

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

We Had Something Real But Didn't Handle It Right

621

Chapter 621 The Fall Begins

Finished

As Elowen's pregnancy advanced, the swelling in her ankles had become impossible to ignore, and Cassian had been paying closer attention to it with each passing day. He sat beside her with one of her legs resting carefully across his lap while his thumb worked slowly along the tender muscles of her calf, easing the soreness little by little with far more patience than any servant could have managed.

The steady pressure felt so soothing that Elowen gradually relaxed against the cushions near the hearth. Her eyes drifting half shut while she let him tend to her in silence.

Without pausing his movements, Cassian finally said, "The Ministry of Rites finished reexamining the court qualification trials papers. The revised rankings should be posted within the next couple of days."

Elowen gave a soft hum, already sensing from his tone that this was only the beginning of what he meant to tell her.

"The investigation's gotten uglier the deeper they dig," he continued. "His Majesty intends to have everyone tied to the Crown Prince's Wing questioned as well."

Her eyes opened immediately.

Just moments earlier she had been enjoying the quiet comfort of the evening, but now the ease left her

expression almost at once.

Cassian noticed the shift before she even spoke, and his hand smoothed reassuringly over her leg.

“I know you’re worried about Iris,” he said calmly. “The moment I heard this morning, I went straight to speak with Elira. She’ll find some excuse to pull Iris into her own household for a while so she can avoid most of the inquiry altogether. And even if someone insists on bringing her in for questioning, they won’t get much from her. Iris is smarter than most people give her credit for. She knows exactly what should stay buried.”

Only then did Elowen finally relax again.

“What about Tristan?” she asked.

Cassian did not hide the truth from her.

“Iris never planned on taking him with her.”

Elowen fell quiet for a moment, her gaze drifting toward the pale afternoon light stretching across the floorboards beneath the windows.

“Then either she never fully won him over,” she said thoughtfully, “or she still has another use for him.”

Two days later, Elowen learned exactly what that use had been.

When Cassian returned to Duskmoor Manor that evening, Elowen was seated near the tall windows of her study with estate ledgers spread neatly across the desk before her while the last traces of daylight faded beyond the manor grounds. The moment she heard him enter, she shifted slightly to make room beside her without interrupting her work.

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Cassian settled naturally into the seat at her side, reached for her cup as though it belonged equally to him, and took a sip before speaking.

“Tristan gave them quite a lot,” he said. “Enough to make sure Alaric never recovers from this.”

Elowen turned toward him immediately, every trace of her attention fixed on what came next. Anything involving Alaric finally getting what he deserved was something she had no intention of missing.

“Near the end of last year, Alaric sold a Treasury Office appointment to a merchant named Lucan for a thousand dollars,” Cassian explained. “Once Lucan secured the position, he used the authority that came with it to help his relatives make fortunes off private trade routes and merchant tariffs. In only a few months, they embezzled tens of thousands, and a large portion of that money ended up flowing straight into the Crown Prince’s Wing.”

He paused briefly before continuing.

“And according to the account books investigators uncovered, that wasn’t the only office Alaric sold. Once they followed the ledgers far enough, they found the Baker family tied to similar dealings all over the capital. The former queen’s side wasn’t clean either. Investigators uncovered evidence that several ladies and attendants inside the royal residence suffered because of her over the years, and there were frequent financial exchanges between her household and people outside the palace walls.”

Understanding immediately dawned across Elowen’s face.

“So that’s why Iris left Tristan behind,” she murmured. “He stayed close to Alaric for years, and he’s one of the few people Alaric genuinely trusted. The things outsiders never saw, Tristan saw. And the things nobody else would dare say out loud, people would believe coming from him.”

Cassian nodded once.

“That’s exactly it.”

At this point, Iris had become one of the most critical pieces in the entire plan to bring Alaric down.

Perhaps the most important one of all.

Elowen thought over everything quietly before asking, “With all of this exposed, Alaric isn’t keeping his royal title after this, is he?”

Cassian reached over and loosely closed his hand around hers.

“There’s no chance of that,” he said evenly. “Still, considering he’s His Majesty’s son, my guess is he’ll be stripped of his title and reduced to common status rather than executed.”

Elowen found that outcome perfectly acceptable.

After this scandal, neither the Baker family nor the former queen would ever regain the influence they

once had.

And once all of them were drowning in their own ruin, a disgraced commoner like Alaric would hardly be in any position to protect himself anymore.

Chapter 621 The Fall Begins

At that point, whether she chose to make his life miserable or simply watch him rot would depend entirely on her mood.

The thought pleased her enough that the corners of her lips curved upward before she lowered her attention back to the ledgers,

Then Cassian suddenly remembered something else.

“Oh, right. Today was also the day the examination results were posted.”

Elowen looked up immediately, her eyes lighting with excitement.

“Did Josh go check yet?”

The words had barely left her mouth when a rapid burst of footsteps echoed down the corridor outside, followed almost instantly by Nikki’s breathless voice.

“Your Grace! My brother passed! He really passed!”

Elowen laughed before she even realized she was smiling, and Cassian rose at once to steady her carefully as she stood.

Outside the chamber, Josh’s voice followed behind in obvious panic.

“Slow down! You’re shouting through the entire manor! Her Grace might’ve still been resting!”

Scarlet's amused laughter drifted after him.

"You really think you can stop her right now?"

And she was right.

Nikki was far too excited to restrain herself.

By the time Elowen had fully steadied herself, the door had already creaked open slightly and Nikki cautiously peeked inside, though there was absolutely nothing cautious about the joy shining across her face.

She had clearly run all the way there. Damp curls clung to her forehead, and her cheeks were flushed bright pink from exertion.

The instant she saw Elowen awake, her eyes lit up even more.

"Your Grace!"

Elowen smiled warmly at her.

"Your brother passed, didn't he? I heard you celebrating from halfway across Duskinoor Manor."

Nikki nodded so hard she nearly made herself dizzy, her dimples showing as pride burst across her face,

"He did! Your Grace, he really did! First place!"

That genuinely surprised Elowen.

She had always believed Josh would perform well. He was talented disciplined, and far more hard than most young scholars his age, and with the examinations finally judged fairly this time, he was no longer buried beneath corruption.

Still, she had n

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all of Avenlor.

Cassian explained, “His Majesty appointed several additional scholars from the see the regrading personally. Every paper was reviewed by multiple examiners ere decided.”

not help smiling,

edible.*

turned back toward Nikki, her voice gentler.

k you for bringing me such wonderful news. You’ve made me very happy tonight.

ki’s face flushed even redder.

should be thanking Your Grace instead,” she said shyly. “Without Your Grace helping us, my brother never would’ve had a chance this year.”

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Chapter 622 Names for the Baby

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A softer set of footsteps followed behind Nikki’s earlier chaos, and a moment later Josh finally stepped into the room several paces behind his sister.

Elowen’s gaze naturally settled on him the moment he entered.

The young man wore a dark wool coat that had clearly been altered and repaired more than once over the years, but the worn fabric did little to diminish the quiet steadiness about him. If anything, the simplicity of his clothes only made the composure in the way he carried himself stand out more clearly.

Elowen smiled warmly.

“You really did well, Josh. I’m proud of you.”

Josh immediately stepped forward before lowering himself into a formal bow, one hand pressed across his chest in proper court etiquette as he spoke with unmistakable sincerity.

“I never would’ve reached this point without Your Grace’s support. I’ll remember that for the rest of my life, and I’ll work even harder from now on to repay the kindness you’ve shown me.”

