

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 401 Sweet Return Finished She paused for a moment, then snapped her fingers softly as something came back to her. "Oh, right. Set aside The Begonia Hairpin and have it brought to my chamber. That's the one I want to read tonight." With that, she picked up the pastry box herself and headed toward Cassian's study, her steps light and almost playful. Bran stood guard outside the door. The moment he saw her approaching, his face brightened and he prepared to announce her arrival. Elowen lifted a finger to her lips, her expression teasing but firm.

He immediately understood and kept quiet, standing properly as if nothing had happened.

Elowen slowed her steps and approached the door without making a sound. Just as she reached for it, Cassian's voice came from inside, tight with restlessness. "Bran." Bran straightened. "At your service, Your Grace." Cassian did not bother to hide his impatience. "Has Ella not returned yet? What time is it now?" Elowen could not help the smile that spread across her face when she heard that. Before Bran could answer, she called out, her tone warm and bright, "I'm back.

It should be close to the end of the morning, I think." A muffled thud sounded from inside, as if something had bumped rather awkwardly into a piece of furniture. She had only just stepped inside when she was suddenly pulled forward into a firm embrace. The familiar scent of him settled around her instantly, grounding and warm. His voice came from above her, low and softened in a way that felt almost indulgent. "Why are you back so early?" Elowen tipped her face up, meeting his gaze with an easy smile.

"I actually meant to come back sooner, but I realized I hadn't seen Aunt Isobel in a while, so I stopped by her shop for a bit. And look, I even brought you something..." He only caught the

beginning. The rest of her words slipped past him entirely, his attention already fixed on her face, on the way her eyes lit up when she spoke. Before she could finish, he leaned down and kissed her. It was not hesitant. It was immediate, as if he had been holding back for too long.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

:36 pm PPPP Chapter 401 Sweet Return 0:0 Finished Elowen froze for the briefest moment, then relaxed into it, closing her eyes and returning the kiss. It took a while before he finally let her go. "You brought me pastries?" he asked, reaching for the box in her hands. Her cheeks were still faintly flushed, her thoughts a little slow to catch up. "Yes. They're really good. I brought them back just for you." "Then I'll make sure I finish all of them." He took the box with one hand and her hand with the other, guiding her further inside. She tilted her head slightly, looking at him. "Oh, right.

I wrote a dedication for Kaelan today. Cassian, you're not upset about that, are you?" Cassian looked completely at ease. "A dedication? Why would that bother me? I'm not the jealous type." Outside the door, Bran heard everything and went completely still. Your Grace, this isn't just jealousy. You're putting on quite a show, and honestly, if I hadn't seen everything from the tart, I might've bought it myself. Cassian set the pastry box down on the table but did not open it right away. Instead, he pulled out a chair and carefully helped Elowen sit, his movements unhurried and attentive.

Once seated, she gestured for him to join her, her eyes curving with amusement. "You should sit too. You are still supposed to be recovering, remember?" "Of course." He followed along and sat beside her. When he opened the box, two plates of neatly arranged pastries rested inside, carrying a light, sweet aroma. "My aunt just came up with these recently," Elowen said, propping

her chin in her hand as she watched him. "After leaving the manor, I made a small detour to Cloudmere Lane, it is not often I get to go out, so I thought I might as well.

And when I am out while you are home, I always feel like bringing something back for you." His gaze softened slightly as he listened. "But I did not expect her shop to be doing so well this year," she continued. "She even hired a new server. And it turns out I know him. He is the son of one of my father's deputies." Cassian glanced at her, one brow lifting slightly. "Patrick's son?" Elowen blinked in surprise. "You know him?" A quiet chuckle left him. "Ella, I am the Duke of Duskmoor. Military affairs across Avenlor pass through my hands.

Any officer worth mentioning, I am familiar with." She nodded, understanding dawning. "That makes sense." 2/3 1:37 pm Chapter 401 Sweet Return Finished Then she leaned forward a little, her tone bright again. "Go on, try them. They are really good. I had three plates myself at the shop. Even Doctor Dray had one, and he stayed for two cups of coffee." "Then I should not keep you waiting." Cassian picked up a piece, though he paused just before eating it. He turned slightly toward her, his expression shifting with a hint of something unreadable. "By the way, Ella." "Hmm?" His gaze deepened.

"If I remember correctly, your father once considered arranging a match between you and Patrick's son when you were children." She froze for a moment, then broke into delighted laughter. "Cassian, how do you even know that?" "I was interested in you back then," he said simply. "So I made inquiries. I wanted to know if you already cared for someone, or if anything had been arranged for you." Elowen laughed harder, clearly entertained. "Were you heartbroken at the time? Because once you looked into it, you must have realized I not only had someone I liked, but also a childhood arrangement.

And you were already older than me, so your chances only got worse." 2.5K B 1 admin

Chapter 402 Night Reading Cassian fell silent. Finished At that, he placed a hand over his chest, his expression turning deliberately pained. "It still hurts, even now. That only made Elowen laugh more. Tears gathered at the corners of her eyes, catching lightly on her lashes. She wiped them away, her voice still warm with laughter. "Oh, stop that. I married you in the end. did I not? Whoever I liked before, whatever arrangements were made, none of it mattered." A satisfied smile finally appeared on his face. "That is true." She nudged his arm lightly.

"Then eat." He obeyed without hesitation, taking a bite of the pastry. He chewed slowly, then nodded. "It really is good." Her smile widened at once. "I knew it." Then she added, almost eagerly, "I even asked my aunt how she makes them. I can try making them for you sometime. The steps are simple enough, but the timing matters a lot. If the heat is even slightly off, he texture changes completely..." She kept talking, her voice flowing easily from one detail to the next. Cassian listened without interrupting, finishing everything she had brought him while she spoke.

That night, he continued keeping up the appearance of his injury outside. The moment the wheelchair crossed into their private rooms, he stood up without effort. He took her hand and led her into the bathing room, helping her wash and change with careful attention. By the time they were done, Elowen was already half asleep, leaning against the edge of the tub, her head dipping forward now and then. Something in his expression softened as he watched her. He dried her off, helped her into her nightclothes, then lifted her easily and carried her to the bed, settling her down gently.

The moment she touched the mattress, her eyes opened again. "Cassian," she called softly, her voice slightly drowsy but insistent. "Are you done? Come here. I want to hold you." I am coming." He quickly washed up and returned. 37 pm Pppp. PPPP Chapter 402 Night Reading Finished She suddenly remembered something. "Oh, and bring the book I bought today. I want to read it, but I do not feel like getting up." She said it without the slightest embarrassment, rolling slightly under the covers as if proving her point. Cassian showed no resistance at all. He picked up the book from the table.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"This one? The Begonia Hairpin?" She nodded immediately, her hair spread loosely across the pillow. "That is the one." There used to be a jeweler's shop next to my aunt's place," she went on. "It was turned into a bookshop recently. I went in and bought quite a few novels. This title stood out, so I brought it back to read before bed." Cassian, however, found the title somewhat questionable. He opened it at random and skimmed a page. His expression shifted ever so slightly. He closed the book and walked back to the bed, lifting the bed curtains and looking down at her.

Elowen did not notice anything unusual. She shifted over to make space for him. Then, seeing the book in his hand, she spoke again, her tone softening as she leaned into him. "I do not really feel like reading it myself. Cassian, why do you not read it to me?" His gaze deepened. "Ella, are you certain?" She gave him a look, faintly dissatisfied. "What is that supposed to mean? You do not want to read to me?" It is not that," he said, his voice carrying a trace of restrained amusement. She sighed, idly toying with the edge of the blanket.

"I have always heard that the Duke of Duskmoor is as accomplished in letters as he is in war. Reading a simple novel should not be difficult. And yet now, when I ask, he hesitates. That is

rather disappointing." A low laugh escaped him, warm and unhurried. "Fine. I will read." He settled beside her on the bed. She immediately leaned in, wrapping her arms around his waist and pressing close. His frame was lean but firm, the strength in him evident even through the fabric of his nightclothes.

Elowen rested her face against him, took a slow breath, then leaned back slightly with her eyes half-closed, letting out a long, contented sigh. "That feels nice." He looked down at her.

"Drawing strength from me again?" She smiled up at him. "Of course. Now start reading."

"Alright." 213 :37 pm P P P PP PP Chapter 402 Night Reading 0441 Finished He had no objection. If memory served, works like this had been restricted under Theodric's orders. He had no idea where she had found it, but as something to pass the evening, it was not unwelcome. He opened the book and cleared his throat.

Elowen leaned against his shoulder, completely at ease, already expecting his voice to lull her toward sleep. Then he began to read. "The first entry. Johnny had been restless for days, unable to settle his nerves. When a maid came in with water, he pulled her close without warning, pressing her against the table as he kissed her, his hands already moving to undo her dress..." Elowen's eyes snapped open. J She had heard him clearly. And she understood exactly what he was reading. Cassian continued at an even pace, as if nothing were unusual.

'She kept calling out to him, asking him to stop, but he paid her no mind, already reaching to-" Before he could continue, Elowen scrambled upright and clapped a hand over his mouth, her movements quick and flustered. 2.5K 。 admin

Chapter 403 The Wrong Book Cassian looked at her, his gaze quiet but questioning. Finished Elowen's face flushed instantly, color rising fast all the way to her ears. "Don't... don't read any

more of that." Cassian studied her for a brief moment, then nodded like he had no objections at all. Only then did she let go of him. At first, she had been convinced he was messing with her, making things up just to see her reaction. But when she picked up the book and checked for herself, her breath caught. It matched. Exactly. And the deeper she read, the more outrageous it became.

By the second page, there was even a detailed illustration. A man and a woman stretched across a writing desk, tangled together in a way that left very little to the imagination. Elowen's cheeks burned, but something stubborn in her made her keep going. She flipped another page. "Second entry. A young lady comes to stay at the estate. Johnny invites her into the garden. A newly built swing catches her interest, and she suggests a more... creative use for it. He laughs, calls her a wicked tease, then follows her lead, lifting her legs over the frame as she asked." Elowen froze, eyes widening.

That... that's even possible? She swallowed, pulse racing, then hurriedly flipped ahead. "Sixth entry. Three days after her coming-of-age feast, the sister complains of a persistent itch. Johnny grows curious. "Take them off,' he says. 'Let me have a proper look." That was the breaking point. She snapped the book shut so fast it made a sharp sound in the quiet room. Now she finally understood what the title really meant. It wasn't poetic in the slightest.

Each so-called "hairpin" was just another entry, another woman added to the list, one after another, whether it was a maid, a visiting relative, or some sheltered young lady who should have known better. Elowen pressed a hand to her forehead. Wait, what did I even fall for just now? And worse, she had just asked Cassian to read it aloud. And the male lead's name had to be

Johnny, of all things. 1/3 Chapter 403 The Wrong Book Finished Heat flooded her whole body. Her face, her neck, even the tips of her ears burned as if she had been standing too close to a fire.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"Ella," Cassian said slowly, his tone thoughtful in a way that made everything worse, "I think I understand. You've been... curious." Her heart skipped. "But you're expecting," he added, lowering his voice. "Hugh was very clear. It's not a good idea." A brief pause. "And honestly, you don't need a book like that. If you want something, you can just tell me." Elowen went completely speechless. Her entire body felt like it was overheating. "I... I didn't..." She couldn't even finish a sentence. In the end, she grabbed the blanket and pulled it over her face, her voice muffled.

