

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 31 They Share a Bed ? Having said that , Alaric brushed past Elowen and strode into the inner chamber . Inside , Cassian lay motionless on the bed . 87 % 1 Finished Since childhood , Alaric had revered this uncle , a respect that even surpassed what he felt for his own father , Theodric . Only now , with his uncle unconscious , did he dare to look at him so boldly . His gaze lingered on Cassian's face for a moment , then suddenly , he noticed something amiss with the bed . On the inner side of the bed , next to his uncle , a small space was vacant , occupied by a pillow .

The bedsheet there bore faint creases . It was obvious someone had slept there . Alaric's heart gave a violent jolt . Could it be Elowen truly shares a bed with Uncle at night ? Elowen was about to follow him in when Bran and Cora approached . Seeing Cora's hesitant expression , Elowen guessed something had happened at the Manor . In no rush to enter , she signaled to Bran with her eyes . Understanding her meaning , Bran walked into the inner chamber . Weighed down by his thoughts , Alaric heard Bran's praise .

" Your Highness is truly filial , coming to pay your respects the moment you heard His Grace had regained consciousness . It's a pity he has not fully recovered ; he was only awake for a short while Preoccupied , Alaric showed no reaction to the compliment . Frowning , he abruptly asked , " Does Elowen sleep beside my uncle every day ? " Bran chuckled , somewhat amused , " What kind of question is that , Your Highness ? His Grace and Her Grace are lawfully wedded . Isn't it perfectly normal for them to share a bed ? " Alaric was half - convinced .

" But I just saw a bed set up in the adjacent room ... " " That was me , acting on my own . " Bran scratched his head . " I thought Her Grace might find His Grace an inconvenience . But she said marrying him was her heart felt wish , and she could not be happier . " Heartfelt wish . Could not be happier . Those words scraped at Alaric's nerves . Bran eyed him . " However ... " Alaric's interest piqued .

He lifted his eyes , expecting a turn in the story , Unexpectedly , Bran said earnestly , " Your Highness , you shouldn't have addressed Her Grace by her given name . You ought to show respect , calling her ' Aunt . She is kind and gentle , and may not hold it against you , but if His Grace were to learn of it , he would surely be displeased . " Alaric gritted his teeth . " What ? Would Uncle actually take her side ?

" If he recalled correctly , his uncle had a beloved woman in his heart - it certainly couldn't be Elowen . What man would favor a woman like her , who lacked grace and was full of schemes ? This marriage was merely Elowen's doing , taking advantage of Cassian's coma and the King's guilt towards the Hales to force it through . Upon learning the truth , his uncle should despise her , should want her gone ! Yet Bran spoke with grave seriousness , " Your Highness , you have no idea ! His Grace treats Her Grace exceedingly well !

The first time he woke , he called for no one else - he rested in her arms . They were most affectionate ! The second time , His Grace personally commanded that the entire household's stewardship be not fully conscious yet , handed to her . In my humble view , His Grace is deeply satisfied with his bride ! He's but once he is , he'll doubtless dote on her beyond measure ... " If anyone else had said this , Alaric would have dismissed it as But this was Bran . A fool , and

blindly loyal to Cassian . He wouldn't lie . So it's true ? Uncle truly treats her well ? He doesn't loathe her ?

He doesn't want her gone ? s meant to provoke him . A complex storm of emotions rage inside Alaric , his face turning ashen .. Bran continued speaking at length , but Alaric heard none of it . He hardly remember how he left the room . He only recalled seeing Elowen in the outer chamber , his expression cold and hard . Through clenched teeth , he warned , " Elowen , don't you dare regret this . " Refusing to look at her again , he turned and strode away without a backward glance . Elowe . ut barked at for no reason and honestly thought Alaric was out of his damn mind .

She shrugged it off and turned back to Cora to resume their conversation . " You were saying , Vivian keeps complaining of headaches or that her things aren't packed , stubbornly refusing to leave ? Fine . In a bit , take two guards over and stuff her straight into the carriage ... Meanwhile , outside , Alaric headed for his carriage to return to the palace , Before he reached it , a slender , graceful figure approached . She moved with elegant steps , then curtsied before him . "

Greetings , Your Highness .

May you be well Her voice was sweet , her eyes limpid pools that seemed to hold a captivating hook , « O r 2/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MOM . Chapter 31 They Share a Bed ? She was undoubtedly a beauty . Yet Alaric , Crown Prince of Avenlor , had seen countless beauties and encountered every ploy imaginable . He remained utterly unmoved , his face an impassive mask . For the first time , Vivian felt a flicker of doubt about her own charms . She bit her lower lip softly and dared to take a step forward . " Your Highness , a moment please ! " A touch of impatience colored Alaric's tone . " What is it ?

Finished Vivian offered an ingratiating smile . I am the eldest daughter of General Aldric , and Duke of Duskmooor's cousin . " Alaric sneered , " You ? " Vivian faltered . " Pardon ? " Alaric coldly tossed the words over his shoulder as he walked away . " You've been married before . Stop pretending to be an unmarried maiden . " admin

Chapter 32 A New Form of Stimulation He turned and left without another word . Vivian felt as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped over her head . Her entire body went cold . 87 %

Finished After a long moment , she mustered the strength to chase after him . " Your Highness , I have something urgent to report . It concerns the Duchess of Duskmooor ! Alaric's foot was already on the carriage step . At those last three words , his movement froze mid - air . He turned his head , his gaze locking onto her . " The Duchess of Duskmooor ?

" His voice dropped low , edged with a possessiveness he probably didn't even notice . Vivian caught her breath . She'd gambled right ! Suppressing her frantic heartbeat , she drew closer . " Your Highness , please follow me . " A short while later , Alaric stood by the stable door , watching a boy in the distance . The lad wore a pained expression , reluctantly gathering armfuls of hay to feed the horses , muttering curses under his breath . " That boy ruined a rare , expensive quill , " Vivian explained in a hushed tone . " By rights , he should have been flogged to death .

