

## Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 71 Unwelcome Guests "What's wrong?" Elowen asked, concerned. "It's morning. You're the lady of the house now. Lots to handle," Cassian said. The reason sounded plausible enough. Elowen nodded. After climbing out of bed, she drew the bed curtains closed. Finished As she washed and dressed, the heat in her cheeks subsided, and she replayed their morning interaction. Cassian had initially wanted to hold her to sleep, then suddenly told her to go. She didn't think she'd said anything wrong.

There could only be one reason-he had thought of the woman he truly loved, felt guilty, and ultimately decided to remain faithful to her. That was fine by her. While she was finishing her toilette, Cora came in from outside and reported, "Your Grace, the visitors from Rose Hall are here." Elowen nodded. "Have Lady Sylvia wait for me in the parlor." Cora hesitated. "It's not just Lady Sylvia. Lady Marwen is with her." Elowen wasn't surprised. "Then have them both wait in the parlor." "Yes, Your Grace." Once she was ready. Elowen made her way there.

The moment she stepped through the doorway, Marwen launched into a voluble speech. "Your Grace! I heard about the little disagreement Sylvia caused at the verse salon yesterday. Such a bother for you! I've brought her here today to apologize." Marwen's smile was wide and ingratiating. Elowen offered a thin, humorless smile in return. "How thoughtful of you." Marwen's smile widened. "Well, it's not hard to guess what was on the poor girl's mind. She's at that age, you see, starting to think of marriage.

Seeing His Highness the Crown Prince-so noble, so handsome- well, it's only natural she'd be smitten. She's just a young girl, trying to catch his eye, though her methods were clumsy." If

Elowen hadn't already spoken to Sylvia, she might have been taken in by this performance. She remained silent, sipping her tea slowly, her eyes downcast. Marwen scrutinized her expression. "To be honest, when you think about it, His Highness addresses His Grace as 'Uncle. Sylvia is His Grace's cousin.

It's not such an impossible match, is it?" 1/3 2:28 pm Chapter 71 Unwelcome Guests There it was-the naked ambition laid bare. Finished Elowen held her cup and smiled, "His Highness does address His Grace as 'Uncle. But His Highness' marriage is not for His Grace to decide: Her Majesty the Queen oversees that. Just as Sylvia's marriage is your concern, is it not?" Marwen gave a strained laugh. "My point is, we're all family. Wouldn't it be lovely to strengthen those bonds? You and Her Majesty are sisters-in-law now. You can enter the palace anytime.

Could you put in a word?" Mira, standing behind Elowen, couldn't hold her tongue. "Her Grace is swamped every day. How would she have time to drop by the palace just for your daughter's marriage..." Marwen's face instantly hardened. She shot Mira a withering glare. "When your betters are speaking, a servant should know her place and hold her tongue!" Thud. Elowen set her cup down with deliberate force. Marwen instinctively looked at her face. Elowen's face had zero smile. "Mira came with me from Hale Manor as my only attendant from home.

When you insult her, you insult me-and the Hales." Marwen blinked, taken aback. "Your Grace, you misunderstand, I didn't mean-" "Please leave," Elowen said, standing up. "I've got a lot on my plate today. I won't be keeping you." With that, she turned and left, Mira following closely. In the now-empty parlor, Sylvia squirmed with embarrassment. "Mother, let's just go. What's the point of staying here?" Marwen snorted, "This is to show Elowen my resolve! If she refuses to help me, she'll pay for it dearly." Sylvia frowned.

"But Mother, we're the ones left cooling our heels out here-we're the ones enduring this slight. Her Grace is far too busy with her own affairs inside to know the first thing about hardship... Marwen glared and shook off her daughter's hand. "Heartless girl! Taking her side! It's all your fault-you couldn't even catch your own cousin's eye, let alone the Crown Prince!" Sylvia hung her head. "I'm not beautiful or talented. What could I possibly use to attract them?" "Exactly! That's why you need me!" Marwen declared. "Now, you sit here and be quiet.

We're not leaving!" She then waved imperiously at Cora, who had remained by the door. "You! Fetch fresh tea. And pastries!" Cora stared. 2/3 2:28 pm Chapter 71 Unwelcome Guests Finished "Well? Don't just stand there! Go!" Marwen snapped. Cora pressed her lips together. "I'll ask Her Grace." She hurried out and found Elowen in the study, reviewing household ledgers. "Your Grace, Lady Marwen still refuses to leave. She demands fresh tea and pastries." Elowen frowned. Mira muttered under her breath, "The nerve of that woman." She turned to Elowen.

"Your Grace, shall I have them escorted out?" Elowen shook her head. "She is still the Duke's aunt by marriage. Forcing her out would be an ugly scene. And if word got out, people would say I disrespect my elders." She remembered Marwen's previous visit with Yvonne; they seemed close. If Marwen left in a huff and complained to Yvonne, all of Vanelle would know by tomorrow that Elowen had thrown her husband's aunt out. 1.7K admin

Chapter 72 Ulterior Motive That wouldn't do at all. Mira looked worried. "Then what should we do, Your Grace?" Finished Elowen lowered her head again to the ledger. "If they want to sit in the parlor, let them sit. If they want tea and pastries, serve them the best we have." Mira sighed. People always said a new bride had to endure her mother-in-law's temper. Cassian was fine; he had no mother. But he did have this unreasonable aunt... Elowen reviewed the accounts for a

while longer. Then she looked up. "Mira, have the kitchen prepare breakfast." "Are you hungry, Your Grace?" Mira asked.

Elowen smiled slightly, "Not me. It's for the Duke. He must be hungry." Mira was puzzled. "Isn't His Grace still asleep?" Elowen nodded. "He is now. But he'll be waking soon." Long ago, her sister-in-law had taught her: if a mother-in-law proved utterly unreasonable and impossible to deal with, one should start with the husband. A new wife was an outsider; there were things she couldn't say, actions she couldn't take. But a husband was different. Her sister-in-law's words echoed: "That's why the man you marry is so crucial.