"I didn't know what was in it. I swear I didn't." If she had known, she would have burned it on the spot. Cassian watched her for a second, then his expression softened. He reached out and brushed a hand over her hair. "I know. I was teasing you." Elowen slowly lowered the blanket, only her eyes showing. Cassian continued, "When His Majesty ordered this book banned, I was the one handling the investigation. A few copies must have slipped through." He glanced at the book. "Where did you get it? Selling something like this earns a few days behind bars at the very least." Elowen thought of Finn.

He probably had no idea what he had been selling. She let out a quiet breath. "It's fine. He's just trying to make a living. Let it go." The book still lay on the bed. She glanced at it and immediately looked away again, her cheeks turning even redder. "I can get rid of it," Cassian said. Elowen hesitated. "Not... not yet." Cassian raised an eyebrow. She pulled the blanket back over her face, her voice small and embarrassed. "Maybe... after the baby is born... we can read it together." 2/3 2:37 pm pppp. Chapter 403 The Wrong Book 04 Finished Cassian stilled.

Something in his chest tightened, heat spreading fast and sharp. Under the same blanket, Elowen clearly felt the change. She shifted slightly and turned her head. "Cassian... are you...?" There was a brief pause. "...Yes." Her face went even redder. "Then I... should I do something?" His voice dropped, rougher now. "You don't have to. Give it a minute." But she didn't move away. After a moment, she gathered her courage and spoke softly, almost whispering, "Hugh said we shouldn't... but he didn't say we couldn't... do anything at all, right?" Cassian looked at her. Restraint was slipping.

Elowen lay half-hidden in the blankets, her hair spread loosely across the pillow. Her skin was pale, but now warmed with a soft, flushed color that made her look even more vivid. She looked... inviting in a way that was impossible to ignore. Cassian swallowed. Since her pregnancy, he had been careful and gentle. He had kept his distance, limiting himself to brief kisses at most. He could usually keep it under control, but not tonight. He held her gaze for a moment longer, then reached for her, pulling her into a deep, urgent kiss. Elowen didn't pull away.

But the intensity caught her off guard. She raised a hand and smacked him lightly. Cassian blinked, then eased back slightly, his movements noticeably more controlled this time. 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 404 A Long Night He slowed down after that. The change was immediate, and Elowen finally relaxed. The kiss ended, but Cassian didn't stop. Elowen was still a little dazed when she heard him, his voice low and rough. "Ella." She looked at him. "Give me your hand." She hesitated, then placed her hand in his. What followed left her completely overwhelmed. She shut

her eyes tightly, unable to watch. Finished All she could hear were the quiet sounds around them. Fabric shifting. Uneven breathing. And his voice, again and again. "Ella...

Ella..." There was something in the way he said her name. It was gentle, but also insistent, almost possessive. The contrast made her thoughts blur. And the night stretched on. In the study, everything had already been locked away. Rosaline and Seren stayed behind to clean. After finishing one round of mopping, Rosaline stepped out to change the water. For a short while, Seren was alone. She moved to the shelves, dusting carefully. Elowen had brought back several new storybooks that day, which made the task slower than usual. A trace of irritation crept in.

"Why so many of these..." she muttered under her breath. "Who even reads this much?" She tapped the shelf a little harder than necessary. A soft click followed. Seren froze. A hidden panel had shifted open in the corner. Her heartbeat quickened. There had to be something important inside. She glanced around quickly to make sure no one was watching, then reached in. It was a handwritten manuscript. 2:37 pm pppp. Chapter 404 A Long Night Finished The handwriting was elegant and familiar. She had seen it before in the duchess's ledgers. Seren recognized only a few words, but it was enough.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

This was a story. Her fingers tightened slightly. Her Grace... writes these? Footsteps sounded outside. Seren's heart jumped. She quickly closed the manuscript, shoved it back into place, and restored the panel as best as she could. Rosaline appeared at the doorway with a bucket, pausing to catch her breath. "Seren, come help me with this." Startled, Seren blurted out, "I didn't mean to!" Rosaline blinked. "What?" Seren froze, gripping her sleeve. "I mean... I didn't mean to leave you to carry it alone." Rosaline frowned slightly.

"I just asked for help." Seren forced herself to move and walked over. They carried the water back in together. Rosaline glanced at her again. "What was that about?" Seren kept her eyes lowered. "Nothing. I'm just tired." Before Rosaline could ask more, Seren added quickly, "Let's finish up. It's late, and I can barely stay awake." That seemed to settle it. They finished cleaning and returned to their room. Rosaline fell asleep almost immediately. Seren did not. She turned restlessly under the covers, unable to settle. The bed was soft, but she felt tense, like she couldn't relax.

Storybooks weren't strictly forbidden, but everyone knew they weren't considered proper reading. And Her Grace didn't just read those stories, she was the one writing them. Did His Grace already know? A man like the Duke of Duskmoor, respected, disciplined, admired... If he ever found out she'd been spending her time writing those kinds of stories... would he start to think less of her? Would she disappoint him? The thought made her chest tighten. She couldn't lie there anymore.

2/3 Chapter 404 A Long Night 940 Finished She carefully slipped out of bed, stepped around Rosaline, pulled on a cloak, and quietly opened the door. The winter night was long and bitterly cold. The air cut against her skin, sharp and unforgiving. She pulled her cloak tighter and stood beneath the covered walkway until her thoughts began to settle. She remembered what Rosaline had told her. The Duke of Duskmoor cared deeply for his duchess. More than most would think possible.

If anything, Rosaline had said, even if the duchess did something outrageous, he would probably defend her without hesitation. When she thought about it that way, writing stories hardly seemed like a problem. Seren let out a quiet breath. She turned to go back inside. "Seren!" A soft voice

called out. She glanced over and found Alyssa by the archway, the candlelight casting a soft glow around her. "It's late. Why are you still awake? Something bothering you?" Seren looked away. "No.

Just needed some air." Alyssa studied her face in the dim light for a moment before speaking again, her voice gentler. "Seren... did I say something wrong recently? Or do something that upset you?" 2.5K admin

Chapter 405 A Dangerous Confidence Seren looked at her, clearly caught off guard. "Why would you think that?" Finished Alyssa's gaze dropped, her fingers tightening slightly at her sides as her voice softened. "You've been distant lately. Not just busy, but actually avoiding me. I kept wondering if I crossed a line somewhere or said something I shouldn't have." Seren paused, unsure how to respond. She wasn't wrong. I have been avoiding her. That had been her sister's advice, and she had followed it without questioning too much.

Alyssa let out a quiet breath, the kind that carried more weight than she probably intended. "I don't really have anyone I trust in the palace. And here at Duskmoor Manor, it's even harder to feel like I belong. I know I can be too blunt sometimes. I say things before I think them through, and I'm sure that hasn't helped. If I made you uncomfortable, then I'm sorry. I mean that." She finally looked up, her expression open and unguarded. "But I really do want us to be close. I'm not pretending, Seren. I want you to be well.

I want us to be on the same side." There was nothing calculated in the way she said it. It felt honest in a way that was hard to dismiss. Seren felt her resolve loosen. She gave a small smile. "You're overthinking it. I'm not upset with you. We're friends. That hasn't changed." Alyssa's eyes lit up at once. "You mean that?" Seren nodded, more certain now. "Of course I do." The

tension between them melted, and for a moment, it felt like things had returned to how they were before. Seren exhaled quietly, then leaned a little closer. "Actually...

there's something I've been meaning to tell you." A flicker passed through Alyssa's eyes, quick and sharp before it disappeared behind a bright, reassuring expression. She stepped closer without hesitation and lifted a hand lightly over her chest. "You can trust me. Whatever you say stays between us." Before sunrise the next morning, Alyssa slipped out through a lesser-used gate at Duskmoor Manor, wrapped in a cloak that blended easily with the early morning gloom. She lingered just outside Baker Estate, scanning the quiet street before approaching a maid who had stepped out to fetch water.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Their exchange was brief and hushed. Within minutes, a carriage bearing the Baker crest rolled out through the gates and headed straight toward the palace. Inside the palace, the morning audience had just concluded. One by one, the consorts withdrew, leaving 1/3 2:3 Chapter 405 A Dangerous Confidence behind a faint trace of perfume and powder that still lingered in the air. Finished Clarisse entered once the room had cleared. She motioned for the attendants to leave, then delivered Alyssa's message in full, sparing no detail.

Isla sat with a cup in hand, gently circling the surface with the lid in slow, absent motions. When Clarisse finished, Isla lifted a brow. "She writes fiction?" Clarisse inclined her head. "Yes, Your Majesty. The information has been confirmed. This is a rare opening. We should act on it before the moment passes." The mention of Geoffrey was not spoken aloud, but it lingered between them. Clarisse could never look at him without remembering what had been lost. And all of it traces back to her. The emptiness that followed had curdled into something sharper over time.

A mix of resentment and restlessness settled in, something that simply refused to ease. Isla did not respond immediately. She took a measured sip of coffee instead, the rising steam softening the edges of her expression. Clarisse stepped forward, unable to hold back. "Your Majesty, if we handle this carefully, we could drive a wedge between them. A man of his standing would not tolerate his wife involving herself in something so... improper. If the situation turns, Alyssa could step in at the right moment and secure a place for herself." Isla let out a quiet laugh, cool and dismissive.

"You are overestimating how fragile that marriage is." Clarisse fell silent. "I have been watching," Isla continued, setting her cup down with deliberate care. "Cassian is deeply attached to her. Writing stories will not offend him. If anything, he will take pride in it." Her gaze sharpened as it shifted toward Clarisse. "As for Alyssa, I warned you already. She lacks the presence to turn a man's attention, let alone hold it. Sending her to win over Cassian is a wasted effort. Let that idea go." Clarisse pressed her lips together, unwilling to concede.

"Then are we simply going to let this pass?" "Why would we?" Isla replied, her tone calm but edged. "This is not a new game. Do you remember what happened when Daphne entered the Crown Prince's Wing and tried to claim the name Azure?" Clarisse looked up at once. "I do, Your Majesty." Isla's fingers traced the rim of her cup, slow and thoughtful. "She was exposed on the very day of her wedding. After that, she could barely show her face anywhere in Vanelle." Her eyes cooled. "I have considered it more than once. That outcome was not coincidence.

Elowen had a hand in it." 2/3 Chapter 405 A Dangerous Confidence 046 Finished Clarisse leaned in slightly. "What would you have me do, Your Majesty?" "If the manuscript is already complete, then it will surface soon enough," Isla said. "Whether or not it carries the name Azure

is irrelevant." She met Clarisse's gaze directly. "Once you return, have someone watch Duskmoor Manor closely. The moment she makes contact with a bookshop or a café to arrange printing, you will spread word that Azure is releasing a new work." A faint smile touched her lips. "Make sure the rumor travels far.