But the Duchess took pity on him . She made an exception and kept him on . At first , I merely thought her kind - hearted . But after seeing Your Highness today , I realized her motives might not be so pure . This is serious . I didn't dare hide it from you . " With these words , Vivian neatly absolved herself of all responsibility . As she spoke , she sneaked a look at the Crown Prince's face . She figured he'd blow up and scold the Duchess of Duskmooor . That would at least vent some of he ger . To her surprise , he showed no anger .

Instead , a faint , knowing smile curved his lips , his yes holding a glint of knowing pleasure , as if to say , " I knew it . " Vivian was stunned . Even as the Crown Prince departed , and even when Com arrived with guards to bundle her into a carriage and send her away , she still couldn't fathom what that expression had meant . With the bangle snatched by Alaric , Elowen still needed to prepare a rthday gift for Maerwyn . However , after mid - month , having taken over the management of all Duskmoor Manor affairs , she was swamped from dawn till dusk .

There was no time for another outing . After some thought , she asked Edith for help with the selection . Edith had served in the palace . Her taste was a sure thin . Since witnessing Edith's formidable slap , Mira had become her fervent admirer and formally asked to learn from her . III O < 1/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 32 A New Form of Stimulation Elowen , understanding her maid's desire , arranged for her to accompany Edith . Edith had no objections , and Mira was thrilled . The day was particularly hot , so Elowen told them to wit until the sun had set before heading out .

She herself remained in the chamber , sorting through the account books . Bran entered with a washbasin and bowed . " Your Grace Elowen didn't look up at first . " Come to tend to Cassian again ? " Bran chuckled . Finished Elowen was about to tell him to go ahead when a crucial memory struck her . Her head snapped up . " Wait ! " Last night , driven by curiosity about that prominence , she had tugged Cassian's robe aside . Later , overwhelmed by embarrassment , she had simply hidden under her own covers to sleep . She hadn't fixed his clothing !

Bran , knowing nothing of this , stopped and turned . " What is it , Your Grace ? " Elowen feigned calm . " The task of washing him might be better left to me . " Bran blinked . " You ? " He grew flustered . " Have I done something wrong ? " It's not that you did anything wrong ; it's

that I did . She couldn't very well say that . Putting down her quill , she looked up . " You've done perfectly well . It's just ... I am his wife now . He is my husband . Such intimate matters are more fitting for me to handle . " Bran protested , " That won't do ! You e the Duchess , a noble lady .

This chore is best left to a servant like me ! " Seeing she couldn't persuade him , Elowen grew increasingly anxious . But desperation breeds ingenuity . A sudden inspiration flashed in her mind . " ... Didn't the royal physician say that if Cassian received regular stimulation , it might help him wake ? " " He did " Think about it . You always wash him . He's grown accustomed to it ; it's no longer a stimulus . If I do it today , wouldn't that be a new form of stimulation ? "

Bran's eyes widened slightly . " That's true ! How clever you are , Your Grace ! " Elowen forced a laugh .

" Ha , yeah. " The matter settled , Bran placed the basin and cloth on he bedside table , As he left , he very tactfully closed the door behind him . Silence descended upon the room . A nervous tension slowly seeped into every part of Elowen . III O < 2/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 32
A New Form of Stimulation She took several deep breaths , steeling herself , then stood and walked to Cassian's bedside . The basin and cloth were ready . Elowen knelt , dipping the cloth into the water and wringing it out . Clutching the damp cloth , she sat on the edge of the bed .

The light had been dim last night . After that one fleeting glance , she had whipped her head away . But the sight had been so arresting that the impression was seared into her memory . Now , up close , the memory flooded back . 87 % Finished Elowen's cheeks burned . Her heart pounded like a war drum . With a trembling hand , she reached to pull back the covers over

Cassian . Too timid to look , she squeezed her eyes shut , groping blindly . But seeing nothing meant she couldn't tell if the covers were pulled back or where exactly they were .

She huffed and slit her eyes open to the thinnest line 1.5K 1 admin

Chapter 33 Awakening So she saw it anyway . It was daylight , and everything was painfully clear . 86 % Finished Elowen was drowning in shame , stunned to her core . She muttered under her breath , " It ... it really won't burst ? " Before the words fully left her lips , she was startled by a low , hoarse chuckle . It sounded as if someone had been holding it back for a long , long time and finally failed . That voice ... Elowen's heart already knew the answer , but she didn't dare turn to confirm it . Shame consumed her .

From Cassian's perspective , the entire side of Elowen's face was flushed a deep crimson , the rosy hue spreading down her pale neck . If one glimpse scares her this bad , how's she going to handle the wedding night ? Not that he was faring much better . Being stared at like that , he felt like he might blow . He swallowed , his throat dry . " Thirsty , " he rasped . " I ... I'll get you water . " Elowen scrambled to her feet , flustered , and hurried to the table to pour a cup . When she returned to the bedside , Cassian had propped himself up .

His clothing was now decently arranged , the covers drawn over him . The worst of Elowen's blush had receded somewhat . She silently handed him the cup . Cassian took it , his tone carefully neutral . " Were you about to wash me ? " His voice gave nothing away . Elowen clutched the damp cloth still in her hand , her eyes fixed on a point on the wall as she nodded . Cassian ed , " I recall Bran usually handles that . " A faint pink returned to Elowen's cheeks . " I discussed it with Bran , " she murmured . " The royal physician said you needed stimulation . That it might help you wake .

I thought if I did it , maybe it would work . " A lucky guess , but it did . Cassian inclined his head . " Thoughtful of you . " Elowen secretly let out a breath of relief . Cassian took a sip of water , then seemed to remember something . " But what's with my clothes ? " Elowen's face burned anew ! O 1/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 33 Awakening She wanted the floor to open up and swallow her whole She wanted to pack her bags this instant and flee this manor , never to return ! But ... She remembered Cassian saying last time that he couldn't hear anything while unconscious .

