

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 481 A Dangerous Turn Finished Elowen didn't move right away after waking. She stayed where she was for a few quiet moments, letting her thoughts settle before slowly pushing herself upright. "Mira," she called. Footsteps came quickly from the outer chamber, hurried and uneven, and Mira stepped inside. "You're awake, Your Grace." Elowen looked at her, taking in the tension she hadn't quite managed to hide. "What happened?" she asked, her tone calm but direct. "You don't look like everything's fine." Mira hesitated, her hands tightening slightly at her sides. That hesitation was enough.

There was only one thing that could leave her like this. Elowen let out a quiet breath. "This is about His Grace, isn't it?" Mira froze for a second, then slowly lifted her head. Elowen met her gaze without wavering. "You don't need to hold back. If something's happened at court, it won't stay contained for long. I'd rather hear it clearly now than pick through rumors later." Mira's eyes reddened almost instantly. "Your Grace..." Elowen didn't rush her. The morning light fell softly across her face, but it did nothing to soften the steadiness in her expression.

After a moment, Mira spoke in a low voice. "His Grace has been detained at the royal residence." Elowen's fingers tightened slightly against the bedding, though her expression barely shifted. "Is this about Prince Roderic?" she asked. Mira nodded quickly, wiping at her eyes. "Word from inside says Prince Roderic was badly injured. Every royal physician on duty was called in, and they worked through the entire night. They tried everything they could, but nothing worked. He passed just before dawn. His Majesty lost his temper on the spot, threw a drinking cup, and ordered a full investigation.

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The city watch, the High Court, and the royal guard have all been pulled in." Elowen's voice remained even. "And how did this end up tied to Cassian?" Mira lowered her voice further.

"They're saying the scene didn't make sense. It was too clean. No sign of a struggle, no blood, nothing left behind. But somehow, the investigation led to His Grace. People are saying the prince offended him more than once at Hall of Imperial Grace, spoke out of turn, and pushed too far. So His Grace supposedly took advantage of the chaos last night and had him killed.

They're saying he had the skill to do it cleanly and knew the city well enough to leave nothing behind..." 2:49 pm Chapter 481 A Dangerous Turn Finished Her voice faltered, but she didn't need to finish. Elowen already understood what kind of move this was. It had been set up carefully from the start, with each step leading cleanly into the next, leaving just enough tension in place before everything was forced to a breaking point. First the rumors, then the friction, and finally a death that demanded an answer.

Cassian had been pushed exactly where they wanted him, right into the center of a crisis that could not be ignored, with a charge that would be nearly impossible to shake once it settled. And the way it had been done told her everything she needed to know. This wasn't Alaric. He didn't plan like this. This was Iris. Elowen let out a slow breath. "I see." Her voice was quiet, but steady enough that Mira's panic began to ease without her realizing it. "Mira!" Gerda came in quickly, her expression tight with worry. One glance at the scene told her enough, and her face hardened immediately.

"What were you thinking? Her Grace needs rest right now. Why would you bring this to her?"

Elowen turned her head slightly, her gaze clear and composed. "I was always going to hear about it. And I'm not someone who can afford to stay uninformed. If His Grace isn't here, then

everything in this house depends on me. If I don't know what's happening, then we're already in trouble." Edith stepped in behind, her tone flat but certain. "I said this wouldn't stay hidden."

Gerda shot her a look, then turned back to Elowen, her voice softening. "I was thinking of your condition.

His Grace is only being questioned. His Majesty won't let anything happen to his own brother. Once the truth comes out, he'll be sent back safely. There's no need to carry this burden right now." Elowen shook her head slowly. "It won't be that simple," she said. "Anyone bold enough to set this in motion isn't aiming halfway. They want him finished, and they want this house dragged down with him. His Majesty may hesitate, but he still has to answer for a dead foreign prince in his capital.

Once pressure builds, even if he wants to protect Cassian, it may not be enough." She held Gerda's gaze, her voice steady. "He's not coming back anytime soon." 2/3 admin

Chapter 482 Holding the House Finished With every word Elowen spoke, the color drained further from Gerda's face until she stood there pale and at a loss for anything to say. Elowen rested a hand lightly over her abdomen, her tone calm but unwavering. "As for the child, if something like this is enough to bring her down, then she was never meant to stand in this house to begin with." Gerda looked at her as if seeing her for the first time, caught between shock and disbelief. Edith, however, watched her with a different kind of focus now, her usual indifference giving way to quiet approval.

Elowen rose without hesitation, steady despite everything pressing in around her. "Mira, help me get ready. I'm going to Falconcrest Manor." Yes, Your Grace." Mirá quickly wiped her face and moved at once, her earlier panic replaced by urgency and purpose. Seated before the mirror,

Elowen studied her reflection. Her face was composed, her features softened by pregnancy, but her eyes were far from calm. There was tension there, tightly held beneath the surface, along with something sharper that refused to give way. She was unsettled. Anyone would be.

The man caught in this was her husband, and the child she carried was his. But none of that could show. Not now. Not when she was the one everyone else would look to. And not when she had already made her decision. 'f something happens to him, I won't sit back and wait for someone else to fix it. She remembered what Cassian had said before he left. "The Duke of Duskmoor doesn't lose. Not where it counts." He had seen the shape of this before it ever surfaced. He had prepared for it. And more importantly, he had trusted her to handle what came next. 'Ella, you're more than capable now.