Elowen’s expression softened further at his earnestness.

“You don’t owe me repayment,” she said gently. “Just become the kind of official who truly looks after the people under his care. That’ll mean more to me than anything else.”

Josh straightened slowly, though his posture remained respectfully lowered.

“I’ll remember Your Grace’s words always.”

Elowen smiled before asking, “Does your mother know yet?”

Josh shook his head with visible embarrassment.

“Not yet. The moment we saw the rankings posted outside the Examination Hall, Nikki dragged me straight here before I could even make it home.”

That earned another laugh from Elowen.

“Then stop standing here talking to me and hurry home already. Your mother deserves to hear the news first. I’ll have the kitchens prepare a proper feast tonight so the entire manor can celebrate together.

Josh still looked slightly overwhelmed by all the praise directed at him, but Nikki had already cheered excitedly before grabbing his arm and pulling him toward the door..

“Come on! We have to go tell Mother!”

Josh nearly stumbled after her from how quickly she yanked him away, though he still remembered to turn back long enough to bow respectfully toward Elowen once more before disappearing outside with his

sister.

Not long afterward, Scarlet entered with a small smile that suggested she had enjoyed watching the

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excitement unfold from nearby.

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Whenever something important happened in the capital, Elowen almost always sent Scarlet to gather news personally.

As Elowen carefully lowered herself back into her chair beside the desk, she looked up and asked, “How did the new rankings turn out overall?”

Scarlet stepped closer before answering respectfully.

“Josh placed first. Master Kaelan, Lady Aveline’s son, ranked second, and third place went to the son of a county magistrate from a respected scholarly family. I remained near the square outside the Examination Hall for some time listening to the crowds afterward. Naturally there were still scholars disappointed by the outcome, but most people seemed convinced the judging was finally fair this time.”

Elowen nodded lightly.

“That’s good.”

Scarlet continued, “People throughout the capital are also discussing Prince Alaric’s investigation. From what I heard, most believe his crimes deserve severe punishment, and very few think the king should show him mercy.”

A faintly satisfied smile appeared on Elowen’s face.

“The people most invested in court affairs are usually scholars and educated men,” she said. “Alaric manipulated the court qualification trials and practically turned every ambitious scholar in Avenlor against him overnight. Of course they’re furious.”

And truthfully, that was exactly the outcome she had hoped for all along.

Back when Nordia and Avenlor had still been negotiating peace, Alaric assassinated Roderic and attempted to pin the blame on Cassian instead.

Worse still, he secretly manipulated public opinion so effectively that voices throughout both the capital and the royal court demanded harsh punishment for Cassian day after day. During the worst of it, Duskmoor Manor had even temporarily hidden behind the Hale family name to avoid attracting further hostility.

And now that same tide had finally turned against Alaric himself.

The ruin he once prepared for others had circled back onto his own head.

The day Alaric was officially imprisoned inside the Iron Bastille, the weather over Vanelle was so bright and beautiful that it almost felt ironic.

That morning, after breakfast, Elowen sat near the windows of Stillwater Court with one hand resting absently against the curve of her stomach while she debated whether she ought to go personally witness Alaric’s humiliation for herself. Unfortunately, her pregnancy had become so physically exhausting by now that even leaving the manor for a short outing no longer felt simple.

Before she could make up her mind, another burst of hurried footsteps suddenly sounded outside.

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Lirien and Nikki rushed into the room together, both girls flushed pink with excitement before they had even spoken.

Simply seeing them in such high spirits immediately lifted Elowen’s mood.

“What happened?” she asked with a smile.

Cassian, meanwhile, did not even bother lifting his gaze from the papers in front of him before dryly asking, “So which courtyard did the two of you nearly destroy this time?”

Lirien’s eyes widened instantly.

“Nothing! We didn’t destroy anything!” she protested so quickly that the words nearly tangled together. “We’ve been behaving ourselves lately!”

Nikki nodded emphatically beside her.

“We already got punished after the last time! We’ve been staying inside reading and practicing our writing every day!”

That finally made Elowen laugh.

She beckoned the girls closer before asking gently, “Then what brought the two of you here today?”

Lirien’s cheeks immediately turned a deeper shade of pink.

After hesitating awkwardly for a moment, she finally gathered enough courage to speak.

“Ella... before this, you said I was good at coming up with names, and you promised I could help choose a nickname for the baby.”

Elowen smiled and nodded.

“I remember.”

The instant she answered, Lirien visibly brightened.

She exchanged a quick look with Nikki as though the two girls were silently encouraging one another before carefully pulling a folded sheet of parchment from the hidden pocket sewn inside her cloak.

The parchment had clearly been folded and unfolded countless times already.

“Nikki and I came up with several names together,” she said nervously. “We just weren’t sure if Your Grace would like any of them.”

Something inside Elowen softened immediately at the sight.

She reached out and accepted the parchment gently before unfolding it across her lap.

Several names had been written across the page in crooked, uneven handwriting, every letter carefully traced with obvious effort.

The sight moved her far more than she expected.

Chapter 622 Names for the Baby

They really are such sweet girls.

Seeing that Elowen looked pleased rather than amused, Lirien finally relaxed enough to lean closer and point excitedly toward one of the names.

“This one was my idea,” she explained. “Pip. Because babies are always tiny and round at first, and it also means the whole family staying together.”

Nikki immediately pointed toward another name.

“And this one was mine! Everly! Because I want the baby to stay safe and happy every single year.”

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Chapter 623 The Labor Begins

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Lirien continued, “And this one was Nikki’s idea together with mine. Poppy. The day we were trying to come up with a nickname, there happened to be a magpie singing right outside the window, and everyone said it was a wonderful omen, so we thought the name sounded especially fitting.”

every

The two girls immediately began talking over each other, eagerly explaining how long they had debated

nickname and which ones they liked best. Their voices filled the room with lively energy, and as Elowen listened, the smile at the corners of her lips softened into something warmer and deeper.

She had just opened her mouth to praise them when a violent cramp suddenly tightened through her lower stomach.

The pain struck so abruptly that she barely had time to react before another wave followed close behind, sharper and more brutal than the first until it nearly stole the air from her lungs.

Color drained from Elowen's face almost instantly. A thin sheen of sweat gathered across her forehead while her fingers instinctively tightened against the edge of the chair.

Without even thinking about it, she turned toward Cassian, panic flickering across her features as her lips trembled faintly.

"My stomach hurts... I think maybe I..."

Another contraction crashed through her before she could finish the sentence.

The paper slipped from her fingers completely.

Cassian understood immediately.

His expression changed at once as he crossed the room in long strides and caught Elowen before the pain could fold her in half.

Another wave twisted through her abdomen hard enough to darken her vision. By then, most of the strength had already drained from her body.

Without hesitation, Cassian lifted her into his arms and carried her quickly toward the main chamber while issuing calm but unmistakably urgent orders to the servants outside.

"Go bring Doctor Dray and the midwives right now. Have the warm water brought in along with the linens and everything prepared beforehand. Move quickly."

Then his voice carried sharply through the courtyard.

“She is in labor.”

Mira froze for the briefest moment before delight burst across her face.

“Yes, Your Grace!”

She turned and ran so quickly her skirts nearly tangled around her feet.

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The entire estate immediately sprang into motion. Servants hurried through the corridors carrying steaming water, bundles of fresh cloth, blankets, and extra iron lamps while anxious voices spread the news from one wing of Duskmoor Manor to the next.

