

# Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 431 Cracks Appear Finished The attendant looked Rowan over, taking in the bruises, the swelling, the way he could barely hold himself upright, and the displeasure in her eyes was impossible to hide. "You're in no condition to be standing here, sir. You should head home and have a physician see to you before it gets worse." Rowan brushed that off entirely. The moment he heard Maerwyn had been at the royal banquet, his thoughts began racing. Theodric would be present. Isla would be present. Every noble house and court official would be gathered under one roof.

If he showed up like this and made a scene, if he laid everything out in front of them, then even if Alaric chose to stay silent, Theodric and Isla would not ignore it. The dignity of the court would force their hand. "Your Highness?" The attendant suddenly called out, her voice sharp with surprise as she looked past Rowan toward the far end of the stone corridor. Under the steady glow of iron-bracketed wall torches, a lone figure was making her way forward. Maerwyn. She looked like someone who had lost her way entirely.

Her steps were uneven, her posture slack, as if she were walking on instinct alone. In her arms, she clutched a worn manuscript so tightly that her fingers had gone pale. Tear tracks marked her face, her cosmetics smeared beyond saving, her eyes swollen and unfocused. It took her a moment to even register the voice calling to her. The attendant hurried forward, concern overtaking everything else. "Your Highness, why are you alone? You don't look well at all. Where are your ladies?" Maerwyn parted her lips slightly, as if to answer, but no sound came.

Her thoughts were still tangled up in Azure, in everything she had just learned, everything she had done wrong. "Your Highness!" Rowan's voice cut in, rough and strained, carrying just the right amount of desperation. That finally drew her attention. She looked toward him, and when she saw the state he was in, something flickered faintly in her otherwise hollow gaze. She sniffed lightly, her voice hoarse. "What happened to you?" Rowan seized the moment. His shoulders sagged as if he were barely holding himself together. "I was attacked. Your Highness, I nearly didn't make it.

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I thought I would never see you again." 1/3 :40 pm P Chapter 431 Cracks Appear Finished

Macrwyn's voice came out distant, almost detached. "That. looks serious. Who did this?" Rowan hesitated, then chose his approach carefully. "Will Your Highness stand up for me?" She went quiet for a brief moment before answering, soft and uncertain. "I suppose I will." Rowan stiffened. That was not the response he expected. It was vague, noncommittal, nothing like the certainty she used to show. He pushed forward, unwilling to let the moment slip.

"Did Your Highness not send word just days ago that Her Majesty had already given her approval, and that after the festival we would begin discussing our marriage? If your future husband is beaten like this, surely Your Highness would not let it pass." The attendant's expression darkened further, her patience clearly wearing thin. The audacity of this man was astonishing. And yet, she fully expected Maerwyn to defend him, just as she always had. Instead, Maerwyn shook her head slowly. Her voice was calm, almost eerily so. "That will not happen. We are not getting married." Rowan froze.

"What do you mean?" She did not answer. How could she possibly explain that the person she admired most was the very one she had tried to tear down? How could she admit that she refused

to stand by while Isla moved against Azure, and that because of that, there would never be any approval for this match? The thought made her chest tighten again. She shut her eyes briefly and pressed her palm against them, forcing the emotion back down. When she looked at him again, whatever softness had been there was gone, replaced by something distant and steady.

"Just tell me who did this." Rowan felt a chill run through him. Something is wrong. She's not reacting the way she should. Still, he had come too far to back down now. He let out a heavy breath, layering his voice with grievance and restraint. "It was Duchess of Duskmoor."

Maerwyn's gaze sharpened slightly. "Who?" "It was the one you've always disliked. Duchess of Duskmoor." 2:40 pm Chapter 431 Cracks Appear Finished Rowan continued, slipping smoothly into his story. "Tonight, since Your Highness was attending the banquet, I could not enter the palace to accompany you.

I went to the Stargazer Pavilion for a quiet meal, thinking of you the entire time." The attendant looked away, barely holding back a scoff. Thinking of her was the last thing he had been doing. Rowan pressed on. "As I was leaving, I ran into Duchess of Duskmoor. One of the serving girls made a small mistake, but I said nothing. Duchess of Duskmoor insisted I was at fault. When I tried to explain myself, she accused me of disrespect and had her guards beat me without hesitation." He softened his expression, his voice lowering. "I can endure a beating. That is nothing.

But I represent Your Highness. If she treats me this way, is she not disrespecting you as well? I could not accept that." 2.5K 1 3/3 admin

Chapter 432 Favor Reversed Finished He sighed again, as if weighed down by injustice. "I have no standing, no influence. Against someone like Duchess of Duskmoor, I have no way to defend

myself. I had no choice but to come to you." He looked at her, eyes filled with carefully crafted emotion. This always works. She won't turn me away. He had done this before, and it had worked every time. There had been that incident at the gaming tables when he lost everything and ended up deep in debt. His family had beaten him for it, and he had come running to her.

He had told the story in just this way, turning himself into the victim, and she had been so moved she gave him more than enough to recover. She had even told him, gently, that he could always come to her if he needed help. For a long time after that, he had lived comfortably off that generosity. Now, under the flickering torchlight, he noticed the faint redness in her eyes again. It's working. The attendant, however, saw right through it. She stepped forward, unable to stay silent. "Your Highness..." Maerwyn raised a hand, stopping her. The attendant let out a quiet sigh and fell back.

