

# Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 491 The Thread She Almost Missed Finished Elowen felt the tension ease from her expression, her features softening as the thought settled more clearly in her mind. She had never become who she was on her own. There were traces of others in her, woven in so deeply they could no longer be separated. Her mother. Her sister-in-law. Cassian. The people she loved, and who had shaped her in return. Everything they had given her had quietly taken root, becoming part of her without her even noticing when it happened.

They stayed a while longer, asking carefully after her condition, offering small but earnest reminders, each one grounded in concern rather than formality. When it grew late, Elowen rose to leave. Her aunt walked her all the way out to the front of the confectioner's shop, holding her hand as if reluctant to let go. "Ella, once you're back, you need to slow down and take care of yourself. You're not just looking after your own health anymore. Whatever is happening outside, let the men handle it, and trust His Majesty to make the call. Don't carry all of it on your own.

Your husband has weathered worse than this. He'll come through." Elowen nodded, already about to reassure her. But just as the words formed, something shifted sharply in her thoughts. Cassian would be fine. That part, she did not doubt. But everything leading up to this felt too deliberate. Would Alaric and Iris really go this far just to see him reprimanded? That kind of effort for such a small outcome made no sense. No. There's something else. There has to be. She simply had not seen it yet. When she returned to Duskmoor Manor, she went straight to the study without stopping.

The air in the estate still carried a quiet weight, but after her instructions earlier that day, everything was running as it should, Servants moved with purpose, no one lingering, no one daring to fall behind. She sat and began drafting orders, laying out in careful detail how the arrowhead was to be traced, where to look, who to contact, and how to keep it from drawing attention. Once finished, she summoned two of the most trusted leaders among Cassian's shadow guards and gave her instructions in a low, controlled voice, making it clear that speed and secrecy mattered equally.

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1/3 5:36 pm PPP Chapter 491 The Thread She Almost Missed They accepted without hesitation and disappeared as quietly as they had come. The room settled into stillness again. 9:30 Finished Elowen leaned back slightly, her thoughts already shifting. The arrowhead was one thread. Dominic was another. And unlike the arrow, Dominic was not an object that could be hidden away. He was a man who moved, spoke, spent coin, and made mistakes. That meant he could be followed.

At that moment, Scarlet stepped in with a freshly prepared herbal infusion meant to steady the nerves, and Nikki followed close behind, almost glued to her side. Neither of them looked at ease. Scarlet set the cup down carefully. "Your Grace, I went over everything again. There's something else I remembered about Dominic. When he drinks, he talks more than he should. More than once, he mentioned gambling houses in the southern quarter. One along Whitecloud Street, and another near Sixspire Tower called Greenwood Hall.

If he's that deep into it, there's a good chance someone there knows who he deals with, or where his money comes from. I thought it might help." Elowen wrapped her hands around the cup, letting the warmth settle into her fingers before she looked "It does help," she said. "You notice

things most people miss." And once again, she felt certain she had made the right choice bringing Scarlet back from the Stargazer Pavilion. With this, Dominic would be far easier to track. Nikki, who had been watching quietly, suddenly spoke up, her voice small but determined.

"Your Grace, I don't want my wages this month." Elowen let out a soft laugh. "You've been worried about money in this house again, haven't you?" Nikki nodded, completely serious. "Of course I have. The boy who runs errands at the court told me that once someone's locked up, you have to spend a lot of coin to get them out. And His Grace isn't just anyone, so it must take even more, You can use mine first." Her reasoning was simple, but her sincerity left no room for doubt. Elowen's expression softened. "That's kind of you. Truly.

But your brother is sitting for the court qualification trials this year, isn't he? He'll need that money." Nikki tilted her head, thinking it through with great effort, then shook it firmly. "If he doesn't pass this year, he can try again next year. He's still got time. But His Grace can't just stay locked up that long. 2/3 5:36 pm PPP Chapter 491 The Thread She Almost Missed Getting him out matters more." Elowen was still smiling when the realization struck. It didn't creep in slowly or take shape over time. It hit her all at once, clean and sharp, like a lock clicking open.

The court qualification trials. How did I miss something that obvious? 0:30 Finished Every year, the court qualification trials in Vanelle had been overseen by Cassian. His reputation alone was enough to keep anyone from attempting anything underhanded, and his judgment had always been trusted. Because of that, scholars across the realm, especially those without powerful backing, had come to respect him deeply. But now, with him held in the palace and unable to act, that responsibility would fall to someone else. And that meant opportunity. 2.5K admin

Chapter 492 Where It Truly Leads The memory came back to her with unsettling clarity. In her previous life, at this same point in time, Cassian had been unconscious, and the entire court qualification trials process had been handed over to Alaric. She had been in the Crown Prince's Wing then. { Finished She remembered hearing about it, a disruption during the court qualification trials. Not large enough to shake the kingdom, but significant enough to matter. At the time, she had not thought much of it. Now, she saw it differently. Iris had been involved.

And if that was the case, then everything happening now pointed in one direction. This was never about Cassian alone. It was about the court qualification trials. Elowen's fingers tightened slightly against the edge of the table.. That changed everything. She could not afford to wait and see what would unfold. She had to act first. n the royal study, Theodric was working through a stack of reports when something crossed his mind. Cassian." By the window, Cassian lounged comfortably against a cushioned seat, completely absorbed in the book in his hands. The title was clear. Ode to Springlight.

