

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 301: No Turning Back

Alistair lowered his voice. "You don't have to approach her like that," he said calmly. She glanced at him, her face composed. Then, in a collected manner, he asked, "You think that was harsh? Do you want to hear what harsh really sounds like?" Elspeth sat upright in her chair, every movement controlled. She spoke slowly and clearly, "Alistair, I've made up my mind. I want us to separate." Alistair froze, staring at her as if he had misheard something impossible. "What... what did you just say? Elspeth, say that again?" Elowen felt a knot tighten in her chest. She stepped forward, gently taking Elspeth's hand, and spoke softly. "Aunt, please don't say something you might regret just because you're upset." She had witnessed such situations before. Anger often led people to say irreversible words. Words could inflict deeper wounds than anything else, and even after the anger subsided, the damage often lingered. Elspeth squeezed Elowen's hand firmly, making her resolution unmistakably clear. "Ella, I'm not speaking out of anger. I've thought this through for many days and nights."

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"Elspeth..." Alistair finally spoke again, his voice strained. "Is this because I haven't been around lately? I thought we both needed time to cool off and reflect. I've been trying to figure out the best way to handle everything, especially arranging things for Lydia and Nina so that you wouldn't have to worry about them." Before he could finish, Lydia suddenly dropped to her knees as if her strength had given out. Tears streamed down her pale face as she cried, "Elspeth! If our decades-long marriage is falling apart because Nina and I have nowhere else to go, I'd never forgive myself!" She wiped her tears frantically, her voice growing more hysterical. "This

is all my fault, every bit of it! I've already decided to take Nina and leave so you'll never have to worry about us again. And if that's still not enough..." Her voice trembled as she forced herself to continue. "Then I'll pay for everything with my life!" Before anyone could react, she suddenly pushed herself up and hurled toward the sharp edge of the table.

"Lydia!" Alistair reacted on pure instinct. He rushed forward, wrapping his arms tightly around her waist, pulling her back just in time. Lydia struggled in his arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Alistair, let go of me! Just let me go! If I'm gone, Elspeth won't blame you anymore! You two can go back to the way things used to be!" "Enough!" Alistair snapped, his voice rough as he tightened his grip. Lydia had no strength left to fight him and collapsed against his chest, crying helplessly.

Elspeth watched the scene in silence. A faint, bitter smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. "See that, Ella?" she said quietly. "Isn't this almost ridiculous?" Elowen frowned. She couldn't find anything amusing about the situation. "Why keep putting on this act?" Elspeth's voice turned sharp as a blade. "Lydia, you might not know me well, but you can ask your dear Alistair. When I say I want a separation, I mean it. I have never once gone back on a decision I've made." The color slowly drained from Alistair's face. He knew she was telling the truth.

The calmer Elspeth sounded, the more serious she actually was. After a moment, he released Lydia. "Elspeth, we've been married for decades. We have two sons together. Why allow Lydia and Nina, two helpless relatives, to come between us? Besides, there has never been anything improper between Lydia and me. Nothing at all." Elspeth's voice grew even colder. "Maybe nothing has happened. But Alistair, your attention, your affection, and all that misplaced pity of yours aren't with me anymore." Her gaze was steady as she continued. "How often did you read

to our sons when they were little? Did you ever sit with them patiently and teach them how to write the way you do with Nina? You remember every treat Nina likes, but do you even remember which pastry makes our son sick every single time?" Her eyes swept across both Alistair and Lydia. "Your heart left this marriage a long time ago." Then she gave a quiet, humorless laugh. "And right now, while you're begging me not to leave, are you still thinking about wiping the tears off Lydia's face?" Alistair's composure finally cracked. He stood there, pale and speechless. A strange calm slowly settled over Elspeth.

"I used to believe I couldn't live without you," she said. "But these past few days at Duskmoor Manor, without all that resentment and suspicion hanging over me, I realized something." She paused briefly. "I was happier living alone than I've been in years." Her voice remained steady as she continued. "And the more I thought about it, the more I understood something else. I'm not young anymore. I don't want to spend the rest of my life trapped in misery, stuck between a husband who doesn't care and a cousin who never stops playing the victim." Her expression softened slightly, though her eyes remained clear. "If my mother could see the way I've been living, swallowing my pride, lying awake night after night because of anger and humiliation, she would be heartbroken too."

Chapter 302 The Final Break Awakening Love to Be His Duchess 16% Finished It sounded as if Elspeth were announcing something perfectly ordinary. "Well, it's pretty simple. Let's settle this right here at Duskmoor Manor. We sign the separation papers, after that we each go our own way. Maybe we'll both be happier once everything is over." and The moment she finished speaking, her matron stepped forward and carefully produced two neatly copied separation papers.

Only then did Elowen realize what had been happening. For the past few days, Elspeth had seemed relaxed and cheerful, almost unusually so. While everyone else thought she was simply enjoying her stay, she had quietly made a decision that would change everything. She had even prepared the separation papers ahead of time. And Elowen had not noticed a thing. Alistair stared at the thin sheets of paper. He stood there motionless, unable to take a step forward. After a long moment, he lifted his head and looked at Elspeth. Desperation roughened his voice. "Elspeth... can't we talk this through?"

