull, heavy ache spread through his chest, as though something deeply important were slipping away at that very moment. Inside Rose Hall, the Queen had been waiting for some time. When she saw Elowen, she immediately put on a gentle smile-pleasant, yet shallow, lacking any real warmth. "Elowen, you've finally arrived," she said, beckoning her over.

"Come, sit beside me." Elowen did not approach at once. Instead, she performed a proper, formal curtsy. "Your Majesty." The Queen smiled on. "You're always so well-mannered. Why did you come alone?" Elowen understood perfectly what she meant-but pretended not to. Her voice was subdued as she answered, "There's only me left at Hale Manor. There was no one to accompany me." The Queen's gaze flickered for an instant before softening again. "Enough of sad matters. Come-take a look at the dates." On the table lay a parchment with two dates written neatly upon it. The third of June.

The nineteenth of October. October nineteenth. The day Elowen had married Alaric in her previous life. They had called it an auspicious day. And yet, a torrential storm had poured down without mercy. The wedding procession had been soaked through, the ceremony miserable and humiliating. Later, people whispered that Elowen was unlucky. Some even claimed she would bring disaster upon the royal family. "In my opinion," the Queen said, "the nineteenth of October is the better choice. Why not choose that?" "Thank you, Your Majesty," Elowen replied with a gentle smile.

"But I believe the third of June is better." "It's already April," the Queen said. "Isn't June third a bit rushed?" "It is," Elowen admitted. "But I wish to marry Duke Cassian as soon as possible." As she spoke, she allowed just a trace of shyness to surface-subtle, perfectly timed. At that moment, Alaric entered the hall. When her words reached his ears, his steps faltered slightly. His jaw tightened without him

realizing it. Is she truly that eager to marry? "Alaric is here as well," the Queen said pleasantly. "Perfect timing.

Elowen wishes to marry on the third of June, but I find it far too soon. October would be better. Come-help persuade her. She's always listened to you since she was young." Alaric shot Elowen a glance, his voice sharp and cold. "If she's so eager to marry my uncle, why spoil her good fortune? If the wedding were delayed until October, she might start complaining behind our backs." The words were openly cutting. One might have expected Elowen to feel embarrassed or wounded. Instead, she smiled. "His Highness is right," she said calmly. "Then the wedding will be held on the third of June.

I hope Your Highness will honor us by attending the celebration." Alaric's gaze darkened dangerously. He curled his lips slightly, then turned to the Queen. "I still have matters to attend to. I'll take my leave." "Very well," the Queen replied. "Don't overwork yourself. Rest early." Alaric gave a perfunctory response and left. Elowen was about to excuse herself as well when the Queen suddenly spoke again. "Oh-Elowen." She turned back. "You know Duke Cassian remains unconscious," the Queen said thoughtfully. "He won't be able to come to Hale Manor to escort the bride.

Someone must stand in for him. By custom, that person must be unmarried. I was thinking-perhaps Alaric?" Elowen shook her head without hesitation. "His Highness bears many responsibilities. I wouldn't dare trouble him. It would be better to choose someone else from the royal family. Leonhart would be suitable-he is unmarried, twenty years old, and of age." If Alaric escorted her, he would only find more opportunities to humiliate her. The Queen nodded faintly. "Very well." On the way back to Hale Manor, memories from Elowen's childhood resurfaced.

Her grandfather had once been Alaric's instructor in riding and archery, and he often brought her along when he entered the palace. In that sense, she and Alaric truly had grown up together. Once, they shared everything. They slipped out of the palace to play, laughed without restraint. One year, they encountered a runaway carriage in the street. Elowen pushed Alaric aside in time, saving his life-but she was knocked to the ground. Her left knee struck the stone road hard, leaving her badly bruised and unable to walk.

Back then, Alaric had been frantic, sweat streaming down his face as he clutched her hand. "I'll take care of you in the future, I promise!" he had said. When had he started pulling away from her? When had affection turned into disdain? She couldn't remember. In her previous life, she had tortured herself over that question-crying alone through countless nights. In the end, not only did her injured knee ache

constantly, her eyesight deteriorated as well. In dim light, she could barely see. This time, she chose to let it go. There was no need to dwell on why Alaric came to hate her.

In this world, aside from life and death, everything else was trivial. As the wedding day drew nearer, preparations were in full swing at the palace, Duskmoor Manor, and Hale Manor alike. Living in the Crown Prince's Wing, Alaric could hardly avoid the sight of crimson decorations everywhere. After several days of mounting irritation, he finally stepped out of his chamber for some air. At that moment, a visitor arrived at the Wing. His cousin-Leonhart Valebourne, the eldest legitimate son of Duke Roland. They met in the study. "You're here for something?" Alaric asked casually.

Leonhart grinned broadly. "Well, Uncle Cassian is getting married, isn't he? Her Majesty said she needs to select someone from the royal kin to escort the bride from Hale Manor." admin