

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

We Had Something Real But Didn't Handle It Right

581

Chapter 581 Just Enough

Elira didn't slow her steps. At the maid's words, she only turned her head slightly, casting her a cool, measured look.

"You're getting ahead of yourself," she said evenly. "Do you really **think** His Majesty can be steered that easily? That he has no judgment of his own?"

Her gaze lingered for a moment, then shifted forward again.

"I already gave him what he needed to hear. I let it slip that the Crown Prince left the palace. That was intentional. But if I had stayed there any longer, pressing the matter, commenting on his movements, it would have started to look deliberate.

Her tone remained calm, but there was a quiet warning beneath it.

"And once that line is crossed, the suspicion doesn't fall where you want it to. It circles back.

The maid hesitated, then lowered her head. "I spoke without thinking.

After a brief pause, she added cautiously, "But the Duchess sent word. She wanted us to work together, to push His Majesty into anger and doubt toward the Crown Prince. The situation has only just begun to turn. If we stop now, wouldn't that weaken the effect?"

Elira's expression didn't change.

"The Duchess has her approach. I have mine."

Her voice stayed even, controlled.

“We’re working together, not taking orders. I’ve already done my part. *The moment His Majesty learned that the Crown Prince left the palace and went to the Boyd family, the seed was planted.*”

She let the silence stretch for a breath.

“That’s all it takes.”

Because it was the truth.

The Crown Prince had indeed left the f

palace without permission. That *fact* alone carried

weight. His Majesty would consider it on his own, question it on his own

That kind of doubt was far more powerful than anything imposed *from* the outside

.

Once it took root, it wouldn’t be easily removed

Fit, May 2L

Chapter 581 Just Enough

No matter how Alaric explained himself, that doubt would remain.

The maid’s expression shifted as realization set in. “Your Grace has thought this through completely. I was shortsighted.”

Elira withdrew her gaze, her voice light but distant. “And you really think the Duchess doesn’t have a second move prepared?”

A faint pause.

“You wouldn’t see the full shape of her plans even if there were ten of you thinking on it together.”

The maid fell completely silent after that, not daring to speak again.

On the other side, Alaric had just returned from the Boyd estate.

He had said everything that could be said, offered reassurances, hinted at promises where he could. But whether the Boyd family would accept any of it, he had no real certainty.

By the time he returned to the palace, fatigue had already settled into his bones. He hadn't even had a moment to catch his breath before Quin arrived in person and requested his presence.

The moment Alaric stepped into the royal study, the tension in the air hit him immediately.

It felt heavy, pressing down from all sides.

When he looked up and saw his father seated behind the desk, expression unreadable, a chill ran through him.

He stepped forward quickly and lowered himself into a formal bow. "Your Majesty ."

Theodric's gaze rested on him for a long moment before he spoke.

"I had Quin go *to* your residence earlier. You weren't there."

A brief pause.

"Tell me, where did you go?"

The tone was calm, but it tightened something in Alaric's chest instantly.

A thin layer of sweat broke across his back.

Chapter 581 Just Enough

"I went out of the palace to take care of... some personal matters."

"Personal matters?"

Theodric's voice lifted slightly at the end. "What kind of matters?"

"I..." Alaric faltered, his thoughts tangling. The answer didn't come.

Theodric watched him, taking in every sign of hesitation. Cold displeasure settled into his expression.

“If you don’t wish to answer, I won’t press you.”

Then, without warning, his tone shifted. “There is a case at hand. Dominic, Deputy of the Ministry of Rites, has beaten the Boyd family’s only son to death. A life has been lost, and both families carry weight. The matter is complicated. The High Tribunal, the Ministry of Crown Justice, and the Royal Censorate are all finding it difficult to proceed.”

He paused slightly, then looked directly at Alaric.

“You seem to have strong opinions lately. Since that’s the case, why don’t you take responsibility for this matter?”

Alaric’s head snapped up, his eyes lighting almost instantly.

If the case was handed to him, he would control its direction. He could protect Dominic. He could bring the situation under control.

The thought came too fast.

“If Your Majesty entrusts this to me, I will do everything in my power to uncover the truth and handle it fairly. I will not fail-”

“Enough!”

The shout cut him off sharply.

A heavy report was snatched up and thrown straight at him.

Alaric instinctively shifted aside. It brushed past his shoulder and struck the ground, pages scattering.

Seeing him avoid it only darkened Theodric’s expression further.

“So you even know to step back now?”

His voice dropped, cold and cutting.

17:47 **Fri, May 22**

Chapter 581 Just Enough

“You’ve grown bold. Too bold. Reaching into everything, trying to involve yourself in every

matter.”

Each word came down harder than the last.

“What is it? Is your position no longer enough for you? Or do you think the authority I’ve given you is too little?”

His gaze sharpened.

“Should I move every matter of state to your residence as well? Would that satisfy you?”

The anger hit like a sudden storm.

Alaric’s composure collapsed. He lowered himself fully, his voice trembling. “I wouldn’t dare! Your Majesty, please forgive me!”

Theodric looked down at him from above, his expression cold.

“You went to the Boyd family,” he said slowly. “To settle this matter before it reached me.”

A brief pause.

“What exactly were you trying to protect?”

Alaric’s face drained of color. “I wouldn’t dare! That was not my intention!”

The words rushed out, uneven with urgency. “Your Majesty, this was an accident. I have looked into it. Rowan struck first, and Dominic only defended himself. He had been drinking, lost control, and that is what led to the tragedy. It was not deliberate.”

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17:47 Fri, May 22

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Chapter 582 Tightening Control

Alaric lifted himself slightly, forcing his voice to remain steady.

“I went because Rowan and I grew up together. When I heard what happened, I felt I should go in person to offer my condolences. That is all. There was no other intention.”

Theodric’s expression did not change.

Alaric felt the pressure mounting again. He lowered himself further.

“As for offering to take the case, it was only because Your Majesty has been burdened by the

the southwest. I wished to ease your concerns, even if only a little. If I could take off your hands, that alone would be enough for me.”

