

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 6 You Should Call Me Your Aunt Mira frowned, speaking up for Elowen. "The Duchess has just woken up. Why rush her over so urgently?" The matron snorted. "Of course. The Duchess comes from a military household, noble and honored, personally chosen by His Majesty. No wonder she looks down on a widowed matron like Lady Marwen." Mira froze, eyes widening. "When did I ever say that?" "If you can't even explain what you mean, then you'd better not speak at all." With just a few sharp words, the matron shut Mira down, then turned to Elowen.

"Your Grace, what do you say?" Sending someone so sharp-tongued, Marwen was clearly determined to put Elowen in her place on the very first day of her marriage. Meeting the woman's piercing gaze, Elowen simply smiled. "I should indeed go pay my respects to Lady Marwen." Her tone was gentle and calm, but the words pay my respects carried a sharp edge. The matron lowered her gaze slightly. "Your Grace misunderstands. It's not a formal courtesy visit, just a meeting." Elowen seemed not to hear her. "General Aldric gave his life to save the Duke. His widow deserves everyone's respect.

I admire Lady Marwen as well. Going to pay my respects today is only proper." Seeing the matron look pleased, even smug, Elowen curved her lips slightly and continued, "So please trouble yourself to make a trip to the palace." The matron looked confused. "To the palace?" Elowen smiled and nodded. "Yes. You can report that since Lady Marwen, as a war widow, holds precedence, I must pay my respects to her first before going to see His Majesty and Her Majesty." The matron froze, a flicker of panic rising in her chest.

Leaving aside whether she could even get past the palace gates, suggesting that Marwen should be seen before the King and Queen would be enough to cost her head. Such disrespect, how could she dare? Her earlier arrogance melted away. The matron forced a smile. "Your Grace is joking. Naturally, His Majesty and Her Majesty come first." Elowen kept smiling. "Since you understand, then go back and tell Lady Marwen that once I've finished my duties, I will go see her." The matron stood there for a long moment, unable to find another word.

This orphaned daughter of a general looked soft and delicate, but she was not easy to bully at all. She answered weakly and turned to leave. Elowen continued getting ready. Mira asked in a low voice, "Your Grace, are you really going to see Lady Marwen?" Elowen picked through the hairpins on the table, choosing carefully. "She is my aunt by marriage, and she is indeed the widow of a fallen hero. Of course I'll see her. But when I go, it will be decided by me, not by her." It was a matter of who held the upper hand.

If she lowered herself the moment she stepped through the door, her future days would not be easy. These were lessons Elowen had learned from her sister-in-law. Her sister-in-law came from a centuries-old noble family filled with wives, concubines, and children. In her own words, she had seen every kind of schemer and every sort of intrigue. The battles within the household were no less bloody than the battlefields her father and brothers had faced. After marrying Elowen's brother, no one in the family played those games anymore.

With nothing else to occupy her, her sister-in-law often came to instruct Elowen. Elowen was the only daughter in the family. Her sister-in-law had taught her almost everything she knew. In her previous life, Elowen never had the chance to use those lessons. Sometimes, she thought it was a shame. But now, things were different. After finishing her preparations, she had the carriage

readied. Elowen left with Mira and another handmaid from the manor, Cora. "I'm not drunk. I'm not drunk.

"I can still drink three more barrels." Just as Elowen was about to step into the carriage, she heard a loud commotion. Following the noise, she saw an unfamiliar carriage stopped at the gate. Two men dressed like tavern workers were helping a young man down. The young man wore fine, luxurious clothes. The greenstone circlet on his head was slightly crooked, and his sleeves were stained with wine. He staggered to the ground, barely steadying himself, then slapped away one of the workers and cursed, "Do you know who I am? The Duke is my cousin. The Dowager watched me grow up with her own eyes.

"I've even seen His Majesty in person." The worker covered his face and dared not argue.

Everyone else spoke softly, coaxing and trying to calm him. Elowen frowned and asked Cora, "That's the Duke's cousin?" Cora nodded. "Yes." Elowen had heard of him. Lucien Ashcroft, infamous for being a debauched playboy. He loved wine and women and was a regular at the Velvet Lantern. Yesterday, while she married Cassian, Lucien had been drunk in a courtesan's arms and hadn't returned for the wedding. What kind of relatives had Cassian brought into his household?

