

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 451 Shattered Loyalties. Finished Elowen's brows lifted slightly, genuine surprise flickering across her face. "Is something wrong? Please, bring them in." Outside, attendants hurried in disarray, carefully supporting Isla as they guided her forward. Maerwyn remained where she stood, her breath uneven, her chest rising sharply, yet she made no move to approach. After a brief hesitation, she set her jaw and turned, heading straight into the inner chamber instead.

On the bed, Elowen had just been helped upright, Cassian seated beside her with a steady arm around her shoulders, keeping her from slumping back. Her complexion was so pale it almost seemed to fade into the linens beneath her, while the last trace of color had drained from her lips. Damp strands of hair clung to her temples and the curve of her cheek, making her look as though even sitting upright took more strength than she had to spare. Maerwyn slowed, then stopped entirely, still several steps away, as if something unseen held her in place.

Elowen looked up at her and offered a faint, gentle smile, her voice soft but warm. "Maerwyn, you made it." A-Aunt..." Maerwyn's voice came out thin, unsteady, almost unfamiliar to her own ears. She had come with so much to say, yet now every word seemed to slip out of reach. "I'm all right," Elowen said before she could struggle further. "I just didn't get much rest last night. I shouldn't have caused such a fuss and pulled you away from your day." Maerwyn's fingers curled tightly at her sides as her brows drew together. She forced herself to speak. "I...

I heard what was said outside." Elowen paused, as though the words had caught her off guard, then let out a quiet breath. "Alyssa hasn't admitted anything, which tells me there's more going

on here than meets the eye. Your mother is Her Majesty, and she knows you better than anyone. You know her just as well. She wouldn't do something like his." Maerwyn said nothing. That was exactly why she couldn't just brush it aside. She knew all too well what her mother was capable of when it came to guarding her position, and there was no denying it. This was well within her reach.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Elowen watched her for a moment before continuing gently, "You came all this way to see me, and I truly appreciate that. But today matters to you, doesn't it? You shouldn't let something like this interfere. You should head back to the palace." Maerwyn didn't move. Elowen seemed to remember something, her expression softening further. "I read everything you sent me, I know you were younger before, and you didn't really understand me, so you made a few mistakes. That's all right. I never held it against you." 1/3 2:42 pm pppp.

Chapter 451 Shattered Loyalties Finished She met Maerwyn's gaze, her smile warm and unguarded. "And I'm glad you like my stories. That means more to me than you think." Maerwyn's vision blurred almost instantly, her eyes burning as tears welled up. Behind her, Isla had finally been steadied. She endured the pain in her ankle, lifting a hand to adjust the intricate gold hairpiece that had shifted out of place, though the rest of her carefully arranged hair remained slightly disordered. Cassian's gaze passed over her, cool and unreadable.

When he spoke, his tone carried the detached clarity of someone handling a formal matter. "I assume Your Majesty sent you and the princess to visit. Please inform His Majesty that, thanks to Doctor Dray, Ella is no longer in danger. With a few days of rest, she'll recover fully." He did not wait for a response, simply motioning to the attendants. "Escort Her Majesty and the princess

out." Maerwyn gave Elowen one last look, then glanced at Isla, whose expression had tightened into something rigid and controlled.

Her thoughts in complete disarray, she turned abruptly and walked out, her pace quick and unhesitating. "Maerwyn!" Isla called after her and moved to follow. Maerwyn didn't slow down. If anything, she walked faster. By the time she crossed out of Stillwater Court, Isla's composure had begun to crack. Her voice rose, sharp with authority. "Maerwyn, stop." Maerwyn halted at last. Isla stepped closer, lowering her voice, though urgency edged every word. "You're letting yourself be misled. Can't you see what this is? This was planned.

The Duchess did this deliberately..." "Planned?" Maerwyn cut in, turning back, disbelief and bitterness plain across her face. "Mother, from the moment I walked in, every word Aunt Elowen said was defending you. She said you wouldn't do something like this. She said there had to be another explanation. She's kind, she's fair. And you?" Her voice broke, then rose again, sharper this time. "You hurt her child. What comes next? Are you going to go after her too?" Tears spilled freely now, tracing down her cheeks.

"You promised me," she said, her voice shaking, "you said you wouldn't make things hard for her anymore." Frustration flared in Isla's eyes. "I told you, I had nothing to do with this." But seeing the look on Maerwyn's face, that raw, unfiltered disappointment, something inside her snapped. 2/3 2:42 pm P P Chapter 451 Shattered Loyalties 9 Finished "I carried you for months and nearly died bringing you into this world," Isla said, her voice tightening.

"I've spent years navigating this court, making sure you were protected, making sure your future was secure so you could grow up with every privilege. And this is how you repay me? You read

a few romantic tales, listen to a few carefully chosen words, and suddenly you turn against your own mother?" 2.5K (1) 2 3/3 admin

Chapter 452 A Daughter's Fury "I'm done talking to you!" Finished The words came out sharp, almost breaking. Maerwyn turned and took several quick steps away, only to stop again as something surged up inside her. She spun back, her eyes red and blazing. "You didn't raise me," she said, each word hitting harder than the last. "It was the wet nurses. The matrons. They were the ones who fed me, who stayed with me when I cried at night, who held me when I got hurt. Where were you?" Her voice climbed, years of resentment finally spilling over.

