

## Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 51 Satisfied? Maerwyn trembled, burying her face even lower. A wave of bitter regret washed over her. I never should have touched Elowen! Finished But who could have guessed Uncle Cassian would take her side? He's never shown an interest in anyone's affairs before... Elowen must have bewitched him! Cassian said nothing more, his gaze shifting to Autumn. The maid trembled violently, prostrate on the floor like a leaf in a storm. Finally, his eyes rested on the two guards. No words were needed. The sheer weight of his presence, the cold authority radiating from him, was enough.

Even those two burly men cowered, lowering their heads in panic. "Cassian..." Isla drew a steadying breath, mustering her courage. "Since the Duchess came to no harm-not a hair on her head was touched-this is really an internal palace matter. Perhaps..." Cassian's eyebrow lifted slightly. "A moment ago, Your Majesty invoked the bond between His Majesty and me, urging my wife to keep this from me. Now you call it an 'internal palace matter, as if to exclude me. Having spent my life on campaign, I fear my understanding is simple.

Please clarify: do you consider me close to His Majesty, or do you consider our connection severed?" Isla's face paled. Theodric shot her an exasperated glare. He owed his secure throne in no small part to Cassian's blood and sacrifice. With the northern borders still unstable, he relied on Cassian.\ How dare she imply otherwise! "Furthermore, Cassian continued, a cold edge to his smile, "it is only because my wife is unharmed that we are having this conversation. Had she come to harm, heads would have already rolled within these palace walls.

His tone was lethally calm, yet brimming with an undeniable, intimidating authority that filled the entire chamber. Isla wanted to accuse him of overstepping. But Theodric spoke first, waving a hand. "Cassian, you don't need to lift a finger. I'd have dealt with them myself-and fast!" Isla closed her eyes in despair. 1/3 2:26 pm Chapter 51 Satisfied? Finished Elowen stood quietly, watching as Autumn and the guards, under the combined pressure, confessed everything. She watched Theodric thunder at Maerwyn, sentencing her to six months of strict confinement, forbidden.

to leave her quarters without express permission. She watched Maerwyn dissolve into ugly, heaving sobs, her eyes flashing with hatred toward Elowen before she caught Cassian's icy gaze and cowered back, her face contorting further. Theodric, learning the plot had been genuinely aimed at Elowen-and in front of Cassian no less-was furious. His recent promise to protect her fresh in his mind, he turned his anger on Isla, blaming her lax parenting for their daughter's corruption. Isla, still weak, scrambled from the chaise to kneel before Theodric, kowtowing and begging forgiveness.

"Satisfied?" Elowen, absorbed in the unfolding drama, started at the low voice near her ear. She turned to find Cassian watching her intently. She felt a flicker of embarrassment, but answered honestly with a soft, "Mm-hmm." She met his gaze sincerely. "Thank you, my lord." A faint curve touched his lips. He seemed pleased by her gratitude. At least she's appreciative. His eyes lingered on her ear for a moment, then narrowed. "You're injured." Elowen blinked. How does he know? As if reading her mind, he tilted his chin slightly toward her left ear. "Your earring.

Half of it is broken." Elowen raised a hand to her earlobe. Her white pearl drop was indeed shattered. She thought back. It must have happened when Alaric shoved her against the wall on

her way to find Theodric. "Who hurt you?" Cassian asked, his expression growing serious.

Elowen hesitated. Should she tell him about the encounter with Alaric now? It didn't seem the right moment. Theodric had just punished his daughter; to immediately bring up his son's transgression might wound royal pride and breed resentment toward Cassian. Even between brothers, one was still the sovereign.

After a moment's thought, she pressed her lips together. "Noth-" 213 2:26 pm Chapter 51

Satisfied? Frushed "Father. Mother." Alaric's voice sounded from the doorway at that exact moment. He stepped into the chamber, his eyes landing on Cassian. His feet froze mid-step, his eyes widened with instant, visceral fear. The childhood dread of his formidable uncle seized him completely. Cassian raised an eyebrow. "Grown so tall, yet you've forgotten your manners?" Alaric's lip twitched slightly. He forced down his panic. "Uncle. Cassian's gaze was steady.

"And?" Alaric paused, then belatedly noticed Elowen standing beside the wheelchair. A strange, sick feeling momentarily overshadowed his fear. Elowen's hair was elegantly coiled. She wore a gown of deep violet silk, the cuffs embroidered with delicate gold thread in a pattern of waves and clouds. Cassian wore a tunic of a strikingly similar shade of violet. One standing, one seated, they formed a picture of unexpected harmony. A sharp, acidic pang twisted in Alaric's chest. It felt as if something precious that belonged to him had been stolen. 1.7K (!!! 1 admin

Chapter 52 The Price of Transgression Alaric stared at Elowen for a long, silent moment, lost in his own turmoil. Finished Cassian noticed. His brow furrowed. His fingers, resting on the arm of his wheelchair, tapped twice in a gesture of impatience. He let out a soft, dismissive click of his tongue. The sound snapped Alaric back to the present. He gritted his teeth, steeling himself. Aunt

Elowen." Cassian's frown did not ease. Across the room, Theodric noted the odd tension. "What brings you here?" he asked Alaric. his tone pointed.

Alaric glanced at the kneeling Isla and the weeping Maerwyn before lowering his head slightly.

"In the Gilded Hall, with Mother and Maerwyn both absent, people are curious what happened."

Cassian let out a low, humorless laugh. Theodric snorted, "More like you're the curious one."

Alaric didn't deny it. Theodric gestured angrily toward Maerwyn, his expression one of profound disappointment. "It's your sister! On her own birthday, she couldn't behave! She plotted to harm your aunt!" Alaric stiffened. "Harm Aunt Elowen?" "And she's dumb as a rock.