Please don't end things like this. If you're angry, yell at me, hit me if you want, just don't walk away like this." He was a tall man with a solid build, but at that moment his eyes were bloodshot, the rims dark with strain. Elspeth's voice was cold. "I'm not about to slap you, Alistair. That would only make me look like some hysterical shrew. Every time you pushed me until I lost my temper, somehow I ended up looking like the crazy one. I was the one people said had a bad temper. I was the violent one.

I'm done letting that happen." "But-" He tried to say more, but Elspeth cut him off immediately. "Just sign it, Alistair, don't make me lose the last bit of respect I still have left for you." His jaw tightened and he stepped back. "No. I'm not signing it. Elspeth, just take a few days to calm down. I'll sort everything out, and then I'll come get you myself." A His last words came out through clenched teeth and carried the faint edge of a warning. He gave Elowen a brief nod of courtesy before turning and walking out, Elspeth glared at his retreating back, her whole body shaking with anger.

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"Pathetic. Is that really what a man is supposed to be?" Alistair paused briefly at the far end of the hall, but he did not turn around. A moment later he disappeared from sight, with Lydia

hurrying after him. 1/3 12:24 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 302 The Final Break On the carriage ride back, Lydia shifted closer to Alistair and carefully studied his face. She hesitated for a moment before speaking. 16%. Finished "Alistair," she said gently, "she made herself pretty clear today. Why won't you sign the separation papers? Honestly, it might be better for both of you.

Sometimes letting go is the only way to move on." Alistair looked exhausted. "We've been married for decades, Lydia. I can't just throw the marriage away like it means nothing. We have two sons who are already grown and living their own lives. If we separate now, what do you think people will say? What kind of man will they think I am?" For just a moment, something sharp flickered in Lydia's eyes, a trace of resentment and jealousy that vanished almost immediately. "I know this must be difficult for you," she said softly. "But your wife seemed completely determined today.

I doubt she'll change her mind. If she really means it... does that mean it's over between you two?" Alistair let out a long sigh. "I don't know. She's always been stubborn. Once she decides something, she rarely changes her mind. If she's truly made up her mind... what could I possibly do to stop her?" He could not continue speaking. He closed his eyes and turned his face away. Lydia watched him quietly, her mind racing. She muttered under her breath. "As long as she doesn't walk away with the fortune..." Alistair did not catch what she said. He raised his tired, bloodshot eyes.

"What did you say?" She immediately smiled, looking every bit like a caring cousin. "Nothing important. I just mean that after so many year together, of course you still care about her. Let's go back and talk it through carefully. Maybe we can figure out a way to win her back. She might still change her mind." Alistair looked completely drained. He simply murmured, "Mm," then

leaned his head against the carriage wall and stayed silent. Back at the manor, Alistair made up his mind to find another place for Lydia and her daughter to live.

If he moved them out and cut that connection completely, perhaps Elspeth would understand how serious he was. Maybe then she would soften and come back, Meanwhile, Lydia returned to the small cottage where she and Nina were temporarily staying. Inside, Nina sat by the window practicing her handwriting, carefully tracing letters across a sheet of paper. When she heard Lydia enter, she immediately looked up. "Mom, did Aunt Elspeth come back yet?" ||| 2/3 12:24 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 302 The Final Break Lydia reached over and flicked her daughter's forehead. "You silly girl.

Why are you still waiting for her to come back?" Nina winced and rubbed her forehead. "But... Aunt Elspeth is always nice to me..." "Oh really? So she's nice to you, and I'm not?" Lydia scoffed. Nina fell silent. She was too young to explain it clearly, ut she could feel the difference. Elspeth could be loud and overwhelming at times, but Nina always felt safe around her. With her mother, things felt different. Whenever Lydia was near, Nina found herself shrinking into silence without even realizing it. O 2.4K 3/3 16% admin

Chapter 303 None Left Unscathed "They'll probably end up divorcing," Lydia said after a while. For once, the meek softness that usually filled her eyes was gone. A flicker of excitement shone there instead. Nina looked confused. "Divorcing? What does that mean?" Lydia gently stroked her daughter's hair. 16% Finished "It means that once they separate, I'll be the lady of Havenstead Manor. And you, sweetheart, won't be some poor cousin living in someone else's house anymore. You'll be the young lady of the manor, with money, status, everything that comes with it." Nina blinked.

"Oh..." Lydia looked at her daughter's blank expression with a mix of amusement and irritation.

"You really are a silly girl. Havenstead Manor is full of wealth and comfort. Once we take control, you and I will never have to worry about money again. We'll have more than we could ever spend." But when she remembered Alistair's hesitation earlier, the smile slowly faded from her face. Clearly, he did not really want the divorce. Which meant she would have to push things along herself. A thought suddenly came to her mind, and her eyes lit up.

She walked to her vanity, opened a hidden drawer, and took out a small object she kept carefully hidden. Back at Duskmoor Manor, Elowen followed her aunt all the way to her rooms. Several times she wanted to say something, hoping to persuade Elspeth to reconsider. After all, Elspeth had been married to Alistair for decads, while her stay at Duskmoor Manor had only lasted a few days. What if she regretted such a sudden decision later? The world was rarely kind to women who left their mariages. Just imagining the gossip was enough to make Elowen's stomach tighten.