Maerwyn looked at Rowan, her gaze clear and cold. "You're lying." Rowan blinked, thrown off. "Your Highness does not believe me?" Her expression did not change. "What you said is not the truth." He grew agitated. "How could it not be the truth? Would I deceive you? You know me." Maybe I don't know you at all. But I know Azure would never do something like that. She turned slightly, no longer interested in arguing. "Guards." Rowan's heart dropped. A sense of dread crept up his spine. Her voice remained calm, almost detached.

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"Perhaps you need a reminder before you decide to tell the truth." As the guards approached, the memory of his earlier beating came rushing back. His body seemed to remember the pain all at once. His legs weakened, his voice faltering. "I'll talk. I'll tell you everything." Under pressure, he finally admitted what had really happened, including the drinking and the women he 1/3 2:40

pm Chapter 432 Favor Reversed had kept at his side. Finisher At the end, he rushed to salvage what he could. "Your Highness, my feelings for you are real.

It was only because I could not see you that I felt so alone. I had no choice but to find some comfort elsewhere." Macrwyn did not react to that at all. Her brows drew together slightly. "You insulted Duchess of Duskmoor." Rowan stared at her, completely speechless. So I say one thing about the Duchess and suddenly you're mad at me? Haven't you said worse about her yourself before? And now you're getting upset over this? He did not dare voice that thought. "Your Highness... I don't understand." "You will." Her tone turned colder. She took a step back and gave the order.

"Do it." The guards hesitated, exchanging uncertain looks. "Your Highness... this is Rowan..." Everyone knew how much she used to favor him. No one wanted to be the one to cross that line. Maerwyn did not waver. "That was before. I didn't understand things then. I do now. I will not marry him." Shock spread through the small group. The attendant, on the other hand, felt a wave of relief she could not hide. Maerwyn held the manuscript of Tales of Luminara tightly against her chest, her gaze fixed on Rowan. He had dared to go after Azure. Her voice was steady, stripped of hesitation. "Do it.

He crossed the line. He answers for it." Panic took hold of Rowan. He turned and tried to run, but his injuries made it impossible. The guards moved in quickly, surrounding him and cutting off any escape. Despair flooded him as he collapsed onto the cold stone floor. He could not make sense of any of it. Why had everything changed? Why were both Alaric and Maerwyn now siding with Elowen? Before he could find an answer, the guards forced him down and began

striking him again. His cries echoed through the corridor, raw and desperate, until they gradually faded.

2.3 Chapter 432 Favor Reversed 040 Finished It did not take long before his body gave out completely and he lost consciousness. Maerwyn watched, her expression unmoved. "Take his entry pass," she said coldly. "From now on, he is not to be allowed inside the palace under any circumstances." Without another glance, she turned and walked inside. 2.5K admin

Chapter 433 A Price Well Paid Finished The attendant answered with a quiet "yes," her eyes lowered as the attendants scrambled to haul Rowan away, half dragging him down the corridor in a clumsy rush. She watched them go, her expression unreadable, though something sharp and unsettled flickered beneath the surface. Rowan had just said that the Duke of Duskmoor had been inside Stargazer Pavilion. Standing there as if nothing had ever been wrong. The implication settled heavily in her chest. If that's true, this isn't something I can sit on. Her Majesty needs to know immediately.

Upstairs, in a private chamber on the second floor, Elowen had just finished speaking with Scarlet when a soft knock came at the door. "Ella, we should be heading back." Cassian's voice carried through the door, low and steady. "Coming." Elowen crossed the room and opened it. Cassian stood just outside, posture relaxed but composed, one hand resting lightly at his back. Behind him, the steward hovered a step away, shoulders slightly hunched, his head lowered in careful deference. A sheen of sweat clung to his temple, and his expression was arranged into something overly polite.

The moment he saw Elowen, he stepped forward and bowed deeply. "Your Grace, please forgive the disturbance earlier. I hope you'll be merciful." Elowen gave him a brief glance but did not

respond. Her attention returned to Cassian. Cassian reached for her hand as if it were the most natural thing in the world, his fingers closing around hers with quiet certainty. 'From tonight onward, no one in this house will be forced to entertain, drink, or keep company against their will," he said evenly. "This place returns to what it should have been from the start. A house for food.

music, and company that people choose freely." He paused, then added with deliberate clarity, "Nothing beyond that." The steward nodded quickly, almost bending over himself in agreement. "Of course, Your Grace Orders have already been passed down. Everyone understands. There will be no exceptions." Cassian turned slightly toward Elowen. "It's getting late. Shall we go?" Elowen nodded, then remembered something. "I'm bringing Scarlet and Nikki with us." Cassian did not hesitate.

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"That's fine." 1/3 2:40 pm P p p p Chapter 433 A Price Well Paid Finished At that moment, raised voices broke out from the upper floors. "What is this supposed to mean? We're halfway through the night and suddenly everything changes? "Since when does this place run like a church hall?" "I heard it came straight from His Grace. All for someone upstairs." A scoff followed, thick with wine. "Really going that far for a woman? What happens to business now?" "This is ridiculous. Do you know how much I spend here every year? And now we're just done?" "Unbelievable. Treating loyal patrons like this.

Fine. I won't be back." The complaints rolled through the building, uneven and loud, colored by drink and irritation at being cut off mid-indulgence. The order had been enforced quickly and without compromise, and it showed. Elowen's brows drew together slightly. Cassian felt the shift in her hand and gave her fingers a small, reassuring squeeze before turning to the steward. "Let

everyone know that tonight's expenses are covered." The steward blinked, clearly caught off guard, but the question died in his throat the moment he met Cassian's gaze. "Yes, Your Grace. Right away." He hurried off, nearly stumbling in his haste. A moment later, his voice carried through the building. "Ladies and gentlemen, your evening is on the house. All food, drink, and entertainment have been fully covered. Please enjoy yourselves." There was a brief pause, as if the entire place needed a second to process it. Then the reaction hit. Cheers broke out from the lower hall first, loud and immediate, For the merchants and lesser officials, this was nothing short of a windfall.

