

## Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 61 A Lesson in Respect Cassian leaned forward and pushed the wooden door open with one hand. Finished Daphne and the other young women found themselves face-to-face with his strikingly handsome, yet utterly icy, countenance. His gaze was sharp as a blade. Unaccustomed to such intensity, the girls instinctively recoiled. But they were already surrounded. Duskmoor Manor guards had silently closed in, cutting off any escape. They never would've guessed that someone as high and untouchable as Cassian would actually show up at a verse salon with Elowen.

Right now, Cassian stood above them, looking down, his eyes sweeping over their faces.

"Eleanor Ginvier, daughter of Councilor Edward Ginvier. "Cathy Lancaster, daughter of Academician Richard Lancaster. "Daphne Garrett, daughter of Lord Chancellor Galen Garrett." With each name, their faces paled further. Cassian paused, as if in thought. "Did your fathers neglect to inform you? Elowen was wed to me by His Majesty's own decree. I am more than satisfied with this union. To disrespect her is to disrespect me. And to disrespect me," his tone lowered, "is to disrespect His Majesty.

I heard every word you said. It seems your fathers hold strong opinions-about both His Majesty and me." Thud. Daphne was the first to drop to her knees. The other two quickly followed. "W-We were wrong, Your Grace! Please forgive us!" "Have mercy, Your Grace!" "We... we were misled by rumors!" Cassian raised a brow. "Oh? Rumors? I'm curious-who spread the tale that I'm in love with someone else and that I'm marrying Elowen because I've been forced into it?" Daphne kept her head bowed so low her chin touched her chest. "I... I don't know the source...

It's just what many in Vanelle are saying... The others nodded frantically. "Yes! So many people in Vanelle say it!!" Cassian's voice was flat. "Fine. However, your vile insults towards my wife just now-I heard every bit of it. Today, I'll let this be a small warning for a big lesson. Kneel here for an hour, and we'll let the matter rest" 1/3 2.2 Chapter 61 A Lesson in Respect Daphne bit her lip, humiliation burning through her. She had never endured such public shame. Finished But they were undeniably guilty, caught red-handed by one of the most powerful men in the kingdom.

There was no choice but to submit. After instructing the guards to ensure the sentence was carried out, Cassian turned to Elowen. His voice softened. "Let's go." Elowen murmured an assent. Finally, she understood why he had insisted on coming today. The incident with the woman at the Northern Garrison had spread through Vanelle's gossip mills. Sheltered in the manor these past days, Elowen had been unaware. But once she entered the palace, especially one teeming with noblewomen, she would have inevitably faced whispers and barbs. Cassian had come to shield her.

Daphne and her friends were the example he made to warn the rest, and the spreading gossip would soon die down. As she pushed his wheelchair towards the palace halls, Elowen bowed her head slightly. "Thank you," she said, her gratitude genuine. A faint smile touched Cassian's lips. "Don't you have any questions for me?" About the garrison woman. About whether he truly had a beloved. About who she might be. He felt she could ask. He wanted her to. Elowen considered for a moment. "I do have one." His expression warmed with anticipation.

"Would you prefer to go see His Majesty first?" she asked gently. "The verse salon is for ladies. You might find it uncomfortable." Cassian stared. "...That's your question?" "Is there... another I

should ask?" Elowen seemed genuinely perplexed. Cassian almost laughed, a short, humorless sound. It confirmed it. Her supposed admiration was just empty words. She felt nothing for him. "Fine," he bit out, the word sharp. "To see the King." Elowen sensed his sudden displeasure but found it baffling. She decided not to press.

Years ago, under the pen name "Azure," she had partnered with the Willow Breeze Bookshop in the west district to publish Tales of Luminara. The bookshop owner's wife was attending today's event, and they had arranged to meet. 2:3 2:27 pm ppp. Chapter 61 A Lesson in Respect Once she delivered Cassian to the King, she could slip away for her own rendezvous. Finished Elsewhere in the palace, Maerwyn was in a state of delightful agitation. She gripped her maid Moll's hands, her voice trembling with excitement. "Is it true? Are you certain?

Azure might come to the gathering today?" This was the third time she'd asked. Moll nodded vigorously. "It's true, Your Highness! I checked thoroughly! Azure published Tales of Luminara with the Willow Breeze Bookshop. The bookshop owner is cousins with the Court Chronicler. The Court Chronicler's wife and daughter are attending today and brought his cousin's wife along. She has met Azure in person! She said Azure will be here today!" A blush crept onto Maerwyn's cheeks. "She's coming... She's really coming... Could she be the daughter of some official here in Vanelle? Who could she be?

Oh, if only she could marry my brother! If Azure married Alaric, I would be the happiest person in the world!" 1.7K 4 admin

Chapter 62 Why Not Teach Her Yourself? The thought of her current predicament twisted Macrwyn's stomach into fresh knots. Finished "I'm confined to the chamber by Father's orders. I can't attend the verse salon! Otherwise, I could have met Azure in person!" Her frustration boiled

over into a hissed curse. "It's all that vile Elowen's fault!" Suddenly, an idea sparked in her eyes. She fixed her gaze on Moll. "Quickly! Switch clothes with me! You stay here in my chambers. I'll pretend to be you and go to the salon to meet Azure." Moll's face drained of all color.

She dropped to her knees with a thud. "I beg you, Your Highness, I cannot! If His Majesty were to discover this, it would be treason! I would lose my head!" She remembered Autumn, who had displeased the King at Maerwyn's birthday feast and was banished to the brutal laundry yards. She dared not follow that path. "Useless coward!" Maerwyn bit out, displeased. Tears welled in Moll's eyes. "My punishment is of little consequence, but I fear His Majesty's wrath would fall upon you! You are merely confined now. If he were truly angered, he might not show you such favor again." Maerwyn paused.