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head lowered.

patter were truly entrusted to me, I would act impartially and follow the law. I would

personal considerations to interfere.”

g silence followed. Then came a cold scoff.

ou had better mean that.”

The tone was still cold, but it had eased slightly. Alaric finally allowed himself a small breath.

Then Theodric spoke again, “You will not handle this case.”

The words landed heavily.

Alaric’s heart sank, but he did not dare speak.

“Rowan’s death will be judged jointly,” Theodric continued. “From today on, you will remain in your residence.”

A brief pause.

“If you wish to leave the palace again, for any reason, you will inform me first.”

His gaze hardened.

“Do you understand

A chill sprea

There w

er *had begun* to doubt him.

17:48 Fri, May 22

Chapter 582 Tightening Control

“...I understand,” he said at last, his voice dry.

leave.” Theodric waved a hand, his patience gone. “That will be all. You may

Alaric forced himself to stand, his legs unsteady, and withdrew from the room step by step.

The moment he stepped outside, the cool air hit him. Only then did he realize his clothes were damp, clinging uncomfortably to his skin.

His legs still felt weak. He steadied himself against a stone column, taking a few slow breaths before regaining his balance.

He made his way back to the Crown Prince’s Wing.

Iris hurried forward at once, concern clear on her face. “Your Highness, you’ve returned. I heard His Majesty summoned you. Did something happen?”

Alaric’s gaze turned sharp.

“That suggestion of yours,” he said coldly. “Going to the Boyd estate. Look at the result. His Majesty is furious, and I am now under scrutiny. Are you satisfied?”

Iris did not retreat. Instead, she stepped forward.

“Your Highness, this is exactly when we must remain steady. There are too many eyes on us right now. If we start doubting each other, we only give others an opening.”

Alaric paused, his expression tightening.

She was right.

At a time like this, he could not afford internal discord.

He exhaled slowly, his tone easing. “Go on.”

Iris lowered her voice.

“Think about the timing. From the moment you decided to leave *to* the moment you *reached* the Boyd estate, it was barely half *an* hour. And everything was handled cleanly. How *did His Majesty* learn of it so quickly?”

Alaric’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“You’re suggesting...”

“I felt uneasy, so I asked around,” Iris continued quietly. “Before you were summoned, Lady

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17:48 Fri, **May 22**

Chapter 582 Tightening Control

Elira had gone to the royal study to deliver tonic. She did not stay long, but it was during that time that Lord Jett came looking for you.”

“Elira...”

Alaric’s

gaze

darkened.

He wasn’t blind to it. Elira had her sights set on the queen’s seat, and her son, Caelan, had been eyeing the Crown Prince’s place for just as long.

What happened today had her fingerprints all over it.

He exhaled, his jaw tightening. "...I misjudged you."

Iris lowered her head slightly. "That is not important. What matters is your situation now. How serious is it?"

Alaric rubbed his temple, frustration evident. "The Boyd family is not yielding. They act respectful, but avoid giving a clear answer. They will not follow my lead. As for His Majesty, he is already angered and has grown suspicious. He has forbidden me from interfering and warned me that if I leave the palace again, I must report it first."

Iris listened quietly, then spoke after a moment.

"You need not worry too much. His Majesty may have doubts, but that does not mean he fully rejects your explanation. His anger is also about authority. He believes you have overstepped."

She met his gaze, calm and steady.

"You may be restricted for now, but you are not without options."

A brief pause.

"If Your Highness trusts me, anything that needs to be handled beyond the palace, or any message that must be delivered discreetly, you may leave it to me."

Her voice was soft, but resolute.

"I will do what I can to ease your

burden."

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Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess

Chapter 583 Misread Intentions.

A flicker of warmth crossed Alaric's chest.

“Iris, I’m fortunate to have you. In the Crown Prince’s Wing, you’re the only one who truly understands me... and the only one who’s ever acted in my best interest.”

Iris lowered her head in a modest bow. “You give me too much credit, Your Highness. I’m only doing what I’m meant to do.”

Alaric studied her quiet, obedient posture, and that earlier suspicion crept back into his mind.

His brow tightened slightly.

“There’s something you should understand, Iris. My heart has already been claimed. Elowen may be married now, but that changes nothing. I won’t forget her, and I won’t give up on her either.” His tone turned matter-of-fact. “You’ve been loyal, and you’ve done more than most. But whatever reward you’re hoping for... I can’t give you much.”

Iris blinked, not quite following.

Alaric continued, as if clarifying something obvious. “When you’re older and it’s time for you to leave service, I’ll personally arrange a good marriage for you. Consider it... a proper ending to your years under me.”

Iris was speechless. It slowly clicked. He thought she wanted to marry him.

A chill ran down her spine, raising goosebumps along her arms.

Fortunately, Alaric didn’t dwell on it. His thoughts had already moved elsewhere.

He frowned, irritation creeping in. “They’re questioning Dominic tonight. No telling what he might say under pressure.”

Iris let out a quiet breath. “And Lord Piers is stationed there. He’s not exactly inclined to favor the Lady of the First Rank.”

Alaric nodded sharply. “Exactly.”

He began pacing, agitation building. “But my father has me confined. There’s too much I can’t handle personally right now.”

Then he stopped abruptly and turned.

“Iris. You go.”

Chapter 583 Misread Intentions

She looked up, hesitation clear in her eyes. “Your Highness... I’m not suited for something like that. I’ve never handled matters beyond the Crown Prince’s Wing, let alone set foot in a place like the Ministry of Crown Justice. I... wouldn’t know what to say.”

Alaric’s expression darkened instantly. “What’s there to be afraid of? You’re just delivering a message. Didn’t you swear you’d share my burdens? Now I ask you to step outside *for* once, and suddenly you can’t?”

Iris immediately dropped into a deep bow, lowering herself completely. “I was wrong, Your Highness. I would never refuse you. Whatever you command, I’ll carry it out.”

His expression eased slightly. “That’s better.”