If I'm not there, you decide how this plays out." They didn't need to say anything more than that. All she had to do was keep the house steady and move when it mattered. Right now, that meant Falconcrest Manor. What Mira had brought back was too broad, too vague. She needed specifics. She needed to understand 1/3 2:49 pm Chapter 482 Holding the House exactly how this accusation had been built and where it might come apart under pressure.

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Finished The weather had turned milder, and Elowen chose a structured gown in soft lavender with fine gold- thread detailing, a light cloak fastened neatly at her shoulders. Her hair was gathered and secured simply. without excess ornament, and her makeup was light but deliberate, enough to sharpen her presence. When she stepped outside with Mira supporting her, the courtyard felt tight with unspoken tension. Servants stood in small groups, careful about where they looked, careful about what they didn't say. No one dared speak openly. But the unease was written plainly enough.

Elowen walked forward and stopped beneath the covered gallery, where the daylight fell evenly across her. Elowen stepped forward beneath the gallery, her voice carrying cleanly across the courtyard, steady and assured. "You've all heard something by now," she said, her gaze moving over them. "About the Nordian prince, and about His Grace being held at the royal residence for questioning. But listen carefully, nothing has been decided. The matter is still under investigation." She let that settle before continuing, her tone firm.

"Until His Majesty issues a formal decree, he is still the Duke of Duskmoor. I am still your duchess. And this is still Duskmoor Manor." Her posture remained straight, composed, her presence anchoring the space around her. "I am Elowen Hale of Hale Manor, and I hold my title by the King's own decree. As long as I stand here, this house stands with me. And as long as this house stands, you still have a place within it." She paused briefly, then her voice softened, though it did not lose its weight.

"If any of you are afraid, if you're worried about being drawn into this, I won't force you to stay. I can see that you're released properly, or have word sent to the palace so arrangements can be made for you there instead." A slight pause. "But understand this, we're standing at a turning point. Walking away now doesn't guarantee safety. It may just put you in a worse position. So think carefully before you decide." Her eyes swept across the courtyard once more. "If anyone wishes to leave, step forward now and say so.

You won't be stopped." Silence settled over the courtyard, heavy but controlled. Then the cook stepped out first, lowering herself into a deep, formal bow, her voice firm and unshaken. "Your Grace, I don't understand court politics, but I know how we've been treated here. You and His Grace 2/3 2:49 pm Ppp. Chapter 482 Holding the House 0:1 Finished have always been fair to

us. I came into this house, and I'm staying with it. If we make it through this, then we're fortunate. If we don't, I'm still not leaving." That broke the stillness.

Others followed, stepping forward one after another, voices overlapping, plainspoken but sincere, each choosing to stand their ground. From the back, Nikki called out, breath a little uneven but determined, "Take it out of my wages if you have to, just don't let anything happen to this house!" The tension didn't disappear, but it shifted into something steadier, something that could hold. 。 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 483 The Shape of Control 0:41 Finished Elowen cast her a brief look, and a quiet laugh slipped out before she could stop it. The attendants sent from the royal residence glanced at one another, caught off guard by the shift in tone. The ease in the room was contagious, yet the weight of Elowen's earlier words still lingered. Each of them hesitated, silently weighing whether it was wise to step away now. In the end, not one of them moved. Elowen let her gaze move across the gathered household, her expression calm, touched with a hint of warmth. "That's enough.

There's no need for anyone to start giving up their wages. Duskmoor Manor is doing just fine. I understand what you're trying to do, and that's more than enough. Just keep things running the way they should, mind your duties, and don't let unnecessary trouble take root. Everything continues as it always has." With that settled, she rose. Mira stepped forward at once, steadying her as they made their way through the inner gate. A carriage waited just beyond, its dark fabric drawn close against the chill, the horses already restless with impatience.

Elowen stepped inside without delay, the carriage soon rolling out toward Falconcrest Manor.

Yvonne had long held a reputation across Vanelle as someone who always seemed to know

where the wind was turning before anyone else even felt it. Court whispers, council shifts, quiet tensions between noble houses, she never claimed to know everything, yet somehow always knew enough. And with Piers now holding a key position in the Ministry of Justice, one of the first offices to become involved in this affair, there was little doubt he had seen details others had not.

That was reason enough for this visit. At the Crown Prince's Wing, Alaric returned at a brisk pace, energy practically radiating off him. The moment he stepped inside, he brushed past the attendants who approached to receive him, clearly in no mood for ceremony. 'Where's Iris?' he asked immediately. "Where is she?" A servant hurried to respond. "Your Highness, she is in the study." \ That was all he needed. He turned at once and headed straight there, Inside, Iris stood by the window, her pale blue gown catching the light in soft folds.

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She was still, composed, her attention resting somewhere beyond the glass as though she had been standing there for quite some time. At the sound of his approach, she turned and inclined her head in a proper bow. "Your Highness." Alaric did not bother hiding his satisfaction. "You pulled it off perfectly. I mean that. I'll make sure you're rewarded for it. Tell me what you want. Coin, land, a future for your family, just say the word." He dropped into his seat, relaxed and pleased with himself. Iris did not answer the question. Instead, she looked at him briefly, her voice soft but steady.

