

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 441 When the Floor Gives Way Finished A soft blush spread across Sylvia's cheeks, and her voice turned gentler, almost shy. "It's really thanks to you and Duchess Yvonne. You've been patient with me and taught me everything I needed." Elowen looked at her with quiet warmth. "If your father could see you now, he'd be proud of the woman you've become, and he'd be happy knowing you're doing well." Sylvia felt her throat tighten slightly, her eyes warming as she tried to find the right words to respond, but before she could speak, Elowen slowly rose to her feet.

"I'm feeling a little worn out," Elowen said, her voice soft but steady, though there was a faint strain beneath it. "And a bit dizzy. I think I should go lie down for a while. You don't need to worry about me, just head back." Rowena and Sylvia immediately stood as well, their attention fixed on her. Elowen moved toward the entrance of the Great Hall at an unhurried pace, one hand lightly brushing the side of a nearby table as if steadying herself without making it obvious.

J The afternoon sun streamed in through the wide-open doors, laying long bands of golden light across the stone floor, bright enough that the edges of shadow looked almost sharp by comparison. She stopped right where the light met the dimmer interior, her figure momentarily outlined, slender and slightly fragile against the brightness. Then, without any warning at all, her balance gave out. Her body tilted sharply, and in the next instant, she collapsed. "Your Grace!" "Elowen!" The cries broke out at once.

Mira and Cora rushed forward in a panic, barely catching her before she hit the ground, each grabbing an arm to hold her up. Elowen's eyes were shut, her body completely slack, her weight sinking into their arms as if all strength had left her at once. "Get her back to her room, quickly!"

Rowena's voice trembled, the panic impossible to hide. "Send for Doctor Dray, right now!"

Sylvia reacted faster, already turning to the nearest servant. "Careful, don't rush her!" "Make space, move aside!" Voices overlapped, footsteps hurried, and within moments the Great Hall had dissolved into confusion.

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1/3 2:41 pm P p pp. pp Chapter 441 When the Floor Gives Way The news of Elowen collapsing after being startled reached Isla first. Finished A servant standing at her side spoke with quiet satisfaction, unable to hide the approval in her tone. "Alyssa handled it carefully. When I passed the message along, she didn't go straight to Elowen. Instead, she let it slip among the attendants working in the manor, just enough for people to start talking." She lowered her voice slightly. "It spread naturally, and Elowen happened to overhear it herself.

No one can trace it back, but the result came immediately. She fainted on the spot. Given her condition, there's no way the child wasn't affected." A faint smile touched Isla's lips, measured and controlled. "If she didn't have that kind of sense, I wouldn't have chosen her and sent her to Duskmoor Manor." The woman nodded quickly. "Your Majesty always knows exactly who to trust and how to use them." Isla gave a quiet hum, accepting the compliment without much interest. "This must not reach Maerwyn," she said calmly, though there was a subtle firmness beneath the softness.

"Her thoughts have been unsettled lately, and she's already said I shouldn't make things difficult for Elowen. If she finds out, she'll only create trouble." Her gaze sharpened just slightly. "Keep it from her. I don't want anything unnecessary complicating this." "Yes, Your Majesty." At the same time, inside the royal study. A chessboard sat between two men, black and white pieces

locked in a tense exchange that had yet to reach its conclusion. Theodric held the white pieces. Cassian played black.

The first match had ended with Theodric narrowly winning, which had put him in a good mood, and now, early into the second round, his movements were unhurried and confident. Quin stepped in quietly and stopped beside the desk, his posture respectful, though something in his expression suggested hesitation. Theodric had just picked up a white piece, considering his next move. Without looking up, he asked, "What is it?" Quin glanced toward Cassian, who was still studying the board, then lowered his voice. "Your Majesty, Your Grace, someone has come from Duskmoor Manor.

They say it's urgent and are asking to see His Grace." Theodric let out a light chuckle as he set his piece down. "Seems like your wife is already worrying about you and sent someone to check on you, probably to drag you back." Cassian's lips curved faintly. "She does tend to keep me on her mind. She can't help it." He didn't notice the tension in Quin's expression. 2/3 2:41 pm p p pp Chapter 441 When the Floor Gives Way Finished Theodric gestured casually. "Let them in." "Yes, Your Majesty." Anson hurried in, stopping short as he bowed deeply. "Your Majesty.

Your Grace." Cassian was just about to speak, ready to make a light remark about Elowen being impatient. Anson spoke first, his words coming fast. "Your Grace, Her Grace suddenly collapsed and lost consciousness. Doctor Dray says she was badly frightened, which disturbed her condition, and it has affected the pregnancy. It's serious. Please return immediately." Cassian went still. The black stone slipped from his fingers and struck the board with a sharp sound. He pushed himself up abruptly. The wheelchair behind him jolted backward from the force, scraping harshly across the floor.

Anson quickly added, "Before I left, Her Grace woke for a moment. She insisted I tell you gently and not alarm you. She said your leg hasn't fully recovered and that you mustn't rush because of her." Cassian's gaze paused for a fraction of a second. The cold sharpness in his eyes slowly faded. He lowered himself back into the chair. Theodric was already unsettled. "Go back and see her, now." Cassian lifted his eyes and looked at him instead. "Didn't Your Majesty say earlier that I was to stay, finish the game, and have a meal before leaving?" Theodric stared at him, momentarily speechless.

"I did say that, but that was before. This is different. She's unconscious, and the child is at risk. This isn't something trivial." Cassian lowered his gaze, his voice calm. "Doctor Dray is there. Your Majesty knows his skill. With him present, Elowen should be safe." 2.5K " 3/3 admin

Chapter 442 The One Who Moves First Finished Theodric frowned, irritation breaking through.

"What do you mean should be safe?" Cassian's tone remained even, almost detached. "I changed the rules at Stargazer Pavilion without approval. Even if Your Majesty is willing to overlook it out of regard for me, it's only natural that some displeasure remains." He continued at the same steady pace. "I should stay and give Your Majesty time to let that pass." A brief pause. "As for what happened at Stargazer Pavilion, it is not entirely unrelated to Elowen.

