

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 341 In Each Other's Arms 15% Finished She looped her arms around Cassian's neck, and her so warmth instantly filled his arms. She was so close their noses nearly brushed, and her voice came low and teasing. "What's wrong? You look upset." Her face was only inches away, pale and delicate, her eyes bright enough to steal the breath from him. Cassian felt his mood give way at once. The last of his irritation melted. He sighed, tightened his hold on her, and let his chin brush her hair. "A little." Elowen traced a finger over his brow. "Want to tell me why?" He hesitated, then frowned.

"Too many people want you" Elowen blinked, then laughed. "What do you mean? Floira? She's a Nordan princess. She can't possibly be your rival." She really couldn't help it-Cassian's jealousy was a little adorable. "Men have instincts," he said quietly. "And women can fall in love too." Especially Flowira. He couldn't explain it, but something about her put him on edge. Elowen leaned in and kissed the corner of his mouth. "Don't brood over that. Even if she did want me, it wouldn't matter. My heart only has room for you." She took his hand and pressed it over the gentle curve of her belly.

"And now there's a part of you inside me too. No one's taking me away." Looking down at her, Cassian couldn't stop the smile that touched his mouth. It softened his whole face. Elowen finally relaxed and leaned against his chest. "Still I don't get it. Why is Zachary being so nice? Why am I supposed to be special? I've never even met him before." "I can have someone look into it," Cassian murmured, rubbing slow circles along her back. Elowen nodded at once. "Please. I'd rather know than keep guessing." Then she tipped her face up, eyes bright with mischief. "I'm so lucky to have you, Cassian."

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If I didn't, what would I ever do..." She let the words trail off on purpose, her tone sweet enough to be obviously fake. 93 Cassian laughed. "Where do you get these lines?" She winked. "You don't like them?" His answer came without pause. "I love them." "Then I'll save them just for you," Elowen said with a smile. Before long, the late hour started to catch up to her, and she covered a tiny yawn. "I want to nap in your arms." || 1/2 12:28 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 341 In Each Other's Arms Cassian brushed her hair back from her face. "Of course 15% Finished But Elowen still wasn't done.

She softened her voice and pouted a little. "And I want you to sing me to sleep." He agreed easily. One arm held her close while the other gently patted her back, and then he began to hum a lullaby in that deep, magnetic voice of his. Elowen nestled closer, her voice muffled against him. "You sing so well. Did someone teach you?" "My mother used to sing to me," Cassian said gently. "Do you like it?" She nodded. "I love it." "Then I'll sing whenever you want," he promised. "Mhm." Elowen closed her eyes. Cassian's mention of his late mother stirred thoughts of her own.

Her mother had died years ago, and even the memory of her face had begun to fade. Half-awake, drifting somewhere between thought and sleep, Elowen suddenly felt that memory sharpen. Vivid. Strange. Why did it feel like she'd seen someone with a face like hers not long ago? But she was too sleepy to chase the thought. Before she could think any further, she drifted off. That night, Cassian sent someone to investigate Nordia. He knew it would take time for news to travel there and back. But before any answer returned, Warren came to visit.

Before this, with relations between Nordia and Avenlor so strained, Warren had been closely watched at an estate outside the city and rarely allowed out. The last time he'd come to

Duskmoor Manor, he'd done it in secret. Now, though, with the Nordan envoys in Vanelle, his position was less delicate. For the first time in a while, he could breathe a little easier. Still, he had been gone from Avenlor for years. His old friends had either died in battle or were posted far away, and he had never cared much for city life. Most days, he kept to himself.

But just before the Christmas, he finally gathered the courage to visit Duskmoor Manor. 2.4K III

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Chapter 342 Reunion He arrived while Elowen and Cassian were having breakfast. Since becoming pregnant, Elowen no longer rose early. By the time they sat down to eat, the sun was already high. Warren saw that as he entered, and paused, clearly surprised. Elowen smiled, bright as morning itself. "Here to steal breakfast?" Without waiting for an answer, she turned to the maids. "Bring another place setting." He waved both hands at once. "You're too kind, Your Grace. I didn't come for breakfast." Elowen turned back, curious. "Then what did you come for?"

Warren hesitated before speaking.

"The Christmas is almost here. I was hoping... if it's allowed, I could bring my wife and daughter to join me. Or else be granted leave to go see them for the holiday." He sounded cautious, almost guilty. Elowen paused. She had heard Cassian speak many times about Warren's devotion to his wife, Rowena. Elowen had gotten along well with Rowena, but Rowena's daughter, Elara, had once nursed a naive infatuation with Cassian. That was one of the reasons Rowena had taken her daughter and left the capital. Elowen glanced at Cassian. Cassian said nothing.

He simply served her another helping of vegetables with calm, steady hands. The meaning was obvious. It is my call. Elowen felt a soft sigh rise in her chest. She still had some reservations. But when she saw the hope on Warren's weathered face, and thought of Rowena raising their

daughter on her own, her heart softened. At this time of year, everyone deserved to be with family. She smiled, her voice gentle but firm. "Of course. Christmas's is for family, I'll have the manor send a carriage to bring your wife and daughter here."