"You were too busy dealing with Lady Elira, trying to get rid of her child, or going after whoever had just caught His Majesty's attention. Everything you did was about keeping your position, getting rid of anyone you didn't like. When were you ever actually there for me? When did you ever care if I was happy?" Isla's face went completely pale, her body swaying as an attendant quickly steadied her. Maerwyn stood there for a moment longer, breathing hard, as if she had nothing left to give. Then she wiped her tears roughly and turned, leaving without another glance.

Isla trembled, her chest tight, anger and something heavier tangled together until she could barely breathe. After a long moment, she forced out through clenched teeth, "Ungrateful child... I should never have-" "Your Majesty, please." Hilda stepped in quickly, her voice low but urgent as she signaled the others to move further away. "Please don't say something you'll regret. The princess is young, and she doesn't see the full picture yet. It's easy for someone to influence her right now. But she is still your daughter. That won't change." She leaned in slightly, her tone more pressing.

Follow new episodes on the

"What matters right now isn't the princess. It's His Majesty." Isla's expression tightened. Yes. No matter how Macrwyn acted, she was still her daughter. \ But the King... Elowen had pushed this too far. The collapse, the near loss of the child, everything pointed back to someone from Isla's household. And Theodric had already grown dissatisfied with her. Isla drew in a slow breath, forcing herself to steady. "I never ordered something like this. She set this up." Hilda nodded immediately. "I believe you, Your Majesty. But that's exactly why you need to act first.

You can't wait for His Majesty to question you or hear only one side. You should return to the palace now and explain everything yourself. Alyssa came from your household. This needs to be cleared by you." Isla closed her eyes briefly, then opened them again, her gaze colder than before. 1/2 2:44 pm P p pp. Chapter 452 A Daughter's Fury Finished "Prepare the carriage. We're returning to the palace." Inside the room, Gerda moved quietly, dismissing the attendants before stepping forward. "Your Grace, Her Majesty and Princess Maerwyn have left." A faint light flickered in Elowen's eyes.

"How did it go?" "They argued outside the courtyard," Gerda replied. "The princess spoke rather harshly, and Her Majesty seemed genuinely angered. In the end, the princess left in tears." Elowen nodded slightly, a faint curve touching her lips. "That sounds about right." She wanted Alaric out of the way, gone for good. But she understood one thing with absolute clarity. As long as Isla still held her place at the heart of the royal court, the influence backing her would never falter, and Alaric's standing would remain untouchable.

If she was going to settle this properly, then Isla had to be the first to fall. At first, she had been considering how to make a move. Then the opportunity presented itself. Cassian had been urgently summoned away, and almost immediately, rumors began circulating through the estate,

exaggerated just enough to cause alarm. The timing couldn't have been better. It was as if everything was lining up for her without any effort at all. She followed the current and staged her collapse. With that foundation laid, everything that came after unfolded naturally. Elowen had figured it out early on.

Of all the attendants Isla had sent over, Alyssa was the one who mattered most. She was careful, knew how to wait, and never made a move unless she had to. Instead, she preferred to turn others into tools, and the one she used most often was a maid named Seren. So Elowen used the rumors as an excuse, reassigned Seren, and placed Alyssa where she wanted her. Then came Macrwyn's message. The tone of it had been unmistakably sincere. 2.5K 2:44 pm admin

Awakening Love. Reborn to Be His Duchess Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess

Chapter 453 Drawing the Net Finished Elowen had not truly forgiven Maerwyn, though she had come to recognize that the princess's affection and guilt were both real. She understood something else just as clearly. If anything were to happen to her, Maerwyn would not remain indifferent. On the day of the feast, Elowen quietly began to close her trap.

She stationed herself in the study with the household ledger, then dismissed her attendants one after another with excuses that sounded perfectly reasonable, until only Alyssa remained. After a while, she casually mentioned that she felt like having something warm to drink. The water Alyssa brought was, of course, untouched and entirely safe. Alyssa was far too careful to act on her own at a time like this. Without clear instruction, she would never risk doing anything that might turn suspicion back on herself. And yet, Elowen fainted again.

This time, everything had already been arranged with Cassian, Sylvia, and Rowena. Sylvia and Rowena deliberately delayed before entering the royal residence, only reporting the matter once

enough time had passed. Just as Elowen expected, Maerwyn hurried over without hesitation. For several nights beforehand, Elowen and Cassian had gone over every line together, refining their words until nothing felt out of place. So the moment they heard Isla and the princess had arrived, the two of them slipped into their roles effortlessly, their voices weaving together so naturally it felt almost real.

Everything Maerwyn heard was exactly what Elowen intended her to hear. What she had not expected was Isla's presence as well, which made the entire performance land far better than planned. "Where are Beatrice and Alyssa now?" Elowen asked. "They've been kept in separate guest chambers, just as Your Grace ordered, with guards watching them at all times," Gerda replied. Elowen gave a small nod. After today, neither of them would remain at the manor. That part, however, would not require her involvement.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Reclining against the headboard, her fingers absently tracing the stitched patterns on the coverlet. Elowen let her thoughts settle. "If I were Isla, I wouldn't sit back and wait for this to play out. I'd go straight to His Majesty and get ahead of it. I'd lower myself enough to admit I misjudged the people under me and failed to keep proper order, then offer to make amends for the fright caused at Duskmoor Manor.

After that, I'd press him to let me bring Beatrice and Alyssa back to the royal residence, so I could question them myself and deal with it under my own authority." She let out a quiet breath. "Alyssa didn't do a thing. What she brought me was perfectly clean. If Isla takes her back, she'll see that for herself right away. And even if she doesn't act on it immediately, she'll hold onto that truth and wait for the right moment to use it." That alone made it dangerous. Cassian shifted slightly, a relaxed ease in his posture, one brow lifting just a fraction.