If she has to bear a little discomfort today, that is not unreasonable." Theodric inhaled sharply, something heavy settling in his chest. Then suspicion followed quickly after. "You're not putting on an act to make me feel worse, are you?" Cassian's brow shifted slightly. "...Of course not." He looked up again. "I simply find something strange. Your Majesty decided to keep me here on a whim. No message was sent to the manor, and I didn't send word either." His voice cooled slightly. "So how did Elowen hear about it?" Theodric froze.

The realization hit him a moment later, and it turned his expression cold. Someone had taken that piece of information, twisted it to their advantage, and used it against Elowen right under his nose. His expression darkened. "This isn't the time to dig into that," he said quickly. "No matter how the news reached her or who is behind it, what matters right now is her and the child." His gaze locked onto Cassian. "As for what you said earlier, I understand it. Stargazer Pavilion has already been granted to you and her, and I won't take that back.

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I may be displeased, but I am not so unreasonable that I would take it out on my own family."

His voice hardened. "I would never use her or the child to balance anything. Go. Now." Cassian finally nodded. "Very well." He gestured to Anson. "We're leaving." 1/3 Chapter 442 The One Who Moves First Anson quickly moved behind him and pushed the chair out The room fell quiet again. Only Theodric and Quin remained. The chessboard sat untouched, the game abandoned halfway through. But Theodric's attention was no longer on it. Cassian's words kept repeating in his mind. How did Elowen hear about it?

The more he thought about it, the heavier the guilt became. If he hadn't kept Cassian here, none of this would have happened. If anything happened to her... or the child... He let out a slow breath. Finished "Quin," he said at last, his voice lower now, "who in this palace would have the motive to do something like this; Before Quin could answer, a voice came from outside. "Your Majesty, Her Majesty has arrived." Theodric turned his head. Isla entered with her usual calm composure, a gentle, perfectly measured smile resting on her lips. She offered a formal greeting.

"Your Majesty." Her gaze swept lightly across the room before returning, a hint of polite surprise in her expression. "I thought Cassian was here. Has he already left?" "He returned to the manor. There was something urgent," Theodric replied. "What could be so urgent?" Isla asked casually.

Theodric did not answer directly. Instead, he shifted the subject. "What brings you here at this hour?" Isla smiled softly and gestured behind her. A servant stepped forward carrying a covered tray. "I had some fresh honey delivered to the kitchens and tried a few new pastries.

I thought Your Majesty has been overworking, and since Cassian was here today, I prepared extra and brought them for you both." Theodric's tone cased slightly. "You're thoughtful." He paused, then added with a trace of regret, "I shouldn't have kept him here so long." Isla's expression remained unchanged, her voice gentle and reassuring. "Your Majesty is too hard on 2/3 2:41 pm P P P Chapter 442 The One Who Moves First yourself. Wanting to spend time with your brother is only natural." Finished Theodric shook his head, still troubled. "Even so, Elowen is in a delicate condition.

She shouldn't have been frightened like this." Isla's gaze flickered briefly. So it's true. The child was affected. Even Theodric is this shaken... she really is fortunate. Theodric exhaled. "If anything happens to her, I won't be able to forgive myself." Isla spoke softly, her tone soothing but deliberate. "Your Majesty, if they act without restraint and provoke your anger, that is hardly your fault. If she was so easily frightened into this state, it only shows her condition was unstable to begin with." She paused, then gently redirected the conversation. "Of course she matters.

But Your Majesty shouldn't overlook our own children either." Theodric's attention shifted slightly. "What is it? You're not here to speak on Alaric's behalf, are you?" Isla shook her head at once. "No. I came to speak for Maerwyn." Theodric raised a brow. "Don't tell me she's causing trouble again over that marriage." 2.5K ◦ 1 3/8 admin

Chapter 443 A Gift That Cuts Deep Finished Isla smiled, completely at ease. "Not at all, Your Majesty. Maerwyn came to see me early this morning and told me herself she's changed her

mind. She no longer wishes to marry Rowan." Theodric looked up, a hint of surprise crossing his face. "Is that so?" "Absolutely." Her tone remained steady, then softened into something more thoughtful. "I've been thinking about it since. Maerwyn isn't a child anymore. It's time we find her a proper match.

But I've spent so long within the palace walls, I'm not as familiar with the young nobles outside or the standing of their families. This concerns her entire future, and the dignity of the royal house. I would feel far more assured if Your Majesty personally took a hand in choosing."

Theodric's expression eased as he nodded. "You're right. I'll give it proper attention." Isla lowered her gaze with a gentle smile. "Thank you, Your Majesty." Once his attention shifts to arranging Maerwyn's marriage, even if something happens to Elowen, he won't have the time or inclination to dig into it.

The small plates of pastries Isla had brought were arranged neatly across the table, each one crafted with care, topped with fruit and delicate sheets of edible gold. "Would Your Majesty care for one?" Theodric picked one up and took a bite. The texture was soft, the sweetness balanced, the flavor refined. Under normal circumstances, he would have appreciated it. Now, it barely registered. He frowned, swallowed with effort, then set the rest down. "No... I can't shake this feeling. The more I think about it, the worse it sits with me." He looked toward Quin. "Go to the treasury.

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Have the ivory statue of the Lady of Blessings carefully prepared and sent to Duskmoor Manor. It's to be given to Elowen, to ease her condition and watch over the child." The moment he said it, Isla's expression stiffened. For a split second, the composure slipped. That statue... she knew exactly what it was. Carved from a single block of the finest white jade during the late emperor's

reign, flawless and luminous. shaped by a master whose work had never been equaled. The figure itself carried a quiet dignity, robes. flowing as if caught mid-motion, the child in her arms full of life.