We will answer her in her own language. I want her to experience what it means to lose her standing in the public eye." Clarisse's expression shifted, satisfaction flickering through. "And if the pressure becomes too much... if it affects her condition..." She lowered her voice slightly. "That would only work in our favor." By the time Clarisse returned to Baker Estate, every instruction had already begun to take shape under her direction. Elsewhere, inside Duskmoor Manor, Elowen was only just waking.

She remained beneath the covers for a while, staring up at the canopy above her bed, where intricate floral embroidery curled across the fabric like something out of a painted chapel ceiling. Her mind drifted, slow to gather itself. After a long moment, she pushed herself upright, still wrapped loosely in the blankets. She took a quiet breath before calling toward the door, her voice soft but clear. "Mira. Cora." 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 406 The First Move Finished Her voice had barely faded when the familiar sound of wheels rolling across polished wood approached from the corridor. Cassian entered seated, maintaining the appearance he had chosen to present to the outside world. The door closed behind him. Without hesitation, he rose to his feet and crossed the room, reaching for the bed curtains and drawing them back with an easy, practiced motion. "You're awake." The moment Elowen saw him, everything from the night before came rushing back with startling clarity. Her face flushed instantly.

Cassian noticed at once, amusement flickering in his eyes. "Still embarrassed?" He brushed his fingers lightly along her cheek, the warmth beneath his touch unmistakable. Elowen covered her face, her voice slipping through her fingers. "I can't stop replaying it. This is entirely your fault." His smile deepened. "You'll get used to it, Ella." Then, as if nothing about the moment was unusual, he reached for the clothes set aside nearby. "Are you hungry? I had them prepare something light.

You should eat before you start your day." He began helping her dress with quiet efficiency, movements unhurried and natural. Elowen hesitated, then looked up at him, still flushed. "When you said I'd get used to it... what exactly did you mean? That this is going to be... frequent?" Cassian gave a soft laugh. "Not quite." She relaxed, just a little.. No... that'd be too much. Cassian adjusted the outer layer over her shoulders, his tone turning thoughtful. "What I meant is that there is more than one way to approach it.

There is no reason to repeat the same thing every time." Elowen stared at him, speechless. Several seconds passed before she managed, under her breath, "You are unbelievable." It was meant as criticism. It did not sound like it. Cassian seemed entirely pleased as he rested a steady hand against her back. "Sit up a little. Let me finish." 173 2:37 pm Chapter 406 The First Move Her face still warm, she complied. Finished After breakfast, Elowen worked through the household accounts before settling down with a book. Halfway through, her attention drifted. Her gaze lifted toward the shelves.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

The story in her hands was decent, but it did not hold her the way her own writing did. She set it aside. Using the excuse that she needed uninterrupted quiet, she dismissed the attendants from the room. Once she was alone, she crossed to the shelves and opened the hidden compartment

with practiced ease. She looked inside. Then frowned. Something was off. The manuscript did not sit quite the way she remembered leaving it. Wait... did someone actually go through this? Or am I misremembering? Lately, her thoughts had not been as sharp as they once were. Details slipped more easily.

Reactions lagged behind where they should have been. Maybe I'm imagining it. Even so, caution won out. She decided she would ask discreetly later. For now, she took the manuscript and returned to the window, settling into the light to read through it again from beginning to end. The more she read, the more certain she became. It was far stronger than Tales of Luminara. The urge rose again, stronger this time. She wanted it published. She wanted it read. Willow Breeze Bookshop was no longer an option. That door had closed.

After a moment's thought, she wrapped the manuscript carefully and called out, "Anson." He entered promptly. "Your Grace." "The man I asked you about yesterday. Finn. What did you find?" "His background is clean, Your Grace," Anson replied. "He supports an elderly mother and has a wife and two young children. His family has experience with engraving and printing, and he is literate." Relief eased through her. 2:37 pm P p pp. Chapter 406 The First Move That was exactly what she needed. She rose at once, the wrapped manuscript held close. "Prepare a carriage.

I'm going out." Finished The carriage rolled out from Duskmoor Manor and made its way to Cloudmere Lane, stopping in front of a modest bookshop. The moment Elowen stepped down, Finn rushed out to meet her. He stopped short in front of her, visibly shaken, hands clasped tightly as if bracing himself. "Your Grace, I owe you an apology. I made a serious mistake that day. I should never have sold you that book without checking it properly. If there is any

punishment, I accept it. I only ask that you show mercy for the sake of my family." Elowen blinked, momentarily caught off guard.

"I'm not here to hold you accountable for that. You can relax." She gave him a look, slightly puzzled. "And there's no need to make it sound like a confession at trial." Finn searched her expression, trying to gauge whether she meant it. Slowly, he let out a breath. "Your Grace... you haven't read *The Begonia Hairpin*, have you?" Elowen kept her expression steady. Not only did I read it... Cassian actually read it out loud. Outwardly, she remained composed. "Not yet. Why do you ask?" Finn's entire posture loosened with relief. "That's good. That's very good." He forced a small laugh.

"No reason. Just thought I should check." Elowen gave a casual nod. "I bought quite a few books that day. I haven't gotten through all of them yet." 2.5K admin

hapter 407 The Reveal 9440 鏡 Finished Finn nodded quickly and leaned in a little, lowering his voice like he was offering sincere advice. "Your Grace, that story you picked up earlier really isn't worth your time. If you'll take a humble suggestion, go home and get rid of it. Toss it in the hearth and be done with it. No reason to let something like that ruin your evening. I'll return the money to you shortly." "There's no need," Elowen said calmly, steering the conversation elsewhere. "I came today for something different." Finn straightened at once, hand pressed to his chest.

"Whatever it is, Your Grace, if it's within my ability, I'll see it handled properly." She glanced around the shop floor. "Let's step inside." Once they entered the back room, Elowen motioned for Mira and the others to remain outside. With the door closed and only the two of them inside,

she took a moment before speaking, weighing her words. "I have a friend who recently finished writing a story.

She's thinking of having it printed and sold, but it's been a long time since she's worked with any bookshops, so she isn't sure who's reliable these days." The moment Finn heard this, his whole demeanor shifted, alert and eager. "A friend of Your Grace must have real talent. Do you happen to have the manuscript with you? Let me take a look first. If it's strong, I'll do everything I can here, small as my shop may be, to see it properly published for you and your friend." Elowen handed him the manuscript she had been holding.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"This is the one." Finn quickly wiped his palms against his tunic before taking it carefully with both hands. He opened to the first page with visible respect. After reading only a few lines, his eyes widened, and he looked up at her in disbelief. "Your Grace... you're Azure?" Elowen paused, clearly caught off guard. Finn froze, realizing what he had just blurted out. "No, I mean... Your Grace, your friend... is Azure?" Elowen said nothing, simply watching him. Under that steady gaze, Finn grew flustered, letting out an awkward laugh as he scratched the back of his head.

A faint smile curved at her lips. "Since we'll be working together, there's no reason to keep this hidden. Yes. The friend I mentioned is me." Finn stared at her for a heartbeat, then nearly bounced in place. "It really is you!" "How did you recognize it?" "It's the handwriting, Your Grace. I once had the rare chance to see one of Azure's original drafts. I never forgot it. The way the letters flow, the balance, the confidence in every stroke. This manuscript is exactly the same." 1/3 2:37 pm Chapter 407 The Reveal Elowen nodded lightly.

"That explains it." Finished Finn looked at her with open admiration. "Your Grace, you might not realize this, but you're my favorite writer. My wife feels the same way. Truth be told, we met because of Tales of Luminara. We kept running into each other over that book, and before long, we found ourselves building a life together. We even named our youngest daughter Lumi." A quiet warmth spread through Elowen's chest. She smiled, her expression soft. "I'm honored." Finn continued, growing more animated. "You haven't released anything in years. My wife and I always felt something was missing.

People came up with all kinds of rumors. At one point, they claimed the Crown Princess was Azure, but I read that story, and it didn't hold a candle to your work. I said right away it couldn't be true, and it turns out I was right." His voice thickened with emotion. "I never thought I'd see the day you wrote again. And now I'm standing here, holding your new manuscript." Elowen let out a small, easy laugh. "I simply didn't have the time before, and nothing really pushed me to write." She nodded toward the pages in his hands. "Go on, take a proper look.

If you think it works, we can talk about what comes next." "Of course, Your Grace." Finn adjusted his posture, suddenly serious, and began reading from the first page again. He quickly became absorbed. Watching him, Elowen felt her own nerves creep in. What if he doesn't like it? What if I misjudged it completely? Even the scenes she had once felt proud of now seemed less certain in her mind. Then suddenly, Finn let out a quiet laugh. Her fingers tightened slightly. As he kept reading, his eyes gradually reddened. He lifted a hand and brushed them quickly, clearly trying to hide it.

Time passed. At last, he reached the final page. He stared at the closing lines for a long while without speaking. Elowen pressed her lips together. "If it doesn't work, you can say so. Just... be

a little gentle about it. I can handle it, but I'd still rather not hear it too harshly." Finn blinked, as if snapping back to himself, and looked up at her. "Your Grace, this manuscript..." 2/3 !:37 pm

Pppp. Chapter 407 The Reveal 。 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 408 A New Name Elowen held her breath without realizing it. Finished Finn's voice carried a tremor of excitement. "It's outstanding. The story pulls you in completely, the characters feel alive, and the writing is sharp and confident. Compared to Tales of Luminara, this is on another level. It feels more seasoned, more controlled. This is the kind of book people remember." The tension in Elowen's chest finally eased. Finn rubbed his hands together, already thinking ahead. "I'll start arranging everything right away.

I'll bring in reliable scribes, set up the engraving, and get the presses running. This will sell even better than your previous work, I'm certain of it." Elowen's smile came easily now. "I hope you're right." Finn stood, then hesitated and sat back down, looking slightly awkward. "There is one thing, Your Grace. About the earnings... how would you like to divide them?" "After covering all necessary costs, you take sixty percent, and I'll take forty. As for my share, hold onto it for me for now. I have a general idea of how I want to use it, but I haven't settled the details yet.

Keep it safe, and I'll come to you when I need it." "Understood, Your Grace. I'll see that it's kept properly," Finn said at once. He hesitated, then added, "If I may ask, why not continue using the name Azure? It's well known and would certainly help sales." Elowen smiled faintly. "I did think about it. But that name draws too much attention, and not all of it welcome. I'd rather start fresh with a new name and keep things quieter this time. In the end, if the story is strong, the name on the cover shouldn't matter." Finn nodded slowly.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

They went on to discuss the finer details, including script style, parchment quality, initial print volume, and distribution. Only after everything had been settled did Elowen finally leave. Her carriage rolled steadily back toward Duskmoor Manor. At a shadowed corner of the street, a servant dressed in plain gray had been watching the shop entrance the entire time. The moment the carriage pulled away, he lowered his hat and slipped into the crowd. Elowen remained completely unaware. But one of the Cassian's shadow guards, who had been quietly watching from a distance, caught every detail.