She bought some aphrodisiac wine and gave it to the wrong person-your mother drank it!"

Theodric continued, exasperated. "If not for the Duchess alerting me in time, who knows what chaos would have ensued!" Understanding dawned on Alaric. "So when El- when Aunt Elowen came to find you earlier, it was because of Mother?" Isla, still on her knees, looked up sharply.

"What else would it be?" Alaric fell silent. I thought... she came to see me. "Your Majesty,

Cassian's measured voice cut through. "There is something that puzzles me." "What is it?"

Theodric asked.

"From what you and the Crown Prince just said, when my wife went to get you, she ran into the Crown Prince? Cassian's tone was deceptively casual. Theodric nodded. "Yes." "Which would suggest," Cassian continued, his words dropping like stones, "that the injury to my wife was His

Highness' doing?" Theodric paused, taken aback. 13 Chapter 52 The Price of Transgression

Finished Alaric's heart lurched with sudden panic. Theodric remembered the scene earlier-the tension between Alaric and Elowen, her claim that he had pushed her. His face darkened.

"Good...

Very good!" he spat, glaring first at Isla. "The daughter you raised! The son you raised!" He turned to Elowen and Cassian, his expression shifting to one of forced civility. "You have my word. Those at fault will be dealt with. The wrong done to you will be made right." His face hardened as he addressed Alaric. "You caused injury to the Duchess. You will cover all costs for her physician and medicine. Furthermore, as Crown Prince, your disrespect toward your elder is intolerable. You are suspended from court sessions for the next week.

You will spend the time copying texts on propriety and duty until you understand your error!"

That was Alaric's sentence. J Later, Elowen discovered what Theodric meant by "making it right." She and Cassian had just returned to Duskmoor Manor when a royal carriage arrived hard on their heels. It contained a chest brimming with solid gold and silver coins, and a gilded ivory scepter inlaid with emeralds and rubies, as long as a man's forearm.

Though her father and brothers had held high military rank, their expenses were great-often covering the families of fallen soldiers-so the Hale household had never been wealthy, often living on the edge of scarcity. Elowen had never seen a piece of ivory so large, so perfectly formed. She ran her fingers over its cool, smooth surface, her eyes wide with wonder. "This is truly for me? So exquisite." Who knew being shoved by Alaric could yield such a treasure? Perhaps I should have let him push me a few more times. She lifted her head and glanced at Cassian.

He was leaning back in his wheelchair, his expression detached, almost indifferent. He had been like this since their encounter with Alaric, speaking little to her. Elowen wasn't sure why. She turned it over in her mind and arrived at the only logical explanation- In public, he had to show respect for Theodric's authority-the marriage was Theodric's decree, so he would treat her with a

certain courtesy and patience. 24 2:26 pm Chapter 52 The Price of Transgression In private, however, his indifference returned.

Finished In her past life, Alaric had been the same-one person in public, another in private. She had grown. accustomed to it. She supposed it was just the way of men. Still, Cassian was an improvement. At least in front of others, Alaric had never defended her. Cassian had. "Your Graces." Bran entered from outside. "A physician from the palace has arrived. He is to examine Her Grace and prescribe any necessary remedies." Cassian gave a noncommittal grunt. Elowen ventured, "Perhaps you would prefer to wait outside, my lord?" Cassian glanced at her, another grunt his only reply.

Without another word, he gestured for Bran to wheel him out. His coolness didn't wound her deeply. Alaric's treatment had been far crueler. She looked again at the beautiful ivory scepter, and her spirits lifted considerably. If Cassian ever wishes for an annulment, this was a gift to me personally. I could take it with me. Sold, it would provide more than enough to live comfortably for the rest of my days. 1.7K 303 2:26 pm admin

Chapter 53 Doubts and a Gift While the physician examined Elowen's injuries, Cassian exited the bedchamber. A man in dark attire knelt silently at his feet. Finished In addition to the two visible guards assigned to Elowen, Cassian had also dispatched a shadow guard to follow her discreetly, meant for her protection. He hadn't anticipated the incident with Alaric. Cassian knew of Elowen's past with Alaric. He knew she was supposed to marry into the Crown Prince's Wing. He just didn't know what twist of fate had brought her to Duskmoor Manor instead.

When Alaric entered the chamber today, the way he looked at Elowen-yeah, that was a man still in love. And Elowen? When Cassian had asked about her injury, she had started to say 'no. She

had intended to hide it. So, what had passed between them? Did Elowen regret becoming the Duchess? Or did Alaric pine for her day and night? A restless irritation coiled within him. "You followed the Duchess all day?" Cassian asked, his voice low. "Yes, Your Grace," the shadow guard answered. Cassian's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"When she sneaked off to see the Crown Prince, what did she say?" Beside him, Bran looked startled. He couldn't help but ask, "Your Grace, you don't trust Her Grace?" Cassian didn't even glance at him. "Haven't you heard? She once injured her knee so severely saving the Crown Prince that she was bedridden for over a fortnight." Bran, not being from Vanelle, was hearing this for the first time. He rubbed his hands together awkwardly. "But that was the past, wasn't it? Her knee healed. People grow apart, become strangers." He had witnessed the last visit from the Crown Prince.

Elowen's annoyance had been palpable. Cassian's expression remained impassive, clearly unconvinced. Bran stole another look at him. "Besides, Your Grace, you're handsome, powerful, favored by the King- why would she prefer the Crown Prince over you?" Cassian frowned deeply. He turned to look at Bran. "You..." 1/3 Chapter 53 Doubts and a Gift Bran waited, expecting him to say, "You have a point!" Instead, Cassian's face was etched with suspicion. "You sure you're not into men?" Bran stared, baffled. What? Even the kneeling shadow guard couldn't help but glance up.