He stepped closer, voice low and firm. “Go in my name. When you see Dominic, make this clear. What happened last night was a drunken brawl that got out of hand. Nothing more. He is to stick to that, no matter what. As for anything involving the Crown Prince’s Wing, not a single word leaves his mouth.”

He held her gaze.

“Tell him this. If he keeps quiet, I’ll find a way to protect him.”

“I understand.”

Alaric urged, “Go now. The longer we wait, the worse this gets.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” She rose, gave a final bow, and left without another word.

Not long after, Iris arrived at the Ministry of Crown Justice.

She presented the Crown Prince’s seal, and the guards immediately ushered her inside without delay.

The corridors were dim, lit by iron sconces casting uneven light across cold stone walls. Before she even reached the main chamber, a voice rang out, light with mockery.

“The Crown Prince moves fast. The prisoner’s barely been locked up a few hours, and already someone’s here to see him?”

Iris turned toward the voice.

A few officials stood ahead, and at the center of them was Piers, dressed in formal court robes, his expression sharp with amusement.

His

eyes narrowed slightly. “Let me guess. You’re here before the formal hearing starts... to

sure your stories line up?”

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Chapter 583 Misread intentions

Iris stopped, her tone steady. “You may speak of me however you wish, my lord. I won’t take offense. But you should not make baseless accusations against the Crown Prince. His Highness sent me only out of concern for the case. There is no personal agenda, and certainly no intention to interfere with the law.”

Piers let out a quiet laugh. “You might be able to sell that to someone else. Don’t try to sell it to yourself. If there’s no agenda, why send you at all?”

At that moment, the Minister of Crown Justice stepped out from within.

He gave Piers a brief nod before turning to Iris. “If you’re here on the Crown Prince’s orders, we will cooperate. What is it you require?”

Iris bowed politely. “I’ve been instructed to deliver a message directly to Lord Dominic. I would appreciate your assistance.”

The minister considered this briefly.

Refusing outright wasn’t an option, but neither was bending the rules.

“You may see him. But by law, a ministry official must be present, and anything said will be recorded.”

“That’s acceptable.”

“I’ll go,” Piers said immediately.

The Minister of Crown Justice glanced at Piers, then at Iris, who stood quietly with her gaze lowered, and let out a silent breath. This whole situation was getting messier by the minute, but there was no clean way out of it now.

“Alright,” he said at last.

Piers gestured for her to follow and led Iris down the corridor toward the high-security cells where the most dangerous prisoners were held.

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584

Chapter 584 Breaking Point

They passed through several secured gates, each one heavier than the last. The air grew colder, heavier.

Dominic was being held alone in a cleaner, guarded cell deeper inside.

Piers suddenly stopped. “Forgot something.”

He glanced at Iris. “Wait here. I’ll be right back.”

Then he turned and walked off.

Iris remained where she was, watching.

Inside the cell, Dominic paced restlessly, his robes disheveled, hair undone. His hands clenched and released over and over, muttering under his breath.

The sound of Piers’s footsteps faded.

Iris stepped forward, leaving the shadows.

The moment Dominic saw her, his face lit up with desperate relief. He rushed to the bars.

“Iris! The Crown Prince sent you, didn’t he? He’s here to get me out, right? I knew it. He wouldn’t abandon me!”

Iris met his gaze calmly.

Then she said, flatly, “He’s not coming for you.”

Dominic froze. “What... what did you just say?”

She stepped closer.

“The Crown Prince showed you nothing but favor. He arranged a private passage for you, gave you freedom when tensions were already high. And how did you repay him?”

Her voice hardened.

“You got drunk. You caused a scene. You killed someone.”

She held his gaze.

“And now, because of you, he’s been reprimanded by His Majesty and confined to the Crown Prince’s Wing. From this moment on, everything you’ve done is your own responsibility. It has

nothing to do with the Crown Prince. He will not protect you.”

“No... no, that’s not possible!”

Dominic staggered back, panic rising. “I’ve done so much for him! Every step I took was a risk to my life! He can’t just cast me aside like this!”

His voice dropped, desperate. “Doesn’t he realize... I could tell them everything?”

Iris smiled.

“If you want to talk, then talk.”

She tilted her head slightly.

“But think it through. If you speak, does that save you? The Crown Prince has the Queen. He has the Baker family. And you?”

Her gaze swept over him.

“What do you have besides that position?”

Dominic’s breath turned ragged.

After a moment, he snapped, voice breaking. “The assassination attempt on the No rdian prince. Framing the Duke of Duskmooor. That was his order!”

Iris’s smile deepened.

“Yes. And yet every trace leads back to you. As for anything that ties directly to the Crown Prince... those traces are long gone. You know that.”

Dominic went still. Then the truth hit him.

He’s been cut loose. Completely.

Footsteps echoed behind them.

Piers returned, a sheet of parchment and ink in hand. “Orders from the minister. Everything said here gets recorded.”

He set the parchment down and looked up. “Go on.”

Iris stepped back, her tone once again composed. “The Crown Prince asks that you respect the law and speak truthfully. Do not let fear or resentment drive you into reckless accusations.”

She turned slightly and bowed. “Thank you for your assistance, my lord. My task is complete.”

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Piers escorted her out.

A short while later, he returned, gathering up the parchment with a faint smirk.

“So this is what happens when you let yourself be used,” he said lightly. “Everything’s fine while you’re useful. The moment something goes wrong, you’re disposable.”

He glanced at Dominic.

“Right now, the Crown Prince would rather you never speak again.”

Dominic’s fingers curled tightly.

Piers continued, almost casually, “I hear he’s already visited another household. Looks like he’s picking a replacement.”

He let that sink in.

“You killed a man. At worst, you lose your position. But the victim’s family lost their only son. A military man, from what I hear. Do you think he’ll let that go?”

A pause.

“You’ve got a newborn, don’t you?”

Dominic’s face drained of color.

Piers’s voice remained calm. “I wonder how a man like that might choose to settle his grief.”

With each word, Dominic seemed to shrink further.

By the end, he collapsed to the ground, strength draining out of him.