1/3 Chapter 443 A Gift That Cuts Deep It was beyond value. More than that, it carried a reputation people didn't dare dismiss. 9:30 Finished When Selene had been pregnant years ago, her condition had been unstable to the point where even the court physicians had given up hope. It was the Ashcroft family who had gone to great lengths to bring this statue into the palace. From the moment it was placed in her chambers, her condition had steadily improved, and she later gave birth safely to Cassian.

Later, when Elira faced a similar crisis while carrying Caclan, Theodric had the statue brought out again. By morning, everything had stabilized. Since then, people spoke of it in hushed tones. Isla had planned for years to give it to Maerwyn as part of her marriage dowry. It would show favor, display the strength of her family, and serve as a blessing for her daughter's future. And now, just like that, Theodric was handing it to Elowen. A sharp wave of resentment surged through her. She forced her expression back into something composed. "Your Majesty's care for Elowen is truly thoughtful.

I understand your intention. However... with everything that's happened recently at Stargazer Pavilion, there is already quite a bit of attention on the Duke of Duskmoor and Elowen. If such a significant gift is delivered openly, it may invite further scrutiny. People might say Your Majesty is showing too much favor, or that Elowen is becoming... indulged. That wouldn't do her any favors, nor would it help the stability of the court." Theodric fell quiet, his fingers tapping lightly

against the table as he considered it. Isla felt a flicker of relief. That should be enough to stop him.

He nodded slowly. "You've thought this through well. That's fair.". Her shoulders almost relaxed. Then he added, "In that case, send it discreetly. No announcement. No need for anyone else to know." Isla froze. For a brief moment, she felt like she couldn't breathe. Quin had already bowed and left to carry out the order. Isla watched him disappear, the ache in her chest sharp enough to feel physical. Theodric reached for her hand, noticing how cold it had become, and gave it a light squeeze. "Isla, you need to understand. I can't settle my conscience.

If I hadn't kept Cassian here today, talking over a game and keeping him for dinner, Elowen would have been resting quietly at home. She wouldn't have heard 713 2:41 pm P P pp. Chapter 443 A Gift That Cuts Deep 0441 Finished those rumors or been frightened like that. This isn't just a gift. It's... something to make it right. Maybe then I'll feel a little less burdened." 2.5K (i admin

Chapter 444 What It's Worth His words sounded sincere, measured, even gentle. To Isla, they landed one after another, each one cutting deeper than the last. Make it right. For her. For Elowen, he was willing to part with something like that without hesitation. Then what about Macrwyn? What about her? Where did they stand in his heart? Finished The questions rose fast and sharp, but she forced them down just as quickly, pressing every trace of it beneath a composed, agreeable expression. When she spoke again, her voice was soft and steady, as though none of it had touched her.

J "Your Majesty's concern for family and future heirs is something I understand. Since you've already decided, I will of course support it." Theodric seemed relieved, even faintly moved.

"You've always been thoughtful." Thoughtful. That's what you call it. Isla lowered her gaze, hiding the flicker in her eyes. "It is only right that I share Your Majesty's burdens." By the time Cassian reached Duskmoor Manor, he hadn't slowed once. The moment he stepped inside, something felt wrong. The air itself seemed tighter, as if the entire estate were holding its breath.

Servants moved carefully, voices lowered, and even the usual rhythm of the household felt disrupted in a way that made the unease impossible to ignore.. This isn't nothing. Something really did happen. In the courtyard, several servants had been lined up and made to stand under watch. Their faces were drained of color, shoulders tense, some trembling badly enough that it was obvious they were struggling to hold themselves together. Rowena and Sylvia remained nearby beneath the covered walkway, neither of them looking at ease.

Rowena noticed him first and stepped forward, offering a respectful greeting. "Your Grace, you're back." Sylvia followed, her tone sharper, more controlled but edged with anger. She gestured toward the group without hesitation. "Cassian, it was them. They were outside the Great Hall spreading word that you'd been held back at the palace and might face punishment. They spoke as if it were certain. People started talking, and it carried inside. Elowen heard it clearly. That's what frightened her into collapsing.

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How do you want !:41 pm Chapter 444 What It's Worth to handle this?" Finished Among those standing there, Seren looked like she might collapse at any moment, her head lowered, her entire body shaking. Beatrice, older and more composed, was still crying, but she managed to force words. out through it. "Your Grace, please, I swear I meant no harm. I only overheard something and asked about it out of concern. I never meant to spread anything. Elowen's condition...

it can't be blamed on me..." "Enough." Cassian didn't raise his voice, but the cold finality in it cut through everything else in the courtyard. "Another word out of you, and you won't like how that ends." The effect was immediate. Beatrice went silent, and no one else dared to move or speak. The space fell into a heavy stillness, broken only by the faint sound of wind brushing against the stone. Cassian didn't look at them again. "I'm going to see her." The tightness in his voice was unmistakable now, and neither Rowena nor Sylvia tried to stop him.

At the entrance to the main chamber, Cora and Mira were waiting. Cora held herself together, though her face had gone pale and her hands were clenched tightly around a handkerchief. Mira, on the other hand, had clearly been crying for some time, her eyes swollen and red. The moment she saw him, her composure broke. 'Your Grace... you're finally back. Please, go see her.' Cassian gave a brief nod and stepped inside, leaving Anson at the door. The warmth hit him first.

The fire had been kept high, filling the room with a steady heat that should have been comforting, but instead only made the silence more noticeable. It was too still, too quiet, as though even the air had settled. He pushed himself up and walked further in, each step measured but quicker than he intended. Thoughts began to surface, uninvited and impossible to ignore. If the baby is gone... The idea came, but it didn't land the way he expected. The child was still something distant, not yet real in his mind.

If she was hurt, if she was shaken, then he would stay with her, make sure she recovered, give her whatever she needed without question. But if she- The thought stopped there. 2:41 pm P
PPP. Chapter 444 What It's Worth Finished Something darker rose in its place, fast and absolute. If anything happens to her.... None of this would matter. Not this manor, not his position, not

anything he had built. Anyone involved, anyone who had even brushed against this, anyone who thought they could get away with it. They would answer for it. Every single one.