She sighed silently and stepped straight into the carriage. She didn't know that through a gap in the flowering trees, Lucien had seen her. That fair, delicate face fell into his eyes as a stone dropped into still water. The haze of his drunkenness rippled outward, clearing into sharp, unmistakable amazement. Lucien rubbed his face, grabbed a nearby servant, and asked, "Who was that girl? Why have I never seen her before?" The servant hadn't seen her clearly but recognized the carriage.

"That was the Duchess of Duskmoor." "The Duchess?" Lucien frowned, slowly recalling that his cousin had married yesterday. Watching the carriage roll away, Lucien muttered to himself, "But my cousin is still unconscious. She couldn't have consummated the marriage on her own."

Amused by the thought, Lucien's mood lifted, and a smile crept onto his face. Elowen entered the palace and went to see the Queen first. By custom, a newly married woman of Elowen's rank was expected to present herself at court soon after the wedding.

With the former King and Dowager Selene both long passed, it was her eldest brother who now stood in place of her father. So Elowen made her way to the palace, not as a daughter of Hale family, but as the new Duchess of Duskmoor, to present herself before the King and Queen. She had timed her arrival carefully. By now, the royal ladies would have retired from their morning gathering, and the final hours of court business were winding down. If she was fortunate, she would have a quiet moment with the Queen before the King arrived. There was just one thing she hadn't anticipated.

Outside the doors, Elowen ran into Alaric. She remembered that Leonhart had mentioned yesterday that Alaric was ill. No wonder he hadn't attended court. He did look thinner, and his face still carried the signs of sickness. He stood with his head lowered, staring at the corner of the wall, whether searching for something or waiting for someone was unclear. Elowen thought that whatever it was, it had nothing to do with her. Still, out of courtesy, she paused and greeted him, "Your Highness." Alaric looked up, taken aback.

Among the nobility of Avenlor, a married woman did not wear her hair loose. It was bound and arranged, proper and unmistakable. Today, Elowen's hair was braided and set into a crown-like coil, fastened with silver combs and small jeweled pins. The image of her from his dream-draped

in a jeweled circlet and royal bridal gown-flickered in his mind and slowly faded into the sight before him. Now, she wasn't smiling at him. Her expression could even be called cold. When had Elowen ever looked at him like this? Irritation stirred in Alaric's chest.

His voice was low as he said, "Elowen, marrying my uncle, you must be very pleased with yourself, right?" Elowen shook her head. "No." Alaric's gaze trembled slightly. So she wasn't happy? He was about to speak when Elowen's expression hardened. "You should call me your aunt." Alaric froze. A beat later, he realized that when she said no, she wasn't talking about her feelings. She was correcting his form of address. Elowen adopted the air of an elder and lectured him calmly, "Calling me by my given name just now was extremely improper. You have very poor manners." admin

#:54 pm PPPP. Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 7 Feeding the Duke His Medicine The single word "Aunt" made Alaric knit his brows at once. Finished "If we're talking about satisfaction," Elowen said, "this marriage was something I asked for myself. I got exactly what I wanted, so of course I'm pleased. Surely Your Highness isn't asking something you already know the answer to." Her words so angered Alaric that he broke into a violent fit of coughing. Elowen felt no concern at all.

She quickly stepped back more than half a pace, putting enough distance between them that she would not be affected, and said coolly, "If Your Highness is unwell, you should take more medicine and rest properly. I'm going to pay my respects to Her Majesty now." Before Alaric could say anything else, she turned and left, taking Mira and Cora with her. While Elowen was still with the Queen, the King arrived after court. When he saw her, he was visibly pleased. As it turned out, the court officials had praised him today because of this marriage.

In Avenlor, the civil ministers and the military commanders were rarely on good terms. Small disputes proke out every few days, major ones every few weeks. This was the first time they had reached complete agreement. For that reason, the King was in exceptionally good spirits. Taking advantage of his mood, Queen Isla invited Elowen to remain in the palace for a meal. Elowen did not refuse. By the time she returned to Duskmoor Manor, the sun had already climbed high into the sky. In the courtyard, Bran was leading two young footmen toward the house.