If he has a backbone and cares for you, your life will be much easier. If he neglects you or is a coward, leaving you to bear all the hardship alone, life becomes unbearable." In her past life, Elowen had been too young. She heard the words but didn't truly understand them. It wasn't until after she married into the Crown Prince's Wing and endured years of torment that she grasped their profound meaning. Fortunately, now she was the Duchess of Duskmoor, When the kitchen sent up breakfast, Elowen rose and walked to the bedchamber.

Since Cassian was still asleep, the windows were shuttered, leaving the room dim. She approached the bed quietly, took a deep breath, and reached to draw back the curtain. Her fingers had barely touched the fabric when a hand shot out, gripping her wrist with surprising strength. She was yanked forward, the world tilting. 173 2:28 pm Chapter 72 Ulterior Motive Before she could process it, she was flat on her back on the bed, a hand at her throat. Finistied Elowen looked up into Cassian's expressionless, handsome face. She could feel the fingers around her neck slowly tightening.

"My lord, it's me!" she gasped, her voice trembling with fear. Cassian leaned closer, his gaze initially distant and cold, then focusing on her face. Elowen paled, a fine sheen of sweat appearing on her nose. Cassian let out a silent breath, the coldness in his eyes melting into something softer. He relaxed his grip, his voice rough. "I didn't know it was you." Years of war, of constant attempts on his life, had honed his instincts. Anyone approaching him in his sleep triggered an automatic, defensive response. His years of martial training had saved his life more than once.

He released her throat but didn't immediately pull his hand away. Her skin was so soft. "Did I hurt you?" he asked, his voice low, almost intimate. The tone made Elowen's cheeks warm again. She shook her head slowly. "You didn't use much force. It doesn't hurt." He made a soft sound of acknowledgment, his thumb brushing lightly over the skin of her neck. "Why did you come in?" Her voice was soft. "I was hungry, so I had the kitchen make breakfast. I wanted to ask if you'd like to join me. It looks quite good. Too much for one person, and I hate to waste." Cassian raised an eyebrow.

"Compared to your cooking?" Elowen's voice dropped to a whisper. "Probably not as good. If you'd prefer my cooking, I can make something now." Cassian shook his head. "No need. The kitchen's fare is fine." Looking at him, she could see he was still drowsy. She'd woken him. A pang of guilt struck her. She became more attentive, fetching his clothes and helping him from the bed to his wheelchair. Cassian watched her, a thoughtful glint in his eye. Elowen stood back. "Wh-what is it?" A faint, almost teasing smile touched his lips. "I didn't think much of it at first. But now that you're being so solicitous, I'm beginning to wonder if you have an ulterior motive."

2/3 2:28 pm ppp. Chapter 72 Ulterior Motive Finished Elowen's heart skipped a beat, but she

feigned indignation, shooting him a look. "You misunderstand me again. Wasn't it you who said I should get used to your presence?" Cassian replied, his tone measured, "I wouldn't mind if you did have an ulterior motive concerning me." Elowen blinked, caught off guard. He wouldn't mind if she had an ulterior motive? What did that mean? She didn't press, and he didn't elaborate.

Once they were ready, Elowen wheeled him out to where breakfast was waiting, still warm. Remembering the earlier "lesson," she was attentive but not overly eager, serving him food on his plate, but not excessively. A short while later, Cora entered. "Your Grace, the pastries and tea have been delivered to the parlor." Elowen, mouth full of a savory pie, didn't reply immediately. Cassian looked up. "Delivered pastries and tea? To whom?" Elowen was still chewing her pie.

1.7K admin

Chapter 73 Cassian's Stand Finished Cora replied, "Lady Marwen and Lady Sylvia are in the parlor/They demanded refreshments. I consulted Her Grace, and she ordered them to be served." Cassian's gaze shifted to Elowen. "And why are they in the parlor?" Elowen finally finished her mouthful of pie and swallowed. Her answer was blunt. "She wants me to find a way to take Sylvia to the palace, to present her to Her Majesty and the Crown Prince as a candidate for Crown Princess." Cassian let out a soft, incredulous laugh. "She has quite the imagination." He tilted his head. "Keep eating.

I'll go talk to them in a bit." Elowen assumed a docile tone. "I should accompany you, Your Grace." As you wish," he agreed. Once breakfast was done, Elowen wheeled him to the parlor. Inside, Marwen had already drunk most of her tea and finished the pastries. She was just considering demanding more when footsteps sounded outside. She stood up, a smug smile on her

face. Your Grace, you can't just leave us sitting here like this. Some matters, you-" Her words cut off abruptly as her eyes landed on Cassian's cold, handsome face. Primal fear surged through her.

She took two involuntary steps back, forcing a shaky smile. "Y-Your Grace, you're still at the manor?" Cassian's gaze was frosty. "Aunt. This is not the first, nor the second time you have imposed upon my wife." Marwen blinked, feigning innocence. "Impose? I... I would never! How could you say such a thing?" Cassian leaned back in his wheelchair. "Then explain your presence here." Marwen cleared her throat. "Her Grace took Sylvia to the palace verse salon yesterday. Sylvia was clumsy and caused a bit of a scene. I brought her here to apologize..." Cassian raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Apologized, and then decided to stay?" His eyes flicked to the empty cup and pastry plate. "You've consumed quite a bit. Shall we have a room prepared so you can spend the night?" Tears instantly welled in Marwen's eyes. "So this is it! Married and powerful now, and you turn your back on your uncle's family! Your uncle doted on you! Whatever you wanted, he'd move heaven and earth to get it. He followed you onto the battlefield! He died saving your life!