His wife's work. And precisely because of that, he had avoided reading it in front of her. Elowen was far too easy to fluster, and he knew she would not last a moment before turning red and snatching it away. Now, with nothing to do but wait inside the palace, he finally had the chance to read it properly, And he was enjoying it far more than he had expected. The writing was clean, vivid, full of quiet intelligence. The title she had been granted suited her perfectly. Which was why he did not respond at all. "Cassian," Theodric called again, louder this time. 1/3 1:36 pm PPP.

Chapter 492 Where It Truly Leads Finished Cassian finally made a vague sound of acknowledgment, though his eyes never left the page. "Mm. What is it?" This part is exactly how

she thinks. She didn't even change it. Theodric set his pen aside. "I asked you something." Only then did Cassian glance up, clearly distracted. "Go on." The court qualification trials are next month. You're not in a position to oversee them. Who do you think should take your place?" There's no shortage of capable men in court," Cassian replied, entirely unbothered.

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"You have options." Do you have a recommendation?" Cassian considered for half a heartbeat, then said lightly, "Let Ella do it." Theodric stared at him, then let out a short laugh. "Have you lost your senses? That's the court qualification trials. You want your wife in charge of it?" He waved a hand dismissively. "Go back to your book." Cassian smiled, completely unbothered. "You asked." He was only half serious. But only half. The truth was, there were not many who truly fit the role. The position required authority, credibility, and enough weight to keep others in check.

Which meant, in the end, it would have to be given to one of the princes. And that was exactly the problem. Recommending either one would only complicate things further. So he said the one thing no one could take seriously. Still, in his mind, neither of them came close to Elowen. Theodric gave a short scoff. "I'll decide." Cassian let the matter drop, shifting back into a more comfortable position, ready to continue reading, before something else occurred to him.

"Your Majesty, one more thing." "What is it now?" "When you issue the decree regarding my punishment," Cassian said, his tone suddenly far more deliberate, "could you do it sooner rather than later?" 2/3 5:36 pm PPP Chapter 492 Where It Truly Leads Theodric raised a brow. "You're eager to be punished?" Finished "Not exactly," Cassian replied. "But once it's settled, I can leave properly. Ella is alone at the manor, and she's expecting. She's been worrying all day. I'd rather

get back to her." Theodric fell silent for a moment, then let out a quiet breath that could have been a laugh.

He's being held here under suspicion, and somehow he's still lounging around reading storybooks, like that's what matters most to him. At this point, it's hard to tell if he's being detained... or simply enjoying a comfortable stay at court. Theodric glanced at him. "So, shall I have the decree drawn up now?" Cassian answered quickly, "Not just yet." Theodric raised a brow. "What is it now? Changed your mind again?" Cassian lifted the book slightly. "I'm not finished with this. It's quiet here.

If I go back now, she'll be right there, and I won't get through a single page without her getting embarrassed." That did it. Theodric let out a short, sharp laugh. "Get out of my sight as soon as possible." By the time evening settled over Duskmoor Manor, the last light had faded from the sky. Iron wall sconces cast a steady glow along the corridors, their flames flickering gently against stone. In the dining hall, a full meal had been laid out, each dish prepared exactly to Elowen's taste, still warm, still fragrant. She sat alone at the table.

But the sight of it did nothing for her appetite. The weight in her chest lingered, dull and persistent, leaving her with no desire to eat at all. 3/3 admin

Chapter 493 The King's Judgment 041 Finished Even without the slightest appetite, Elowen still forced herself to pick up her fork, steadying her breathing as she recalled Cassian's words before he left, as though holding onto that memory alone might keep her from unraveling. Just as she was about to take a bite, a voice broke sharply from outside. "Your Grace!" Anson's tone was tight, urgent in a way that immediately felt wrong, so unlike his usual measured composure that it sent a sudden chill through her chest before she even turned her head.

By the time she looked toward the doorway, he had already reached the entrance, breath slightly uneven as he spoke. "The royal decree regarding His Grace has been issued." For a brief moment, Elowen didn't react, as if the words hadn't fully settled. Then the fork slipped from her hand, striking the table with a soft but unmistakable sound. She rose immediately, the movement too quick to be entirely steady. "What does it say? What happened to His Grace?" "I haven't heard the full decree yet," Anson replied without pause. "Lord Jett is already at the gates, and the procession is prepared.

They'll be inside at any moment to announce it." Her heart tightened. "And His Grace?" she pressed, her voice lower now, edged with something harder to hide. "Is he still being held at court?" She feared that more than anything, that judgment had already been passed while he remained beyond her reach. Anson was about to answer when the sound of approaching footsteps carried in from the courtyard, firm and deliberate, leaving no time for anything further. Elowen didn't wait.

She gathered her skirts and moved quickly toward the entrance, her pulse rising with every step as the flickering light from iron sconces along the corridor cast long, shifting shadows across the stone. Through the archway ahead, a procession was already entering. Quin led at the front, composed and formal, holding the rolled decree in both hands, its golden binding catching the light. And beside him was Cassian. The moment her eyes found him, everything else seemed to fall away.