At the same time, she did not want to interfere with Elspeth's decision. She felt completely torn and had no idea how to begin. Elspeth broke the silence first. "Ella, do you know why I married Alistair in the first place?" Elowen thought for a moment. "Because he was the Marquess of Havenstead? The family had a respected title and a decent reputation." Elspeth chuckled. ||| 1/3 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 303 None Left Unscathed 16%2 Finished "Oh, silly Ella. There are plenty of lords and nobles in this world. Most of them only look impressive on the surface.

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Behind those grand titles, some of them can barely afford to pay their servants." She rested her chin on her hand as her gaze drifted into the past. "Havenstead Manor was exactly like that when I first married into the family. "Even before the wedding, the estate was already struggling.

Officially they said they were cutting expenses and dismissing servants to save money, but the truth was much simpler. There just wasn't enough money to pay them. "The marquess was dying and burning through money on medicine, while Alistair was still studying for the imperial examinations.

Every day was a struggle." Elowen asked softly, "Then why did you marry him, Aut?", Elspeth shrugged. "Because Alistair was incredibly handsome." "You've never seen what he was like when he was younger," she said with a faint smile. "He looked as though he'd stepped straight out of a painting. Tall, sharp-eyed effortlessly elegant. The first time we met was at the polo grounds. He kept complimenting my riding the entire afternoon. After that, he treated me as if I were the center of his world. If I'd told him to ride east, he wouldn't even have considered going west. Tell me honestly...

how many young women could have resisted someone like that?" She smiled faintly. "I certainly couldn't." To be fair, Alistair was still a handsome man even now. Elowen nodded. "That makes sense. Anyone would fall for that." She hesitated before continuing, "But now he has a title and an official salary. Life at Havenstead Manor seems comfortable enough." Elspeth laughed quietly, though there was clear irony in her voice. "You think his salary covers even a fraction of the household expenses?

There are dozens of mouths to feed, endless social obligations, gifts to prepare, and business matters to handle. Everything costs money." She shook her head slightly. "If I hadn't quietly filled the financial gaps with my own money all these years, Havenstead Manor would never have been able to maintain the image it shows the outside world today." That night, Elowen lay

across the bed in a soft yellow nightgown, completely absorbed in the book she was reading. Her feet swung lazily behind her as she turned the pages.

Cassian entered the room after bathing and immediately noticed a plate of cakes on the table. He picked one up, took a bite, and looked toward the bell. "Ella, did you bake these yourself today?"

Elowen barely looked up from the book. "Mhin." After a moment she added casually, "Aunt Elspeth was feeling down today, so I made her favorite cakes to cheer her up. I made extra for you." Cassian's expression softened when he heard that, and he reached for another cake. [III O < 2/3 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 D Chapter 303 None Left Unscathed Elowen asked casually.](#)

"So, do you like them?" "They're really good." [9 Finished](#) Even though he had already eaten dinner earlier, Cassian still pulled out a chair and sat down at the table, clearly planning to finish the entire plate of pastries. As he continued eating, he asked, "I heard that Aunt brought up separating from the Marquess of Havenstead again today?" [1 2.4K 1 admin](#)

[Chapter 304 Hard-edged Resolve "That's right..." 99 Finished](#) There was a faint sadness in Elowen's voice. Then something Cassian had said clicked, and she looked up at him. "Wait. You said 'again? Aunt Elspeth's talked about divorce before?" Cassian nodded. "More than once. She and the Marquess of Havenstead were never a good match. She's blunt and hot-tempered, and he's weak and indecisive. The only reason they've lasted this long is that after every fight, he backs down and sweet-talks her. And for Aunt's temper, she's softhearted.

Every time he begged, she forgave him." Elowen rested her chin on her folded arms. "But I think she means it this time." She remembered how things had ended in her last life. Elspeth had died suddenly. People said someone in the house had poisoned her. In the end, they caught a young maid. After questioning, the girl confessed. Elspeth had punished her not long before, she held a

grudge, and she'd dared to poison her. But Elowen had never believed it was that simple. The maid could easily have been a scapegoat, pushed forward by whoever had really been behind it.

Originally, Elowen had planned to watch her aunt closely around the time she was poisoned in her previous life. Maybe she would even bring her to stay at her own house and use her as bait, quietly drawing out the person who truly wanted her dead. But now, if Elspeth really did go through with the divorce, maybe that wouldn't be necessary at all. Cassian spoke in the same calm, certain tone. "She may be serious, but the Marquess will never agree." "Why not?" Elowen asked. "Because he can't take the humiliation," Cassian said.

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"How would it look for a man his age-a Marquess, no less-to have a public separation? He's terrified of being laughed at. And if we're being honest, everything he has his title, his household-depends on aunt. If she leaves, he loses it all. So even if he has to grovel, he'll do whatever it takes to make her stay." Elowen frowned. then why did he keep Lydia and Nin around in the first place? Even if he didn't think it'd cause trouble at first, Aunt Elspeth didn't get angry chly once or twice. So why keep them?" Cassian's tone stayed mild. "That's human nature.