When they brought his body back, there wasn't a patch of skin left whole!" 173 2:29 pm Chapter 73 Cassian's Stand \*\*Finished She sank into a chair, dabbing at her eyes. "And what's left? A widow and her children, alone and helpless! All I want is a good match for my daughter. Is that a crime? Her Grace comes from the noble House of Hale. She looks down on us, leaves us sitting here ignored. Fine! I can't say anything to her. But you, Your Grace... I'm your aunt! How can you treat me this way? Have you no conscience?

Doesn't it shame you, thinking of your uncle looking down from heaven, unable to rest in peace?" Listening beside him, Elowen felt a cold sweat break out. Dragging Cassian over in such a rush today suddenly felt reckless. Aldric had been close to Cassian, his savior. This tearful appeal would soften any heart. And she... she had only been married to Cassian for a short time. Why would he take her side over his late uncle's widow? It was then she heard Cassian's low, derisive chuckle. "Aunt," he said, his voice cutting through the theatrical sobs.

"In this world, whoever cries the fastest or the loudest is not necessarily in the right." Elowen blinked, looking down at him in surprise. Marwen also froze mid-sniffle, staring. Cassian's expression remained impassive. "Your words are mistaken. What do you mean, 'powerful now and turning your back? Have you forgotten? I was born to royal nobility. For me, there is no 'becoming' powerful. I am the power others seek." Marwen's mouth opened and closed soundlessly. "You are correct about one thing-I am married now," Cassian continued, his tone relentless.

"When Uncle died, I brought you and your children into this manor immediately. I was unmarried then, so I temporarily entrusted the household management to you. All these years, the 'fees' and 'gifts' you've skimmed-did you think I was blind? I turned a blind eye out of respect for Uncle's memory. "Your son's constant scrapes and scandals outside-who has smoothed them over every time? And your eldest daughter, married into Earl Manor-how many lovers does she keep on the side? In any other family, she'd have been given divorce papers long ago.

They tolerate her only because they fear offending me. If Uncle truly looks down from heaven, I believe he would be deeply ashamed of you all." Marwen's face had gone ashen.. "Aunt," Cassian said, his voice dropping to a deadly calm. "My position is clear. Out of respect for

Uncle. you may continue to reside in Rose Hall. As for Sylvia's marriage, my wife and I will discuss and find a suitable match. As for the Crown Prince's Wing-abandon that fantasy. If you persist, or use it to harass my wife again, do not blame me for severing all ties." He narrowed his eyes, the threat palpable. "Aunt.

Do I make myself clear?" A chill ran down Marwen's spine. She found herself nodding slowly, helplessly. "G- crystal clear" 2:29 pm admin

Chapter 74 A Home to Build Cassian finally shifted his gaze to Sylvia. She stood pale with a mixture of shame and fear. Finished His tone, however, was surprisingly even when he addressed her. "Discuss your preferences with Elowen. She is kind-hearted and will find you a suitable match." Sylvia responded haltingly, "Yes, Your Grace..." Elowen offered her a gentle smile. "Go back with your mother for now. I'll look into families in Vanelle with sons of appropriate age and standing. We'll arrange meetings." Sylvia nodded meekly.

"Yes, Your Grace." Leaving the parlor, Elowen felt a lingering sense of awe. It was almost unbelievable-Cassian hadn't softened at his aunt's tears. He had stood firmly by her side. Perhaps Marwen's behavior over the years simply pushed him too far. The day after tomorrow is my uncle's memorial day," Cassian said, his voice low as she wheeled him. Elowen paused, looking down at him. From her angle, she could see his smooth brow, the bridge of his nose, and the thick sweep of his lashes. Though she couldn't see his expression, she could feel the weight of his mood.

After a moment's thought, she ventured, "Would you like me to accompany you to pay respects?" He made an affirmative sound. "Yes." Somehow, Elowen sensed his spirits lifting slightly. Back in their chambers, she asked, "Would you like to rest some more, my lord?"

Cassian shook his head. "No. If I sleep now, I won't sleep tonight." Elowen nodded. "I'll go to the study to read." He had brought back several "interesting items" from the palace, most notably Tales of Luminara, of which he had only finished half.

"Alright." As she began pushing him toward the study, Cassian suddenly asked, "Where do you usually review the household accounts?" "In the room next to our bedchamber," Elowen replied naturally. The main courtyard was sizable, but it had only one proper study-Cassian's. 1/3 2:29 pm Chapter 74 A Home to Build Finished As someone who had grown up in a military household, Elowen knew a Duke's study would be full of important, often secret documents like military maps. She didn't dare enter casually, fearing she might be blamed if anything went missing.

As a child at Hale Manor, she had wandered freely in and out of her father's and brothers' studies. They would never have blamed her. But in her past life, she had entered Alaric's study twice. Once, when some important intelligence went missing, he had immediately suspected her and punished her severely. Since then, she had become cautious. The room next to their bedchamber was small, but it sufficed for ledgers. Cassian frowned upon hearing this. "That courtyard hasn't been properly arranged." Truthfully, before his coma, he hadn't anticipated marrying her.

Her connection with Alaric had been common knowledge in Vanelle. Cassian, believing they were destined for each other, had left for the battlefield with a heavy heart. He hadn't expected to wake and find her as his Duchess. After a moment's thought, he decided. "This afternoon, I'll have that room properly furnished." "It has a table and shelves. It's adequate for my use," Elowen protested softly. She didn't want to trouble him. "It needs work," Cassian insisted. "I know that

room. The table is low. You sit on the floor to read the ledgers, don't you? That's not comfortable.

The shelves are too small. New furniture will be purchased. "...All right," she conceded, seeing he was set on it. "Is there anything else that needs attention?" he asked. "Nothing else." Elowen shook her head. Cassian, however, seemed to be making a mental inventory. "You don't have a proper dressing room or a wardrobe chamber. And the kitchen-this courtyard lacks a dedicated scullery." Elowen was suddenly reminded of a scene from Tales of Luminara. After Alrik and Luminara married, they worked together to arrange their new home.