"From the look on your face, I take it everything went exactly as planned." 1/3 2:49 pm P PPP.
Chapter 483 The Shape of Control Finished Alaric let out a short laugh, leaning back. "Better than planned. My dear uncle is stuck at court right now with no easy way out. I don't think I've ever seen him this cornered." The memory alone was satisfying. Step by step, just as Iris had laid

it out. First, the negotiation roster had been adjusted. A few extra names added here and there, nothing too obvious. Some were loyal to him. Others appeared neutral, or even inclined toward the Duke of Duskmoor.

But the key piece had always been Dominic. To most, Dominic belonged closer to Elira's side, tied through old associations and expected loyalties. What no one accounted for was his appetite for risk, or the debts that came with it. That had made him useful. Second, Dominic had been guided to move closer to Cassian in full view of others, speaking up for him at the right moments, backing him just enough to build the impression that he stood on Duskmoor's side. He played it convincingly. Third came the fracture.

After the first round of talks ended smoothly, a minor attendant approached Prince Roderic under the pretense of returning something misplaced, using the moment to plant just enough doubt to unsettle him. It worked. By the next meeting, Roderic's tone had sharpened, his patience gone. What should have been a discussion turned into something far more volatile. And that bronze everyone talked about? Roderic never threw it. Dominic moved when he was supposed to, drawing attention at just the right moment, and while every eye followed him, the real blow came from elsewhere.

From the outside, it told a very clean story. A man closely tied to Cassian stepping in to protect him, struck down in the process. One move, two results. Tension escalated, and the image of Roderic as the aggressor took hold without effort. From there, anything Cassian did next would look justified. 213 :49 pm P Ppp. Chapter 483 The Shape of Control Finished Alaric tapped the edge of the desk lightly, still riding the high of it. "You were right about one thing I almost ignored. Keeping the scene clean. No obvious struggle, no chaos.

I thought it might be overkill at the time." Iris's tone remained even. "If it had looked like a fight, people would have questioned it. When something appears too orderly, it invites a closer look. And when people start looking closely, they begin to notice the smaller details." She paused, just slightly. "Once they believe they've uncovered something themselves, they rarely question it."

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Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 484 Playing the Longer Game Alaric studied her with clear approval. "You've got a talent for this." Finished His mood remained high, though something sharper crept in beneath it. "A Nordian prince is dead. That's not something that can be brushed aside. My uncle is stuck at court now, and all that's left is to see how Father handles it. Hopefully he doesn't lose his nerve at the last moment." Iris shook her head gently. "He won't. Even if he feels inclined to protect his brother, he cannot ignore what this means for the realm.

Nordia will expect a response, and the King cannot appear weak. Whatever he decides will reflect that first." Alaric leaned forward slightly. "So what does that look like?" Iris considered briefly before answering. "It won't be light, because that would invite further pressure. But it won't be severe enough to break him either. The Duke still holds his place within the royal family. Most likely, some of his authority will be reduced, his movements restricted, and his income cut back. There will be a formal censure, and perhaps a temporary loss of certain honors.

Enough to satisfy appearances, without going too far." The answer didn't sit right with Alaric.

Alaric frowned. "That doesn't solve my problem. Give it time and he recovers. Then what?

Where does that leave me with Ella?" Iris did not hesitate. "If you want the Duchess, removing him entirely is not the only path forward. There are other ways to shift the balance." That caught

his interest. "Such as?" "You should go to His Majesty and speak in the Duke's favor." Alaric's eyes narrowed slightly. "So I come off as reasonable. Loyal. Someone who values family." "That is part of it," Iris said.

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"But not the part that matters most. Think about what comes next. The court qualification trials."

Recognition flickered across his expression. "In past years, the Duke oversaw them. He built a reputation for fairness, and that left an impression. Many who entered service through those court qualification trials respect him for it. Some of them quietly align with him even now. They are not the most powerful figures yet, but they are everywhere, and in time, they will matter."

She met his gaze directly. "This year, he cannot take that role. Someone else will be chosen.

If you position yourself well, that responsibility can fall to you. Handle it properly, and you gain more than reputation. You gain influence over the next generation entering court." The implication settled in. 1/3 2:49 pm P P pp. Chapter 484 Playing the Longer Game "It strengthens your position now and secures it for the future." Finished Alaric studied the young woman standing before him, her posture modest, her gaze lowered, yet every word she spoke carried clarity and structure. The more he listened, the more his approval deepened. Keeping her close was the right call.

If he had not acted on that passing moment of mercy back then, he would not be standing here now with everything unfolding so smoothly in his favor. His thoughts drifted, unbidden, to Daphne. She had someone like this at her side and still managed to end up where she was now. Pathetic. Leaning forward slightly, Alaric rested an arm against the table and asked, his tone curious but edged, "When you were serving the Garrett family, did it never occur to you to

advise her?" Iris kept her head lowered, her voice calm and even. "Daphne has always been strong-willed and certain of her own judgment.

She tends to act on what feels right in the moment, without much concern for what may follow. Someone in my position could speak, but rarely be heard. Even when I did offer suggestions, they were usually dismissed." She paused just enough to let the contrast settle before continuing. "It is different with you, Your Highness. You listen. You weigh things carefully. That is why I am able to be of any real use." The answer landed exactly where it was meant to. A faint smile touched Alaric's lips. "You've got a way with words." And more than that, she had substance to back them up.