People always want to know how far they can push. If you forgive one thing, they'll expect you to forgive the next Elowen didn't disagree. She only let out a quiet sigh and turned back to her book, Cassian finished his cakes, wiped his hands, then got up and walked to the bedside. He pulled back the drapes. Warm candlelight spilled over Elowen's bare feet. Her loose silk trousers had ridden up a little when she shifted, revealing a long stretch of her lower leg-pale skin glowing softly in the light. Cassian felt his throat tighten.

reached out and wrapped his warm hand around her slender ankle, his thumb brushing slowly over the delicate bone. His voice dropped. "Are you cold?" Most of Elowen's attention was still on the book. "Not really. It's warm in here." Cassian didn't let go. He leaned closer and looked down at the page. It wasn't a classic. It was a detailed illustrated guide to antique silver and gold objects. Cassian lifted a brow.

"Since when are you interested in antiques?" Is Ella seriously thinking about writing one of those big high society family dramas? Caught off guard, Elowen obviously couldn't tell him she was doing research for her next story. She closed the book with forced casualness. "I was just curious." She had barely finished speaking when she felt his grip tighten a little on her ankle. He lowered his head and kissed her toes. The heat of his breath sent a shiver up her leg. Her heart jumped, and color rushed into her face.

"Cassian!" Bracing one knee against the bed, Cassian answered easily, "I'm here." He still held her ankle, amusement glinting in his eyes. "guess we don't have to pretend anymore. No more acting like we can't stand each other, right?" Elowen hesitated. "I... I suppose not..." Cassian bent lower, his voice teasing. "So tonight we don't have to hold back?" Elowen didn't shove him away. Red to the ears, she mumbled, "If you keep this up, what if I get pregnant..." A low laugh rumbled in his throat. "If you don't, then I really am getting old." Elowen said nothing. No way Cassian is useless.

That is ridiculous. He barely let her rest the entire night. By morning, Elowen naturally overslept. Sitting at her vanity, she struggled to keep her eyes open. Mira pinned up her hair and spoke softly, "Your Grace, the Marquess sent another pile of gifts to his wife this morning. He

stood outside Duskmoor Manor for a long time. Looks like he's determined not to agree to the divorce." That woke Elowen at once. She raised her head. "Is he still there?" 2.4K U 2/2 12:25

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Chapter 305 Good News, Bad News Mira shook her head. "He came before dawn and left once it got warmer." Elowen sighed. "And Aunt Elspeth? How did she react?" 16%2 Finished "The Marchioness was angry at first. She shouted at the Marquess for a while," Mira said. "But she never saw him. She sent in her card and went straight to the palace" Elowen blinked. "The palace?" Later that day, Elspeth returned from court. Elowen had already sent Cora to wait outside. The moment Elspeth arrived, Cora told her Elowen wanted to see her.

Elowen sat in the study with a book open in front of her pretending to read, her nerves prickling. She only got through a page or two before hurried footsteps came to the door. She looked up. Elspeth came in almost glowing. The second she saw Elowen, she burst out, "Ella, I've got good news and bad news. Which do you want first?" One look at Elspeth's face tested her. "Want me to guess?" Elowen could already guess the result. She held out a cup of warm water and Elspeth nodded, smiling as she took the cup. Elowen tilted her head and pretended to think hard.

"The good news is that you persuaded His Majesty, and he agreed to grant the divorce?"

Elspeth's eyes lit up. "Exactly! Ella, you're as sharp as ever!" Elowen smiled. "So what's the bad news? Did His Majesty refuse something else?" Elspeth raised one finger and wagged it. "No, no. His Majesty was all smiles. He even drafted the royal decree on the spot. But the bad news is this: he'd already planned to honor me this Twelfth Night. He was going to grant me the title of Lady of the First Rank. He said our marriage falling apart couldn't have come at a worse time." Lady of the First Rank.

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Elowen caught her breath. In Avenlor, women could no serve in government, and Lady of the First Rank was the highest honor a woman could receive. It meant unmatched status and distinction. In the entire kingdom, among both the living and the dead, fewer than ten women had ever held that title. If Elspeth lost that honor because of the divorce, it really was a blow. But knowing her, she probably didn't care much for that kind of empty glory. As the news spread, it eventually reached Lydia. Lydia's hands shook with barely contained excitement as she grabbed Nina's arm. "Lady of the First Rank!

Can you believe it?" Nina didn't understand the title, but her mother's grip hurt. She tried to pull away. "Mom, that hurts..." O 1/2 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 D Chapter 305 Good News, Bad News 16% Finished Lydia ignored her and muttered to herself, "I was worried Alistair wouldn't agree to the divorce. But now that there's a royal decree, it's settled. All that's left is for Alistair to marry me..." "Mom, please..." Nina's eyes filled with tears. Lydia didn't seem to hear her. Then, all at once, she remembered what was hidden.

She sucked in a breath, a hard look crossing her face, and finally let go. Nina fell to the floor, startled and sore, but Lydia paid her no attention. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small vial. Years earlier, Lydia's parents had tried to marry her to Alistair, but his family had already fallen on hard times. Lydia hadn't wanted a life of poverty, so she married into a wealthier household instead. That husband, however, had turned out to be a monster. In public, he seemed refined and gentle. In private, his beatings always left deep bruises in places no one could see.