There was some logic in that. Agitated, she paced the length of her chamber. Moll tentatively lifted her head. "How about this, Your Highness... I go take a look for you? I will memorize which lady is Azure and report everything back to you." Maerwyn looked down at her. "Once you know which noble lady she is, you can befriend her properly in the future," Moll suggested. Maerwyn thought it over. Not bad. "Then, by my orders, you'll go along with Alaric." Moll bowed her head in acceptance. Before she left, Maerwyn warned her again and again.

"You have to be sure which one is actually Azure, Don't get it wrong! And be polite to her. Don't upset her even a little!" Moll kept saying yes. Maerwyn had never shown such deferential caution, even towards the King or the Queen. Her fascination with the mysterious author was profound. After escorting Cassian to Theodric's study, Elowen greeted Theodric and then led Sylvia away. 1/3 2:27 pm Chapter 62 Why Not Teach Her Yourself? Finished Cassian's gaze

lingered on Elowen's retreating figure, a faint crease between his brows. Theodric, noticing, found it amusing.

It was rare to see his brother so visibly preoccupied. "What exactly happened at the betrothal banquet?" Cassian asked, his frown deepening. Theodric thought back carefully. "That day, I asked Elowen to tell me frankly whom she liked. She didn't answer immediately; she seemed distracted. It was Maerwyn who spoke up, saying Elowen liked the Crown Prince." Cassian's brow furrowed further. "However, Elowen denied it swiftly." Theodric continued. "She said she held only respect for Alaric, nothing more.

Then she said she had long admired you and that to be your wife would leave her with no regrets in this life." "We've barely met. How could she 'long admire' me?" Cassian found the statement suspect. "Neyer met, but surely she has heard of you? 'Duke Cassian of Duskmoor, peerless in grace and talent. Who in Vanelle hasn't heard that?" Theodric saw nothing strange in it. Cassian didn't comment. "What's the matter? Unhappy with your bride?" Theodric teased, raising an eyebrow.

"The man who got drunk, clutched my hand, begging me to let him marry the Hale girl, then wept, saying he wasn't good enough for her-that was you, wasn't it? Or have I misremembered?"

A rare flush of embarrassment touched Cassian's cheeks. He lifted a hand to cover his face.

Theodric leaned in, intrigued. "So shy? Don't tell me you and your wife have accomplished nothing yet?" Cassian's voice was muffled behind his palm. "My leg still hasn't recovered. And she... seems none the wiser to such things." Theodric looked surprised. "None the wiser? She's married now. Shouldn't she know?"

Elowen is being rather neglectful of her duties." "It's not her fault." Cassian's hand fell away, revealing his earnest expression. "General Hale had no time to instruct her. She has had no one to learn from." Theodric chuckled softly. His brother was truly smitten. He played along with a nod. "It's Isla's fault. I put her in charge of the wedding arrangements, and she never thought to guide Elowen on this detail." A thought struck him, and a mischievous smile spread across his face. "Why not teach her yourself?" Cassian stared. "I... teach her?" "Yeah!" Theodric confirmed.

Cassian's fingers tightened. He pressed his lips. "...I don't know where to start." 273 1:27 pm  
ppp. Chapter 62 Why Not Teach Her Yourself? Finished Theodric laughed, "You've always been good at everything-poems, essays, you memorize them after one look: weapons, you pick them up and handle them right away. Father used to praise you, saying you could do anything. And now there's something you can't?" Cassian sighed, "No man is perfect." He lifted his eyes, a plea in them. "Brother, teach me, please." Theodric's smile widened. "Sure, no problem." 1.7K 2  
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Chapter 63 What Kind of Young Lady Do You Favor? He patted his shoulder. I've got plenty of good stuff in my palace. Take it all back with you later." Thanks, brother." Finished "It's nothing." Theodric said, waving a hand. "This year, I won't be sending you on any campaigns. Stay in Vanelle. focus on healing those legs properly and on giving your wife a child or two." The thought of having children with Elowen sent an unexpected heat creeping up Cassian's neck. He lowered his gaze, silent for a long moment. On the other side of the palace, Isla and Alaric were already seated.

A senior maid hurried over, leaning close to Isla's ear to whisper a report-three young ladies had offended Cassian and were now kneeling in punishment on the palace pathway. Isla murmured. "She does have a way about her." She had never seen Cassian show such blatant favoritism to anyone except Theodric. What spell had Elowen cast on him? Isla looked up as Elowen appeared at the entrance, walking with an unhurried grace, a younger girl trailing behind her. "Who is that with her?" Isla asked, though she didn't specify. The maid understood immediately.

"That should be the youngest daughter of the late General Aldric Ashcroft, the Duke's maternal uncle." "Unmarried?" "No, Your Majesty." Isla gave a soft, derisive snort. "Hoping to marry into the Crown Prince's Wing, is she? Elowen still has ambitions..." Hearing the name, Alaric glanced up, his eyes tracking Elowen's progress into the hall. She looked even more captivating today than she had the last time he saw her. His gaze lingered, reluctant to pull away. "What is it, Alaric? Do you fancy that girl?" Isla asked. He took a moment to drag his eyes back. "No." Isla relaxed slightly.

"Speaking of which, I've never really asked-what kind of young lady do you favor?" Alaric's gaze strayed back to Elowen, noting the faint, serene smile that seemed perpetually on her lips. His 1/3 2:27 pm P p p. Chapter 63 What Kind of Young Lady Do You Favor? fingers tightened. "...I prefer one who doesn't smile so much," he said. "Doesn't smile?" Finished His eyes dropped to Elowen's knees. He remembered, before her injury, how much she loved riding and archery-excelling at both, even surpassing him. He gritted his teeth.

"Preferably the type who stays within the manor walls and spends her days reading scripture and classical texts, practicing embroidery-a quiet, domestic sort." Elowen had now reached them. Seeing her, Isla lifted a warm, kind smile at once. "Duchess of Duskmoor! There you are. We've

been waiting. Please, sit." Elowen curtsied. "Your Majesty." Sylyia behind her followed suit with a quick curtsy of her own. Isla glanced past Elowen, affecting a politely inquisitive look. "And who is this young lady?" "This is General Ashcroft's youngest daughter," Elowen replied smoothly.