Elowen called out to him, "What's going on?" Bran answered honestly, "My lady, it's time to give His Grace his medicine." Elowen's gaze fell on the wooden tray in his hands. Resting on it was a dark stoneware pot. The herbal scent rising from it was identical to the one she had smelled the night before, when she lay beside Cassian. "My lady, you should wait outside for a moment," Bran said. "Once we finish feeding His Grace, we'll come back out. It may take some time.

Given his current condition, giving him medicine isn't easy," Elowen spoke lightly, I'll go in with you." Bran clearly froze, thinking he had misheard her. His face filled with surprise. "With us?" She nodded, "Yes. I'm his lawful wife. Caring for him is my responsibility. I'll watch and learn today. From now on, these things can be done by me. Hearing this. Bran felt deeply moved. He had no reason to refuse, but as they walked inside, he still reminded her. 'My lady. His Grace is unconscious. He has no awareness at all. He won't drink on his own. We have to force it.

Sometimes, even 174 4:54 pm P PPP. Chapter 7 Feeding the Duke His Medicine after it goes in, he spits it back out. This is not an easy task." 4:4 Finished Elowen listened patiently, but her expression remained calm, clearly showing that she had not taken these difficulties to heart. Bran let out a silent sigh. He could only hope that when the time came, the Duchess would not feel

disgusted. Once inside the room, the two footmen stepped forward and slightly lifted Cassian's upper body. Bran poured some of the medicine from the pot into a small bowl.

Holding it, he sat at the bedside and used a spoon to scoop up half a spoonful, feeding it toward Cassian's mouth. Cassian's thin lips remained tightly closed. One of the footmen supported his jaw, forcing his mouth open. Only then was Bran able to pour the medicine in. Yet although the liquid entered his mouth, it soon slid back out along the corners of his lips. The medicine soaked into his sleeping garments, leaving a large, wet stain. Bran continued feeding him. Half of it went down, half of it spilled out. Elowen watched for a while.

In the end, she could no longer bear to look and turned away. Bran glanced at her carefully. The Duchess must still find His Grace's current state too messy, too filthy. She could not stand it after all, could she? Elowen was unaware of his thoughts. With her back turned, she rolled up both sleeves. Only then did she turn back and speak, "Bran, the way you're feeding him like this, more than half the bowl is being wasted. Let me do it." Bran froze. So she was not turning away out of disgust. She actually intended to feed His Grace herself?

Elowen extended her hand toward him, her expression serious and resolute. "Stand up. Give me the bowl." Bran rose and looked at Elowen as she sat down beside the bed. "My lady, we'll withdraw at once." This time, Elowen looked confused, "Why would you withdraw?" Bran answered solemnly, "You're about to feed His Grace his medicine. If we remain here, you may feel embarrassed. It wouldn't be proper" Elowen looked even more puzzled. "Feeding medicine is a proper thing. What's there that can't be seen?" Bran scratched his head awkwardly.

"Aren't you going to feed His Grace mouth-to-mouth?" Elowen was stunned. Mouth-to-mouth? Holding the medicine in her mouth, leaning close to Cassian's lips, and passing the warm liquid into his mouth? The image made her heart jump violently. Heat rushed to her cheeks. She asked sharply, "Who told you that unconscious people have to be fed mouth-to-mouth?" 2/4 54 pm P PPP. Chapter 7 Feeding the Duke His Medicine Finished Bran answered honestly, "That's how it's written in storybooks." Elowen fell silent.

Then she said, "You do know those are just storybooks." Bran stood by the bed, his one remaining round eye blinking, shining with innocent ignorance. Clowen felt inexplicably choked by the exchange. Why was she even arguing with him? he took a deep breath, finally calming her tone. "Stories are stories. Feeding medicine is feeding medicine. There's no need for mouths to touch. Go find a thin wooden strip. About a finger's length, a nger and a half wide. Smooth it well, no splinters. Wash it clean." Yes, my lady." Although Bran had no idea what this was for, he still obeyed.

efore long, he returned with the wooden strip. lowen motioned for the two footmen to place an extra cushion beneath Cassian's head. Then she serted one end of the strip into his mouth, scooped up the medicine, and poured it onto the wood. The liquid flowed steadily along the strip and down Cassian's throat. ran watched with delight, a look of delight written across his face. "So feeding medicine can be this easy." lowen snorted lightly. "Read fewer storybooks in the future." ran laughed sheepishly and leaned closer, his face full of curiosity.

