

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 81 I Shall Go Attend to Him as Well Finished Cedric looked at the sparse dishes and few jugs of wine on their table and shouted toward the door, "What's taking so long with the food and drink? Is everyone in this tavern dead?" A servant poked his head in, bowing apologetically. "My apologies, sir. We're short-handed today." Cedric scowled. "Short-handed? We're the only patrons here!" The servant looked pained. "There is... another party on the ground floor, sir. Please understand..." The ground floor-that meant Elowen?

Cedric snapped, "How can they compare to the exalted presence of His Highness the Crown Prince?" The servant was visibly struggling. "But... that is the Duke..." "We know who it is," Cedric cut him off impatiently, assuming he meant "the Duchess." "Get all your people up here, now!" "...All of them, sir?" The server hesitated. "Of course, all of them! Who in the realm is more exalted than the Crown Prince? Everyone should be serving His Highness! Whoever's downstairs-what are they, anyway? They dare cut in front of the Crown Prince? Hah!

Think they're hot stuff, the fool..." The servant stared, bewildered. The Duke of Duskmoor... was, by common understanding in Vanelle, considered above the Crown Prince in influence and sheer presence. Was there some shift in palace politics he didn't know about? Alaric listened to Cedric and felt a flicker of interest. He spoke up, "If they've got a problem with me, they can come up and say it to my face." With that, the server had a rough idea. Either the King granted the Crown Prince sweeping new powers, or the Crown Prince simply asserted himself against his formidable uncle.

Either way, it was a conflict far above his station. He could only bow. "Yes, Your Highness. I'll relay the message." After the servant left, Cedric sneered, "Married a Duke and thinks she's ascended to the heavens. It's not like she became Crown Princess." Alaric felt a peculiar flicker of anticipation. If Elowen comes up here and sees me with Daphne, she'll surely be filled with regret. The thought brought a faint, expectant curve to his lips.

1/3 2:29 pm ppp Chapter 811 Shall Go Attend to Him as Well Finished Downstairs, the servant reported the exchange to the manager, who was currently bowing and scraping before Cassian and Elowen. Seeing the servant's distressed face, the manager pulled him outside. The servant relayed the message faithfully, "They said no one is more exalted than the Crown Prince. We are to ignore the ground floor and attend only to His Highness." The manager was stunned. "Didn't you tell them it's the Duke of Duskmoor down here?" "I did! I wouldn't dare hide that!" The manager was utterly confused now.

"No need to whisper outside." Cassian's voice, clear and carrying, came from within the room. His hearing was exceptionally sharp. The manager, resigned, led the servant back in. Cassian lifted his chin lazily. "Repeat what was said upstairs. I want to hear it." The servant glanced nervously at the manager, who gave a weary nod of permission. Taking a deep breath, the servant recounted the conversation, emphasizing Alaric's line: "If they've got a problem with me, they can come up and say it to my face." By the end, both the manager and the servant were holding their breath.

When gods fought, mortals suffered. Cassian stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Well, well. He's grown up. Found his spine." His voice was low, almost amused, and devastatingly pleasant to the ear. To the others, however, it sounded like the whisper of a reaper's scythe. Elowen found it

strange. In both her lives. Alaric had been terrified of his uncle, shrinking like a mouse before a cat in Cassian's presence. How had he grown so bold today as to issue such a challenge?

Suddenly, it clicked. Daphne was with him. A man before the woman he loved, would go to great lengths to save face.

With Daphne watching. Alaric was puffing himself up, daring to disregard his uncle. "Your Grace. The manager wiped cold sweat from his brow. "What would you have us do?" 2:29 pm Chapter 81 I Shall Go Attend to Him as Well 0441 Finished Cassian's tone was deceptively mild. "When the Crown Prince commands, who dares disobey? Go. Attend to him." The manager blinked. "And you, Your Grace...?" Cassian replied, perfectly calm, "I shall go attend to him as well." The manager was stunned. Are you serious? Elowen tilted her head.

"My lord, if we are to 'attend' to His Highness, should I come as well?" Mostly, she wanted to witness the spectacle. Seeing Alaric or the Garretts get their comeuppance promised to be highly entertaining. Cassian nodded his assent. The group made their way upstairs. Since the stairs were impossible for a wheelchair, two guards carefully carried Cassian up. 1.7K 3/3 :29 pm admin

Chapter 82 A Defense for Her Brother Inside the private room, the sound of approaching footsteps made Alaric's lips curl. I knew she'd come. Finished Cedric snickered. "Who would've thought she'd be so brazen? But then, that's a Hale family trait, isn't it?" One of the other young nobles laughed, "Well, back when the Hales were in power, Cedric here was always trailing behind Young General Hale. He'd know all about their traits." Trailing behind. The phrasing ignited Cedric's temper. "What's that supposed to mean?" The young man shrugged, oblivious. "Just stating facts.