"I thought today's verse salon was a rare opportunity. All the attendees are of a similar age, so I brought her along. It would be nice for her to make a friend or two." "I see," Isla said, her smile unwavering. She gestured to a maid. "Fetch a chair for Lady Sylvia." As Elowen sat, Alaric spoke up, his tone deliberately pointed. "Mother, I hadn't quite finished my thought earlier." He spoke while watching Elowen from the corner of his eye. She showed no reaction, her attention instead on a platter of fruit and cakes. Irritation flickered in him.

"What I meant to say," he continued, "is that I particularly dislike frivolous, playful girls. If I am to take a wife, especially a Crown Princess, she must be dutiful and reserved. And if she's a skilled cook, I'd dislike that too." Isla looked puzzled. "Why ever not? If she cooks well, she could prepare meals for you." Alaric scoffed, "Mother, I am to marry a Crown Princess, not hire a kitchen maid for the Wing. If she cooks for me, what are these maids for? People would say I mistreat my wife." He then shifted his gaze fully to Elowen, his voice challenging.

"What do you think, Aunt?" Elowen had just taken a bite of cake. She turned to him, confusion plain on her face. "Pardon?" She hadn't been listening at all. Her mind was wholly occupied with thoughts of Azure. Alaric saw no trace of the humiliation or anger he'd hoped to provoke. Only genuine bewilderment. A fresh wave of frustration washed over him. 2/3 Chapter 63 What Kind of Young Lady Do You Favor? 0471 Finished Why does she not react? We were discussing what qualities to look for in a Crown Princess," Isla interjected smoothly, playing the peacemaker.

"In my opinion, culinary skill is the least important. Literary talent and refinement are paramount." Alaric kept his eyes locked on Elowen. "I recall Aunt Elowen always got headaches from memorizing texts as a child and struggled to compose essays. So, I suppose Aunt has little in the way of such 'talent.'" Isla immediately chided him. "Alaric! Mind your manners! She is your aunt!" Elowen, however, merely offered a serene smile. "It's alright. Today's verse salon is the perfect occasion for the Crown Prince to select a truly talented young lady.

Once someone can keep the Crown Prince's Wing in order, His Highness can focus on his own cultivation. Then, perhaps, he won't incur His Majesty's displeasure so often and miss morning court sessions." 1.7K 1 admin

Chapter 64 The Veiled Azure Finished The barbed implication-that his current punishment was due to his own lack of discipline and that he was clearly asking for more-landed perfectly.

Alaric's face darkened. After a tense pause, he forced a careless laugh. "If only we could meet Azure today." Elowen's hand stilled mid-air. Isla looked puzzled. "Azure? Who is that?" Alaric's eyebrow arched, his gaze sliding to Elowen. "An author of popular tales. Surely you've heard of her, Aunt?" Elowen shook her head immediately. "I haven't." Isla's memory sparked. "Ah, I remember now.

At the birthday feast, the Garretts gave Maerwyn some manuscript pages. She adored them. They were drafts of Azure's work." Alaric nodded. "Exactly. According to Maerwyn's sources, Azure is attending today's salon. I promised my sister I'd seek her out in person." Elowen suddenly found the cake in her hand utterly tasteless. That blabbermouth, the owner of Willow Breeze Bookshop's wife! She had stressed secrecy, emphasizing that her identity must never be revealed. And yet it had spread. Even Alaric knew....

Seeing the subtle shift in Elowen's expression, Alaric pressed on, his tone deliberate. "Mother, if Azure can write such compelling stories, she must be exceptionally talented, a true literary genius. It seems she's also a noble lady from Vanelle. Maerwyn is quite taken with her, even hopes she could become my wife. Let's check her out later together. If she's the right fit, I'll make her Crown Princess." Elowen lowered her eyes, a flicker of anxiety tightening her chest. Meeting the bookshop owner's wife today was now impossible.

Fortunately, her last visit to Willow Breeze to deliver Tales of Luminara had been years ago. She had worn a heavy veil that obscured her face completely. Even face-to-face now, the owner's wife might not recognize her. The thought brought a wave of relief. Noticing her sudden relaxation as she calmly picked up another cake and even offered one to Sylvia, Alaric frowned.

1/3 Chapter 64 The Veiled Azure 940 Finisher Then he thought it through. From the way her expressions had shifted, she still cared about him-and about who his crown princess would be.

She was just good at hiding it, marking her feelings away in a blink. What good will that do? He sneered hem my wedding day comes, she'll be the one weeping her heart out, begging for forgiveness at the gates of the Cream Prince's Wing. Soon, the verse salon formally began. Though its true purpose was matchmaking, Isla maintained the pretext. She announced the theme: 'Summer.'" and invited all the young ladies present to compose a poem. This provided a perfect opportunity for each girl to step forward, present her work, and be assessed by the Queen and the Crown Prince.

As a Duchess Elen enjoyed a privileged position. She sat beside Isla, observing the proceedings while leisurely enjoying refreshments. Sylvia joined the others to write, but Elowen watched her bite her quill, frown, and fidget without putting a single word to parchment. It was clear she had

no talent for this and was only here under her mother Marwen's stern orders. As Elowen finished a plate of cakes, she spotted the owner of Willow Breeze Bookshop's wife, Mora, entering the hall. Mora's eyes scanned the assembled young ladies, clearly searching for someone. Isla beckoned Mora forward.

"We hear you are here to meet Azure?" Mora bowed, flustered by the royal attention. "Your Majesty, I never imagined such a trivial matter would reach your ears." Isla smiled benignly, "My daughter, Princess Maerwyn, is a great admirer of Azure." She leaned forward. "Have you seen her in person?" "Yes Your Majesty." Mora replied. "Years ago, when Azure finished *Tales of Luminara*, she delivered the manuscript to my husband herself. However, she wore a full veil. I couldn't see her face clearly." Alaric frowned. "Then how will you identify her today?" Mora explained.