Lydia had gone to her parents for help. They had blindly confronted her husband. He smoothed everything over in a few words, and afterward he only treated her worse. She sank into despair

and wanted nothing more than to escape-until she realized she was pregnant. Her husband filled the house with servants and kept watch on her every move. She couldn't even try to end her own life without being stopped. Then one day, a doctor came to visit-white-haired, bright-eyed, almost unreal. He saw her injuries at a glance and asked whether he could help. Lydia begged him for poison.

She wanted to die and take the child in her womb with her. The doctor stroked his beard and asked, "You've got the courage to die, but not to fight back?" She had hesitated. Before he left, the doctor gave her a vial and said, "This is strong. Two pills will kill a man, and only I could detect it." At first, she had planned to take it herself. But his words kept echoing in her head. "You've got the courage to die, but not to fight back?" So Lydia started slipping it into her husband's food and drink, crushing off tiny bits of the pills so the taste wouldn't show.

Never too much at once-just a little poder now and then. 2.4K O < admin

Chapter 306 The Divorce The first time Lydia heard her husband say he felt unwell and call for a doctor, she'd been scared half to death. But after a long examination, the physician only said her husband was exhausted and needed rest. That had finally put her at ease. And he'd been right. Lydia respected that doctor. His skill was the real thing. Not long after Lydia gave birth to Nina, her husband die. It was unfortunate. Nina was only a girl, so Lydia didn't inherit much. Even so, compared with ordinary people, she still lived well enough.

The house wasn't large, but it belonged to her, and she could keep a few servants. Years later, Lydia ran into Alistair for the first time in a long while. He had inherited the family title. Even his servants were dressed better than Lydia's late husband had ever been, every one of them polished and elegant." It was obvious Alistair was doing very well. From that day on, Lydia

began making plans. She found ways to get close to him. In time, she and Nina both managed to move into Havenstead Manor. The original plan had been simple.

She would play the elpless widow, become Alistair's mistress, and then quietly poison that hateful Elspeth. But Elspeth refused to budge, and to Lydia's surprise, Alistair usually did whatever Lydia wanted. So Lydia switched to smaller schemes, stirring up quarrels between husband and wife again and again. At last, yesterday, Elspeth had actually asked for a divorce. Lydia had almost been wild with joy-until Alistair refused. She had started wondering whether she should go through with the poison after all.

Once Elspeth was dead, becoming the new lady of Havenstead Manor would only be a matter of time. But now Elspeth was staying at Duskmoor Manor under the Duke of Duskmoor's protection. Lydia was afraid it would be too dangerous. Still, word had come that the court would soon issue a decree granting the divorce, and another naming her a Lady of the First Rank. Lydia knew she couldn't wait any longer. She had to act now and secure her place as Marchioness of Havenstead. She looked at the bottle in her hand, drew a deep breath and tipped out a single black pill. "Everyone lives for themselves.

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That's how the world works..." She whispered it like she was convincing herself. Then she steeled herself and swallowed the poison in one gulp. That evening, with dusk settling outside, Elowen and Cassian had just sat down to dinner when Anson 1/3 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 306 The Divorce hurried in. "Your Grace, the Marquess of Havenstead is here." Elowen glanced sideways. "Wasn't he here this morning He really wants Aunt Elspeth back." Anson frowned. "From the marquess's manner, I don't think he's here to ask her to return." She paused.

"What do you mean?" Before Anson could answer, Alistair was led into the hall 3. 16%2

Finished He bowed deeply to Cassian and Elowen. His head was lowered, his shoulders shaking, his grief plain on his face. "Your Grace, forgive me. My uncle and aunt were like parents to me. Before they died, they entrusted Lydia, their only daughter, to my care. Now Lydia is on the edge of death. I... I can't fail her." Elowen stared at him, startled. "Lydia is dying?" Alistair nodded and took a trembling breath. "Ever since Elspeth brought up divorce, Lydia has blamed herself. She can barely eat or sleep.

When I returned home today, I found her unconscious. The doctor says worry and grief have done lasting damage to her body. He says she may not have long." Elowen was quiet for a beat. Alistair's voice shook. "I never meant to let Elspeth down. But this is Lydia's dying wish. She's looked after me for years. Now, at the very end, the only thing she wants is to marry me once, properly. I... I don't know what else to do." Cassian's voice was cold as frost. "Get to the point. What do you want?" Alistair stepped back half a pace and bowed again. "I've come to see Elspeth.

I'm prepared to agree to the separation." Cassian's brow moved slightly. He gave a small nod.

"Bring Aunt Elspeth." Bran hurried off at once. Elspeth was sitting beneath the window, pretending to read. She had never cared much for books. When she was young, she had preferred playing to studying. Even now, most books gave her a headache, but lately she had seen Elowen utterly absorbed in reading, so focused she wouldn't even answer when spoken to. That had made Elspeth curious. Are books really that interesting? She had struggled over a single page for what felt like forever.

"Your Grace." Bran stopped a respectful distance behind her. "The marquess is here." Elspeth was already irritated from reading, and her face darkened at once. She assumed Alistair had

come yet again to beg her to change her mind. She snapped, "He's back? Can't the 2/3 12:25
Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 306 The Divorce 林家 16% 99 Finished gatekeepers just chase him off
with a stick? Always making a spectacle of himself, and probably using my money to do it."
Bran hesitated, then said carefully, "Your Grace, this time he says he's here to agree the divorce."
That stopped her cold.