He returned to Duskmoor Manor ahead of her and went straight to Cassian's study, reporting everything. He added, "Your Grace, the Duchess spoke privately with the shop owner for about half an hour. She Chapter 408 A New Name dismissed everyone else, so I was unable to hear what was discussed." Cassian lifted a brow slightly. A bookshop. So Ella is planning to publish again. He said nothing. The guard continued, "The man watching the shop belongs to the Baker family." Cassian's gaze sharpened. "Her Majesty has been making more moves lately." Finished "Yes, Your Grace.

The previous attack that left you injured likely involved both the Baker family and her." Cassian leaned back in his chair, fingers tapping lightly against the armrest. "We still don't have proof." "They've been growing more active. It's only a matter of time before they slip." A faint smile touched Cassian's lips. "Then keep watching them." "Yes, Your Grace." The guard bowed his head, then asked, "Should we inform the Duchess?" Cassian gave a small nod. "Let her know the Bakers are watching her so she can stay cautious.

But don't tell her that I'm already aware of it." She's careful, and easily embarrassed. If she hasn't told me, she isn't ready yet. Cassian had already pieced together most of the truth, but he had no

intention of exposing her over something like this. When she was ready, she would tell him herself. Until then, he would handle everything else. He would make sure nothing ever reached her, not trouble, not danger, not even the faintest disturbance in the quiet of her world.

Not long after Elowen returned to Duskmoor Manor, a shadow guard came to report that the Baker family had secretly set people to watch her. Hearing this, she immediately recalled something that had felt off earlier. When she retrieved her manuscript, its position had been slightly different. She checked that hidden compartment every day. That morning, it had clearly been disturbed. The night before, everything had been exactly as she left it. Which meant someone had accessed it during that window. At that hour, almost no one had any reason to step into her study.

213 2:37 pm Chapter 408 A New Name Finished Mira, Cora, and Anson were beyond question, people she trusted without hesitation, which left only the two who had been newly assigned there this year. Rosaline. and Seren. 2.5K W 3/3 1 2:37 pm P P admin

Chapter 409 A Quiet Lead Finished Elowen leaned back in her chair, resting her chin lightly against her fingers as she watched Seren across the room. The girl stood near the window, focused on shaping a potted evergreen, trimming it with careful, practiced movements like she had all the time in the world. "Your Grace, your coffee." Rosaline stepped in, placing a warm cup into Elowen's hands. Elowen accepted it, but didn't look away from Seren. Rosaline caught that and hesitated before speaking again, her tone cautious.

"Has Seren done something wrong, Your Grace?" Elowen shook her head, a faint smile tugging at her lips. "No, nothing like that. I just didn't realize pruning was part of her duties. I was under the impression the estate brings in professionals for that." Rosaline dipped her head politely.

"Seren and I only just started serving in the study, Your Grace. We're still new, so most of what we handle is light work, cleaning, organizing, keeping things in order. That plant had been left unattended for quite a while.

Seren used to help tend the gardens when she served under Lady Elira, so she knows her way around it. She thought she'd be helpful. If she overstepped, I ask your forgiveness." "It's fine. She did well," Elowen said, then let her gaze shift slightly. "So your duties are mostly cleaning the shelves?" Rosaline answered without hesitation. "The shelves are actually Seren's responsibility." "I see." That was enough. A few quiet pieces clicked into place in Elowen's mind. Still, something didn't add up. Rosaline and Seren both came from Elira's side, yet somehow they were tied to Isla...

and the Baker family. That connection didn't happen by accident. There was something else going on behind the curtain. Later that night, Elowen called Mira over. "I have a feeling Seren might be getting a little too interested in Cassian," she said, keeping her voice even. "Keep an eye on her. I want to know who she spends time with." Mira froze for half a second, then her eyes went wide with outrage. "Excuse me? She thinks she can go after His Grace and compete with you? That's bold. That's incredibly bold. Absolutely not. Not on my watch." She straightened, already fired up.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"Don't worry, Your Grace. I'll be watching her closely. She won't get near anything she shouldn't." 173 2:37 pm Chapter 409 A Quiet Lead Finished Elowen let out a soft laugh and patted her hand. "Alright. I'll leave it to you." Mira didn't disappoint. By that same night, Elowen had her answer. Seren had been spending time with a maid named Alyssa. Elowen checked the

household registry, and there it was. Alyssa had previously served in Isla's palace, and more importantly, she was Beatrice's niece. That was the thread.

Then she asked Anson and learned that Alyssa had left the manor early that morning, claiming she needed to purchase sewing supplies. Everything lined up. So that's how it is. Isla already knew about the stories. And the Bakers had someone watching closely enough to know Elowen had visited the bookshop. So the question wasn't whether they knew. It was what they were going to do next. Elowen sat with that thought for a long time. In another life, she had lived under Isla's roof, but they had never truly gone head-to-head. She had never seen how Isla handled someone she considered a threat.

Which meant she couldn't predict her or stay one step ahead, at least not for now, but Cassian could, and that changed everything. This wasn't just personal anymore. She wasn't some overlooked daughter tucked away in a quiet household. She was the Duchess of Duskmoor. Anything that happened between her and Isla wouldn't stay contained. It would ripple outward into power, into alliances, into families. And now she had something to lose, a husband, a child, an entire household that relied on her, people who trusted her, people who had no business being dragged into something like this.

I can't afford to guess wrong. She exhaled slowly. Fine. She'd ask. 2/3 Chapter 409 A Quiet Lead

That night, Elowen sat at her vanity, absentmindedly removing her jewelry, her thoughts clearly somewhere else. She didn't even notice when Cassian walked in. He noticed immediately. Finished With a subtle gesture, he dismissed everyone else in the room, then stepped behind her. His hands settled. gently on her shoulders, easing the tension there. "Want me to help?" he asked. "Mhm." Her response was vague, distracted.

He reached up and carefully slid the pin from her hair, letting it fall loose over her shoulders. The metal was cool in his hand, and for a brief second, something about the moment pulled a quiet smile from him. "Cassian," she said softly. She turned slightly, looking up at him. "Have you ever heard of someone named Azure?" Cassian's expression didn't shift. "Azure... sounds familiar. Wasn't Daphne claiming that name for a while?" Elowen gave a small, unimpressed look. "She was lying." "Right. That became pretty obvious," he said.

"So why bring it up now?" Her fingers curled slightly in her lap. She hesitated. Then took a breath. "Because Azure is actually... me." The words came out quiet, almost like she wasn't sure she should've said them at all. 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 410 No More Secrets But Cassian heard her. Finished He paused for a brief moment, then let a look of surprise settle naturally across his face. "What? Ella, that was you? You're serious?" Elowen went quiet. Something felt off. She couldn't quite explain it, but his reaction didn't feel entirely real. Still, she couldn't pinpoint why, so she decided not to dwell on it. A faint flush crept across her cheeks. "I know it sounds a little hard to believe, but it's true. I chose the name because my grandfather once gave me a piece of land with a lake on it.

It's called Lake Azure." Cassian nodded. "That explains it." She hesitated, then asked softly, "Do you believe me?" "Yes." No pause. No doubt. Elowen let out a small breath and continued, "I've also started writing a new story." Cassian lifted his brows, looking even more surprised. "A new one? Really? How did I not notice at all?" Elowen fell silent again. That strange feeling came back. She stared at him without blinking. Cassian met her gaze. "Is there something on my face?" Elowen narrowed her eyes slightly. "Cassian... you already knew, didn't you?"

About me writing stories." He was just about to deny it. She cut in immediately, her tone turning sharp, though her eyes carried a warning more than anger. "If lie to me, you're going to regret it." you Cassian let out a low laugh. "Ella, you really are sharp." That was enough. Elowen knew she was right. A rush of heat climbed straight to her face, spreading so fast that even her ears burned. "And very cute," Cassian added, reaching out to lightly pinch her flushed cheek. 1/3 2:37 pm P P Chapter 410 No More Secrets Elowen bit her lip and shot him a look.

"So you did know." "Not entirely," he said, eyes warm with amusement. She looked at him, waiting. Finished Cassian held her gaze for a second before continuing, "I didn't just know you were writing. I knew you were Azure." Elowen froze. Her eyes widened, and when she spoke again, her words stumbled over each other. "What? That's... that's not possible. You knew? How would you even know that?" Her expression shifted, suspicion flashing across her face. "You had your people look into me." "How could I do that?" Cassian replied, looking almost wronged.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"I figured it out." Elowen frowned, unconvinced. "You figured it out? That's not something you just guess." Cassian gave a small nod. "First, your handwriting and the manuscripts signed by Azure are nearly identical." Elowen immediately covered her face. I can't believe I overlooked something that obvious. "Second, some of the stories in Tales of Luminara feel very close to what happened between you and Alaric. Then there was Elias. The way he showed up around the Crown Prince's wedding was a little too convenient.

And afterward, you were the only one who met with him privately." He didn't go on. He didn't need to. That was already more than enough. Cassian looked at her. She still hadn't moved, her face hidden, though the tips of her ears and the curve of her neck were flushed a soft pink. "I knew you'd be embarrassed," he said, his voice casing. "I wasn't planning on saying anything.

But you did warn me not to lie." Elowen slowly parted her fingers, peeking at him through the small gap. That small, hesitant gesture softened something in his expression.

"Ella," he said gently, "I'm not telling you this for any other reason than honesty. I actually think what you're doing is a good thing. It shows your talent. And your writing really is good. The stories are engaging. and the way you write stays with people." He continued, his tone steady and sincere. "Tales of Luminara was given to me by Theodric. He wanted me to read it and learn from it. Even he thinks there's real insight in what you've written." 2/3 2:37 pm pppp. Chapter 410 No More Secrets Finished Elowen stilled. For a brief moment, it felt like even her breathing paused.

Something in her chest loosened. Maybe being discovered wasn't as terrible as she had imagined. Slowly, she lowered her hands, revealing her face. The candlelight caught the softness in her eyes and the faint color still lingering on her cheeks. The embarrassment hadn't fully faded, but it made her look even more delicate, more real. Cassian's gaze softened. He reached out and gently brushed his fingers along her cheek. "As for Isla," he said calmly, shifting the conversation, "she's actually not that difficult to understand." Elowen looked up at him. "Really?" Cassian nodded.

"The Baker family has held power for generations. Isla grew up as the eldest daughter in that kind of household, which means everything about her life was shaped from the beginning. Education, manners, reputation. She wasn't just raised well, she was raised to represent something." He continued at an even pace. "When Theodric took the throne, he needed the support of established noble families. Marrying her secured that. So the moment she entered the

palace, she stood at the very top. And after that, she gave birth to Alaric. That made her position even more secure.

Her daughter is also the one most favored. She's lived a life where everything has come easily to her, where things have always gone the way she expected." 。 admin

Chapter 411 The Price of Pride 040 Finished Elowen tilted her head slightly, her voice calm but thoughtful. "So Isla carries herself like someone who never has to second-guess anything. Steady, composed. It doesn't matter who she's dealing with, whether she likes them or not, she always gives them that same warm, polished smile." Because from where she stood, everyone else was... smaller. Some were pitiable. Some were laughable. None of them was worth losing control over. Not when dignity was part of the crown she wore. Cassian let out a quiet chuckle. "Exactly.