Weren't you always-" An elbow jabbed into his side from a friend, accompanied by a sharp warning look. He fell silent, but the damage was done. Cedric's face flushed with anger. "Julian Hale? That worthless piece of trash! He was just lucky with his birth and had a famous father. Did he earn any real glory on the battlefield? No! He just rode on his father's coattails! Out of respect for his father, people called him 'Young General. But what was he really? A nobody!" He finished with a contemptuous spit. His voice boomed through the wooden door.

Elowen, standing right outside, heard every venomous word. Her face paled, then flushed with fury. Her hands clenched into fists. Julian was her brother. The words were identical to those she'd heard in her past life. Back then, she had thrown wine in Cedric's face and cursed him, only to be scolded by Alaric for being undignified. But she had never believed herself wrong. Her brother, Julian, had followed their father and uncles to war when he was barely taller than a sword, carrying the wounded and hauling supplies.

At thirteen, his slight build allowed him to slip through enemy lines, delivering critical intelligence that saved hundreds of soldiers and turned the tide of a battle. He had collapsed unconscious after the grueling run, not waking for two days. On the battlefield, he always led the charge, his body a map of scars, each one a brush with death. Every stipend, every reward he received, he shared with the men under his command, earning their fierce loyalty. 2:29 pm ppp. Chapter 82 A Defense for Her Brother Finished And Cedric dared call him a nobody? A glory-stealer?

A wave of white-hot rage crashed over Elowen. She shoved the door open. Everyone inside turned, smirks of anticipation on their faces. Cedric raised an arrogant eyebrow. "Well, well, if it isn't Elowen. What a-" Splash! Before he could finish, Elowen strode forward, snatched a wine

cup from the table, and dashed its contents directly into his face. The room fell silent in shock.

Daphne gasped, her voice a tremulous whisper. "Elowen! What are you doing? His Highness is right here! You... you insult His Highness as well!" Alaric's brow furrowed, his expression darkening.

"Elowen, you're out of line." Elowen's face was a mask of icy calm. "My brother fought and bled for this kingdom until his last breath. Cedric slanders him behind his back. You, Your Highness, did not reprimand him. Yet when I punish the slanderer, I am the one out of line? My grandfather did not teach you that. I doubt His Majesty did either." A shadow fell over Alaric's features.

Cedric wiped the wine from his face, a sneer twisting his lips. "Elowen, your grandfather is dead. Your brother is dead. You-" Elowen spun back, her hand lashing out in a sharp, stinging slap across his cheek.

Cedric's head snapped to the side, his eyes wide with disbelief. "You dare strike me?" Elowen didn't bother with words. She delivered a second, equally forceful slap to his other cheek. Two solid strikes. Humiliation and rage boiled over in Cedric. "You crazy bitch! I'll-" He balled his fist, drawing it back to swing at her. "Enough!" A roar from the doorway froze everyone. All eyes turned. Bran stood there, pushing Cassian's wheelchair into the room. "Uncle!" Alaric shot to his feet. The others in the room scrambled up, bowing hastily.

"Your Grace!" The devastatingly handsome man leaned back in his chair, in no hurry to acknowledge them. Instead, he smiled faintly and gestured to Elowen, his tone almost gentle.

"Come here." 2/0 Chapter 82 A Defense for Her Brother Finished Elowen's throat tightened- whether from anger or something else, she couldn't tell. She gave a muffled sound of assent and

walked back to stand beside him. Watching them, Alaric felt a sharp, irrational pang. They're way too close! He ground his teeth.

"Uncle, to what do we owe this visit?" Cassian replied leisurely, "I've come to serve your meal." Terror flickered in Alaric's eyes. "I don't understand your meaning." "Didn't you say." Cassian continued, resting his chin on his hand, "that everyone in the tavern should attend you? And that if anyone had a problem, they should come and tell you to your face?" Alaric's face went bone-white. Did I say that? I wouldn't dare! The idea of his uncle serving him-it was a death sentence.

1.7K (admin

Chapter 83 Take Her Away As the memory clicked into place, a cold sweat broke out on Alaric's back. He had said that. But he'd thought only Elowen was downstairs! He hadn't known his uncle was with her! "Uncle. it's a misunderstanding..." he stammered. "So, you no longer require my service?" Cassian asked, his tone mild. "How could I ever ask you to serve me?" Alaric forced a shaky smile. Cassian nodded. "Good. Then you will serve me presently." Alaric blinked. "And my wife," Cassian added. Alaric froze. Cassian raised an eyebrow.