"To His Grace and Her Graces!" "Our thanks, Your Grace!" 2/3 Chapter 433 A Price Well Paid Finished The excitement spread quickly, climbing to the upper floors where the private rooms were filled with higher-ranking guests. Even there, irritation gave way to approval once the meaning sank in. "Well, that changes things." "Can't argue with that." Within moments, the earlier complaints were swallowed completely by laughter and praise. The atmosphere shifted as if nothing had happened at all. Amid the noise, Cassian led Elowen out without drawing attention.

As they stepped into the corridor, Elowen suddenly remembered what she had said earlier, half joking, half wistful, about walking in, making a grand gesture, and covering everyone's bill like it was nothing. He actually did it. Just because I said it. Something tight in her chest finally loosened. Because of the commotion inside, they exited through a side passage. Outside, the carriage from Duskmoor Manor was already waiting, sturdy and well-kept, the horses calm despite the noise behind them.

A second carriage stood a short distance away, slightly smaller but just as comfortable, clearly arranged in advance. He thought of that too. Once inside, the heavy curtains were drawn, shutting out the noise, the lights, and everything that came with them. The world outside disappeared. 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 434 What It Costs Finished The moment the carriage door closed, Elowen leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Cassian, pressing her face into his chest as if she needed something solid to hold onto. Through the fine layers of his coat, she could feel the firmness of him, the steady strength beneath the fabric, the quiet tension in his body that never fully left him. When she pressed closer, his chest tightened slightly under her cheek. Cassian lowered his gaze to her, his voice softening. "What's going on?" Elowen didn't lift her head. Her voice came out muted against him.

"I just... feel awful." His hand moved slowly along her back, steady and grounding. "Talk to me." She shifted slightly, still holding onto him, then spoke in a low voice. "Nikki's Patrick's daughter. Her father served under mine. He never made it back." Cassian was quiet for a moment before answering. "Theodric did order support for families like hers," he said, his tone even, "but once that kind of order moves through enough hands, things get lost. Funds disappear. Promises don't always reach the people they were meant for." He didn't dress it up. Elowen nodded faintly against him.

"And Scarlet... she grew up in that place. She doesn't even know who her father is. Her mother worked there and raised her with the other women. When her mother died, she just... stepped into that life like it was already waiting for her." Her fingers tightened slightly against his clothes. "We're the same age. I was out riding, going to festivals, doing whatever I wanted. She was

pouring drinks for men old enough to be her father, smiling like she didn't have a choice." Her voice grew tighter as she went on. "And Nikki told me... before her, there was another girl. She worked in the back.

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One night they took her away." Elowen finally lifted her head. Her eyes were red, her voice unsteady. "She wasn't even thirteen." A tear slipped free and landed against Cassian's hand. 1/3 Chapter 434 What It Costs Finished His expression darkened, something restrained but unmistakable settling into his gaze. He reached up and gently brushed the tear from her cheek with his thumb. "That's on me." Elowen blinked, caught off guard. "What do you mean?" Cassian didn't look away. 'Stargazer Pavilion belongs to me. I knew what was happening behind the scenes.

I didn't stop it." He let out a quiet breath. 'It brings in money. A lot of it. Theodric needs that money. The army, disaster relief, keeping the whole system running... none of it happens without it." There was no hesitation in his voice. No excuse. just fact. Elowen looked at him and shook her head. I'm not blaming you," she said softly. "I understand the position you're in. I understand His Majesty too." Her voice dropped. I just... hate that it's like this. For her. For Scarlet. For all the others who don't get out." Cassian watched her, something tightening in his chest.

She shouldn't be the one crying over something I let happen. He leaned down and pressed a quiet kiss against her hair. "Then it ends here," he said. "If I've said it, I'll follow through." Elowen nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. "Thank you." She hesitated, then added, more quietly, "But stopping one place won't change everything. There'll just be another somewhere else." "There will." Cassian considered it for a moment, then spoke again, his tone calm in a way that made the words carry more weight. "Then I shut them all down.

Every last one in Vanelle, and anywhere else I have the reach. Anyone who ignores it answers for it." 273 :40 pm P p pp. Chapter 434 What It Costs Elowen stilled. He's serious. He would actually do it. That realization hit her harder than anything else. It wasn't just power. It was the fact that he would use it because of her. For a moment, the thought pulled at her. If everything like that could just disappear... If no one else had to go through it... But reason pushed back just as quickly. She shook her head. Finished "That won't work. You'd be making enemies everywhere. We just heard them.

One change tonight and they were already furious. If you go further, you'll have half the court against you." Cassian let out a quiet, almost amused breath. "You know I don't care about that." Elowen leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to the corner of his lips. "I know," she said gently. "And I know you're saying it because you don't want me to feel like this." She stayed close, her voice calm but firm. "But I don't want you standing alone against everyone either. You and His Majesty are close, but even that has limits.

He might feel sympathy, but when it comes down to it, he has to choose what keeps everything stable. A few people, or everyone else. And if you start changing things just for me, he won't see it the same way you do." 2.5K admin

Chapter 435 What Matters Now Finished Cassian held her gaze for a long moment, something in his expression softening in a way that only ever showed when it was her. He had always known that Elowen was sharp, steady under pressure, and far more perceptive than most people realized. Elowen took a breath and let the tension ease out of her shoulders before her smile returned, lighter this time. "At least there's one good thing. I got Scarlet and Nikki out of there." Cassian's expression warmed. He reached up and brushed his fingers along her cheek, slow and deliberate.