His gaze lingered on her for a moment longer. A shame, really. Her features were too plain, too restrained, the kind that faded into the background no matter how long one looked. Nothing like Elowen. Elowen carried a warmth that drew the eye without effort, something bright and alive that made people want to stay near her. And she was clever too. If things had unfolded differently, if fate had not taken its strange turns and placed her at his uncle's side instead, then the one standing here now, offering insight, sharing these quiet moments, would have been her.

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The thought dimmed his mood more than he cared to admit. Finished He straightened slightly, the earlier spark in his expression fading. With a casual flick of his hand, his tone turned indifferent. "You've done well. Go get some rest. I'll send for you when I need you." "I understand. Your Highness." Iris inclined her head, composed as ever, showing no sign that she

had noticed the shift in his mood. She withdrew quietly, the door closing behind her without a sound.

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Finished At Falconcrest Manor, Elowen's carriage had just begun to turn toward the side gate when another carriage rolled out from within the estate, clearly on its way out. The driver spotted the Duskmoor crest at once and pulled the reins, bringing the horses to a controlled stop. Elowen pushed the carriage door open and looked out. At the same moment, the curtain across from her was lifted from inside, revealing Sylvia's face, pale and tight with worry.

Just behind her, Piers sat angled toward the door, his presence steady even in silence. 'Elowen!'

Sylvia leaned forward, her voice quick and breathless. "We were just about to come find you.

We heard what happened to my cousin, and we couldn't sit still another moment." A flicker of warmth passed through Elowen's chest. Before she could respond, Piers spoke, his tone calm but firm. "Since you're already here, there's no need or us to go out. This isn't something to discuss at the gate. Let's take it inside." Sylvia blinked, then gave a quick nod. "Right. Of course. I wasn't thinking straight.

Come on, let's go in." The two carriages passed through the gates one after the other. With Mira's help, Elowen stepped down, and Sylvia immediately moved to her side, taking her arm as they walked together. Piers led the way without another word, his pace measured. They reached his study not long after. He dismissed every servant, shut the door himself, then crossed the room to check the windows before finally turning back to them. You don't need to panic just yet, Your Grace," he said, getting straight to the point.

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"As of now, there's nothing solid that ties the Duke of Duskmoor directly to the Nordian prince's death." Elowen met his gaze. "Then how did this land on him?" Piers exhaled slowly before answering. "From what I've gathered through contacts in the court offices, the attack happened in a narrow service lane while the prince was being escorted back to his residence. A night patrol came across it first. By the time they arrived, the place had already been... cleaned." He chose the word carefully.

"There were bodies, the prince and several of his guards, and a few dropped weapons, but almost no signs of a struggle. Hardly any blood left behind. It didn't look natural. It looked like someone had taken the time to erase what happened." Elowen's eyes narrowed slightly. 1/3 2:49 pm P Ppp. Chapter 485 Crossing Paths 0121 Finished Piers continued, "The prince was still barely alive when they found him. Given who he was, the guards didn't hesitate. They carried him straight toward the palace for treatment and sealed off both ends of the lane.

No one was allowed through." "His Majesty was woken in the middle of the night," he went on. "And when he heard, he was furious. He called in the senior officials immediately and ordered a full investigation. He wants answers, and he wants them fast." Piers paused briefly, then added, "At first, they found nothing. The scene was too clean, which only made it more suspicious. It wasn't until just before dawn that something changed." Elowen's voice stayed even. "That's when they tied it to him." Piers nodded. "Yes.

One of the deputy magistrates expanded the search area and found a bloodstained arrowhead lodged between stacked crates not far from the scene. It wasn't ordinary. The make, the balance, even the marking at the base all pointed to one thing. It matched the kind used by the elite guards at Duskmoor Manor." He let that settle before continuing. "That official had once served in the

northern campaigns and owed his advancement, at least in part, to the duke. When he recognized what he'd found, he didn't report it. He hid it." Sylvia sucked in a breath. "But it didn't stay hidden," Piers said.

"Within half an hour, his actions were exposed, and the evidence was placed directly before His Majesty." Elowen's fingers pressed lightly together. First, a scene wiped so clean it raised suspicion instead of removing it. Then, the perfect person to find the one piece that mattered. And finally, that same person exposed for trying to bury it. This wasn't just planned. It was staged, step by step, with every reaction accounted for. For a fleeting second, she almost respected the mind behind it. Piers frowned. "That's the problem. There's no witness, no confession, nothing definitive.

But every piece of it points in the same direction. The court is already restless, and with a Nordian prince dead, people want answers. His Majesty doesn't have the luxury of waiting. Right now, the duke is in a very difficult position." Sylvia's expression tightened. "Who would go this far just to drag him down..." She turned to Elowen, determination breaking through her worry. "We should go to the palace and speak for him. We can't just sit here." Elowen shook her head, her voice steady. "No. Right now, the last thing he needs is to be pulled out." 2:50 pm P PPP.
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Chapter 486 The Better Position Sylvia frowned. "What do you mean?" Finished Elowen leaned back slightly, her tone calm but precise. "Right now, the pressure is coming from every direction. The court, the public, and Nordia. His Majesty has to respond quickly to keep things from spiraling. But without real proof, this can't turn into anything that truly destroys him. At most, it

becomes a formal punishment meant to settle the situation." She paused briefly, then continued.
"And more importantly, he didn't do this. That matters.