That meant he'd had no awareness . 86 % 1 Finished Right . Inspiration , born of sheer desperation , struck . She bit her lip and flatly denied it . " I don't know . " She dared a quick glance at him . He was watching her , a thoughtful look in his eyes . Summoning every ounce of audacity , she ventured , " Could ... could it have been Bran ? " Cassian was stunned . Elowen adopted an expression of understanding . " Though it was rather rude of him , I'm sure he meant well , my lord . Perhaps it's best not to question him . It might ...

make things awkward for everyone . " Cassian studied her for a long moment . " You're exceptionally ... considerate . " Elowen forced a laugh . " Just ... just doing my duty . " She gathered her courage . " My lord , more water ? " She gestured to his cup . " Shall I fetch another ? " Cassian didn't call her bluff . He simply nodded . " Then , may I have your cup ? " As she spoke , Elowen took two steps closer . He was sitting up , holding the cup in lap , not offering it up . She had to lean in to take it . Cassian's gaze settled on her face . The proximity granted him a clearer view .

Her skin , usually pale and translucent like a peeled hard - boiled egg , was now flushed . A warm , thick blush , like the glow of dawn upon snow . Quite lo So he suddenly asked , " When I

first woke , I thought I heard you say something about ... bursting ... " Elowen's fingers twitched .
Cassian's lips quirked in a faint , teasing smile as he looked at her . " What did you mean ? "
Elowen's shame returned tenfold . She flushed from head to toe , resembling a lobster tossed
onto a fire . Cassian's smile grew more pronounced. Even prettier .

||| O 2/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 33 Awakening 86 % Finished This time . Elowen's mind
went completely blank . No plausible explanation surfaced . She fumbled for words , her mouth
opening and closing soundlessly . Cassian enjoyed the sight for a satisfyingly long moment
before finally showing mercy . " Perhaps I misheard . " He placed the cup in her hand , his voice
softening , gentle as one speaking to a child . " Go on , fetch some more water . " Elowen felt as
if she'd been granted a pardon . She snatched the cup and practically fled .

While pouring the water , she pressed the cool back of her hand against her cheek , willing her
temperature to drop . Returning to the bedside with the fresh cup , her eyes lingered on the
washbasin on the floor . He still hadn't been washed " Have them bring hot water . I'm going
to bathe , " Cassia said . " Alright , " Elowen agreed , relieved . She remembered something else .
" Shall I send for the royal physician ? " Cassian shook his head . " Not yet . " Elowen frowned
with concern . " What if you fall unconscious again ? " Cassian raised a brow . " That depends .

Are you available " " Me ... ? " " If you are free , you could assist me . If you're too busy ,
suppose I'll have to manage alone . If you hear a crash , then you can call for help . " He made it
sound so pitiful . Elowen's heart softened . She bit her lip . " Perhaps Bran and I could both assist
you ? " admin

Chapter 34 The Bath Finished Cassian replied , unhurried , " Didn't you just say that Bran was
the one who secretly lifted my robe ? It seems he harbors inappropriate thoughts . No way I'm

letting him help with the bath . Guess it'll be just you . Sorry to make you handle it alone ."

Elowen froze . I brought this upon myself . I have no one to blame . " Go on , " Cassian urged gently, sitting on the edge of the bed . " Tell Bran to prepare hot water . " Elowen murmured a quiet assent and walked out slowly Bran had been waiting just outside . He hurried forward at the sight of her .

" Your Grace , is the washing done ? I'll fetch the basin- " Elowen stopped him . " Prepare some hot water , please . Cassian's awake . " Bran stared , then his face broke into a wide , disbelieving grin . " Awake ? " Elowen nodded . " He says he wants a bath . " " Wonderful ! Wonderful ! " Overjoyed , Bran rushed off to carry out the order . Soon , he returned with servants hauling bucket after bucket of steaming water . They poured it into the large oak tub in the adjoining bathing chamber . Beaming , Bran darted to the bedside to speak with Cassian .

Elowen sat to the side , idly watching the commotion , when she heard Cassian's voice call , " My love . " It took her a moment to register . Then came the sound of wooden wheels rolling across the floor . Someone crooked a finger and rapped it , not too gently , on the table beside her . Elowen finally looked up . " ... My lord ? Is something wrong ? " Cassian sat in a wheelchair , his gaze level with hers . " I called for you . You didn't hear . " Belatedly , Elowen realized those calls of " my love " had been for her . " It's my fortune being called that by someone else .

I'm not used to it yet . My apologies . " She meant it sincerely , which made Cassian's slight frown all the more puzzling . " By someone else , " he repeated , the words deliberate and slow . " Ah ... " Elowen began to explain , but Cassian let out a soft , humorless laugh . His deep eyes were unreadable . The sound sent a shiver down Elowen's spine . She lowered her gaze to the

wheelchair beneath him . In her past life , Cassian had woken years later . When she'd seen him , he was in a wheelchair , his face haggard with pain .

III r 1/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 34 The Bath Now , he had awoken much earlier . But why was he still confined to a chair ? " Let's go , " Cassian said . Bran pushed the wheelchair toward the bathing chamber . Elowen twisted her fingers together , then followed . The bath chamber was a small , square space . A large wooden tub stood in the center , now filled with steaming water that misted the air . A folding screen partitioned the room , providing a place to hang clothes and a modicum of privacy . Bran wheeled Cassian right up to the tub before bowing and leaving .