"That was the right call, Ella." Elowen smiled, then lifted her hand and tapped his cheek lightly in return, mimicking him without thinking too much about it. A thought struck her, and her expression shifted. "Cassian, earlier today you stood up in front of everyone. A lot of people saw it, especially Rowan. He answers to Alaric, and if he hasn't already gone straight to the palace with it, I'd be surprised. If the Crown Prince or Her Majesty find out your legs have recovered, isn't that going to complicate things?" Cassian gave a quiet laugh, like the idea barely registered as a concern.

"If they weren't paying attention before, they will be now. That works in my favor." Elowen tilted her head slightly, studying him. Once they were back at Duskmoor Manor, Elowen brought Scarlet and Nikki straight to Gerda. "Find a room for Scarlet," Elowen said, her tone calm but decisive. "She'll stay here for now. There's no need to assign her work immediately. Let her settle in first and we'll figure out where she fits best." Gerda nodded. "Of course, Your Grace." Nikki had been hovering nearby the entire time, and now she leaned forward, unable to stay quiet any longer.

"Elowen, I want to stay too. I can work, I promise." Elowen glanced at her. "You want to stay here? I was planning to send you home tomorrow so your brother knows you're safe." Nikki shook her head quickly, her expression turning serious. "I told my family I was leaving to find work, and my brother already knows that. If I go back now, they'll know something went wrong. They'll worry, and I don't want that." She stepped a little closer, her voice gaining urgency. "Please let me stay. I work hard, I don't complain, and I can handle things most people avoid.

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I've dealt with situations worse than this." Elowen couldn't help the smile that slipped through.

"You're making this sound like we run a battlefield. here." Nikki paused, thinking, then

brightened again. "I'm good with cleaning too. Floors, windows, whatever you need. I don't leave things half done." 1/3 2:41 pm P Ppp. Chapter 435 What Matters Now There was a note of pride in her voice that made it hard not to like her. 019 Finished Elowen let the moment stretch just long enough for Nikki's hope to start dipping before she spoke again.

"You can stay with me and help in the study." Nikki froze for half a second, then lit up like someone had handed her the world. "Really? Thank you, Elowen. You have no idea how much that means. My mother always said your family was known for kindness, and now I see why." Elowen watched her, amused by how quickly her mood shifted. "You'll be paid five dollars a month." Nikki blinked, then stared at her in disbelief. "That much? I think I might actually faint." Elowen laughed softly and reached out, smoothing a stray strand of her hair. A girl like this...

raising her would probably be pure chaos, but honestly, it'd be kind of fun. The next morning, while breakfast was still being served, Bran arrived with news from the palace. "At this morning's session," he said carefully, "several officials raised formal complaints about what happened last night at Stargazer Pavilion. They're accusing Your Grace of overstepping and causing disorder." He hesitated before adding, "His Majesty was not pleased." Elowen's hand paused slightly. Cassian, on the other hand, didn't seem bothered in the slightest.

"That's expected." After breakfast, Elowen walked him out herself, staying close as they moved through the courtyard until they reached the carriage. She still looked uneasy. "Cassian, if His Majesty pushes back, don't force it. If the place keeps running the way it always has, then let it. Not everything is worth pushing to the edge." Cassian rested his hand lightly against her abdomen, his voice lowering. "It'll be fine, Ella." He looked at her for a moment longer. "Stay here. You and the baby." Elowen nodded.

By the time Cassian arrived at the palace, Theodric was already in his study, going through reports. Quin stepped forward. "Your Majesty, the Duke of Duskmoor has arrived." No response. Theodric didn't even look up. Quin set the chair in place, then cleared the room, leaving them alone. Cassian glanced toward Theodric before speaking, his tone steady. "Your Majesty." Theodric did not respond, not even a flicker of acknowledgment. ::41 pm P p pp. Chapter 435 What Matters Now Finished Cassian showed no sign of impatience.

He simply remained where he was, composed and unhurried, as if the silence itself didn't concern him in the slightest. The room settled into a heavy stillness, broken only by the faint scratch of pen against parchment and the soft rustle of fabric as Theodric shifted now and then while reviewing documents. Time stretched. Theodric's irritation built gradually, tightening beneath the surface until he finally lost patience and tossed the report aside with a sharp snap against the desk. Cassian chose that exact moment to speak, his voice calm and almost casual.

"I misjudged the situation." Theodric looked up sharply, his gaze cold. "You misjudged it?" His voice hardened. "From what I've heard, you seemed perfectly satisfied with yourself." Cassian met his eyes calmly. "If that's how it came across, I won't argue." Theodric went still, clearly not expecting that answer. His anger faltered, just for a moment. 2.5K admin

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 436 The Line He Drew Finished Theodric shot him a sharp look, irritation flaring again. "Do you have any idea how far I could take this if I chose to?" Cassian didn't hesitate, his tone calm, almost conversational. "If Your Majesty needs to make a statement, you could go all the way and erase my entire line. It would certainly make an impression." Theodric stared at him for a second, then let out a short, disbelieving laugh. "You've lost your mind. That would include me as well."

What exactly do you expect me to do, condemn myself along with you?" Cassian allowed a faint smile. "Then I'll take that as a sign Your Majesty doesn't intend to go that far." "Don't put words in my mouth," Theodric snapped immediately, though the edge of his anger had shifted. "I've been dealing with this mess since before sunrise. Do you even know how hard they came at you this morning?" Cassian's expression remained unchanged. "Public misconduct, abuse of authority, humiliating officials in a private establishment and forcing them out in front of witnesses.