"My lady, how did you know you ould feed medicine like this?" Clowen focused on the spooning and replied, "My grandfather practiced medicine. I grew up watching im, so I naturally know some things. This wooden strip is only a makeshift solution. There are proper eeding

instruments made for unconscious patients. They're very convenient." Gran looked enlightened. "So that's how it is." another bowl of medicine was finished. Bran eagerly took the empty bowl to refill it. Elowen watched his retreating back and suddenly realized something strange.

Cassian was unconscious and under the care of royal physicians. Logically speaking, anything her grandfather knew, the royal physicians would also be aware of. So why had they never told Duskmoor Manor about feeding instruments like this? Elowen's gaze shifted to Cassian's astonishingly handsome face. Doubt quietly filled her heart. Could it be that winning battles repeatedly also made enemies? "My lady," Bran returned with the final half bowl of medicine. Elowen pulled her thoughts back and accepted it.

She was feeding him carefully when Bran suddenly asked, "My lady, later we'll need to change His Grace's clothes and wipe his body. Will you be staying to watch that as well?" admin

Chapter 8 How to Seduce a Man 135 Finished Elowen was startled by the sudden question. Her fingers twitched, and the spoon tilted slightly. A few drops of the dark medicine splashed onto the corner of Cassian's mouth. She quickly pulled a cloth from her sleeve to wipe it away. In her hurry, her fingers brushed against Cassian's cheek. Cassian's eyelashes unexpectedly fluttered twice. But Elowen had already turned to look at Bran and did not notice. Her heart pounded like a drum as she stared at him.

Fortunately, Bran merely touched his chin and said thoughtfully, "Changing clothes and cleaning him will definitely require turning His Grace over. You're a woman, my lady. You don't have the strength to move him. These matters should be left to us." Elowen let out a breath of relief. She steadied herself and set the cloth down. "By the way, aside from you and Cora, I haven't fully met everyone in this courtyard.

Call them all over so I can take a look." Bran answered, "Yes." Then he added, "But my lady, there's something you need to understand." "What is it?" Bran said, "The manor is actually divided into two sides. One is this courtyard. The other is everything outside it. Whether it's staffing or expenses, everything is handled separately." Elowen was taken aback. "Why would it be arranged like that?" "When His Grace first brought Lady Marwen into the manor, he made this arrangement. I never asked why. Now, everything outside the courtyard is managed by Lady Marwen.

Inside the courtyard, His Grace used to oversee things himself. After he fell unconscious, I took over temporarily. I haven't done well. It's been a mess. Lady Marwen has mentioned several times that she should take charge, but I didn't agree." Bran looked embarrassed as he spoke, then glanced at Elowen. "It's fortunate that we have you now, my lady." For reasons he could not explain, despite not having known her long, Bran felt an absolute trust toward this seventeen-year-old young woman. Elowen, meanwhile, was deep in thought.

Before entering the manor, she truly had no idea that Duskmoor Manor was like this. 1/4 16:40 Tue, Mar 31 d 20 Chapter & How to Seduce a Man Finished But this situation actually put her at ease. At the very least, she would not be constrained by others. Many things could be decided by her own hand. When they stepped out of the room, the heat rushed toward them. Bran brought over a chair and placed it in the shade beneath the covered walkway. Soon, everyone serving in the courtyard, aside from the armed guards, was called over. Elowen sat in the chair and swept her gaze across them.

Six footmen, six maids, and two older women. She spoke, instructing each of them to explain how they entered the manor, where they had served before, and what their daily duties were.

Listening to them, she gained a general understanding. The two older women had entered the palace as children. They had originally served Empress Dowager Selene. When Cassian was granted his title, the Empress Dowager sent four women from her side to manage his household. Over the years, one had grown too old and returned to her hometown, and another had passed away. Only Gerda and Edith remained.

As for the other footmen and maids, some were the children of palace attendants, while others were relatives of soldiers from Cassian's army. Some handled menial cleaning work, while others could read, had experience, and knew how to manage affairs. All in all, the staff was reliable, and the arrangements were reasonable. And because Bran stood behind Elowen, his broad frame and status as a deputy commander radiating pressure from every angle, everyone treated the young Duchess with great courtesy. Everything gave Elowen a distinct feeling.