Meanwhile, Lirien and Nikki still stood exactly where they were, staring blankly toward the doorway as though neither of them had fully understood what had just happened.

Only moments ago Elowen had been smiling and chatting with them.

Then all at once her face had gone completely pale before the Duke of Duskmoor swept her away in his

arms.

had even managed to hear the rest of what he said.

ly turned to look at each other, both standing there utterly stunned.

silence, Lirien’s voice finally trembled out first.

id I somehow make Ella sick?”

ikki’s eyes widened in horror. “What if it was because of the babies?”

Tears instantly welled in Lirien’s eyes. “My mother’s going to kill me if I caused this.”

Nikki’s tears had already begun spilling down her cheeks. “Mine too. And my brother’s definitely going to lose his mind.”

The two girls frightened themselves into complete panic and immediately burst into tears, clutching onto one another while sobbing so hard they could barely breathe.

At the same time, the main chamber had already become a whirlwind of controlled chaos.

Maids moved rapidly in and out carrying steaming basins, clean towels, fresh blankets, and additional candles for the wall sconces. Even though everyone's expression was tense, the household remained orderly because preparations for this day had been made long ago.

Elowen lay against the bed while waves of pain rolled relentlessly through her body. Every contraction dragged downward with crushing force, as though something deep inside her was being twisted tighter and tighter.

Fortunately, her mind remained mostly clear despite the agony.

Breathing unevenly through clenched teeth, she gripped Cassian's hand tightly and forced out a strained whisper.

"Alaric..."

Even now, she was still thinking about him.

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rown jealous hearing another man's name while his wife was delivering

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The reason she still thought about Alaric at a moment like this had nothing to do with affection.

It was hatred.

Deep, relentless hatred tied to plans she had carefully arranged for a very long time.

And by sheer coincidence, today happened to be the exact day Alaric was finally imprisoned for his crimes.

Everything had happened at once.

Cassian brushed the damp strands of hair away from Elowen's face before wiping the sweat from her cheek with gentle fingers. His voice remained calm and steady despite the worry hidden beneath it.

"Don't think about any of that right now. I already sent Scarlet to handle it. She has my personal seal, so nobody in the royal residence will stop her from entering or leaving. Once everything's settled, she'll come back and tell you herself."

Something in Elowen's expression finally loosened after hearing that.

The moment she learned Scarlet had gone in her place, she released Cassian's hand and focused entirely on enduring the labor.

News that the Duchess of Duskmoor had gone into labor spread through the estate at astonishing speed.

Everyone in Duskmoor Manor had been waiting eagerly for this child.

Elowen was known throughout the household for her kindness and generosity toward the servants, so nearly everyone in the estate silently prayed for her safe delivery.

Elspeth happened to be staying at the manor and naturally learned the news very quickly. Alarmed and deeply worried, she immediately dragged Marissa with her toward Stillwater Court.

By the time they arrived, the courtyard was already crowded with attendants and servants. Duskmoor Manor had long prepared experienced midwives and nurses for the birth, while the royal residence had also sent additional women to assist several days earlier. At that moment servants moved constantly through the courtyard carrying supplies in and out until the entire place felt packed beyond reason.

Elspeth paused to consider the situation before waving her hand decisively.

"We'll only make things more crowded standing around here. We might as well head to Serenity Church and light candles for Ella's safety. Afterward we can go

back and gather some proper gifts for the babies so we'll have something ready once she's delivered."

Then she muttered thoughtfully beneath her breath, sounding completely sincere.

"Although now that I think about it, would Ella actually like receiving an entire chest filled with gold?"

Marissa froze awkwardly beside her.

Elsbeth was wealthy enough that anything she gave would naturally be extravagant and priceless.

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Chapter 623 The Labor Begins

Marissa, meanwhile, did not even own jewelry worthy of presenting before a duchess.

What could she possibly offer Elowen?

It was not because she felt unwilling. Elowen had shown enormous kindness to both her son and daughter, kindness so great that Marissa often felt she could never repay it properly even if she devoted the rest of her life to trying.

Still, whatever she brought would inevitably seem painfully humble beside Elspeth's lavish gifts.

Once Elspeth made up her mind, she immediately turned toward the gates. Marissa quietly swallowed the embarrassment in her chest and followed after her.

Halfway there, Elspeth suddenly remembered something and turned toward the older maid accompanying them.

"Wait a moment. Wher

The maid answe

rien and Nikki are both still back in the courtyard, my lady."

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Chapter 624 A Son Is Born

Marissa looked puzzled. “What are they still doing there?”

Elsbeth sounded almost envious as she sighed lightly. “Young girls can squeeze through crowded rooms without anyone stopping them. Women our age don’t have that kind of luck anymore.”

Then she waved the matter aside.

“Never mind them. Let’s head to Serenity Church.”

Marissa nodded quickly. “Of course.”

Inside the chamber, Elowen was already drenched in sweat from the pain.

Earlier she had honestly believed she could stay calm and quietly deliver the babies, but before long she realized there was no such thing as peacefully giving birth.

Everything hurt.

Her stomach hurt. Her back hurt. Even breathing felt difficult.

At first she had still been gripping Cassian’s hand tightly, but eventually the contractions became so overwhelming that she no longer had the strength to hold on at all. Tears had begun falling at some point without her even realizing it, soaking her lashes, her cheeks, and half the pillow beneath her head.

“Your Grace, you’re doing well. Push a little more. We can already see the baby’s head.”

“That’s right. Slow breaths now. Don’t panic.”

The midwives’ voices seemed to circle endlessly around her ears until every word blended together like the ringing of cathedral bells.

Elowen cried weakly through the pain while miserable thoughts spun helplessly through her mind.

I don’t want to do this anymore. Can’t somebody just put them back?

But the moment her eyes met Cassian's face, she swallowed every complaint before the words could escape.

These were their children.

Because of that, she could only grit her teeth and continue enduring the labor through tears.

Cassian remained beside her the entire time, murmuring soft reassurances whenever another contraction struck, though eventually even he realized there was very little he could truly do for her.

Watching tears stream endlessly down her face made his chest ache unbearably.

Frowning deeply, he turned toward the outer room and called sharply. "Where's Hugh? Bring him in immediately."

Hugh had already been waiting outside with his needles prepared. The moment he heard Cassian's voice, he entered without delay.

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Cassian looked at him impatiently. "Aren't you supposed to be some miracle physician? You've months helping Ella recover her strength, so why is she still suffering this much?"

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Hugh answered with remarkable patience, "I already warned Your Grace that Her Grace is carrying twins. Even if the babies are not especially large, delivering two children at once is naturally more difficult than an ordinary birth."

The room fell quiet for a brief moment.

Cassian still frowned. "And?"

Hugh nearly stopped breathing.

Cassian's expression made it perfectly clear that he considered the entire problem Hugh's responsibility.

"I don't care w

twins or triplets. You're the miracle physician, so figure out a way to make it hurt less."

Hugh

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ugh finally replied, "Then the first thing Your Grace e I work."

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1. fe. If it comes down to choosing, forget the twins entirely. med."

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dded in complete seriousness, "Actually no, Save the twins too. If

babies were lost, she'll be devastated."

ed for her.

just the same.

y swore to himself that after these children were born, he would never allow egna ncy again.

about her, then leave now before you interfere with the treatment.”

reluctantly step out of the chamber, though he kept looking back every few steps a s

away from Elowen physic

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Chapter 624 A Son Is Born

Outside the room. Bran immediately stepped forward with water already prepared

“Your Grace, perhaps you should sit for a while and drink something. Her Grace is blessed with good fortune. I’m sure the children will arrive safely before long.”