I assume that covers most of it." Theodric let out a cold breath. "None of that is what concerns me." He leaned forward slightly, his voice tightening. "That place brings in a substantial amount every year. You changed how it operates overnight. Do you intend to replace that income yourself?" His frustration built as he spoke, the words coming faster now. "We are still in negotiations with Nordia. There is no guarantee this ends peacefully. If it turns into a war, we will need funding for everything, supplies, horses, armor, men. If it does not, maintaining leverage still costs just as much.

Either way, money does not appear out of nowhere." He straightened, his expression darkening further. "And now Falkriver is unstable again." A brief pause, heavy with meaning. "We received urgent reports this morning. Local leaders have turned, outside forces are involved, and strongholds have already fallen. If that situation spreads, we will have no choice but to respond with force. But Clement is gone. There is no one left who understands that region well enough to take command.

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I don't even have a clear candidate to send." Theodric stood behind the desk, looking down at Cassian, the pressure in his gaze unmistakable. "So here we are. I don't even have to worry about

appointing a commander anymore, because at this rate I won't even have the funds to field an army. Tell me, should I just abandon the campaign altogether? Should I hand Falkriver over and be done with it?" Falkriver was no minor territory. It was vast, fertile, and known across Avenlor for its fine textiles, a steady and critical source of revenue for the crown.

More importantly, its terrain made it a natural stronghold. The mountain ranges and river systems formed a defensive barrier that shielded the entire southwestern frontier. If Falkriver fell, that entire flank would be exposed, and the consequences would not stop at one lost province. 1/3 2:41 pm Chapter 436 The Line He Drew e Finished Theodric knew that as well as anyone. Surrendering it was never truly an option. His gaze snapped back to Cassian, sharp and unforgiving. "You walked into that place last night and rewrote the rules on impulse, all because of her.

You made your point, played the hero in front of Elowen, and walked away satisfied, but not once did you stop to consider what that costs me or what it risks for everything I'm trying to hold together." The frustration he had been holding back finally broke through. His hand came down hard against the desk, the impact rattling everything on it. "Go on, tell me what I'm supposed to do now. If this turns into a war, what exactly do you expect me to use to sustain it?

You are my brother, and while I'm sitting here trying to hold this entire realm together, you're out there making decisions like this just to win a smile from her." "Your Majesty," Cassian said quietly. Theodric looked at him. Cassian placed his hand on the armrest and rose to his feet. Theodric's eyes dropped instantly, locking onto his legs. Cassian took a few steps forward, steady and unhurried, before stopping at the desk. Theodric's expression hardened. "And this is what angers me most.

When did this happen, and why was I not informed?" Cassian didn't look away, his expression steady, his tone controlled. "Your Majesty, I understand your concern, but that wasn't my intent. Nordia's delegation is still in Vanelle, and negotiations are far from settled. Right now we don't know whether they'll walk away as allies or enemies. I wasn't about to show my hand too early and give anyone room to exploit it." That's only part of it. There was more beneath the surface. Isla, the Baker family, the quiet currents shifting through the court, none of that could be ignored.

But none of it was something he intended to lay out here. After a long pause, Theodric let out a sharp breath through his nose. "Fine. I'll accept that." Cassian cased himself back into the chair, his posture relaxed but deliberate. "As for Stargazer Pavilion, you and I both know what kind of business is really being conducted there." Theodric said nothing. His fingers moved absently against the polished stone on the desk, his expression unreadable. "For years, I chose to look the other way," Cassian continued, his voice lowering. "I told myself it was necessary.

That it served stability, that it was a compromise worth making for the sake of Avenlor." He paused briefly. "But last night, Elowen was there. She saw everything. Not rumors, not secondhand stories. She saw it for 2/3 :41 pm pppp. Chapter 436 The Line He Drew herself." The weight of that hung in the air. Finished "She's not like the people in this palace, or the ones in court who have learned to accept how things work," he went on. "She hasn't been worn down into calling it reasonable. She still believes there's a line that shouldn't be crossed." His gaze remained steady.

"I've made my peace with what I've had to do to stand where I do. That doesn't mean I want her to see it. I won't have her look at me and realize that everything I represent is built on the

suffering of people who never had a choice." His voice stayed calm, but there was no hesitation in it. "Even if all I can change is what's visible on the surface, that's still something I intend to protect." 2.5K <sup>Ⓜ</sup> admin

Chapter 437 Not Letting Go Finished Theodric gave a half-smile, clearly unimpressed. "I should have known. You stirred all this up over a woman. The way you went after that situation for her sake, do you even realize how much that cost?" Cassian let out a quiet breath, his tone calm but steady. "Your Majesty, Ella said something afterward that stuck with me. She said you and I are family, and whatever trouble I cause should not be pushed onto you. If the money is what bothers you, then just restore Stargazer Pavilion to how it was before." Theodric lifted a brow, watching him closely.

"So she feels bad for you now?" A trace of warmth surfaced in Cassian's eyes, something unguarded and real. "She does. She understands more than people give her credit for. If you are angry, direct it at me. Don't let it fall on her." He leaned forward slightly, his voice turning more deliberate. "However you want to deal with this, I will accept it. This started with me, so I will take the consequences. Just leave her out of it." Theodric said nothing for a moment. The logic was sound, but somehow it only made him more irritated. The way Cassian protected Elowen was... excessive.