In her last letter, Azure said the matter was urgent and we must meet. She said she would attend today but not reveal her face. Instead, she would wear a light veil and feign a slight limp. That is how I am to recognize her." Alaric found this amusing. A light chuckle escaped him. "How cautious of her His interest in this mysterious author was genuinely piqued. "Have you seen her yet today?" Isla asked. Mora shook her head. Her gaze drifted and accidentally met Elowen's. She paused, a flicker of confusion crossing her face.

2/3 2:27 pm Chapter 64 The Veiled Azure "What is it?" Alaric asked sharply. Finished Mora stared at Elowen, her expression turning hesitant. "It's strange... but this lady seems somewhat familiar... Elowen's heart skipped a beat. She forced her features into serene neutrality. "Have we met?" Isla provided the introduction. "This is the Duchess of Duskmoor." The Duke of

Duskmoor's name thundered across all of Vanelle. Mora instantly bowed her head deeper.

"Forgive me, Your Grace. I spoke out of turn..." Elowen joked on purpose.

"I thought you were about to say I'm Azure." Mora shook her head vigorously. "I wouldn't dare, Your Grace!" Alaric snorted derisively, "Of course not. You can barely compose a letter, let alone write popular tales." 1.7K 3/3 admin

Chapter 65 The Imposter Finished Elowen was too preoccupied with maintaining her composure to bother with Alaric's blatant disrespect. The accusation, though insulting, was currently the least of her worries. Mora sighed, her shoulders slumping. "I waited and waited at the agreed-upon spot, but Azure never appeared. I've been looking since I entered the hall, but I haven't seen her either." "Perhaps she was detained by other matters?" Alaric suggested. Isla's expression sharpened as she recalled something. "Speaking of which, there are still three young ladies who haven't arrived.

Eleanor, Cathy... and Daphne. Daphne is the Garrett girl who gifted Maerwyn Azure's manuscript pages at the birthday feast." Alaric's memory connected the dots. "Lord Chancellor's daughter, Daphne?" Isla nodded. The two exchanged a significant look. Galen had once been a famed strategist and advisor for Elowen's family, renowned for his sharp intellect and literary prowess. His daughter's talents would naturally be considerable. Furthermore, it was Daphne who had given Maerwyn the manuscript. How did she get her hands on it?

☞ One possibility-she was Azure herself, humble for years and never revealing her identity. As if summoned by their thoughts, Daphne entered the hall slowly. All eyes turned. The girl had a pale lilac silk scarf draped loosely over the lower half of her face. More noticeably, she walked with a distinct, painful limp. Mora's eyes widened. "That... that must be her! That's Azure!" Isla

smiled with satisfaction. "Bring Lady Daphne here." Across the hall, Daphne was in a world of hurt. Earlier punishment from Cassian had forced her to kneel under the harsh sun.

She'd used the scarf to shield her face from sunburn. The stone pathway had been merciless, leaving her knees throbbing so badly that every step was agony. She was just about to collapse into a seat and gulp some water when a senior maid from the Queen's retinue approached, summoning her forward. Daphne took a deep, bracing breath and forced herself to walk, each step a fresh jolt of pain. As she drew near the dais, her eyes immediately found Elowen. 1/3 2:27 pm ppp. Chapter 65 The Imposter There she sat, looking perfectly comfortable, nibbling pastries without a care in the world.

A spike of bitter resentment shot through Daphne. Are you... Azure? Mora ventured, her voice tentative. Daphne froze. Azure Me? The idea was absurd. "No I'm not-" she began to deny. Isla's voice was gently encouraging. "Lady Daphne, please don't be afraid. We mean no harm. It's just that Maerwyn is such an admirer of Azure. We heard she would attend today, and both Alaric and I were curious to meet her in person." Alaric made a sound of agreement. His earlier intrigue about Azure had softened his demeanor. He rested his chin on his hand, his gaze on Daphne almost pleasant.

"Just tell the truth. No need for nerves. But Daphne's nerves were screaming. Her palms grew clammy with sweat. This was the first time Alaric had ever spoken to her with such a mild, almost friendly tone. In the past, due to her family's connection with the Hales, she'd crossed paths with him a few times. He had always been like a distant, untouchable peak-alooof, indifferent, his attention a rare commodity. The only person who ever seemed to thaw that icy exterior was Elowen. Daphne had watched, green with envy.

Later, when Alaric began ignoring Elowen too, Daphne had initially felt a spiteful satisfaction. But she soon realized that without Elowen as a link, she had lost her only tenuous connection to Alaric, leaving her frustrated and disappointed. And now, he was looking at her, speaking to her. His tone was almost gentle, A warm. dangerous thrill shot through Daphne's chest. Azure If only she really were Azure. How perfect that would be. But... They didn't seem to have ever met Azure in person. The author was beloved by many in Vanelle but had always been a ghost, never seen.

Chapter 5 The Imposter Perhaps Azure had stopped writing. Perhaps she was even dead. A wild, audacious idea took root in Daphne's mind. If that was the case, what was to stop her from claiming the name? Finished She could write. She composed poems and stories; she believed herself no less talented than this so-called Azure. She'd just lacked the opportunity. And if she claimed the title here, now, under the witness of the Queen and the Crown Prince, even if the real Azure surfaced later, who would believe her if Daphne held firm? Her decision was made. Her heart hammering against her ribs.

Daphne sank into a deep curtsy. "Your Majesty, Your Highness, I... I am indeed Azure. Elowen blinked, caught off guard. She hadn't expected Daphne to outright steal her identity. While she had no intention of revealing herself today, having her pen name hijacked still left a sour taste in her mouth. "Lady Daphne, Elowen said, her voice cool and clear. "Are you certain?" Daphne lifted her chin. "What does Your Grace imply? Do you doubt my word?" Elowen arched an eyebrow. "I merely have a question. Why did you choose the name 'Azure'?"