You see right through it." Then his tone shifted, just a touch more measured. "Still, her life isn't as perfect as it looks." Elowen glanced at him. "What do you mean?" Cassian leaned back slightly, his gaze steady. "Theodric didn't marry her for love. It was a strategy and an alliance. He respects her, gives her everything that comes with being Isla, but that's where it ends." He paused, as if choosing his words carefully. "Maybe she tells herself that love doesn't matter when power is on the table. Maybe she even believes it most days. But that kind of absence doesn't just disappear.

It lingers. Like something you can ignore until it suddenly isn't ignorable anymore." Elowen listened quietly. "And then there's the Baker family," Cassian added, his expression turning faintly amused. "That bad?" she asked. "Oh, worse than it looks," he said. "Their reputation still holds. Old name, long history, plenty of scholars in the family tree. From the outside, they still

look like they belong at the center of everything." He gave a short, knowing smile. "But inside, it's a mess. Every branch of the family is at each other's throat, constantly undercutting one another.

And the younger generation..." He shook his head slightly. "Most of them have been raised with too much comfort and not nearly enough discipline." Elowen raised a brow. "They hand off their studies to attendants, spend their nights chasing entertainment, and treat responsibility like something optional. If Isla wants to keep her family relevant, she has to push them into positions of power." He let out a soft breath. "Problem is, they're just not up to it. And Theodric doesn't reward lineage. He rewards competence.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

That leaves Isla stuck, trying to hold up a structure that's already cracking." He glanced at Elowen. "When I was out of the picture before, she tried to place her nephew in my role.

Thought it would secure her influence." 2:37 pm Chapter 411 The Price of Pride Elowen leaned forward slightly. "And?" Finished Cassian let out a low laugh. "And he nearly ran the whole thing into the ground. Poor decisions, no control, one disaster after another. I had to come back and fix it myself. Theodric hasn't forgotten." Elowen nodded slowly, piecing it all together.

Cassian's voice turned quieter, but sharper. "Isla cares deeply about how she's seen. If someone embarrasses her, she doesn't let it slide. She'll return the favor, and she'll make sure it lands harder." Elowen's eyes brightened instantly. "So when I used Azure's name before and made Daphne look ridiculous... and dragged the Crown Prince's Wing into it..." She leaned in slightly. "Now that she knows I'm the one behind the stories, she's going to come after me the same way. Publicly." Cassian's gaze softened with approval. "Exactly." { He studied her for a moment, then smiled.

"You know, with a mind like that, you must've been excellent in your lessons growing up."

Elowen made a face. "Not even close. I used to dodge lessons whenever I could. And if I did show up, I was half asleep. My tutors were ready to give up on me." Cassian didn't hesitate.

"Then they were the problem." She blinked. "Excuse me?" "If your father had put you under my instruction," he said smoothly, "you'd be running policy by now." Elowen burst out laughing.

"That's ridiculous." Cassian leaned in, brushing a soft kiss at the corner of her lips, his voice dropping low. "I'm serious.

I love you." Her breath caught for a second. Warmth spread through her chest as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Cassian... thank you. For telling me all this. And for not making fun of my writing." His gaze darkened slightly. "If you're thanking me," he said quietly, "you should probably do more than just say it." The meaning landed instantly. Heat rushed back into her cheeks. He can't be serious... no, he definitely is. For a moment, she hesitated. Then, caught up in the moment, she leaned closer and whispered something in his ear.

273 Chapter 411 The Price of Pride Finished Cassian froze. His entire body went tense, his breath turning heavier. "You mean that?" Now that she'd said it, embarrassment hit all at once. She instinctively tried to pull back. "If you don't want to, we can just forget it-" "I want to." The answer came immediately, firm and without hesitation. "Very much." Before she could react, he had already lifted her into his arms. The sudden movement made her let out a soft gasp as she instinctively clung to him. "Wait, I'm not even ready, I haven't changed yet-" Cassian didn't slow down.

He carried her straight toward the bed, completely unbothered. "You won't need to worry about that." Elowen went completely speechless. A moment later, she found herself pressed into the

mattress, looking up at him, her face flushed. "You're unbelievable," she muttered. "There's seriously something wrong with you." Cassian grinned, completely unashamed. He leaned down, brushing his nose lightly against hers. "Yeah," he said easily. "There is." His voice dropped, softer now. "But only when it comes to you." Cassian did not hold back that night.

By the time the first light of morning crept through the windows, Elowen was completely worn out, her strength finally giving in as she fell into a deep sleep. 2.5K M 3/3 admin

Chapter 412 Let Them Make the Noise Just before sleep fully claimed her, Elowen felt herself drawn back into Cassian's arms. Finished His lips brushed over her damp forehead, then her brow, then the corner of her mouth, lingering in slow, unhurried kisses, one after another, as if he had no intention of stopping. When she woke again, the light had already shifted well into the afternoon. The space beside her was empty. Cassian had long since risen. She shifted slightly. The lingering fatigue was still there, heavy in her limbs, but everything else felt... comfortable and clean.

Her nightclothes had been changed, and the sheets beneath her were fresh. He must have taken care of it himself. Lying there, staring up at the canopy, Elowen found herself drifting into thought. People always said that as men got older, they slowed down, lost their edge, and didn't care nearly as much about that side of things anymore. But Cassian... How is he still like this? He was older than her, and yet in that regard, he showed no sign of restraint. If anything, he had far too much energy. Has he really been holding back all these years... and now he's just making up for it all at once?

The thought made heat creep up her neck. She pulled the covers halfway over her face, letting out a quiet, embarrassed laugh to herself before finally pushing herself upright. She lingered in

bed for quite a while before slowly sitting up. With Cassian away from Duskmoor Manor today, Mira and Cora finally had the chance to attend to her closely. "Your Grace," Mira said while helping her get ready, "the guard His Grace assigned to you has been waiting outside.

He has something to report but didn't wish to disturb your rest." Elowen gave a soft hum, unable to stop a small yawn from slipping out. By the time she was seated at the table, a bowl of warm oatmeal had been set before her. As she ate, the guard began his report. "After Your Grace left the bookshop yesterday, Finn immediately went to gather several acquaintances. He also brought out printing plates, ink, paper, and everything else required. At first light today, they began working in the back courtyard, dividing tasks between copying, proofreading, carving, and binding.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

They're moving efficiently." 1/3 37 ph Chapter 412 Let Them Make the Noise Finished Elowen nodded. "I won't be going out much for the time being. Let him deal with you directly if needed. If he has anything to pass along, or if I have instructions, you'll carry the message." "Yes. Your Grace." The following day, Elowen's new book was placed on sale at Finn's shop. The first day's results, however, were far from impressive. When the guard returned with the update, Elowen was in the middle of drinking a bitter herbal tonic. The taste made her whole face tighten.

"The shopkeeper asks," the guard said, "whether Your Grace would like to invest some coin to build interest." Elowen looked up from the cup, her brows still slightly drawn from the bitterness. "What exactly would that involve?" "He suggests inviting a few well-known readers or respected patrons in Vanelle to review the book first. Once they speak highly of it, word would spread, and more people would be drawn in." Elowen let out a quiet laugh, setting the cup aside and dabbing the corner of her lips with a cloth.

"So that's the idea." She reached for a piece of preserved fruit from the dish and popped it into her mouth. It was something Cassian had prepared himself over the past few days, noticeably sweeter and far better than what she'd had before. "No need for me to spend anything," she said lightly. Later that day, the guard returned again, his tone carrying a trace of subtle intrigue.

"Your Grace, there's been some movement from the Baker family." Elowen smiled faintly. "You see? The ones willing to spend the coin and make noise have already stepped in." The very next day, things shifted.

"Today, a large crowd came to the shop," the guard reported. "Word is spreading that this is Azure's first new work in years, and many came specifically because of that. However..." He hesitated slightly. "The shopkeeper says it still hasn't matched the surge from before, when Daphne claimed the name." Elowen sat at her writing desk, carefully recording the household expenses, not even glancing up. "That was expected," she said calmly. "After what happened last time, people are naturally more cautious.

They'll wonder whether this is another imitation, or whether the quality still holds." The guard continued, "The initial batch has already sold out. The shop is asking whether to begin another print run immediately. But doing so would require hiring additional workers at higher wages, and the 2/3 Finished ::37 pm Chapter 412 Let Them Make the Noise current craftsmen would have to continue through the night." Elowen shook her head. "No. Once today's copies are gone, that's it." She paused, then added in an even tone, "This kind of work demands focus.

There's no need to push people to exhaustion just to sell a few extra copies. Tell them to close on time." A brief beat. "Pay everyone in full," she continued. "And give each of them an extra bonus. Consider it proper compensation for their effort." 2.5K (admin

Chapter 413 Playing the Long Game 448 Finished By early evening, the palace had slipped into that golden hour where candlelight began to take over from the fading sun, casting a warm glow along the corridors. Clarisse arrived once again at Isla's residence and was quickly brought inside to report. "Your Majesty, everything has been set in motion," she said, lowering her voice slightly. "We spread word throughout the city that the bookshop is selling a new release under Azure's name.

At the same time, we placed people in the crowd to stir up conversation, saying the book is underwhelming, even worse than what the Garrett girl passed off before. The shop did brisk business today. But once they sold out, they didn't restock. They shut their doors instead." A faint, amused smile touched Isla's lips. "She does know how to play this." Clarisse blinked, confused. "Your Majesty?" Isla leaned back into the cushions, one hand resting lightly against the carved armrest as she spoke with quiet disdain.

"She realized the response wasn't as explosive as before, so she cut the supply on purpose. It creates the illusion that the book is hard to get." Her fingers tapped once, slow and deliberate.

"People who had no interest will start wondering what they're missing. And then you have those who like to think of themselves as refined. Tell them something is rare, and suddenly they have to have it. She's holding back just enough to make everyone curious." Clarisse let out a soft breath, understanding dawning. "So that's her angle.

The Duchess of Duskmoor is far more calculating than she appears." She hesitated, then added carefully, "I did manage to get a copy. I only skimmed a few pages, but... it's good. The writing is polished, the pacing feels natural, and the characters are vivid. It made me wonder if she truly is Azure," Isla's expression cooled instantly, her gaze sharpening. "Whether she is or not," she

said, her voice turning firm, "in public, she cannot be." Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Back then, Elias was enough to discredit Daphne.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

We can produce witnesses just as easily this time." After all, Elowen had never openly claimed the name Azure. There was nothing concrete, only rumors and beliefs. And belief could be guided. Once enough people accepted a version of events, it became reality. Clarisse nodded. "If I remember correctly, Azure's earlier works were first released at Willow Breeze 2:38 pm p p p p Chapter 413 Playing the Long Game Bookshop in the western district." "They were," Isla replied calmly. "And that shop knows better than to refuse us." Finished Clarisse's expression shifted slightly.