The case looks tight if you follow it step by step, but if you step back and look at the whole structure, there are gaps. Enough of them. Staying in the palace keeps him inside the center of the storm, where nothing can be done to him quietly." And if I know him at all, that is exactly where he wants to be. Inside the royal residence, in the king's private study, Theodric finally dismissed the last of the arguing officials after another exhausting council. The silence that followed felt almost unreal. He stepped inside, already worn thin, only to stop short.

Cassian sat by the window, completely at ease, writing as though nothing in the world required his attention. Light filtered through the tall panes, settling across his profile in a way that made the whole scene feel strangely calm. Too calm. Cassian glanced up. "You're back." That was enough to set Theodric off. "I've been dealing with chaos all morning," he snapped, irritation breaking through. "And you're sitting here like this. What are you writing?" His gaze dropped to the page. Cassian shifted slightly, letting him see.

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Theodric read the opening line, then let out a sharp breath that turned into a disbelieving laugh. "You're writing to your wife? Now? Of all times?" Cassian set the pen down, his tone even. "If clearing my name were simple, I'd already be gone. The way everything unfolded, even I sound guilty when it's laid out." He lowered his gaze slightly. "I'm not as calm as I look. I just don't see the point in adding to your burden. Ella's alone, and she's 2:50 pm Chapter 486 The Better Position 0151 Finished carrying my child. She's probably worried.

If a letter can ease that even a little, then it's worth writing." Theodric watched him for a moment, taking in the ease in his posture and the way he spoke, and found that the irritation he had been holding onto simply refused to rise again. He understood the situation perfectly well. Cassian had neither the reason nor the need to assassinate a Nordan prince. This had all the markings of a calculated move, one that aimed to disrupt the negotiations while bringing Cassian down at the same time.

And looking at the court, at how fiercely Isla and the faction tied to the Crown Prince's household were pushing the matter, Theodric already knew where to point his suspicion. To him, at its core, this was still a matter within his own house. But that was not the most urgent concern. Not now. What truly mattered was Nordia. Theodric had no desire to be dragged into another war. The fighting in the southwestern marches had already stretched his patience thin. And now a Nordan prince had died in Vanelle. That alone was enough to set things spiraling. This has to be contained, and fast.

Someone would have to answer for it. Because if Nordia began to stir, if outrage turned into action, then the stability of Avenlor itself would be at risk. Theodric crossed the room and sat down across from him, pressing his fingers briefly to his temple. "This has spread too far. The court is watching, and I can't delay much longer. I'll have to make a ruling soon. When I do... if it means you take the fall, even for appearances..." He didn't finish the thought. Cassian rose and inclined his head in a formal bow. "Whatever you decide, I'll accept it.

If it helps steady things, then I won't argue." The words were measured, exactly what they needed to be. Theodric watched him, something unreadable passing through his expression before he finally waved a hand. "I'll handle it." Back in the study at Falconcrest Manor, Elowen's

voice cut cleanly through the tension. "So here's where we stand. We go through every part of this carefully and find where it breaks." 2/3 50 pm P Ppp. Chapter 486 The Better Position Her fingers tapped lightly against her knee as she thought it through. 0190 Finished He would never order something like this.

And without his word, no one at Duskmoor Manor would act on their own. That kind of discipline doesn't allow it." Her gaze sharpened. So that arrowhead leads to one of two possibilities. Either it's a carefully made imitation..." She paused, then finished evenly. ...or someone found a way to get their hands on the real thing, through the manor itself or through the raftsmen and supply lines connected to it." 2.5K 3/3 admin

Chapter 487 Storm at the Bookshop Finished As Elowen followed the thread of it further, her thinking sharpened into something clean and decisive, each step leading naturally to the next. "We start with the arrowheads. Check the manor's armory records and any smiths who supply them. Find out exactly who could have handled that kind of work, then trace it back. If we follow it far enough, we'll find proof that clears His Grace." There was another gap in the matter, one that involved Dominic, the Deputy of the King's Works.

Elowen had learned that from Scarlet, but with Piers and Sylvia present, she chose not to bring it up yet. Sylvia stood to the side, watching her closely, something in her expression quietly shifting. She had once thought her sister-in-law gentle to a fault, even a little naïve. Within the walls of a household, their mother would never have been able to outmaneuver her, that much was obvious. But this was different. Elowen handled matters that brushed against court and law with the same steady ease, laying everything out as though she had done it a hundred times before.

Sylvia felt something tighten in her chest. She wanted to become someone like that. 'If there's anything you need from me,' Piers said, his tone firm, 'just tell me. I'll take care of it.' Elowen inclined her head. "I appreciate that." With the matter settled for now, she rose and took her leave. After leaving Falconcrest Manor, Elowen had the carriage turn toward Cloudmere Lane. Her aunt was there, and after hearing what had happened at Duskmoor Manor, she would surely be worried. And beyond that, the bookshop's affairs had always been handled through Anson and Finn.