Why not Crimson or 'Sapphire?" A bead of sweat traced a path down Daphne's temple. "I..." She faltered. She couldn't answer. The name held a personal meaning for Elowen, one Daphne could never guess. 1.7K 1 admin

Chapter 66 Stolen Glory Years ago, Elowen had traveled with her mother to visit her maternal grandfather for his birthday. Finished In high spirits and particularly fond of his granddaughter, he had gifted her a sizeable tract of land, complete with a mountain. Her favorite place of all was the lake hidden in the valley-its waters a clear, vivid blue, bright and dazzling as a precious gem, inlaid amidst the rolling hills. She named it Azure Lake and took Azure as her pen name ever after. Alaric snorted dismissively, "What's there to be jealous of?"

If she isn't Azure, does that suddenly make you the author?" Elowen's voice was cool. "I'm not jealous. No one has ever seen Azure. It's easy to fake that identity." At her words, Daphne flinched. Her eyes instantly grew wet and red-rimmed. "Fake?" Alaric glanced at her. "If it's fake, how would Lady Daphne know about the identifying signals? The scarf and the limp?" Daphne's heart skipped a beat. So that was the signal? It seemed fate itself was aiding her deception! Elowen was equally taken aback.

The signals she'd hastily concocted, and here was Daphne, performing them perfectly by sheer, unlucky coincidence. Now, now," Isla interjected smoothly, offering Elowen a conciliatory smile. "I understand, Duchess Elowen. You mean well, wanting to ensure we aren't deceived. But how dare Lady Daphne deceive the Crown Prince and me?" She would. Elowen thought coldly. The Garrett family had a history of deceit. Years ago, if Daphne's older brother hadn't forged a military order, Elowen's sister-in-law wouldn't have been frightened into a miscarriage- robbing Elowen's brother of his only child.

The memory sent a chill through her veins. Daphne spoke up, voice trembling with feigned hurt. "The name 'Azure' was just something I thought of on a whim. I never revealed my identity before because I wished to avoid unwanted attention. If Your Grace dislikes it, then I will stop writing. I'll never use the name 'Azure' again." Elowen frowned. The performance was masterfully pitiful, painting Elowen as the unreasonable bully. 2:27 pm Chapter 66 Stolen Glory Mora shot Elowen several disapproving looks, though she dared not speak out against a Duchess.

Elowen also heard Alaric's soft, derisive tsk. She knew that sound intimately from her past life-it was the sound he made when he was deeply displeased. A phantom trace of that old anxiety tightened her chest, and her fingers curled instinctively. Finished But then she looked down, her gaze catching on the intricate pattern embroidery on her sleeve. A sudden, solid realization washed over her. I am not the unloved, powerless Crown Princess anymore. I am the Duchess of Duskmoor. Cassian has my back. Her fingers slowly unfurled. She lifted her eyes to Daphne, her tone measured and calm.

"Lady Daphne, we grew up together. You used to visit Hale Manor frequently. But after my father, brother, and uncles fell in battle, your visits ceased entirely." The implication was clear-Daphne was a fair-weather friend who abandoned the Hales when they lost their power. Daphne paled, stammering, "That was because-" Elowen cut her off cleanly. "Yeah. We haven't been close for years, so I have no way of knowing if you truly are Azure, or if you've ever written a single tale. Now that I am married to Duke Cassian, Princess Maerwyn is my niece. She adores Azure.

As her aunt, I feel a responsibility to ensure the person claiming that name is genuine, to prevent any disappointment or misunderstanding. Yet you speak as though I am envious of you?" She

allowed a slight, ironic smile to touch her lips. "Your father once served under mine. If I were truly jealous of your talent, your reputation as Vanelle's 'little literary prodigy' would never have flourished. Why would I choose today, in front of Her Majesty and His Highness, to make such an issue of it otherwise?" Daphne was left speechless, tears now streaming freely down her cheeks.

"Enough," Isla sighed, her tone weary. "Of course the Duchess is not jealous." She turned a gentler expression on Daphne. "We know you are a modest girl, dear. No one is blaming you. Dry your tears. After a few more soothing words from the Queen, Daphne finally used her scarf to dab at her eyes, nodding with red-rimmed acquiescence. No sooner had this scene settled than a sharp, angry voice cut through the hall below. "Did you do that on purpose?!" Elowen looked toward the commotion. A girl around ten had shot to her feet, gripping Sylvia's wrist tightly, her face flushed with fury.

Sylvia cast a helpless glance toward the dais. 2:27 pm ppp. Chapter 66 Stolen Glory Finished  
"Stop looking around!" the girl snapped, her voice rising. "I worked for ages on my poem! Then you come along and knock over my inkwell! It's ruined! What am I supposed to present to Her Majesty and His Highness now?" Sylvia shook her head frantically. "I'm sorry. It was an accident..." "An accident? 'Sorry' fixes nothing!" the girl retorted. "Then... you can have my poem instead?" "Your poem? It's terrible! I don't want it!" A murmur of gossip began to ripple through the surrounding guests.

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Chapter 67 A Mother's Ambition "Who's that girl?" 049 Finished "That's the daughter of the Deputy of the King's Works. Quite a clever poet, they say. Unlucky to have her work ruined."

"And the one who ruined it?" "No idea. She came with the Duchess of Duskmooor, didn't she?" "I saw the whole thing. Looked intentional to me. Maybe the Duchess put her up to it..." "I heard the Duchess used to be close with the Crown Prince..." The whispers faded into pregnant silence, heavy with unspoken implications. Elowen's brow furrowed. Below, Sylvia was pleading, voice thick with forced meekness.

"I said I was sorry. I even offered you my poem. You refused it, called it terrible..." "Stop your sniveling!" the girl snapped, shoving Sylvia hard. Caught off balance, Sylvia stumbled backward several steps, teetering on the edge of a fall. A firm hand caught her arm, steadying her. Sylvia looked back into the calm face of Edith, a senior maid from Duskmooor Manor. Elowen's voice rang out, clear and authoritative. "This is a verse salon personally hosted by Her Majesty, with His Highness the Crown Prince in attendance. No one wants trouble, so let's not call it deliberate.