"And there is something else," Cassian added, his expression tightening just a fraction. "If Falkriver turns into open war and someone needs to take command, send me." That caught Theodric off guard. Cassian's voice remained even, but there was weight behind it. "I told you before, no matter what it costs, I will make sure you stay where you are. I meant that. Even if I do not come back, Falkriver will hold." Theodric went quiet again. Over the years, Cassian had

spent more time on campaign than in Vanelle. The life he lived was nothing like that of other nobles.

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He had delayed marriage for so long. Part of it was Elowen, but just as much of it came from the reality that he might not survive the next campaign. He never spoke about what those battles were really like, He always brushed it off. But Theodric knew. From battlefield reports, from the lists of the fallen, from the endless flow of military expenses, he could piece together what Cassian's life had been, Always on edge. Always one step from death.

Two years ago, when news of victory came back, it was followed by word that Cassian had been gravely wounded and had not woken. Theodric still remembered how cold his hands felt hearing that. Finished For the first time, he realized that the one person who had always stood in front of him, clearing every obstacle, might not return. Even back when they were still princes, every hidden threat had been intercepted by Cassian first. He had never failed him. Never once broken his word.

The anger slowly drained out of Theodric, replaced by something quieter, something heavier.

"...Fine." After a long pause, he exhaled. "Stargazer Pavilion stays as it is. Take it as something I am giving you and Elowen. Those rules should have been dealt with a long time ago anyway. I have seen what goes on there. It is not clean, but it is tangled up with too many interests. Money complicates everything. Since you already stepped in, then let it stand." Cassian's expression eased slightly. "Thank you." He turned his chair, already ready to leave. Ella is probably still waiting.

"Stop right there." Cassian paused and looked back. "Is there something else?" Theodric let out a short laugh. "Other men forget their family once they marry. You did not just forget the family, you forgot me specifically. How long has it been since you stayed and actually spent time here? And now you think you can just leave?" Cassian hesitated, then answered honestly. "I would prefer to go back." Theodric raised a brow. "You would." "Yes. Ella knows you were upset earlier. She is likely worried. I should go back and put her at ease. Theodric nodded slowly.

"I see." Cassian looked at him, waiting. Then Theodric's lips curved slightly. "In that case, you can stay for lunch." Cassian froze, completely caught off guard. Theodric looked satisfied. "I will admit, watching the two of you gets a little irritating. Makes me want to get in the way now and then." 2/3 :41 pm Finished Chapter 437 Not Letting Go Cassian looked at him, completely speechless. In her chambers, Isla sat by the window with a finely crafted silver set laid out before her.

She held a small whisk and worked it through a bowl of warmed cream, blending it with care until it thickened into a smooth, airy foam that slowly rose to the surface. The texture turned light and velvety, just the way she liked it. Watching it come together, she felt her mood ease, steady and quietly pleased. 2.5K 1 admin

Chapter 438 A Subtle Push Things had not unfolded the way Isla intended at the banquet. 0191 Finished She had been certain she could corner Elowen in front of everyone, force her into a position she couldn't recover from, but instead the entire situation slipped out of her control. Not only had Elowen avoided humiliation, the whole affair had ended up confirming her identity as Azure, and she had even been formally granted a title. Still, not everything had gone wrong.

Maerwyn had finally grown out of her fixation on Rowan. That alone made the situation worth something.

And if she was being honest, Elowen had played a part in that. What pleased Isla even more was what happened afterward. At Stargazer Pavilion, Cassian and Elowen had caused a scene that no one could ignore. Cassian had Rowan beaten without restraint, then imposed new rules on the establishment, overriding practices that had been in place for years. That move alone had angered a number of influential families who had long treated that place as their private playground. Theodric had not lost his temper like that in a long time. That reaction was exactly what Isla wanted to see.

The only thing that ruined an otherwise perfect turn of events was this. Cassian was no longer crippled. Years ago, Isla and the Baker family had carefully arranged everything, layer by layer, until they seized the right moment during that campaign. Cassian had come close to death. Even after surviving, even after waking from that long period of unconsciousness, his legs had been left useless. A prince who could not stand on his own could never seriously threaten the line of succession, no matter how respected he was or how many victories he had earned.

That had been the greatest danger removed for Alaric. And now everything had changed. Cassian was not only standing again, but according to reports, there was no stiffness in his movements at all. He had clearly recovered long ago, yet continued to present himself as disabled, remaining in that chair as a disguise. So he's been hiding it all this time. Fortunately, Isla had learned the truth early.

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1/3 2:41 pm 040 Chapter 438 A Subtle Push She had already received word that when Cassian entered the palace today, he was still using the chan which meant he had no intention of revealing it just yet.. Isla's eyes narrowed slightly. Since she knew, there was no reason to wait any longer. Certain arrangements could now begg "Your Majesty." Her most trusted attendant entered the chamber with quick, controlled step. Isla's attention remained on the cup in her hands, watching the surface semle as she stirred it lightly. "Speak." "The study has sent word," the attendant said, lowering her voice.

"His Majesty dismissed everyone. including Lord Jett, and spoke with His Grace alone behind closed doors. At first, there were raised voices. His Majesty sounded furious, and there was the sound of something walking the table. But after a while, things quieted down. We could no longer make out what was being said. In is unclear whether His Majesty has calmed down." Isla's hand paused for just a fraction of a second, barely noniteable, but enough to disturb the smooth surface of the drink. "If it went quiet, then the anger passed." She frowned slightly. "No matter what, Cassian is his brother.