"There's also Princess Maerwyn. She's always admired Azure, and people know it. If she speaks, no one will question her." Isla gave a small nod. "Did you bring the book?" Clarisse quickly presented it. An attendant stepped forward, received it with both hands, and placed it before Isla. Isla glanced at the cover. Ode to Springlight. Her lips curved with faint disdain. Predictable. Likely another shallow love story dressed up to look refined. She didn't bother opening it. The attendant quietly set it aside.

Later that night, under a pale wash of moonlight, Isla made her way to Maerwyn's chambers. Maerwyn had just finished bathing and was dressed in a simple nightgown, her complexion noticeably paler than before. The long confinement had worn her down, leaving her looking tired and subdued. Still, she pushed herself upright when Isla entered. "Mother, what brings you here at this hour?" Isla sat beside her, dismissing the attendants with a gentle motion. She took Maerwyn's cool hand, her tone soft and reassuring. "Your father mentioned something earlier.

During the midwinter banquet, when the court gathers, your confinement will be lifted."

Maerwyn's eyes lit up immediately. "Really?" "Of course, Isla said with a warm smile. She gave her hand a gentle pat before continuing, "But there's something I need you to do." Maerwyn tilted her head slightly. "What is it?" Isla met her gaze, her voice steady and deliberate. "At the banquet, I want you to stand before everyone and say that the Duchess of Duskmoor is not Azure. Maerwyn let out a quiet scoff. "Her? Of course she isn't.

Someone like her could never write Tales of Luminara." Then she paused, something clicking into place. Her expression turned cautious. "Mother... are you trying to go after her?" Isla sighed softly, letting a trace of weariness show. "Macrwyn, this is for your brother. The Duke of Duskmoor holds too much power, and his intentions are unclear. If we can weaken his household even 2/3 Chapter 413 Playing the Long Game slightly, it will help secure your brother's future." Macrwyn hesitated, fingers tightening unconsciously in the fabric at her waist. "But if I accuse her...

she'll hold it against me..." That day at the autumn hunt flashed through her mind. Elowen had caught her meeting Rowan in secret. Cornered, with no way out, she had been forced to agree to Elowen's terms. 2.5K 313 admin

Chapter 414 The Bargain If she sided with her mother now, there was no guarantee that the secret would stay buried. Isla studied her daughter closely. "Maerwyn, if you do this for me and see it through, I will make sure you marry Rowan." Macrwyn's eyes widened in disbelief. "You mean that?" Isla smiled gently. "I do." No, of course I didn't. Rowan was nowhere near worthy of her daughter's standing. Finished Once everything was settled and Alaric's position secure, Isla would arrange a far more suitable match. But Maerwyn didn't see through it.

Excitement overtook her hesitation, and she nodded eagerly. "Then I'll do it, Mother. I'll speak against Elowen." She threw her arms around Isla. "Thank you." For a brief moment, Isla's expression softened. She loved her children deeply. For them, she was willing to do anything. Everything she was doing now, including this scheme against Elowen, was for their future. She smoothed Maerwyn's hair and spoke gently for a while longer, reminding her to eat well and take care of herself, before finally leaving. The room dimmed as the lights were lowered. But Maerwyn lay awake, her mind racing.

Finally, she could marry Rowan. She lay on her back, hands resting lightly over her stomach, staring up at the canopy. Do I even like him that much? The thought came quietly. Truthfully, she didn't. What she loved was the feeling she had after reading Tales of Luminara. The idea of loving someone so deeply that it gave your life direction, something worth chasing. She had wanted that for herself. She just hadn't known where to find it. 1/3 Chapter 414 The Bargain Then Rowan appeared at just the right moment, filling that empty space. But deep down, she knew. It wasn't Rowan who mattered.

It was Azure. 0: Finished She had imagined more than once what it would be like to meet Azure, to speak with her even briefly. If I could just meet her once... nothing else would even matter. If Rowan dropped dead that very moment, she doubted she would feel much at all. But if anyone tried to harm Azure... No matter who they were... She would not forgive it. The next morning was bright and clear. Elowen and Cassian were seated together for breakfast when Anson stepped in, holding a gilded invitation.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"Your Grace, a message from the palace." Elowen took it and opened it, scanning the contents.

Cassian didn't look up from his plate. "Midwinter banquet?" She nodded, then muttered, "I don't

like this. Something about it feels off." Cassian gave a faint smile. "If anything's about to go wrong, it won't be for you. It'll be for Isla." That earned a small laugh from her. She set the invitation aside and picked up her spoon again. "Still, I have to say, those palace banquets are exhausting. Too many rules, too much watching every little move.

You can't even laugh without thinking about how it looks." It had been that way in her past life, and nothing had changed now. Every banquet felt the same. And somehow, trouble always followed. "Especially during the midwinter," she added with a sigh. "It's supposed to be a celebration. Feels like a waste to spend it locked inside the palace." Cassian raised a brow. "Is the city really that much better?" Elowen's eyes lit up right away. "It is. Vanelle really knows how to celebrate. Cloudmere Lane is the highlight every year.

The whole street is strung with glowing festival lights, there are performers on every corner, rows of food stalls, and crowds just soaking it all in. The entire place feels vibrant, like the city finally comes alive." The change in her expression didn't go unnoticed. 2/3 2:38 pm Chapter 414
The Bargain Finished Cassian's gaze softened, a hint of indulgence in his voice. "Then we leave early and go." Her smile came easily after that. A little while later, Cora stepped in again to announce Rowena's arrival. Elowen quickly wiped her hands and made her way to the Great Hall.

Rowena was already waiting, dressed neatly with her usual gentle smile. Two maids stood behind her, each holding decorative boxes. They opened them one by one. Inside were tiny baby clothes, carefully made and beautifully detailed. "I've had some free time lately," Rowena said. "So I made these myself. The fabrics are as soft as I could find." Elowen picked up a small embroidered cap, running her fingers lightly over the stitching. "You're incredibly talented. This

looks amazing." Rowena smiled. "With the standing of Duskmoor Manor, your child will have the finest things anyway.

This is just... something from me." Elowen looked up, her expression warm. "I love them. I'll make sure my child wears these." Rowena nodded, clearly pleased. Elowen placed the items back carefully before asking, "By the way, why didn't Elara come with you today?" At the mention of her daughter, Rowena's smile faded slightly. She let out a soft sigh.. "She hasn't been feeling well lately. She's resting at home." Elowen frowned. "Is she sick? I can send Doctor Dray over." Rowena shook her head gently. "It's not that." She paused, her voice quieter.

"It's something weighing on her mind." 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 415 A Girl Who Fell Too Fast Elowen blinked, caught off guard. "Huh?" Finished Rowena's brows pulled together, her tone edged with frustration. "I've seen this before. Back then, she was infatuated with His Grace. Now it's someone else. Says she ran into a young man at Duskmoor Manor, but when I ask who, she just shakes her head and cries like she doesn't even understand it herself." Elowen fell quiet. Oh no... Elara really doesn't do anything halfway when it comes to feelings. As for who the man was, Elowen had a pretty good idea. Zachary.

If it had been anyone ordinary, maybe this could have been handled cleanly. But Zachary was anything but simple. His identity alone made things complicated, not to mention everything tied to him. Helping her was not just difficult. It was almost impossible. Rowena let out a breath and waved a hand as if pushing the whole matter away. "I'm done worrying about her. She's grown, yet she lets something like this consume her. Maybe she needs to get hurt a little. Might teach her some sense. We're not meant to fall apart over a man." Elowen nodded right away. "Exactly.

That's what I was thinking too." Rowena leaned back slightly, her tone turning more serious.

"There's a book going around Vanelle lately. Ode to Springlight. Everyone's talking about it. I won't let Elara near it. Stories like that only pull girls deeper into their fantasies. Next thing you know, they're chasing feelings that have no place in real life." Elowen felt a flicker of guilt but kept her voice steady. "Yeah... probably best to stay away from that kind of thing." The night before the midwinter, Zachary slipped into Duskmoor Manor under the cover of darkness.

Elowen received him in Cassian's study. That room had no palace attendants assigned to it, which made it the safest place in the entire residence. Zachary didn't waste time. "Your Grace, about tomorrow's banquet. Our informants say Her Majesty is planning something." Elowen gave a small, calm smile. "I already know. You don't need to worry about that." She paused, then shifted her gaze slightly. "There's something else I wanted to ask. After Christmas, when you left the manor, did you happen to run into a young girl? Maybe fifteen or so?" Zachary thought for a moment, then nodded.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"I think I did. Why?" 1/3 2:38 pm Chapter 415 A Girl Who Fell Too Fast Elowen chose her words carefully. "She seems to have... taken a liking to you." Zachary went completely still. That girl... liked him? But she was a girl. Finished Elowen let out a quiet breath. "I'm not saying this to encourage anything. Quite the opposite. I don't think the two of you are suited at all. Once the festival is over, I need you to handle this properly. Make sure she lets go, completely." Zachary drew in a slow breath, then nodded with clear resolve.

"Understood, Your Grace." Elowen studied his face for a moment. It really was a problem. That kind of face tended to draw trouble without even trying. She couldn't help frowning slightly.

"Girls at that age don't let go easily." Zachary didn't hesitate. "I'll take care of it." The midwinter

arrived in full splendor. The great hall of the palace blazed with candlelight, music drifting through the air as servants moved between tables pouring wine.. Theodric and Isla sat at the head, elevated above the rest. Below them, nobles, officials, and their families filled the hall in careful order.

Not long after everyone had settled, Sandy finally arrived. She wore a pale blue court gown, though the faint shadows beneath her eyes suggested she hadn't rested well. Elowen rested her cheek lightly against her hand, watching. Isn't she one of Isla's people? From above, Theodric spoke, his voice steady and authoritative. "You're rarely this late." Sandy dipped into a graceful curtsy. "Your Majesty, forgive me. I was reading last night and lost track of time. By the time I put the book down, dawn was already breaking.

I ended up sleeping through part of the afternoon." Theodric raised a brow. "What could possibly keep you up that late?" Her lips curved into a soft smile. "A new story from Vanelle. Ode to Springlight." Theodric repeated the title, sounding unimpressed. "Doesn't sound like much." ... Yeah, that tracks. My titles really aren't doing me any favors. 713 Chapter 415 A Girl Who Fell Too Fast Finished But Sandy only smiled more sweetly. "The title may be plain, but I've heard it's written by Azure." That caught his attention. "The same Azure?" "Yes, Your Majesty.

That's what people are saying." Theodric leaned slightly forward. "So the author didn't sign their name?" Sandy lowered her gaze. "It was published under a different name." She paused just long enough. "I've also heard... Azure is the Duchess of Duskmoor." The hall fell silent. Every gaze turned toward Elowen, curiosity sharp and unmistakable. Isla smiled warmly, as if recalling something pleasant. "What a coincidence. I heard the same thing today." Before Elowen could respond, Theodric looked at Isla. "And how did you come by that?" Isla answered smoothly.