By the time he reached the bed, his expression had gone completely still, the kind of stillness that carried something dangerous underneath it. And yet when he reached out to draw back the curtain, the movement itself was careful, almost instinctive, as though he were afraid even the smallest disturbance might matter. Then he saw her. Elowen was asleep. Not restless, not pale, not in distress. Just asleep. She lay on her side, her breathing slow and even, her hair spread loosely across the pillow, softening the line of her face.

The warmth in the room had made her shift in her sleep, the covers slipping just enough to reveal one leg, part of her shoulder, and the faint curve of her stomach beneath the fabric. The change there was subtle. Easy to miss. But he didn't linger on it. His gaze stayed on her face. There was color in her cheeks, a quiet warmth in her skin, the kind that only showed when someone was completely at ease.

Her expression shifted slightly in her sleep, the corner of her lips lifting just a little before her brows drew together again, and she made a small, soft sound, somewhere between a sigh and a murmur. Cassian didn't move. He just stood there, watching her, letting the sight of her settle something in him that had been coiled too tightly since the moment he stepped into the manor.

Slowly, the tension left his shoulders. The sharp edge that had followed him in dissolved without a trace, replaced by something quieter, steadier, and far more dangerous in its own way. 2:41 pm

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Chapter 445 When He Came Back Finished Cassian cased himself down at the edge of the bed, careful not to disturb her, and rested his hand gently against Elowen's cheek. Her skin was warm

beneath his hand, steady with life, unmistakably real. He had already suspected the truth on his way back. The whole episode with her collapse had likely been a calculated move on her part. But knowing something and feeling it were two entirely different things. The fear had been immediate and visceral. The kind that tightened around his chest and refused to let go.

The kind that turned every passing thought darker than the last. And when his mind brushed against the possibility of losing her, something far more dangerous had risen up underneath it. Something sharp and merciless that didn't care what it destroyed as long as it made the feeling stop. Only now, seeing her here, safe and breathing, did that storm finally settle. Elowen shifted in her sleep. She turned her face slightly and leaned into his hand, pressing closer like she recognized him even without waking. Her cheek brushed against his palm, soft and trusting.

Her lips moved faintly, the sound barely there, blurred by sleep. Cassian leaned closer, lowering his head until he could catch it. "Cassian..." Soft. Unclear. But unmistakably his name.

Something in his chest tightened hard, then spread into something warm and aching. He didn't think. He just moved. His lips brushed lightly against hers. "I'm here," he murmured, voice low and steady. "Ella, I'm right here." Whether she heard him or not, her expression eased. The faint crease between her brows smoothed out, her breathing turning slow and even.

Her hand shifted again, searching without awareness until her fingers found his. She wrapped them around his thumb, holding on. Only then did she settle fully, drifting deeper into sleep.

Cassian stayed where he was. 2:41 pm P PPP. Chapter 445 When He Came Back The position wasn't comfortable, but he didn't move. Not even a little. Time passed quietly. Eventually, Elowen stirred and opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was him. It took a second for her to

register it. Then her whole face lit up. "Cassian!" She pushed herself upright and threw herself into his arms.

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"Easy," he said quickly, catching her and holding her steady. "Careful, alright?" Finished Elowen wrapped her arms tightly around his waist and leaned into him, breathing in deeply like she needed proof he was actually there. After a moment, she let out a long breath. "I thought I was dreaming." Cassian's hand moved slowly along her back, grounding her. "You're not. I'm here." She didn't let go. And that was exactly what made his thoughts turn. She leans on me this much... At the same time, Theodric had been uneasy about the situation in the Southwestern Marches.

If things escalated, there was no guarantee Cassian wouldn't be sent out. And if he left Vanelle... What happened to her then? Elowen tilted her head, studying him. "You heard what happened and rushed back, didn't you?" Cassian came back to himself and nodded. "I did. But when Anson made a point of mentioning my leg hadn't healed properly, I figured you had something planned." Elowen broke into a grin. "That's what I call perfect timing." Cassian let out a quiet laugh, then looked her over carefully, his expression turning serious. "You're really alright?

No pain, no discomfort?" Elowen shook her head. "I'm fine. I've been taken care of way too well here. Honestly, I feel stronger than ever." She paused, then added, almost casually, "Even if something had actually happened to you, like if His Majesty had you punished or locked away, I wouldn't just collapse. I'd be figuring out how to get you out." She froze halfway through, then quickly corrected herself, a little flustered. "Okay, no, that's not happening. You're not getting into trouble." 213 2:41 pm PPPP Chapter 445 When He Came Back Finished Cassian looked at her, completely disarmed.

He leaned in and kissed the corner of her lips. Then again, because he clearly wasn't done. His voice dropped slightly. "Did you just wake up from a dream?" That instantly caught her attention. She pulled back, eyes lighting up. "How did you know? It was such a good one." "What was it about?" he asked. Elowen didn't hesitate. "I had a daughter." Cassian paused, his gaze instinctively dropping to her abdomen. Elowen went on, fully immersed. "She had my complexion, but your eyes. And when she smiled, she had these little dimples that made it impossible not to stare." Cassian's lips curved.

"She sounds beautiful." Elowen nodded eagerly. "She really was." "And then?" he asked. Her expression shifted immediately. "Then she got married. Out of nowhere, this boy shows up, and I can't stand him. Not even a little." She looked at him, animated. "So I asked you if we could knock some sense into him. You said that wasn't appropriate. Then I asked what if we did it where no one would find out, and you actually thought about it and said that might be fine." Cassian let out a low laugh. Elowen started laughing too, completely unable to hold it in.