Sylvia made an honest mistake and has apologized. Grilling her won't help anyone and only puts Her Majesty on the spot. How about we leave it at that?" All eyes shifted to Elowen. Everyone present knew who she was—the Duchess of Duskmooor, whose status had soared in Vanelle, especially now that the Duke was awake and his future looked brighter than ever. The angry girl's face remained stormy. She gritted her teeth but managed a stiff, "Your Grace." Elowen offered a conciliatory smile. "I understand your frustration. You care deeply about today's event, which is why the accident upset you.

But the poem was freshly written. The words should still be fresh in your mind as well. Take a moment to recall them. Sometimes, what we remember and rewrite turns out even better than the original." With the Duchess having spoken so reasonably, the girl had no grounds to press further. She shot Sylvia one last venomous glare before muttering to Elowen, "Thank you for

your kind words. Your Grace." Elowen nodded, then gestured for Sylvia to follow her. She first addressed Isla. "Your Majesty, with your 1/3 28 pm p pp.

Chapter 67 A Mother's Ambition permission, I shall retire briefly to refresh myself." Isla granted it with a wave. "Come with me." Elowen said to Sylvia, her tone leaving no room for argument. Sylvia gave a muffled "Yes, Your Grace." As Elowen left the hall, the whispers started up again behind her. 944 #Finished Isla leaned toward Alaric, a knowing smile on her lips. "Duchess Elowen did that on purpose. Stirring things up to catch your eye-she wants to marry the girl into the Crown Prince's Wing." Alaric had reached the same conclusion. His eyes darkened.

So Elowen knows she can't have me for herself anymore, and now she's trying to plant one of her own people beside me. All her previous indifference had been an act. She couldn't let him go. She was resorting to underhanded tricks to stay in his orbit. A cold, superior amusement curled inside him. How pathetic. Ironically, he found himself losing interest in Elowen's theatrics. The mysterious Azure-Daphne-seemed far more intriguing now. Outside the hall, Elowen led Sylvia to a secluded, shaded spot near an ornamental rock garden. She sat on low stone ledge and cut straight to the point.

"Was this your mother's idea?" Sylvia flinched. "I... I don't know what you mean, Your Grace." Elowen spoke calmly, her gaze steady. "Once a scheme like this begins, it rarely ends with just one incident. If you followed your mother's instructions today, she will demand more from you tomorrow. I helped you today. But if you won't be honest with me, I'll not intervene again." Sylvia's face paled. After a long silence, she hung her head. "My... my mother said I have no talent for verse. That whatever I wrote would only invite ridicule from His Highness. But...

she said I must find a way to catch his eye..." Elowen's frown deepened. "So you deliberately ruined another girl's work?" Sylvia gave a miserable, barely audible nod. Elowen understood. "Your mother wants you to marry into the Crown Prince's Wing, huh?" Humiliation washed over Sylvia. She buried her face even deeper, which was answer enough. Elowen felt a flash of cold anger toward Marwen. First, she tried to force her daughter into being the Duchess of Duskmoor. Failing that, she now aims for Crown 2/3 2:28 pm pp p Chapter 57 A Mother's Ambition Finished Princess?

Today's little drama had done nothing but tarnish Duskmoor's reputation. She fixed Sylvia with a penetrating look. "What do you want?" Tears welled in Sylvia's eyes. "All I'm good at is embroidery... How could I ever dream of being Crown Princess? But my mother threatened to disown me if I didn't obey. I had no choice..." Elowen studied her. The fear and shame seemed genuine. Her expression softened slightly. "If what you're telling me is the truth, then listen. When we return to the manor. I'll help you find a suitable match-a good marriage, away from your mother's influence.

Once you have your own household, she will have far less power over you." Sylvia's head jerked up, hope warring with disbelief in her eyes. "You'd help me?" Elowen met her gaze squarely. "I give you my word." 1.7K H 313 admin

Chapter 68 Who You Marry Really Matters 1 Finished Sylvia was effusive in her gratitude, promising through her tears, "When we return, I'll embroider the finest baby bonnet for you! For when your child arrives." Elowen was momentarily taken aback. Her child. Her and Cassian's child? She... had never even thought about it. The remainder of the verse salon passed without further incident. Several young ladies displayed notable talent, but it was clear that Isla and

Alaric's favor had settled on Daphne. If nothing unexpected happens, she'll still marry into the Crown Prince's Wing in this life.

On the way back, Elowen fell into thought. Some details of her past life were shifting, but the core trajectory seemed stubbornly unchanged. As for the stolen pen name "Azure," she found she didn't mind much. It was just a name. A name could be stolen, but true talent could not. She could simply create another name and find a more discreet bookshop. Reaching the Duskmoor carriage, she found the door already open. Cassian was inside, casually flipping through the pages of a book. "You're back so soon?" Elowen asked, surprised. She'd expected him to converse longer with Theodric.

"Not long," he replied without looking up, his focus on the page. A long finger turned another leaf. Curiosity piqued her. "What are you reading?" She assumed it would be a treatise on military strategy, or perhaps a volume of classic poetry or scripture. She climbed into the carriage and leaned over to glance at the page before he could react. Her eyes caught a passage—"Luminara feigned a pout and turned to leave, but was caught and pulled tightly into an embrace. He was desperate for her kiss, and Luminara resisted no longer.

Locked together, they fell back upon the bed..." Elowen's face flushed a brilliant scarlet. It was Tales of Luminara! Her book! "It's a popular tale, Cassian said smoothly, noting her blush from the corner of his eye and attributing it to maidenly modesty. 1/3 Open the Who You Marty Really Matters 0491 Finished He smoothly closed the book. "Written by Azure. My brother gifted it to me." Elowen was stunned. The King reads this? Something in her worldview cracked a little. Yet, a wave of profound relief washed over her. Thank goodness she hadn't been exposed as Azure today.