7:41 Finished Bran took three rapid steps backward. "I am not! Absolutely not! A gross misunderstanding, Your Grace!" Cassian studied him for a moment, saw no signs of deceit, and finally looked away. "You'd better not be." His gaze turned cold again. "Before I fell into that coma, I heard she frequented the Crown Prince's Wing. I wake up, and she's married into this

manor. eager to sever ties with him. Does that not strike you as odd? What if she and the Crown Prince had a lovers' quarrel, and in a fit of pique, she married me? And now she regrets it?

Where does that leave me?" Bran ventured cautiously, "If that were true, would you seek an annulment, Your Grace?" The word "annulment" grated on Cassian's ears. He frowned but didn't answer, gesturing instead for the shadow guard to proceed. The guard obeyed. Starting from the moment Elowen encountered Alaric, he recounted every detail-their movements, expressions, words, even mimicking their tones with eerie accuracy. Cassian listened, his brow furrowing deeper with each sentence. "If I harbored feelings for you, wouldn't I treat a man who resembles you like a treasure?"

Why would I have him shoveling manure in the stables?" "My admiration for the Duke of Duskmoor is genuine. Marrying him was a considered choice, never a whim." "Nonsense! The sight of you disgusts me! How could I possibly regret anything? I'm overjoyed you're no longer clinging to me!" By the end, Cassian raised a hand to press against his temple. He had wronged her. He truly had... But since when had she decided she wanted to marry him? A "considered choice"? What exactly had she considered? The shadow guard fell silent when he finished. Bran didn't dare say a word either.

Cassian said nothing, and a heavy quiet descended. 213 2:26 pm P P P ppp. Chapter 53 Doubts and a Gift Finished It was broken by the physician emerging from the chamber. Your Grace, the wounds on Her Grace's back aren't serious. She should avoid getting it wet for a couple of days and apply the salve regularly. It will heal soon enough." Cassian looked up.. "Oh, and one more thing. The physician stepped forward, presenting a small white porcelain jar with both hands.

"This is the salve for Her Grace's back. I forgot to give it to her just now." Cassian reached out and took it.

Bran escorted the physician out. The shadow guard vanished as silently as he had appeared. Cassian looked down at the jar resting in his palm. A faint, approving thought crossed his mind. That physician has good sense. After the physician left. Elowen's eyes wandered back to the magnificent ivory scepter on the table. She pondered. Such a precious gift deserved a proper place. It would be a tragedy if it were damaged or lost. But where? Holding its box, she paced the room. Finally, she decided on the second-to-lowest shelf of a tall display cabinet. She carefully placed the box.

then couldn't resist opening the lid again. Her fingers traced the intricate carvings on the smooth ivory. 1.7K 0 ↻ admin

Chapter 54 I'm of Little Use Now "You like it that much?" Cassian's voice sounded from behind her. Elowen startled, turning around slowly. "M-my lord..." He was alone in his wheelchair. Bran hadn't wheeled him in: he had managed it himself. Elowen hurried over. "Where's Bran?" Finished "He's seeing the physician out," Cassian replied succinctly. He glanced past her at the ivory scepter. "You like it that much?" Elowen found it strange. His manner toward her seemed different from earlier. "I do," she answered. "It's a gift from His Majesty, of course I appreciate it.

And it truly is beautiful." "I have many such things. The vaults are full of them." Cassian said, raising an eyebrow. "You accepted the household keys. Haven't you bothered to look?" "I haven't had the chance," Elowen admitted, a little sheepish. Besides, everything in the vaults belonged to Cassian. After an annulment, she couldn't take a single piece. Unaware of her thoughts, Cassian

simply said, "You should." Elowen nodded. "Once I've finished reviewing the ledgers, I should take an inventory." She then looked down at him. "My lord, why did you come in?" His gaze settled on her face.

"Before you left, you said you'd bring me back something tasty from the birthday banquet." Elowen froze. I completely forgot. She maintained a perfectly straight face. "The food at the Princess' banquet was really quite ordinary. Nothing worth mentioning." "Was it?" His tone held a hint of skepticism. "It was, Elowen insisted, quickly changing the subject. "Are you hungry?" Cassian gave a noncommittal grunt. Elowen ventured, "Shall I go to the kitchen and make you something good?" He shook his head. "No need." 13 2:26 pm 9:0 Chapter 54 Im of Little Use Now Elowen's heart skipped.

Did he notice my lie? But then he added. "You have an injury. Stay out of the kitchen. Let the servants handle t Elowen couldn't help but look at him a moment longer. She remembered her past life, when an old knee injury had flared up, accompanied by a low fever. She had stayed in bed. Alaric had returned from court, found no breakfast waiting, and was furious He had bellowed her name. Elowen had forced herself to sit up, her voice weak. "Your Highness. I'm unwell' Alaric had only sneered. "What now? You forced your way into my life.

Can't you handle a little discomfort?" He had stared her down. "Get up and make my meal Looking back, Elowen couldn't fathom her past self. ay dan: I just poison his food? End it for both of us? But instead, she had dragged herself up and cooked him an elaborate breakfast. That's what happens when you're too nice-you get walked all over. The manor kitchen sent food up fast. Elowen, already full from the banquet, only picked at her meal. Cassian glanced at her

plate. "Not hungry?" Elowen hesitated. "I'm watching my leg." One of Cassian's eyebrows lifted slightly, but he said nothing more.