Confusion flashed across her face, followed by suspicion. "This isn't some trick?" "His Grace
and Her Grace are both in the front hall. The marquess wouldn't dare try anything with them.
there. And it sounds like his cousin really is gravely ill. Her last wish is to marry the marquess
once, as his lawful wife." Elspeth let out a sharp laugh. "Disgusting." 。 2.4K 1 3/3 admin

Chapter 307 Signed And Sealed Disgust aside, she felt relieved. After all this dragging back and
forth, it was finally going to end. 林金16% 日 Finished Her maid stepped forward, holding the
separation papers they had prepared in advance. "Your Grace, shall we go?" But Elspeth paused.
After a moment's thought, she leaned close and whispered a few instructions to her maid. In the
front hall, the water had long gone cold. Alistair sat there uneasily, glancing toward the door at
every sound. At last, he heard footsteps approaching. He looked up and saw Elspeth enter, her
face hard and unreadable.

With a look of pain, Alistair began, "Elspeth, I know this isn't what you really want. We've been
husband and wife for so many years. But Lydia is at death's door. I have no other choice-" She
cut him off. "Who told you I didn't want this?" He froze. "I waited for you-" "I was copying the
papers," she said flatly. He blinked in surprise. From the corner of his eye, he saw the maid step
forward carrying a rosewood tray. On it were two freshly copied separation papers, every line

clear and neat. "You..." was all he said before falling quiet again. "Let's finish this," Elspeth said coolly.

The maid held the tray out to him. Alistair reached for the papers. But when he saw the terms, his face changed. His hand stopped over the page. "You want all the engagement gifts back? The shops, the land? Everything?" Elspeth didn't so much as blink. "Why not? It was mine She fixed him with a stare and stressed each word. "Min" His expression turned ugly. "I'm even leaving you the house at Havenstead Manor. I can't be bothered moving the furniture. That's generous enough, don't you think? I furnished the whole place after I married in. By rights, that's mine too." He sighed.

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"Elspeth, we were married for decades. Why be this harsh? This unforgiving?" She fired back, "If you cared about this marriage at all, you'd have sent Lydia away the day she arrived!"

"Because I know you can take care of yourself. Lydia can't. She's always been delicate, and Nina is still so young. Without me, they'd have no one. How could I leave them to fend for themselves? My uncle and aunt did so much for me..." Alistair pleaded. 1/2 12:25 Mon, Apr 13
Chapter 307 Signed And Sealed 16% 99 Finished "So you let me endure it instead?" Elspeth said with a scoff, cutting him off. "Enough.

Sign it. The sooner you do, the sooner you can take your precious cousin and her daughter far away. And get them out of my guest house too. That belongs to me as well." Alistair took a shaky breath, looking pained. "Even if we divorce, we still have two sons. We're connected by blood. Why do you have to be so absolute?" She laughed right in his face. "This is who I am. Haven't you figured that out yet? And don't flatter yourself. I'm not demanding every coin you spent from my dowry over the years, am I? That's me being generous.

So don't stand there calling me heartless." That hit him where it hurt. Alistair swallowed his temper. "If you resent the money spent on my household that much, I'll repay it. Little by little if I have to." She caught that at once. "You mean that?" He was too angry to think clearly. "I do." Without hesitation, Elspeth slapped his hand aside, grabbed a pen, and quickly added a new line at the bottom of the papers.

"Alistair, Marquess of Havenstead, willingly agrees to repay all dowry funds to Elspeth, amount to be calculated later." The handwriting was a little rough, but the meaning was plain. She signed her name and pushed the pen toward Alistair. "Alistair, you'd better keep your word." He stared at the added line and her neat signature. Slowly, his expression sank into resignation. Without another word, he signed his name beneath hers. Elspeth took one of the two copies and waved it lightly to dry the ink. Seeing their signatures side by side gave her an unexpected thrill of victory.

Then Alistair spoke, "Elspeth, even now I have to tell you this. Your temper is too stubborn, your pride too high. No man can truly stand a woman who never yield It's suffocating. If you ever want to remarry, you'd better-" 2.4K 2/2 admin

Chapter 308 No More Warnings He never got to finish. Elspeth's hand flew up and cracked across his face. The lap rang through the hall. 16% Finished She lowered her hand, her voice cold. "You know I'm tough, and you still think you can preach to me? Then you deserved that." Alistair's head snapped to the side. He stood there stunned and speechless. Elowen spoke briskly. "See the marquess out." Bran and Anson stepped forward at once, efficiently guiling Alistair toward the door. His voice rose, thick with anger and humiliation.

"Elspeth, you can't-" Cassian cut straight through him, his tone sharp as steel "Bran, go with him. Make sure the marquess and his people leave Aunt's guest house." That order drowned out everything Alistair was trying to say, swallowing whatever threats or regrets might have followed. By the time Alistair climbed into his carriage, he felt half as though he were being driven into exile. The feeling unsettled him badly. Once, he was the Marquess of Havenstead. More than that, his wife was the aunt of both Theodric and the Duke of Duskmoor. Even the greatest nobles treated him with courtesy.