He has served him for years without fault and carries more merit than most. Even if His Majesty was furious in the moment, he will not stay that way for long." The attendant nodded. "Yes, Your Majesty: And nibene is more. His Majesty has asked His Grace to remain in the palace for the noon meal." "For a meal?" Isla turned her head slightly, something thump flickening in her eyes. She considered that for a moment, bona fain, knowing smile curved at her lips. "Elowen may not know this you, the mud slowly. "She is with child, and already in a fragile state.

If she hears that His Majesty was emraged and thu Cassian has not returned, she will not take it well." The attendant immediately undermood, a small, complicit smile forming. "That is true. A

woman in her condition cannot handle too much shock. Things could easily go wrong." Isla gave a quick glance and drew her attention to the cup in her hands. She lifted it slightly blowing across the surface before taking a measured sip. "Then go. Handle it carefully. I don't want anything ruined back. "Yes. Your Majesty. The attendant bowed and turned to leave.

213 Chapter 438 A Subtle Push Finished "Wait." Isla's voice stopped her. She set the cup down, her tone more deliberate now. "Keep this from the princess. She now knows Elowen is Azure. If she learns about this..." Before she could finish, a voice came from outside. "Mother, what are you talking about? What am I not supposed to know?" Maerwyn stepped inside. She looked better today, dressed in a soft golden gown that brought out the brightness in her complexion. Only her eyes gave her away, still slightly swollen from crying too much the night before.

The attendant froze for a moment under Maerwyn's questioning look, then instinctively glanced toward Isla. Maerwyn followed that glance. "Mother, what were you just saying?" Isla's expression didn't change. "If I tell you, you're not going to lose your temper again, are you?" Maerwyn walked further in and took a seat beside her. "I won't. Just tell me." Isla sighed lightly, adopting a patient, almost persuasive tone. "It's about your engagement to Rowan." She continued, calm and deliberate. "The Boyd family is respectable, but not exceptional within Vanelle.

As for Rowan himself, his character and ability leave much to be desired. You are my only daughter. Of course I want you to marry well, to have a peaceful and comfortable life ahead of you." She paused just enough to let the words settle. "I agreed before because you insisted, and I gave in. But the more I think about it, the more I realize I cannot watch you walk into something

that will only bring you regret." Her gaze softened, but her words were firm. "This match should be called off." 2.5K 售 admin

Chapter 439 What She Asked For So that was what this was about. Maerwyn didn't question it. She just gave a small nod. "I'm not upset." Isla studied her closely. "Maerwyn, don't say that just to make me feel better." Finished Maerwyn lifted her eyes and met Isla's gaze head-on, her voice steady this time. "I'm not saying it to make you feel better. I really don't care about Rowan anymore." A flicker of relief crossed Isla's face, perfectly measured. "You mean that?" Maerwyn nodded. "After the court banquet last night, he actually came all the way to my residence and wouldn't leave.

He kept talking, saying things that were honestly disgusting. I lost my patience. I had the guards throw him out after teaching him a lesson. If you don't believe me, you can ask around." "Why wouldn't I believe you?" Isla said, her tone softening as she slid a cup of warmed spiced wine across the table. "If you've come to your senses on your own, that's exactly what I'd hoped for. Go on, have a sip." Maerwyn didn't reach for the cup. She hesitated, lips pressed together, clearly weighing something she hadn't yet decided to say. "Mother..." "Yes?" Maerwyn looked up again, more determined now.

"Can you stop going after Elowen?" For the briefest second, Isla's expression tightened. Then it smoothed over. I spoke to your father and had your confinement lifted so you could attend the banquet and clear your head," Isla said, her tone still gentle but with an edge underneath. "And this is what you bring up the moment you see me? Since when have I ever made things difficult for her?" Maerwyn frowned. "How is that a bad thing to say?" She leaned forward slightly, her

voice tightening with emotion. "Her father and brother both died in the war. She has no one left in her family.

She's carrying a child and still dealing with everything here. That's already enough. Why would you keep putting pressure on her?" The memory of the banquet flashed through her mind, the way Isla and Sandy had worked together so smoothly, every word landing exactly where it was meant to. And then she remembered how she herself had treated Elowen. Her chest felt tight. Isla watched her quietly, her gaze lingering on Maerwyn's still-reddened eyes. 2:41 pm Chapter 439 What She Asked For 99 Finished A few thoughts turned over behind that calm expression.. Then she sighed softly. "Alright.

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She's family, and she's carrying His Grace's child. Why would I make things difficult for her? It was just a misunderstanding." Maerwyn hesitated. "Really?" "Of course." Isla's voice turned warm again. "Didn't you say she's the writer you admire so much, Azure? If you like her, then so do I. Why would I treat her poorly?" That hit exactly where it needed to. Maerwyn leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Isla, resting her head against her shoulder, her voice muffled but soft. "Thank you, Mother." Isla gently smoothed her hair. "You're my daughter. You don't need to thank me." But as Maerwyn held onto her, Isla lifted her eyes. Across the room, the maid standing quietly near the doorway met her A single look passed between them. gaze. The maid understood immediately, lowered her head, and slipped out of the chamber to carry out the order Isla had already set in motion. At Duskmoor Manor, the air felt different after Cassian left. Elowen couldn't settle. It felt like something had been pulled out from under her, leaving everything slightly off balance.

Back in her room, she tried to read, hoping it would distract her, but the words blurred together. She turned pages without taking in a single line. Mira came in with her tonic. Elowen took the bowl and drank it straight through without hesitation, not even reacting to the bitterness. The sugared fruit sitting beside her remained untouched. It was as if her mind wasn't even registering taste anymore. Cora and Mira exchanged a look, both surprised. They had never seen her this distracted. Footsteps sounded from outside. Elowen looked up immediately. "Is His Grace back?" But it wasn't him.