At the time, she had thought it the height of romance-building a life with the man she loved. A life she and Alaric never shared. Ironically, she was now experiencing it with Cassian. 213 2:29 pm Chapter 74 A Home to Build Elowen felt like fate was messing with her. Finished "Don't you think this courtyard is rather bare?" Cassian asked, seeking her opinion. "A few trees, no flowers. What flowers do you like? I'll have some planted." Elowen felt a little embarrassed. "I don't know many types of flowers..." "Trees, then?" She grew even more flustered.

"I don't know many trees either..." Cassian fell silent for a beat. Elowen suggested in a small voice, "Maybe... we could plant some vegetables?" Cassian blinked. Elowen's cheeks pinkened. Cassian let out a soft laugh. "Very well. Vegetables it is." True to his decisive nature, Cassian set things in motion that very day, dispatching servants to procure furnishings. Juskmoor Manor was always under close watch, and news of the sudden flurry of activity soon reached the palace. 1.7K 1 33 admin

Chapter 75 Ripples in the Palace Finished Alaric had stayed up far too late reading Tales of Luminara, only to be tormented by vivid, restless dreams. He'd slept poorly and planned to nap at

midday to recover. His head had just touched the pillow when a servant roused him. "Your Highness, His Majesty summons you." A command from his father could not be ignored. Alaric dragged himself up, stifling his exhaustion, and went. Upon arrival, Theodric immediately launched into news from Duskmoor Manor. "For years, I urged your uncle to make that courtyard a proper home. He never listened. Now?"

Dressing rooms, wardrobe chambers, plans to plant trees and flowers..." Theodric beamed. "It seems marriage truly does work wonders." Alaric stiffened, his sleepiness evaporating, replaced by a strange, hollow feeling. Uncle Cassian is going to such lengths for Elowen? Theodric mused, "You and Elowen grew up together. I always thought she'd be your princess. If that had happened, it would be you arranging a home for her now." A peculiar, sour ache twisted in Alaric's chest. "But you didn't care for her, and it seems her heart belongs to your uncle."

Theodric's expression turned curious.

"Though I do wonder, when did Elowen develop this affection for Cassian? They barely met before. She never mentioned him." Alaric forced a tight smile, his mood darkening. "I'm not sure, Father. Perhaps she heard tales of Uncle's military exploits and developed an admiration from afar." Theodric nodded slowly. "That could be." He sighed with genuine warmth.

"Regardless, as long as Elowen is happy, I can feel I've done right by the Hales." Alaric remained silent. Theodric's gaze sharpened, focusing on him. "Speaking of which, you're not getting any younger. Elowen is married now.

It's past time you settled down. Your mother has pestered me endlessly on your behalf. hence the verse salon. So many young ladies attended, I hear, each one fresh as a budding flower. Didn't a single one catch your eye?" At the mention of the salon, only Elowen's face surfaced in Alaric's

mind. He suppressed a faint frown. "There was one, Father. Lady Daphne-not only beautiful but also..... exceptionally talented." "Oh?

Who's she?" 1/3 2:29 pm p p Chapter 75 Ripples in the Palace Finished "Lord Chancellor Galen Garrett's daughter." Theodric's expression shifted, a flicker of disinterest passing through his eyes. He wasn't fond of Galen-the man was an opportunist, a sycophant with a reputation for corruption. But statecraft required using such men. As long as Galen performed his duties, his petty embezzlements could be overlooked-so long as he didn't touch the Crown's treasury. Alaric continued, "She is also the author behind the pen name 'Azure, the writer of Tales of Luminara." At this.

Theodric's eyes lit up. "Is that so? Galen's daughter is Azure?" Alaric nodded. "Indeed." Theodric chuckled, clapping his hands together. "Well, I never would have guessed Galen capable of raising such a literary daughter. You're interested in her? Good. Have you made plans to meet outside the palace?" Alaric shook his head. "Not yet." "Perfect. You're still suspended from court, with time on your hands. Go into the city. Invite Lady Daphne out. Spend time together, get to know each other. If it seems suitable, we can settle the marriage." Alaric blinked, taken aback. "Isn't that...

a bit fast?" Theodric waved a dismissive hand. "Do you think you're still a child? The Garretts are a respectable enough family. And the girl has genuine talent. Marrying her would give you a capable lady for the Wing, freeing you to focus on state affairs. Then, I can begin entrusting the realm's weightier matters to you with peace of mind." The realm's weightier matters.... The words resonated. Ambition stirred within Alaric. He bowed his head. "Yes, Father. I'll follow your guidance. Like his brother Cassian, Theodric was a man of action.

That very afternoon, in the name of the Crown Prince's Wing, an invitation was delivered to the Garrett household, proposing a boating excursion on Miren Lake two days hence. When the invitation arrived, the Garrett household was thrown into a frenzy. Daphne's mother, Seline Garrett, clutched the elegant parchment as if it were gold. "This came from the palace... for my daughter..." Galen scowled. "Woman, can you even read? You're holding it upside down!" Seline, too ecstatic to be offended, simply turned the invitation right-side up and beamed at Daphne "Oh, my clever girl!

You make me so proud! Back when the Hales were in royal favor, Elowen's mother was always sending me things-royal tea, imperial silk. People called her generous, said she treated the Garretts so well. But I knew! It was all a show of superiority! Her daughter was close to the Crown Prince, 2/3 29 pm Chapter 75 Ripples in the Palace Finished while mine was just a follower! Well, look at us now! The tables have turned! My daughter is marrying into the Crown Prince's Wing!" Galen shot her a warning glare. "Don't count your chickens before they hatch! This is just an outing.