Cassian answered distractedly while reaching for the chair beside him, though his attention repuned sed entirely on the chamber doors.

Then suddenly, a loud newborn cry rang clearly from inside the room.

Cassian froze.

The next instant, relief and joy flashed across his face as he turned sharply toward the inner chamber

Not long afterward, one of the older attendants emerged carrying a tiny bundle wrapped **tightly in** soft blankets, smiling so broadly she looked ready to burst.

“Congratulations, Your Grace. A healthy young heir.”

Cassian still looked momentarily dazed as the servant carefully brought the child closer.

The baby was crying loudly with his eyes squeezed tightly shut, his tiny face flushed red from effort.

The servant woman laughed warmly. “This little lord is bound to grow into a strong and fortunate man someday.”

Then she gently urged him, “Your Grace, hold him for a moment. He’s your son.*

Only then did Cassian finally recover from his daze.

On the battlefield he had always remained calm no matter how dangerous the situation became. Even during vicious struggles at court, he had never once shown fear.

Yet now, standing before a child barely larger than his forearm, he suddenly felt completely at a loss.

Cassian carefully gathered the infant into his arms with astonishing caution. The baby felt impossibly soft against his chest, fragile enough that he feared even a little extra strength might hurt him.

Still, after only one glance at the child, Cassian immediately lifted his head again.

“How is Ella? Is she still in pain?”

The servant woman chuckled kindly. “Your Grace, every woman suffers while giving birth. But Doctor Dray has eased much of the pain for Her Grace, and she’s no longer crying out as strongly as before. The doctor also had us prepare slices of supplements for her to keep up her strength. Lady Elspeth sent it over several days ago, and thankfully it’s helping greatly.”

Before Cassian could ask another question, the servant woman hurried back inside.

Cassian listened carefully toward the chamber.

Sure enough, Elowen’s cries had grown much quieter.

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Chapter 624 A Son Is Born

Meanwhile, the tiny infant in his arms had apparently exhausted himself from crying. Before he settled peacefully against Cassian's chest and drifted soundly to sleep.

Cassian lowered his gaze and quietly studied the child.

Bran leaned closer curiously before smiling.

"Your Grace, the young heir looks remarkably like Her Grace."

A faint smile finally appeared on Cassian's face.

"He does."

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Chapter 625 Twin Blessings

The newborn boy looked so much like Elowen that Cassian could see it at a glance the moment the child was placed into his arms beneath the glow of the iron wall lamps,

Lowen's features had always carried a quiet sort of beauty, gentle and refined in a way that only grew lovelier the longer one looked at her, and their son had inherited every bit of that softness. Someday, when the boy was older, he would surely become the sort of young nobleman capable of charming half the ladies at court without even trying.

Even so, another thought lingered stubbornly at the back of Cassian's mind.

Ella's always wanted a *daughter*.

Now that the first *baby's a boy...* is she secretly disappointed?

Before he could dwell on it any longer, another cry suddenly rang out from inside the birthing chamber. Sharp and strong enough to echo through the corridor beyond.

Cassian barely paused to think. Holding the swaddled infant securely against his chest, he immediately turned and strode back into the room.

The midwives had only just finished bathing the baby and wrapping him in soft cloth, planning to bring him outside so Cassian could see him properly.

The moment Cassian crossed the threshold into the chamber, he looked directly toward them and asked without preamble, "Is it a girl?"

One of the older women broke into a delighted grin at once. "It is, Your Grace. A beautiful little lady.

The baby girl had stopped crying almost immediately after being wrapped up warmly. Curled inside the swaddling cloth with her eyes shut tight, she slept peacefully with one tiny fist lifted beside her cheek, pink and impossibly small.

The instant Cassian heard the answer, the tightness in his chest eased completely, and an unguarded smile finally appeared on his face. "Bring them both to Her Grace."

"Yes, Your Grace."

Elowen had nearly exhausted herself during labor. Her face and hair were damp with tears and sweat alike. yet she no longer had enough strength left to care. Resting weakly against the pillows, she looked as though she could barely keep her eyes open.

Mira sat beside the bed with obvious concern written all over her face as she carefully wiped away the dampness from Elowen's cheeks using a soft linen cloth.

"Ella."

Only after hearing Cassian's voice did Elowen slowly force her heavy

eyelids open.

One of the midwives carefully placed a tiny bundle beside her. Cassian lowered the child in his own

arms onto the bed as well.

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Chapter 625 Twin Blessings

No matter how exhausted she felt, these were still the children she had carried into the world herself. Happiness and curiosity inside her were impossible to suppress. Leaning forward slightly, she gently pulled back the edges of the crimson cloth one child at a time to look at them properly.

After studying the first baby for a moment, she spoke in a hoarse whisper. "This one looks like me. Those eyes are definitely mine."

Cassian smiled faintly as he looked down at the infant. "That's our son."

Elowen nodded seriously before turning toward the second baby. The moment she saw the tiny girl, her expression softened all over again. "This one looks more like you, Cassian. Just look at her little hands. They're so pink."

As she spoke, she lifted her gaze toward him with tears still glimmering in her eyes and a smile trembling faintly at the corners of her lips.

Cassian's voice gentled instinctively. "Ella, this is our daughter."

Elowen nodded again, and before she realized it herself, tears slipped quietly down her cheeks once more)

Cassian chuckled softly under his breath as he brushed them away with his fingertips. "Hey now, why are you crying again?"

Elowen sniffed lightly before managing a shaky little smile. "I'm happy, that's all."

The midwife who had delivered the children finished washing her hands before stepping forward with a broad smile of her own. "Congratulations, Your Grace. A son and a daughter both. Duskmoor Manor has truly been blessed tonight."

The other maids and attendants immediately followed with cheerful blessings and congratulations of their own, and before long the entire chamber had filled with delighted voices.

Though Elowen still looked pale from exhaustion, the warmth of the celebration gradually returned a little color to her face.

Cassian turned calmly toward the servants. "Ella has delivered twins safely tonight. Everyone in Duskmoor Manor will receive a reward."

The room became even livelier at once.

Amid all the celebration, Gerda still remembered the important practical matters that needed tending. Stepping forward respectfully, she lowered her head slightly before addressing him properly.

"Your Grace, allow us to bring the babies to the wet nurses for now. Her Grace must be utterly exhausted after labor, and we should prepare fresh bedding, tidy the chamber, and help Her Grace wash before she rests."

Cassian glanced toward Elowen, whose eyes already looked heavy with sleep, and nodded quietly. "You're right. Ella needs rest."

Gerda and Edith each carried one of the babies from the room.

Even while lying there half-asleep with exhaustion, Elowen still found herself worrying about two entirely different things at once. Part of her thoughts followed the children who had just been taken away, while

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Chapter 625 Twin Bla

another part still lingered anxiously on Alaric and whether word of his late had arrived

Her gaze instinctively followed the two older women toward the door, and her lips parted slightly as if she wanted to ask something.

Cassian immediately noticed.

Taking her hand gently into his own, he leaned clo

beside her and spoke in a low, soothing voice. “Don’t start worrying yet, Ella. Nothing involving Alaric will be decided this quickly. Try to get some sleep first. The babies have only been taken to the wet nurses we chose together earlier, the very ones you trusted most

Elowen slowly turned her eyes toward him.