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He looked unchanged, dressed simply as he had been when he left, his posture straight, his stride unhurried, his expression carrying that same distant calm that never seemed to break. Then he looked at her. Their eyes met. The reaction

came faster than she could stop it, a sharp sting behind her eyes as her vision blurred. Finished She had held herself together this entire time, keeping her thoughts clear, her decisions steady, never allowing anything to show in front of others. But now... He's back. He's safe.

The fragile balance she had maintained gave way all at once, something softer and far more vulnerable breaking through. Cassian saw it immediately. Something in his gaze shifted, subtle but unmistakable, as the corner of his mouth lifted just slightly before he gave the faintest shake of his head. He was telling her not to worry. Elowen drew in a breath, forcing the emotion back down before it could surface any further, blinking until her vision cleared again. Then she stepped forward. Quin stopped at the entrance to the hall and raised the decree, the movement precise and practiced.

Cassian lowered himself first into a formal bow. Elowen followed at his side, her posture straight, her gaze lowered to the stone beneath them. Quin unrolled the decree and began to read, his voice steady and carrying. "By command of His Majesty. Cassian has acted with grave misconduct and is hereby stripped of all official duties, relieved of rank, and deprived of his stipend, effective immediately." Elowen's fingers tightened slightly against the folds of her gown, though her expression did not change. Quin continued without pause.

"The estate formerly known as Duskmoor Manor is reassigned under the name Hale Manor and granted to Lady Elowen, who shall retain all provisions befitting her rank. Cassian is to remain within the estate under confinement and may not leave without express permission from His Majesty." When the decree ended, the silence that followed felt heavier than the words themselves. The punishment was severe. Everything that defined his position had been taken. 2/3

3:54 pm P p pp. Chapter 493 The King's Judgment And yet, it had stopped short of ruin. The estate remained intact.

He had not been taken away. There was still ground left to stand on. Cassian inclined forward in acknowledgment. "I accept His Majesty's decree." Elowen followed him, lowering herself in the same measured motion. Finished Quin stepped forward, handing over the decree, his tone easing just slightly. "His Majesty asks that you reflect on your conduct." Cassian accepted it with the same calm as before. "Understood." With that, Quin turned and departed, the procession withdrawing as smoothly as it had arrived, leaving the courtyard quiet once more.

Only then did Cassian turn fully toward her, extending his hand. "Ella, come here." Elowen placed her hand in his at once. Her fingers were cool. His were warm, steady, closing around hers as he helped her rise, the familiar solidity of his grip grounding her more than anything else had. Once she was standing, she said nothing, her gaze moving over him carefully, searching for anything out of place. Cassian let her look, a faint hint of amusement surfacing. "No injuries. Nothing worth worrying about. I was kept in His Majesty's study the whole time.

I couldn't leave, but I wasn't exactly suffering either." He added, almost casually, "I even wrote to you, more than once. Didn't get the chance to send it before I was sent back." Elowen didn't respond to that. Instead, she stepped closer, circling him slightly, her attention fixed, even catching his wrist to check more closely. 2.6K admin

it sounded like you expected something like this. Did you trust me to handle it?" Cassian considered briefly before answering. "I knew someone was making a move, but not exactly how. So I adjusted as things unfolded. But yes, I trusted you." He added another portion to her plate.

"You kept everything steady and handled it cleanly. That kind of clarity doesn't come easily."

Elowen smiled, tension finally easing as she managed to eat properly. 1/3 3:54 pm P p pp.

Chapter 494 What Remains Finished Later, he took her hand and led her back to rest.

After washing up, they settled into bed, and Cassian leaned in, his kisses slow and unhurried as they traced along her cheek and down her neck. Even then, Elowen held onto a thread of clarity.

"Now that you're confined here, you won't be overseeing the court qualification trials." Cassian gave a quiet acknowledgment. "It'll be Alaric or Caelan." "Probably Alaric," she said softly.

Cassian looked at her more closely. Elowen hesitated slightly. "Did that bother you?" He shook his head. Then leaned closer, lowering his voice just enough to shift the tone. "I was just thinking...

maybe you should check again. Just in case I missed something." The next morning, Elowen woke to the feeling of someone pressing insistently at her cheek, the sensation persistent enough to drag her slowly out of sleep. Still groggy, she frowned and kept her eyes closed, her voice thick with drowsiness. "Cassian... stop. Let me sleep a little longer..." The touch didn't stop. If anything, it became more deliberate, almost playful, fingers pressing and tugging just enough to keep her from slipping back into sleep. Elowen groaned and lifted a hand to push him away.

"Cassian, seriously..." A low laugh followed, warm and unmistakably amused. "You didn't even open your eyes, and you already knew it was me?" She forced her eyes open, blinking slowly as she looked up at him. "Who else would try something like that..." She had been about to say more. But then her vision cleared. And there he was. Close enough that every detail was impossible to ignore, the morning light softening the sharp lines of his features while his gaze

rested on her with quiet warmth. For a moment, she simply stared. She knew he looked good. But sometimes it still caught her off guard.