Don't o spreading foolish rumors outside! You'll ruin my official reputation!" 1.7K 3/3 admin Chapter 76 Echoes of the Past Finished Seline's temper flared. "Why are you always contradicting me? Have you been the Hales' lackey for so long you can't stand to see your own daughter succeed?" "How dare you! Who's a lackey?" Galen's face flushed with anger. "Who else?" Seline sniffed, then turned a beaming, proud smile on Daphne. "My good girl, I'll take you to buy new gowns this afternoon." Her eyes swept over her daughter critically, and she frowned. "Though you do look a bit plump. No supper for you tonight. And nothing tomorrow either. Only water.

You'll keep that up until the boating trip." Daphne stared. "Nothing at all?" Galen sputtered, "Are you trying to starve her to death?" Seline rolled her eyes. "What do you know? A few hours of hunger won't kill anyone! A slimmer figure looks more graceful. The Crown Prince will be more taken with her!" Galen still disapproved. "Elowen was always slender as a reed. Didn't make His Highness favor her." That was Elowen's fault!" Seline's voice rose. "How could she compare to our daughter? All she knew was how to get into trouble! My girl is refined, cultured, and talented!

Having her eat less is for her own good! Do you think I'd harm my own child?" Daphne stepped in to smooth things over. "It's alright, Father. Missing a meal or two won't hurt." She turned a sweet, determined smile on her mother. "I'll do my very best, Mother. I'll make sure His Highness has eyes for no one else! I won't be less than Elowen!" The current weather was unsuitable for planting vegetables; anything sown would likely wither in the heat. So, the vegetable garden idea was tabled for the moment. Furnishing the rooms took priority.

The furniture Cassian ordered was of the finest quality, not all available in Vanelle, requiring shipment from elsewhere. While the items were in transit, Cassian had the rooms emptied, the windows enlarged for better light, and the walls freshly painted and whitewashed. Elowen, claiming to oversee the work, mostly stayed in the shaded corridor, sipping cool minted pea broth. Cassian, meanwhile, spent the afternoon quietly in his study, finishing *Tales of Luminara* and learning a thing or two about "wooing a wife." 1/3 12:29 pm Chapter 76 Echoes of the Past  
Finished At dinner.

Elowen asked, "My lord, where will we go the day after tomorrow to pay our respects to General Ashcroft?" "East of the city," Cassian replied. "Near Miren Lake. There's a wooded hillside by

the lake where many fallen soldiers are buried." He paused, a thought occurring to him. "I've heard a new lakeside tavern opened there recently. They offer pleasure boats. After we pay our respects, we could go for a boat ride." The suggestion of a boat ride was inspired by a scene in Tales of Luminara where the protagonists drifted on a river at night.

Luminara, slightly intoxicated, had looped her arms around Alrik's neck, risen on her toes, and initiated a kiss. The scene was vividly, sensually written and had left a deep impression on Cassian. The thought of Elowen initiating a kiss.... Cassian didn't dare dwell on it. Even the idea made his heart race. But a boat ride together on the lake was undeniably romantic. Hearing the name "Miren Lake," however, gave Elowen a start. In her past life, she had gone to Miren Lake. For a boat ride. It was mere days after Maerwyn's birthday feast.

In the wake of the foul frame-up, Alaric had shunned her entirely-refusing all meetings, all words. Theodric, catching wind of the bitter rift between them, proposed a day of leisure to mend their bond, and the spot he chose for it was a gentle boating excursion upon Miren Lake. She had gone with Alaric. They encountered the Garrett siblings there-Daphne and her brother, Cedric Galen. Elowen had overheard Cedric slandering her own brother. Without a second thought, she marched over and flung a cup of wine in his face. A scene erupted.

Alaric arrived, and in front of everyone, he chastised her for causing trouble. "Why can't you be more sensible, like Daphne?" he had demanded. She could never forget the humiliating heat on her face or Cedric's gloating smirk. She wondered if, this time around, Cedric and Daphne would show up again. "What are you thinking?" Cassian's voice pulled her back. Elowen shook her head slightly. "Nothing." Cassian studied her face. "You don't want to go?" 23 2:29 pm ppp.

Chapter 76 Echoes of the Past She shook her head again. "No, it's not that." She met his gaze and offered a small smile.

"Let's go." After a beat, she added, "Should we ask Sylvia if she'd like to join? After all, it's her father." Cassian nodded. "A good thought. We'll ask." Elowen sent Cora to Rose Hall with the invitation. Cora returned and reported that Marwen had initially been excited, thinking Elowen had found a potential match for Sylvia. She seemed visibly disappointed when she learned it was only for the memorial. Sylvia, however, had agreed promptly. With that settled, Elowen sought out Mira privately.

"Head out tomorrow and find out whether the Garretts plan to visit Miren Lake the day after tomorrow." Mira didn't question the order, simply nodded. 0401 Finished The next day, Mira returned with news. "They are going, Your Grace! His Highness the Crown Prince sent an invitation for Lady Daphne to join him for a boating trip on Miren Lake. Lady Daphne even went out today to buy a new gown specifically for it." 1.7K 3/3 2:29 pm admin

Chapter 77 My Heart Finished "And Cedric?" Elowen asked, a hint of disappointment creeping in. "He won't be staying behind, will he?" Mira's smile turned a little sly. "I made sure to ask. Lady Daphne is on that strict fast to 'slim down. Her father is worried she might faint or something during the outing, so he's asked Lord Cedric to accompany them." Elowen let out a relieved breath. "Good. That's good." It was only then that Mira voiced her curiosity. "Your Grace, why did you ask? Did you already know they would be going?" Elowen maintained a serene smile.

"How could I possibly know the future? It's precisely because I didn't know that I asked you to find out." Mira still felt something was odd but couldn't pinpoint it. She blinked, deciding not to

press further. Elsewhere in the manor, word of Mira's inquiries about the Garretts reached Cassian in his study. "She seems unusually interested in the Garretts' affairs," he remarked, puzzled. Combined with her strange reaction to the mention of Miren Lake earlier, a vague sense of unease settled over him. Bran, standing nearby, offered a theory.