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The gues house will be yours until the season ends." Gratitude flooded Warren's face, and his words nearly tipped over each other. "Thank you-thank you so much! And you too, Your Grace!" "But," Elowen said, turning serious, "there is one thing." He stiffened. "What is it?" She met his eyes. "Your daughter greatly admires the Duke. A few months ago, while you were in Nordia, your wife brought her to the manor. More than once, she said she wanted to become his concubine-that she hoped he would take her in, and that I would agree. Shock flashed across Warren's face.

||| O 1/3 12:28 Mon, Apr 13 O Chapter 342 Reunion 15% Finished "She's a good girl, and I don't look down on her feelings But I could never accept a concubine, so I refused. Your wife understood and took her home immediately. Elowen's tone stayed matter-of-fact. "Lieutenant Wrenner, I'm happy for your family to be together this Christmas. But I do hope you'll speak to your daughter." Regret darkened his face. "I've been gone too long. I wasn't there to guide her, and for that I'm sorry." He bowed deeply. "You have my word. It won't happen again." Elowen smiled and nodded. "We trust you.

That's why I agreed." Then she gave a soft sigh. "I really enjoyed talking with our wife before she left. I hated to see her go." Her smile brightened again. "When she arrives, make sure you bring her here. Tell her I invited her myself." Warren broke into a relieved grin. "I will!" By the end of the conversation, Warren felt a quiet sens of relief. He found himself looking at the

duchess with newfound respect. She had been generous, willing to understand the hardships his family had endured, even agreeing to let them reunite.

At the same time, she had spoken plainly about her concerns, laying them out with calm honesty and sound reason. Warren couldn't help thinking that it showed in her upbringing. A daughter raised in a general's household carried herself differently. No wonder Cassian trusted her so deeply, cherished her and felt comfortable placing the entire household of Duskmoor Manor in her hands. Elowen gestured again. "Will you stay and eat with us?" Warren looked tempted, but uncertain. He glanced toward Cassian. Cassian gave him a lazy grin. "Come on. Don't make us beg." Elowen laughed.

"It's more polite to say yes anyway." Warren chuckled and sat down, At Elowen's signal, a maid brought fresh spoon and a bowl. Warren looked over the breakfast spread-eggs, bacon, laky pastries, golden jam, sautéed greens-and seemed almost overwhelmed. "After all these years in Nordia, I'd almost forgotten what a real breakfast looks like," A thought flashed through Elowen's mind. Nordia and Avenlor haven't had much contact for years, so neher side really knows the other very well. Everyone keeps thinking about sending people north to gather information, yet they're missing the obvious.

Lieutenant Wrenner is right here, He spent years in Nordia. Why go looking far away when we ready have the answer here? O 2/3 12:28 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 342 Reunion Elowen turned toward him, a spark of interest lighting her eyes. 15% Finished "Come to think of it, Lieutenant Wrenner," she said, "you spent quite a few years in Nordia. You must know the royal family fairly well, don't you?" 2.4K admin

Chapter 343 A Pattern Emerges Warren nodded. "Not everything. But I've heard plenty 15% 1 Finished Elowen pressed on. "Do you know the visiting envoys? Zachary and Flowira especially?" He nodded again. "They're twins, and they look almost exactly alike. If they dressed the same, most people couldn't tell them apart." Elowen remembered something from her previous life. Back then, the envoys sent for the Christmas talks had not been these two. She frowned. "A few months ago, there was upheaval in Nordia's royal family, wasn't there? That's how you managed to return to Avenlor.

What happened?" Warren set down his spoon, his tone turning formal. "Nordia's ruling family bears the surname Wallace. The king was powerful and had many children. Zachary and Flowira's family name is Howard. Their father married the king's sister, but under Nordian custom tha alone shouldn't have put them in line to inherit the throne. Still, they claimed the gods had chosen them. With the people behind them, and Zachary pushing hard for it, they managed to take power with their father's backing." Elowen leaned forward, curiosity lighting her expression.

"What do you mean, the gods chose them?" Warren explained, "Life in Nordia is harsh, so the people are deeply religious. In earlier years, there was even something like a holy woman, someone said to speak with the gods. But such women were rare, and they never lived long. By the time I got there, none remained. I never believed much in gods myself. I think the Howards just got lucky." "Oh?" Warren continued, "At the beginning of the year, a plague broke out. Many Nordians died. Even the king fell ill.

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Then an physician arrived in Nordia-a true master and he cured the outbreak." Warren's voice took on a note of awe. "But Zachary told the people the healer was proof of the gods' mercy, and

that helped his family rise to power." A physician. Extraordinary skill. Elowen's heart started pounding. A daring thought flashed through her mind. She pressed him. "Do you know the doctor's name?" "I never heard it. But he looked almost unearthly. I do remember one thing, though. The things he carried were marked with a special pattern. It looked like...

some kind of herb, I think." Elowen couldn't hide the urgency in her voice. "What kind of herb?

Was it... twinleaf?" Warren gave an honest shrug. "I don't know herbs. I couldn't tell you."

