

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 695 A Celebration at Duskmoor Manor As they stepped out, Elowen glanced toward Cora beside her. "Everything I asked you to prepare is already in place?" Cora gave a respectful nod. "Yes, Your Grace. It's all been arranged exactly the way you wanted." Elowen murmured in satisfaction and lifted her gaze, only to find Cassian already waiting outside the doory He was dressed in deep crimson today, the same shade she wore, even the fabric matched perfectly.

Cassian usually favored dark colors, charcoal, black, muted tones that sharpened the commanding air around him and made his tall frame seem even more imposing. But today, dressed in red, much of that cold severity had softened away, leaving behind only striking, good looks impossible to ignore. Even Elowen, who saw him every day, found herself staring for a second longer than usual. Cassian caught the look immediately. Amusement flickered in his eyes as he held a hand out toward her. "Come on.

Guests should start arriving any minute." Elowen slipped her hand into his, and the two of them walked out together. Outside Duskmoor Manor, the entire avenue had already been locked down by the King's Guard. From the manor gates all the way down the street, armored guards stood watch every growing crowd of curious townsfolk behind the barriers. few steps, keeping the Naturally, nobody wanted to leave. People clustered together along the roadside, stretching for a better look while conversations rose one after another through the crowd. "Look at this security.

What kind of gathering needs this many guards?" "You seriously haven't heard? It's the twins' one-month celebration today. His Majesty's supposed to attend in person." "His Majesty? For two infants?" They aren't ordinary infants. They're and Her Grace is practically adored across all of Vanelle. Those two children were born luckier than half the nobility already! His Grace is His Majesty's own brothechildren of the Duke of Duskmoor and Lady of Grace and Virtue. "Well, that explains the King's Guard." A man holding a hot meat pastry sighed dramatically.

"Imagine coming into the world with every possible advantage." His friend glanced sideways at him. "You're standing there complaining while eating pies you didn't even 10 G VOICIOUS at Duskmoor Manor pay for." Laughter immediately broke out around them. At the manor entrance, Elowen and Cassian stood side by side welcoming guests as carriage after carriage arrived. The first to appear were Lady Aveline and Kaclan. Kaelan had filled out noticeably since the last time Elowen saw him.

The added weight suited him far better than the severe thinness he used to carry, softening his features into something more refined and elegant. The moment Cassian

noticed him, he casually stepped half a pace forward. Elowen turned just enough to catch the movement and nearly laughed. Their children were already a month old, and he still had opinions about men who used to admire her. Lady Aveline offered congratulations first before leading Kaelan forward. Elowen greeted them warmly and politely asked after his recent work.

Kaelan answered calmly, "I've been assisting at the Ministry of Rites recently. I don't officially hold rank yet, and I'm mostly learning court procedure and administrative work for now. His Majesty said that after six months, I'll likely receive a formal appointment." Cassian nodded thoughtfully. "Work hard. By your age, I was already commanding the royal armies." Kaelan blinked. Elowen looked sideways at Cassian in disbelief. Apparently today's jealousy had decided to make an appearance early. Soon after, the Falconcrest family arrived together.

The Duke of Falconcrest walked in front with Duchess Yvonne beside him, dressed magnificently in sapphire blue layered robes embroidered with silver thread. Behind them came Piers and Sylvia. Sylvia's pregnancy was already obvious beneath her soft lavender gown, and she moved carefully while Piers hovered beside her protectively, supporting her arm so attentively that he looked nervous every time she took a step too quickly. "Congratulations to Your Grace and Her Grace," the Duke of Falconcrest greeted warmly. Cassian returned the greeting while Elowen smiled. "Please come inside.

With so many guests today. I'm afraid we may not manage to host everyone properly." Yvonne stepped forward and took Elowen's hands warmly, studying her with approval. "You look incredible. Honestly, no one would guess you only recently recovered from childbirth. And this fabric is gorgeous. Is it from Silverloom Exchange?" 10 O G Chapter 695 A Celebration at Duskmoor Manor Elowen smiled. "It is. If you like it, I'll send several bolts over to Falconcrest Manor another day Yvonne immediately brightened. "Then I won't pretend to refuse." She linked arms with the Duke and headed inside.