With trouble breaking out now, Finn was unlikely to be at ease, and she wanted to see it firsthand. They had not yet reached the shop when the carriage slowed, then stopped. Noise carried through the street, loud and restless. Mira leaned closer to the door. "Your Grace, something's going on ahead." Elowen pushed the carriage door open just enough to look out. A crowd had gathered. Right in front of Finn's shop. With the door open, the voices became clearer, sharper. 1/3 2:50 pm P PPP. Chapter 487 Storm at the Bookshop Finished "Everyone knows this shop answers to Duskmoor Manor.

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People kept quiet before, but now the Duke's been accused of killing a Nordinan envoy and taken into custody. Why is this place still allowed to operate?" All they sell are scandalous stories, filling young people's heads with foolish ideas about love and defiance." That's right. My daughter used to listen to everything we said. She's only fifteen, and after reading that Ode to Springlight, she refuses the match we arranged. Now she says she wants a post in the royal household. "Shut it down. This shop has no business staying open." Elowen's gaze cooled. This was not just outrage.

It was targeted. Whether these people were truly offended, or simply pushed forward by someone else looking to weaken Duskmoor Manor while it was already under pressure, that was not yet clear. A sudden crash rang out. Wood splintered. The noise surged all at once. Through the shifting crowd, Elowen saw a heavy table at the entrance overturned and smashed onto the ground. Books scattered across the street, loose pages skidding, a jar of ink shattered and spreading dark stains over the stones. "My books. My table!" Finn shouted as he lunged at the man who had done it, a thickset brute.

The two of them collided and grappled, stumbling over the wreckage. Elowen's expression tightened slightly. "Anson." "Your Grace. He stepped forward immediately. Her gaze stayed fixed ahead. "Clear the way. We're going in." "At once. Though her carriage was modest, Cassian had long since arranged for her to travel under quiet protection. The men at her side were chosen from the ranks, broad-shouldered and disciplined, their presence alone enough to shift the mood of a crowd.

At the order, several moved forward together, cutting through the gathering with controlled force, pressing people aside until a clear path opened. The carriage rolled ahead and stopped directly in front of the shop, beside the scattered books and broken 2/3 2:50 pm P PPP. Chapter 487 Storm at the Bookshop wood. The street fell still. The driver set the step in place. Under a dozen watchful eyes, Elowen took Mira's hand and stepped down. Finished The man who had overturned the table was already restrained, his arms locked tight by two guards as he struggled and glared, breath heavy.

Elowen looked at him, her voice calm, steady, and impossible to ignore. "You're going to pay for what you broke." The man jerked against the hold, his voice rising. "Why should I? This place

sells garbage that twists people's heads. Smashing it was doing everyone a favor." Elowen lifted her voice just enough to carry across the crowd. "Because that's how the law works. Any shop that prints or sells books in Avenlor must be registered and licensed through the city office. This one is. It's legal, properly recorded, and allowed to operate." She held his gaze without wavering.

"No order has been given to shut it down. No court has ruled these books forbidden. So tell me, who decided you get to enforce the law in the King's place?" The man faltered, his bluster slipping. 2.5K B 3/3 admin

Chapter 488 Her Ground Finished Elowen did not spare him another glance. Instead, she turned to Finn, whose face was bruised but whose eyes were still sharp with anger. "That table. What was it worth?" Finn wiped the blood from his lip and answered loudly, "Your Grace, good cedar, made by a master craftsman. With labor included, five dollars." "Alright." Elowen nodded and looked back at the man. "Five dollars. You'll pay the shopkeeper. And as for his injuries..." She glanced at Finn's face, about to continue. Finn scratched his head, a little sheepish.

"Your Grace, I went at him first." Elowen lifted a brow slightly. "I see." Then that part settled itself. She let it go and turned her attention outward. The people gathered here were not random passersby. Their clothes, their posture, the way they spoke, all of it pointed to households with standing. Stewards, lesser heirs, men used to having their word carried out without question.

Why were they here? The answer came together quickly. Some had likely taken offense when Duskmoor Manor reshaped its businesses, especially the changes tied to Stargazer Pavilion.

Now that Cassian stood accused, they saw an opening. Others had daughters or young women in their families who had read her books and begun to question the lives laid out for them. That kind of shift rarely sat well with those who expected obedience. So that was why they had come,

and it had never really been about the shop at all, because from the very beginning their target had been her, and what they left behind was not damage but a warning. They believed the Duke was finished, and that she would be next. A faint chill passed through Elowen's thoughts.

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They think I'm already on the losing side. Her expression, however, remained composed. Her voice rang clear across the street. "The attack on the Nordan prince is under investigation. If any of you have real evidence, something you saw or heard with your own eyes and ears, then bring it to the city court. Step forward properly, give your name, and testify." She let the silence stretch for a beat. 143 2:50 pm P p pp. Chapter 488 Her Ground Finished "But if all you have are rumors, then stop repeating them like truth and dragging others through the mud." Her gaze swept across them.

"And even if His Grace were stripped of his title, I would still stand where I do now. I hold my rank by royal decree, and I am the sole daughter of Hale Manor. Ode to Springlight and Tales of Luminara are my work. You don't have to like them. You don't have to read them. But if you have not read them, or simply don't agree with them, that does not give you the right to call them corrupt and tear this place apart." Her eyes narrowed slightly. "This shop stands under my protection. If you come here to cause trouble again, you answer to me.