"That's fine." Elowen excused herself, hurried back to her room, and took a bottle from her chest of treasures, Hugh had once obtained this bottle. A twinleaf design was carved into its base, marking it as her grandfather's. She rushed back and put it in Warren's hands.

"Did the pattern look like this?" O 1/2 12:28 Mon, Apr 13 O Chapter 343 A Pattern Emerges He studied it carefully, then nodded without hesitation. Exactly like this." He looked up, echoing her urgency. "How do you have this, Your Grace?" Finished Hope tightened in Elowen's chest until it almost hurt. Her voice shook. "Then the doctor you saw in Nordia must have been my grandfather." Warren fell silent for a moment, taken aback. "Now that you mention it... I heard Mrs. Hale was skilled in medicine." Emotion swept through Elowen so suddenly it nearly overwhelmed her.

All this time, she'd assumed the Nordians were drawing close to her for political reasons, or because they wanted to use her. But now it made sense. They were doing it because of her grandfather. She swallowed and asked more softly, "Do you know if he's still in Nordia?"

Warren shook his head. "After the plague was cured, things turned chaotic. I managed to send a letter home and return to Avenlor, but I don't know what happened after that." Disappointment

pricked through her at once. "We'll figure it out," Cassian said lightly, offering her another bite of food. "Eat first.

"We'll handle your grandfather's situation one step at a time." She nodded and picked up her spoon again. After breakfast, Elowen kept her promise and sent a carriage and guards to bring Rowena and Elara. Even so, the news about her grandfather distracted her all day. She forced herself to focus on the holiday preparations arranging bonuses and food parcels for everyone in the manor. Everything was distributed carefully by rank and years of service, though even the lowest servant received a generous ten dollars. That night, after dinner, Cassian gave Elowen her usual soothing massage.

She lay on her back, her face quiet with worry. 2.4K J| 2/2 admin

Chapter 344 Her Grandfather's Shadow Cassian paused and leaned over her. "Thinking about your grandfather?" Elowen nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. "He's the only family I have left." Cassian raised a brow. "Only family?" She glanced at him, then corrected herself. "Other than you." He rested a hand on her belly. "And our child?" She caught herself, and the faintest smile touched her lips. "And our child." 15% Finished As soon as she said it, the truth of it settled over her. Her family wasn't shrinking. It was growing. Warmth rose in her chest.

Cassian's palm stayed protectively over her stomach. "I never learned much about your grandfather. Just that his name was Wynne, and that he was a gifted healer. Did he only have your mother?" Elowen laid her hand over his. "He had two sons and a daughter. My mother was the youngest. I have two uncles." She paused, a little embarrassed. "So maybe I'm not quite as alone as I said. My uncles and their families are still out there somewhere. We just haven't had

real contact in years. And my grandmother... I only ever knew her from a portrait." She let out a long, slow sigh.

"But that was so long ago. I couldn't remember her face now even if I tried." Cassian listened quietly. "Was your grandfather good to you?" Her whole face lit up. "He spoiled me rotten. He always gave me special presents for my birthday. One year he even gave me an entire mountain range-a valley with a blue lake. It was called..." She stopped herself, her heart jumping. If she said the real name, Cassian would know she was Azure. "Huh?" Thankfully, she recovered quickly. "Called..."

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It's been so long since I was back in Falkriver, I can't remember." Then she even let out an exaggerated sigh, putting on quite a show. Cassian clearly wasn't fooled, but he only looked at her with a gentle, knowing smile. "Have you ever been to Falkriver? It's beautiful in its own way-so different from Vanelle. Here everything is busy streets and fine clothes. But Falkriver is wild. Mountains, lakes, strange herbs everywhere. They even have elephants. My youngest uncle could tame them.

He let me feed one once, and I even got to ride a baby elephant..." As she talked, contentment slowly warmed her cheeks. Cassian smoothed her hair back and watched her until her mood lightened, then turned his attention back to easing the tension from her body. Relaxed and warm, Elowen said after a while, "If Lieutenant Wrenner was telling the truth, and the Nordian royals really know my grandfather, then maybe that's why they're willing to help. Zachary did say as much.

Cassian, do you think they mean it?" O < 1/2 12:28 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 344 Her Grandfather's Shadow Cassian's tone stayed easy. "We'll know soon enough. Anyone can talk. Let's wait and see who follows through." Elowen nodded thoughtfully. Finished Two days later, a Nordian envoy arrived at the Crown Prince's Wing, speaking fluent Avenlorian. "I've come on behalf of Her Highness, the Fifth Princess. After the ther day, Her Highness has reconsidered. She now believes the Crown Princess may have had a point." Daphne's eyes brightened.

"Does the princess have a suggestion?" The envoy shook his head. "Not a suggestion. A warning The Duke of Duskmoor is close to his wife. He won't be easy to tempt. Any ordinary trick is unlikely to drive them apart." Daphne frowned. She had to admit that sounded true. The envoy smiled. "Still, Her Highness and His Highnes will support whatever plan you choose. And if the Duke is willing, a political marriage is not out of the question." A political marriage! Daphne's eyes widened. Of course. Elowen had been married to the Duke for months, and still there was no sign of a child.