"What, you unhappy about it?" Finestred Alaric gritted his teeth. "It's not that I'm unhappy. I merely worry Elo... Aunt might feel uncomfortable..." Cassian turned to Elowen, his voice softening. "Would that make you uncomfortable, my dear?" Elowen's smile was sweet and bright. "Not at all. A nephew serving his uncle and aunt is only right and proper. Alaric felt a surge of fury so intense he nearly choked. Cassian's gaze then shifted to Cedric. It was cold, sharp, like an invisible blade. Cedric shivered.

"Earlier, Cassian said slowly, his voice devoid of all emotion, "you were about to strike the Duchess?" Cedric dropped his head guiltily. "N-no..." Cassian actually smiled, I think you were.

And weren't you just saying that Young General Hale was a nobody?" Cedric hadn't realized Cassian had heard that! His legs turned to water, and he almost collapsed "The Hale family's military honors, Cassian continued, his tone deceptively casual. "were verified by me and conferred by His Majesty. By your words, Young General Hale's achievements are false.

Does that mean both His Majesty and I are incompetent fools?" Cedric's eyes bulged. He shook his head frantically. "No... no, never...!" Chapter 83 Take Her Away It had been angry bluster, nothing more! He wouldn't dare defy the King or the Duke! Finished Furthermore, Cassian mused, "the Hale family's loyalty has been praised by His Majesty in court countless times. He has spoken of commissioning a chronicle of their deeds and ensuring the welfare of their sole surviving daughter. So perhaps you don't think Julian is a nobody.

Perhaps you think His Majesty is a nobody." The accusation was lethal. Cedric crumpled to his knees, terror-stricken, kowtowing repeatedly. "Your Grace, please! You've got me wrong! I wouldn't dare! I swear I wouldn't!" Your Grace, my brother is the most loyal subject. He'd never think such things!" Daphne stepped forward, her voice trembling with distress. "He just had too much to drink today and misspoke..." Elowen tilted her head. "In the past, Cedric has spent entire nights drinking and carousing at the Velvet Lantern, yet been fresh and ready for court the next morning.

How is it that today, with less than a jug of wine, he is already 'drunk?" Daphne blinked, then turned wounded, tear-filled eyes on Elowen. "Elowen, that's unkind! I know you and His Highness share a history. But you are married to His Grace now. Whatever His Highness does, you shouldn't be so attentive, or follow him here." Elowen frowned. They were discussing Cedric's insult. Why drag her and Alaric into it? Daphne glanced meaningfully at Cassian. "If

you cannot let go of His Highness, that is your affair. But why drag His Grace here as well? The journey is long. the weather is hot.

His Grace and His Highness are uncle and nephew. Are you trying to make them..." She let her voice trail off, heavy with implication. Cassian's handsome face darkened. Daphne's heart leapt with secret triumph. There. Now my brother is safe. Elowen, you and the Crown Prince have a past. Even if you're both married to others, that history remains. I don't believe the Duke won't feel resentment. I don't believe he'll keep defending you! A tense silence filled the room. Then Cassian turned his head slightly, "Bran. Take her away." Bran bowed. "Yes, Your Grace" He strode toward Daphne.

Daphne recoiled in shock. "Wh-what? Me? Shouldn't it be Elowen who-" Bran's voice was icy. "That is Her Grace the Duchess." He grasped her wrist with brutal force. 2:29 pm Chapter 83
Take Her Away Pain made Daphne cry out. She turned pleading eyes to Cassian. "Your Grace! There must be some mistake!" Finished Cassian's expression was stony. "In the palace, you offended the Duchess. I made you kneel. You learned nothing. Seems it wasn't long enough. Today, you will kneel for two hours." Daphne's face drained of color. The previous hour had been agony. Two hours would kill her! She bit her lip.

"I didn't offend her! If Elowen held no old feelings for His Highness, why would she even be here-" Cassian clicked his tongue. "Old feelings? What old feelings? Today, I came to Miren Lake to honor my late uncle. I wanted to take the Duchess boating on the lake. For your loose tongue, make it four hours." Daphne stared, stunned. So Cassian brought Elowen here himself? Bran tightened his grip and began dragging the struggling, protesting Daphne from the room.