The story's first half was full of witty antagonism between the leads, but the latter half-well, it involved a great deal of kissing and other activities. If Theodric knew she was the author, he'd either praise her to her face or ask, with unsettling curiosity, how an unmarried maiden had conceived of such amorous scenes. The sheer mortification would have made her wish to vanish into the earth. Thankfully, that particular brand of awkwardness was now Daphne's problem.

Seeing her blush and clam up.

Cassian thought she was bothered that he was reading a spicy storybook, that she'd think he wasn't serious or something. After a pause, he clarified, "I don't usually read this sort of thing. It was a gift from my brother. I was merely glancing through it." Elowen dragged out a soft "Oh." Cassian set the book aside. "How was the salon?" "It went smoothly." "Who caught the eye of the Queen and Alaric?" Daphne." Elowen said after a moment's thought. "She claims to be 'Azure.'" Cassian's brow furrowed. "And no one questions the claim?" "You doubt her?" Elowen asked, surprised. He nodded.

I've only read half, but I can already sense the author's character. It doesn't fit Daphne." As he spoke, his gaze flickered to Elowen. If anything, it seems more like you. Elowen was inwardly astonished. Isla, Alaric, so many others had accepted Daphne's claim without question. Only Cassian had doubted. Was his intuition simply sharper? 213 2:28 pm Chapter 68 Who You Marry Really Matters For some reason, the thought pleased her. A small, genuine smile curved her lips. As the carriage rolled on, Elowen recounted the incident with Sylvia.

alb Finished "...I confirmed with her that she has no such ambitions; it's entirely her mother's doing. But what happened at the salon will mess with our Duskmoor Manor's reputation once it spreads." Cassian listened with half an ear to most of it. But the phrase "our Duskmoor Manor"

resonated deeply. A pleased, almost imperceptible smile touched his lips. "Reputation is a fickle thing. Pay it no mind." "Really?" Elowen asked softly. "Really," he affirmed. "People will whisper behind closed doors. We live within our own walls; we won't hear a word of it.

And if anyone is foolish enough to mention it to your face, you have every right to rebuke them, punish them, or simply tell me, and I'll handle it." Elowen felt a quiet sense of wonder. In her past life as Crown Princess, Isla had constantly reminded that she represented the dignity of the Crown Prince's Wing and the royal family, that she must act with utmost caution. Her failure to produce an heir had been framed as a profound dishonor. Yet here was Cassian, telling her not to worry about such things.

"Tell me, and I'll handle it." She felt that line sink deeper into her bones: who you marry really matters. 1.7K 1 3/3 2:28 pm admin

Chapter 69 Dreams and Doubts 4445 Finished "As for Sylvia, handle the matter as you see fit," Cassian continued. "Everyone in Duskmoor Manor answers to you now." Elowen nodded slowly. "Thank you, my lord..." The carriage pulled into the manor's courtyard and halted. A young footman was already waiting. "Your Grace, General Nevin has been waiting for you for some time" Before Elowen could even form a question, Cassian explained, "General Nevin serves in the Northern Garrison. Years ago, he kept a woman outside. Pressured by his family, he later married a lady of equal standing.

Recently, that woman sought him out at the garrison. It was a mess." Elowen blinked. So the one making a scene wasn't Cassian's former sweetheart. It seemed Cassian's mysterious beloved was indeed considerate and discreet, causing him no trouble. No wonder he liked her. She simply nodded. "I understand. Please, don't let me keep you." Cassian studied her for a moment longer

before allowing Bran to help him into his wheelchair and wheel him away. In the palace, as soon as the verse salon ended, Moll hurried back to Maerwyn. Azure is Lady Daphne, Your Highness!

The Lord Chancellor's daughter." Maerwyn was taken aback. "Her?" She frowned. "Are you certain? There's no mistake?" "Absolutely! Mora identified her, and she admitted it herself," Moll confirmed. "Though the Duchess of Duskmoor did question it at first." Hearing Elowen's name stirred Maerwyn's ire. "Who is she to question anything? Just petty jealousy, no doubt." "His Highness the Crown Prince said the same-the Duchess was jealous." Maerwyn sniffed in agreement. Yet, thinking of Azure- She had met Daphne before.

Neither her personality nor anything else about her seemed to fit the author's 1/3 2:28 pm ppp. Chapter 69 Dreams and Doubts persona she had imagined. Something felt... off. Elsewhere in the palace, Alaric returned to the Crown Prince's Wing. With his temporary suspension from court, no official documents were sent his way. He tried to read a history tome in his study but found his mind wandering. An idea struck him. "Attendant," he called. "Fetch me a copy of a tale written by Azure. I want a look." That very evening, Tales of Luminara was placed in his hands. He opened to the first page.

The male lead's name was Alrik.. Finished Reading further, he found the description of the leads' first childhood meeting-they took an instant dislike to each other and promptly got into a physical fight. Alaric froze. He remembered his first meeting with Elowen. It had been exactly like that. He couldn't recall what started the fight, only that Elowen had been surprisingly strong. She'd pinned him to the ground, leaving him with a black eye. Later, before his father, before he could even speak, Elowen had burst into tears first. The similarity between memory and tale was unnerving.

A strange, unsettling feeling curled in his gut. Could Elowen be Azure? But that was impossible. If she were, and knew how much Maerwyn adored Azure, she would have flaunted it immediately to win his favor. Yet she hadn't. Daphne grew up with Elowen. She must have heard stories about our childhood and found them amusing, so she wrote them into her tale. He talked himself down and kept reading. The witty banter between the leads amused him. The subtle development of their affection made him smile.

Their passionate declarations and intimate scenes made his gaze grow intent, his throat strangely dry. "Your Highness." A servant's voice startled him. 2:28 pm ppp. Chapter 6 Dreams and Doubts 0 Finished He snapped the book shut. The servant entered and said softly, "It's late, Your Highness. Time to rest." Alaric cleared his throat, his voice oddly rough. "Mm." After a brief ablution, he went to bed. Sleep brought dreams. In the dream, he was Alrik, meeting Luminara under a moonlit sky. She stood gracefully beneath a blossoming tree. As he approached, he saw Daphne's face.