Someone had prepared everything in this courtyard long ago, simply waiting for the lady of the house to arrive. Cassian had done this for the woman he loved. Unexpectedly, after living another lifetime, Elowen had taken advantage of that woman's place. Feeling a quiet sigh in her heart, Elowen faced the group and said, "By His Majesty's decree, His Grace and I are married, and I have become Duchess of Duskmoor. I was raised in Hale Manor. I don't understand the twists and schemes of noble households. I only know one thing.

As long as each of you handles your duties well, there will be generous rewards." She glanced at the heat shimmering in the air. "It's warm today. I've kept you standing here too long." 214 16:40 Tue, Mar 31 d. Chapter 8 How to Seduce a Man : 35 Finished After pause, she added, "When this is done, have the kitchen bring you some barley broth." The group was clearly surprised.

Standing under the sun, they were already sweating. When they heard there was soup, they couldn't help but swallow.

Elowen continued, "From today onward, every afternoon you'll each have a bowl of barley soup until summer ends. If one bowl isn't enough, you're welcome to go back for more. If you want something else, tell Mira. Once I know, I'll make arrangements as I see fit." Everyone offered their thanks. Elowen thought to herself that this must be what her sister-in-law once called balancing authority with kindness. Let them stand in the sun for a while, then give them soup to cool off. They would fear her authority as Duchess, and they would also remember her kindness.

That way, whatever she needed to do in the future would be much easier. After meeting everyone in the courtyard, Elowen went to review the account books. Just as Bran had said, he understood nothing about accounting. The ledgers were a mess, and his handwriting looked like it had been scratched by a dog. Elowen read patiently, losing all sense of time. "My lady, it's time to rest. If you keep reading like this, you'll ruin your eyes." It was Mira, entering from outside.

Elowen was still trying to decipher a blot of ink and asked casually, "What time is it?" "It's nearly ten." Elowen froze and looked up. Because she had been bent over for so long, her neck and shoulders had grown stiff when she moved even slightly, and a dull ache spread. She hissed softly, rubbing her neck, and looked out at the night, dark as spilled ink. She hadn't expected it to be so late. She still hadn't gone to see Marwen today. Marwen furrowed her brows tightly and slammed her palm down on the table. "That Elowen girl.

She doesn't put me, her elder, in her eyes at all." Her youngest daughter, Sylvia Ashcroft, was embroidering beside her. Without lifting her head, she said, "Mother, she didn't do anything wrong. You're her aunt. No rule says a new bride must

16:40 Tue, Mar 31 d ... 15 Chapter 8 How

to Seduce a Man greet her aunt on the first day." "I'm the one managing this household." Sylvia muttered, "But that courtyard isn't under your control..." 29 Finished Marwen choked, then glared at her viciously. "Heartless thing. Taking her side already.

That position of Duchess of Duskmoor should have been yours." Seeing Sylvia still focused on her embroidery, Marwen's anger flared. She roughly snatched the cloth away. "Stop sewing. All day long, all you ever do is sew. What do you think you'll ever make of yourself? How did I give birth to such a useless daughter?" Sylvia had not expected it. The needle cut her finger, leaving a long streak of blood. She sucked in a sharp breath, her eyes instantly reddening. Clutching her finger, she cried out, "I never wanted to marry Cassian in the first place.

He never cared for me either." Marwen snapped, furious. "Fool. If he doesn't care for you, don't you know how to seduce him? If you could have climbed into his bed, even if he didn't love you, he would still have had to marry you." She clenched her teeth and said bitterly, "If you can't become Duchess of Duskmoor, this manor will fall into someone else's hands sooner or later." Tears pooled in Sylvia's eyes. "But Duskmoor was never ours. Cousin only took us in because he's kind." A sharp slap cut her off. Marwen raged, scolding endlessly. "You're nothing like your sister.