1.7K M admin

Chapter 84 The Price of Words 0171 Finished Panic seized Daphne. She cast a desperate, pleading look at Alaric. "Your Highness! Please!" Alaric's brow furrowed with displeasure. He was already in his uncle's bad graces. Her drawing attention to him now would only make things worse. But then he remembered-she was Azure. A flicker of pity stirred within him. He wet his lips. "Uncle, four hours-is that not too severe?" Cedric, still on his knees, also looked up imploringly. "Yes, Your Grace! Daphne is delicate! She can't take it!" Cassian remained unmoved.

"She is delicate, unable to endure four hours of kneeling. Is my Duchess, then, so robust that she deserves to be slandered and bullied by the likes of you?" His words hung in the air, silencing everyone. Even Elowen was taken aback. Cassian's tone brooked no argument. "Take her. Four full hours." Seeing his unyielding harshness, Daphne suddenly turned to Elowen, sobbing, "Your Grace! Please! Have mercy! We grew up together! You used to share your pastries with me, give me the finest fabrics!" She was calling her "Your Grace" now. How ironic.

Where was that memory when you were alluding to my past with Alaric in front of Cassian?

"My lord," Elowen spoke up, "perhaps a lesser punishment today?" She wasn't softening out of pity. She remembered what Mira had reported-Daphne had been starving herself for days to achieve a slender figure. Four hours of kneeling would likely break her. And Daphne was here as an invited guest of the Crown Prince, seemingly favored by the King and Queen as a potential Crown Princess. If Cassian punished her too severely on Elowen's behalf, would it cause friction with the King and Queen?

She added softly, "If she were to faint or worse, die, it would be rather troublesome." Cassian nodded slightly. "You make a valid point." Her suggestion was the only one he considered. Bran

paused obediently at the doorway, awaiting further orders. Daphne's heart lifted with a secret sigh of relief. Of course. Elowen is soft-hearted, always clinging to old sentiments. 173 2:29 pm ppp. Chapter 84 The Price of Words Finished Though it irked her to see Cassian heed Elowen so readily, at least she was spared. "All right then. Cassian decided. "Bran, you and the others will keep watch.

If she faints, pour water on her and continue." Daphne stared, frozen. "If she dies, then the kneeling is over. Find a coffin and return her to the Garretts." His tone was disturbingly casual. Daphne's face turned ashen. She nearly fainted on the spot. Bran, perfectly serious, asked, "What sort of coffin, Your Grace?" Your choice. An expensive one is fine. We're not short of funds." "Understood." Bran resumed dragging the struggling Daphne out. Her cries and pleas echoed, ignored by Cassian. Bran offered some practical advice. "Save your strength, lady.

You'll need it if you're to survive." Daphne's sobs hitched. He then added, almost conversationally, "What kind of coffin do you prefer? What wood? If you die. I'll pick one you'd like." Daphne's legs gave way. She couldn't even muster the energy to cry. A heavy silence fell over the room. No one found it strange. No one dared object. This was the Duke of Duskmoor as he was known-ruthless, decisive. It was how he had secured the throne for Theodric and cowed all opposition. Recent peace and his coma had made people forget his true nature.

It was in this moment that a sliver of fear pierced Elowen's heart. She realized the vast power imbalance between her and Cassian. For now, he chose to be kind to her. But what if, one day, he chose otherwise? Would he discard her as callously as he was discarding Daphne? Would she, like Daphne, be left with no recourse? After Cassian and Elowen left, the atmosphere in the upstairs room remained suffocating. Servants brought food and wine, but few touched it One

young noble whispered. "From now on, we must show the utmost respect to the Duchess of Duskmoor." 2/3 2:29 pm ppp.

Chapter 84 The Price of Words Another agreed fervently. "Indeed! She's clearly the Duke's favored one now." Listening, Alaric felt a churning mix of irritation and bitter resentment. Finished It was as if he'd owned something he hadn't valued much, decided to discard it, only to watch someone else pick it up and treasure it beyond measure. A sharp, possessive anger flared within him. That was mine! By the lakeside, Sylvia remained seated before her father's grave, sharing quiet, one-sided confidences. Recent days held little joy to recount, so she spoke of the past instead.

Unbidden, tears traced paths down her cheeks. How she wished she could go back... The frontier had been harsh, the wind and sand relentless, but she had been happy there. 1.7K 1 3/3

Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess 0179 Finished admin

Chapter 85 New Encounters Now, Duskmoor Manor offered silks and delicacies, but she wanted none of it. "Hey, you over there!" A man's voice, clear and righteous, startled her. She looked up to see a handsome young man staring warily at the two guards beside her. "Are these men bothering you?" Sylvia blinked, hastily wiping her tears with her sleeve. "No... they're protecting me..." The young man looked skeptical. "Truly?" Sylvia explained, "I'm from Duskmoor Manor. I'm Sylvia Ashcroft. They... were left here by the Duke of Duskmoor." The man.