Sylvia quickly walked over toward Elowen first. "Ella." Piers followed immediately behind her. "Slow down a little, Sylvia." Sylvia shot him an exasperated look before complaining softly to Elowen, "Now he worries every time walk faster than a turtle." Elowen laughed softly and squeezed her hand. "First babies do that to husbands. Back when I was pregnant Cassian nearly summoned the royal physicians every time I sneezed." Sylvia burst into laughter at that and finally looked at Piers a little more fondly. The two of them continued inside together slowly. Afterward came Gareth and his wife.

Though connected through family ties to Falconcrest Manor, Gareth was not particularly close with either Elowen or Cassian. After exchanging polite greetings, he simply entered the manor. Then Rodney's son, Benedict Jones arrived with his wife and children. Benedict looked to be around fifty, lean-faced and scholarly, wearing deep navy formal robes. G 111

Awakening tower Reborn to Be His Duchess Chapter 696 His Majesty Arrives Frisched His wife Marian wore dark wine-colored court attire, while their son and daughter followed neatly behind them, both young and graceful as they bowed respectfully before Elowen and Cassian. Benedict smiled politely. "My father's health hasn't been very good lately, so he asked me to attend in his place today. The last time I saw Your Grace was back at Hale Manor. You were still young then, lively enough that nobody could overlook you. And now you're the Lady of Grace and Virtue, with children of your own already.

If Candy knew, I'm sure she'd be happy for you." The Candy he referred to was Elowen's sister-in-law. As he spoke, his eyes lingered briefly on Elowen's face, subtle enough that most people would not have noticed. Elowen noticed. She met his gaze calmly without avoiding it, her smile remaining perfectly gentle. "Lord Jones remembers selectively," she replied lightly. "We've crossed paths several times since then. At the autumn hunt, and again during the palace gatherings afterward. We just never spoke directly." Benedict paused slightly at the response.

Elowen smoothly shifted the conversation away before the silence could stretch further. "Please, go inside. Only then did Benedict withdraw his gaze and continue onward with his family. As more guests arrived, the entrance to Duskmoor Manor became increasingly lively. Edmund arrived. Several deputy ministers from the Ministry of the King's Works followed. Officials from the Ministry of Rites soon appeared as well. Even Milo came personally.

Back during the court qualification trials scandal, the Baker family had tried to pressure him into participating in the fraud scheme, but he had refused and later testified honestly during the investigation. Afterward, he had received an unusual promotion, rising several ranks in one step. Today he looked overwhelmingly grateful while thanking Elowen and Cassian repeatedly. Leander did not attend, but the newly appointed deputy minister Everard certainly compensated for it. He began greeting people before he had even reached the gates, smiling so broadly that every wrinkle on his face deepened.

Servants hurried constantly through the manor entrance carrying trays of warmed cider and hency pastries, guiding guests toward the reception hall while others rushed to manage coats, gifts, and seating arrangements. Chapter 696 His Majesty Arrives Everyone was exhausted. And yet every servant held themselves straighter than usual today. After all, the guests gathered here were among the most powerful people in all of Vanelle. Even the servants of Duskmoor Manor felt proud standing among such prestige. Besides truly, how many households in Avenlor could compare to this?

Suddenly, a ceremonial announcement echoed from farther down the street. "His Majesty has arrived!" Elowen immediately turned. A magnificent royal carriage approached slowly beneath gold-trimmed canopies while the King's Guard flanked the procession on every

side. the entire street fell silent. One by one, the gathered nobles and officials lowered themselves into formal bows. Elowen and Cassian bowed as well in respectful greeting. The carriage stopped. Quin stepped forward and opened the door before Theodric descended leisurely from the carriage.

Today he wore gold ceremonial robes beneath an official court crown, and judging from the healthy color in his face and the obvious satisfaction in his expression, he was in unusually good spirits. Elira had accompanied him. Standing among the attendants behind her, Elowen immediately spotted a familiar face. Iris. (Almost at the same moment, Iris seemed to sense her gaze and looked up as well. Their eyes met briefly before both women calmly looked away as though nothing had happened. "Everyone may rise." Theodric lifted a hand casually.

The crowd st As he a "You ment immediately appeared in his eyes That color makes you both look younger Compared to you, I'm the one looking worn out. Chapter 696 His Majesty Arrives Theodric laughed outright before clapping him firmly on the shoulder. Then he headed inside while asking eagerly, "Where are the children came here specifically to see them." Elowen smiled. "Your Majesty, the twins are in the reception hall with their nurses. Please come this way." "Then let's not keep me waiting." Inside the reception hall, every guest had already taken their seat.