Finished Elowen entered a beat later . Against the screen , she saw the clear silhouette of a man - tall , straight - backed , the line of his shoulders and neck speaking of lean strength . After a moment , Cassian turned his head . Even through the screen , his gaze felt tangible , settling heavily on Elowen . The pressure was immediate . " Not coming over ? " Cassian asked . " Coming ... " Heart fluttering , Elowen steeled herself and walked around the screen . " Shall we start with the clothes ?

" Cassian's voice was low slightly hoarse , the words seeming to curl directly into her ear . A tingle ran down her spine . Her heart skipped a beat . Truth was , this was Elowen's first time undressing a man . In her past life , married to Alaric , she had suffered years of cold neglect . Once , Alaric had come home unusually drunk . The Queen had been planning to take a second wife for him , a concubine . Elowen , desperate , had decided her only chance was to truly become his wife - to share his bed , hopefully bear his child .

Her thinking had been simple then - a child might bind his heart to her , make her life more bearable . And that night , he was drunk , She had thought it the perfect opportunity . In truth , she knew nothing of what to do . She only knew that husbands and wives entered their chambers together at night , removed their clothes , blew out the candles , and lay together until morning . D that enough , and a child would come . That was the extent of her knowledge . III O 2/3 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 34 The Bath 86 % Finished So , she had slipped into Alaric's room .

He lay on his back , eyes shut tight , a frown etched between his brows . Summoning all her courage , she had reached to unlace his tunic . The moment her fingers touched him , his eyes flew open . Caught in the act , Elowen had blushed crimson . " I ... " She had meant to say something soft , to remind him they were husband and wife . But Alaric's gaze had been pure ice . Without a word , he had shoved her away with brutal force . Elowen had crashed to the floor , the rough stone scraping the skin from her palms .

Tears of pain had sprung to her eyes , only to be burned away by his cruel words , exploding in her ears : " Disgusting ! Get out ! " Now , Elowen's fingers hovered over the fastenings of Cassian's belt . The memory , sharp and cold , made her hesitate . She bit her lip . " My lord , would you find this ... disgusting ? " After all , they say you have a woman you love . admin

Chapter 35 Disgusting This position as Duchess of Duskmoor - Elowen had , in a way , seized it . 86 % Finished Just as Alaric had found her desperate plea for marriage utterly disgusting , wouldn't Cassian feel the same ? Wouldn't he ? But Cassian didn't speak for a long moment . Elowen looked down , seeing his brow furrow , his expression turning cool . " Then leave . " A bleak chill settled in her heart . Of course . Disgusting . She withdrew her hand . " Then ... I'll leave you alone ... " Cassian's voice was flat .

" I can manage ." Elowen remembered her father and brother after their evere injuries . They hadn't wanted help either . A broken left arm ? They'd use their teeth to help the right hand dress . A shattered right leg ? They'd hop on the left . She understood Cassian's pride . Still , she whispered , " I. I'll just sit by the screen . If you need anything , just call . " Cassian gave a noncommittal grunt . Elowen walked over , fetched a small stool , and sat down From behind the screen came the soft rustle of fabric - Cassian removing his clothes .

The wheelchair creaked , then came the sound of water lashing as he presumably ho ed himself into the tub . Elowen didn't turn her head , but her cheeks remained warm . Her mind wandered . When will he ask for an annulment ? Once the woman he loves is willing to marry him , I suppose . Once the appens , without the protection of Duskmoor Mand I'll need a new plan ... On the other side of the screen , Cassian sat in the bath , his gaze fixed on the screen . The light from the oil lamp cast a faint , diffused glow , outlining Elowen's silhouette .

She sat on the little stool , elbows on her knees , chin propped in her hands . She looked like a small creature in a new place , instinctively curling into a corner . She hadn't moved for a long time , lost in thought . His mind returned to her earlier words . Disgusting . 1/3 III O 11:36 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 35 Disgusting Did she find him disgusting ? Or was it the act between Husband and wife itself ? Would she feel the same revulsion if it were Alaric ? A frown creased Cassian's brow . He closed his eyes . Elowen rested her head in her hands , unaware of how much time had passed .

The room's temperature had dropped noticeably , yet there was no sound from behind the screen . " My lord ? " she called out tentatively . From beyond the screen , Cassian leaned against the tubs edge , unmoving , unresponsive . A sudden , cold dread shot through Elowen . Did

something happen to him ? She leapt to her feet . 86 % Finished Water had spilled onto the floor by the tub . She saw it , but her steps were too hurried , her injured knee unsteady . As she neared the tub , her foot slipped . She lost her balance , pitching forward . " Ah- ! " A gasp escaped her .

She braced for a painful impact with the hard wooden edge . She instinctively squeezed her eyes shut , but heard a loud splash instead . A wave of cool , damp air washed over her . A strong hand shot out , gripping her arm firmly . Instead of crashing into the tub , she tumbled into a wet hard embrace . Her heart hammered . Her lashes fluttered as she prepared to open her eyes and stammer her thanks . But a broad , calloused palm gently covered them before she could .

Cassian's voice came from above , close . " I'm not dressed . Keep your eyes closed . " He had acted swiftly .

Elowen saw nothing . Somehow , this made her even more flustered than if she had . " Alright ... " she breathed . Cassian's palm remained over her eyes . He could feel the frantic fluttering of her lashes against his skin , a light , ticklish sensation . He glanced down at himself beneath the water . His throat moved as he swallowed . " ... Wait for me outside . " Elowen hesitated . " Leave you here alone ? " Getting out of the tub , drying , dressing ... with his legs impaired , it would be a struggle .

2/3 III O < 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 M M Chapter 35 Disgusting " I'm not an invalid , " Cassian stated , his words clipped . Elowen froze . 86 % Finished Her brother had lost his left arm in a skirmish . Afterwards , both at home and in the barracks , everyone tried to stop him from doing things , urging him to rest . Young then , Elowen hadn't understood why her brother was always so unhappy . Isn't it nice not have to work ? Now , she suddenly understood . He had been unhappy because they treated him like an " invalid .