I should have kept you by my side from childhood instead of letting you follow your father and grow into such a weak, useless fool who never fights for anything. If your sister hadn't married so early, she would have taken the Duke long ago." 1.5K 1 admin

Chapter 9 Be Careful 05 Finished Sylvia's hand throbbed, her cheek stung, and tears streamed down her face. She was overwhelmed by grievance. Without another word, she grabbed the half-finished embroidery from the table and rushed outside. "Sylvia?" At the doorway, she nearly ran

straight into Lucien. "You've got no skill and still have the nerve to cry. How did I end up raising such a fool?" Marwen shouted behind her, her voice shrill with rage. Sylvia couldn't bear to hear another word. She didn't even stop to call Lucien's name. Her filled with tears as she hurried off.

Lucien watched her go, then stepped into the room. He asked calmly, "Arguing again?" Marwen was already fuming. At the sound of his voice, she exploded. eyes "Who else but that useless sister of yours? I've worked myself to the bone, planning her future. And what does she do? Turns her back on us, throwing herself into another family's arms. She's already calling that woman cousin-in-law. At this rate, she'll be begging to wash their feet in a few days!" At the word cousin-in-law, Lucien raised an eyebrow. He sat down beside Marwen and gently took her hand. "She's still young, Mother.

She doesn't understand how things work. Don't let it upset you. As for our new Duchess..." He paused, lips curling into a slow smile. "I'll visit her later. Mother, give me the manor token." The guards watching over that wing were far too strict. Without the token, Lucien couldn't get in. And if he tried to force his way in, those guards wouldn't hesitate to draw their blades-even on him. Marwen frowned. "What are you going there for? Absolutely not." But for hours now, Elowen's face and that slim waist had haunted Lucien's thoughts.

The images had gnawed at him, itching in a way he couldn't ignore. There was no way he was giving He coaxed her softly and sweetly. "You've been saying she hasn't come to greet you, haven't you? You run the household, you can't be expected to chase after her. She clearly doesn't care for the servants. Only I can speak with her. Don't worry. I promise, by tomorrow, she'll greet 16:41 Tue, Mar 31 d ... Q () Chapter 9 Be Careful you with proper courtesy." Finished Elowen loosened her hair, removed the ornaments from it, and settled herself for the night.

Mira finished arranging the blankets and stepped out. She hadn't taken more than a few steps when a sudden cry escaped her. Elowen rushed two steps toward the door, just about to ask what had happened. A man's voice rang out from outside, calm and amused. "No need to be alarmed, miss. I am Lucien Ashcroft, cousin to the Duke. I mean no harm. Here-this is my access token." Elowen's brow furrowed. Why would he come at such an hour? Outside, Mira's voice took on a colder tone. "It's the middle of the night, Lord Lucien.

Might I ask why you're here?" Lucien responded with a pleasant tone, "There's an urgent matter I must discuss with Elowen." Mira didn't hesitate. "Her Grace has already gone to bed. Lord Lucien, please return in the morning." Lucien persisted, "It's truly urgent. Please inform her." Mira remained firm. "I've served Her Grace since childhood. Once she's asleep, she's very difficult to wake. If the matter is urgent, you may come earlier tomorrow." Her voice was steady, leaving no room for argument. Lucien was silent for a moment, then gave a soft chuckle. "Very well.

I'll return in the morning." Outside, Mira quietly let out a breath. Inside the room, Elowen also relaxed and moved toward the bed. Then, from the west window, came the faint rustle of movement. She turned her head. A shadow pushed the window open and slipped inside. Her heart dropped. The figure moved forward two steps. In the candlelight near the bed, his face was revealed-cocky, grinning, and unmistakably familiar. "So you were lying to me." Elowen didn't hesitate. She opened her mouth to call for help, but Lucien was already prepared.

He crossed the room in two quick strides and clamped a hand over her mouth. "Shhh." He'd done this before-far too many times. Every movement was practiced. 2/4 16:41 Tue, Mar 31 d. ...

Chapter 9 Be Careful 35 Finished "Don't scream. If the others rush in and see you here alone

with me, what do you think they'll say? It won't sound good. And besides, do you really want to live the rest of your life as a lonely widow?" Elowen struggled. She had trained briefly with her father and brothers, but against a grown man like Lucien, she was no match.