Theodric sat at the head of the room with Elira beside him. Cassian and Elowen sat below them while the remaining guests arranged themselves according to rank. Conversation and laughter filled the hall. Soon afterward, the nurses carried the twins into the room. 4 Truthfully, this was the first time the babies had ever been surrounded by so many unfamiliar faces at once. Emily, however, showed no fear whatsoever. Her wide dark eyes darted curiously around the room while she stared openly at everyone nearby. Caius was much quieter.

Curled sleepily in his nurse's arms, he still looked somewhat pale and delicate after his recent illness. The moment Theodric saw the children, the smile on his face became impossible to hide. He immediately reached out and carefully took Caius into his arms. The movement looked slightly awkward, making it obvious rarely held infants himself, but his hands remained extremely steady while supporting the child carefully against his chest. "This little one's still too thin." A faint frown appeared between his brows before he looked toward Cassian.

"I heard he had a terrible fever recently." Cassian nodded. "He did. it scared us badly. I was away handling negotiations with Nordia at the time, Ella dealt with everything herself. She was terrified." Theodric's expression darkened immediately. "How does a child suddenly end up with that high a fever?" he asked sharply. "What happened"

8.34 am POM Awakening the Reborn tege His Dub Chapter 697 A Gift From Theodric Elowen lowered heaze sightly before answering in a calm voice. "Your Majesty, it was

my oversight. I was still weak after childbirth and didn't manage the household as carefully as I should have. One of the wet nurses ate something that upset her milk, and after Caius drank it, he developed a fever. I dismissed her some time ago and replaced her with another caretaker. Thankfully, he's doing much better now. Theodric's expression eased a little. "You've only just recovered," he said.

"Stop trying to handle every matter inside the manor yourself. That's what servants and stewards are there for." Elowen nodded obediently. "Your Majesty is right. I've already rearranged the household staff. Both Cajus and Emily are now looked after by dedicated attendants." Then, as though something had just occurred to her, she smiled faintly. "Actually, I should thank Lady Elira for that." As she spoke, her eyes drifted casually toward Elira. The change in Elira's expression lasted only an instant, faint as a ripple crossing still water, but Elowen caught it anyway.

Elira returned her usual gentle smile. "You give me too much credit. What exactly are you thanking me for?" Elowen answered warmly, "Have you forgotten? Back/when I was expecting, Your Majesty specifically selected several capable attendants from your own residence and sent them to Duskmoor Manor to help me. Recently, I chose one of them to help care for Caius and Emily. Rosaline." Her smile deepened slightly. "She's thoughtful, careful, and quick on her feet. Ever since she took over, the children haven't had a single problem." Theodric nodded immediately. r "I remember Rosaline," he said.

"I saw her several times while visiting Elira's residence before. She always handled her duties well. If she can lighten your burdens now, then that's fortunate for everyone." Elowen only smiled and let the matter drop. Just then, Emily suddenly began babbling happily from Theodric's arms. Theodric looked down in surprise and found the little girl reaching both hands toward him, staring up with bright dark eyes that sparkled with excitement. Cassian laughed immediately. "Looks like Poppy wants her uncle's attention." Chapter 697-A-Gift From Thandric Even the wet nurse smiled at that.

"Your Majesty may not know this, but the young lady usually doesn't like being held by anyone except Her Grace. Most days she barely fets His Grace carry her either, but today she's asking for Your Majesty herself" Cassian clicked his tongue dramatically. "Little social climber. Theodric burst out laughing. "You shameless brat," he shot back at Cassian. "That's my niece you're talking about. She just knows who her favorite uncle is." He handed Caius back to the wet nurse before opening his arms toward Emily, "Come here, Poppy.

I got you." The moment the wet nurse carried Emily closer, the little girl practically threw herself into Theodric's embrace. Theodric caught her carefully and bounced her lightly in his arms. "She's heavier than her brother already." Emily naturally understood none of it. Instead, she grabbed eagerly at the engraved pendant hanging from Theodric's neck, clutching the braided cord attached to it as though she had discovered the

greatest treasure in the world. She babbled nonstop at him in complete seriousness, sounding almost like she was trying to hold an actual conversation.