If anyone doubts that, you're free to find out." The weight of her words settled heavily over the street. Around her, the guards rested their hands near their swords, silent but unmistakable. The crowd's confidence broke. People exchanged uneasy looks, then began to drift away in twos and threes. Before long, the street started to clear. At the far edge of the thinning crowd, Elowen caught sight of someone familiar. He stood apart, hands clasped behind his back, dressed in a dark coat, watching without stepping in. But his eyes had never left her. Alaric.

Elowen looked away almost at once, unwilling to linger even a second longer than necessary. She turned back to the restrained man. "Pay what you owe, and you walk away." The man no longer argued. His hands shook as he pulled out a worn pouch. "I'll pay, I'll pay..." Finn stepped forward, counted out five dollars carefully, then pushed the pouch back into his hands. "I ake what's owed. Not a coin more." Elowen gave a small nod. "Let him go." The guards released him. He stumbled off without looking back. With the matter settled, Elowen felt some of the tension ease from her shoulders.

She turned toward the shop, ready to head inside with Finn. "Ella." The voice came from behind her, low and deliberate. It made her skin crawl. Elowen turned slowly. A few steps away, Alaric stood there, a faint smile playing at his lips. 2:50 pm Chapter 488 Her Ground 44 Finished When she finally looked at him, that smile deepened, touched with quiet amusement. "Ella, what is it this time. Going to remind me I should be calling you my aunt by marriage?" 3/3 admin

Chapter 489 No One to Hide Behind Finished A slow, dangerous smile spread across Alaric's face, something sharp and mean flickering in his eyes as he looked at her. "It's a shame, really. Once my father's decree is issued, my uncle won't be the great Duke of Duskmoor anymore. And you... you won't be someone I need to treat with respect." As he spoke, he started forward, clearly intending to close the distance. He barely moved before one of the manor guards stepped in, cutting him off cleanly and placing himself between Alaric and Elowen with solid, unmoving presence.

Alaric was forced to stop. Irritation flashed across his face, but it didn't last. The corners of his mouth lifted again, almost amused. He leaned slightly, looking past the guard, his gaze lingering on Elowen with a kind of greedy intensity. 'Ella, why make this harder than it needs to be? If my

uncle falls, you lose your protection. A woman on her own doesn't have many options in this world. Sooner or later, you'll come to me. If you push me away now and leave things this tense between us, what do you think happens to you later?" He spoke as if he were offering her something reasonable.

Elowen let out a soft, humorless laugh, her eyes cold. "Did you walk out of the Crown Prince's Wing without your wits today, or is this just how you usually sound?" The smile on Alaric's face faltered. Elowen's voice turned sharp, every word clean and deliberate. "Even without His Grace, I still hold my title by royal decree, granted openly before the court. And the child I carry is still of the Valebourne line. rightful and undeniable. Rely on you?" Her gaze moved over him slowly, openly dismissive. "Daphne tried that once.

She played every angle she could think of, pushed every boundary she dared. Where did that leave her? Shut away in the Secluded Wing, staring at stone walls. You really think you're worth that kind of gamble?" The blunt force of her words hit him all at once, leaving him speechless for a brief moment. The Elowen he remembered had never spoken like this, never this sharp, never this cutting. And yet, something about it felt familiar. Where had he seen this before? Before he could follow the thought, Elowen had already turned away from him.

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She spoke to the guards beside her, her tone steady and unquestionable. "Keep watch. No one gets near me. That includes the Crown Prince. If he takes even a single step closer, don't wait for permission. Remove him." Her gaze didn't waver. "If anything comes of it, I'll answer for it myself before Their Majesties" She didn't look at Alaric again, as if even acknowledging him would be beneath her. 1/3 Chapter 489 No One to Hide Behind Finished Instead, she walked

straight toward the bookshop. Mira had already stepped ahead and pushed the door open. Elowen entered.

The heavy wooden door shut firmly behind her, cutting him off completely. Alaric instinctively moved to follow, but the guard stepped forward again, one hand settling on the hilt of his sword in clear warning. Alaric stopped. He knew exactly what kind of men these were. They had followed Cassian through war, not court games. Titles alone meant nothing to them. If he forced his way in, they would act. So he stayed where he was, staring at the closed door. It had been a while since he had seen her. And yet she had only grown more striking. Perhaps it was the pregnancy.

The softness of youth had given way to something fuller, warmer, more luminous. Her skin seemed to catch the light, her features cool and composed, carrying a beauty that felt distant and dangerous at once. It didn't matter. She still hasn't seen things clearly. She's clinging to him like it means something. Once I take control of the court qualification trials and start holding real power, she'll understand. She'll come to me on her own. She'll ask for protection. She'll ask for my favor. He had handled the court qualification trials in his previous life. And he had done it perfectly.

His father had praised him without reserve. As he stepped into the carriage waiting outside the Crown Prince's Wing, Elowen's earlier expression surfaced again in his mind. He went still as the realization hit him all at once. There was something in her eyes, in the way she spoke, in that calm, razor-edged tone that didn't need to rise to carry weight. It was Cassian. There was no mistaking it. The thought settled in his chest and left behind a sharp, bitter edge.