Cassian continued patiently, “Get some rest. By the time you wake up, Scarlet should already be back, and I’ll have the children brought to you again.”

Elowen nodded obediently, though she still kept looking at him as though reluctant to let him leave. Her voice came out soft and worn with exhaustion. “Cassian.... stay with me a little longer.”

The instant the words left her lips, Cassian felt his heart soften so completely it almost became painful.

Nearby, Mira hesitated briefly before speaking up in a careful voice. “Your Grace, perhaps you should step outside for a while so we can help Her Grace clean up properly.”

you need to do. I’m staying here with

Cassian never even looked away from Elowen. “Go ahead and do what you Her Grace.”

Mira blinked in surprise. “But Your Grace... the room is still

Cassian’s expression stayed perfectly calm. “It’s fine.”

In all her years serving noble households, she had never thing.

d

mess after the birth...”

seen

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duke remain in the chamber during such a

Mira still looked uncertain, but before she could continue, Cora quietly rested a hand against her shoulder and gave her a subtle look that stopped her immediately.

Just leave it alone.

Mira could only give in.

Elowen was already drifting toward sleep again, and because of that, Mira and Cora naturally moved far more carefully while cleaning the chamber.

Warm water and cool water were mixed together inside a copper basin until the temperature felt perfect against the skin, and only then did they soak soft cloths and gently clean away the sweat and blood left behind from labor.

Throughout it all, Elowen remained weakly reclined against the pillows without enough energy left to speak.

Cassian stayed seated beside the bed the entire time with one hand resting beneath her cheek, and eventually Elowen unconsciously leaned against his palm as though seeking comfort there naturally.

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the woken up, he was will there exactly the same wa

idden ache rose inside Elower's chest and left her eyes stinging faintly **with** emotion

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Chapter 626 Poppy

He had not doved his eyes once since she fell asle

betade the bed with quart vigilanc

You're av

he asked softly as he leaned closer toward her

Elowen gave a sleepy little hum before instinctively reaching beneath the blanket her fingers around his, she asked quietly. "Why didn't you try to get some rest?"

Cassian gently tightened **his** hold around her hand, **his** voice warm enough to soothe her almost. "Because I knew the first thing you'd want to see after waking **up** would be me

The answer made Elowen laugh softly through tears.

Cassian lowered **himself** closer and brushed away the moisture gathering at the corner of her eye with **thumb**. "What's **this**? Crying again already? You're a mother now?"

Elowen smiled helplessly despite the tears in her lashes. "I honestly don't know what's wrong **with me**."

Then another thought suddenly returned to her all at once. "Wait... I really did give birth to both a daughter and **a son**, didn't I?"

Cassian nodded immediately. "You did. **And** you were incredible, Ella

At once, her attention shifted elsewhere. "Where are the babies?"

"They were just with the wet nurses," Cassian explained patiently while **shifting** slightly aside so she could see farther into the room. "They've already been brought back. They're sleeping now."

The large decorative screen that had once stood beside the bed had been moved away earlier, leaving the center of the chamber open and spacious. In its place sat two carved wooden cradles near the hearth where warm candlelight flickered softly over the sleeping infants inside.

The sight stirred something impossible to describe inside Elowen's chest.

The children had only been away from her for a short while, yet already she found herself aching to see them again.

Supporting herself against the mattress, she pushed herself upright despite the lingering weakness in her body. "I want to look at them."

Cassian immediately moved to help her up carefully.

Wrapped in a pale sleeping robe, Elowen slowly crossed the chamber before leaning over the first cradle to study the tiny sleeping face inside. "This one really does look like me," she murmured with unmistakable delight. Especially the eyes. He's adorable."

Even though she had already said the exact same thing earlier, Cassian still answered with the same patience as before. "That's our son.

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Cosder \$20 Puppy

Elowen smiled quietly to herself before moving toward the second cradle.

The moment she looked down at the baby girl, the tenderness in her expression deepened.

"This one looks much more like you. Cassian. Especially her lips.

Cassian's gaze lingered on both mother and daughter for a moment before he smiled softly. "There your beautiful girl, Ella. We really have a daughter now. Are you happy?"

Elowen nodded at once. "Of course I am."

As she spoke, she carefully reached out to touch the baby girl's soft cheek with the tips of her fingers, and happiness shone so brightly in her eyes that it nearly overflowed.

Even now, the entire thing still felt almost unreal to her.

She and Cassian had children now.

Children who belonged to the two of them together.

“Cassian...

*

Something surfaced in her memory suddenly. “Before I fell asleep earlier, I think I heard magpies outside the window.

Cassian followed her train of thought easily. “I heard them too.”

That made Elowen smile immediately. “Then let’s call our daughter Poppy. Nina and Nikki actually came up with it together before, and I loved it the moment I heard it.”

Naturally, Cassian had no objections whatsoever. “Poppy,” he repeated softly with amusement warming his voice. “That’s perfect.”

Then he glanced toward the second cradle. “So what are we calling our son?”

Before Elowen could answer, the peacefully sleeping boy suddenly burst into loud crying powerful enough to ring through the entire chamber.

The abrupt sound startled Elowen so badly that her shoulders jerked sharply.

Cassian reacted on instinct, pulling her immediately against his chest in a protective embrace before she could steady herself properly.

Together, both of them turned toward the crying infant.

The boy’s voice was astonishingly loud for someone so tiny.

Naturally, the wet nurses and attendants waiting outside the chamber heard him immediately as well. A moment later, the door opened carefully, and several women entered as quietly as possible.

Yet the instant they stepped inside, all of them paused briefly after seeing the scene before them.

Her Grace stood wrapped in pale sleeping robes with a soft linen band tied neatly around her forehead after childbirth. Though traces of exhaustion still lingered in her complexion, warmth and happiness remained unmistakably visible around her eyes.

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Chapter 626 Puppy

Beside her stood Cassian.

Tall and broad-shouldered beneath the candlelight, he remained close enough that the shadowed figure seemed to shelter Elowen naturally within them.

The two of them stood together beside their children in such quiet harmony that the sight of the richly painted family portraits displayed in noble galleries.

embled

Simply look

them filled people with warmth.

Gerda's

reached her ears.

Behind her

the wet nurses stepped forward cautiously before asking in a lowered voice, "Gerda, hal rd?"

named Lenora,

Gerda heard her speak, however, her expression shifted slightly.

x

head, she immediately noticed that the top fastening of Lenora's dress had been left partly

opened at once before lowering her voice sharply enough to warn her without disturbing the room. instructed all of you earlier. When attending His Grace and Her Grace, your appearance must remain proper and orderly."

flushed crimson immediately before fumbling to fix her collar.

at same moment, Elowen noticed the group gathered near the doorway and smiled gently toward

“The little one’s probably hungry. Which of you has been caring for the young lord?”

instant she spoke, Gerda instinctively prepared to answer.

before she could say anything, Lenora hurried forward eagerly with obvious enthusiasm written all over face. “Your Grace, my name is Lenora. The young lord feeds especially well with me.”

owen glanced toward her briefly,

The smile on her face faded ever so slightly, though her tone remained polite. “I see. Thank you for taking such good care of him.”

Lenora immediately lowered her head respectfully. “It’s my honor to serve, Your Grace.”

As she spoke, she crossed the chamber, lifted the loudly crying infant into her arms, and reached to loosen the front of her gown.

Outside,”

Cassian’s voice cut cleanly through

ing.

ra froze instantly before

expression re

he outer sitting room.”