He had waited so long for that child. A healthy boy. He had loved him more than anything.

If someone took that child from him...

He wouldn’t stop until blood answered for it.

And a soldier?

Piers gave a small shake of his head. “If you’d been smarter, you might’ve switched sides sooner. The duchess at Hale Manor might’ve given you a way out.”

He turned to leave.

3/4

Chapter 584 Breaking Point

‘But if you’re set on loyalty, and you’re willing to drag your whole family down with you, that your choice.’

He walked off without looking back.

“W–wait...”

The voice behind him was barely audible.

Piers acted like he hadn’t heard a thing and kept walking, not slowing his pace.

“Wait!”

Dominic snapped. He dragged in a breath and shouted with everything he had left. The force of it cracked his voice, the sound scraping harshly against the stone and echoing through the cellblock.

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Chapter 585 Cracks Beneath the Surface

Piers’s footsteps finally slowed, then came to a complete stop, the echo of them fading into the damp stillness of the corridor before he turned back at last.

Behind him, Dominic struggled upright, his face streaked with grime and tears that had long since dried into uneven tracks. His voice came out hoarse, unsteady, like something dragged up from deep inside.

“My lord... I’ll talk. I’ll tell you everything.”

He drew in a ragged breath, forcing the words out. “The Crown Prince... the attack on the Nordian envoy... everything I know.”

For a brief moment, Piers simply watched him, saying nothing, as if weighing whether the man in front of him had truly reached the end of his resistance. Then he st

epped back toward the cell, stopping just short of the iron bars, his posture straight, his gaze fixed and unyielding.

“You’re certain?” he asked, his voice even but edged with warning. “Once you start, there’s no walking this back.”

Dominic let out a hollow, broken laugh that carried no trace of humor. “At this point, what is there left to walk back to?” His lips trembled as he forced a bitter smile. “It’s all true. I’ll sign whatever confession you put in front of me.”

He faltered, then added in a lower voice, “I only ask... that the Duchess-”

Piers cut him off before he could finish, each word deliberate and unmistakable. “If you confess, the Duchess will see that your family is protected.”

That was enough.

Dominic closed his eyes and nodded, the last thread holding him together finally giving way.

Only then did Piers allow himself a quiet breath.

Since the night before, when Dominic had first been brought into the Ministry’s custody, Piers had already tested every approach he could think of. Pressure, persuasion, cold reasoning, even the careful laying out of consequences. Dominic had been shaken, visibly so, but he had held on with surprising stubbornness, refusing to say anything that mattered.

In the end, Piers had sent word to Hale Manor.

The reply had been infuriatingly simple. “Wait for Iris.”

At the time, it had made no sense.

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Wait for her? A former attendant from the Crown Prince’s household?

Sylvia had mentioned, almost in passing, that Iris had already shifted her allegiance and was now working for the Duchess, but even then, Piers hadn’t thought much of it. In his mind, a servant was still a servant, no matter how clever.

Until now.

Just moments earlier, he had stepped away under the pretense of retrieving writing materials, pausing in the shadows where he could hear without being seen. What he heard had been enough to change his mind entirely.

Iris had not raised her voice. She had not threatened. She had not pleaded.

She had simply spoken, calmly and precisely, placing each word exactly where it would do the most damage.

And Dominic had broken.

Not forced. Not cornered. Just... undone.

Piers's gaze shifted slightly, thoughtful.

There was something unsettling about that kind of control, about the way she seemed to see straight through a person and find the one place they couldn't defend.

And beneath that quiet, compliant exterior, there was something far sharper, far colder than he had expected.

No wonder Elowen had taken her in.

Even so, the thought rose unbidden.

Sharp as she is... she's still not Sylvia. Not quite.

The outcome of the interrogation sent a ripple through the entire Ministry of Crown Justice.

The questioning itself had ended quickly, almost abruptly once Dominic began speaking, but what followed was anything but simple.

Senior officials gathered behind closed doors, the atmosphere inside turning heavy as voices rose and fell in tense, drawn-out debate that stretched deep into the night..

On the table lay Dominic's confession, signed and sealed.

Only a few pages.

2/5

Chapter 900 Cracks Denedure ounque

Yet no one reached for it.

No one seemed willing to be the one to carry it forward.

Piers stood off to one side, watching the entire exchange unfold with quiet detachment, his patience thinning as the hours dragged on and the arguments circled the same cautious concerns without resolution.

By the time the first pale light of dawn filtered through the high windows, he had seen enough.

“My lords,” he said at last, his voice cutting cleanly through the room, not loud but impossible to ignore, “the facts are clear, the testimony is complete, and the case has been laid out in full. What exactly are we still discussing?”

The room fell briefly silent.

A few avoided his gaze.

Piers let that silence sit for a moment before continuing, his tone steady but edged now with something firmer.

“Or perhaps the question isn’t about the case at all,” he said. “Perhaps it’s whether this report is ever going to leave this room.”

The Minister of Justice glanced at him, fatigue written plainly across his face. “That’s not what this is,” he replied. “Of course it will be submitted. Just not immediately.”

“Not immediately?” Piers repeated, as if testing the words.

The Minister exhaled slowly. “Timing matters. How this is presented matters. If it reaches His Majesty without preparation and he reacts badly, do you understand the consequences? This concerns the Crown Prince. If it shakes the court, if it destabilizes the realm... who answers for

that?”

Piers paused for a split second.

Back at home, Gareth had given him a quiet warning.

If anything real came out of the interrogation, the seasoned officials in the Ministry wouldn’t dare submit it up the chain.

At the time, Piers hadn't quite understood.

Why wouldn't they?

Now, hearing the minister speak in almost the exact same way, it finally clicked.

3/5

Of course. Men like that know exactly where the line is... and how not to cross it.

Still, Gareth hadn't just warned him.

He had also shown him how to handle it.

"That's an interesting way of putting it," he said. "His Majesty decides what he can bear, not us. Our responsibility was to investigate and report. The truth is sitting right there. Delivering it is not a matter of timing. It's the duty we were given."