The irritation she had felt moments ago faded completely. 2/3 Chapter 494 What Remains Finished "Now that you're awake, don't go back to sleep," Cassian said, clearly entertained as he leaned down to kiss her lightly. "Come on. Time to eat." He was already dressed, hair neatly tied, everything in place, wearing a simple house robe, carrying the faint, clean scent of soap and fresh linen. When he kissed her, it lingered. The last of her sleepiness faded, replaced by a soft warmth that settled quietly in her chest. 2.6K admin

Finished Chapter 495 Close Quarters Elowen let out a soft, sleepy hum and shifted under the covers, turning into Cassian as if guided by instinct, her body settling comfortably against his. It took her a moment to fully wake. When she finally lifted her gaze, her eyes were still unfocused. "Lunch?" Cassian looked down at her, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "I came in at midday. Had to keep bothering you for a while before you finally stirred." She wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her cheek against his chest, her voice warm and unguarded.

"That's because you're here. When you're around, I don't have to stay on edge, so I sleep deeper." That answer clearly pleased him. He lowered his head slightly, brushing his chin against her hair in a slow, absent gesture. "Well, I've been sidelined for the time being. Looks like you're stuck with me." A soft laugh slipped from her. "That sounds like a good deal to me." They stayed that way for a long while, unhurried and entirely at ease, as though the outside world had been pushed far beyond the walls of the manor.

Eventually, Elowen tilted her head up, her expression turning more thoughtful. "How long is this confinement supposed to last? Did His Majesty give you any indication?" Cassian's tone

remained calm, almost indifferent. "At least until the truth comes out and clears my name. He'll need time to settle the court and smooth things over with Nordia." She nodded slowly, then straightened a little, something clearly clicking into place. "There's something I should have told you yesterday," she said, her tone sharpening with focus. "I've been thinking it through carefully.

What Iris did, arranging that attack on Prince Roderic and shifting the blame onto you, it doesn't feel like the end goal. It feels like a setup for something bigger." Cassian's gaze settled on her, attentive but quiet. "I think they're aiming at the court qualification trials," she continued.

"You're the one who usually oversees them, but now that you've been pushed out, that responsibility will pass to someone else. And realistically, the Crown Prince is the obvious choice." Cassian gave a slight nod.

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"That matches my thinking." Elowen leaned in a little closer, her voice lowering, though not out of fear so much as habit when discussing strategy. "I've already set things in motion. One group is tracing the origin of the arrowhead. Another is keeping an eye on Dominic. Scarlet mentioned a few gaming houses he frequents, and men like him always leave a trail if you watch long enough." She paused briefly before continuing. "As for Nordia, what happened to Prince Roderic is unfortunate, but mourning won't change anything. This is the kind of situation you turn to your advantage.

I've already 1/3 3:54 pm Chapter 495 Close Quarters Finished reached out to Zachary and Flowira. They both suspect something is off, so for now they're holding their position and waiting for my signal." When she reached the next point, her voice faltered slightly. Memories from another lifetime surfaced, unbidden. She had seen this play out before. She had heard conversations she was never meant to hear. But there was no way to explain that now. I can't tell

him I already lived through this once. He'd think I've lost my mind. She hesitated. Cassian didn't press her.

Instead, he reached out and tapped lightly at the tip of her nose, his tone shifting into something teasing and easy. "So, what's going on in that head of yours, Ella? You've got something else planned." 4 She laughed and nudged him lightly. "Why does everything I come up with sound suspicious to you?" He placed a hand over his chest as if offended. "All right, fair enough. Let's call it a well-crafted plan." His eyes lingered on her, warm with amusement. "So tell me, what is it?" Elowen curled her finger at him, inviting him closer. He leaned in without hesitation.

She rested a hand on his shoulder and spoke softly into his ear, laying out her idea in a low, steady murmur. As he listened, the ease in his expression faded into something sharper, more focused. When she finished, he turned his head slightly and answered just as quietly, Elowen's eyes lit up at once. She leaned closer again, adding to the plan, her tone quick with excitement. They stayed like that for quite some time, their voices low, their heads nearly touching, refining each detail between them. Only after they were done did Elowen suddenly pause, then let out a small laugh.

"You realize we're in our own room, right? Why are we acting like this is some kind of secret meeting?" Cassian didn't miss a beat. "Because it makes it more interesting." Then, after a brief pause, he added with clear intent, "Speaking of interesting, did you enjoy last night?" The memory hit her instantly. Color rushed to her face, spreading fast enough that even the tips of her ears turned red. She pressed her lips together and turned her head away. "I'm hungry.

I'm getting up." 2/3 3:54 pm Chapter 495 Close Quarters Finished Cassian knew exactly where her mind had gone and chose not to push further. He let it drop with a quiet chuckle as he rose

from the bed. "All right, I'll behave. Come on, let me help you get dressed." He moved with practiced familiarity, retrieving her clothes and helping her into them with steady, unhurried hands. As he adjusted the ties and smoothed the fabric, his palm brushed lightly over the gentle curve of her abdomen. Something seemed to occur to him, and he glanced up.

"Your birthday is coming up soon, isn't it?" Elowen looked at him, surprised. "How did you figure that out?" A faint smile touched his lips. "I pay attention to you." She muttered under her breath, almost unconsciously, "Not everything..." Not the parts that matter most. Not the life I've already lived once. Cassian caught it. "Something I'm missing?" She shook her head. & He didn't push, only saying lightly, "Then we'll celebrate it properly this time. And while we're at it, we can start turning the tide." 。 2.6K 3/3 admin

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 496 Family Matters Finished Elowen's decision to host her birthday celebration on a grand scale quickly spread across Vanelle, and before long, invitations had reached nearly every household with any standing in the city. The Baker family was, of course, among them. That morning, Clarisse followed her usual routine and went to attend her grandfather. The lord's health had been failing for some time, yet the discipline within the household remained unchanged. Formal greetings at dawn and dusk were still expected without exception.