" She said nothing more , simply murmured a quiet , " Alright , " and prepared to leave . She lifted her hand , intending to grasp the rim of the tub to steady herself . But blinded , her fingers landed on Cassian's arm instead He was well - built . Even after his long slumber , his muscles remained firm . Her hand closed over the hard swell of his bicep , taut from the effort of holding her . Her heart gave a violent , sudden leap . Once outside the bathing chamber , the memory of that touch lingered in her palm . It was embarrassing to admit , but ... it had felt rather nice .

She sat in a chair , staring down at her hand , her ears still burning . Not long after , she heard the sound of wooden wheels . Turning , she saw Cassian emerge , fully dressed and seated in his wheelchair . His face was devastatingly handsome , yet utterly expressionless , his features as sharp and cold as a honed blade . admin

Chapter 36 A Feast Finished His hair was still damp , barely toweled , hanging loose over his shoulders , droplets tracing paths down his neck . The moisture on his face lent his sharp features a hint of softness . Elowen looked at him , then remembered the feel of the muscle in his arm . She couldn't understand it . A man like Cassian - noble , handsome , with a physique like that - how could any woman not want him ? Does he have some terrible secret ? An unspeakable quirk ? " What are you thinking ? " . Cassian's gaze settled on her face .

Elowen could hardly say , " I'm wondering if you have a bizarre fetish ." She offered a gentle smile instead . " I was thinking if you're hungry . Would you like something to eat ? " Surely , a meal couldn't be considered " disgusting ." Cassian recalled the conversations he'd overheard while unconscious . Her cooking , it seemed , was exceptional . He didn't refuse . " Yes . " " Do you have any favorites ? Or anything you don't eat ? " Elowen asked , considerate as always . " I'm easy . You decide , " Cassian said . " Alright . " She nodded and left the m .

Bran , who had been waiting outside , entered to take her place . Cassian wore only a thin layer of underclothes . Bran fetched a heavier tunic and began helping him dress . " How has the Manor been these past days ? " Cassian asked , his voice measured . Bran , adjusting the garment , replied , " Everything's been running smoothly , Your Grace . Her Grace is truly clever ! ly Marwen tried to play sick , holding onto the keys and account books . But Her Grace found a way . She had them back in no time . " Her Grace's got a good head on her shoulders and a kind heart .

She raised the monthly wages for the servants and kitchen hands . Even arranged for chilled pea soup for them every afternoon ... Lately , I hear folks whispering . They say since she arrived , life's gotten better . They call her the Manor's ' lucky star . " Lucky star . A faint smile touched Cassian's lips . An interesting turn of phrase . " Oh , and word of your waking reached the palace . The Crown Prince was sent to visit , " Bran added . M O 1/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MOM Chapter 36 A Feast 6 % Finisher Cassian's head turned sharply . " The Crown Prince was here ? Who received him ?

" " Her Grace , of course . " Cassian's brow furrowed . " But she didn't give him an inch of ground , " Bran said chuckling . He recounted the exchange between Elowen and Alaric from the other day . Cassian listened . his gaze deep and thoughtful . His fingers tapped a slow rhythm on the arm of his wheelchair Bran leaned in . " His Highness stormed out , puffed up like a bull . I made sure to sing Her Grace's praises , said you like her and mean to treat her well . " Cassian raise a brow . " You've learned a thing or two over the years . " Bran chuckled .

" Sticking by your side , I had to pick up a trick or two . " Cassian acknowledged this with a slight nod , then changed the subject . " What of the army ? " Bran's smile vanished , replaced by

a weary sigh . " Since you've been gone , the commanders can't agree on anything . Brawls among the ranks are common . And we heard rumors that the clans to the north and west hearing you're lying unconscious , are itching to make a move . " Cassian considered this for a moment . " Send word . A council of all commanding officers , three days from now , at the Northern Garrison .

Mandatory attendance " " Yes , Your Grace ! " Not long after Bran finished helping him dress , Elowen returned , directing servants bearing trays of food . The rich , savory aroma reached Cassian even from across the room . The servants laid out the dishes . Elowen stood by , explaining , " These are spiced meatballs in broth . This is a ham hock and root vegetable stew . This is almond custard . And this , " she pointed to a small , creamy - looking dish , " is a sweetened walnut and honey paste . For after the meal , to cleanse the palate .

" Cassian sampled each one , his eyes growing progressively brighter with appreciation . It was indeed , exquisite . No wonder her maid , Mira , was always raving about it . Cassian , a man of simple tastes , found himself taking several extra bites . He remembered hearing that Elowen learned to cook from her aunt , Isobell . He also recalled hearing that she used to send her best dishes to the Crown Prince's Wing . So Alaric had tasted these flavors long ago . Lucky bastard .

|| O 2/2 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 36 A Feast The thought made Cassian chew with a little more force .

" Oh , my lord , " Elowen remembered something . " Yes ? " Cassian didn't look up from his stew . Finished " Princess Maerwyn's birthday is in three days . There will be a banquet at the palace . The invitation arrived at the Manor some time ago . You were still unconscious , so I took the liberty of accepting it ... " " You are the Duchess . Accepting invitations is part of your duties . There is no ' liberty ' involved ." Elowen relaxed slightly . " Will you be attending , then ? "

Cassian took a sip of the warm broth . " I have business that day . " Elowen's face fell , just a little .

Cassian paused , then added , " But if I finish in time , I will join you as soon as I can . " admin

Chapter 37 Share a Meal Elowen opened her mouth , then shut it . In her last life , something went down at Maerwyn's birthday banquet . Having lived through it once , Elowen had no desire to repeat the experience . Now that Cassian was awake , his presence by her side would make all the difference . But he had business that day . His business probably mattered way more than hers . 86 % 1 Finished That he tolerated her occupying the position of Duchess was generosity enough . To demand more would be to invite his annoyance - a lesson learned all too well from her marriage to Alaric .