Theodric looked utterly delighted. "All right, all right," he laughed. "Bold little thing, aren't you? Definitely one of the Valebournes." He let her continue tugging happily at the pendant. "If you like it that much, your uncle will give it to you." Then, in full view of the gathered guests, he added with obvious pleasure, "And while I'm at it, I'll grant you a title as well. From today onward, you'll be known as Lady Everwyn." The entire hall fell silent.

There were many titled young ladies throughout Avenlor, but for a child barely a month old to receive a personal title directly from Theodric was extraordinarily rare. Beside him, Elira's gaze darkened slightly. Elowen and Cassian immediately rose together to thank Theodric formally. At almost the same moment, Caius stirred awake in the wet nurse's arms. He did not cry but let out a few sleepy sounds before waving his tiny hands twice toward Theodric. Theodric laughed again. "What's this?

Phoenix wants something too?" 3.34 am PM Chapter 697 Gift From Theodric Caius answered by reaching both hands out again. Theodric looked almost regretful. "You're already heir to the Duke of Duskmoor. One day you'll inherit your father's title, so there's not much more your uncle can give you." From nearby, Cassian suddenly said with lazy amusement, "If Your Majesty's in such a generous mood today, you could always strip my title away and hand it to Phoenix instead. The comment nearly terrified everyone listening. Theodric, however, laughed even harder.

As the feast continued, the atmosphere inside the great hall grew warmer and livelier. Guests traded goblets of wine back and forth while laughter and conversation filled the room. It was precisely then that Anson hurried over and leaned close to whisper something into Elowen's ear. His urgency immediately drew attention from several guests. Especially Elira. Because of her guilty conscience, her eyes followed every movement closely. After hearing Anson out, Elowen frowned faintly before quietly calling Cora over and murmuring several instructions.

Cora understood at once and immediately headed toward the rear servants' quarters. For a while afterward, everything seemed normal again. Then, not long later, faint crying drifted from the direction of the back rooms. Though muffled, it was still loud enough to reach the great hall. Several guests turned instinctively toward the sound. Even Theodric frowned slightly. "What's that noise?" 13.1K 8.34 am O POM Awakening the Rebom to Ba Hin Duchess Sara Lili Sara Lili is a daring romance writer who turns icy landscapes into scenes of fiery passion.

She loves crafting hot love stories while embracing the chill of Iceland's breathtaking cold.

Chapter 698 What Finally Reached Theodric Cassian tilted his head slightly as he listened. "Sounds like someone crying" According to the original plan, Elowen should have stood now, apologized to Theodric, and gone personally to deal with the matter in the servants quarters. Inside, Nelly was already kneeling where Elowen had arranged for her to be. Soon, she would reveal everything about eating the honey cakes Rosaline had given her and how the spoiled milk afterward caused Caius's fever. Elowen had already tested the distance herself beforehand.

From where Theodric sat in the great hall, he would not hear every single word clearly, but he would hear enough. What Elowen had not expected was Emily's reaction.. The moment the crying reached the hall, Emily turned immediately toward the rear corridor while babbling insistently and waving both little arms toward the sound. Theodric lowered his head with amusement. "What's this? Poppy wants to go over there?" This time Emily even kicked her feet excitedly as though urging him to hurry. Theodric was currently so charmed by his niece that naturally he indulged her without hesitation.

"All right then," he said warmly while standing. "I will take you to investigate." Elowen exchanged a glance with Cassian. Both of them saw the exact same thought reflected in the other's eyes. Their daughter really is something special. As for Elira, the moment she saw Theodric heading toward the rear chambers, a terrible feeling settled heavily in her stomach, and her fingers tightened instinctively around the handkerchief in her lap. By the time Theodric reached the back rooms, the voices inside had become perfectly clear. "...Nelly, please stop crying," someone inside was saying gently.

"Today's supposed to be a joyful celebration for the young lord and young lady. Her Grace already showed mercy because you once cared for the young lord personally, and she even rewarded you with ten dollars before sending you away. If you keep making a scene today, it'll only put Her Grace in an awkward position." Then came another burst of sobbing. "I know I made a mistake," Nelly cried miserably. "But Her Grace never punished me. She even gave me money before dismissing me, and I've felt guilty ever since. I've gone over it again and again these past few days.