"In that case, I should make a visit to the royal residence myself." Elowen turned her head toward him, a hint of curiosity in her eyes. "What for?" A faint smile curved at the corner of his mouth, unhurried and deliberate. "We're not done yet. Might as well give them one more scene." There were still cracks in the plan. He kept that to himself, only reaching out to lightly brush his fingers over the back of her hand. "Get some rest. I won't be long." Elowen nodded, quiet and compliant. Elsewhere, Maerwyn was still seething.

She climbed into her carriage and left immediately for the royal residence, not waiting for Isla. By the time Isla arrived, some time had already passed. She went straight to seek an audience with the king, but the moment she stepped into the council chamber, a goblet came hurtling toward her. "Your Majesty!" Hilda cried out and pulled Isla back just in time. The goblet struck the stone floor and shattered, fragments scattering across the tiles. Startled, Isla looked up and met Theodric's cold, furious gaze from behind the long table. Her heart sank at once.

Maerwyn must have told him everything. "Isla, you've truly outdone yourself," Theodric said, his voice edged with anger. "It wasn't enough to intimidate Elowen, so you thought you'd meddle with what she drinks as well. It seems taking the Queen's Privy Seal from you wasn't lesson enough. A woman capable of this has no place holding the seat of queen." 2/3 2:44 pm Pppp. Chapter 453 Drawing the Net Isla stood frozen for a moment. In all these years, she had never seen him like this. 0130 Finished She had been raised in privilege, never spoken to so harshly, never publicly condemned like this.

"Macrwyn told me everything," he continued. "Elowen showed you no disrespect. I know you favored that ivory goddess carving and wanted it for Macrwyn, but Cassian is my brother, and he's given more to Avenlor than most. The royal residence is full of treasures. You could have

chosen another. There was no need to go this far." A sharp mix of hurt and indignation rose in Isla's chest, her eyes reddening, though she did not argue. Instead, she lowered herself into a deep, formal bow, her posture composed and restrained.

Theodric watched her for a moment, and the edge of his anger dulled slightly. "I was wrong," Isla said softly. "However Your Majesty chooses to deal with me, I will accept it without complaint." He studied her, then exhaled. "Elowen and the child are unharmed. There's no need for severe punishment." Isla kept her head lowered, her voice faintly unsteady. "Thank you, Your Majesty." 2.5K B 3/3 admin

Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 454 Turning the Tide Your Majesty!" Finished Hilda could not remain silent any longer. She stepped forward despite herself. "Her Majesty has been wronged." Theodric frowned, clearly displeased. "And what is it you think you're adding to this?" Isla turned slightly, her voice low but firm. "Hilda, that's enough." But Hilda's expression tightened with resolve. "I've served you for decades. I won't stand by and watch you take the blame for something you didn't do." Before Isla could stop her, Hilda lifted her gaze to the king.

Your Majesty, if Her Majesty truly ordered harm against the Duchess and her unborn child, if Alyssa truly brought her tainted drink, then that would mean Her Majesty acted without a shred of sense. Alyssa was still at Duskmoor Manor. If anything happened, suspicion would point straight back to the royal residence. Anyone could see that. It would lead directly to Her Majesty."

Theodric's expression shifted, his brow drawing tighter as he considered her words. Whether that drink was ever tampered with, whether the Duchess truly collapsed because of it, only those Duskmoor Manor would know.

Only the Duchess herself would know. Perhaps that physician does as well, but he serves the Duke and Duchess. There is no reason to assume he would speak against them," Hilda continued, her voice thick with restrained emotion. "I beg you to look deeper into this." Theodric's silence stretched, feeling that, Isla allowed herself the smallest breath of relief. On their way back, she and Hilda had carefully gone through everything, piece by piece. No scheme was ever flawless. Elowen's move had been clever, but it was not beyond question.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

\ There were too many details that did not hold up under scrutiny, and that gave them their chance. ...Why would Elowen do such a thing?" Theodric said at last, his tone lower now. Hilda stepped forward. "Have you forgotten, Your Majesty? The Duchess was once close to the Crown Prince, yet the match was never allowed. Later, Her Majesty arranged for Daphne to enter the Crown Prince's Wing. And during last autumn's hunt, His Highness killed the Duchess's prized horse right in front of her. She collapsed from the shock, and His Grace struck the Crown Prince before your very eyes.

The Duchess has every reason to resent both His Highness and Her Majesty." Theodric fell into thought. Isla lowered herself even further, her voice quiet and controlled. "Your Majesty, what lies in the past can remain there. I do not wish to reopen old matters. But today's incident still reflects my failure. Beatrice 1/3 :44 pm PP PP. 0:41 Chapter 454 Turning the Tide Finished and Alyssa came from my household. Now they have caused such trouble and nearly harmed the Duchess. I am deeply ashamed. I ask only for the chance to make this right. Allow me to bring them back to the royal residence.

I will question them properly and deal with them as needed, so there is a clear answer for Duskmoor Manor." As long as Alyssa is in my hands, the truth will come out. I can clear my

name. "Your Majesty." At that moment, Quin entered and bowed his head. "Your Majesty, His Grace, the Duke of Duskmoor, requests an audience." Isla stiffened slightly and exchanged a quick glance with Hilda. This was not good. Theodric paused, then said, "Let him in." The quiet roll of wheels carried across the chamber floor. Cassian entered, seated, with Bran guiding him forward.