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Chapter 526 Poppy

The gentleness he had shown Elowen moments earlier had vanished entirely.

Now he looked every bit the cold and untouchable Duke of Duskmoor once again.

The sudden shift frightened Lenora badly enough that the color drained from her face.

She did not dare argue in the slightest. Lowering her head immediately, she hurried from the chamber with the crying infant still carefully cradled in her arms.

As she passed by, Gerda cast her a cool glance filled with unmistakable disapproval.

Pretending not to notice, Lenora quickened her pace even more.

Once the chamber door closed again behind them, silence slowly returned.

Elowen turned back toward the second cradle.

Unlike her brother, little Poppy had slept peacefully through the entire commotion without waking even once. Her tiny pink cheeks looked soft and round beneath the candlelight as she continued sleeping sweetly beside the fire.

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627

Reborn to Be His Duchess

Chapter 627 Phoenix

When Elowen first learned she was carrying twins, she had nestled against Cassian's chest and solemnly promised that no matter what happened, she would never favor one child over the other. She had even declared she would keep everything perfectly fair between them.

Now that the babies had finally arrived, she realized the promise was far harder to keep than she had imagined.

Curled comfortably beneath the heavy blankets while soft candlelight flickered against the carved bedposts, Elowen gently brushed her fingertips across her daughter's

r's tiny cheek again before smiling helplessly. "Poppy," she murmured affectionately, "your brother might grow up into a terrible little glutton."

Cassian laughed quietly from beside her.

"Well, he definitely knows how to make himself heard."

That immediately amused Elowen even more. She tipped her face upward to look at him properly, her eyes bright with warmth and lingering exhaustion.

"He cries loudly enough to wake the entire Phoenix for his nickname?"

Cassian did not even hesitate. "I like it."

estate," she said, unable to stop smiling. "What if we call him

Then, after a brief pause, he added, "As for their formal names, the Ministry of Rites will prepare several options according to Avenlor tradition, and we'll choose from those ourselves."

Still focused on the tiny sleeping girl in her arms, Elowen gave a soft hum of acknowledgment.

"I remember," she said. "You already told me before."

Cassian watched her for a moment with faint amusement lingering in his eyes.

Ella's memory certainly seemed much better now.

After spending a while admiring her daughter to her heart's content, Elowen finally remembered something else and turned toward him again.

"Aunt knows I gave birth, right? How is she?"

Cassian reached over to adjust the blanket more securely around her shoulders before answering in usual calm tone.

his

"While you were in labor, the room was too crowded for her to get anywhere near you, so she took Marissa to Serenity Church to light prayer candles for your safety / By the time they came back, you were already asleep. She didn't want to wake you, so she stayed long enough to see the babies, praised them endlessly,

and left.”

Elowen nodded lightly.

Cassian lowered his voice. “Still tired? Want me to lie down with you for a while?”

Elowen immediately looked at him. “Only if you stay.”

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Chapter 627 Phoenix.

His expression softened almost at once. “Of course I’m staying”

The two of them settled back against the pillows together, and once Elowen curled comfortably into his arms, warmth spread lazily through her entire body.

After resting quietly for a while, another thought suddenly crossed her mind, and she tipped her head back slightly.

“Why didn’t you let the wet nurse feed Phoenix in here earlier?”

Cassian’s hand moved slowly along her waist in absentminded comfort while he answered.

“She would’ve needed privacy to loosen her gown, and it wouldn’t have been appropriate for me to remain in the room. Besides,” he added smoothly, “I already knew it would bother you.”

Elowen smiled faintly. “Then maybe I should feed them myself instead.”

Cassian rejected the idea immediately.

“No.”

She blinked in confusion. “Why not?”

The corner of his mouth curved upward with unmistakably dangerous amusement.

The second she saw that expression, Elowen already knew he was about to say something shameless. Heat immediately crept into her cheeks as she glared at him halfheartedly.

“You’re not allowed to say whatever you’re thinking.”

Cassian chuckled under his breath and mercifully kept the inappropriate comment to himself. Instead, he simply tightened his arms around her and pressed a kiss against her cheek.

“After this,” he murmured softly, “we’re never doing this again.”

Elowen blinked at him in surprise.

“What happened to having ten children running through Duskmoor Manor?” she teased lightly. “The estate’s big enough for all of them.”

Cassian looked down at her with a smile that carried more tenderness than humor.

“Did *it* hurt?”

The moment he asked, Elowen’s entire expression collapsed into grievance.

“It hurt so badly,” she complained quietly. “I thought I was going to die from it, but then I kept thinking these were our children, so no matter what happened, I had to bring them safely into the world.”

The softness in Cassian’s gaze deepened instantly.

“And that’s exactly why I can’t bear to let you go through it again.”

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His fingers brushed grody through her hair

“Besides, now we have a von Duskmoor Mapy has an heir

Klowen’s eyes brightened at one

“That’s true And now we have a daughter too. If the title of Oracle ever needs to be passed doug there’ll be someone for that tou

The more she thought about it, the happier she became

A bright smile spread slowly across her face as she continued dreamily, “Once the children are old e we’ll hand everything over to them and leave with all our gold to travel wherever we want, I’ve already so many treasures over the years too , Gifts from

His Majesty, presents from **Aunt...** Her for gradually softened as sleepiness began pulling at her again. “And now that I’ve given birth. **Aunt** will definitely send me even more things... then tomorrow we still have to visit the palace, which means **Hi s** Majevry will probably reward us again too...

Her words slowly faded into silence until only the soft rhythm of her breathing remained.

Curled safely against Cassian’s chest, Elowen fell asleep.

Cassian stayed exactly where he was, lowering his gaze to watch her sleeping face without moving away for

even a moment.

Then, very quietly, he murmured, “All right. Whatever you want.”

Later that night, Poppy woke briefly and cried twice.

Just twice.

Almost as though she were politely reminding everyone that she had opened her eyes.

The moment someone came to check on her, she quieted immediately, and after the wet nurse fed her once more, she fell peacefully back asleep.

Phoenix, however, proved much harder to handle.

Even after being fed and brought back, he continued crying on and off through the night.

Elowen slept deeply enough not to wake.

Cassian, unfortunately, possessed far less patience.

By the time Phoenix started crying for the second time, Cassian had already summoned Gerda inside.

“Take the young heir to the adjoining room,” he instructed calmly. “Have the wet nurse stay there with him. When Her Grace wants to see him again, bring him back.”

As Gerda carefully carried the loudly protesting infant away, Cassian looked after his son with visible

dissatisfaction.

This kid already won't let *anyone* get any sleep.

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Chapter 627 Phoenix

Who knows how much trouble he's gonna be when he's older?

The rest, whatever.

But if he ever makes Ella upset someday...I'll deal with him myself.

The following morning, the very first thing Elowen saw after opening her eyes was Cassian beside her.

He was still there.

Warmth instantly settled in her chest as she moved closer and wrapped her arms around his waist. “You're awake,” Cassian said almost immediately, waking the second he felt her move. “Are you hungry?”

Elowen hummed softly in response, though another thought quickly surfaced as she looked up at him again.

“Where are Poppy and Phoenix?”

Cassian smiled faintly.

“Poppy’s still sleeping in here. Phoenix cried too much during the night, so I had Gerda move him next door. If you want to see him, they’ll bring him back right away.”

Elowen nodded slowly before looking at him more carefully beneath the pale morning light.

“Cassian, you’ve barely slept these past two days because you’ve been staying beside me,” she said softly. “You should get some rest.”

Cassian simply shook his head.

