

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess

Novel

Chapter 518 The Unspoken Weight To Albert, her words felt like a thin, piercing thorn. Not loud, not forceful, but sharp enough to sink deep and linger. He did not know what expression to wear. Stiffly, he brought his hands together and bowed properly. "Thank you for your hospitality and for your guidance. We'll take our leave." Elowen gave a small nod. "Take care on your way back." It was not until he had climbed into the carriage and the door shut behind him that Albert slowly let out a breath. Liam studied him for a moment, then asked, "What's going on with you? You've been out of it all night." "Nothing..." Albert slumped back against the seat, tilting his head up, his voice low and heavy. "I just feel like... this time, I have to pass the court qualification trials. No matter what it takes, no matter the cost, I have to pass." Liam frowned slightly. After a brief hesitation, he lowered his voice. "Do you still like her?" Albert reacted like he'd been burned, snapping his head toward him. "What? No. Of course not. She's married, and she's pregnant. Why would I..." Liam looked at him steadily.

"I didn't say who." Albert choked on his words and fell silent. Seeing his reaction, Liam understood enough. They were cousins, but they had grown up in the same household, close in age, closer than many brothers. They knew each other's secrets. For instance, Albert knew about Liam's early indulgences. And Liam knew that Albert had once harbored feelings for Elowen, had even considered marrying her. Liam let out a quiet sigh and patted his shoulder. "Even if that's true, it doesn't matter now. She's married, and she's Cassian's wife. That's Cassian. Do you think you can compete with him?"

Even without his former title, he's still the king's brother. You saw those fireworks tonight. Even if our entire family emptied everything we had, we couldn't pull off something like that. So what are you competing with? What do you have?" Albert did not respond. He leaned his head back again and closed his eyes. After a long moment, he clenched his jaw, as if making a final decision.

"No matter what, I have to pass." Back at Hale Manor, after the last guest had been seen off, Elowen and Cassian walked side by side beneath a covered stone passageway, their fingers intertwined as they made their way toward the main residence. The night air was gentle. Torchlight and moonlight blended together, casting their shadows along the ground, overlapping and inseparable. After walking for a while, Cassian spoke. "Ella, why did you say those things to the Baker brothers just now?" Elowen curved her lips into a faint smile, her eyes catching the flicker of firelight.

"Because, if I'm not mistaken, that Albert probably had a bit of a thing for me." Cassian lifted a brow slightly. "You didn't interact much before. How would you know?" Elowen gently swung their joined hands. "We didn't. But lately, I've been thinking back on small details. He used to sneak glances at me. Whenever we spoke, even just a little, he'd get nervous, sometimes even blush. And this time, when I sent an invitation to the Baker family, I expected Clarisse. Instead, the two of them came." Her tone was certain. "When someone likes you, it shows.

In their eyes, in the way they carry themselves. You can't really hide it. I might have been slow to notice back then, but looking back, the signs were always there." If I want to stir real trouble for Alaric during the court qualification trials, the Baker family is the best place to start. The master of the Baker family, the Queen's father, valued scholarship deeply. And from what she

had learned, Albert and Liam had both failed the exam more than once. That made Albert useful. Young, impulsive, not especially firm in resolve.

If pushed enough, he would fixate on passing, even resort to questionable means. Cassian glanced at her with interest. "Then why didn't you notice how I felt when you first came to Duskmoor Manor?" Elowen froze for a moment, clearly not expecting the question to turn toward her. A flush spread across her cheeks. "That was different. I wasn't very confident back then... I didn't even dare look at you directly." The amusement in Cassian's eyes deepened, and he pressed further. "Is that so? Then think a little more carefully about the past." Elowen actually paused to think, following his lead.

After a long moment, she suddenly laughed out loud.

chapter 519

Elowen turned her head and shot Cassian a playful grin. "Your Grace, I'm afraid there's nothing to report. I can't remember a single thing." Cassian paused, clearly not expecting that. "Nothing at all?" Her smile widened, bright and teasing. "Nothing. Completely blank." "Completely blank?" He lifted a brow, studying her for a long moment, then gave a quiet, knowing look. "Alright. Keep that energy. We'll deal with it later." Elowen blinked, feigning innocence.