So , she swallowed the words and simply nodded , her expression yielding . " Alright . " She turned to leave . " Wait . " Cassian's voice stopped her . Puzzled , she looked back . " Is a dish not to your liking ? " Cassian raised a brow . " Did you snack in the kitchen ? " Elowen blinked , then quickly denied it . " Of course not ! " A faint amusement touched his eyes . " Then you worked hard to prepare this feast , yet you stand there watching me eat ? Won't you join me ? " Elowen stared , taken aback . He's inviting me to eat with him . Alaric had never done such a thing .

Sometimes , in a foul mood , he'd return to his wing and snap at her , " What use are you as a wife if you can't even cook a proper meal ? " She'd rush to the kitchen . She'd memorized his preferences - his fondness for subtly sweet flavors , his aversion to overly spicy food . that made him break out in rashes . If the meal displeased him , his mood would sour further . He might not

speak to her for days . So every time she cooked for him , it was with trembling hands and meticulous care , often emerging from the kitchen sweaty and exhausted .

And while he ate , she would stand nearby , serving him - refilling his plate , ladling his soup . "

This ham is too salty . " " This stew is undercooked . " 1/3 III O < 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MOM

Chapter 37 Share a Meal She'd listen intently , whispering apologies , " Got it . I'll do better next time . " They had never once shared a meal at the same table . And now , Cassian was inviting her to do just that . " It's dull eating alone . Join me , " he said . Ah . Because it's dull . Elowen nodded , understanding that sentiment all too well .

After her family was gone , she , too , had found meals lonely and tedious . She sat down . From Cassian's vantage point , he saw her quiet profile . Finished Her gaze remained fixed on the dishes , her lashes lowered , effectively shielding whatever emotion lay beneath . She seemed preoccupied , but since she offered nothing , he didn't press .. They ate the rest of the meal in a companionable , if silent , peace , the only sounds the soft clink of cutlery against porcelain .

As they finished and dusk began to settle , Elowen sipped from a cup of water , a crucial realization suddenly dawning . Cassian is awake ! She had been sharing his bed all this time . But now he was conscious ... While he was unconscious , it had been marginally acceptable . But now ... Elowen couldn't quite imagine it . Cassian watched her hold the cup without drinking , her face twisted between tangled and worried . Honestly , it was a sight . He tho it for a moment , a smile tugging at his mouth " Elowen . " Distracted , she looked up . " Y - yes ?

" He asked , perfectly aware of the answer , " While I was unconscious , where did you sleep ? "

A blush crept up her neck . " I ... slept beside you . " Cassian made a noncommittal sound .

Elowen bit her lip . " My lord , if you find that inappropriate , Bran set up a cot in the adjoining room . I can sleep there ... " Cassian shook his head . " You'll stay here ." III O 2/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 37 Share a Meal . Elowen blinked , her fingers tightening around the cup , Finished Cassian , having bathed earlier , was already in bed when Elowen finished her own preparations .

He sat propped against the headboard , a book in his right hand , fully focused . She approached slowly , stopping by the bedside . " My lord , I'm ... coming in ." Without looking up from his ledger , he murmured , " Take your time . ") Then , a fraction of a second later , his brow furrowed slightly . " I'm coming in . " " Take your time . " The exchange sounded utterly absurd out of context . He glanced at Elowen , but she showed no reaction . She simply removed her slippers , climbed carefully onto the bed , minding his legs , and slipped under her own covers on the inner side .

She pulled the blanket up to her chin , leaving only her small face visible , framed by strands of hair that fell across her flushed cheeks . Suddenly , Cassian realized he couldn't focus on the book anymore . But putting it down now might make her nervous ... " My lord ... " Elowen's soft voice broke the quiet . His gaze returned to her face . She seemed to wrestle with herself before gathering her courage . " Could I ... could I row two of your guards to accompany me to Princess Maerwyn's banquet ? " admin

Chapter 38 The Princess ' Banquet Cassian frowned , an expression that looked almost like displeasure . Finished Instinctively , Elowen shrank a little further under her blanket . If it doesn't work , then forget it ... it's really not- " " You don't need to tiptoe around me , " Cassian said . Elowen blinked , confused . " I entrusted the stewardship of this household to you . That means

you have the authority to command its guards . There's no need to seek my permission for such things . Take as many as you wish , wherever you wish .

Asking for approval over such minor matters makes it seem as if I'm keeping you under my thumb ." His gaze remained fixed on her . " Do understand ? " you Elowen nodded slowly . " I understand . " Her voice was a soft promise . " My lord , you can rest assured . In public , I'll conduct myself with confidence . Even before the King , I'll speak of your trust and generosity . " Cassian felt his jaw tighten slightly . I don't think she fully grasps it . But Elowen was already succumbing to exhaustion . A yawn escaped her , her words growing faint .

" Oh , and don't worry - the gift for Princess Maerwyn is ready . I'll present it in Duskmoor Manor's name ... " Her sentence trailed off as sleep claimed her . It was no wonder . She had been busy all day . Cassian didn't disturb her . He set his book aside and , with a wave of his hand , extinguished the bedside candle News of Cassian's recovery wasn't widely broadcast , kept even from the residents of Rose Hall . For the next two days , Elowen prepared him two elaborate , nourishing meals daily , along with medicinal broths . The care paid off .

By the third day , the color had returned to Cassian's face , and some strength seemed to have seeped back into his frame . Soon , Maerwyn's birthday arrived . Before leaving , Elowen gave Cassian final instructions . Drink this broth before you leave , my lord . It might rain later , so take the oiled canvas cloak . " Cassian nodded . " Alright ." Elowen thought for a moment , then added , " If there are any special delicacies at the banquet , I'll bring some back for you . " Something in Cassian's chest softened . " ... Alright .