“I’m fine. I only relax when I’m here with you.”

Before Elowen could answer, he added smoothly, “As for Alaric, everything on that side was settled yesterday. Scarlet came back early and has been waiting outside ever since. She’s been waiting for you to wake up.”

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Chapter 628 The Iron Bastille

The moment E

heard that her interest

ed immediately

“Then help me get ready, she said at once. “I want to hear what Scarlet has to say

“Of course

Cassian carefully helped her sit up before draping a warm amber cloak around her shoulders and fastening the ties securely beneath her throat to keep away the lingering morning chill

Her long hair was brushed smooth and loosely tied back with a ribbon, while a soft embroidered band was placed across her forehead to keep stray strands away from her face.

Elowen glanced toward the polished mirror nearby and frowned slightly.

“My complexion looks awful.”

Cassian studied her seriously for a moment before answering without hesitation.

“You still look beautiful enough.”

That immediately made her laugh.

And once she smiled, the lingering exhaustion in her features softened noticeably, as though light had slowly returned to her face.

After Elowen finished preparing herself, Scarlet was finally invited inside.

The moment she entered the room, she lowered herself into a respectful bow toward both Cassian and Elowen.

“Your Grace and Her Grace,” she said properly before continuing. “Yesterday, using Your Grace’s signet, this servant entered the palace and personally witnessed the entire process of Prince Alaric being taken into custody

Elowen leaned forward immediately, interest obvious in her expression.

“Well? What happened?”

Scarlet paused briefly before beginning her account.

According to what she witnessed, when the King’s Guard arrived under imperial orders, Alaric appeared to have expected them already. He had been seated behind his writing desk with a cold, composed expression, showing remarkably little panic at first.

“So Father finally sent you to drag me away for questioning?” he asked coolly.

The guards exchanged awkward glances with one another, seemingly uncertain how to answer.

Alaric let out a sharp laugh.

“You’ve already hauled away everyone around me for interrogation. Iris, Tristan, all of them. And now it’s

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Chapter 628 the Iron Bastile

my turn?” His expression darkened further. “Even if I’m no longer Crown Prince. I’m ab Aventor My mother is still the empress.”

The former empress **has** already been stripped of her title and demoted to Lady Delphine.

The correction came suddenly from Draven, commander of the King’s Guard.

instantly.

emanded, eyes widening. “That’s impossible.”

pression remained perfectly cold.

day, he continued evenly,

“we are not here to escort Your Highness for questioning. By His Majesty’s hand, we are delivering you directly to the Iron Bastille.”

his time, genuine shock overtook Alaric completely.

“They’re not even questioning me first?” he snapped. “Father’s sending me straight to the Iron Bastille?”

Draven’s voice remained emotionless.

“The evidence against Your Highness already fills His Majesty’s desk. Witness testimony, financial records, written correspondence, every accusation fully supported and impossible to deny. Since the facts are already clear, further questioning is unnecessary.”

Alaric clenched his jaw violently.

“What evidence?” he spat bitterly. “Dominic panicked and exposed a few things, that’s all. I killed one Nordian prince, and I helped my younger brothers a little during the court qualification trials. None of that is worth this kind of reaction. Why is Father acting like I committed treason?”

Draven frowned slightly.

“Your Highness greatly underestimates your own crimes while placing far too much faith in the people around you.”

Alaric stared at him sharply. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Draven did not bot

“Everyone in Highness

Every pu Majest

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interrogated. They may once have belonged to Your His Majesty. Once ordered to speak, naturally they spoke. The power he committed over the years has already reached His

ed abruptly. “Iris and Tristan too?”

as transferred to Lady Elira’s residence after only minimal questioning. Tristan, everything almost immediately.”

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Chapter 628 The Iron Bastille

Alaric’s hands clenched violently into fists.

“Worthless trash!”

Standing above him, Draven flexed one hand casually before speaking in an even colder tone

“Since Your Highness now understands the situation, I suggest cooperating peacefully. Otherwise, things may become unpleasant.”

Alaric barely seemed to hear him.

He shot abruptly to his feet.

“I don’t believe Father would really be this heartless!” he shouted furiously. “My mother was his first wife! I’m his son! Over something this small, he’s willing to throw both of us aside like we’re nothing?”

As he spoke, he strode toward the door.

Draven immediately signaled his men with a glance.

Alaric barely made it two steps before two guards seized him forcefully from either side, wrenching his arms back hard enough to make him gasp in pain.

“Unhand me!” he roared. “I’m still the prince!”

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Draven crossed the room in several long strides before stopping directly in front of him, his expression colder than iron.

“His Majesty made himself perfectly clear,” he said flatly. “The crown is occupied with negotiations involving Nordia and preparations for the coming war in the Southwestern Marches. He has neither time nor patience left for Your Highness. If Prince Alaric resists, we are not required to show restraint. Use force if necessary. And if something breaks in the process, summon a physician afterward.”

The words struck Alaric like freezing water poured straight over his head.

Father...

He really is abandoning me.

But no matter how violently he struggled, he could not break free from the guards restraining him.

ed from the room with both arms pinned tightly at his sides.

rything before looking back toward Elowen.

the way to the Iron Bastille and personally watched Prince Alaric being led to let me enter using Your Grace's signet as a special exception, but..." turned instead."

ually surfaced across her face.

stille is an important prison, and this servant felt it inappropriate to enter carelessly given nd..." She lowered her head slightly. "I knew Her Grace would be anxious for news, so I

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Chapter 628 the iron Bastille

hurried back immediately. But by then, Her Grace had already fallen asleep, and I didn't dare disturb you.

The more Scarlet spoke, the guiltier she appeared.

At last, she lowered herself into another deep bow,

"This servant was foolish. Please forgive me, Your Grace"

Elowen immediately smiled.

“How could I possibly blame you for this?” she said warmly. “You handled everything wonderfully, and I’m very pleased. Make sure you collect your reward before you leave.”

629

Chapter 629 A Dangerous Thought

Scarlet looked up immediately, surprise flashing across her face.

“Really?”

Elowen smiled at her, warmth softening her features.

“You explained everything clearly. You told me everything I wanted to know.”

Only then did Scarlet finally relax.

After a brief pause, Elowen asked casually, “You didn’t know Captain Hall before this?”

Scarlet quickly shook her head.

“No, Your Grace. Yesterday was the first time I’d ever met him.”

That only made Elowen more curious.

“Then how did you learn his name?”

Scarlet answered honestly, sitting upright as though afraid to leave out a single detail.

+5 Pearls

“At first, the royal guards wouldn’t let me near the prison escort, but after I showed them His Grace’s signet token, they allowed me through. Prince Alaric never noticed I was standing outside. Later, on the way to

with

1. me. He said he used to serve under His Grace the Iron Bastille, Captain Hall came over and spoke

years ago, and he introduced himself as Hall, with Draven as his given name. He also said that once he found the time, he hoped to visit Duskmoor Manor properly and pay his respects to Your Grace and His Grace. Then before I left, he asked me for my name as well.”

The moment Scarlet finished speaking, the smile on Elowen’s face became impossible to hide.

Amusement spread through her expression little by little until her eyes curved brightly with mischief

without

She tilted her head slightly and simply looked at Scarlet without saying a word.

Scarlet’s face instantly flushed red.

The color spread all the way from her ears down to her neck.

“Your Grace, please don’t look at me like that...”

She lowered her eyes, her voice growing quieter the longer she spoke.