"Your Majesty, since the Duchess is expecting, attendants were sent to Duskmoor Manor. Some of them used to serve under me. Today, I had gifts prepared for the manor, so Beatrice came to collect them. When I asked about the Duchess's condition, she mentioned that Her Grace has been writing stories to pass the time." 2.5K M 3/3 admin

Chapter 416 A Title That Cuts Both Ways Theodric's expression tightened slightly. 040 Finished

At that moment, Elira spoke up with a soft sigh. "I heard Beatrice caused trouble when she first arrived at Duskmoor Manor, overstepping her place and offending the Duchess. Her Majesty should be cautious. It's possible she's holding a grudge." Isla's smile only deepened. "A fair concern. But Beatrice isn't the only one. Wasn't there a girl named Seren from your household? She knows as well. She's even read Azure's work. If you doubt it, you can ask her." Elira stiffened, her expression darkening.

Isla continued calmly. "Elowen may not have been known for scholarship in her younger days at Hale Manor, but writing stories is a matter of talent, not upbringing." She turned to Elowen, voice gentle. "Still, since you are Azure, you should have told us. To the court, His Majesty is your sovereign. But within the family, he is also your elder brother." Sandy picked up the thread smoothly. "Elowen, I've admired Azure's work for a long time. I always imagined someone distant, someone I'd never meet. And yet here you are. If it's not too much to ask, could you sign an autograph for me someday?"

I would treasure it." Between the two of them, the matter had already been pushed into place.

Isla sat a little straighter, clearly satisfied. "Your Majesty, now that word is spreading, shouldn't the Duchess be granted a title? It would reflect well on the royal household." Elowen understood immediately. So this is how she's playing it... not coming at me head-on, just building me up first

so the drop hits that much harder. Theodric didn't answer right away. His gaze shifted to Cassian. Cassian sat at ease, the faintest hint of a smile touching his lips. That was enough.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Theodric turned back to Elowen. "Well? Are you Azure?" Isla's voice softened, persuasive. "I know you're modest. You may hesitate to admit it. But think about what this means. Your house stands on your shoulders now. You cannot take the field like your father did, but recognition like this carries its own kind of honor. If he could see you now, he would be proud." Elowen felt that land exactly where it was meant to. She knows exactly where to press. "Your Grace?" Isla prompted. All eyes were on her. 1/2 2:38 pm Pppp.

Chapter 416 A Title That Cuts Both Ways Elowen lifted her gaze and rose to her feet. 049 Finished The gold-thread phoenix embroidered across her gown caught the candlelight as she stepped forward, shimmering with quiet brilliance. She came to the center of the hall and lowered herself into a formal curtsy. "Your Majesty. It's true I've written under the name Azure. Tales of Luminara, and more recently, Ode to Springlight. They're only meant as light reading, nothing of great importance. That's why I never made it public." A flicker of satisfaction passed through Isla's eyes.

Theodric studied her. "There's nothing to be ashamed of." Elowen kept her gaze lowered. "Even so, I cannot accept a title." Theodric gave a faint smile. "It's only a title. There's no reason to refuse. I've read Tales of Luminara. It's well written. Not everything that endures has to come from history or doctrine. If people love it, that's enough." He raised his voice, carrying easily across the hall. "Have it proclaimed. The Duchess of Duskmoor is hereby granted the title Lady of Grace and Virtue.

Further honors will be sent to Duskmoor Manor after the banquet." Elowen lowered herself again in a formal curtsy. "Thank you, Your Majesty." Isla smiled, gesturing lightly to the attendants. "Go on, spread the word. Let everyone share in the celebration. Lady of Grace and Virtue... it suits her perfectly." "Yes, Your Majesty." The attendant bowed and quickly withdrew. Theodric cast Isla a measured glance, She returned it with an easy smile. "I mean no harm. A woman's talent shouldn't be hidden away." Theodric said nothing. Isla quietly let out a breath, then turned her gaze toward Maerwyn.

Maerwyn felt it immediately. Her hand pressed lightly against her bodice. For courage, she had brought something with her. The original manuscript of Tales of Luminara was hidden carefully within her gown. Feeling its weight, she steadied herself. "Alright." 2.5K admin

hapter 417 The Accusation Finished Theodric looked at Elowen with a trace of amusement in his expression. "That's enough. You should not strain yourself in your condition. If anything happens, Cassian will hold me responsible." Elowen allowed a faint smile to touch her lips. Mira and Cora stepped in smoothly, helping her back to her feet with careful hands. "Your Majesty." Before the moment could settle, a clear voice cut cleanly across the hall. "The Duchess of Duskmoor cannot be Azure." It was Maerwyn. Theodric's brows drew together. "I lifted your confinement so you could attend tonight.

Is this really how you choose to behave?" "I am not causing a scene, Your Majesty." Maerwyn rose abruptly and strode forward, stopping at the center of the hall with her back straight and chin lifted. Elowen turned her head slightly, catching the tension in her expression. Maerwyn did not spare her a glance. Instead, she faced Theodric directly, posture rigid with conviction.

'Azure's work has been my constant companion. I have read Tales of Luminara more times than I

can count. There is no chance I am mistaken." Her voice sharpened. "Azure exists. But she is not the Duchess of Duskmoor.

This is a false claim." A ripple of unease spread through the gathered nobles. Theodric's expression darkened. Elowen, however, was quietly surprised. This had not been part of what she anticipated. Isla had clearly arranged more than one move tonight, and Maerwyn was one of them. She angled her head slightly toward Maerwyn and spoke under her breath. "We had an understanding. At the hunt." She meant the agreement they made during the autumn outing. Maerwyn's eyes flashed, something harsher surfacing. "Whatever that was is finished. But pretending to be Azure is something else entirely.

Do not think I will let that pass." Elowen paused, then chose not to press further. 1/3 2:38 pm P p p p Chapter 417 The Accusation Finished At the head of the hall, Theodric's voice dropped, steady and commanding. "Maerwyn. Return to your place. This does not concern you." Maerwyn lifted her chin, refusing to yield. Isla exhaled softly at just the right moment, her tone gentle and composed. "Your Majesty, perhaps we should allow her to speak. You know how devoted she is to Azure.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

If there is any misunderstanding, it would be best to clear it here and now, with the family present." Her gaze turned toward Elowen, warm on the surface. "If the Duchess truly is Azure, then there is nothing to worry about. But if she is not, the title of Lady of Grace and Virtue has already been announced. Should doubts spread later, it may reflect poorly on her. Clarifying things now would spare her unnecessary trouble." The words sounded considerate. In truth, they placed Elowen squarely under scrutiny. Theodric pressed his fingers to his temple, irritation flickering across his face.

After a moment, he lowered his hand and looked at Maerwyn. "Very well. Explain why you are so certain." Maerwyn's voice rose, firm and unwavering. "Because I understand Azure. Her writing shows breadth, insight, and compassion. There is depth in her work, real vision." Her gaze finally shifted toward Elowen, cool and dismissive. "And what of the Duchess? She has never shown any real interest in literature. Her attention has always been on courtship and intrigue. First pursuing the Crown Prince, then marrying the Duke of Duskmoor, and there have been rumors involving others besides.

Someone like that does not suddenly produce writing of that caliber." The words landed heavily. No one spoke aloud, but glances passed between the guests. With the Duke of Duskmoor present, no one dared voice agreement, yet the shift in their expressions was impossible to miss. Under those watchful eyes, Elowen slowly lifted her gaze, There was no embarrassment, no urgency to defend herself. Only a calm that seemed entirely out of place. "So," she said evenly, "you have no evidence. Only your impression." Maerwyn stiffened.

"What did you say?" "You cannot prove I am not Azure," Elowen continued, her tone steady. "But I can prove that I am." "That is absurd," Maerwyn shot back. "Maerwyn," Elowen said calmly, "have you read my recent work, Ode to Springlight?" 2/3 2:38 pm Chapter 417 The Accusation Maerwyn hesitated, then shook her head. "Not yet." "That explains it," Elowen replied. "If you had read even the opening chapters, you might not be so certain." A flicker of unease crossed Maerwyn's face.

"Elowen, what are you implying?" Finished "The original manuscript of Tales of Luminara," Elowen said, her gaze steady. "You still have it, do you not?" Almost instinctively, Maerwyn's hand moved to her bodice, pressing lightly against the hidden booklet beneath the fabric. Elowen

turned toward Theodric, composed and respectful. "Your Majesty, Maerwyn and I have never been close. I could not possibly have known she possessed that manuscript, nor is there any chance of prior arrangement in what is happening now." Then she looked back at Maerwyn.

"You may bring it out and examine it yourself." Her voice remained even as she continued. "In Chapter Three, second passage, I originally described the night air a different way," Elowen said, her voice steady and unhurried. "I changed it later for personal reasons. The final version reads, 'cool against the skin.'" She let that settle before continuing, her tone calm, almost conversational. 2.5K 3/3 :38 pm p p pp. admin

Chapter 418 Written in Ink Finished "And in Chapter Five, somewhere in the middle. I hit a wall while writing. I remember sitting there, unable to move forward, so I started idly sketching along the margin while I thought it through." Maerwyn went still. Then, almost abruptly, she moved. Whatever awareness she had of the room. of the watching court, disappeared. She reached inside her gown and pulled out the manuscript she had kept hidden close to her. The motion was hurried, lacking its usual polish, her fingers already unsteady before she even opened it.

She flipped through the pages too quickly at first, then slowed, letting memory guide her instead of sight, until she found the passage. "...cool against the skin," she read under her breath. Her voice sounded thinner now, stripped of its earlier certainty. She stared at the line, as though expecting it to shift under her gaze. It didn't. Her fingers tightened slightly on the page before she turned forward again, faster this time, the soft rasp of paper loud in the quiet hall. She reached the middle of Chapter Five. Her movements slowed.

Her fingertips traced along the outer edge of the page, searching, then stopped. The marks were there. Faint, uneven strokes of ink, scattered along the margin as if they had been drawn without

intention. Except they hadn't. Her grip tightened, the tension running visibly through her hand.

'And there's one more thing,' Elowen said, her tone still even, though quieter now. "Those lines weren't entirely random. If you follow them closely, you'll see they were shaped with purpose."

Maerwyn lifted the page closer, her eyes fixed on the ink.

Her breath hitched as she leaned in closer, no longer just glancing at the page but carefully tracing the movement of the ink with her eyes, following each line as it curved into the next. At first, it looked like nothing more than a few careless marks scattered along the margin, the kind anyone might make without thinking. But the longer she studied it, the more the pattern began to emerge, until what once seemed random slowly resolved into something deliberate, unmistakable, and impossible to ignore—a signature hidden in plain sight. 1/3 :38 pm pppp.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Chapter 418 Written in Ink 0:30 Finished Hidden so carefully it could be missed entirely, unless you knew to look. Her fingers began to tremble. No... that's not possible... The noise in her ears rose, drowning out everything else, the room, the voices, the world beyond that single page. It's her. It's always been her. The manuscript shook in her hands now, her grip no longer steady enough to control it. All those nights spent reading in quiet corners, all the admiration she had never spoken aloud, all the stories that had felt larger than life— They all pointed here.

To the woman she had dismissed without hesitation. Slowly, as if her body no longer quite belonged to her, Maerwyn lifted her head. Elowen was already watching her. There was no triumph in her expression. No sharp edge of satisfaction. Just a calm, steady presence. And somehow, that made it harder to stand there. "I... I... Maerwyn tried to speak, but her voice faltered, the words refusing to come together. "Maerwyn, what is the matter?" Isla's tone

tightened, unease surfacing. "Speak clearly." "Mother..." Maerwyn choked, tears falling freely now. "She is..." Isla's eyes widened.