After they finished, Elowen stood. "My lord, I'll go look at the ledgers." Cassian dabbed his mouth with a napkin, unhurried. "You're injured. The ledgers can wait," He set the napkin down and tilted his chin toward the bedchamber. "Go lie on your stomach." Elowen blinked. "Pardon?" His tone was matter-of-fact. "To apply the salve." Elowen was taken aback again. "I can manage." "On your back?" Cassian asked. "Can you see it? Can you reach it?" She couldn't. She thought for a moment. "Mira could help me. Or Cora." Mira, standing nearby, immediately chimed in. "Yes! I grew up with Her Grace.

When the General used to discipline her, I was always the one to apply the ointment!" Cassian's eyebrow twitched almost imperceptibly. Elowen's cheeks flushed. "That was a long time ago. I was young and foolish." Finished Mira nodded eagerly. "Yes, yes! Her Grace is very sensible now! But I can still apply the salve well!" Elowen felt like she was listening to a job application... Cassian merely hummed, lowering his eyes. "Of course. I'm of little use now." Elowen stared. "Little use...?"

"My lord, how can you say that?" very His voice was quiet. "I'm confined to this chair. I cannot walk. I cannot even perform a simple task like applying salve. What use am I?" Elowen was speechless. She looked at him. The usual sharp, commanding edges of his strikingly handsome face were gone, replaced by an uncharacteristic, profound dejection. She had never seen this side of him, not in this life nor the last. The mighty Duke of Duskmoor, who had once ridden fearlessly across battlefields, now awakened to find his legs useless, his capabilities diminished.

It was no wonder a deep-seated frustration festered within him. 1.7K ( admin

Chapter 55 Not Care for Him? Here was a rare, simple task he could perform-applying her salve-and she had refused him. Of course he would feel dejected. Finished Elowen's heart softened. She gentled her tone. "But Mira and Cora will have their own duties. They're likely quite busy. And I truly cannot see the injury myself... I suppose I must trouble you, my lord." Cassian's eyes lifted slightly. "May I?" Elowen tilted her head, offering a soft smile. "Yes. There's no one else I'd trust." Her voice was clear, like a stream flowing over smooth stones.

Now it was even softer, almost coaxing, as if speaking to a child. Cassian found it surprisingly agreeable. "Very well." Elowen pushed his wheelchair into the inner chamber, stopping near a table. "I'll sit here. It'll be easier for you." She moved a stool into position, then, suddenly shy, avoided his gaze. "Wait here a moment. I need to use the bath chamber." Cassian wasn't sure what she intended. But when Elowen re-emerged, her face was flushed a remarkable shade of pink. Cassian was momentarily at a loss for words.

Elowen had already turned her back to him and begun to untie the sash of her overdress. Her fingers trembled slightly with nervousness, making her movements slow. It was summer; the garments were light. Elowen carefully slipped her outer and inner robes down together, baring her back. Cassian's gaze fell on the smooth, pale skin of her back. It took him a long, distracted moment to realize what she had done in the bath chamber. She had removed her chemise. The realization sent an unexpected jolt through him. His heartbeat quickened; his throat moved as he swallowed.

Watching her bow her head slightly, so earnest and focused on this vulnerable act, a rare flicker of genuine remorse stirred within Cassian. He had been a mischievous child.. Pranks and trickery were second nature. When caught, he would instantly adopt a pitiable look, and with his

naturally handsome features, he'd 1/3 Chapter 55 Not Care for Him? Finisher escape punishment time and again. Later, on the battlefield, this had evolved into strategic deception. Afterward, Cassian would lounge and think, easy mark.

Just moments ago, he had deliberately played on her sympathy to gain this small privilege. But now, seeing her sit there so obediently, having shed her garments, he found himself thinking-I really am a scoundrel. "...Aren't you going to start?" Elowen asked softly. Her voice felt like a feather brushing against Cassian's heart, leaving a faint, ticklish sensation. He snapped back to the present. "Hmm." He was startled to find his own voice slightly hoarse. He cleared his throat.

"Right away." Cassian picked up the white porcelain jar, poured a small amount of salve into his palm, and pressed it gently against Elowen's back. She was slender. Even seated, he could trace the delicate curve of her spine. Her skin was delicate, marred now by several ugly bruises that starkly disrupted its perfection. Cassian's eyes darkened. He cursed Alaric silently again. His touch grew even lighter as he worked the salve into the bruised areas. These hands had ended countless lives. Today, he wanted, more than anything, not to hurt her. He tempered his strength to its gentlest.

The fierce energy of a warrior melted into tenderness. Elowen could feel the pads of his fingers on her skin. He was trying to be gentle, but he was a military man, his palms and fingers calloused from years of wielding weapons. Her own skin was delicate. The friction, however light, held a faint sting. She gritted her teeth, determined not to make a sound. If she complained, he might retreat into that wounded pride again. "My lord..." Elowen tried to distract herself with conversation. "You seemed... subdued after we returned from the palace.

May I ask why?" Cassian certainly couldn't say it was because he'd suspected her of lingering feelings for Alaric. He answered slowly. "Not subdued. Merely tired." Elowen thought for a silent moment, then pressed her lips together. "There's something I feel I should clarify. 2:26 pm ppp Chapter 55 Not Care for Him? Finished "Oh?" His tone was questioning. "In the past, I was on good terms with the Crown Prince," she chose her words carefully. "Many people assumed I would marry into the Crown Prince's Wing." Cassian was taken aback. He hadn't expected her to broach the subject herself.