He shifted his stance slightly, his gaze moving across the room.

"Unless," he added, "we've taken it upon ourselves to decide what the king should or shouldn't be allowed to hear."

No one answered.

The silence stretched.

Piers stepped forward then, not abruptly, but with quiet certainty.

"Or perhaps this is about something else entirely," he continued. "Perhaps this is about protecting the Crown Prince, about delaying what cannot be delayed, about hoping that if we wait long enough, the problem will resolve itself."

The Minister's expression tightened sharply. "Careful," he warned.

But Piers did not stop.

"Dawn is breaking," he said, his voice carrying just enough to reach every corner of the room. "Court will convene shortly. When His Majesty asks about this case, what answer do you intend to give? The truth, or something more convenient?"

The question lingered, heavy and unavoidable.

Because they all knew there was no safe answer.

Piers let the moment settle before speaking one final time.

“If I were in your position,” he said, “I would present the report exactly as it stands, without alteration, without delay, and let His Majesty judge it for himself. That is how this office proves it serves the crown and not the whims of power.”

He paused, his gaze steady.

“Anything less... invites doubt.”

586

Chapter 586 When the Crown Turns Cold

Morning light crept slowly across the palace as the great bells sounded, their deep, measured toll echoing through stone corridors and open courtyards alike, calling officials to assembly.

One by one, they entered the great hall, their movements orderly, their expressions restrained, each taking their place as the weight of the day settled in.

At the far end, seated above them all, Theodric watched in silence, his presence alone enough to hold the room in check.

The formalities passed without incident.

Then, from beyond the doors, a clear voice rang out.

“The Minister of Justice requests audience.”

All eyes turned.

The Minister entered quickly, both hands holding a thick case file, his steps controlled but lacking their usual ease. When he reached the foot of the dais, he lowered himself into a formal bow and raised the document.

“Your Majesty,” he began, his voice steady despite the tension beneath it, “in accordance with your orders, the Ministry conducted an overnight inquiry into the death at Greenwood Hall involving Dominic of the Ministry of Rites.”

He paused briefly before continuing.

“During questioning, new testimony emerged. The matter extends beyond the original case, and I did not presume to draw conclusions. All statements have been recorded in full. I now submit the complete report for Your Majesty’s judgment.”

“Bring it forward,” Theodric said.

Quin stepped down, received the file, and returned with it, presenting it with both hands.

The hall fell into a deep, unnatural quiet.

The Minister remained where he was, back straight, though the faint darkening at his shoulders betrayed the strain he carried.

Theodric opened the file.

His gaze moved steadily across the pages, line by line, unhurried, deliberate.

Chapter Be6 When the Crown Turns Cold

No one spoke.

No one dared.

The silence pressed in, thick and suffocating, broken only by the faint sound of parchment

turning

And as the moments passed, something in the air began to shift.

It was subtle.

But unmistakable.

Theodric’s expression darkened, not in sudden anger, but in a slow, gathering weight that made the entire hall feel colder.

Alaric felt it immediately.

Standing below, he found himself unable to stay still, his eyes moving between the Minister and the throne, unease tightening in his chest with every passing second.

This wasn't how a simple case unfolded.

It shouldn't feel like this.

What did they *find*?

The question pressed harder the longer the silence stretched.

At last, Theodric turned the final page and closed the file, his fingers tightening slightly around it before he lowered it to his side.

Then he lifted his gaze.

It passed over the court without pause before settling, unerringly, on Alaric.

“Crown Prince.”

The words landed quietly.

But they carried.

Alaric stepped forward at once, lowering himself into a formal bow at the base of the dais.

“I'm here Father”

Theodric regarded him for a moment, his expression unreadable.

2/4

“You've had dealings with Dominic.”

Alaric kept his head lowered, his reply measured. “As Crown Prince, I work with many officials. That is expected of my position. I wouldn't describe any one relationship as particularly close.”

He hesitated, then added carefully, “May I ask why Your Majesty raises this now?”

A faint, cold smile touched Theodric's lips.

“You've become quite practiced in your answers.”

The air tightened.

“Then explain this,” he said.

His voice did not rise, yet it cut cleanly through the hall.

“In his confession, Dominic claims you instructed him to approach the Duke of Duskmoor, that

orchestrated the attack on the Nordan envoy, and that you arranged for the blame to fall upon your uncle.”

you

Each word landed with quiet finality.

Alaric’s head snapped up, shock breaking through before he could stop it.

“That’s false,” he said, the denial coming too quickly, too sharply.

A beat later, he forced himself to recover, lowering his head again.

“Your Majesty, I’ve been set up. I have no reason to act against that envoy, nor would I ever move against my own uncle. This is someone trying to drive a wedge within the royal house.”

Theodric’s expression did not soften.

“If that is the case,” he replied, “then it is a remarkably detailed fabrication. Dates, locations, names, even descriptions of exchanged tokens.”

He let the words settle.

“And

yet you expect me to believe it is all invented?”

Without waiting for an answer, he cast the file forward.

“Read it.”

The pages scattered across the floor

Chapter 586 When the Crown Turns Cold

No one moved.

Quin stepped forward, gathered them carefully, and placed them back into Alaric's hands.

As Alaric read, the color drained from his face.

His fingers trembled.

His breath grew uneven.

Cold sweat seeped through his clothes as the weight of each line pressed down harder than the

last.

How...?

Who *broke* him?

He had already taken precautions.

He *had* made sure Iris would handle it. So how had it come to this?

"Your Majesty."

The voice came from the side.

Quentin stepped forward, speaking before Alaric could regain control of himself.

"There is something that does not quite align," he said, his tone careful but deliberate. "The Ministry was tasked with investigating a death at Greenwood Hall. Yet the inquiry has now brought forth matters concerning an attack on a Nordan envoy from months ago."

He paused slightly.

"The two are not naturally connected."

Then he lifted his gaze.

“It raises questions.”

9.9K

4/4

587

Chapter 587 A Dangerous Suggestion

He paused just long enough to let the tension settle, then glanced toward Piers.