He felt nothing but smiled a little. But as he drew nearer, Daphne's features wavered like ripples on water, dissolving and reforming until they solidified into Elowen's face. Alaric's breath hitched. He pulled her into his arms, his mouth seeking hers as his hands fumbled with the laces of her gown... Dawn had not yet broken when Alaric jolted awake. He looked down at himself, his heart pounding. Last night, he had dreamed of... Elowen? He scowled fiercely. Impossible. He didn't like Elowen. He should have dreamed of Daphne. It was Daphne he wanted.

In Duskmoor Manor, Cassian's discussion with General Nevin in the study lasted the entire night. Elowen, alone in their chambers, slept soundly and comfortably. In the deepest part of sleep, she grew warm. Something was crowding her, pressing against her side. Half-asleep, she

tried to push it away. Her hand met something firm yet yielding. Her mind, sluggish with sleep, couldn't process it. It felt like wading through thick honey. 1.7K admin

Chapter 70 Get Used to Each Other Finished Too drowsy to even open her eyes, Elowen gave a half-hearted push. When it yielded nothing, she gave up with a soft, disgruntled murmur, wriggled backward to reclaim a sliver of space, and sank back into sleep. In the hazy distance between waking and dreaming, she thought she heard a quiet sigh. But sleep was a far more pressing demand. It felt like an age before she finally awoke. A distinct feeling of being watched crept over her. She slowly cracked one eye open a sliver, only to meet Cassian's dark, intently focused gaze.

She snapped her eye shut immediately. "Awake?" His voice was low, a rumble in the quiet room. Elowen hesitated, then opened her eyes again, caught in the act and feeling flustered. Cassian studied her. "It seems..." he began, choosing his words with care, "you are not yet accustomed to my presence." Accustomed-the word was both accurate and gentle. 'Of course I am," Elowen denied reflexively. She scrambled for proof. "If I weren't, how could I share a bed with you?" Cassian reminded her gently, "Last night, I did not return.

When I came back this morning, you had your eyes closed, but you tried to push me away." Heat bloomed at the base of her ears. She averted her gaze, guilty. He continued, "A few nights ago, I returned to the manor very late. I thought you might wait, but you were already asleep." "I..." Elowen started to defend herself. "Sound asleep," he added. She had no defense. "I'm not blaming you," Cassian said, his tone shifting. "I simply think that since we're married, we should get accustomed to each other sooner rather than later." Elowen gave a slow, thoughtful nod.

"I understand..." Cassian leaned a little closer, as if he hadn't quite heard. "What was that?" Elowen met his eyes, her expression earnest. "I said I understand, my lord. In the future, I'll wait for you. And I won't push you away." 173 2:28 pm PPP Chapter 70 Get Used to Each Other Finished A faint, satisfied smile touched Cassian's lips. "Good." "My lord," Elowen ventured, "you finished your work very late. Would you like to sleep a little longer? It's still early." "I should," he agreed. Elowen made to sit up.

"Then you rest, I'll-" Before she could finish, a firm hand settled on her waist, holding her in place. "Stay." "Me?" Elowen blinked. Cassian made an affirmative sound, his arm resting loosely around her waist as he closed his eyes. "As we just agreed, we should get used to each other." Elowen lay perfectly still, acutely aware of the steady rhythm of his breathing and the warmth radiating from his body. A whirlwind of thoughts spun in her head. From his words, it seemed he intended for them to settle into a proper, peaceful married life. Had something happened to the woman he truly loved?

She didn't dare ask, fearing she might reopen a painful wound. It didn't matter, she decided. For now, she would stay in Duskmoor Manor. And it gave her time to think about what her next tale should be about. "What are you thinking?" Cassian's voice broke the silence, startling her.

"Nothing," she said after a beat. "Your body is tense," he observed, his hand giving a slight, testing press against her waist. "Are you nervous?" "I..". The waist was a sensitive spot, and Elowen was still an untouched maiden. Just that light touch had her cheeks burning. Even her voice shook.

"My lord, please don't... tease me like that..." The words came out soft, trembling with shyness. Cassian's eyes flew open. He moved his hand from her waist to gently cover her mouth. Elowen's

cheeks burned a deep rose. Her wide, confused eyes, glistening with unshed moisture, looked up at him. Cassian's throat moved as he swallowed hard. My brother said if she doesn't know, then I might as well teach her. 2 Theodric's advice echoed in his mind: "You're husband and wife. If you've got the nerve, just be direct. Tell her you want a child. If you're shy, take it slow.

Start by holding each other. That tale, Tales of Luminara, 2:28 pm Chapter 70 Get Used to Each Other shows it-they kissed first, then found their way to bed." Cassian wasn't shy. But he wanted to show Elowen respect. He had decided to proceed gradually, starting with getting her used to simple touch. Finished What he hadn't anticipated was how sensitive she would be. A mere touch to her waist, and she flushed like this. Feeling his hand over her mouth, Elowen squirmed slightly in discomfort. Cassian released her. "Aren't you going back to sleep?" she asked.

Cassian, wrestling with the physical reaction, ground out a single word. "Yes." Elowen thought for a moment, then tentatively reached for his wrist. She guided his hand back, placing it on her side. Cassian stiffened. "What are you doing?" "You said..." Her voice was so soft he had to strain to hear it. "...I should get used to you." She hesitated, her voice dropping even further. "Just... just don't squeeze or press like you did before. Holding me like this is fine." Something inside Cassian went impossibly soft. How could anyone be this adorable...

His palm rested against the small of her back, and he closed his eyes tightly. With a formidable effort of will, he forced back the more primal thoughts clamoring for attention. Then, he withdrew his hand. "You get up first." 1.7K 3/3 admin