Sensing her resistance, Lucien's breathing grew heavier. "You've never tasted pleasure, that's why you resist. Just once-and I promise, you'll crave it every night." He lowered his head. His sticky gaze landed on her face. Then he noticed her eyes-fixed not on him, but on the bed behind them. He laughed low in his throat. "No need to worry. My cousin won't ever know. Every royal physician and herbalist has examined him. They all said he'll never wake again. He's already useless." Elowen struck. She stomped hard on his right foot. Lucien yelped, his grip faltering.

Elowen tore free and shouted, "Mira! Bran!" They were too far to arrive in time. The path from her room to the outer doors wasn't short. She knew she couldn't outrun Lucien, so instead of trying to flee, she sprinted to the display shelf. Resting there was a heavy broadsword. Bran had once told her it was the sword Cassian had carried into war. Elowen, daughter of a soldier's house, would never allow herself to be violated without a fight. Lucien looked amused. "Are you sure you want them in here? I'm only trying to spare you the shame.

Once they're gone, we can do it right here, in front of my cousin. He won't know. You and I, though we can enjoy every second." "Shut up." Elowen snapped. She gripped the sword with both hands. She had held blades before. But this one-this one was absurdly heavy. She lifted it with great effort, her arms trembling under the weight. So focused on the sword, she failed to notice the movement on the bed. She tightened her grip and stared down Lucien, refusing to back away. If he came any closer, she would kill him. Lucien didn't look concerned. He smirked and took a step forward.

Then-something changed. 16:41 Tue, Mar 31 d Chapter 9 Be Careful Finished His face twisted in shock. His eyes widened with horror. He stumbled backward, step by step. Elowen blinked in confusion. Then, faintly, she smelled it-an herbal scent, subtle and bitter. Slowly, she turned her head. She saw pale lips. Then, as her gaze lifted, she met a pair of sharp, narrow eyes. His eyelids were thin. The corners of his eyes tilted upward slightly. His stare carried the weight of command and distance. But when his dark eyes turned fully toward her, that sharpness faded.

A softness shimmered behind the steel. Elowen's heart skipped a beat. Her grip on the sword faltered. Cassian raised a hand and caught her wrist. He steadied the sword, taking most of its weight. "Careful." His voice was dry, hoarse from long silence. But in Elowen's ears, it felt steady. Safe. Across the room, Lucien let out a strangled sound and collapsed to the floor.

"Ca... Ca... Cassian!" 1.5K 1 16:41 Tue, Mar 31 d. admin

Chapter 10: Elowen, Come Here

Cassian didn't acknowledge Lucien; he lowered his eyes instead. From where he sat, he could see the sheen of sweat glistening across Elowen's brow. "Will you give me the sword?" His voice was low, almost like a suggestion. Elowen nodded faintly in reply. Whether from shock or the lingering adrenaline, her voice trembled despite herself. Cassian noticed. His brows drew slightly together. He reached out and took the iron sword from her hands.

What had felt heavy enough to make Elowen's arms shake now lay effortlessly in his grip, as though it weighed nothing at all. His eyes shifted towards Lucien. Cassian had a face too beautiful to belong to a man made for war, but the battlefield had carved something darker into him. After hundreds, maybe thousands of brutal fights, he wore death like a second skin.

Standing there, tall and still, he looked down at Lucien with the cold precision of a reaper.

Lucien couldn't meet his gaze. His entire body stiffened.

"What was it you said just now?" Cassian's voice broke the silence, calm and deep, like still water before a storm. Lucien dropped to his knees without hesitation. "Cassian, I was wrong, I know I was wrong! I swear I'll never—never again—!" He had been present when physician after physician had examined his cousin. Every last one of them had said the same thing: Duke Cassian would never wake again. Not from wounds like those. If not for that, how could he have dared tonight? He had feared this cousin since they were boys—feared the way Cassian was cold, calculating, and utterly ruthless.

And yet here he was, caught red-handed trying to violate Cassian's new wife. "I asked," Cassian said again, interrupting him coldly, "what exactly you said." He rotated the blade in his hand. The sharp point kissed the ground, letting out a high-pitched metallic chime. Lucien flinched. Cold sweat gathered at the base of his neck.

"I... I said..." He looked up, swallowing hard. "I said... if we sent the others away, we could... be together, right here, in front of you—" "Not that line," Cassian cut him off again.