I truly didn't eat anything improper. Every meal I had came from the manor kitchens, and I never dared touch anything outside of that. It was only that day when Rosaline brought back some cakes and shared one with me. I thought a pastry wouldn't matter, so I ate it without thinking... how was I supposed to know? Chapter 698 What Finally Reached Theodric to know. Outside the doorway. Theodric's face darkened completely. Emily seemed to notice his mood immediately. She both tiny arms around his neck as though trying to comfort him.

expression softened slightly at once, and he patted her gently on the back before turning around and Cassian behind him. both of them had heard every word as well. lowered her gaze. "Your Majesty, this was my failure." sn't on you." Theodric's voice had gone cold. I've had enough wine for tonight. I'm tired." He paused briefly. "I'm returning to the palace."

Cassian answered immediately. "Then I'll escort Your Majesty out." Theodric allowed it. Before leaving, he reluctantly handed Emily back to the wet nurse, though even then he could not resist gently touching her cheek one last time.

Only after that did he finally leave. Elira followed behind him unsteadily. Naturally, she had heard everything from the servants' quarters. Especially Rosaline's name. Cassian and Elowen escorted Theodric and Elira all the way to the front gates, watching silently as the royal carriage disappeared into the night beyond Duskmoor Manor. Inside the carriage, Theodric leaned heavily against the cushioned wall with his eyes closed and his face frighteningly dark. Across from her, Elira's knuckles had gone pale. She showed her lip, quietly.

"I've committed a grave offense," he said, closing his eyes. "My useless younger brother learned that the Duke of Duskmoor was overseeing the negotiations with Nordia and feared his growing influence among the people would eventually threaten the throne. That's why he resorted to something so foolish. He only wanted to warn Duskmoor Manor and remind Her Grace that certain matters shouldn't be touched."

The moment I learned what he'd done, I reprimanded him severely and forbade him from trying anything like it again." At that, Theodric finally opened his eyes. His gaze landed on Elira with terrifying coldness. "Something foolish?" he repeated slowly. "Poisoning an infant is what you call foolish?" His voice sharpened. "Then tell me, Elira. What exactly would count as unforgivable?" Elira's whole body stiffened instantly. The color drained from her face. Theodric narrowed his eyes.

"You just claimed your brother feared the Duke of Duskmoor would threaten the throne." His tone grew colder with every word. "Then explain something to me. How exactly has Cassian threatened my authority? Has he gathered factions behind my back? Hoarded troops for himself? Filled the court with loyal followers? Spread rumors among the people? Elira opened her mouth, but no words came out. Theodric's expression darkened further. "If Cassian truly wanted the throne, then why didn't he take it years ago?"

Back when I first ascended, he held military command and had supporters throughout the court. If he'd decided to seize power then, I might not have been able to stop him." His voice rose with restrained fury. "Instead, he supported me onto the throne. Every province that refused to recognize my rule, he personally led troops to suppress. How many wars has he fought for me over the years? How many blades has he taken in my place?" His eyes hardened sharply.

"While the Jones family enjoyed comfort and luxury behind palace walls, he was out on the borders surviving snowstorms and bloodshed." Elira sat there speechless. Theodric exhaled slowly before continuing, his voice calmer now but no less cold. "And you mentioned Nordia." A humorless smile crossed his face briefly. "You said Cassian gained too much prestige because he handled the negotiations successfully." He looked

directly at Elira again. Do you think I should have reached Thosdric Pinighed Tunestly think the Nordians are easy to negotiate with?

Even Valessa barely bothers showing me proper courtesy half the time. Yet now the treaty is signed and peace has finally been secured." His gaze sharpened. "If that responsibility had been handed to your brother instead, could he have accomplished any of it?"

Chapter 699 Theodric's Warning Elira did not dare answer him. "You wouldn't have succeeded anyway." Theodric let out a cold, humorless laugh, then fixed her with a hard stare beneath the dim lantern light inside the royal carriage. "I may as well tell you the truth. Cassian's influence is already formidable, and it could grow far beyond what it is now if he chose to pursue it. When the fighting in the Southwestern Marches turned critical, I originally intended to send him there myself."

He refused because he wanted to remain in Vanelle with his wife, and he personally urged me to appoint someone else instead. That is the only reason the sons of the Jones family were ever given that opportunity." Theodric's brows tightened sharply, anger creeping back into his voice. "So tell me this. Why can't the Jones family win a battle? They've been deadlocked in the Southwestern Marches this entire time. What exactly is stopping them? Do they dislike earning the people's loyalty? Do they dislike receiving honor from the crown?" His expression darkened further.