“Captain Hall commands the King’s Guard. He’s a respected man of high rank. So someone like him would never truly notice a woman as insignificant and rough as me. He only asked my name because of His Grace’s reputation. It was courtesy, nothing more. A man like that isn’t someone I could ever dream of matching.”

By the end, there was a faint bitterness in her voice that even she herself did not seem to notice.

9:54 am

Chapter 629 A Dangerous Thought

Elowen’s smile faded slightly.

345 Pearts

“You’re beautiful, clever, and thoughtful,” she said gently but firmly. “Where exactly did you get the idea that you’re beneath anyone else?”

Scarlet lifted her head slightly as though she wanted to explain herself.

Before she could speak, however, hurried footsteps sounded outside the room.

Fast and heavy, filled with unmistakable energy. Even before the door opened, the voice arrived first.

“Ella! I heard you’re awake!”

Elsbeth’s bright voice rang through the chamber loudly enough to startle the little birds perched beneath the stone eaves.

“I came to see you, and I brought gifts for you and the babies!”

Before the sentence had fully ended, she had already swept through the doorway.

Marissa entered behind her dressed far more modestly, her smile shy and restrained.

Scarlet wisely swallowed whatever she had meant to say. She bowed respectfully to

Elowen, then greeted both Elspeth and Marissa properly before lowering her gaze and quietly slipping from the room.

The moment she stepped outside, sunlight spilled warmly across her.

Scarlet paused beneath the gallery corridor while laughter and cheerful conversation drifted from the chamber behind her.

Slowly, she reached up and touched her own cheek.

The skin beneath her fingers was smooth and warm.

She knew she was beautiful.

And she had noticed the way Draven looked at her.

That day at the palace, his eyes had lingered on her again and again.

But what did that really mean?

Men were always quick to lose themselves over a pretty face.

She had seen too many men like that before.

Back in those shameful years she never spoke about, those men had looked at her in exactly the same way Draven did now.

Some men hid it better than others.

That was the only difference.

9:54 am

Chapter 629 A-Dangerous Thought

+ Pearls

If one day he learned the truth about her past, learned where she came from, what kind of woman she used to be, and all the things she had once done...

He would probably avoid her like a cursed thing.

He would likely feel ashamed that he had ever shown interest in her at all.

At the thought, Scarlet frowned faintly.

A breeze drifted through the open corridor, lifting the skirts of her gown lightly around her ankles.

Still.

This was enough.

To remain here at Duskmoor Manor and spend the rest of her life serving the duchess was already more than enough for someone like her.

After standing there quietly for a moment, Scarlet finally turned and walked away.

Inside the chamber, the atmosphere had grown lively.

The moment Elspeth entered, all her attention went straight to Elowen.

Ignoring the cradle where the twins lay sleeping side by side, she crossed the room in a hurry and clasped Elowen's hands tightly while looking her over from head to toe.

“My poor Ella, you must’ve suffered terribly bringing those babies into the world. Are you hurting anywhere? Have you eaten? Do you need anything?”

Elowen smiled and squeezed her hands gently.

“Don’t worry, Aunt. Cassian’s been taking very good care of me. I’m perfectly fine.”

Elspeth looked entirely unsurprised by that answer.

“Well, of course he has. That’s exactly what a husband’s supposed to do.”

Cassian let out a quiet laugh nearby.

Elspeth immediately glanced at him. “What? You think I’m wrong?”

Cassian smiled helplessly. “No. You’re absolutely right.”

Elspeth gave a satisfied little nod before turning back toward Elowen.

“Just make sure you don’t overexert yourself while you’re recovering. Rest when you need rest, eat properly, and stop worrying about everything else. I don’t care how important something seems, it can wait until you’ve regained your strength.”

Elowen obediently nodded.

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“What fought hardly compares to Marwa?”

Elowen followed her toward Marisa standing several steps away.

The moment Elspeth praised her, Marissa immediately looked embarrassed,

Vispeth happily explained, “She insisted on *bringing* gifts too. She carried over rescued hens from hunbe aung Wakefreshegus Tue hew have been raised in her courtyard for years, iyak can

two

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ally nothing special jom-
hedis We Talkd Hillys. We treat them grain at home so they re health

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9:55 am

Chapter 638 Gifts and Blessings

Marissa blinked in surprise.

Then the embarrassment on her face gradually eased into genuine happiness.

+5 Pearls

Elowen asked the servants to bring Phoenix over from the neighboring room as well. Soon, she, Elspeth, and Marissa were all gathered beside the cradle together admiring the twins.

“They’re beautiful children,” Marissa said fondly before asking, “Have their names been decided yet, Your Grace?”

Elowen nodded lightly.

“Their formal names will be chosen through the Ministry of Rites, but I’ve already picked their nicknames.”

She pointed toward the baby girl lying on the left.

“This one is Poppy.”

Then she gestured toward the little boy beside her.

“And this one is Phoenix.”

Marissa blinked in confusion and looked back and forth between the twins.

“The names are so different from each other. I thought twins usually had matching names.”

Elowen laughed softly.

“Poppy was chosen by Nina and Nikki. The two of them spent ages coming up with ideas and filled an entire sheet of parchment with names. Cassian and I both thought Poppy sounded lovely, so we used it. As for Phoenix, labor started too suddenly for me to think of another name ahead of time. Cassian and I came up with it on the spot and ended up liking it immediately. We didn’t really care whether the names sounded symmetrical or matched neatly.”

Marissa nodded thoughtfully.

“That makes sense. As long as the name sounds good and carries a good meaning, that’s what matters.”

“Speaking of Nina and Nikki...” Elspeth said while holding Poppy carefully in her arms. The more she looked at the baby, the more delighted she became. “Yesterday, when your face suddenly went pale and you collapsed into Cassian’s arms, those two girls were terrified.”

Elowen blinked, only then remembering the incident.

“They’re all right, aren’t they?”

Elspeth smiled reassuringly.

“They’re fine now, just badly frightened. Yesterday, Marissa and I went to Seremy Chuch to light candles and pray for your safe delivery, so we returned rather late. By then the cure manor was focused on your labor, and nobody had time to pay attention to the girls. When we came back, both of them were crying so hard their faces were swollen red. It took forever before they finally explained what happened. Apparently

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they thought they’d somehow caused your collapse and were too guilty to even ask anyone what was going

Elowen could not help sighing softly.

Young girls really were endearing.

“What happened afterward?” she asked.

Elsbeth continued, “I explained that you had simply gone into labor and that child birth was a perfectly natural thing. I told them it had nothing to do with them. The girls still looked unconvinced, though. I finally sent them back to their rooms, but neither of them would sleep. They stayed awake until they heard you and the babies were safe, and only then did they finally rest. They still haven’t woken up yet.

Warmth spread through Elowen’s chest immediately.

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Lirien and Nikki were usually noisy little troublemakers who somehow managed to create chaos everywhere they went. One courtyard still had not been fully repaired after the disaster they caused there.

And yet when it truly mattered, they cared about her this much.

Elowen gently touched Poppy’s tiny cheek and smiled softly.

“Once they wake up, have someone bring them over to see the babies. I should properly thank them for helping choose such a lovely name.”

Elsbeth hummed in agreement before lowering her head to look at Poppy again.

The more she stared at the little girl, the more completely charmed she became.

“Our sweet little Poppy,” she murmured lovingly, “when you grow up, I’m going to buy you every beautiful thing imaginable, Gold bracelets, gemstone pendants, beautiful gowns... whatever you want, I’ll give it to your

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