The Nordians wanted a royal alliance. If His Majesty had a reason to cast aside a wife with no heirs and no powerful family behind her, why would he hesitate? Iris moved closer to Daphne and whispered, "Your Highness, something about this feels... wrong." Daphne's smile tightened. "Wrong? What, you think youre the only clever one here?" Iris immediately lowered her head. "I wouldn't dare, Your Highness. I just think that after everything with the Duke and Duchess... whatever you decide, you should send someone to scout out Duskmoor Manor first." 11 2.4K admin

Chapter 345 Secrets × 1.15% 1 Finished Iris let out a quiet sigh. "But... Duskmoor Manor is famous for tight security. I'm not sure we'd get anything useful." Daphne gave a dismissive snort.

"That's easy. Throw enough money around, and people talk. Everyone loves money." Iris turned to her. "How much do you think?" Daphne's expression hardened. "Five should be enough. Even the highest-ranking ladies-in-waiting in the palace were fortunate to earn one dollar a month, let alone the servants at Duskmoor Manor. To them, five dollars was a fortune.

With that much on the table, they'd scramble to spill whatever they knew. Iris paused and thought it through. She had once served in Daphne's household as a personal maid, and in a whole year she had barely earned five dollars. After she married into the Crown Prince's Wing staff, her wages improved, but only to one dollar a month. In their world, five dollars really was an enormous sum. She didn't question the amount. Instead, she asked, "Then who are you planning to send into Duskmoor Manor?" Daphne frowned. "I haven't decided.

Do you have someone in mind?" Iris edged closer and lowered her voice. "The Baker family." Daphne looked at her, brow tightening. "The Baker family?" Iris nodded. "The Baker family steward's son, Geoffrey, grew up with Clarisse. But some time ago, Geoffrey offended Lady Sylvia—you know, the one who just married into Falconcrest Manor. The Duke punished him for it, and now..." She hesitated. "The poor man can even call himself a man anymore." Daphne waved that away. "He's just a servant, dead or alive, what does it matter?" Iris softened her voice.

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"There's also a rumor that Lady Clarisse never married because she had... well, an ongoing affair with Geoffrey," At that, Daphne laughed sharply, the sound ringing through the room. "Clarisse acts like she's above everyone. Turns out she's just as low as the rest." The last words came out bitter, Iris hesitated, then pressed on. "If you bring the Baker family in, they'll have reason to help. They'll want to bury Clarisse's secret just as much as you want your information." Daphne

studied her for a long moment, then lifted her chin. "Fine. We'll do it your way." Duskmoor Manor was quiet..

Elowen had just finished revising the first draft of her new story, marking corrections and notes in the 1/3 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 345 Secrets margins. Overall, she was pleased with it. 林会15% Finished But the hardest part still remained-choosing a title, and deciding what pen name to use. Titles had never been her strength. She sat there for a long while, staring off into space, her cheeks resting in her hands as she gazed out the window. The sun was already sinking low. And all at once, she missed Cassian. They had only napped together after lunch.

When she woke, Cassian had gone off to deal with some business, and Elowen had slipped into her study to write in secret. We've only been apart for a couple of hours, and I already find myself missing him. Elowen absently rubbed her stomach and murmured, "Sweetheart, do you think your father's got me completely under his spell?" Cassian's warm, unhurried voice drifted in from outside "Oh? What makes you say that?" Elowen didn't startle. By now, she was quite practiced at looking perfectly innocent whenever Cassian caught her up to something.

Without hurry, she slid a book over the fresh pages of her manuscript, hiding them from view, then lifted her head and gave him a sly little smile. "Because I can't seem to stop thinking about him." Cassian raised a brow, amused. "We just took a nap together," Elowen said with a sigh. "And the second you left, I missed you. Isn't that strange?" Cassian laughed softly as he walked over and stopped in front of her. He bent down and kissed her gently on the lips. "Nothing strange about it, Ella. You miss me because you love me." Elowen blushed and tilted her face up, her voice quiet and coaxing.

"Kiss me again." The tenderness in his eyes made her feel like she was the only thing in the world. He happily leaned down and kissed her again, deeper this time, slow and lingering. When they finally pulled apart, Cassian asked, "Want another?" Elowen giggled and wiped at her lips. "Alright, that's enough." Cassian brushed his thumb over her cheek. "I made stew noodles and sesame biscuits. Want to eat now?" She agreed in a voice as soft as her smile, and let him help her to her feet. Dinner was already set out.

The broth was rich and hot, loaded with slow-cooked pork, and the fermented seasonings filled the air with a mouthwatering smell. Elowen took a spoonful and tasted it. Her eyes curved into happy crescents. "This is delicious!" Cassian smiled as he watched her eat. He tore a warm sesame biscuit in half and placed part of it by her hand. "By the way," he said, "Daphne just sent someone to make a deal with the Baker family." Elowen chewed, swallowed, and said, "Perfect."