The laughter built until she leaned forward and collapsed right back into him. It took a while before she finally calmed down. Then she looked up at him, suddenly serious again. "Cassian, I'm hungry." Cassian didn't hesitate. "What do you want? I'll make it." 2.5K W 3/3 admin

Chapter 446 A New Move "Meat pies," Elowen said immediately. "Alright." Cassian stood. "Stay here. I'll handle it." Elowen nodded without hesitation. Finished Later that day, a finely carved Ivory Goddess of Blessings was quietly delivered to Duskmoor Manor as part of Theodric's reward. Elowen looked at it for a long moment. Then she smiled faintly. So even this still happens... just differently. Because of her "condition," she remained in bed for two days.

Meanwhile, Beatrice, Seren, and the others who had caused trouble were kept standing out in the courtyard the entire time.

By the third day, word spread that Elowen was well enough to spend time in the study again. The punishment, however, had not been lifted. With Seren gone, there was a gap in the study staff.

Elowen thought for a moment, then said, "I've heard there's a girl named Alyssa, Sharp, capable.

Bring her in. She'll take Seren's place." Cora hesitated, clearly surprised. "Your Grace... Alyssa?"

Elowen nodded. "Yes," Cora looked uneasy. "I'm not sure she's the right choice." Elowen tilted

her head slightly. "Why not?" Mira stepped closer and lowered her voice. "Your Grace, you remember, right?"

She came from Her Majesty's household. She's even related to Beatrice. If we bring her close—"

Elowen smiled, unconcerned. "Then she's probably better trained than most. Bring her in." Cora

and Mira exchanged a glance. Neither of them looked convinced, but neither dared argue further.

"Understood, Your Grace." 1/3 Chapter 446 A New Move A short while later, Alyssa entered.

She wore a neatly arranged teal dress, her hair pinned back cleanly with a simple silver piece.

She stopped at a proper distance and lowered herself into a respectful bow.

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"Alyssa, at Your Grace's service." Finished Elowen looked at her calmly. "There were four of you serving here before. Cora, Mira, Rosaline, and Seren. Seren is no longer suited for this role.

From now on, you'll assist in the study." She paused slightly. "Can you handle that?" It wasn't

really a question someone in her position could refuse. But Elowen asked anyway. Alyssa kept

her head lowered, her voice steady. "Before I left the palace, Her Majesty made it clear. Once I

entered Duskmoor Manor, I no longer belonged to her household. I serve only His Grace and

Your Grace.

Wherever I'm assigned, I will carry out my duties with full loyalty." Everything about it was measured, careful, and clearly thought through. Isla really knows how to pick her people. Elowen smiled faintly. "Good." Later that afternoon, Sylvia and Rowena came by. The three of them sat together, coffee laid out between them as the conversation drifted easily. Sylvia had settled into Falconcrest Manor with a mother-in-law who thrived on social circles and gossip, which meant she always had the latest news. "Have you heard?" Sylvia said, leaning in slightly. "Maerwyn's changed completely.

She's not chasing after Rowan anymore. His Majesty and Her Majesty are thrilled. They're already looking for a match." Rowena sighed. "That's what favor gets you. Most princesses don't get a choice. But for her. His Majesty is letting her decide," Sylvia nodded. "They've already picked a few candidates from the major houses. She'll meet them herself and choose." Then she added, glancing at Elowen, "Although I heard she's not interested. She stays in her rooms all day reading Ode to Springlight." Elowen smiled slightly. "When is she meeting them?" "End of the month," Sylvia said.

"There's going to be a garden gathering at the palace. All the candidates will be there. Her Majesty and Elira will attend as well. She'll choose in person." 2/3 2:42 pm P p pp Chapter 446
A New Move Elowen nodded and took a slow sip of her coffee. Finished At the palace, Maerwyn finished the last page of Ode to Springlight. Her vision blurred, tears welling despite herself. It really is her. It's Elowen. She closed the book and held it lightly against her chest. After a long moment, she stood. "Someone come with me.

I'm going to see Her Majesty." When she arrived, Isla was just about to begin dinner. "You came at the right time," Isla said with a smile. "Dinner's ready. I was just about to send for you."

Maerwyn stepped forward, composed and gentle. "Mother, let me take care of you tonight." Isla paused, clearly surprised. Maerwyn sat down, picked up her utensils, and carefully prepared a portion of fish, making sure it was clean before placing it onto Isla's plate. Isla looked at her, momentarily speechless. 2.5K 3/3 2:42 pm p p pp. admin

Chapter 447 A Shift in Heart For as long as Isla could remember, Maerwyn had never behaved like this. Finished There had always been tension between them, something unspoken but constant. Maerwyn complained when Isla interfered too much, and complained even more when she didn't. No matter what Isla did, it never seemed right. And yet tonight, everything felt... different. Throughout the meal, Maerwyn stayed by her side, attentive in a way that felt almost unreal.

She made sure Isla's plate was always arranged properly, gently recommending dishes, refilling her cup before it was empty, even tasting the broth first before serving it. Afterward, she personally brought over a basin of warm water. "Here, Mother. Let me take care of that." Isla finally gave her a long look. "What are you after this time?" That was how it had always worked. This kind of effort never came without a reason. Maerwyn frowned, a little offended. "Why does there have to be a reason? Can't I just do something nice for you?" Isla did not look convinced.

"That's not how you've ever been." Maerwyn hesitated, then answered honestly. "I just finished Ode to Springlight. There's a part in it about what children owe their parents, not out of obligation, but because it's simply the right thing to do. It made me think about a lot of things." She lowered her voice slightly. "I used to think you were wasting your time, always focused on Father and the rest of the court instead of me. I even resented you for it." She let out a quiet breath. "But I get it now. You didn't have a choice."

If you hadn't held your ground, if you hadn't kept your place, I wouldn't have grown up the way I did. And Alaric wouldn't be where he is either." Isla's expression shifted. "Mother," Maerwyn said more softly, "you've always done everything for us." That was what finally broke through. Isla's eyes grew moist, the emotion catching her off guard. Maerwyn reached up and gently wiped the corner of her eye. "I mean it. I'll do better.