Anson stepped inside and bowed. "Your Grace, Miss Ashcroft and Mrs. Wrenner have arrived." ::41 pm Chapter 439 What She Asked For A trace of disappointment flickered across Elowen's eyes before she smoothed it away. "Bring them in." She closed the book, set it aside, and headed toward the Great Hall with Mira and Cora. The Great Hall was warm, the fire burning steadily. Sylvia and Rowena were already seated, and Elara had come with them. Finished She had clearly taken extra care with her appearance today. A soft flush colored her cheeks, and her eyes carried a shy brightness.

Ever since Elowen walked in, her gaze kept drifting over, then slipping away again. Sylvia stood first. "Your Grace." Rowena followed, her expression full of concern. "Your Grace." Elowen gave a small smile. "Please, sit. No need for formalities." j Her gaze passed briefly over Elara with a polite nod before turning back. "What brings you both here ogether?" Sylvia answered, "I ran into Mrs. Wrenner's carriage at the entrance, so we came in together." Rowena studied Elowen's pale expression, worry deepening. "We heard about what happened at Stargazer Pavilion last night.

It's spreading everywhere. I couldn't sit still, so I came to see how you're holding up." Elowen asked quietly, "What exactly are people saying?" Rowena replied, "They're saying that during the midwinter court banquet, you were granted the title" 2.5K 374 admin

Chapter 440 The Noise Outside Sylvia nodded. "That part sounds good. But there's more being said." Finished She continued, her tone more serious now. "People are talking about what happened at Stargazer Pavilion. Something about a confrontation." She folded her hands lightly. "That place had a reputation. The upper level especially. Nobles, wealthy patrons, people who think the rules don't apply to them. There were stories about women being pressured, even forced into situations they couldn't refuse." Her gaze steadied.

"What His Grace did, changing how things work there, and then covering everyone's expenses afterward... people are saying it was a hard move followed by something to soften the blow." She paused briefly. "But this morning, when I was with my mother-in-law, she mentioned something else. The people who frequent that top level are not ordinary. They have influence. Real influence. Changing the rules there means stepping on the wrong people's interests." Rowena added, "There's also talk that His Grace had Rowan beaten severely. When he was carried back, he was already unconscious.

He still hasn't woken up. I've heard that even if he survives, he may never fully recover." Elowen listened quietly. There was a faint smile on her lips, but her eyes were unfocused. Her thoughts were clearly somewhere else. Sylvia and Rowena exchanged a glance. They were about to change the subject when sudden noise broke out from the courtyard. Voices overlapped, low but urgent, servants gathering and whispering among themselves. Elowen's expression shifted.

Something's not right. She turned toward the door. "What are they saying out there?" Gerda immediately stepped out to check.

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Moments later, her voice rang out sharply. "What is this behavior? Your Grace is receiving guests. Have you all forgotten yourselves?" But before things settled, another voice broke through. Seren. "I heard... His Majesty is furious. His Grace has been held at the palace. They're saying there will be serious punishment." The courtyard erupted again. 2:41 pm P P Chapter 440 The Noise Outside Finished "I heard the same thing." "If something happens to His Grace, what happens to us?" "We were assigned here from the palace.

If things go badly here, shouldn't we go back?" "That would be safer..." The voices layered over one another, anxious, calculating, spreading quickly. Inside, Elowen's face lost color, her brows drawing together. Rowena immediately spoke, trying to steady her. "Your Grace, please don't listen to them. His Majesty and His Grace are brothers. They've always been close. Rumors like this get exaggerated. There's no reason to believe them." Sylvia's expression turned cold.

After marrying into Falconcrest Manor, she learned the ropes under Yvonne, managing the household and handling estate affairs alongside her. Over time, she grew into it, and she was no longer the timid young girl who once stayed quiet in the background. She stood without hesitation and walked straight out. "Enough." Her voice cut through the noise cleanly. "Gerda. Anson. If anyone continues spreading rumors or stirring panic in this household, deal with them immediately. I don't care who it is. Make an example out of them." The courtyard quieted, but not completely.

Beatrice's voice followed, edged with challenge. "This is Duskmoor Manor. Shouldn't matters like this be handled by Her Grace herself?" Sylvia turned her gaze on her, sharp and unyielding. "So now you remember where you are?" Her voice didn't rise, but it carried weight. "When you were standing here gossiping, did you stop to think about how that would affect Elowen? Or this household?" Her eyes swept across the group. "You all know exactly what you're doing. This isn't carelessness. Someone put you up to it." Inside the hall, Elowen's fingers tightened slightly. Someone behind this...

of course there is. Sylvia continued, her voice steady and unmistakable. "I am Sylvia Ashcroft. I may be married into Falconcrest Manor, but this is still my family. His Grace is my elder brother. Elowen is my sister-in-law, What happens here concerns me." 2:41 pm PPPP Chapter 440 The Noise Outside No one spoke. Finished "Now leave." she said. "All of you. Go back to your duties. If I hear another word of this from anyone, you will be dealt with and sent back to the palace. We don't keep people who stir trouble." That did it.

The courtyard cleared quickly, footsteps scattering in every direction. Silence returned. Sylvia stepped back inside, the sharpness in her expression fading as she approached Elowen. "Are you alright. Your Grace?" Elowen looked at her. Then she smiled, this time real. "Sylvia... you've really grown." Her voice softened. "You can handle things on your own now." 2.5K admin