But privilege came with its price. He had endured Elspeth's temper, her sharp tongue, even her blows. He had never dared strike back. When Lydia had arrived with Nina, she had seemed so gentle, so compliant. That was what he had always thought a woman ought to be. He couldn't help favoring her, or spoiling Nina. Whenever Elspeth got angry, Alistair would simply avoid her until she cooled off, or until he needed something from her. The truth was, she usually wasn't that hard to coax into better mood. But this divorce-he had never expected it. For the sake of appearances, he had resisted, but...

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Maybe this was freedom after all. He was the Marquess of Havenstead. His sons were grown, and both had bright futures. Even if Elspeth took back her property and money, he would still live comfortably. And now he could finally marry Lydia. The thought stirred a flicker of heat in him.

1/3 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 308 No More Warnings He returned to the guest house and went straight to Lydia's room. 16% Finished She looked deathly pale, with no color in her lips and barely any strength left, yet the moment she saw him, her eyes lit with desperate hope. "How did it go?" Alistair took her hand gently.

"It's done. I divorced her. From today on, it's over between us." A flush rose in Lydia's cheeks. She looked openly overjoyed. He smiled. "Lydia, you're my wife now." Tears ran down her face. She could barely force out a whisper. Alistair pulled her into his arms and murmured her name again and again. "Marquess." Bran's voice came from the doorway, polite but firm. "You need to leave now." Alistair stiffened. Lydia looked up, confused. "Where are you going?" He forced a smile. "This guest house belongs to her.

She doesn't want us staying here anymore." Lydia blinked, then offered a sympathetic explanation. suppose Elspeth just refuses to accept what's happened. She wants to make things difficult and force you to lower yourself." That was how it looked to him too. Bran added pointedly, "Marquess, please hurry." Lydia snapped, "Always pushing. You'd think she owned the place. Didn't the marquess buy this estate with his own money?" Alistair didn't reply. If he was being honest, no. He had paid a single coin. He had never had that kind of money. This was Vanelle. Property here cost a fortune.

But he said nothing. He only gave Lydia a tired smile. "Let's just go, all right?" Lydia let it go. Fine. It's only one house. Really, Elspeth was a complete fool to settle for only the guest house. The important things were the businesses, the jewelry, the gold. Those mattered far more. Especially since the royal decree was still coming, the one that would make her a Marchioness of the First Rank. That thought steadied Lydia again. With Lydia weak and leaning on his left arm, and Nina's small hand in his right, Alistair walked out. At the carriage, the driver looked at him without warmth.

"Marquess, this carriage belongs to Lady Elspeth. Since you're divorced, you can't use it anymore." 2/3 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 D Chapter 308 No More Warnings Caught off guard, Alistair

hesitated. Finished Lydia frowned. "Wasn't this carriage bought with the marquess's own money? How can she refuse to let him use it now?" The driver gave her a strange look. "The marquess's money?"

Chapter 309 Nowhere To Run Lydia was about to argue, but Alistair stopped her and pulled her behind him. "Let it go, Lydia." So the three of them left on foot, with no carriage and no display. Behind them, the gates slammed shut, heavy and final. Finished Lydia glared back at them, then turned to Alistair, her voice trembling and pitiful. "Where do we go now?" He said, "We'll find somewhere to stay for the night first. Then we'll arrange a carriage back to Rivenshire." Lydia pressed her lips together. "Can we... stay near the guest house?" He raised a brow.

"Why?" She had her own reason. She wanted to keep watch. If the royal envoy arrived with the decree, she wanted to be there first to receive the title. But what she said was, "I just thought... after all these years, maybe you won't want to cut ties completely. If Elspeth regrets this, you'll be close enough to know." Alistair squeezed her hand. "You're too kind, Lydia." He couldn't very well stay at some common inn. That wouldn't suit a marquess. There was an expensive tavern nearby, but at least it matched his status. They took two rooms there, one for Alistair, and one for Lydia and Nina.

Despite the pain spreading through her from the poison, Lydia forced herself to sit by the window. She had chosen this room because from there she could see the gates of the guest house. If the decree arrived, she would know at once. She waited and waited, until her vision blurred and her body could no longer hold up. At last her head dropped, and she collapsed unconscious. Frightened, Nina ran to find Alistair. He called for a doctor, who examined Lydia but found

nothing. Alistair pressed him in desperation. "If you can save her I'll pay whatever you ask." The doctor looked uneasy.

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"Marquess, I truly want to help. But I can't even tell what's wrong with her, much less how to treat it." Still, he offered a suggestion. "I've heard Doctor Dray is Vanelle. Why not seek him out?" Alistair paused. "Doctor Dray?" The doctor nodded. "I hear he's a close friend of the Duke of Duskmoor. Not long ago, the duke asked him out of retirement. Wasn't your wife the duke's aunt? If you ask, I think he might agree." Alistair felt torn. 1/2 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 309 Nowhere To Run He had just divorced Elspeth. Going back to beg her family for help would be humiliating.

But Lydia's life was at stake. She had always loved him, and now she was dying because of him. Could he really do nothing just to protect his pride? Nina's crying came through the wall. At last, his conscience won. At daybreak, he got up and went to Duskmoor Manor. 16%. 93 Finished But instead of being shown to a study or reception room, he was taken somewhere that left him stunned—a narrow, plainly furnished kitchen. Cassian himself sat in his wheelchair before a chopping board, calmly slicing pork.