Clarisse spoke gently at his bedside, keeping her tone soft and measured as she exchanged a few quiet words with him. When she noticed fatigue setting in, she excused herself with proper courtesy and withdrew. As she made her way back along the covered gallery toward her own courtyard, she ran into several of her cousins near the arched passage. 4 Albert and Liam were at

the front, both around the same age, with a few younger boys trailing behind them. Even before they reached her, the smell gave them away.

Wine, stale and heavy, mixed with cloying perfume that didn't belong in any respectable household. Clarisse instinctively lifted her handkerchief, her brows drawing together ever so slightly. It didn't take much imagination to guess where they had spent the night. She stopped, her posture composed, her tone calm but edged with disapproval. "Grandfather hasn't been well, and he needs quiet, especially while he's taking his medicine. You should show some restraint.

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If you go in like this and upset him, it won't reflect well on any of you." Albert, already in a sour mood from his hangover, let out a short, dismissive laugh. "If you're so concerned about him, maybe you should focus on getting yourself married into a proper household. That would do more to ease his mind than lecturing us." His gaze sharpened, his tone turning pointed. "Instead, you keep to yourself and spend all your time with your attendants. Especially that Geoffrey. He's hardly even whole anymore, is he?

What exactly are you doing with him?" The younger boys immediately lowered their heads, not daring to react. Clarisse's expression stilled, though her fingers tightened slightly at her side.

Liam stepped in quickly, forcing a smooth smile. "Don't take that to heart. He drank far too much last night and hasn't come to his senses yet. He doesn't even know what he's saying." Clarisse took a slow breath, then gave a faint smile that carried no warmth.

"I wouldn't waste my time arguing with someone who can barely stand straight." 1/2 Chapter 496 Family Matters Finished She let that settle before continuing, her tone still even but carrying a sharper edge beneath it. "Since we're talking about responsibility, the court qualification trials are

coming up. You might want to start taking your studies seriously. You failed two years ago, and then again last year. If it happens again this time..." She allowed the silence to stretch just enough to make them uncomfortable. Then she finished calmly, "You know Grandfather's temper.

At that point, it won't stop at a scolding. Your allowances will be cut, and you may find yourselves thinking twice before spending even a coin at a tavern." Liam's smile stiffened.

"That's... fair." Albert, however, bristled immediately. "And whose fault was that? We didn't fail because we didn't try. It was because the Duke of Duskmoor was in charge. The standards were ridiculous, the rules airtight. No room for anything. It wasn't just us. Even the Jones family barely got anyone through." He gave a scoff, confidence returning to his voice. "This year will be different.

The Duke's out, and everyone knows the Crown Prince will take over. That makes him family. You really think he won't look out for us? This time, we're passing." Liam nodded quickly in agreement. "Exactly." Clarisse felt a quiet, cold disdain settle in her chest. So this is what they rely on. Not skill, not discipline, just connections and favors. If she had been born a man, she would never have needed to depend on something so hollow. Out loud, her tone remained light, almost casual. "That reminds me. The Duchess of Duskmoor will be hosting a birthday celebration soon.

An invitation has already been sent to our household." Her gaze lingered on them, steady and composed. "Grandfather has made it clear that all of us are to attend. So make sure you're present." 2.6K 3 2/2 3:55 pm P ppp. admin

Chapter 497 A Name That Still Matters Finished Albert blinked, clearly still foggy, his expression slow to catch up. "The Duchess of Duskmoor... who's that supposed to be?" Liam shot him a look, a little sharper, a little quicker on the uptake. "You're kidding, right? That's Elowen." Elowen. The name hit harder than it should have. Albert froze for a split second, then straightened slightly as the haze of last night's drinking cleared from his mind far faster than before. Her. Liam, meanwhile, was already thinking ahead, his tone more practical.

"With the Duke stripped of his title, I doubt many people will bother showing up to her celebration. It doesn't exactly sound like an event worth attending." Clarisse let out a soft laugh, the kind that carried just enough edge to make the correction unmistakable. 'You're behind on your information,' she said smoothly. "The Duke may have been stripped of his title, and the estate has been reassigned, now officially known as Hale Manor, but that doesn't change her standing. The title 'Lady of Grace and Virtue' was granted to her personally by His Majesty and Queen Isla.

That rank doesn't disappear just because her husband fell from favor." She paused just long enough for the point to settle. And more importantly," she continued, her tone turning almost light, "she's Azure. The author everyone n Vanelle can't stop talking about. People admire her far beyond the court. She doesn't rely on the Duke o hold her place." As she spoke, her gaze drifted, deliberately settling on Albert, She took in the way his expression had gone slightly distant, the way something unspoken flickered behind his eyes. For the first time that morning, she felt a trace of satisfaction.