He hadn't expected that after only a few months at Duskmoor Manor, she would already carry traces of his 2/3 Chapter 489 No One to Hide Behind uncle so clearly. Even the way she spoke now echoed him. And she was carrying his child. Alaric's fingers tightened slowly. When I take her back, I'll strip every trace of him away. Every last one. And when I'm done, she'll be mine again. My Ella. Finisher Inside the bookshop, the light was low, and the faint scent of ink and parchment lingered in the air. Finn made no move to tend to the bruise on his face. Elowen spoke in a calm, even tone.

"What happened today isn't something you need to carry with you. The shop stays open. Business continues as usual. I'll have two men from the manor posted here so nothing like this happens again." Her voice softened just slightly. "You and everyone else here can go about your work without worry. Like I said before, His Grace may not be here, but I am. No one is going to push us around." 2.5K H 3/3 admin

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 490 What Holds 0:30 Finished Finn nodded quickly. "Your Grace, even if you hadn't said that, I would still trust you completely." Elowen gave a small nod and asked about the shop's recent business. Finn answered carefully, going through everything in detail. When they had nearly finished, Mira stepped in quietly from outside and leaned close, lowering her voice. "Your Grace, the Crown Prince's carriage has already left." Elowen's expression remained steady. "All right." She rose and smoothed the folds of her skirt.

"See that everything here is put back in order and settle everyone down. I'm heading next door for a bit." Finn responded at once. "Of course, Your Grace." He stood to walk her out, then hesitated before speaking again. "Please take care of yourself. Leave the shop to me. You don't

need to worry about anything here." The door was opened from outside. Elowen stepped out, her hand resting lightly on Mira's arm. She had just reached the entrance when she spotted two familiar figures approaching. The woman in front was dressed simply, her expression gentle and warm. Her aunt.

The moment she saw Elowen, her face lit up with relief. She hurried forward, taking Elowen's hands and looking her over carefully. "Ella, there you are. I was already planning to come by the manor today no matter what. Then I heard the commotion from the tavern and asked around. As soon as I heard you were here, I came straight over." Elowen smiled softly. "I'm fine. I'm sorry to have worried you." Her aunt let out a quiet breath and gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. She was not alone. A young man stood beside her, tall and composed, his features clean and refined. Elowen looked toward him.

"Josh, did you receive the letter and the books I sent over a few days ago?" Josh stepped forward and inclined his head respectfully. "Yes, Your Grace. I received everything and have already gone through them carefully. Thank you for thinking of me. And thank you for taking in Nikki. With her at the manor, my mother and I are both at ease. We do worry sometimes that she might trouble you or disrupt your peace," Elowen shook her head with a small smile. "Not at all. Nikki is thoughtful and well-behaved. She keeps me 1/3 5:36 pm PPP. Chapter 490 What Holds company.

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If anything, the house feels livelier with her there." 9:30 Finished As they spoke, they moved together to a quiet private room upstairs in the tavern next door, one that overlooked the street but remained comfortably secluded. An attendant brought in a cup of fine coffee along with a selection of small pastries, then withdrew, closing the door behind him. They had already

exchanged greetings outside, so once seated, her aunt got straight to the point. "Ella, we've heard what's been happening at Duskmoor Manor. I've been worried sick.

I reached out through a few acquaintances to get word from the palace, and Josh went to speak with Edmund." She lowered her voice slightly. "What we're hearing is far more reassuring than the rumors going around. The attack on the Nordian prince is serious, and suspicion may be circling your household, but those who understand the court don't believe His Majesty is blind to what doesn't add up. Even if he needs to hand down some form of punishment to satisfy appearances, it likely won't be severe.

At the end of the day, he does not turn lightly against his own blood." Elowen had already reached the same conclusion earlier that day. But hearing it now didn't feel unnecessary. Instead, something in her chest softened. For just a moment, her eyes grew warm. Being alive like this... it really is something worth holding on to. And having another chance at it... even more so. In her previous life, she had believed she had lost everything. When Alaric turned away from her, she had let herself fall into despair, as though nothing else in the world could matter.

But the world was far larger than that. A person did not live on love alone. ! Family, friendship, and the quiet, steady presence of people who cared, all of it woven together into something that held firm when everything else felt uncertain. All of it came together, thread by thread, forming something strong enough to hold her up. This life had shown her that. Given her more than she had ever seen before. The lingering disgust from earlier had already faded, replaced by something steadier, warmer. Her hatred for Alaric remained. If anything, it ran deeper.

But it no longer had the power to shake her. 2/3 1:36 pm ppp. Chapter 490 What Holds 0:40

Finished Elowen nodded. "Thank you, both of you, for everything you've done. To be honest, I'm

not too worried about His Grace. His Majesty is fair, and His Grace is innocent. The truth will come out." Her gaze steadied, clear and composed. "What matters now is that we don't sit back and wait. We need to Find out what really happened." Her aunt studied her for a long moment, emotion flickering in her eyes, then let out a soft breath. "Ella... you've truly changed.

Sometimes when I look at you, I'm reminded of your mother when she was young. Decisive, clear-headed." A faint smile followed. "But you're not only like her. You've also got that quiet strength your sister-in-law Gentle on the surface, but unshakable underneath." 2.5K (3/3 5:36 pm admin