The same hands that wielded swords and handled state papers held the knife with practiced ease. Each cut was smooth and exact. The slices fell into neat order. Alistair stood in the doorway staring, unsure whether to step in or announce himself. Without looking up, Cassian said flatly, "What do you want?" Startled out of his daze, Alistair hurried forward and bowed deeply. "Your Grace, Lydia is gravely ill. The doctor says only your friend, Doctor Dray, may be able to save her. Please show mercy. Lydia lost her husband so young, and Nina still needs her mother." Cassian kept chopping.

The knife tapped softly against the board. He didn't look up..His voice was cold. "Ask my aunt first Alistair's nerves began to fray. "But... your friend is only that, a friend. If you speak, Doctor Dray can come at once. There's no need to trouble Elspeth..." He sighed and pressed on in a pleading voice. "Lydia has already suffered so much. She lost her husband, and now she's ill. Nina is only a child. Please, Your Grace.." A heavy clang on the chopping board cut him off. Cassian finally lifted his head. The duke's eyes were dark and dangerous. "I have no connection to your cousin.

Why should I care whether she suffers? The world is full of people with hard lives. o you expect me to pity every one of them?" He leaned forward, eyes narrowed. "And don't forget, Mrquess. Lydia has upset my aunt enough times that I remember every one." 2.4K 2/2 12:25 Mon, Apr 13
Awakening Love: Rebo admin

Chapter 310 Choices And Consequences 林金16%业 9 Finished Under Cassian's gaze, Alistair felt cold all the way down his spine. The color drained from his face. He wanted to defend Lydia. He wanted to say she had done nothing wrong, that Elspeth was simply oversensitive and couldn't bear anyone around her. But the words died in his throat under the warning in Cassian's eyes. "Your Grace, Her Grace and Lady Elspeth are here," Bra called from outside. Cassian still sounded faintly annoyed. "Dinner isn't ready.

They came early." Footsteps pattered through the hall, and Elowen poked her head in with a bright smile. "We're not in a hurry, Your Grace. Take your time." Her voice seemed to melt the chill from him. Cassian nodded gently. "All right." Elowen spotted Alistair standing pale-faced in the corner and gave a little sound of surprise. "Marquess? What are you doing here?" She

glanced at the stove, half amused. "Helping with dinner?" Alistair seized on her tone like a drowning man grabbing driftwood. He bowed deeply. "Your Grace." He thought quickly.

The Duke of Duskmoor is known for being ruthless and hard to read, but his wife is still young and seems gentle, almost softhearted. If she hears about Lydia's miserable situation and sees how pitiful Nina looks, she will probably feel sorry for them. He arranged his face and let his voice break at just the right places. "Lydia is terribly ill. She collapsed. The doctor says only Doctor Dray can save her. Nina is still just a child... she already lost her father. If she loses her mother too..." He looked at Elowen hopefully. She nodded, clearly moved. "That would be awful.

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Such a little girl, losing both parents?" Alistair's heart leaped. Then she went on, "Still, we should ask Aunt. If she agrees, we'll send for Doctor Dray." He froze, then edged another step forward. "Doctor Dray answers to Your Grace. There's no need to trouble Elspeth-" Her smile sharpened. "Marquess, I may pity Nina, but I stand with my aunt. You understand?" His hope crashed all at once. He never would have guessed this gentle young woman could be every bit as firm as the duke. Elowen turned away and raised her voice. "Aunt, the marquess is here. He wants Doctor Dray to treat Lydia.

What do you think? It's your decision." ||| O 1/2 12:25 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 310 Choices And Consequences Alistair gripped his sleeve tightly. 16% Finished He had quarreled with Elspeth. Surely she would refuse She probably hated Lydia enough to let her die without a thought. "Fine. Let him go." Alistair stared at the doorway in disbelief. Elspeth stood there looking completely calm. "You... you agree?" She shrugged. "Why wouldn't I? She's annoying, but she doesn't deserve death. We're both women. Why make life harder for each other?" Alistair could only stare, too stunned to speak.

All at once, he realized he had never truly understood this woman, not even after all their years of marriage. "Elowen, send Bran for Doctor Dray," Cassian said. Then Elowen added kindly to Alistair, "Please wait a moment, Marquess." Bran hurried off. While they waited for Hugh, Cassian finished cooking. He made the fragrant dishes and soup, all of them delicious-looking, then had the servants carry everything to the dining room. Elowen smiled and pushed Cassian's wheelchair over to the table. He turned to her and asked, "Hungry?" She grinned. "I wasn't.

Now I am." Alistair watched the two of them and felt a strange tightness in his chest. Once, he and Elspeth had been like that too, easy with each other, close without effort. When had it all gone wrong? Fifteen minutes later, Hugh arrived with Bran, his medicine satchel slung over his shoulder. This time he hadn't covered his face. Alistair blinked at the young doctor's striking, almost feminine beauty. From the table, Elowen called over in a voice that was cool but not unkind, "Marquess, this is Doctor Dray. Don't be fooled by his looks. Aren't you in a hurry to save Lydia?

Take the carriage. I'm lending you one." Alistair thanked her again and again, nearly stumbling over himself in his haste to bring Hugh back to the inn. ◦ 2.4K L admin