His dark attire set off the pale calm of his expression, his gaze steady and cool. "Your Majesty," he said, inclining his head in greeting. Theodric studied him briefly before gesturing. "You may rise. What brings you here now?" Before Cassian could answer, Hilda spoke first. "Your Grace, after what happened today, the Duchess was badly shaken, and her condition is fragile. You should be at the manor, staying by her side. His Majesty already understands the matter, and Her Majesty has accepted responsibility.

There's no need for you to come all this way to press the issue further." She drew in a breath, her tone edged with restrained grievance. "Unless, of course, you and the Duchess intend to push this until Her Majesty can no longer remain in her place." Theodric's expression darkened slightly, though he said nothing. Cassian let out a soft, humorless laugh, one brow lifting. "I didn't realize the royal household had begun taking its cues from a servant. Her Majesty hasn't spoken, yet you've already decided what I intend." Hilda faltered, her face paling.

Cassian did not give her room to recover. He turned back to Theodric, his tone even. "I had no intention of coming. Ella insisted on presenting herself despite her condition, determined to speak with you directly. I stopped her. If she had come, she would have heard those words for herself. She's already been shaken again and again these past days. If she were to believe she's

unwelcome here, that any strain within the royal family is somehow her fault, it would weigh on her more than she could bear." Awakening Love. Reborn to Be His Duchess admin

Chapter 455 A Courtly Turn Finished Theodric spoke first, his tone measured but cool. "Elowen is still recovering. There was no need for her to come all this way." Cassian let out a soft breath, as if weighing whether to speak at all, though in the end he continued anyway. "She insisted on making things clear in person. The water served earlier was perfectly fine. She simply had a restless night and barely slept, then spent the entire morning going through the manor's ledgers without pause. It wore her down more than she realized, and she fainted from the strain.

It has nothing to do with Alyssa." Theodric frowned slightly. "What do you mean?" At that, Isla lowered herself where she stood, her posture composed, though her shoulders tightened for the briefest moment. Cassian went on, his voice calm and even. "She also said that Your Majesty endured more than most could imagine to bring Princess Maerwyn into this world. Now that she is expecting a child of her own, she understands more clearly what that bond truly means. She could not bear to see distance grow between mother and daughter.

Since the water was never the issue and Alyssa did nothing wrong, she hopes Your Majesty will not blame yourself, and that you and His Majesty will set the record straight with Princess Maerwyn, so she does not continue to misunderstand her own mother." The room fell quiet.

Hilda's face drained of color, while Isla's fingers curled tightly against her palm. What a carefully staged performance. One played the fragile lady back at Duskmoor Manor, all softness and restraint, while the other arrived here to play the generous noble, speaking as though he were above it all.

Every word sounded reasonable, even kind, yet each one closed in around her, leaving no space to maneuver. She had never ordered anything of the sort, yet hearing it framed this way, spoken by Cassian himself, only made her seem more suspicious, while casting the Duchess as thoughtful and gracious. After a brief pause, Cassian continued, "While I was waiting outside, I heard mention of bringing Beatrice and Alyssa back for punishment. Since Ella has already made it clear they are not at fault, perhaps it would be better to bring them back and see that they are properly looked after instead.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

They were drawn into this unfairly." Isla's pulse quickened, unease rising fast. If she agreed, she would look small-minded and unwilling to accept goodwill. If she refused, it would only deepen suspicion. Cassian had guided her into a position that looked courteous on the surface, yet left her surrounded on all sides. Theodric's expression softened just slightly. "Elowen is considerate. She understands what matters. Chapter 455 A Courtly Turn Finished His gaze shifted toward Isla, and though he did not openly rebuke her, his displeasure turned elsewhere, settling firmly on Hilda.

Her earlier words had clearly crossed a line. "An impertinent servant." His voice sharpened, carrying the weight of authority. "In the inner court, it seems discipline grows weaker by the day. Your mistress had not even spoken, yet you stepped forward to speak in her place, stirring trouble and driving a wedge where there should be none. Who gave you that right?" Hilda immediately lowered herself, her forehead nearly touching the floor. "I was wrong, Your Majesty. I accept any punishment." Theodric did not relent.

"As for the two from Duskmoor Manor, Beatrice and Alyssa, their handling of this matter has been careless enough to cause unnecessary turmoil. There is no need for them to return to service

in the inner court. Have them brought back and placed in the laundry ward for discipline.

Without my word, they are not to leave." J Isla's breath caught. The laundry ward was firmly under Elira's influence. And Elira had already made her position clear. If those two ended up there, it would not end well. "Your Majesty..." Hilda began, unable to stop herself.

But Isla reached out at once, catching her by the arm and stopping her before she could say more. There was no salvaging this through argument. Cassian watched the exchange without missing a detail, his gaze steady before he spoke again. "Since I am already here, there is one more thing I hesitate to bring up. Theodric glanced at him. "Then say it." Cassian inclined his head slightly. "The attendants sent to Duskmoor Manor have not performed particularly well. It seems Lady Elira may still be finding her footing when it comes to selecting the right people.

The Queen's Privy Seal governs all appointments within the inner court, and that is no small responsibility. If it proves too much, perhaps Your Majesty might consider returning it to Your Majesty," he said, gesturing politely toward Isla. "With her experience, matters would likely be handled more smoothly." Isla held her composure, though her jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. He makes it sound like concern, yet every word is a move. Theodric gave a short, dismissive breath. "This has nothing to do with Elira's judgment.