“I’m not here to defend the Crown Prince,” he said, calm but deliberate. “If he’s guilty, then he answers for it. No exceptions. But this whole thing lines up a little too perfectly. It feels staged. Like someone set the board in advance and waited for Dominic to step forward and drag all of this into the open.”

His eyes lifted slightly toward the throne.

“Your Majesty sees further than the rest of us. I imagine you’ve already considered that.”

Piers let out a short, sharp laugh.

“That’s a nice way of putting it,” he said, stepping forward. “What you’re really suggesting is that my office botched the case. Or worse, that someone pressured a confession to frame the Crown Prince.”

His tone hardened.

“You might come from the Royal Censorate, where rumors pass for evidence. That’s your business. But in the Ministry of Crown Justice, we deal in records. Every interrogation, every statement, every appearance has been documented. It’s all there, plain and verifiable.”

He held the man’s gaze.

“So say it clearly. Are you accusing my entire office of fabricating a case against the heir to the throne?”

Quentin hesitated for a fraction of a second.

Since when did Piers get this sharp?

But he recovered quickly, smoothing his expression.

“No need to take it personally,” he said. “I never claimed your entire office was involved. The institution itself is sound. No one doubts that. But even a well-run system can be compromised if the wrong person gets involved.”

His voice lowered slightly.

“All it takes is one man acting in bad faith.”

Piers’s expression tightened. “Watch your words.”

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Chapter 587 A Dangerous Suggestion

“Your Majesty.”

Gareth’s voice cut cleanly through the room.

He stepped forward, ignoring the brewing argument entirely, and lowered himself into a formal bow.

Before he could continue, Archer spoke up, a faint edge of mockery in his voice.

“Let me guess. You’re about to take someone’s side again.”

Piers turned, ready to snap back, but Gareth didn’t even acknowledge it.

He addressed the throne.

“This is no longer a routine matter. Dominic’s testimony accuses the Crown Prince of arranging the death of a Nordian prince and placing the blame on the Duke of Duskmoor.”

His voice remained steady, but the weight behind it was unmistakable.

“This concerns the succession. It involves Your Majesty’s own brother. And it threatens our already fragile standing with Nordia. Any one of these would shake the court. Together, they could shake the realm.”

He paused, just briefly, his gaze passing over Archer.

Archer stiffened.

His lips moved, but no sound came.

Damn it. He walked straight into that.

Gareth continued as if nothing had happened.

“One man is your brother. A war-tested commander who once stood beside you, now stripped of title and living in quiet isolation. The other is your son, raised as heir, now standing under suspicion of conspiracy and murder.”

He drew a slow breath.

“No single office can handle this and convince everyone it was fair. Not because they lack skill, but because no one will believe they are untouched by bias.”

He lowered himself again, deeper this time.

“I ask that Your Majesty take direct control of the case.”

Chapter 587 A Dangerous Suggestion

That single remark sent a visible ripple through the hall.

For a heartbeat, the entire court seemed to stall, as if no one quite expected the question to be raised so plainly.

Then the murmurs began.

Low voices spread across the chamber, overlapping in a restless undercurrent. Some nodded in quiet agreement, clearly swayed by the point. Others hesitated, their expressions tightening as they weighed the implication behind it.

But more than anything, eyes began to shift.

Not toward Quentin.

Toward the throne.

Everyone was watching for the same thing.

A reaction.

At the head of the hall, Theodric remained seated, still and composed, his expression offering nothing away. One hand rested against the carved arm of the throne, his fingers tapping in a slow, steady rhythm, the only sign that he was turning the matter over with care.

“Your Majesty.”

Quentin stepped forward again, forcing himself to speak.

“With respect, that would be a mistake. The strength of the realm lies in its laws. No matter how serious the case, it must go through the proper courts.”

He steadied himself and pressed on.

“You may oversee the process. You may question it. But the authority to judge should remain where it belongs. And beyond that, Your Majesty already carries the burden of the realm. The southwestern campaign demands attention. Negotiations with Nordia are delicate and ongoing.”

He shifted, voice tightening.

“If every matter is brought directly before you, then who safeguards your strength?”

Then, more pointedly:

“And if the Ministry is as reliable as Lord Piers claims, why take the case out of their hands now? Or is Lord Gareth suggesting they’re not up to the task after all?”

3/4

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess

588

Chapter 588 No One Walks Away Clean

The remark landed exactly where it was meant to.

Not just at Piers, but at Gareth.

Piers's brow furrowed, ready to answer.

Gareth spoke first.

"That's a curious argument," he said calmly. "A moment ago, you questioned the integrity of the Ministry. Now you insist the case stay with them. So which is it?"

Quentin froze.

Gareth didn't slow down.

"You said the confession might have been influenced. That the process could have been compromised. Those were your words."

He turned slightly, locking eyes with him.

"So if the same offices handle the case and deliver a verdict, will you accept it? Or will you question it again?"

His tone sharpened just a fraction.

"Because if this continues, we'll be trying the same case over and over until it no longer means anything."

Quentin was completely thrown off by the rapid-fire questioning, his mouth opening but no words coming out, while a thin sheen of sweat gathered at his temples.

Damn it...he knows exactly what he's doing.

He wasn't just arguing.

He was turning Quentin's own words back on him and sealing off every way out.

"That said, you're not entirely wrong.

Quentin's chest tightened.

"Your Majesty shouldn't be buried in every detail," Gareth continued. "So here's a better solution."

1/4

Chapter 588 No One Walks Away Clean

His voice carried clearly across the chamber.

“Bring the case here. Hold the hearing in open court. Your Majesty presides. The court

witnesses. Summon the Duke of Duskmoor. Lay out Dominic’s testimony piece by piece and examine it in full view.”

He let that settle.

“No shadows. No speculation. No room to twist the truth. If someone is lying, it will show. If someone is hiding something, it won’t hold.”

His gaze swept the room.

“And when it’s done, there will be no argument left. The Crown Prince is either cleared, or he isn’t. The Duke is either wronged, or he isn’t. The truth stands on its own.”