"Deal with it how?" Cassian leaned in slightly, close enough that his voice dropped into something low and intimate, meant for her ears alone. "Later tonight, when we're back in bed, I'll make sure you remember." Elowen froze for just a beat, then her expression softened and she let out a light laugh. Cassian straightened, giving her a look that was half warning, half indulgence. "Ella, you're supposed to say you're scared." He really had spoiled her. Then again, every bit of it was exactly what he wanted. Elowen's eyes stayed soft with amusement.

She was just about to tell him that whether he planned to "deal with her" or not, she'd probably enjoy it either way, so what exactly was there to be afraid of-before she could speak, hurried footsteps broke the moment. Anson approached quickly, his expression serious. "Your Grace." Elowen turned her head, and the moment she caught his expression, the smile in her eyes faded slightly. Someone's here. And not just anyone. She had a rough idea already. Stopping in place, she turned to Cassian beside her.

"Why don't you head back and get some rest first?" Normally, that kind of thing would come from a husband to his wife. But this was Hale Manor, and everything here revolved around Elowen. Cassian had long since grown used to it. He nodded without hesitation, his voice warm. "Alright. Don't stay up too late. I'll be waiting." Elowen gave a quiet "mm" in response. Then she turned, her gaze sweeping over the attendants behind her. "I need to go over today's gift records and expenses in the study. You're all dismissed. Go take care of your work.

Mira stays with me." "Yes, Your Grace." The group responded and quickly dispersed. Elowen headed straight for the study with Mira and Anson. Inside, a few wall sconces burned low, casting a steady amber glow across the room. Near the window, two figures were already seated: Flowira and Zachary, carefully. From their posture and demeanor, it was clear they hadn't switched roles tonight. Flowira wore a pale, silver-embroidered tunic, tailored cleanly despite being styled as men's attire, subtly outlining her slender frame.

The neckline sat slightly lower than usual, revealing a stretch of pale skin that caught the warm light. Zachary wore a deep red fitted coat with narrow sleeves, a leather belt at his waist, and sturdy boots. His features were naturally sharp and untamed, and in this attire, that intensity only stood out more, like a weapon ready to be drawn. The moment Elowen entered, Flowira rose to

her feet, lifting a long, carved hardwood case from the table with both hands. She stepped forward and presented it. "Your Highness, happy birthday.

May the heavens bless you with good health, peace, and lasting prosperity." She held the case out respectfully. Zachary also stood. "Happy birthday. Wishing you all the best." Elowen remembered clearly that his Avenlor speech had never been very good. Yet those words came out smooth and precise. She accepted the case from Flowira and glanced at him with a faint smile. "Your speech has improved a lot." Zachary tilted his head slightly. Flowira translated for him in their native tongue. A smile immediately spread across his face, and he replied with obvious amusement in his voice.

Flowira turned back. "He says he only learned that one sentence. It took him half a month." Elowen paused briefly, then looked at Zachary again. Those green eyes held something direct, something unhidden, almost possessive. She gave a polite smile and shifted the topic without hesitation. "What's inside the case?" Flowira answered calmly, "A birthday gift from both of us. Mine is a piece of rare white stone. The vein runs deep beneath the northern lands, extremely difficult to mine, and the yield is very limited.

Even in Nordia, it's reserved for sacred use or awarded to generals with great merit. Since our nations haven't opened trade, this kind of material has never reached Avenlor. This piece may not be the only one in existence, but here, it is certainly the first." She paused briefly, then added, "There's also a glowstone. That one is from my brother. It gives off light at night." Elowen smiled. "Thank you, both of you." But Flowira didn't look away. Elowen noticed immediately. "Is something wrong?" Flowira's expression grew more serious.

She turned back, retrieved another box from the table, and returned. This one was completely different. Small, about the size of a lady's cosmetic case. Plain, with no carvings or decoration. The lid and base fit together so seamlessly that the join was almost invisible.