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I won't make things harder for you anymore." She paused, then added, half teasing but sincere underneath, "At the garden gathering, whoever you think is right for me, I'll give them a fair chance." 1/3 2:42 pm P p pp. Chapter 447 A Shift in Heart That was enough. The last bit of resistance in Isla's heart gave way completely. Finished This was the daughter she had always imagined. Thoughtful. Understanding. Willing to meet her halfway. Maybe Elowen's influence had done something after all. Maerwyn hesitated again before speaking. "There is one thing I'd like, though. For the gathering...

I want to invite my aunt. I owe her more than just thanks. I want to apologize properly, face to face." Isla almost refused on instinct. But Maerwyn looked at her, hopeful, open, nothing guarded about it. "Please, Mother?" Isla reconsidered. What had been done earlier had been handled cleanly. Even if Elowen suspected anything, there was nothing she could prove. There would be no real trouble. "...Alright," Isla said at last, her tone softening. "If that's what you want." Maerwyn's face lit up instantly as she threw her arms around her. "Mother, you're the best.

I love you." The next morning, shortly after breakfast, a letter arrived from the palace. It was unusually substantial, the parchment thick and finely pressed, sealed with Maerwyn's crest in gold wax. The envelope itself was deep violet, edged in silver detailing that caught the light.

When Elowen opened it, she found several pages inside. The first was formal, inviting her to attend the garden gathering at the end of the month, the wording careful and respectful. Then the tone changed.

Maerwyn wrote at length about how much Azure's work had meant to her over the years, how it had shaped her thoughts in ways she hadn't fully understood until now. And then came the apology. She admitted to the things she had said, the way she had treated Elowen, and asked for the chance to make amends in person. Elowen finished reading and sat there quietly for a while. Later, she handed the letter to Cassian. He read through it, then looked up at her. "Does it change anything for you?" Elowen shook her head.

"No." 2:42 pm P P P P Chapter 447 A Shift in Heart Finished Her voice was calm, steady. Everything in that letter was real. The admiration, the regret, even the sincerity. But so was everything that had come before it. "If I let that be enough," she said quietly, "then everything I went through before loses its weight." Forgiveness, given too easily, would mean turning her back on herself. After a moment, she added, more thoughtfully, "What it does remind me of is something else. You can't be too quick to judge people.

You never really know what stands behind them, or how much you might regret it later." Cassian let out a low chuckle. "That's usually how it goes." He tapped the letter lightly. "Did you answer her?" "I did." There was a hint of mischief in Elowen's eyes now. "I asked to bring Sylvia and Rowena with me." Cassian raised a brow. Elowen smiled. "She agreed." The end of the month arrived sooner than expected. By Elowen's rules, the last day of each month was reserved for closing the household accounts. Payments, penalties, adjustments. Nothing was postponed. 2.5K
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Chapter 448 The Gathering Unravels Finished Elowen had been up earlier than usual that morning, seated at her desk with the household ledgers spread neatly before her, going through each entry with careful attention. "Mira, I'd like some water," she said without looking up, her pen still moving across the page. Across the room, Alyssa glanced around instinctively. No one else was there. She pressed her lips together, then stepped forward. "Your Grace, Mira stepped out to check that the carriage is properly prepared." Elowen flipped to the next page.

"Cora?" "She's gone to Falconcrest Manor to confirm their side of the arrangements." "And Rosaline?" You asked her to fetch a new pen from storage, Your Grace." Only then did Elowen pause, lifting her head slightly with a faint sigh. "I've completely lost track of things oday. That's not like me." She gestured lightly toward the door. "Alright, then you go. Something warm, not too strong." Alyssa hesitated for the briefest moment before lowering her head. "Yes, Your Grace." She left quickly. Not long after, she returned carrying a tray.

A cup rested at the center, steam rising in thin, steady curls. Elowen set her pen aside, took the cup, and drank without thinking much of it. Then she returned to her work, finishing another section of the ledger with steady focus. A short while later, Mira came back in. Your Grace, everything is ready. The carriage has been fully prepared, and the interior has been warmed. We can leave whenever you wish." "Good." Elowen closed the ledger and pushed her chair back, preparing to stand. The moment she rose, her balance shifted. "Mira..." Her voice faltered, quieter than before.

"Something's not right..." "My stomach..." Her hand instinctively pressed against her abdomen. 1/4 2:42 pm P Chapter 448 The Gathering Unravels Then her strength gave out. Finished The cup slipped from her fingers, striking the stone floor and shattering, the liquid spreading quickly

across the ground. "Your Grace!" Mira rushed forward, catching her just in time, but Elowen's body had already gone slack, her eyes closed, completely unresponsive. Panic broke instantly. "Someone get help, now!" Mira's voice rang out, sharp with urgency.

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"Send for Doctor Dray immediately!" Footsteps thundered through the corridor as servants rushed to respond. "What happened? She was fine just a moment ago!" "How could she collapse like that?" The study dissolved into chaos. Amid it all, Alyssa stood frozen where she was. Her face had gone pale. Her eyes shifted slowly from Elowen to the shattered cup on the floor, the spilled water still spreading between the broken pieces. A heavy, sinking dread settled deep in her chest. This isn't right... something is very wrong...

At the palace gardens, the gathering was set within a lakeside pavilion built of pale stone and tall glass panels, designed to keep out the lingering cold while still allowing light to pour in. Inside, several polished braziers burned steadily, giving off a clean, even warmth. Theodric's chosen candidates had already arrived. Five young nobles, each dressed with care, carried themselves with practiced ease, though their attention drifted more often than not toward one person. Macrwyn. She wore a soft golden gown layered beneath a pale fur-lined cloak, her hair adorned with delicate pieces.

that shimmered faintly as she moved. But she paid them little attention. Her gaze kept returning toward the entrance, a trace of tension in her expression that she could not quite hide. "Waiting for someone?" Elira asked with a faint, knowing smile. "Everyone selected for you is already here. There won't be any last-minute surprises." 2/4 2:42 pm PP pp. Chapter 448 The Gathering Unravels Finished Maerwyn drew her gaze back and answered earnestly, "I'm waiting for my

aunt. She promised she would come today." Nearby, another consort held a warming cup between her hands and laughed softly.