The chamber erupted. Quentin’s vision blurred slightly.

He actually said that out loud.

What did it mean to try a case in

open

court?

It meant everything would be laid bare.

Every

accusation, every piece of evidence, every hidden thread would be pulled into the light, examined in front of the entire court.

For the Crown Prince, there would be no middle ground.

He would walk away cleared of all suspicion.

Or he would fall beyond recovery.

“No...” Alaric dropped low, his voice unsteady, his lips trembling as the instinct to resist rose up before he could stop it.

But from the throne, the emperor's voice came first.

"Granted."

It wasn't loud.

It didn't need to be.

The single word carried through the chamber like the deep toll of a cathedral bell at dawn, steady and final, leaving no space for argument.

Chapter 588 No One Walks Away Clean

Alaric froze, his mouth still parted, the world tilting around him as the weight of it settled in, crushing and absolute.

No way out. Not now. Not anymore.

Gareth was the first to move, lowering himself fully and pressing his head down in a formal show of deference, his voice ringing clear.

"Your Majesty's judgment is wise."

One after another, the officials followed, bowing in unison as voices rose across the hall in a swelling wave of assent.

Theodric turned slightly. "Quin. Bring the Duke of Duskmoor."

Quin bowed and moved quickly out of the chamber.

Members of the King's Guard were already heading for the gates.

At the same time, a palace attendant slipped away quietly, avoiding notice as he made for the queen's residence.

Inside, Isla stood near a tall window, trimming back a flowering branch with a pair of silver shears. The light from the wall sconces cast a warm glow across the chamber.

As the report reached her, her hand jerked.

The blade slipped.

A sharp sting cut across her fingertip. Everything seemed to stop.

No... no, *this can't be happening.*

“Your Majesty!”

A maid rushed forward with a cloth.

Isla snapped back, ignoring the pain. She seized the maid’s wrist with surprising force.

“Go” she said, her voice tight, unsteady. “Send word to the Baker family. Now. Immediately.”

Her grip tightened.

“He has to step in himself. If he doesn’t, we’re finished.”

At the Baker estate, the air had begun to warm with the changing season.

17:50 Fri, May 22...

Chapter 388 No One Walks Away Clean

Colton was in better condition than he had been in weeks.

With the help of two attendants, he made his way slowly along the covered gallery that overlooked the courtyard.

Every few steps, he paused to catch his breath, his gaze drifting toward the large tree at the center of the yard.

It had been planted by his father decades ago.

Now it stood tall and broad, its branches stretching wide enough to cast shade over nearly half the courtyard.

9.9K

589

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess

Chapter 589 The Summons

In the inner courtyard of the Baker estate, an old oak cast a wide shadow across the stone ground. Its roots had long since broken through the earth, thick and stubborn, just like the family it sheltered.

Colton stood beneath it, looking up at the branches for a moment.

A thought surfaced without warning.

Back when his father planted this tree, did he ever imagine the house would rise this far?

The moment didn't last.

Footsteps came fast across the courtyard, uneven and urgent.

He turned.

The steward was hurrying toward him, practically dragging someone along. The woman behind him struggled to keep up, her breath coming hard.

A palace attendant from the queen's household. Colton's expression shifted.

People did not come running from the palace unless something had gone wrong.

She reached him, barely managing to catch her breath. "My lord... Her Majesty asks for you. You're to come to the palace immediately."

His gaze sharpened. "To the Queen's residence?"

She shook her head, clearly rattled. "No. The royal court."

That gave him pause.

"The court?" His voice lowered. "For what reason would they need a retired man there?" She swallowed, then forced the words out in one breath. "This morning, the Ministry of Crown Justice submitted a case. Dominic confessed. Everything about the attack on the Nordian prince. He named the Crown Prince. Lord Gareth pushed for a direct hearing before *His* Majesty and asked that the Duke of Duskmoor be brought in to answer alongside him. His Majesty agreed. The queen fears His Highness won't be able to handle it alone, and... *that* others might take advantage of the moment. She asks that you come oversee things.

The courtyard went still.

Colton felt the ground tilt beneath him for a split second. The Nordian prince. The Crown

Chapter 589 The Summons

Prince. Cassian. A confrontation in open court.

He knew exactly how dangerous that combination was.

He closed his eyes briefly.

So it's finally come to this.

If the Crown Prince fell, the Bakers would not walk

away

clean.

Everything they had built could unravel in a single day.

His eyes opened again, all hesitation gone.

“Get the carriage ready.”

“Now.”

The attendant nodded quickly. “I’ll return and report to Her Majesty at once...”

“Wait.”

He lifted a hand.

“There’s one more call to make. Go fetch someone for me.”

The royal hall felt colder than usual.

Rows of nobles and officials stood along both sides, still as carved figures, each on e careful to keep their head down and their thoughts hidden.

No one wanted to be noticed today.

At the center of it all, Alaric remained bent in a formal bow before the throne, unmoving. Sweat traced down his temple despite the chill in the chamber.

Time dragged.

Every second felt stretched thin.

Then a herald's voice rang out from the entrance.

"Lady of Grace and Virtue. First Rank"

The room stirred. Alaric looked up sharply. So did everyone else.

Sunlight spilled through the tall doors as they opened.

wapier pay the summons

Two figures stepped inside.

Cassian walked in first, steady and composed, his presence cutting clean through the tension in

the room.

At his side, Elowen moved at an even pace. Her pregnancy was unmistakable, the curve of it visible beneath her layered gown, yet it did not slow her. If anything, it gave her a quiet authority.

They crossed the hall together, ignoring the weight of every stare, and stopped below the throne.

They bowed.

"Your Majesty."

Theodric studied them briefly, his gaze pausing on Elowen before he gave a small nod. "Rise."

Quentin spoke first, his tone tight. "Your Grace, His Majesty called for you. This is your *matter*. Bringing your wife into it seems... unnecessary."

Archer let out a low chuckle. "You must not have heard. The Duke of Duskmoor doesn't go anywhere without his

duchess. I'm told he keeps her close at all times. Walks with her, sits beside her, never lets her out of reach."