"If they want prestige, they should earn it with steel and blood on the battlefield. That's where real authority comes from. Drugging infants and plotting in the shadows isn't power. It's cowardice." Elira began trembling violently. She hurried down from her seat and lowered herself onto the carriage floor, bowing deeply until her forehead pressed hard against the polished wood beneath her. "Please calm your anger, Your Majesty. This is my failure. I did not discipline my family properly. Once I return, I'll make certain nothing like this ever happens again."

Theodric looked down at her, disappointment plain in his eyes. Still trying to salvage the situation, Elira kept her head lowered and spoke carefully. "I truly intended to tell Your Majesty everything myself. I simply never expected you would learn of it while visiting Duskmoor Manor today." Theodric's voice turned icy. "I know exactly what you're implying. You think Cassian and Elowen deliberately arranged for me to overhear those conversations."

Elira remained silent. Theodric continued, "You should be grateful they didn't drag the matter directly before the throne in open court. What they did today left room for my dignity and yours. They are family. Cassian is my brother, and Elowen is my sister-in-law. They had no wish to force me into an impossible position or drive a wedge through

the royal household Then his gaze sharpened 11 But hear me cically . you can forget about ever sitting beside me as queen ." His voice lowered dangerously " I will not warn you twice .

" The weight of royal authority pressed down so heavily that Elira could barely breathe . She remained bowed against the floor of the carriage , trembling too hard to force out a single word . At last the royal carriage rolled to a stop before the palace gates . Theodric stepped down first and strode inside without another glance behind him . Elira stayed kneeling inside long after he was gone , her expression completely blank . Back when the Baker family still ruled the court , she never dared fight for greater power because she knew perfectly well she could never surpass Isla .

So she stayed quiet , obedient , and patient . But once Isla fell from grace and Alaric died , Elira finally understood something . Her opportunity had arrived . She wanted the crown for herself . And she wanted Caelan to become Crown Prince . Among all the royal princes , none truly worried her Except Cassian . Originally , Elira believed that if she arranged a politically advantageous marriage for Caelan , then perhaps hey could finally rival Duskmoor Manor . Then she learned something unexpected . Caclan had fallen for a palace servant .

Worse still , Theodric himself seemed entertained by the idea and had casually suggested granting the gui to Caelan as a secondary consort . That servant's name was Iris The moment Elira heard it , she sat stunned for a long while Iris had once served Daphne , then later worked in the Crown Prince's Wing before somehow ending up beside Elowen and eventually entering the royal residence with her A girl with a history like that could not possibly be simple And even setting that aside , Iris came from humble origins .

She could offer Caclan no political advantage whatsoever Yet Caelan brought her constantly . Every time Elira saw the brightness in her son's eyes when he spoke about Iris , her unease deepened . What if he married for affection instead of influence ? What if that cost him the position of Crown Prince ? Elira knew she could not afford to wait passively any longer . She did not want her son disappointed , so she decided to clear the road ahead for him herself . But row she realized she had struck at stone and heard no crack in return . Neither Cassian nor Elowen were easy opponents .

More importantly , Theodric cared for them too deeply . Watching how fondly he treated the twins today , especially little Emily , Elira finally understood one thing with painful clarity . No one in the kingdom could touch Duskmoor Manor anymore . At least not for now . Back at Duskmoor Manor , Elowen had only just returned to her seat when Cora entered the chamber . " Your Grace , Nelly accepted the reward money and left . She promised she wouldn't repeat a word of what happened today . " Elowen gave a small nod . After hesitating briefly , Cora added , " There's something else .

Iris asked whether she might speak with Your Grace privately . " Elowen blinked in surprise . Elira already went back to the palace , so why is Iris still here ? Pushing the

thought aside for now , she said , " All right . Bring her to the Great Hall next door . I'll meet her there . " Not long afterward , Elowen entered the hall and found Iris already waiting . The moment she saw her , Iris lowered into a respectful curtsy . " Iris greets Your Grace ." Elowen immediately stepped forward and helped her back up , then carefully looked her over from head to toe .

3/4 & Chapter 699 Theodric's Warning Concern softened her expression . " You've gotten thinner . Has someone in the palace been giving you trouble ? " Iris quickly shook her head . " No , Your Grace . Lady Elira treats me well and His Highness often looks after me too . Honestly , life there has been much easier than it ever was in the Crown Prince's Wing . " 13,3K

Chapter 700 Iris's Choice Elowen studied her quietly for a moment - before asking , " Weren't you supposed to return with Lady Elira today ? She's already gone back to the palace , so why are you still here ? Iris's lashes fluttered slightly . " His Highness hasn't left yet . I planned to return with him later . " Something about that answer made Elowen pause . You seem rather close these days . " Iris bit lightly against her lip , then stepped backward and lowered herself to the floor . Elowen frowned in surprise . ' What are you doing ?