Chapter 346 Ties That Bind Alaric had Isla behind him, and Isla had the Baker family behind her. If the Baker family got dragged into this, then if Daphne got caught, they would have to share the consequences. And if they lost standing, Alaric's hold over the Crown Prince's Wing would weaken too. The thought put Elowen in a good mood, and even the noodles seemed to taste better. As Christmas Eve drew near, Elira sent Matilda to invite Elowen to the palace to discuss arrangements for the royal banquet. Elowen arrived early. Lyra was already there.

The twelve-year-old princess was curled up asleep in Elira's lap, all soft innocence and childish ease. Looking at her, Elowen felt a sudden ache of nostalgia. She used to love, in her mother's lap like that. Her mother had always smelled faintly sweet, and her warmth had been

softer and safer than any bed. "Your Grace," Elowen said, pulling herself out of the memory as she greeted Elira. Lyra stirred at the sound, lifting her sleepy head and blinking at Elowen with dazed, owlsh eyes. Elowen smiled warmly at her. "The Duchess of Duskmoor is here," Elira said.

She gave Lyra a pat on the back. "Up now, and mind your manners." Lyra clearly wanted to keep dozing, but she sat up obediently. Elira turned back to Elowen with a gentle smile. "I didn't summon you for anything urgent. You've likely heard that His Majesty has entrusted me with overseeing the Queen's household privileges, so court matters have kept me quite busy lately. My mother visited not long ago, but I hardly had a moment to speak with her before she left." She gestured toward the table. "She did bring a few things from home, though.

Among them was a beautiful inkstand and quill set, and there's a small story behind it." Elowen looked up, curiosity bright in her eyes, "Oh?" Elira smiled faintly. "The set was originally meant as a coming-of-age gift for your sister-in-law. She never used it, and when she married your brother she left it behind. My mother found it while sorting through some old belongings at home. It seemed a shame to leave something so finely ade sitting in storage, so she brought it to the palace for me. But I already have more writing things than I could ever need." She looked at Elowen.

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"So I thought you might like it." 173 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 346 Ties That Bind Elowen's

heart gave a small, startled leap. 即刻 15% Finished Her sister-in-law had always kept meticulous household ledgers. Her handwriting was elegant, and she had a fondness for collecting fine stationery and writing sets Elowen even remembered her mentioning this particular piece before. A beautifully crafted twin-swan inkstand, rare enough that people treated

it almost like family heirloom. Elira knew how close Elowen had once been to her sister-in-law, and to her brother as well.

The gift had clearly been chosen with care. She needed Elowen's help, and she wasn't trying to hide it. With a small motion of her hand, Elira signaled for the box to be brought in. The matron returned from the adjoining room carrying it carefully in both hands and presented it to Elowen. "You see," Elira said gently, "I'm still finding my footing now that I've been placed in charge of the Queen's household privileges. The Queen claims to be unwell and has excused herself from most duties, so I can't rely on her guidance for the banquet.

I'll have to manage it myself, and I was hoping you might offer a little advice." There was no pretense in it. She spoke plainly. Cassian had already warned Elowen. The Queen was said to be ill, but according to him, the illness was likely more convenient than genuine. Elowen had begun to suspect that the Queen had somehow angered Theodric. That would explain why her authority had quietly been handed over to Elira, along with responsibility for organizing the largest royal gathering of the year. If Elira mishandled the banquet, Theodric might well restore the Queen's authority.

And this year, with Nordian envoys in Vanelle, the celebration would be far larger and more complicated than usual. With few people she could truly rely on, Elira had come to Elowen. But Elira was no naïve court lady. She had spent years navigating the royal court and had raised children of her own. She wasn't the sort to walk into a trap unprepared. Bringing out such a prized writing set first was her way of securing Elowen's goodwill. "Please accept it," Elira said softly. "I'd be honored." Elowen accepted without hesitation.

Mira, understanding the exchange without a word being spoken, stepped forward and carefully took the box. Elowen turned back to Elira. "Ask whatever you'd like. I'll tell you what I can." Elira brightened immediately. "Good." They began speaking in earnest. 2/3 12:29 Mon, Apr 13

Chapter 346 Ties That Bind Finished Elira asked about seating arrangements, which member of the royal family should be kept well apart, and what dishes Cassian preferred or disliked. She already knew how to please Theodric. It was Cassian, the Duke of Duskmoor, who was harder to read.

And offending him could be every bit as dangerous as offending Theodric. 2.4K 3/3 admin

Chapter 347 Banquet Schemes Toward the end of their conversation, Elira sighed and turned the subject to the Nordian envoys. Lyra sat quietly off to the side, listening. 15% Finished Once they had settled everything related to Cassian and the royal family, Elowen said, "At the welcoming banquet, Nordia's fourth prince seemed polite and reasonable. If you're unsure about anything involving their delegation, maybe you should ask him directly." Elira nodded thoughtfully. "That's a good idea." With the serious matters settled, the conversation grew warmer and more relaxed.