"I did not," Elowen stated plainly. "And I never will." "...Why not?" Cassian asked. She wasn't about to mention her rebirth. She said simply, "I do not care for His Highness, and he does not care for me. Forcing such a union would be torture for us both." "Not care for him?" Cassian recalled the look in Alaric's eyes. As a man, he recognized it. It was anything but indifferent. "No," Elowen's voice was calm, certain. "If I did, when His Majesty asked me at the banquet whom I wanted to marry, I would have named the Crown Prince. His Majesty said any man in the realm. If I had chosen him.

His Majesty would not have refused. But I did not choose him." 1.7K 1 admin

Chapter 56 He Isn't Interested in Me Cassian paused. "You chose me." Elowen gave a soft, affirmative hum. Cassian raised an eyebrow. "So, by your logic... that means you have feelings for me?" Elowen stiffened, instinctively starting to turn her head. But she had forgotten her upper garments were down, and her chemise long since removed. The sudden movement presented a breathtaking, unintended view directly to Cassian. Elowen realized first. A short, sharp gasp escaped her.

Finned She yanked her robes up to cover herself, her face flaming crimson, and fled back into the bath chamber without a backward glance. Behind her, Cassian remained momentarily stunned. Who would have thought, beneath that slender frame... As the memory replayed, a slow, warm trickle began under his nose. He reached up a moment later, his fingers coming away stained red. Elowen stayed in the bath chamber for a long time, waiting for the heat in her cheeks to fully subside before stepping out with heavy steps. Cassian had composed himself. He held a book, reading slowly under the lamplight.

The soft glow cast shadows across the sharp lines of his face, his expression now cool and detached, as if nothing at all had happened. Elowen breathed an internal sigh of relief. So, he isn't interested in me. She wasn't surprised. Cassian had surely seen countless beauties. And he had someone else in his heart. In her past life, Alaric had often called her dull and uninteresting. At first, it had hurt. Everyone wants to be desired. For a long time, she had even avoided mirrors. But eventually, she had understood.

No one can be liked by everyone. When she had written *Tales of Luminara* as Azure, many had loved it, but many had not. Such was the way of the world. 2:26 pm ppp. Chapter 56 He isn't interested in Me. Besides, a person's life wasn't lived solely to please others. Being content with oneself was enough. 0:40 Finished In the royal palace, lamplight flickered. When Isla arrived, the maids began to curtsy, but she waved them to silence. "Has Maerwyn retired?" she asked softly. A maid bowed her head. "She is preparing to, Your Majesty." Isla gave a faint nod and entered the inner chamber.

Maerwyn was sitting on her bed, a book in her hands. Even with her eyes still red and swollen from crying, she stubbornly tried to read by the candlelight at her bedside. Hearing footsteps, she

glanced up at her mother, then looked away, sullen and silent. Isla sighed, "How are your knees? Do they still hurt?" Maerwyn huffed. "Thought you didn't care about me at all." "How could I?" Isla took a small jar of salve from her attendant. "Your father was simply too angry earlier. He forbade the physicians and forbade me from intervening. But it's late now. His heart will soften. You are his daughter. He has always doted on you." The words stirred a flicker of emotion in Maerwyn. "Come, let me apply this." Isla said gently. Maerwyn obediently closed her book, set it aside, and lifted the hem of her nightgown. She had knelt for a long time without padding. Both knees were badly swollen and red. Isla's heart ached. Her gaze strayed to the book's cover-Tales of Luminara. Her daughter truly adored that book. She applied the salve with utmost care, but Maerwyn still flinched, letting out a small, pained whimper. "Bear it a little longer." Tears pooled in Maerwyn's eyes.

"It's all that wretch Elowen's fault!" She clenched her fists. "I'll make her pay for today's humiliation!" After finishing with the salve, Isla spoke slowly, "She is the Duchess of Duskmoor now. Your uncle clearly intends to protect her. How will you make her pay? This time, it was only confinement. Next time, it could be worse. You must behave." Maerwyn bit her lip. She was truly afraid of her father and her uncle. Why does Elowen have all the luck, with Uncle Cassian backing her? A sudden thought struck her. She sniffed.

"Mother, have you forgotten? Doesn't Uncle Cassian have a woman he's loved for years? If we could find her, what would Elowen matter then? He wouldn't give her a second glance!" Isla, however, lacked confidence in this scheme. "The most pressing matter now is finalizing your brother's marriage." Hearing that Alaric had inexplicably shoved Elowen today had set off

alarms in Isla's mind. A deep unease settled within her. She feared Alaric still harbored feelings for Elowen. That couldn't happen. Today's mess had completely derailed the planned selection of a Crown Princess consort.

Isla thought for a moment. "In a few days, when your father's temper has cooled, I'll find a reason to invite all the eligible noble ladies of Vanelle." Maerwyn listened, a new idea taking root. She glanced at her mother. "You fuss over my brother's marriage, Mother. What about mine?" 1.7K 311 :26 pm admin

Chapter 57 An Unwelcome Visit Finished Isla answered. "Your marriage is for your father to decide. The royal court's selection of worthy young lords is this season. Once the assessments are done, he will choose the finest and most distinguished of them for you." Irritation flared in Maerwyn. She raised her voice. "I've told you, I don't want them!" Isla frowned. "Are you still fixated on that young general? Let me be clear-your father will never consent." "You're all prejudiced against him! Elowen is from a military family too!

Why can she marry Uncle Cassian, but I can't marry a general?" "That is entirely different! You are being willfully childish!" Maerwyn refused to speak another word. She pulled the blanket over her head. No matter how Isla called to her, she remained silent and unresponsive beneath the covers. With a sigh of exasperation, Isla finally relented. "Get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow." She left the chamber. Under the blankets, Maerwyn wept tears of bitter frustration. Her parents didn't respect her. They didn't understand her. Only Azure truly did.