Those attendants were chosen by Isla herself and sent to Duskmoor Manor. The seal remains where it is." admin

Chapter 456 A Polished Smile Isla lowered her gaze, saying nothing. She knew exactly how effective this kind of approach was on Theodric. 靠 Finished Cassian turned slightly, a trace of concern in his expression that looked just convincing enough. "Still, I would not want this to trouble Your Majesty." Isla almost laughed. Trouble me? That was putting it lightly. She wanted

to tear straight through that carefully composed expression of his and see what lay underneath.

But none of that could show. Instead, she steadied herself and allowed a faint, composed smile to form.

"You are too considerate. Since Elira took charge, the inner court has been running quite smoothly. I have seen it for myself." Cassian seemed to relax at that. "That is a relief. I was concerned I might have spoken out of turn and caused unnecessary difficulty. If that led to any strain between you and His Majesty, I would find that hard to forgive in myself." Isla's fingers tightened where they rested out of sight. He calls this concern. It is nothing but another layer of pressure. She had used harsher words before, though never for someone like him. And yet, the description fit too well.

If Cassian had been born into the inner court, there would be little left for anyone else to hold on to. "Enough." Theodric's voice cut cleanly through the room. "This matter ends here." He turned to Quin. "Go to Duskmoor Manor and bring Beatrice and Alyssa back at once. Send them straight to the laundry ward and place them under strict watch. No visits, no exceptions, and they are not to leave without my written order." "Yes, Your Majesty." Quin bowed and withdrew. Theodric's attention returned to Isla. "You may rise. You have had a difficult day.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

Return and rest." "...As you command." Her voice came out low as she steadied herself with

Hilda's help and rose. Her legs ached from holding that position for so long, though the

discomfort barely registered compared 2:44 pm P P P P Chapter 456 A Polished Smile to

everything else pressing in on her. Theodric's gaze shifted again, this time settling on Hilda. "As

for you." Both women stilled. Finished "You spoke out of turn and overstepped your place. For

the sake of your years in service, you will remain. Your stipend is suspended for a year. Take it as a warning.

If it happens again, there will be no leniency." Hilda immediately lowered herself again. "Thank you for Your Majesty's mercy. I will not forget this." With that, the two of them withdrew, their composure strained, their steps unsteady. Cassian turned back to Theodric. "I have said all that needed saying. If there is nothing further, I will return to Duskmoor Manor. Ella is not well, and I would rather be there." He paused, then added lightly, "Unless Your Majesty would prefer a game to pass the time." Theodric gave him a flat look. "If you wish to leave, then go." Cassian smiled faintly.

"Much appreciated. Once Ella is born, I will make sure she knows how to greet you properly." Theodric let out a quiet scoff. The soft roll of wheels faded down the corridor, and the study grew still again. For a moment, Theodric's hand paused over the parchment. His gaze drifted beyond the room. In his mind, he saw a small child toddling toward him across a sunlit hall, wrapped in warm winter layers, cheeks flushed, eyes bright with delight. Tiny hands reached forward, voice soft and sweet.

'Uncle...' Without realizing it, the sternness in his expression cased, and a faint smile touched his lips. By the time Isla returned to her chambers in the inner court, she sank heavily into her seat, her body trembling beneath the weight of everything she had just endured. She closed her eyes, her breathing uneven as she tried to steady herself. After a while. Hilda dismissed the attendants and brought over a cup of warm tonic. "Your Majesty, take a sip. It will help." Isla opened her eyes and accepted it. And just like that, the memory came rushing back.

Maerwyn pulling away from her, eyes filled with hurt, looking at her as though she were no longer someone to trust. Chapter 456 A Polished Smile Her own daughter. The child she had carried and brought into this world. Finished 銀动 And yet that same child had turned on her without hesitation, choosing someone else over her, even going so far as to speak before the king, nearly pushing her into a position she might not have recovered from. 2.5K 1 2:45 pm P P P P admin

Chapter 457 Beneath the Surface Finished The attendant standing before her had no ties of blood or loyalty that bound her to this cause, yet she had still stepped forward and spoken at risk of offending the king. It was strange how loyalty worked, how people chose their sides. Nothing about it was ever as simple as it seemed. "Your Majesty..." Hilda's voice trembled as she looked at Isla's drained, distant expression, her chest tightening with guilt. "I failed you. I should have spoken better, done more.

I couldn't turn things in your favor..." Isla slowly shook her head, her voice rough with fatigue. "No. You did what you could. I misjudged him, especially the Duke of Duskmoor." Why had she never seen it before? Looking back now, she realized she had never truly crossed paths with Cassian in any meaningful way. To her, he had always just been a man of war, dangerous on the battlefield, perhaps a threat to her son's future claim to the throne, but nothing more than that. So she had acted.

Quietly, decisively, arranging for him to be gravely wounded, left broken and unconscious, his legs ruined beyond recovery. At the time, she had believed it was enough. Now, the thought felt almost laughable. She should have finished it. She should have made sure he never drew breath again. Isla suddenly straightened, a sharp realization cutting through the haze in her mind. His

legs had healed. At the Stargazer Pavilion, they had seen him with her own eyes, standing without the slightest sign of weakness, moving with ease, even striking a man down without hesitation.

And yet today, in the royal study, he had remained seated in that wheeled chair as though he were still crippled. The answer came to her in an instant. He had been playing weak. Setting a trap, waiting for someone to make the first move. Which meant the Duke of Duskmoor had already begun to act, and their attention had turned directly toward her and the Baker family.

And if that was true... Then Cassian might not be content to stand behind the throne. 13 2:45 pm
P P P P Chapter 457 Beneath the Surface Finished He might be aiming for it. A chill ran through her. They could not afford to wait.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"Go. Now." Isla grabbed Hilda's wrist so abruptly that the older woman flinched, a quiet gasp escaping her lips, but Isla didn't loosen her grip. Her voice wavered under the strain of urgency.