So it does get to you after all. The corner of her lips lifted. 'When the day comes, make sure you're dressed properly,' she added, her tone easy but carrying quiet authority. "Whatever his

current situation, the Duke still commands real wealth, and that kind of influence doesn't vanish overnight. The celebration will be anything but modest. Anyone who matters in Vanelle will be there." Her gaze moved between the two of them, measured and deliberate.

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"So try not to embarrass the family." 1/3 3:55 pm Chapter 497 A Name That Still Matters The invitation made its way into the royal residence as well. 0191 Finished Isla held the parchment between her fingers, reading it once, then again, her brows drawing together. After a moment, she asked, "Did she send one to Elira too?" The attendant beside her shook her head. "No, Your Majesty. This was delivered only to your court. Nothing was sent to Lady Elira." Isla let out a faint, humorless laugh. "Careful. Very careful." Anyone paying attention knew where Duskmoor's loyalties had once leaned.

And yet this time, Elowen had followed court etiquette perfectly, acknowledging only the Queen. The attendant lowered her voice. "Will Your Majesty attend?" "I have no intention of going," Isla replied sharply. Just, seeing that title written out so formally was enough to sour her mood. Granting it in the first place had clearly been a mistake. If anyone deserved blame, it was that useless Daphne. The attendant hesitated, then ventured, "The princess hasn't spoken to you in quite some time. If you mentioned the celebration to her, she might-" That only made things worse.

Isla's hand snapped, and the invitation was flung onto the stone floor. "I carried her, raised her, and now she turns on me over an outsider. And I'm the one who's supposed to smooth things over?" Before the attendant could respond, footsteps sounded outside. Alaric entered the chamber. Since the decree had stripped Cassian of his title, his mood had been noticeably lighter,

and that satisfaction still lingered faintly in his expression. Then he noticed the invitation on the floor. He slowed.

"What's that?" "Your Highness, it's-" The attendant started forward, but he had already crossed the distance, bending to pick it up. He opened it, and his eyes landed immediately on the name at the bottom. Lady of the First Rank, Duchess of Grace and Virtue. The trace of a smile on his face disappeared. 2/3 1:55 pm P p pp Chapter 497 A Name That Still Matters Isla, still irritated, didn't bother softening her tone. "What do you want?" Alaric didn't answer. He held up the invitation slightly. "Why throw this away?" Finished Isla stiffened, then her anger flared again. "Because I felt like it.

"Do I need to explain myself to you over a piece of parchment?" His gaze moved from her face back to the invitation, his tone calm but edged. "She followed every rule. She knows exactly who holds authority in the inner court, and she sent this to you alone. And you toss it aside without a second thought." He looked at her directly. "So I'm curious. What has she done that's so unforgivable you won't even accept a properly delivered invitation?" "You-" Isla's breath hitched, her hand trembling. "Your sister is already testing my patience, and now you've come to do the same.

"Do you all think you can defy me now?" Alaric's voice stayed even. "I came to pay my respects. I asked because I happened to see this." Isla let out a sharp, disbelieving laugh. "Pay your respects? You heard about the celebration and came here hoping I'd agree so you could attend. Don't pretend otherwise." Alaric met her gaze, then smiled faintly, almost lazily. "You're the one who taught me how to behave properly. You said I should show her respect when I address her. Now she's hosting a formal celebration and has extended an invitation to the Queen.

As Crown Prince, it would reflect poorly on the royal family if I didn't attend." He paused, his voice lowering just enough to carry weight. "And beyond that, if I don't go, I might lose my chance to bring a future Crown Princess into the palace." 2.6K H 3/3 3:55 pm P admin

Chapter 498 Breaking the Balance Isla froze for a beat. Finished Then realization struck, and her eyes widened. "Have you lost all sense? She's been married. She's your aunt by marriage. How could you even think this way?" Alaric's smile widened slightly, slow and deliberate. "You seem to have forgotten something, Mother. I've been married before too. Daphne, the one you personally chose for me." The mockery in his tone was impossible to miss. Isla felt her chest tighten. "That's not the same. She's a widow, and she's carrying another man's child." Alaric gave a small shrug.

"The child will carry the Valebourne name. That's what matters." "You... you..." Isla struggled to steady her breathing, one hand pressed against her chest. "What has gotten into you?" He stood there, completely composed, his gaze cool and cutting. 4 I've simply come to see a few things more clearly of late. Take the Baker family, for instance. From the outside, they still look prosperous, but underneath, they're running thin. The younger generation especially. Cousins like Albert and Liam have neither discipline nor direction.

They spend their time drinking, chasing pleasure, and wasting coin, and there's no real substance behind any of it. They've sat for the court qualification trials two years in a row and failed both times." He let the thought settle before continuing, his gaze steady. "This year, the court qualification trials fall under my supervision. I imagine Your Majesty is wondering whether I might... make certain allowances. Give them a gentler path through, so they don't embarrass the family again." With every word, Isla's face grew paler. He didn't stop.

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"This year, I oversee the court qualification trials. I imagine you were planning to ask me to make things easier for them." Her silence confirmed it. "I used to listen to you," he continued. "You said my studies suffered because of Elowen, so I distanced myself from her. You said her family had fallen and she wasn't suitable, so I married Daphne instead." His tone remained steady, but there was a sharpness beneath it now. "And what did that get me? Not progress. Just one mistake after another." He held her gaze. "It made me realize something. You're not always right.