Piers shifted, clearly unhappy with the tone, but Gareth gave him a slight shake of *the* head.

No need.

Cassian didn't even look their way at first. He addressed the throne.

"Your Majesty, forgive the inconvenience. Given my current position, calling me a duke is generous. A man under suspicion doesn't carry much weight in this hall. Matters here, and this case in particular, rely on the Lady of Grace and Virtue."

Only then did his gaze shift.

It landed on Quentin, calm but cutting. "You referred to her as if she doesn't belong here. Tell me, what standing does your household hold? Is your wife of the first rank as well?"

Quentin stiffened.

What rank are you, exactly, to be taking shots at a lady of the First Rank?

Cassian did not speak the way Gareth did.

Chapter 589 The Summons

Gareth dismantled people with polished arguments and well-placed references, leaving them with nothing solid to push back on.

Cassian did something else entirely.

He didn't argue.

He cut. The kind of tone that didn't just corner you, but made it sting long after.

His

gaze shifted, landing on Archer, cold and unyielding.

"And you, Lord Archer."

The look alone made Archer flinch, his body reacting before his mind caught up as *he* took an involuntary step back.

“You said I can’t bear to be apart from my wife,” Cassian continued, his voice calm but edged with something sharper underneath. “That much is true. I don’t make a habit of hiding *it*.”

He tilted his head slightly, the faintest trace of mockery slipping in.

“But that tone you used... what exactly was that supposed to imply?”

He took a step forward, slow and deliberate.

“Whether I care for my wife, whether I choose to keep her *by* my side, what business is that of yours?”

His eyes narrowed.

“I brought her into court. Tell me, which law did that break?”

A brief pause, just enough to let the weight of it land.

“You’re a Deputy Communications Councilor. Last I checked, your job is handling memorials and state reports, not policing my personal affairs.”

His voice dropped slightly, colder now.

“Or is it that you think my current situation makes me an easy target?”

9.9K

590

Chapter 590 Lines Drawn in Court

Archer’s mouth went dry.

For a moment, he genuinely looked like he had no idea what to say.

Elowen, who had been standing quietly beside Cassian, finally stepped forward.

She inclined her head slightly toward Quentin and Archer, her voice calm and warm. “What *the* two of you said isn’t unreasonable. Court affairs aren’t where I usually belong.”

She paused, letting that settle before continuing, “But this case involves my husband. Recently, he’s been confined to the estate, removed from his usual authority. Everything outside those walls has been handled by me. The relationships, the exchanges, the details tied to this matter. If he stood here alone, there’s a real chance something would be missed, and that would be a disservice to His Majesty.”

Her gaze lifted, steady and clear as it moved across the hall.

“I’m here for him. And I’m here for the truth. If my presence causes offense, I ask your understanding. The only thing that matters is that this is handled properly.”

Her words struck the perfect balance, calm, measured, and impossible to fault.

She gave Quentin and Archer a graceful way to step back while making her own purpose unmistakably clear.

The two of them worked in perfect sync. One pressed hard, the other smoothed it over. Together, they controlled the room without breaking a sweat.

From the throne, Theodric spoke, “She stays.”

He gestured lightly. “Bring her a seat.”

Quin moved quickly, returning with a cushioned chair placed just below the dais.

Cassian helped Elowen sit.

She drew quiet attention, one hand resting lightly against her abdomen, composed in a way that

She settled with

rather than pity.

Not far off, Alaric’s gaze drifted toward her again.

He couldn’t stop it. She hadn’t changed. And yet everything had

She stood beside another man now. Spoke for him. Came here because of him

That should have been me.

The thought burned.

Cassian was about to continue when a court attendant hurried in.

“Your Majesty, Colton requests an audience.”

Elowen and Cassian exchanged a brief glance.

Right on time.

Things had spiraled too far. The Crown Prince had been called out in open court, and with the Baker family standing as his strongest backing, there was no way they were going to sit this out.

Of course they would step in and take control of the room.

Up on the throne, Theodric pressed his fingers to his temple, the strain showing through for a brief moment.

Holding the crown was no easy burden.

Theodric rubbed his temple once before lowering his hand. “Let him in.”

The hall shifted again as Colton entered.

He came alone.

No attendants. No support.

Just a bent frame and steady steps that carried him forward through the center of the room.

He stopped below the throne and bowed.

Theodric’s tone softened. “No need for that. Sit.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Another chair was placed.

This one directly across from Elowen.

Colton lowered himself into it, then looked at her and Cassian with a faint, knowing smile.

“Well Your Grace.

Cassian gave a slight nod.

Elowen smiled politely. “It’s been a while, my lord.”

He studied her for a moment. “The last time I saw you, you were still a child at Hale Manor. Always at your father’s side, always smiling. You used to talk about the Crown Prince of ten. How well he treated you. Time moves quickly.”

His eyes lingered.

“That girl is gone. Now you sit here as a duchess.”

Elowen’s expression didn’t change.

Sounds like he’s reminiscing, but the second he opens his mouth, he’s already setting the hierarchy.

You’re the younger one, just a girl. I’m the Queen’s father, your elder. Watch your place when you speak to

1. *me.*

And now he’s dragging up Elowen and Alaric’s past too.

What a sly man.

Then again... it’s not like I’m any less of one.

She answered without missing a beat.

“My lord has a remarkable memory. I must have been very young, because I don’t recall meeting you at all. But my father spoke of you often. He respected the years you spent in service.”

Her tone stayed gentle, but the words shifted.

“He’s been gone a long time now. You’ve stepped away from court as well. Life moves on *for all* of us.”

A brief pause.

Then, softly, almost reflective.

“I suppose I do envy His Highness. When trouble finds him, he still has family to stand in front of him. As for me... even if my father were here, I imagine he’d *be* the first to tell me I’d stepped out of line

The response landed clean.

Polite on the surface

Chapter 390 Lines Drawn in Court

But there was no mistaking the edge beneath it.

9.9K