"You may not know, but ever since she learned who your aunt really is, she hasn't stopped talking about her." Maerwyn smiled, bright and open. "Of course. Do you know how rare that is? The person whose writing I admire most turns out to be family." She turned to Isla. "Mother, may I wait until she arrives before speaking with them properly?" Maerwyn had been especially attentive and agreeable these past days. Isla was in high spirits and saw no reason to refuse. "Very well We can wait a little longer." Maerwyn's face lit up. "Thank you, Mother." But time passed.

The appointed hour came and went. Still, Elowen did not appear. The light shifted as the morning wore on, and the young nobles began to grow restless, exchanging quiet remarks among themselves. Maerwyn's composure began to slip. Her fingers tightened unconsciously in the fabric of her skirt. Why isn't she here yet... A thought surfaced, unwelcome and sharp. Did she choose not to come... because of what I did before? Her throat tightened, her eyes beginning to sting. She had meant every word of that apology. "Send someone to check," Isla said, noticing the change in her expression.

Maerwyn nodded quickly, trying to steady herself. An attendant stepped forward, ready to leave. Just then, a set of hurried footsteps approached from outside, the sound sharp against the frozen ground. Maerwyn's face brightened instantly. "That must be her. I'll go meet her." She moved quickly toward the entrance, not even pausing to gather her cloak. But the moment she saw who it was, she stopped short. Sylvia and Rowena were already approaching, their pace hurried, their expressions tense. Maerwyn's gaze moved past them, searching instinctively.

3/4 2:42 pm P p Chapter 448 The Gathering Unravels There was no sign of Elowen. Uncase tightened in her chest. * Finished She stepped forward, unable to keep the urgency from her voice. "Where is she? Why isn't she here? Did she decide not to come?" Sylvia approached, first offering a proper greeting to Isla and Elira before turning back to Maerwyn. Her expression was strained, worry evident. "Your Highness," she said carefully, "it isn't that she refused. She simply cannot come today." 2.5K (4/4 admin

Chapter 449 Where Trust Breaks Finished Maerwyn blinked, caught off guard. "She can't make it? What do you mean she can't make it?" Rowena let out a quiet, weary breath, her voice carrying a note of real concern. "Something happened to Elowen." Maerwyn's voice jumped, sharp with panic. "What are you talking about?!" She reached out and grabbed Rowena's wrist, urgency taking over. "She was fine. How does something like that just happen? What went wrong?" Rowena steadied her with a gentle pat. "We rushed over to Duskmoor Manor as soon as we heard.

Doctor Dray said she took something she never should have. Luckily they caught it in time. If they hadn't..." She paused, lowering her voice. "The baby might not have survived." Maerwyn's expression darkened instantly. "Something she shouldn't have taken? Then what exactly are the people at Duskmoor Manor doing? Standing around looking pretty? If anything happens to her, I swear none of them are walking away from it." Sylvia spoke up softly, her tone calm but deliberate. "Your Highness, please don't jump to conclusions. It was likely a lapse in judgment.

The girl who served her water is named Alyssa. She was handpicked from the palace and sent there specifically to attend Elowen. It was a simple task, nothing complicated. No one expected something like this." Alyssa. The name landed hard. Maerwyn went still, her thoughts snapping

into place. She knew exactly who that was. That girl used to serve in Isla's chambers. Her head turned slowly, eyes locking onto Isla. Isla had heard every word. Her expression remained composed, but her gaze had gone cold, her brow slightly drawn. Rowena sighed again, her voice softer now, almost reflective.

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"And before this, when His Grace was suddenly called into the palace, rumors started spreading in the manor that he'd been held there. Elowen heard it and fainted from the shock. They had only just stabilized her condition. And now this happens..." She let the words hang, then added quietly, "It really makes you wonder who she crossed to end up in a situation like this." Isla's fingers tightened slightly. The earlier rumor had indeed been her doing. But today? 1/3 2:42 pm Chapter 449 Where Trust Breaks No. That wasn't her move. Finished She had spent years navigating the court.

Nothing about this felt clean. The more she thought about it, the more it felt staged. And then it clicked. Elowen flipped it. This is her setting the board. Isla was about to respond when she caught the look in Maerwyn's eyes. Suspicion. It hit harder than any accusation. There's no confirmed conclusion yet, Isla said, keeping her voice measured. "Elowen being harmed is not something I would ever wish for. I will send people to check on her personally. Maerwyn, today was arranged for you. Focus on what matters right now." Maerwyn's eyes reddened. She stared straight at her, voice tight.

"She might not even be out of danger. and you want me to stand here picking a husband?" Her jaw clenched. "Mother, I'm honestly disappointed in you." A flicker of anger broke through Isla's composure. "I had nothing to do with this!" At that moment. an attendant's voice came from outside. "Your Majesty, Lord Jett has arrived." Isla turned. Quin entered quickly, his expression

serious in a way that immediately shifted the mood. After greeting everyone, he spoke clearly. "Your Majesty, His Majesty asks that you come to the study at once." So Theodric had heard.

And suspicion had already reached her. Isla drew in a breath, steadying herself before rising. Maerwyn stepped forward without hesitation. "I'm coming too. I want to see Father." For a brief second, Isla felt something soften. Even now, her daughter chose to stand beside her. But the moment they entered the study and finished their formalities, that illusion shattered. Maerwyn looked straight at Theodric. "Father, I want to leave the palace and go to Duskmoor Manor to see Aunt Elowen. Please allow it." Isla stood there, completely still. So that's why she came. Not for me. Never for me.