Elira said, "His Majesty joined me for supper last night, and he brought up you and the Duke. He's still asking after Cassian's leg." Elowen smiled politely. "I'm grateful for His Majesty's concern." Elira's expression turned more serious. "There's a great deal of talk at court about heirs, especially Cassian's line. You know as well as I do that the whole court-really, the whole kingdom-is waiting for news of your child." For a moment, Elowen didn't know what to say. Elira's voice gentled, almost motherly. "Heirs matter. Royal heirs even more so.

When I gave birth to a son, my own rank was raised. You should keep that in mind." Elowen thought of her sister-in-law, who would probably have said the same thing. She nodded obediently. "Thank you, Your Grace. I'll remember." "Aunt..." Lyra spoke up softly, carefully. Elowen smiled at her. "What is it?" Lyra looked at her closely. "You live outside the palace. You've heard of Azure, haven't you?" Elowen paused, though she kept her expression neutral. "Azure is well known both in the palace and outside it. Of course I've heard of her." Lyra sighed.

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"I figured." Elowen stayed a little while longer before taking her leave. As soon as she was gone, Elira narrowed her eyes and scolded Lyra. "Why did you bring up Azure to your aunt?" Lyra looked embarrassed, but stubborn. "My brother said Azure's handwriting looked a lot like hers. I wanted to see if she might actually be Azure." Elira stared at her. "You two have been sneaking those novels again? You even looked at the original manuscripts?" Flustered, Lyra slapped both hands over her mouth.

1/3 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 O Chapter 347 Banquet Schemes 15%0 Finished Elira's face darkened in mock anger. "You're only twelve. You should not be reading that kind of romance." "But it's really good- "I don't care. Not until you're sixteen. If I catch you again, you'll copy your lessons fifty times." Meanwhile, Elowen's carriage was rattling out through the palace gates. Without warning, the driver stopped. Elowen was about to ask why when Daphne's impatient voice came from outside. "Why have we stopped?" An attendant answered, "The road is too narrow for both carriages, Your Highness.

One of them has to wait." Daphne sounded irritated. "Then tell them to move." The attendant hesitated. "It's Duskmoor Manor's carriage, Your Highness." There was a pause. Then Daphne pushed open the carriage door and looked out. Sure enough, it was Elowen's usual carriage from

Duskmoor Manor. A smile curled at her lips. "Aunt," she called. Inside, it was warm. Elowen was curled around a heated stone Cassian had prepared for her, drowsy and comfortable. She couldn't be bothered to open the door. She only answered with a lazy, "Hmm?" Daphne's voice turned bright in an almost forced way.

"just came back from outside the palace. Guess who I ran into?" Elowen said nothing. Daphne waited, awkwardness creeping in, then clasped her hands and continued, "Did you know Lieutenant Wrenner's wife and daughter are in Vanelle now? I heard Miss Wrenner has always dreamed of becoming the Duke's concubine." "Do you want that?" Elowen cut in, her voice cold and direct. Daphne was caught off guard. "That's impossible. I'm the Crown Princess. I could never-" "Then move. I'm sure His Highness is waiting for you in the Crown Prince's Wing.

Cassian is waiting for me at home." S Daphne stared at the closed carriage door, teeth clenched. Several seconds passed before she finally hissed, "Fine." She slammed her own door hard enough to make it echo. Gloat while you can, Elowen, On Christmas Eve, we'll see who gets the laugh, By the time Elowen returned to Duskmoor Manor, the sun still hadn't fully set. She took Mira's hand and stepped carefully down from the carriage. Out of habit, she glanced to her right. The garden lay under soft winter light, the snow bright and clean. 2/3 admin

Chapter 348 Old Friends And New Hearts 会15% 创 Finished At the end of the covered walkway sat Cassian in his wheelchair, posture straight, wrapped in a dark velvet robe and a black fox-fur cloak. The fur around his face softened his sharp features and gave him an almost boyish look. He sat there quietly, hands folded in his lap. Not the fearsome Duke of Duskmoor, but something closer to a patient child waiting for family to come home. When he saw Elowen, the chill vanished from his eyes. He smiled, small and genuine, his voice low and warm.

"Ella, you're back." She hurried toward him, her boots squeaking over the packed snow. When she stopped in front of him, she brushed a small snowflake from his shoulder. "Why are you sitting out here in the cold?" Cassian gave her an innocent look. "Mrs. Wrenner and her daughter are inside." Elowen blinked, then grinned. "So you're hiding?" Cassian didn't deny it. "Without you here, I wouldn't dare stay alone with them." The honesty of it was so unexpected-and so endearing-that Elowen's heart softened at once. She slipped her hand warmer into his hands.

"Here.

It's still warm." Cassian accepted it easily. Elowen moved behind the chair, set her hands on the handles, and began pushing him forward. She went deliberately slowly, pretending to struggle. Then she bent down and whispered, "Are you getting heavier? If you keep pretending, I really won't be able to push you much longer." Cassian shook with laughter and glanced back over his shoulder. "Don't worry. I probably won't keep it up much longer." Then he changed the subject. "What did Elira want at the palace?" As she guided him down the cleared path, Elowen began to answer.