In fact, more often than not, you're wrong." "Alaric!" 1/3 3:55 pm PP pp. Chapter 498 Breaking the Balance Isla struck the armrest and rose abruptly. "I am your mother. You will not speak to me like that." Finished He didn't so much as flinch. "Why be angry? I'm stating facts. You've already lost your hold over the inner court. The Queen's Privy Seal is no longer in your possession. Your position isn't as secure as it used to be." He stepped forward and placed the invitation neatly on a carved table nearby.

"If you want to regain control, you should start listening to me." Without waiting for her response, he stepped back, gave a proper bow of departure, and turned to leave. Isla stared after him, her ears ringing, her chest so tight it felt unbearable. She tried to speak, but before the words could form, her vision went dark and her body gave out beneath her. "Your Majesty!" "Call the royal physician, quickly!" The chamber dissolved into chaos. Alaric heard the panic behind him, but his stride never faltered, and he didn't look back.

His mother had spent her life controlling everything, including him. It was time that changed. If not for her, things would never have ended this way with Elowen. But now, things were finally shifting. Cassian had been confined. His fall was only a matter of time. One day soon, every

obstacle would be gone. And when that day came, he would bring Elowen back to him. Back in the Crown Prince's Wing, Alaric summoned Iris and Tristan. "In a few days, I'll be attending her celebration at the estate," he began. He paused, then corrected himself with a faint, satisfied smile. "At Hale Manor.

You'll prepare a gift for me." Iris looked up. "What would you like, Your Highness?" Alaric narrowed his eyes slightly. "A warhorse. The finest you can find. Strong, fast, and well-trained, with a flawless coat. And I want the tack to match, worked in gold thread and set with gemstones." He remembered it clearly. She had always loved riding, better than most men. She had once had a horse she treasured above all others. And I was the one who had it put down. 2/3 :55 pm P P pp. Chapter 498 Breaking the Balance 2.6K 3/3 1 1 admin

Chapter 499 Where It Began to Break Finished That moment had been one of the turning points, one of the times he truly began to lose her. Even now, when the memory surfaced, it twisted in his chest so sharply that he wished he could go back and shut that reckless version of himself up for good. This time, he would fix what had fractured between them, slowly and carefully, until nothing of it remained. The eighteenth day of the second month was Elowen's birthday.

The air still carried a lingering chill from winter, but there was a softness to it now, the kind that hinted spring was finally settling in. Elara had been counting down the days for nearly half a month, and at last, it had come. Their carriage rolled to a stop outside Duskmoor Manor. Rowena turned to her with a steady look. "Your father and I need to speak with the Duchess. There are a few matters that can't wait. Stay here, keep your head down, and don't cause trouble." Elara nodded quickly.

"I will, I promise." Rowena studied her for a moment, clearly not convinced, then left a seasoned matron and two attendants beside her before hurrying off with Lieutenant Wrenner toward the main residence. Elara watched them go, her gaze lingering. She wanted to see the Duchess too, more than she could say, but she knew better than to get in the way at a time like this. Back when she had been infatuated with Cassian, she acted on impulse, doing whatever felt right in the moment. Now, what she felt toward the Duchess was different.

It was steady, genuine, and she had no intention of becoming even the smallest inconvenience. So she followed the attendants toward the garden pavilion where the ladies had gathered to yest. Along the way, servants moved swiftly but quietly, carrying trays of coffee, covered platters, and small chests of gifts, everything running with a smooth, practiced rhythm that spoke of careful planning. Elara couldn't help but admire it. She really has everything under control. No wonder everyone respects her.

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She was just about to settle into a quiet corner of the pavilion when voices drifted over from a nearby open-sided gazebo. "Have you thought about it? The Duke just lost his title, and even the estate's name has changed. Yet the Duchess is still throwing a celebration like this." 1/3 3:55 pm PP PP. Chapter 499 Where it Began to Break Finished "That's easy to explain. She's trying to save face. If people in Vanelle start looking down on them, that would be the end of it. So she spends heavily and makes it grand, just to show they still carry weight." "I noticed it the moment we arrived.

The decorations, the guest list, everything about this place screams expense. The Duke has no stipend now, and he's confined to the estate. Where is all this money coming from?" "Exactly. It feels like she's putting on a show she can't afford." Elara had reached the edge of the gazebo

when the words hit her. Anger rose fast and sharp. Her first instinct was to grab something and throw it, but her eyes landed on the fine porcelain cups and delicate serving dishes nearby, and she stopped. Those belonged to the Duchess. She wasn't about to break them.

So instead, she turned and kicked the carved wooden plant stand beside her with all her strength. The impact cracked through the air, and the ceramic pot on top rattled violently. The chatter inside stopped instantly. Several young women turned, startled. Elara stepped forward, her expression hard. "What exactly do you think you're doing, talking like that?" She moved closer, her voice cutting clean through the space. "Whether the Duchess chooses to celebrate quietly or on a grand scale is entirely her decision. Who gave you the right to stand here and pick it apart?"

Not long ago, your families would have been lining up just to get a foot through these doors. Now she invites you in, treats you as guests, and this is how you repay her?" Her tone sharpened as she went on. "Is the food not good enough, or is the estate not impressive enough for you? Or are you just so bored that gossip is the only thing that makes you feel important?" A girl in pale yellow, clearly the youngest, flushed bright red under the barrage. Still, she muttered under her breath, "You don't have to sound so harsh. We were just talking." Elara let out a short, humorless laugh.