Theodric regarded Maerwyn evenly. "You understand she may not want to see you." 2/3 2:42 pm P Chapter 449 Where Trust Breaks Finished Tears gathered in Maerwyn's eyes. "I know I haven't acted well before. I know she doesn't like me. But I won't bother her. I'll stay out of the way. I just need to see that she's okay, and I'll come straight back." The sincerity in her voice softened his expression slightly. "...If you insist, then go." His gaze shifted to Isla, turning colder. "You will go with her." Isla's chest tightened.

"Your Majesty, I truly had no part in this-" Theodric let out a quiet, humorless laugh. "Maybe not today. What about before?" Isla fell silent, her face losing color. 2.5K admin

Chapter 450 Walking Into the Snare Finished Theodric's tone hardened, leaving no space for refusal. "That's enough. You're coming with her. Whether you had any involvement or not, Elowen fell ill under troubling circumstances. As the queen, you should be there in person. That is the proper thing to do." Isla closed her eyes for a brief moment. I let Maerwyn get in my

head... that was sloppy. When she spoke again, her voice had returned to its usual calm, touched with just the right amount of concern. "Your Majesty is right. I'm worried about Elowen as well.

I'll leave at once." The carriage ride to Duskmoor Manor was quiet, the steady rhythm of wheels against stone the only sound filling the space. Maerwyn sat rigidly to one side, her back straight, her hands clenched tightly in her lap. She kept her eyes fixed on the passing streets outside, her expression cold and distant, offering Isla nothing but silence. Isla watched her for a moment before speaking carefully. "I had nothing to do with this today." Maerwyn didn't react. Not a glance, not a word, as if she hadn't heard a thing. Isla felt something in her chest sink.

This is going worse than I thought. At Stillwater Court, the atmosphere was thick with tension. Servants moved quickly through the courtyard, their expressions tight, voices lowered, the kind of controlled urgency that only made the unease more obvious. As Maerwyn stepped inside, she felt it immediately, the weight of it pressing in from all sides, tightening something in her chest with every step she took deeper into the residence. Isla, on the other hand, let her gaze move quietly across the scene, searching. Beatrice was nowhere to be seen. Neither was Alyssa.

Every person she had sent here had vanished from sight. So there's no one I can question. No way to get ahead of this. Before they could go further, Gerda stepped forward, blocking their path with a respectful bow. "Your Majesty. Your Highness." Maerwyn didn't wait. "I'm here to see Aunt Elowen. How is she? Is she alright?" Gerda answered plainly. "She hasn't regained full strength yet. Doctor Dray is still attending to her." 1/3 2:42 pm Chapter 450 Walking Into the Snare At that moment, a stir broke out inside the room, voices rising just enough to carry.

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Someone called out, unable to hide the relief. "She's awake!" Maerwyn's eyes lit up, and she moved immediately, not bothering to slow down. Gerda stepped in quickly. "Your Highness, please-" "I'm going in," Maerwyn said, already moving. "His Majesty sent me." That was enough. Gerda hesitated, then stepped aside. Maerwyn didn't stop, pushing straight inside. Isla followed, her expression composed, though her steps were just a fraction quicker than before. The moment they entered, the scent of medicine filled the air, thick and unmistakable. Several attendants stood inside, but no one spoke.

Heads were lowered, the room held in a tense, unnatural quiet. Maerwyn's heartbeat picked up as she moved past the partition. Then she heard it. Elowen's voice, faint but clear, carrying from the bed. Finished "Cassian... please don't be upset. Her Majesty wouldn't have done this on purpose. If anything, it must be something I did wrong, something that displeased her. That's why things turned out like this." The words were soft, almost fragile, but each one landed cleanly. Maerwyn stopped cold. Her eyes widened as she turned sharply to look at Isla, disbelief written all over her face.

Isla had been a step behind. She only caught the latter part, "...that's why things turned out like this," and a flicker of unease rose instantly in her chest. Then Cassian's voice followed, low and cutting. "Hugh checked everything. You lost consciousness because of saffron in your system. Today, aside from breakfast, the only thing you had was the water Alyssa brought you. I prepared your breakfast myself. I would never harm my own child. That leaves the water. That leaves Alyssa. And Alyssa answers to Isla.

Without her approval, she wouldn't dare." Elowen's voice came again, softer, almost pleading. "Her Majesty has been looking out for me. Knowing I'm newly pregnant and short on staff, she

suggested sending people to help and specifically chose Beatrice and Alyssa. You and His Majesty are brothers. By all rights, she and I are family. If this child is born safely, it will call her aunt. Why would she do something like that? You're overthinking this." Chapter 450 Walking Into the Snare Cassian didn't hesitate. "Why wouldn't she?" His voice turned colder.

Finished "Ella, you always see the best in people. But have you forgotten? She lost control over the court because of you. And the ivory statue Theodric sent over a few days ago, you wouldn't know this, but she had always planned to give that to her daughter as part of her marriage. Now it's here, with you. You think she doesn't resent that?" Elowen seemed to search for a response, but nothing came. In the end, it dissolved into a quiet, helpless sigh. Behind the screen, Maerwyn felt like the ground had shifted beneath her. Slowly, she turned her head.

Not far away, resting on a carved table, stood the ivory statue. Soft white, flawless, catching the light in a way that made it almost glow. Her breath caught. "Maerwyn, listen to me-" Isla reacted quickly, reaching for her wrist. Maerwyn flinched as if burned and wrenched herself free with all her strength. The force of it caught Isla completely off guard. She stumbled sideways, reaching out instinctively for balance, her hand catching the edge of a tall decorative screen. It didn't hold. The entire thing tipped with a heavy crash, dragging Isla down with it.

The noise shattered the silence of the room. Everyone turned. From behind the curtain, Elowen's voice came again, soft and confused. "What was that? Did something happen?" Mira reacted immediately, hurrying to the partition to look outside before turning back. "Your Grace," she said, "Her Majesty and Princess Macrwyn have arrived. Her Majesty... seems to have taken a fall." 2.5K 3/31 admin