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"Her Majesty says she's ill. Her Grace Elira's new to running the Queen's courts, and with the Christmas's banquet coming, she's afraid she'll make mistakes. So she asked me for advice," Cassian nodded. "At least she was smart enough to ask." "She even gave me a beautiful writing set," Elowen's voice brightened. Cassian's eyes narrowed slightly in recognition. "Your sister-in-law's?" Elowen lit up. "Exactly. How did you know?" Cassian tried to keep his expression calm, but his smile gave him away. "Just a guess." Elowen's eyes shone.

"We really do think alike, don't we That pleased Cassian so much he couldn't stop himself from smiling again. In a softer voice, Elowen added, "It's a twin-swans inkstand, finely made with two

swans carved along the base. They're meant to symbolize lifelong devotion. A rather fitting gift for us." 1/2 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 O Chapter 348 Old Friends And New Hearts Cassian looked absurdly happy. He could hardly have smiled wider. "Your Grace," a gentle woman's voice called from ahead. 15% Finished Elowen turned. out Rowena had come squirrel fur at the collar.

She looked thinner than Elowe remembered, but there was still an easy dignity about her. to greet them. She was graceful and composed, dressed in lavender with gray Behind her came Warren, trailing after his wife with a sly grin, broad and awkward and somehow almost comical beside her. Without even looking back, Rowena tapped lightly at his ankle with the tip of her shoe. He immediately straightened and bowed so fast he nearly lost his balance. Elowen let go of the wheelchair and hurried forward to ake Rowena's hand, searching her face. "It's been a long time. You've gotten thinner.

Was the journey difficult?" Warren could not keep himself quiet. "Don't worry, Your Grace. Now that she's here, I'll make sure she eats well every day. She'll be healthy again in no time." Rowena ignored him. She gently squeezed Elowen's hand and smiled. "Thank you for worrying about me, but I'm well. And you, my lady-you've never looked better." Elowen didn't mention her pregnancy. She just smiled softly and looked around. "Where's your daughter?" Rowena hesitated, then answered lightly, "Elara says it's too cold outside.

She'd rather stay in by the fire and read." A flicker crossed Elowen's face. 2.4K 2 2/2 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 admin

Chapter 349 Letting Go Of The Past 15% Finished In the past, if Elara had heard Cassian was nearby, no amount of rain or snow could have kept her away. Did she really let go? Did she finally find peace? way Rowena noticed Elowen's hesitation. She drew her a little closer and

spoke in a low voice meant for her alone. "Lately... Elara really has been calmer. She doesn't talk about the manor or His Grace nearly as much as she used to." Elowen nodded with a small smile.

"That's for the best." They exchanged a few more personal words, then Elowen released Rowena's hand and returned to Cassian's side, taking hold of the wheelchair again. Warren tried to take over, but Elowen shook her head with a smile. "I've got it." Rowena watched them with open warmth. "You and the Duke really are lovely together." Warren immediately put in, "We're close too." Rowena shot him a look, and he scratched his head sheepishly. The group went inside together. Elara was sitting by the fire in the parlor with a book in her hands.

Even from a distance, Elowen could tell her eyes weren't really on the page. Her gaze had gone unfocused, and she hardly turned a single page. When they entered, Elara finally turned one. Elowen and Cassian walked over, but Elara still didn't look up, even when Rowena said softly, "Elara, look who's here." It took a second call before Elara finally lifted her head. She looked first at Cassian, then at Elowen. Rising to her feet, she curtsied carefully. "Your Grace." Warren shook his head at his daughter, "The Duke is here too."

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Aren't you going to greet him?" Elara blinked, as if she had only just noticed Cassian. "Your Grace," she said quietly. Cassian gave a brief nod, his expression unreadable. Elara looked disappointed, and her hands tightened inside her sleeves. Elowen saw all of it, but only smiled. "It's been a while, Miss Wrenner." Elara met her eyes, shy but sincere. "You can call me Elara, if you'd like." "Alright. What are you reading today? It must be good, you're this absorbed." Elara held up the book.

"Tales of Luminara." Elowen had to pause, 1/2 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 Chapter 349 Letting Go Of The Past Is the whole world secretly reading my books? "I'm a huge fan of Azure," Elara said, searching Elowen's face. "Don't you know her stories?" Elowen let out a light laugh. "Of course I do." Finished Elara sighed. "It's such a shame she hasn't published anything in years. I've reread this one so many times I almost know it by heart. I guess life never really turns out the way you want." She looked genuinely disappointed. Rowena added, "I've told her to stop reading these romances.

She ought to read history, or at least something more proper, but she won't listen." Elowen smiled. "It's fine. Even I read stories like that now and then." Then she looked back at Elara. "Since you're here, would you like to stay at the manor?" Elara shook her head. "No need. Father arranged for us to stay at the guest house. I don't want to trouble His Grace or get in the way." She glanced at Cassian again, and the meaning was obvious. Cassian answered coolly and directly. "I'm glad you understand." Elara blinked. Elowen smiled and stepped in before the silence could sharpen.

"The guest house is fine. But if you need anything, tell me." Elara nodded quietly. Elowen ordered that the whole family stay for lunch. Afterward, she called Gerda over and gave instructions. "Send some dependable servants to the guest house. Make sure they have everything they need. Don't leave anything unattended. All expenses come from the household accounts.