"Well, the Garretts did practically live off the Hales' favor for years. Lady Daphne and the Duchess grew up together. Maybe they just think alike?" Cassian didn't even glance at him, lost in thought. After a long moment, he rubbed his temples. "Forget it." His duty was simple: protect Elowen, care for Elowen. If the Garretts kept to themselves, fine. If they dared step out of line—even if it was just an insulting word that upset Elowen—Cassian had a thousand ways to make their entire family miserable. On the day of the memorial, Elowen dressed in simple, understated attire.

Cassian smiled gently, "No need to wear such muted colors. My uncle wouldn't mind." Elowen's expression was earnest. "But you said many other fallen soldiers rest on that hillside. Dressing modestly is a sign of respect for your uncle and for them." She then asked, a touch hesitant, "Do you think this color doesn't suit me?" Alaric had often remarked that she looked better in darker hues, that light colors made her look "plump." Elowen had never thought herself plump, but hearing it repeatedly had chipped away at her confidence. 1/3 2:29 pm ppp. Chapter 77 My Heart Cassian didn't hesitate.

"You look lovely." Elowen looked at him. You're beautiful. You look lovely in anything." he added. A faint blush colored Elowen's cheeks. Who didn't like being complimented? She offered him a genuine, soft smile. "Thank you." Cassian's eyebrow quirked upward in response. Elowen was about to send Cora to fetch Sylvia from Rose Hall when the maid returned almost

immediately. "Your Grace, Lady Sylvia is already waiting just outside the courtyard gate."

Finished Seeing Sylvia trailing behind Cora, Elowen asked, surprised. "Why didn't you come in?"

"It's so hot outside." Sylvia kept her eyes downcast. "It's still early. It's not too hot." Elowen sighed inwardly. Sometimes, Sylvia's meekness was too familiar. It reminded her painfully of her own past self—a girl too obedient, destined to be trampled upon at home and in marriage.

They took two carriages again, as the journey to the eastern part of the city was longer. Initially, Elowen and Cassian rode in silence. But Elowen was not one for prolonged quiet. Soon, she was fidgeting—peeking out the carriage curtain, tracing the wood grain on the wall with a fingertip.

Cassian, whose gaze kept drifting to her, noticed her restlessness. "What is it?" he asked. Elowen withdrew her hand, looking slightly sheepish. She thought for a moment. "I was just thinking—Sylvia and her older sister, Vivian, have such different personalities." "That's because Sylvia was raised primarily by my uncle. Vivian was always with her mother." "That explains it. Was Sylvia always this reserved?" "She was livelier as a child. After my uncle died and she was sent back to her mother's care, she gradually became as you see her now." Elowen sighed softly.

In such situations, it was hard to place blame. "You were also livelier as a child," Cassian said suddenly, Elowen looked up, meeting his deep, thoughtful gaze. She tilted her head slowly. "You saw me when I was young?" "Yes. A few times." He paused. "You don't remember?" 213

Chapter 77 My Heart Elowen felt a pang of embarrassment. "No, I don't." #Finished Cassian studied her for a long moment. "Perhaps because your eyes and heart were always full of the Crown Prince?" The words escaped him, and he immediately regretted them.

He worried it would upset her, or worse, rekindle old feelings for Alaric... But Elowen showed no sign of anger. Instead, she asked with genuine curiosity, "Which time are you speaking of?"

When I was how old?" "...Around ten to twelve, perhaps thirteen." A time when her father, brothers, and uncles were still alive.. Elowen's expression grew distant, focused on the memory. "At that age, my eyes and heart weren't full of the Crown Prince. They were full of the northern deserts, the southern willows. At Hale Manor, I could eat the meals and pastries my aunt made. I rode to the western riding grounds with my brother to practice archery. Sometimes, I'd travel with my mother to my grandfather's estate. We'd hunt in the mountains, fish in the streams, and soak in the hot springs. There were too many wonderful things to fill my heart." 1.7K 3/3 2:29 pm admin

Chapter 78 Memories and Promises Finished For a moment, Cassian was taken aback. He had nearly forgotten-the Elowen of her early teens had been the brightest, most radiant, and happiest girl in all of Vanelle. With so many wonders filling her world, Alaric hadn't even ranked in her heart. And neither, for that matter, had he, Cassian. No wonder she didn't remember him. "I'm sorry, my lord," Elowen said sincerely.

"There's no need to apologize." He paused, then added, a faint smile touching his lips, "But if you insist on making amends, then be sure to enjoy yourself on the boat ride today." Elowen let out a soft, genuine laugh. As she did, she realized it had been a long time since she'd felt so light and carefree. If Cassian didn't have someone else in his heart, spending her life as his Duchess, peaceful and content, wouldn't be a bad fate at all. But there was no "if" in this world. For the rest of the journey, Cassian told her about Aldric.

Elowen already knew of him, of course; her father and brothers had been military men, and among their circle, everyone knew everyone else. Aldric had been famously kind-hearted and honorable, fiercely loyal to his comrades. He'd often said that if he fell in battle, he wished to be

buried with his fellow soldiers, so they wouldn't be alone. The only regret in his life, it was said, was his marriage to Marwen. It had been arranged by their parents, devoid of affection. At the time, Cassian's mother, Selene, had just entered the palace as an obscure concubine, and Aldric held no high rank.

Marwen had never let him forget it, constantly complaining and belittling him. Elowen was puzzled. "But later, Her Majesty gave birth to the current King. Having a royal child should have elevated the Ashcroft family's status." "In theory, yes," Cassian conceded. "But back then, the palace was full of children, many princes among them. Theodric was a difficult birth, sickly as a child, and never a favorite of the late King." "Ah, I see." Elowen nodded. "So Marwen continued to look down on my uncle. Theodric knew it; he witnessed it firsthand." Cassian said, his voice cooling.