Finished Nervousness still fluttered within her , but the sight of the two guards - handpicked by Cassian for her protection - eased it somewhat . She settled into the carriage bound for the palace . As the carriage approached the palace gates , the sound of a bustling crowd filtered through the curtains . Maerwyn , beloved by the King and Queen , was celebrating not just her birthday , but her formal debut into society . The guest list included royals , high nobles , and powerful officials .

Rumor had it all , but the central ceremonial gate was open to accommodate the influx . The Duskmoor carriage approached the southwestern gate , already a scene of congested activity . The gate could only admit one carriage at a time , leading to a long , slow - moving queue . Elowen peered out and instructed the coachman , " Weave time . No need to rush or jostle . Just follow the line . " To the guards , she said , " Only intervene if absolutely necessary . " She didn't want to give anyone reason to accuse them of throwing their weight around .

Cassian already held immense power and faced no shortage of envious , plotting enemies . She had no wish to put them back in the crosshairs . The summer heat was oppressive . Even the well - ventilated , high - quality carriage grew stuffy after a while . Fine beads of sweat formed on Elowen's nose and brow She said nothing , simply fanning herself with her hand . Finally , the carriage lurched forward - their turn to enter . They were halfway through the gate when the coachman outside let out a sharp , " Whoa ! " The carriage jerked to a sudden halt .

Unprepared , Elowen was thrown forward , her forehead striking the wooden frame with a dull thud . " What happened ? " she asked , rubbing her temple . " Your Grace ! " the coachman called back , indignation clear in his voice . " Someone cut the line ! " Elowen heard his heated

exchange . " Can't you see we're already moving ? Charging in like that - if I hadn't reined in , we'd have collided and blocked the whole path ! " A haughty, dismissive voice retorted , " The road is for everyone ! Your carriage was crawling . Don't blame us for your sluggishness .

If everyone moved at your pace , we'd be here till midnight ! " Elowen pushed the carriage door open and stepped ou , slightly taken aback . She recognized the other carriage's design . It belonged to the Garrett family . The head of the Garrett family now was Galen Garrett . Once a low - born advisor to her father , he'd been III O 213 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 38 The Princess ' Banquet steadily promoted under her father's patronage . 86 % Finished After her father's death , Galen had been appointed Lord Chancellor , a position of significant influence with the King .

The Garrett family's star had risen swiftly in Vanelle's social circles . The door of the Garrett carriage opened as well . Elower found herself looking at a face she knew all too well . Daphne Garrett - Galen's second daughter , a year older than Elowen . In the past , Daphne had often trailed behind Elowen , calling her " Lady Elowen . " When Elowen sneaked out to wander the markets with Alaric , it was Daphne who covered for her . admin

Chapter 39 The Gate Finished Now , they stood on equal footing - no , the Garretts had the advantage . Their family thrived , their influence growing with the King's favor , while Elowen's father and brothers were moldering in their graves , their names fading from memory with each passing year . In her past life , it was Daphne who had entered the Crown Prince's Wing as Alaric's concubine . Her fortune had far outstripped Elowen's . Daphne had shared his bed on their wedding night . Whispers among the servants spoke of Alaric calling for a bath tice , a sign of his ardent favor .

Elowen , thinking their long friendship would provide ompanionship and support , had been naively hopeful . But Daphne , while addressing Elowen with a veneer of respect , had acted very differently . Because of her , the rift between Elowen and Alaric had widened into a chasm . The servants of the Wing , sensing the shift in power , bad gravitated towards Daphne , gradually ignoring Elowen until , at times , she couldn't even get a cup of water . Now , seeing Elowen . Daphne lifted a brow , crimson lips curving . " Elowen . What a surprise . It's been an age .

" Elowen's fingers tightened instinctively , her face paling slightly . Daphne noted her pallor but attributed it to the hardships of being wed to a crippled duke . She didn't dwell on it . With a light laugh , she added , " Now , be a dear and have your coachman back up . I need to go first ."

Under normal circumstances . Elowen might have yielded . It was a minor delay . But not today . Not just because of the past hurts , but because now she represented the honor of both skmoor Manor and Hale Manor . Her expression remained placid . " There is an order to hings .

My carriage has been waiting for its turn . Yours arrived later . Why should you take my place ?

" A flicker of annoyance crossed Daphne's face . Their st off blocked the gate , drawing impatient muters from the carriages behind . " How much longer ? " " Why have we stopped ? "

" What's the hold - up ? " A figure with a notoriously short temper jumped down from his carriage and strode forward . " What the hell is going on here ? " Elowen recognized him - Piers Leofric , only son of the Duke of Falconcrest .

Duke of Falconcrest's military honors rivaled the Hale He still served in court and held real power . || 1/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MM . Chapter 39 The Gate Piers , the pampered only heir , feared nothing and no one , not even the Crown Prince himself . 86 % Finished Rumor had it that the

only person who'd ever bested him was Cassian , the details of that encounter being murky . The young man , barely twenty with handsome , stormy features , glared at them . " There's a damn line ! Either move or get out of the way ! " Daphne bit her lip , turning to Elowen with a performative sigh .

" Elowen , I know you're upset with me , but look at all these people waiting . " She adopted a long - suffering tone . " Fine . If you're in such a hurry , go ahead . I can wait a little longer . " It was her classic tactic - accuse the victim . She was the one cutting in , yet with a few words , she painted Elowen as the unreasonable bully . Elowen had fallen for this trick many times before . Though she was accustomed to it , seeing it now still sparked a bitter , incredulous laugh . Piers was famously , almost fanatically , righteous .

It was said he'd interrogate a stray dog if it looked suspicious . His brows knitted together in disapproval . " What are you letting ' her do ? " he snapped at Daphne . He turned his glare on Elowen . " I know you - you're General Hale's daughter . And I know she used to follow you around . Looks like old habits die hard . You got used to pushing her around , and now you're the Duchess of Duskmoor , you think you can do as you please ! " At the mention of Cassian , his voice took on a sharper , more personal edge , though he cloaked it in righteous fervor .