And at year's end, give every servant helping there an extra ten dollars." Mira asked quietly, "Why are you treating them so generously?" Elowen replied, "Lieutenant Wrenner fought for Avenlo, and he spent years imprisoned in Nordia, separated from his family. He suffered a great

deal for us. Now that he's finally returned, if we don't treat him and his family well, what does that say? Who would stay loyal in the future if we showed no gratitude?" Mira listened, suddenly understanding, and nodded. As Elowen finished speaking, she felt Cassian's gaze on her. She turned and met his eyes.

2.4K 1 212 admin

Chapter 350 Christmas Finished Cassian was reclining with his chin propped in one hand, watching her with a look full of wonder and affection. His admiration was so open that Elowen felt herself blush. She touched her cheek, suddenly self-conscious. "Did I say something wrong?" Cassian slowly shook his head, his eyes bright. "Not at all" After a pause, he said quietly, "I was just thinking... my Ella has grown up so much.

You're thoughtful, you consider every angle, and you stay calm no matter what You really are the lady of this house now." She lowered her head, pleased and embarrassed at once. "That's only because you taught me." Cassian laughed and didn't deny it. Then he looked at her again. "But Ella... are you really not upset with Elara?" She met his gaze plainly. "Why would I be? She's just a girl." I've learned to let things go. Besides, if someone loves my stories, how bad can they really be She smiled, her tone turning lighter as she looked at him. "And I trust you.

I know you'd never betray me or do anything to hurt me. If I'm sure of that, why should worry about what anyone else thinks?" Warmth filled Cassian's eyes. He covered her hand gently with his own. "I promise, Ella. I would never betray you. I couldn't bear to see you cry because of me! Over the next few days, Elara and her family stayed quietly in the guest house. There was little trouble. And before long, Christmas Eve arrived. The palace banquet would be held that night,

but for now the morning was quiet and still. Elowen woke at dawn, earlier than usual, too full of thoughts to sleep.

Cassian was still asleep beside her, his breathing even and calm, and she couldn't resist being a little mischievous. She inched closer and pinched the bridge of his straight nose. When he still didn't wake, she reached out and threaded her fingers through the dark strands spread across the pillow. Cassian still didn't stir. In sleep, his face looked especially gentle in the soft early light. At the sight of him, a playful impulse rose in her, and she leaned down and kissed him on the lips. In the next instant, a warm hand closed firmly around her waist. Cassian slowly opened his eyes.

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The last trace of sleep had already vanished from the deep darkness of them. They were clear now, reflecting her face. His voice carried the rough, low edge of someone newly awake. "You're up early." Elowen didn't look the least bit flustered. She simply shifted where she lay, settling comfortably against his chest, smiling up at him. 111 O L 1/3 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 00 Chapter 350 Christmas 15% Finished "Cassian, it's Christmas Eve," she said brightly. "Let's decorate the house together today. Hang garlands, dress the tree. What do you think?" Cassian had grown up in the royal household.

Customs like that were unfamiliar to him. He made a quiet sound of puzzlement. "Hmm?" Elowen propped her head up on her arm, her eyes sparkling. "It's what families do," she said eagerly. "Back home, every Christmas Eve my parents would decorate the house with us. We'd hang wreaths and garlands, string ribbons everywhere, and bring in a fir tree to dress with ornaments and candles." Her smile widened as the memories returned. "My brother and I used to climb up on stools to help hang everything. And there was always so much to do.

Cleaning the house, baking sweets, preparing the Christmas feast..." She leaned closer, clearly enjoying the recollection. "Once everything was ready, we'd change into new clothes and gather around the fire. We'd snack on pastries and roasted nuts while we stayed up late together."

Cassian listened quietly. His gaze lingered on her face, and the look in his eyes softened little by little. When he was a child, he and Alaric had loved Christmas. The late king had always been busy. It was rare for him to visit them. But at the Christmas feast each year, they would see him.

He might even smile and ask what they wished for in the coming year. Once, when Cassian was seven or eight, he had flushed with excitement and said to his mother, "Mother, I love Christmas. I feel so happy." She had laughed softly and smoothed his hair. "Do you really?" she asked. "A few words from your father make you that happy?" Cassian had nodded earnestly. His mother had rested her hand on his head and smiled! "Then you would love the way ordinary families celebrate Christmas." Cassian tilted his head, curious. "How do they celebrate?" She told him, "Families gather together.

They decorate the house, wear new clothes, and stay up late by the fire, talking and laughing through the night." For a long time afterward, Cassian had quietly longed for that kind of Christmas. 213 12:29 Mon, Apr 1300 Chapt 350 Christmas 15% d Finished If it could be the four of them together. His father, his mother, his brother, and himself. Decorating the house, sharing the evening, staying awake by the fire. How happy that would have been. But his father had never had the time.

And as Cassian grew older, life in the royal family drew his attention elsewhere, toward the royal court and the battlefield. 2.4K 3/3 12:29 Mon, Apr 13 O admin