"Ride to the Baker Estate immediately. Speak to my father and my brother. Tell them to go back over everything tied to that matter. Every record, every person who had a hand in it, no matter how small or how long ago. I want it all checked again, thoroughly. Nothing can be left behind. Not a single thread that could be followed back to us.

Do you understand?" With Beatrice and Alyssa taken back to the palace under Quin's watch, Isla no longer had anyone left inside Duskmoor Manor. That night, Elowen slept more easily than she had in days, the faint tension between her brows finally gone, her breathing slow and even beneath the heavy covers. Seren, however, lay wide awake. She curled into herself beneath the blankets, pressing her face into the fabric as she tried to muffle the quiet sobs that kept slipping out. Across the room, Rosaline stirred. The faint sound of crying pulled her from sleep.

She lay still for a moment, listening in the darkness, then let out a quiet breath before pushing herself up. She reached for a cloak, wrapped it around her shoulders, and struck a small flame to the bedside oil lamp. A soft amber glow spread across the room. Seren was curled tightly under the covers, her small frame trembling with each suppressed sob. Rosaline sat beside her and rested a hand lightly on the blanket. "What's going on with you? Crying like this at this hour... is it your knees again? Did the pain come back?" The sobbing hitched, then paused.

Slowly, Seren peeked out, her face flushed and damp, her voice shaky. "Rosaline..." "They took Alyssa away," she said, her words tumbling over each other. "The palace guards came. I heard them say she's been sent to the laundry ward. They said she'll stay there for the rest of her life..." Her fear spiraled as she spoke, tears spilling freely. "Am I next? Am I going to be thrown out too and locked away somewhere like that? Rosaline... I don't want that. I'm scared." Rosaline watched her, the frustration she had been holding onto slowly giving way to something softer.

Before all this, Seren had ignored every warning, clinging to Alyssa as though she were a true friend. No matter what Alyssa said, she believed it. No matter what Rosaline said, she argued back. 2:45 pm P p pp. Chapter 457 Beneath the Surface Finished In the end, Rosaline had stopped trying. Some lessons had to be learned the hard way. She had thought a few days of hardship might finally make Seren understand, so she had kept her distance on purposC. But now, seeing her like this... Seren had grown noticeably thinner, her cheeks hollow, her eyes swollen from crying.

Rosaline couldn't bring herself to stay cold. After a moment, she reached out and brushed the tears from Seren's face with her thumb. "That's enough. You're not being sent anywhere like that." Seren looked at her, hope flickering through her tears. "You mean it?" "I do." Rosaline

nodded. "Think it through. If Her Grace truly wanted you gone, you wouldn't still be here. She could have dismissed you alongside Alyssa or found a harsher punishment. But she didn't.

You're still in the manor, safe and untouched." Seren hesitated. "But... is she still angry with me?

Will I ever be allowed back in the study?" Rosaline exhaled softly. "Anyone paying attention can see what this was really about. Her Grace is cutting out the Queen's influence from the manor, removing the people placed here to watch and report. That's what this was. But we weren't sent here by the Queen. We serve Lady Elira, and she stands with Her Grace. As long as we don't cross a line again, Her Grace isn't going to ruin us over this, let alone send us somewhere like that." ◦ 2.5K admin

Chapter 458 A Place to Stand Finished Seren's breathing gradually steadied, though a trace of grievance lingered. She sniffed and muttered, "You said it wouldn't be that bad... My knees were so swollen I couldn't walk for days. They still ache if I press on them..." Rosaline's expression tightened again, and she gave Seren a light tap on the forehead. "You earned that. That punishment wasn't meant to break you, it was meant to wake you up. So you'd remember what choices lead you into trouble and which people aren't worth trusting." She paused, her voice sharpening as Alyssa came to mind.

"That girl knew exactly what she was doing. She praised you, flattered you, made you feel special. None of it was real. You were easy to sway, and you had access to the study. That made you useful. And you let yourself be used. A few kind words and you handed her everything. Meanwhile, she stayed out of sight while you took the fall. If that doesn't teach you something, I don't know what will." Seren lowered her head, her voice small. "I know... I really do..." At least

Her Grace saw through her early," Rosaline said, her tone easing again. "So you got out before things went further.

You paid a price, but you learned something. If you listen from now on and keep your head straight, you won't end up like that again." "I will," Seren said quickly. "I'll listen, I promise." She hesitated, then asked in a smaller voice, "Do you think... I could go back to the study?" Rosaline felt the answer before she spoke. The study was too important. Trust, once broken, didn't come back so easily. That's not something I can promise," she said carefully. "It depends on you, and more importantly, on Her Grace." The light in Seren's eyes dimmed again. Rosaline softened with a quiet sigh.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

"I'll ask for you tomorrow. That's all I can do." Seren nodded quickly, relief breaking through her worry. "Thank you, Rosaline. I won't mess up again. Watching her like this, Rosaline felt a knot of conflicting emotions she couldn't quite put into words, and all she could do was hope that this time, the lesson had finally taken root and would force Seren to grow. The next afternoon, sunlight filtered through the tall windows of the study at Duskmoor Manor, warming the rows of ledgers spread across the desk. Elowen had nearly finished her work.

She leaned back slightly, stretching her arms to ease the stillness in her shoulders. Rosaline stepped forward, steadying herself before lowering into a deep, formal bow, "Your Grace," she said, her voice respectful and controlled, "my sister Seren has reflected deeply on her mistakes. She understands where she went wrong and regrets it sincerely. She hopes to make amends and serve you properly again.