"He once told me that as a boy, he overheard Marwen whispering to her maid 1/3 2:29 pm ppp.

Chapter 78 Memories and Promises #Finisher during a palace visit. She said he looked like a sickly runt who'd never amount to anything, and wondered why Mother bothered risking her life for such a son. The final piece of the puzzle clicked into place for Elowen. "So that's why. General Ashcroft was your uncle, and the King's uncle. But Marwen never seems to leverage that connection. It's because she already offended him." "Exactly." Cassian's gaze darkened. I never cared for her either.

But my uncle died for me, leaving behind three children. I couldn't bring myself to abandon them." "It's alright." Elowen said gently. "Vivian is married. Once Sylvia is settled and we find a suitable wife for Lucien, he can establish his own household. As his mother. Marwen should live with him; it would be scandalous otherwise. If she truly has the gall to insist on staying at the

manor, we can let her keep Rose Hall. It's just a bit of coin each month. The manor is vast: we won't have to see her often." Cassian listened, his gaze resting on her. A soft warmth spread through his chest.

He remained silent. Elowen grew self-conscious under his stare. "Is... is there something on my face?" "No..." Cassian began. He wanted to say, "It's just that you're so gentle and kind. It's very endearing." But before he could speak, the carriage came to a halt. Elowen took a deep breath. "We're here!" She stood and stepped out before he could finish his thought. Cassian paused, then swallowed the unspoken words. Before Aldric's grave, offerings were laid out. Cassian and Elowen took turns to pay respect, followed by Sylvia As they finished.

Cassian suggested, "Shall we go to the lakeside for a meal?" Sylvia kept her eyes lowered. "I... ate before I left. I'm not hungry. Please, you and Her Grace should go. I'd like to stay here with Father a while longer." "Alright." Cassian respected her wish, though he discreetly left two guards nearby to ensure her safety. As they walked away, a gentle breeze carried the faint sound of Sylvia's choked whisper. Father. I'm living at Duskmoor Manor now. Everything is fine. Mother is well. Lucien is well. Vivian is well. Cassian is married to Lady Elowen from the Hale family. She is kind.

She says she'll find a good match for me..." Elowen's heart twinged. She glanced back to see Sylvia standing before the grave, her back straight as a rod. It reminded her painfully of her own visit to the Hale family shrine soon after her marriage, when she had 2/3 2:29 pm ppp. Chapter 78 Memories and Promises uttered similar, lonely assurances. Their situations were so alike. "What are you thinking?" Cassian asked, noticing her distant expression.

Finished "I'm thinking," Elowen said, turning her gaze forward, "that I must find a truly good match for Sylvia." "Why?" Cassian raised an eyebrow. 1.7K 3/3 W #29 pm admin

Chapter 79 Do as You Wish Firusher Because I lived a past life, and I know that in this world, a woman's happiness is bound to the man she marries and the family she enters. Sylvia wasn't bad at heart. Elowen didn't want her to suffer. Facing Cassian, she simply offered a gentle smile.

"General Ashcroft saved your life. Ensuring his daughter's happiness would honor his memory. And word would spread in Vanelle, praising your thoughtfulness." Cassian didn't comment on that, instead asking. "What kind of match do you consider 'good'?" Elowen pondered. "Equal social standing is ideal.

But truly, character is paramount. A high-born man who is selfish or cold will only bring hardship. A man of slightly lower birth but with a kind heart would make for a much better life. Of course. Sylvia has to like him herself." Cassian studied her thoughtfully. Barely out of her teens, a newlywed herself. yet she spoke like she'd seen it all. As they talked. the carriage neared Miren Lake. Suddenly, it came to a halt. Elowen was puzzled. She raised her voice slightly. "What's the matter?" An unfamiliar, haughty voice answered from outside. "A noble guest has reserved Miren Lake today.

The entire venue is closed to others. You'd best turn back." The Duskmoor carriage was one of many, and Cassian rarely used it, preferring to ride. The person below clearly didn't recognize it. Elowen guessed the noble guest" had to be Alaric. In her past life, he had never reserved the entire lake for her. Yet now, he did it for Daphne. Seems his feelings for her are genuine. They truly are a match. Elowen really didn't want to go to Miren Lake anymore, mostly because she

didn't want to see them. Beside her, however, Cassian let out a soft, derisive chuckle. "Noble guest?"

You mean the Crown Prince The man below heard his voice but didn't recognize it. He got even more cocky. "That's right, it is His Highness the Crown Prince! Accompanied by the esteemed daughter of the Lord Chancellor. Lady Daphne! I understand you've come a long way, but I'm afraid the lake is fully reserved by His Highness today. You'll have to try another time." Elowen turned to Cassian, whispering, "The food at that tavern isn't very good anyway Since it's booked. let's just go elsewhere." But the servant outside overheard. He clicked his tongue, annoyed. "Sour grapes, are we?"

What do you :29 pm Chapter 79 Do as You Wish Finisher mean, isn't very good? If it weren't, would His Highness be here? Don't speak nonsense if you don't know what you're talking about!" Cassian's voice dropped several degrees, turning icy. "Slap him." "Yes, Your Grace!" A guard moved. Before Elowen could blink, the guard had the man pinned. and Bran delivered two sharp, stinging slaps to his face. The servant's head snapped to the side. his cheek instantly red and swollen. Elowen was momentarily stunned as well. Cassian spoke, his voice a cold blade.

"Mind your tongue when addressing the Duchess of Duskmoor." Then Elowen understood. Cassian was defending her. punishing the man for his insolence. The servant, his mind reeling. finally grasped the identity of the two in the carriage. The Duchess of Duskmoor-so the man beside her could only be the Duke himself. Everyone knew the Crown Prince was noble. But before the Duke of Duskmoor? He was nothing. If the Duke was displeased. the man on the throne would be displeased too. Their lives in Vanelle would be over.