"Just talking? Then so am I. Why does mine bother you so much?" The girl fell silent, unable to answer. At that point, a round-faced girl in a rose-colored vest took a closer look and suddenly recognized her. "Well, now I see who this is. Miss Wrenner." Her tone turned pointed. "You might not know this, but she used to be completely taken with the Duke.

She even begged her family to place her in his household." She let the words hang, then added with a faint smile, "So of course she's eager to defend Duskmoor Manor." 1213 3:55 pm Chapter

499 Where It Began to Break Finished A few of the girls exchanged looks. Some covered their smiles, others glanced at Elara with thinly veiled disdain. Elara didn't flinch. She lifted her chin, meeting their eyes head-on. "That's right. I won't deny it. I did like him." Her voice was calm and steady. "But let me be clear. That's in the past. The only person I respect now is the Duchess.

And I won't stand here and listen to anyone tear her down." 2.6K 4 3/3 3:55 pm admin

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 500 A Line You Don't Cross Finished The round-faced girl looked momentarily thrown, then recovered with a faint, amused smile. "All right then, explain it. What exactly makes her so admirable to you?" Elara didn't hesitate.

"Because she's Azure. I've read Tales of Luminara and Ode to Springlight more times than I can count. I never get tired of them." The girl let out a soft scoff, her expression openly dismissive.

"Those? They're just romantic stories people pass around for amusement.

Entertaining at best, but hardly something worth taking seriously." Elara's brows drew together, but before she could respond, the girl continued, clearly enjoying the sound of her own voice.

"My grandfather is Edmund, a scholar whose name carries weight across the realm. I was raised on proper learning, taught what truly matters. Stories that revolve around romance and personal entanglements don't hold any real value. Carrying one around would only make a mockery of my upbringing." Elara felt her patience thinning. "If you don't like them, that's your choice.

But why drag your family's name into it like that?" The girl tilted her chin slightly. "Because it reflects standards. If we're being honest, the title Lady of Grace and Virtue should have gone to Clarisse of the Baker family. She's a true talent. As for the Duchess, those stories only appeal to girls who haven't been properly educated. No respectable lady spends her days buried in romance." Elara's hand tightened at her side, She really thinks she can talk like that and get away

with it. She took a step forward, ready to put an end to it, when a voice carried across the garden entrance.

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'Her Highness, Princess Maerwyn, has arrived.' The tension shifted instantly. Everyone turned. Maerwyn stepped into view, dressed in deep rose silk threaded with gold, her posture effortless, her presence commanding without a word. A line of attendants followed behind her at a respectful distance. She walked straight ahead, barely sparing a glance for the young ladies who inclined their heads as she passed. As she neared the gazebo, the group quickly composed themselves. "Your Highness." Elara lowered her head as well.

Maerwyn didn't acknowledge them and continued forward, as if they weren't worth her time. 1/3 3:55 pm p p pp. Chapter 500 A Line You Don't Cross Elara glanced at the round-faced girl, then back at Maerwyn. Then she made up her mind. She straightened. "Your Highness." Finished Maerwyn stopped, turning back with visible impatience in her eyes, as though deciding whether this interruption was worth her attention. Elara held her gaze, her pulse quickening, but her voice remained steady. "We were just talking about the Duchess. And her books." That was enough to shift Maerwyn's interest.

"And what about them?" she asked. Elara let out a quiet breath. "I admire her work. But Wendy here believes those stories are beneath notice. She said only girls without refinement would enjoy them, and that anyone who reads them regularly should feel ashamed." Wendy's composure faltered. She opened her mouth quickly, clearly intending to explain herself. She didn't get the chance. Maerwyn's eyes settled on her, the warmth gone entirely, leaving something cold and sharp behind. "Is that right?" The words were calm, but they carried weight that pressed down on the space. Wendy's lips trembled.

"Your Highness, I... that's not what I meant..." Maerwyn's tone turned cool and cutting. "I read those books as well. By your reasoning, that would make me unrefined too. I make a point of keeping up with Azure's latest work. So I suppose I've already embarrassed myself beyond repair." "No, Your Highness, I would never dare imply that," Wendy said quickly, her voice tightening. Off to the side, Elara finally felt the tight knot in her chest loosen. At a moment like this, she wasn't about to stay quiet.

"Please don't be too hard on her, Your Highness," she said, her tone mild, almost considerate.

"Wendy likely spoke without thinking. With a scholar like Edmund guiding her household, I imagine they value restraint and simplicity. Her own celebrations are probably very modest." She let that settle before continuing. "So seeing something like this today might have caught her off guard. It's only natural she'd feel a little unsettled. That might be why she started guessing at the Duchess's situation and dismissing her work." Maerwyn let out a soft laugh, though there was no warmth in it.

"Not be hard on her?" 2/3 3:55 pm P p pp. Chapter 500 A Line You Don't Cross Her gaze sharpened as it fixed on Wendy. "You question my taste and speak lightly of my aunt by marriage, and you expect me to let it go." Finished Her voice lowered, steady but edged with steel. "Do you honestly think your grandfather's reputation gives you the freedom to speak out of turn in front of me?" 3/3 admin