If it pleases you, would you consider giving her another chance?" She lowered her head further, holding the posture without moving, her pulse loud in her ears. The thick woven carpet beneath her softened the pressure, but it did nothing to steady her nerves. Elowen rested her cheek lightly against her hand, her gaze calm and unreadable. When she spoke, her tone was even, almost cool. "No. I have other plans for the study." Rosaline's heart sank, though she kept her posture steady. As expected.

Rosaline knew there was no chance Elowen would allow a maid who had already made a mistake to return to service in the study. Just as that quiet bitterness settled in her chest and she prepared to lower herself in thanks and withdraw. Elowen spoke again. "The girl named Scarlet who came back with me a few days ago, you've seen her. I haven't decided where she fits yet, so I'll have her assist in the study for now and see how she manages." Scarlet? Rosaline's thoughts stirred. She knew exactly who that was, the woman Elowen had brought back from the Stargazer Pavilion.

someone with a rather unusual background. Placing her in the study wasn't a casual decision. It meant Elowen intended to keep her close and shape her into someone she could trust. Still... Scarlet probably couldn't read a single line. But once Elowen had spoken, it wasn't Rosaline's place to question it. "As for Seren, Elowen said, her tone shifting slightly. "I'm assigning her to the conservatory. She used to tend the potted plants in the study, and she did it well. She has a knack for it, and more importantly, she enjoys it. Tell her to focus on that.

If she does her work properly, she'll be treated fairly" Rosaline blinked, surprise giving way to relief. The conservatory wasn't as prestigious as the study, but it was steady work, and more

importantly, it meant Seren hadn't been cast aside. If anything, Elowen had seen exactly where she belonged. 23 admin

Chapter 459 Letter from Rivenshire Finished At Duskmoor Manor, Rosaline immediately lowered herself into a deep bow, her posture respectful and composed. "On Seren's behalf. I thank you, Your Grace. You've shown such kindness to those in your service. Seren will devote herself fully to the gardens and make sure everything is kept just as you wish." Her admiration for the young Duchess deepened all over again. Elowen carried herself with an easy grace that could be mistaken for casualness, yet every decision she made followed a clear and deliberate order.

Problems were removed before they could fester, and people were placed exactly where they were most useful. It made perfect sense that Lady Elira had chosen to stand with her. Just then, the sound of quick, lively footsteps echoed from the corridor, followed by a bright, breathless voice. "Your Grace! Your Grace!" Mira hurried in, cheeks flushed, holding a sealed letter high in her hand. "A letter just came for you. It was sent from Rivenshire by express rider, they didn't waste a moment getting it here." Rivenshire. Elowen's eyes lit at once. Her aunt. She straightened in her seat.

"Let me see it." Mira stepped forward eagerly and placed the letter into her hands. Elowen took it without delay. Rosaline, reading the room at a glance, dipped into a quiet bow and withdrew without a sound. Elowen broke the seal and unfolded the parchment. Mira hovered nearby, curiosity getting the better of her, though she kept her voice low. "What does Lady Elspeth say, Your Grace. Is she asking after you?" Elowen read carefully, her gaze steady. "She says Ode to Springlight is selling faster than the shops can keep up with in Rivenshire.

At first she assumed it was just another forgettable tale written by some self-important scholar and paid it no mind. Then she heard the author was me, and it startled her so much she had every copy she could find bought up and delivered to the house. She piled them into a single room and had the steward read it aloud to everyone, even the old gatekeeper had to stand and listen. Mira let out a soft laugh, her eyes crinkling. "That sounds exactly like Lady Elspeth." Elowen continued, her tone gentler now. "She's also taken Nina in formally and placed her under the Ashcroft name.

[Follow new episodes on the](#)

She wanted a name that would truly suit her, so she invited several well-regarded scholars in Rivenshire and had them search through old texts before settling on one. She named her Lirien. She's arranged tutors to teach her reading, and she's been training her in riding and archery. No lessons in music or painting. She says Nina prefers being on horseback, so she even bought her a young mare. Elowen paused, her fingers still resting lightly on the page. Mira's smile faded as she glanced at her, her expression softening.

2:45 pm Chapter 459 Letter from Rivenshire They both understood what lay beneath those words. 049 Finisher In the letter, Elspeth had written "Ella, I cannot quite explain it, but Nina reminds me so much of you as a child. Teaching her to read, riding out with her, watching her grow from timid and unsure into someone bright and open, it feels as though I have been given the chance to raise you properly all over again. Ella, I am truly happy. It makes me think your mother must have felt the same kind of joy." A faint sheen of tears gathered in Elowen's eyes.

Mira quietly reached for a handkerchief and dabbed them away. Elowen drew in a steady breath before continuing. "Nina has read Ode to Springlight too, and she loved it. Her face turned red as she said she wants to become a woman general someday, to lead soldiers into battle and protect

the people. She wants her name to strike fear into anyone who means harm, so that the moment they hear it, they would rather run than do wrong." This time, Elowen let out a soft laugh. Mira nodded with feeling. "That's because your stories truly change the way people think, Your Grace." Elowen glanced at her.