Pale and contrite, the servant stammered, his cheek throbbing, "F-forgive me, Your Graces! I... I didn't recognize you! A thousand apologies!" Cassian ignored him, turning to Elowen. "Do you still want to go? Or shall we return another day?" Elowen asked instead. "Did Lady Daphne come alone?" The servant remained silent until Cassian coldly repeated, "The Duchess asked you a question." The man jolted. "N-no, not alone! Her brother, Lord Cedric, is with her! He escorted her! And a few of his friends.

His Highness made an exception, allowing them to stay at the tavern..." That matched her last life exactly. She leaned closer to Cassian. "But if His Highness has reserved the place, wouldn't our arrival be improper? A faint smile touched Cassian's lips. "As the Duchess of Duskmoor, no need to concern yourself with propriety. Do as you wish. Let others be inconvenienced, not yourself." The servant gaped, hearing such a statement. Elowen, accustomed to a lifetime of being found wanting, felt an unfamiliar but exhilarating thrill at being 29 pm ppp.

Chapter 79 Do as You Wish backed so completely. She nodded. "Then... shall we go?" Cassian inclined his head. "We shall." Finished The tavern was built right on the lakeshore, with several pleasure boats of varying sizes moored nearby. Smaller ones for two, larger ones capable of hosting dozens for a feast. With all other patrons turned away, the boats lay still at their docks, and the tavern itself was eerily quiet. 1.7K 3/3 admin

Chapter 80 I Saw Elowen! "Would you prefer to dine in the tavern, or on the water?" Cassian asked. "The tavern!" Elowen answered without hesitation. "Alright." Cassian's gaze shifted to the now-chastened servant, who scurried off to make arrangements. Finated He ran into the tavern manager, who hissed at him, "I told you! His Highness is here! No outsiders! What are you doing?" The servant looked miserable. "Manager, not outsiders. It's the Duke and Duchess of

Duskmoor... The manager froze, his voice dropping to a tremble. "The Duke... Duke Cassian is here? Hurry!

The finest wine, the best dishes! Immediately!" The servant wiped his brow. "Yes, sir!" The manager wrung his hands, a mix of terror and excitement warring within him. A Crown Prince was one thing, but the Duke of Duskmoor? One was more formidable than the other. If he could please them, especially the Duke, his fortune was made! Due to Cassian's wheelchair, they were seated in a private room on the ground floor. Bran wheeled Cassian in first, with Elowen following. This entrance was witnessed by a young nobleman returning from the privy to his party upstairs.

He didn't see Cassian at the front, only Elowen entering behind. And he recognized her. He hurried back to his private room on the second floor, a conspiratorial grin on his face. He sidled up to Cedric. "Cedric, guess who I just saw?" Cedric was busy lavishing praise on the guest of honor. Alaric, and was impatient. "The place is cleared out. Who could you possibly see? Don't bug me." The young man chuckled, "I saw Elowen!" His voice carried. Cedric heard. So did Daphne, and so did Alaric Alaric's brow furrowed. Daphne raised a hand to her lips.

"Oh my could it be Elowen heard His Highness was here and followed him?" Alaric remained silent. Daphne sighed delicately. "His Highness even cleared the venue to prevent such intrusions. She must have used her status as Duchess of Duskmoor to force her way in. The poor servants couldn't stop her..." Alaric still didn't speak. He hadn't cleared the venue to keep Elowen out, but to avoid gossip about him being seen alone with Daphne. To him, Daphne lacked Elowen's striking beauty; she was merely pleasant-looking.

But she was Azure, her family was acceptable, and his father was pushing. So here he was. What he hadn't anticipated was Cedric inviting his friends along. He'd been annoyed since their arrival. As he heard Elowen was here, a strange, unexpected thrill of anticipation stirred in his chest. Your Highness, Cedric offered, puffing out his chest, "allow me to take a couple of men and escort her out. She won't disturb you and Daphne." Alaric glanced at him. "You?" Cedric smirked. "Elowen sees me as her brother. She'll listen to me." But Alaric didn't want Elowen to leave.

He wanted to see why she was here. Would she seek him out? With that thought, his lips moved. "Leave her be." Cedric looked puzzled. "Why?" Another young nobleman at the table snickered, "Could it be Your Highness is worried about her getting her feelings hurt?" Alaric's face darkened instantly. Cedric shot the man a warning glare. "Don't talk nonsense! His Highness has no feelings for her! Why would he care?" Alaric's expression was cold. "Her feelings are of no concern to me. But she is married to my uncle now. If she feels slighted, she'll complain to him.

I'd rather not displease my uncle." Daphne looked at Alaric with wide, understanding eyes.

"Exactly. Your Highness and the Duke are uncle and nephew, with the closest bond. In the future, when Your Highness ascends, the Duke will be your staunchest supporter. Women can be so jealous. It would be a shame if an outsider damaged that precious family tie. Cedric snorted in agreement. "That's why choosing a wife is so crucial! Marry the wrong one, like that Elowen, and your household will be in turmoil.

My sister is the best-gentle, virtuous, perfect for managing a home and supporting her husband."

Alaric offered no opinion on that. Daphne allowed a shy, pleased smile to touch her lips. Another young man at the table suddenly spoke up, sounding confused. "But wasn't Elowen's marriage to

2:29 pm ppp. Chapter 801 Saw Elowen! the Duke arranged by His Majesty? By that logic, doesn't that mean His Majesty set the Duke up?" Daphne's smile faltered for a split second. Alaric shot the speaker a sharp, displeased look. The young man belatedly realized his blunder and clapped a hand over his mouth.

Finished Cedric quickly tried to smooth things over with a forced laugh. "Alright, alright, enough of that! Let's just enjoy our meal." 1.7K admin