" But this world runs on order and law First come , first served . You think you can bully someone right in front of me ? Think again ! " He pointed a decisive finger . " You w everyone else has entered ! " apologize to Lad Daphne . Then you will pull aside and wait until Elowen's delicate brows drew together . She met Piers ' gaze squarely , ready to explain . But Daphne cut in first , her voice a gentle , concerned murmur . " Lord Piers , your chivalry is appreciated . But we are at the palace gates . The Crown Prince's Wing is just over there .

If we cause a scene here , and word reaches His Highness ... " She glared meaningfully at Elowen before continuing " It's Princess Maerwyn's day . The Crown Prince is already occupied . To trouble him with something as trivial as a queue would be an unnecessary burden ." Elowen's frown deepened . This was Daphne's ultimate shield , the one that let her wist the truth with impunity . Alaric . Having shadowed Elowen for years , Daphne knew all a out her feelings for Alaric .

She knew that invoking his name was the surest way to make Elowen back dow and swallow her grievances , III O < 2/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MOM . Chapter 39 The Gate III 1.5K admin

Chapter 40 The Truth Prevails Don't trouble the Crown Prince . Don't anger the Crown Princ In her past life , that mantra had made Elowen swallow every insult , bury every grievance . But not anymore . Finished Piers was looking at Daphne with a mix of pity and frustration . " You're too soft ! That's why people walk all over you ! Just leave this to- " " Daphne , " Elowen's voice cut through , clear and cold . " Are you absolutely certain you were here first , and I cut in ? "

Daphne faltered , surprised by the direct challenge . Piers whirled on Elowen . " Why would she lie ?

" " And why are you so sure she wouldn't ? " Elowen retorted . " Did you see it happen ? " Piers was stumped . He'd been too far back in the throng to see the initial sequence . " Elowen , really , it's fine , " Daphne interjected hastily , adopting a conciliatory tone . " You go ahead . It doesn't matter . Let's just forget this whole thing . " She made to retreat into her carriage , signaling her coachman to leave . " Stop ! " Elowen's voice rang out , sharper this time . " You don't go to sling mud and just walk away !

" The two Duskmoor guards , alert to her tone , moved swiftly to block the Garrett carriage's path . Panic flickered in Daphne's eyes . " Elren , please ... the Crown Prince- " " What of the Crown Prince ? " Elowen cut her off , her gaze icy . " I'm married to the Duke . Duskmoor . That makes me his elder . He should address me with respect . Am I to fear offending him ? Even if he were here now , this matter would still need to be settled properly ! Daphne stared , dumbfounded . Elowen has lost her mind . Didn't she love the Crown Prince most ?

How can she risk his anger , risk being seen as an unruly shrew But the undeniable fact remained - Elowen was in the right . Flustered and fearful , Daphne turned tear - filled eyes to Piers , pleading silently for his continued defense . But Piers wasn't looking at her . Elowen's voice was crisp and unyielding . " I arrived first . waited in line for at least fifteen minutes . The Garrett carriage arrived later and insisted on pushing ahead ." III O < 1/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 MM Chapter 40 The Truth Prevails ¥ 86 % Finished She gestured to her own face . " See ?

My face is flushed from the heat and the wait . Lady Daphne , however , looks perfectly composed , not a hair out of place ." Piers looked from Elowen's flushed , slightly sweaty brow to Daphne's immaculate appearance . The evidence was plain . " Furthermore , " Elowen continued , her words landing with deliberate weight , " the carriages behind mine are still here . The gate guards are right there . Lord Piers , why don't you ask them who cut in line ?" Murmurs rose from the crowd behind them . " That's right , the Duskmoor carriage was ahead , waiting properly !

" " It was definitely the Garrett carriage that pushed in ! " The comments reached Piers clearly . The anger drained from his face , replaced by chagrin and embarrassment . He couldn't meet Elowen's eyes . " I ... I was mistaken . My apologies ." To his credit , he admitted his error

without hesitation . Elowen regarded him . " Then you know what must happen now ? " Piers blinked , genuinely confused . " What ? " " Earlier , " Elowen said , each word precise , " you accused me of cutting in and bullying . You demanded I apologize to her and wait until last . Now the truth is clear .

She is the one who cut the line and slandered me . Should she not apologize ? Should there not be consequences ? " A light dawned in Piers ' eyes . He smacked his thigh . " You're right ! " Upon hearing this , Daphne burst into tears . " Elowen , I was inside the carriage . I didn't see what happened . It was all the coachman's fault ..." Her delicate hand gestured towards the coachman . The man , understanding his role , immediately dropped to his knees , kowtowing on t cobblestones . Daphne's voice trembled with sobs . " Elowen , I can apologize . If you're still angry , I ...

I can kneel and beg your forgiveness too ... " A wave of sympathy rippled through some onlookers . " Come now , that's enough . " " She didn't mean it . No need to be so harsh . " " Just clear the air . She's just a gentlewoman . " " It's just a queue . A small thing . Look how upset she is .. Elowen's brow furrowed . It wasn't so much anger she felt , but a weary recognition . This was the way of the world for so many - easy indifference until the trouble was their own . "

Silence ! " ||| O 2/3 11:37 Fri , Apr 3 M M. Chapter 40 The Truth Prevails Piers ' roar cut through the murmurs .

86 % Finisher Everyone knew the Falconcrest heir's temperament . His status commanded respect , and his current fury ensured immediate compliance . The crowd fell quiet . Piers ' face was stern . " Since when do tears make you right ? Cutting in is cutting in . Slander is slander . If

a few sobs could wipe the slate clean , why would the King bother with prisons ? A murderer could just cry and walk free ! " admin