His voice was calm, but it smothered everything else like fog over a lake. The rest of Lucien's words died in his throat. He paused, racking his memory, then swallowed again. "I said... I said you'd never know," Lucien stammered. "That every royal physician and healer in the kingdom had already said you'd never wake again. That you were... a broken man." Cassian nodded once. "That one." There was something like a smile in his voice. But it wasn't a warm smile. It was the kind of smile that made your blood run cold. He took a step forward.

The tip of the sword scraped across the stone floor with a shriek, like something from the underworld clawing its way to the surface. Lucien froze, heart pounding. "Please—please, Cassian!" he cried, head bowed so low it hit the floor. "For my father's sake! You said you'd take care of us—my father saved your life!" At the mention of his uncle, Cassian's eyes narrowed. He stopped just a step in front of Lucien. Lucien lifted his head, face streaked with tears and snot. "So you forgive me, right? You believe me. I really, truly regret what I did—"

"For your father's sake," Cassian said coldly, "I'll let you live." His gaze sharpened. "But if there's a next time... I'll gladly send you down to him so he can discipline you himself." Relief flooded Lucien's face. He scrambled to bow again, banging his forehead against the floor three more times. "Yes! Yes, you're right—absolutely right! I'll behave, I swear!" Cassian grimaced. "Get out." Lucien didn't need to be told twice. He scrambled out on all fours like a dog. Outside the room, Mira nearly jumped out of her skin. "Master Lucien? Didn't you already leave? How did you—?" But Lucien didn't stop. He wiped the sweat from his face and bolted.

Mira frowned, sensing something amiss. "Your Grace?" she called out, voice raised. "Are you all right in there?" The title pierced the quiet air. Cassian visibly flinched. The sword nearly slipped from his hand. Elowen turned to look at him, her voice soft. "Shall I let them in?" Cassian didn't answer. Instead, he echoed the word, as if testing how it sounded in his mouth.

"Your Grace?" His voice lifted slightly at the end, almost curious. Elowen flushed. "It was His Majesty," she said, her cheeks warming. "He asked who I wished to marry. So I..." "So you chose me?" Cassian asked. Elowen nodded slowly. Then, remembering what she had heard before—that he had someone else he cared for—she quickly added, "But it's all right. I know it was a royal decree. We can divorce at any time." "And after that?" Cassian stood close, eyes

lowered, the emotion in them unreadable. "You'll go to His Highness?" Elowen stiffened, caught off guard.

Before she could deny it, Cassian let go of the sword in his hand. It clattered to the floor with a hollow thud. Elowen's eyes widened. She had heard about that sword—how Cassian treated it like a lover. How he had named it, cleaned it with a silk cloth after every battle, and maintained it like it was a part of himself. And now he had dropped it without hesitation. "Elowen." His voice reached her again, hoarse and weary. She looked over. "Come here," he said. Elowen stepped forward without resistance. His face was pale, lips slightly parted.

"You want me to—?" Before she could finish, she felt a weight on her shoulder. Cassian had leaned forward. His head rested against hers, his breath slow, steady, and warm. He said nothing more. "Mira. Bran. Get in here," she called over her shoulder softly. Later that night, Royal Physician Halbrecht was summoned to Duskmoor Manor immediately. Bran waited nearby, visibly thrilled. As soon as the physician withdrew his fingers from Cassian's wrist, Bran asked, unable to contain himself. "Well? What do you think, Master Halbrecht? Is His Grace truly on the road to recovery?" Halbrecht furrowed his brows. "This shouldn't be possible..." He looked towards Cassian, still half-reclined. "He truly woke?" he asked, incredulous. Elowen sat beside the bed. "I saw it with my own eyes." Halbrecht pondered in silence for a moment. "This defies all reason. His body is nowhere near healed. For him to wake, he must have experienced something extremely intense. Something powerful enough to break through the limits of his condition." He turned, serious. "May I ask... what exactly happened before this?" Elowen pressed her lips together.

One hand hidden in her sleeve curled into a fist. She couldn't possibly say it was because Lucien tried to force himself on her. And that Cassian had witnessed it all. It would ruin her name.

Before she could speak, Bran clapped his hands together. "Wait! So you're saying—if we keep giving His Grace a good shock from time to time... he might wake up for real?" Halbrecht blinked. "I... I suppose... it's not impossible."