" Keeping her head lowered , Iris answered softly , " Your Grace , I'm afraid I can't keep the promise I made before . I won't be able to join the Silverloom Exchange or work beside you as an advisor . " Elowen looked genuinely confused . " Why not ? " Iris's fingers tightened inside the folds of her skirt , but her voice remained steady . I've decided to become His Highness's secondary consort . " The words caught Elowen completely off guard . For several moments , she did not know how to answer . Meanwhile , Iris continued calmly .

Your Grace , I heard what happened both at Duskmoor Manor and at the Silverloom Exchange . I know the young heir's fever and the trouble surrounding the exchange were connected to Lady Elira and the Josies family . " She lifted her eyes toward Elowen . " The conflict between them and Duskmoor Manor didn't begin yesterday , and it won't end tomorrow either . They fear His Grace's influence . They fear he may one day threaten Caclan's future . So they'll continue testing boundaries again and again . " Her voice softened tightly .

" Yes , His Majesty reprimanded Lady Elira today , but that won't erase the Jones family's ambitions . Then she asked quietly , " And what about the future ? What happens when His Majesty grows old ? What happens if Caclan eventually takes the throne ? What will become of Duskmoor Manor then ? " Elowen remained silent . Iris continued , " Your Grace needs someone inside the palace . Not simply someone who occasionally protect your interests . " At last , Elowen understood . " You mean ... you want to become that person ? Iris nodded . " Yes .

If I become His Highness's secondary consort , then outwardly I'll belong to Lady Elira's household . But my loyalty will always remain with Your Grace . " Her gaze never wavered . " If conflict rises between them and Duskmoor Manor again , I can help smooth things over . If the Jones family makes another move , I'll hear about it immediately . " Then her voice softened further . And if the day ever comes when you truly need help , I'll still be able to speak for you before His Highness . " Emotion tightened painfully in Elowen's chest . But Iris , you don't have to do this .

Your life belongs to you . You wanted freedom . You wanted to build something for yourself . " Her voice gentled . If you enter the palace as a consort , you'll spend the rest of your life trapped there . " Iris looked at her seriously . This isn't sacrifice , Your Grace . It's gratitude . " Her eyes reddened faintly , though her voice remained calm , If not for you , I would've died in the Crown Prince's Wing long ago . You were the best person who ever treated me with dignity .

You gave me another chance at life . " Then she smiled softly . A person is willing to give everything for someone who truly understands them . I'm no different . Trying to ease Elowen's concern , she added with a faint laugh . Besides , maybe things won't turn out so terribly for me . I may not be especially beautiful but I do have some excuse and His Highness has always treated me kindly . Who knows ?

Maybe one day I'll become the favored consort . Maybe even more than that . " Elowen's heart felt painfully full listening to her . " But Iris , " she said softly , the palace is not a gentle place . You know that better than anyone . One careless mistake there can destroy a person completely . You already suffered enough in the Crown Prince's Wing . Payment . I'm kind of by now . Iris's eyes had reddened too , but her resolve never changed . " Maybe it seemed small to Your Grace , but for someone like me , it meant everything . " She lowered her gaze briefly before continuing .

" And honestly , becoming His Highness's consort isn't only about repaying you . I've thought about this for a long time . This wasn't some impulsive decision . " Elowen looked at her silently . Iris continued slowly . " One day His Highness said something to me that I haven't been able to forget . He said it was admirable that , I wanted to become an advisor and make use of my abilities . But then he asked me something else . " Her voice softened further . " There are countless women across the kingdom . Women sold into brothels . Women cast aside by their husbands .

Women abandoned by their families . Women cornered by life until they have nowhere left to go . " She looked directly at Elowen . " Most of them will never be fortunate enough to meet someone like Your Grace . " Then she asked quietly , " So what becomes of them ? " Silence lingered between them for several long moments before Iris finally continued . " His Highness asked whether there might be another path . No just one for me alone , but one that other women could follow too .

A way that might someday allow them to live better lives ." 13.3K