If only she could meet Azure in person, that would be perfect. Over the next few days, Cassian continued to apply the salve for Elowen. At first, Elowen was tense and embarrassed, the memory of her accidental exposure flashing in her mind. But Cassian was always composed, his

manner detached. Gradually, she relaxed. He was so matter-of-fact about it. If she remained overly sensitive, she'd seem prudish. Her injury wasn't severe. After two days of treatment, it was mostly healed. Cassian became slightly busier, occupied with military affairs.

Due to the physician's orders, Elowen had avoided bathing thoroughly. She was starting to feel less than fresh and planned a proper bath for the evening. "Your Grace." Cora entered from outside. 1/3 :26 pm Chapter 57 An Unwelcome Visit Elowen looked up. Cora presented an invitation. "From the palace." Finished Elowen took it as Cora continued, "Her Majesty is hosting a poetry gathering. All the young noblewomen of Vanelle are invited. This is our summons." Elowen understood immediately. Isla was persisting with her plan to select a Crown Princess consort for Alaric. She gave a slight nod.

"We will attend." She accepted the invitation. Later that same day, another maid announced visitors at the outer gate of their courtyard. "Your Grace, Marwen is here with her younger daughter, Sylvia. They request an audience, saying they've come specifically to pay their respects." Cora looked worried. "If Marwen's here to pay respects, she's probably up to no good..." Mira raised a hand. "Your Grace, if you don't want to see them, I'll go out and chase them off myself!" Elowen couldn't help a small smile. "No need." She gestured to the maid.

"Show them in." She had a fair idea why Marwen had come. Shortly, the maid ushered Marwen and Sylvia inside. Compared to her haughty demeanor during her last visit, Marwen was all smiles today. She offered a respectful. "Your Grace." She then tugged the young woman behind her forward. "Quickly, greet Her Grace!" Elowen lifted her eyes to observe the mother and daughter. This was her first time seeing Sylvia. She appeared a year or two younger than

Elowen. Her features were different from her sister Vivian's-she didn't much resemble Marwen. She likely took after her father, Aldric.

Now, Sylvia kept her head lowered, her voice barely a whisper. "Elowen." Marwen's expression instantly darkened. She gave the girl a sharp, displeased push. "Manners! What did I tell you before we came? This is the Duchess of Duskmoor!" Sylvia's head dropped even lower. "...Your Grace." Marwen rubbed her hands together, her face fixed in an ingratiating smile as she turned back to Elowen, about to speak. Elowen, smiling pleasantly, spoke first. "Cassian is, after all, Sylvia's cousin. I am a cousin-in-law. Your 213 126 pm Chapter 57 An Unwelcome Visit Grace sounds rather formal.

Elowen is more familial. Marwen's smile froze for a fraction of a second. "Please, sit." Elowen invited. "Cora, some refreshments, please." Finished Marwen, her planned opening line effectively blocked, sat down uncomfortably, still eager to state her purpose. Elowen was in no hurry. She gestured unhurriedly. Try this. Aunt." Marwen took a hasty sip. scalding her tongue, but brushed it aside. She smacked her lips and fixed her eager gaze on Elowen. Your Grace. I've heard... there's to be a gathering at the palace in a few days? Hosted by the Queen herself?

Inviting all the young ladies of Vanelle?" Elowen nodded. "Yes. The invitation arrived today. I've already accepted. She raised an eyebrow. Your news is quite swift, Aunt." Marwen gave an awkward laugh. "Oh, just something I overheard in passing..." Elowen smiled. "So you came today just to tell me about that?" 1.7K W 2:26 pm Awakening Love Reborn t admin

Chapter 58 Marwen's Request Firtshet Marwen swallowed nervously, gathering her courage. She gestured to Sylvia beside her, trying to sound casual. "It's just... my daughter, Sylvia, she's so sheltered. Spends all her time embroidering at home, hardly any friends in Vanelle. I was

thinking... perhaps you could take her with you to the gathering? Let her see a bit of the world?"

Elowen smiled but remained silent. Marwen's goal wasn't to broaden Sylvia's horizons or make friends. She wanted her daughter to be seen by Isla and, more importantly, by Alaric. The silence made Marwen more anxious.

"I know I've made mistakes in the past, presuming on my seniority. But Sylvia is innocent in all that. Could you please take her?" Elowen sighed softly, "It's not that I'm unwilling. But the gathering is a royal affair, hosted by Her Majesty. I'm still newly married. I don't have the authority to make such a decision. Perhaps later, when the Duke returns, I'll ask him?" Marwen nodded, though her expression was strained. "I... I suppose that will do." She stood up. "If there's news, please send someone to tell me." "Of course." Marwen led Sylvia away. Mira looked puzzled.

"Your Grace, didn't His Grace say you have full authority over household matters? Why would taking Lady Sylvia require his permission?" Cora smiled knowingly, "Her Grace isn't really going to ask him. She's deliberately making Marwen wait!" Elowen nodded in agreement. Marwen had finally come begging. If Elowen agreed immediately, it would be too easy. Marwen's arrogance would likely resurge within days. Making her wait would take the wind out of her sails and teach her to be more compliant. Nevertheless, Elowen decided to mention it to Cassian.

But for some reason, she waited and waited, the sky darkened, and Cassian still hadn't returned. Mira grew concerned. "Could something have happened?" Elowen thought for a moment. "We're in Vanelle. He has Bran and guards with him. It's not likely. He's probably just delayed by some matter." She wasn't overly worried. As the hour grew late, she finished reviewing the last of the

household accounts, washed up, and went to bed. Fatigue from the day claimed her quickly, and she fell into a deep sleep. 1/3 Chapter 58 Marwen's Request Finished As for Cassian, he finished his business quite late.