"Do not say another word." But Maerwyn could not stop. "She is Azure. She truly is." The words echoed through the hall. For a brief moment, Isla's composure faltered before she forced it back into place. She turned to Theodric, her tone carefully controlled. "Your Majesty, she must have had too much to drink. She is not thinking clearly." From nearby, Elira's voice rose, calm and measured. "That is rather puzzling, Your Majesty. Maerwyn walked without issue, spoke clearly, and presented her argument with confidence just moments ago. She did not appear unsteady then." She paused slightly.

2.3 Chapter 418 Written in Ink Finished "And when she accused the Duchess, no one suggested she was impaired. Yet now that she admits she was mistaken, suddenly she is?" The implication was unmistakable. Isla turned sharply, her gaze cutting. For years, Elira had remained outwardly compliant. Even when there were tensions, they had never surfaced like this.. Now, there was no pretense. Isla's voice cooled. "What are you suggesting?" Elira lowered her gaze slightly.

"Nothing improper. Only that tonight's events seem unusually focused on the Duchess." She continued, her tone even.

"She is expecting and not in the strongest health. She should be resting. Instead, she has been placed under repeated pressure. First the title, then this public challenge. One matter follows another without pause." Her gaze lifted slightly. "If someone less steady were in her place, the strain alone could have caused serious harm. And surely, Your Majesty and Her Majesty have always placed great importance on the safety of royal heirs." Isla's expression tightened,

frustration rising, but before she could respond... "Enough." Theodric's voice cut through the hall, firm and final.

Silence fell instantly. Isla drew in a breath, forcing her emotions down, and lowered her gaze. She then turned to Maerwyn, softening her tone. "Maerwyn, come here. There is no need for tears." 2.5K  admin

Chapter 419 Cracks in the Light Maerwyn didn't respond at all. Finished Her breathing had fallen apart into uneven, shaky pulls, tears running unchecked down her face until her vision blurred. Every attempt to speak broke halfway through, like her voice refused to cooperate. She couldn't bring herself to look at Elowen. The shame sat heavy in her chest, tangled up with guilt so sharp it made her feel like she might come undone right there in front of everyone. It took everything she had just to force out a few broken words. "I...

I'm sorry..." Elowen watched her, eyes settling on the way Maerwyn's head trembled. Her lips parted slightly, as if she meant to say something. But Maerwyn had nothing left. She dragged the back of her hand across her face in a rushed, messy motion, completely past caring how she looked. Then she turned and rushed out of the hall without a second glance. "Maerwyn!" Isla's voice rang out, tight with urgency. She turned sharply toward the attendants nearby, her expression turning cold. "Why are you still standing there? Go after her. Now.

If anything happens to the princess, you will answer for it." Maerwyn heard her. She just didn't slow down. Not until the noise of the hall faded behind her, not until her legs began to give out on their own, did she finally stop running. Even then, she didn't stop crying. Tears kept falling as she walked through the palace grounds alone, the night air cool against her flushed skin.

Somewhere behind her, the official announcement carried through the air, voices rising and falling in practiced rhythm as they proclaimed Elowen's new title. It sounded like a celebration.

To Maerwyn, it felt like something pressing down on her chest. She was Maerwyn of Avenlor. Everyone said she was the most favored princess in the realm. So why did it feel like there was never anyone truly there for her? Isla was always occupied, either with Theodric or with the endless politics of the court. Managing alliances, watching every move in the inner palace, keeping the Baker family in line. There was always something more pressing. 1/4 :38 pm P p pp. Chapter 419 Cracks in the Light Finished And when guilt did surface, it came wrapped in velvet boxes and silk gowns.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Theodric had no time either. Too many affairs of state, too many children to divide his attention. Even Alaric was always busy, buried in his responsibilities. Maerwyn had grown used to being alone. Until she found Tales of Luminara. That had been the first time something felt like it belonged to her. She read it over and over, each time finding something new to love. In her mind, meeting Azure had always been perfect. A clear spring morning, sunlight soft and warm.

She would wear her prettiest dress, run straight to her, heart racing, cheeks warm, words spilling out all at once about how much those stories had meant to her. And Azure would listen, patient and kind, then smile and say, "I'm really glad you love it." So how had it ended like this?

Maerwyn slowed to a stop near a stone garden feature, her strength finally giving out. She lowered herself to the ground, clutching her copy of Tales of Luminara tightly against her chest as her sobs grew louder, no longer held back. Inside the hall, Theodric's voice turned cold.

"You told me she understood her mistake. I trusted you and lifted her confinement." Isla's expression tightened, a flicker of unease crossing her face. "Your Majesty, I failed to guide her properly..." "That excuse again." Theodric didn't raise his voice, but the edge in it was unmistakable, "If you cannot raise your daughter well, then leave it to someone who can." Isla froze, caught off guard, her head lifting slightly. Theodric had already shifted his attention away from her. When he looked at Elowen, his tone softened just a fraction. "You shouldn't be standing this long.

Go sit." "Thank you for Your Majesty's concern." Elowen dipped into a composed curtsy before returning to Cassian's side. As she settled in, she let out a quiet breath. For some reason, she felt unusually tired. Then her hand was gently taken, a warm, steady grip grounding her. 2/4 2:38 pm pppp. Chapter 419 Cracks in the Light Finished She turned her head slightly and met Cassian's gaze. He watched her for a moment before speaking, his voice low. "Something on your mind?" She shook her head. "Not exactly.

It's just..." She paused, then said softly, "She really does love Azure." If this had only been about Maerwyn losing face, Elowen wouldn't have thought much of it. But that wasn't all it was. Maerwyn was also someone who had loved her stories, in a way that was sincere and unpolished and completely genuine. And for someone who wrote those stories, it was hard not to feel something in return. She wasn't just a princess tonight. She was a reader who got hurt. Isla's scheme had been deliberate. But Maerwyn had only been used.

Thinking about the way she cried, Elowen felt a quiet ache settle in her chest. Cassian gave her hand a light squeeze, steady and reassuring. "Don't get stuck on it. We still have something to do tonight, remember?" Elowen blinked, then suddenly recalled. Her mood lifted a little. "Right."

They stayed just long enough to avoid drawing attention, taking a few polite sips and bites before Cassian straightened slightly and looked toward the throne. "Your Majesty." Theodric glanced over. "Yes?" "My wife and I don't handle wine particularly well.

If it pleases Your Majesty, we'd like to take our leave early. Theodric studied him for a moment. That look on his face. Anyone who didn't know him might think he was heading off to something far more exciting than simply going home. Not good with wine? That's a stretch. A hint of amusement flickered in Theodric's eyes. 3/4 2:38 pm Chapter 419 Cracks in the Light Cassian blinked slowly in response. Theodric understood immediately. To most people, Cassian came across as distant and difficult to read. But Theodric knew better. Cassian had a habit of getting exactly what he wanted.

2.5K (1 Finished admin

Chapter 420 A Night for Two Finished Back when they were younger, Cassian would use that exact same look whenever he wanted something and wasn't getting it. He would lean in just enough, lower his voice, and say, "Come on, just this once." If they weren't in a formal hall right now, with half the court watching. Theodric had no doubt Cassian would have said it again. Let me take her home. The thought eased his mood. He lifted his chin slightly. "Granted." Cassian didn't hide his satisfaction. "Thank you, Your Majesty." "Make sure you take proper care of your wife," Theodric added.

J As Elowen stood and moved behind Cassian, guiding his chair with unmistakable energy, Theodric watched them for a moment longer than necessary. A faint sense of something settled in his chest. After years in power, even something as simple as this could feel distant. Then he added, "The rewards meant for your wife will be sent to Duskmoor Manor later." Cassian raised

a hand in acknowledgment without turning back. Elowen glanced over her shoulder instead, smiling brightly. "Thank you, Your Majesty!" Outside, the air felt entirely different.

Cool, crisp, and alive, it cleared away the heaviness of the hall in an instant. Rows of lanterns stretched along the palace eaves, their warm glow reflecting softly against the last traces of snow. Elowen took a deep breath, her shoulders easing. "That feels so much better." Their carriage was already waiting. But instead of heading straight back to Duskmoor Manor, it turned through the city streets and eventually stopped along a quieter stretch of Cloudmere Lane. They stepped down in a dim alley, tucked away from the main road. By then, they had already changed.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Elowen had traded her formal court attire for something lighter and easier to move in, a soft green dress 1/2 2:38 pm P p p p Chapter 420 A Night for Two with delicate embroidery, a pale cloak draped over her shoulders. 0440 Finished Cassian had done the same, dressed now in a dark, tailored coat with a simple cloak, his presence still striking even without the weight of rank behind it. No attendants followed. No formalities lingered. Just the two of them. Their hands found each other naturally as they walked toward the glow spilling in from the main street. Elowen's eyes lit up.

"I haven't done this in so long. Not during a festival like this." Cassian glanced at her. "What do people usually do?" She smiled, relaxed now. "You just go wherever the crowd feels alive. Stop where something catches your eye. Look at the lights, try little games, pick up things you don't really need, grab something hot to eat. It's not about doing anything specific. It's just about being out there." She paused, then added with a spark of excitement, "There's a place up ahead called Stargazer Pavilion. It's tall enough that from the top you can see the whole city lit up.

People say it's incredible on nights like this." Then she laughed softly. "But you can't just walk in. You have to dine there, and it's expensive. I used to want to go so badly, but I could never justify it." Hale Manor had never been short on reputation. But coin had always been another matter. She had grown up careful with everything. Daphne could have dresses made regularly. Elowen couldn't. Sometimes months would pass before she had something new. But she never blamed anyone for it. She knew where the money went. To the families left behind after the wars.

She had seen what that looked like. There had been one family she couldn't forget, all three of them sharing what little they had just to get through each day. After that, she had chosen to give up a year's worth of personal spending to help them. Later, she heard they had managed to build something stable for themselves. Back then, she had realized something simple. Helping someone else stayed with you longer than anything you could buy. Cassian listened quietly, then gave a noncommittal response. "Sounds lively." Elowen tilted her head slightly, studying him. "You're not impressed at all.

Don't tell me you've been there 2/3 2:38 pm Chapter 420 A Night for Two Finished before." "I haven't." She narrowed her eyes just a little. "Then why do you sound like it's nothing special?" Cassian glanced at her. "Because, Ella, Stargazer Pavilion is mine." Elowen stopped mid-step. "...You're serious?" "I didn't mention it?" His tone stayed easy. "I own quite a few places. Some slip my mind. That one's a bit different, though." He continued, "It used to belong to the Second Prince, back before Theodric took the throne. It had a reputation for burning through money.

After he died, it was handed over to me. I have people running it, but I don't go often." Elowen was still looking at him. Cassian added, calm and matter-of-fact, "The profits don't go to Duskmoor Manor." A brief pause. "They go straight back to the palace." 2.5K 3/3 admin