"What makes you say that?" Mira took a moment, choosing her words carefully, her sincerity plain. "The stories I used to hear, whether from traveling players or in town squares, always made it seem like a woman's whole life was meant to end in a good marriage. Everything they learned and hoped for was about managing a household and pleasing a husband. But after reading your stories, Nina wants to become a general, someone who protects others. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with a quiet life like that, it's just...

it feels like many girls are told from the very beginning that there is only one path for them. They never even realize they might have other choices. Like becoming a commander. Or a scholar. Or writing stories, like you. Or even more than else." that. They could stand on their own and shape a life for themselves without relying on anyone Elowen smiled, tilting her head slightly. "And you. What do you want for yourself?" Mira's cheeks flushed. "I don't want anything else. I just want to stay by your side and serve you." Elowen laughed softly and reached out to pinch her cheek.

"Your Grace." Anson stepped in quickly, his expression more serious than usual. He leaned closer and lowered his voice "The Fourth Prince of Nordia has arrived. He is waiting in the receiving chamber Elowen's gaze sharpened slightly. She folded the letter with care and tucked it safely inside her gown before lifting her chin. "Bring him to the study." Before long, Zachary was shown in. 2/3 1:45 pm p p pp. admin

Chapter 460 An Unusual Visit eFinished Zachary stepped in wearing a pale, impeccably tailored coat in the fashion favored by Avenlor's scholars, the fine fabric catching the light with a quiet sheen. The clean lines of it followed his frame neatly, giving him a tall, almost delicate silhouette without looking overstated. His features were refined to the point of being arresting, his jaw clean-cut, his neck long and pale where it showed above the structured collar.

There was a certain sharpness to him beneath all that elegance, something subtle but unmistakable, like a finely honed edge concealed under polished layers. Elowen found herself studying him for a moment longer than she meant to. He was, quite simply, too beautiful. "What brings you here today, Your Highness?" she asked. Mira stepped forward and set down two cups of freshly poured coffee, the steam rising faintly. Zachary accepted one but made no move to drink. He looked at Elowen and spoke evenly.

"In a few days, once the roads have fully cleared and travel is easier, the Nordian delegation intends to begin formal negotiations with Avenlor. Matters of trade, the exchange of envoys, and movement along the borders will all be addressed." Elowen gave a small nod. The delegation had been in Vanelle for some time already, but until now, everything had remained at the level of courtesy and quiet testing. The real discussions were only just beginning.

"This should have started earlier," Zachary continued, "but I could see you had pressing matters to deal with, and things here were not entirely settled, So I chose to wait." Elowen nodded again. Zachary set the untouched cup aside and straightened slightly. "Before we begin those formal talks, there is a personal matter I once promised to handle." "Elara, Elowen said. "Yes." Earlier, she had told him in confidence that Elara had become deeply attached to him at first sight He had taken that seriously. "You may invite Miss Wrenner here," Zachary said.

Follow new episodes on the

"Once she meets me properly, those feelings will fade on their own." Elowen glanced at him again. If anything, getting this close to him will probably just make it worse. "Please trust me," he said, his tone steady and sincere. 2:45 pm p p pp. Chapter 460 An Unusual Visit Finished Elowen considered it briefly. Perhaps he had something in mind that she could not yet see. "Very well." She called for Anson. When he entered, she instructed him, "Go and invite Miss Wrenner. Tell her I would like to speak with her." Anson bowed and left at once.

The study grew quiet, filled only with the soft ticking of the clock and the distant sound of birds beyond the window. As they waited, Elowen found herself thinking about the coming negotiations. Trade between the two nations would shape the stability of the frontier, and a few ideas began to take form in her mind. But when the words reached her lips, she stopped herself. These were not matters to speak of lightly. Zachary seemed to notice. "Was there something you wished to say, Your Grace?" She paused, then chose a different question. "How is your sister these days?" Zachary smiled faintly.

"She is well." In truth, her brother asked about Elowen constantly, even pretending to be overcome with longing. He bought a copy of Ode to Springlight nearly every day, to the point where the delegation's funds were beginning to suffer for it. Elowen nodded. Zachary looked at her as though he had something else to ask, but hesitated. Elowen spoke first. "Is there something you wished to ask me, Your Highness?" He rubbed lightly at his cheek, almost awkwardly. "Is the Duke of Duskmoor in good health?" Elowen smiled. "He is quite well.

Thank you for your concern." The exchange was polite, though a faint awkwardness lingered between them. Silence seeped in again, stretching just a little too long. Even Elowen felt a slight tension building. At last, the sound of hurried footsteps approached from outside, light and quick.

Rowena's voice followed, half exasperated, half amused. "Slow down. You said you were not fully recovered yet, and now the moment you hear the Duchess has sent for you, you rush off like you cannot wait another second..." Before she could finish, Elara stepped into the study.

She wore a soft yellow jacket, and though she had grown noticeably slimmer, a healthy flush colored her cheeks. 2/3 Chapter 460 An Unusual Visit Elowen couldn't help but think, so this is what love can do. Finished "Your Grace, why did you send for me today?" Elara asked, her gaze fixed entirely on Elowen, her voice gentle and eager. "Did you want to speak with me?" It was clear she had not noticed Zachary at all. Her cheeks deepened in color as she went on. "I know now, you are Azure. I truly love your work.

I have read Tales of Luminara and Ode to Springlight, and I adored every one of them. Are you planning to write anything new. Do you need someone to help prepare ink or copy drafts?"

Elowen hesitated slightly. "I have not made any plans for a new story just yet." But Elara leaned forward, her eyes bright with intensity. "But I want something new so badly. Your Grace, please write another one. I can hardly stand it. I feel restless all the time, like I cannot settle, like I can barely breathe. Please, just one more. Only one. I promise I will not ask again. I truly cannot help it." 2.5K admin