Bran fretted, "Her Grace must have waited up for you, unable to sleep." Cassian didn't comment, but the thought that someone was concerned for him, waiting for him-and that someone was Elowen-sent a warm, unfamiliar sensation through his chest. He only said. "Tell the coachman to hurry." "Yes, Your Grace!" They rushed back to Duskmoor Manor. Lanterns glowed in the courtyard, providing light. But to Cassian's surprise, the windows of the main bedchamber were dark. He entered quietly. Elowen was fast asleep in bed, looking utterly peaceful. Cassian was so surprised he almost laughed.

She went to sleep? Without waiting? And she's sleeping so soundly! But as he wheeled closer to the bed, the moonlight fell on Elowen's serene, delicate face. She looked like a fine doll. His irritation evaporated instantly. He watched her for a long moment, then let out a silent sigh. Fine. I'll be patient. The next morning, Elowen awoke feeling uncomfortably warm. Her hand rested on something hard and radiating heat. She squeezed it absently, noting a surprising firmness beneath a layer of softness. Her mind slowly processed this as her eyes opened.

She was met with the sight of Cassian's shoulder. She was curled on her side, nestled against him, her right hand resting on his chest. And what she had just squeezed... was his pectoral muscle. Sleep fled instantly. She snatched her hand back and glanced at his face. He was still asleep. Relieved, she carefully slid out of bed. During breakfast, she brought it up. "Your Grace, Lady Marwen came by yesterday. She requested that I take Lady Sylvia with me to the Queen's gathering" Cassian gave a noncommittal grunt.

"That's your decision." 213 2:26 pm pp p Chapter 58 Marwen's Request Elowen nodded. "Okay."

After breakfast, Cassian went out again. Finished Elowen sent a maid to Rose Hall with the message: Cassian had consented, and she would take Sylvia to the gathering. Marwen returned, her spirits high. This time, she wasn't alone with Sylvia. Another woman accompanied them. She appeared to be in her early fifties, dressed in a vibrant red overdress with a green undergown, full of energy. Elowen knew her. She was the legitimate wife of the Duke of Falconcrest, mother of Piers-Yvonne Leofric.

She was notorious in Vanelle for her love of gossip and meddling, always prying and spreading rumors. In her past life, the tales of Elowen's life in the Crown Prince's Wing, her troubles with Alaric, had spread throughout Vanelle thanks largely to this very woman. As Elowen saw her now, a wave of deep aversion washed over her. Her fingers clenched tight. 1.7K admin

Chapter 59 A Well-Laid Trap Marwen was effusive. "Just now, Cora brought your message to Rose Hall! Sylvia, come on, kowtow to your sister-in-law and thank her." Elowen frowned.

"Why should she bow?" Marwen laughed as if it were obvious, "A royal gathering is a grand affair! Without your grace, such an opportunity would never come to my simple daughter. She must show her gratitude!" She turned to Sylvia. "What are you waiting for? Come here!" Sylvia, head still bowed, shuffled forward and began to bend her knees. Yvonne watched with keen interest from the side.

"Stop!" Elowen's voice cut through sharply. If Sylvia truly performed a full kowtow today, by tomorrow, the entire Vanelle would be buzzing. The lightest rumor would be that the Duchess of Duskmoor was haughty and demanding; the worst would drag Cassian's name through the mud. That was the last thing Elowen wanted. Was Marwen deliberately setting a trap, or was she

simply too oblivious to see the consequences? I'm her cousin-in-law. Taking her to a gathering is a small favor. Demanding a kowtow puts me in an awkward position, Aunt." Elowen's tone was cool. Marwen faltered.

Elowen's gaze shifted to Yvonne, adopting a politely puzzled expression. "And you are...?" Oh, this is Duchess Yvonne, the Duchess of Falconcrest," Marwen introduced with false familiarity.

"She came specifically to pay her respects." I see. Duchess Yvonne, please, sit. Mira, refreshments. Bring the tea His Majesty gifted us." She added casually, "I received it when I attended Princess Maerwyn's birthday celebration recently." Yvonne offered a flattering smile. "His Majesty clearly holds Duke of Duskmoor, and you, in high esteem." Elowen smiled back.

"Isn't the Duke of Falconcrest also a pillar of the realm? At the Princess' banquet. I happened to meet your son-a most impressive young man. Is he... spoken for?" The mention of her son's marital status made Yvonne sigh. "He's a stubborn, troublesome boy! Either the girl isn't pretty enough, or her character isn't to his liking. At his age, he won't even take a bedchamber maid! It worries me day and night." For this kind of chat, Elowen had a catchall line. "He simply hasn't met the right one. When fate decides, he'll be more eager than anyone." Chapter 59 A Well Laid Trap Finished Pleased.

Yvonne accepted the tea Mira presented. Elowen observed her discreetly, wondering what had truly brought Yvonne here. Yvonne took a delicate sip and set her cup down. "I heard something rather shocking happened at the Northern Garrison yesterday." "The Northern Garrison?" Marwen feigned surprise, glancing meaningfully at Elowen. "Wasn't that where His Grace was yesterday? What happened?" Ah. Here it comes. Elowen played along, asking with mild interest, "Yes, what did happen at the garrison yesterday?" Yvonne's eyes lit up with gossipy fervor.

"They say a woman caused a terrible scene, forcing her way into the camp. Apparently, she had a secret understanding with one of the officers there. He'd sworn he loved her for years, treated her like a treasure, but never got around to marrying her. Then, for some reason, the officer suddenly married another woman recently. The jilted lover was so furious she stormed the garrison, making a dreadful spectacle, threatening to take her own life!" Marwen's face was a mask of exaggerated shock. "How dreadful! Who was the officer?" Yvonne shrugged. "No idea who exactly.

Just heard he's someone important in the garrison. They tried to hush it all up, of course."

Marwen's eyes widened dramatically. "Someone powerful in the garrison, and His Grace happened to be there yesterday-could it be..." She cut herself off there and looked at Elowen. The implication was clear-the officer in question was Cassian. Indeed, many in Vanelle knew Cassian had once loved a woman but never married her. And recently, due to Theodric's decree, Elowen had entered the picture. Now Elowen understood, Yvonne and Marwen had come here specifically for her.

They had likely orchestrated this "casual" mention of the garrison incident, suspecting Cassian was involved, to gauge her reaction and confirm the scandal. Elowen's expression remained perfectly composed. "Matters of the military are not for me to discuss..." Marwen interrupted eagerly, "But Your Grace, you can ask His Grace about it when he returns!" Elowen ignored her and continued calmly, "I recall, three years ago, a former Vice-Minister of War let a military matter slip. It reached the ears of a foreign spy, and our frontline suffered losses because of it. His Majesty was furious.

He had the Vice-Minister beheaded." 2/3 admin

Chapter 60 The Carriage Ride The mention of a beheaded official instantly silenced Marwen.

Yvonne's expression also shifted slightly. Finished Elowen's gaze settled calmly on her. "So you see, since we are not in the military and don't know the facts, discussing it within these walls is one thing. But it ends here. It would be unwise to spread idle talk outside. Don't you agree, Duchess Yvonne?" Yvonne forced a smile. "Yes... of course, you're quite right..." Once outside the courtyard, Yvonne couldn't help but mutter to Marwen, "You were right. That girl is sharp.

A few words, and she shut us both down completely." Marwen sighed dramatically, "Yes, my life here is truly difficult." Yvonne cast her a sympathetic look. "You've got it rough." Her eyes flicked to the trailing Sylvia. "But if your daughter catches the Crown Prince's eye-even as a concubine-you won't have to endure such slights." Marwen beamed. "I'll take that blessing, Duchess!" The visit from Yvonne and Marwen left Elowen in a somber mood. She would, of course, not ask Cassian about the incident.

If Yvonne's story was true, if Cassian's former love had indeed gone to the garrison to confront him, then Elowen would likely have to step aside. She wondered if the money she had now would be enough to live on for the rest of her life. Perhaps I should return to my old trade? Write another story as Azure? With these thoughts, the day of the royal gathering arrived. Given the summer heat, Isla had scheduled it for the morning. After breakfast, Elowen instructed Bran to prepare the carriage. "Two carriages," Cassian stated from beside her, his tone unhurried. Elowen glanced at him, surprised.

Reading the confusion in her eyes, he explained, "I'm coming too." Elowen stared. Seeing her expression, Cassian raised an eyebrow. "Don't want me there?" 1/3 Chapter 60 The Carriage Ride Elowen shook her head fast. "That's not it..." Finished These past few days. Elowen had

decided to revive her pen name. She'd heard the publisher who used to handle her work would be at the gathering, and they had arranged to meet discreetly. She had always kept her identity as Azure a closely guarded secret, even within her own family. If people around her found out she wrote stories? Mortifying.

Just imagining friends or family reading her work made her cringe. She had said nothing about it to anyone, least of all to Cassian. If he accompanied her, she would feel constrained, unable to slip away for her private meeting. She felt a twinge of anxiety but carefully kept it from showing. As they moved to leave, they found Sylvia already waiting outside. Seeing them, she immediately curtsied. "Your Graces." Cassian gave a noncommittal grunt. Elowen offered her a kind smile. "Come on. Let's ride together." "Yes." Two carriages stood ready. Elowen's plan was to ride with Sylvia.

She was about to head toward one when Cassian's voice stopped her. "Elowen." She turned. He looked at her, a faint smile on his lips. "Aren't you coming?" Elowen gave a soft, "Oh," and obediently walked over to him. Inside the carriage, they rode in silence. Elowen could not fathom it. For all the talk of a verse salon, this gathering was plainly a crown princess selection hosted by Isla expressly for Alaric. Cassian clearly didn't dote on his nephew, so he wasn't here to help Alaric vet brides. So why was he coming? The carriage rolled smoothly into the palace grounds and came to a halt.

Suddenly, from outside, came the sound of light, mocking female laughter. 3/3 2:27 pm ppp.

Chapter 60 The Carriage Ride "Isn't this the Duskmoor carriage? The Duchess is alone in the palace again, I see." "Before marriage, she came alone in the Hale carriage. After marriage, she still comes alone." "Call it a marriage? It's more of a joke." The words felt eerily familiar.

Finished In her past life, at Maerwyn's birthday banquet, because of her betrothal to Alaric, she had endured similar taunts.

This time, reborn and now the Duchess, having seen Theodric first, she had avoided such a direct encounter. She hadn't expected the same scenario to play out at this new gathering. She also honestly wondered-why did they think her marriage this time was a joke? "Now, now, that's enough." That was Daphne's voice. "The Duke of Duskmoor already has someone else in his heart. The Duchess is heartbroken enough. Saying such things to her face will only make her cry." The words sounded protective on the surface but were laced with even sharper barbs.

Elowen frowned.

Just then, a cold, derisive snort came from beside her. It wasn't loud, but it was icy, cutting through the chatter like winter frost. The women gathered around the carriage steps fell abruptly silent. 1.7K 1 3/3 admin