Piers, seemed to believe her, but the mention of "Duke of Duskmoor" made him frown. He was the son of the Duke of Falconcrest and had been raised to be bold and unrestrained. Only once had he suffered a severe setback, and it had been at the hands of the Duke of Duskmoor. He'd held a grudge ever since. Sylvia managed a small smile. "Thank you, sir. May I know your

name? My father taught me always to repay kindness." Piers didn't want Cassian to know of his presence here. He fabricated quickly, "I'm Peres. My family is in trade. Modest means, not notable in Vanelle." He turned to leave.

"Wait, sir!" Sylvia called after him. He glanced back. "Yes?" She pointed to the hem of his tunic. "Your garment is torn." Piers looked down. Indeed, a small rip marred the fine fabric, probably snagged on a branch during his walk. "It's nothing. I'll change when I return." "But this is fine material," Sylvia said softly. "A patch will fix it. No need to swap the whole thing" She met his gaze. "Would you allow me... to mend it for you?" "You?" Piers looked at her properly. Her eyes, still slightly red-rimmed from crying, seemed to hold a galaxy of stars. A strange pull tugged at him.

He found himself nodding. "Alright... 1/3 Chapter 85 New Encounters Finished Back in the ground-floor room, Cassian and Elowen resumed their meal. When a fish dish was served, Cassian carefully placed a piece of the tender, white flesh on her plate. He studied her face, his brow furrowing slightly. "You look pale. Is the food not to your liking?" The manager, standing nearby, broke into a cold sweat, terrified she would say "yes" and the Duke would have his tavern razed. Elowen shook her head. "Is the wine not good?" Cassian tried again.

The manager trembled, fearing the same catastrophic "yes." Fortunately, Elowen shook her head once more. "It's just a little hot in here." Cassian made a soft sound of acknowledgment, then looked at the manager. Before he could speak, the manager dropped to his knees with a thud. "I beg your pardon, Your Grace! Please don't raze my establishment!" Who said anything about razing it?" he asked, bemused. The manager blinked. "Oh..." Fetch some ice," Cassian ordered.

The manager scrambled up, relieved, and hurried to comply. Elowen's preoccupation wasn't due to the heat, but to the future.

What would happen when Cassian's true love appeared, or when he grew tired of her? She decided worrying was futile. As long as she kept her head and guarded her heart, she wouldn't be hurt. She would prepare a path for herself, so even if they parted, she wouldn't fare poorly. Soon, two large basins of ice were brought in, cooling the room instantly. "Better?" Cassian asked. Elowen curved her eyes into a smile and nodded. "Much better. Thank you, my lord." Cassian felt her smile lacked its usual warmth. He studied her for a moment longer, but before he could inquire further, Bran entered.

"Your Grace, the Garrett girl has fainted." Cassian's tone was indifferent. "Did you try water?"
213 1:30 pm ppp Chapter 85 New Encounters Finished "Twice. She won't wake. She's unconscious." Cassian nodded. "Then send her home." Bran bowed and left. After he was gone, Elowen asked quietly, "With Daphne fainting from your punishment, won't the Garretts hold a grudge?" Cassian replied offhandedly, "Many in the realm despise me. One more household makes no difference." Elowen considered this. It was true. Many feared him, and many hated him.

She knew of several assassination attempts herself over the years. At the Garrett residence, Seline was hosting a small gathering of ladies of similar standing in her courtyard. One of them asked, "Huh, why don't we see Daphne today?" Seline's smile was smug and impossible to hide. "Oh, she's out." "Out? Where?" Seline lowered her voice on purpose. "An invitation came from the palace! His Highness the Crown Prince invited her for a boating excursion on Miren Lake!"

"Oh! The ladies gasped, impressed. This clearly indicated royal favor. Daphne might well become the Crown Princess!

They couldn't help but lavish praise. "Daphne is so talented and graceful. It was only a matter of time before the palace took notice." 1.7K 3/3 admin

Chapter 86 Fallen Pride I always said that girl was destined for greatness!" Finished You two will enjoy boundless prosperity! Mother-in-law to the Crown Prince-I wouldn't even dare dream of it!" Bathed in flattery, Seline beamed, unable to contain her joy. A maid hurried in, her expression anxious. "My lady! Lady Daphne has returned!" Seline, riding high, missed the maid's distress. "Did she return with her brother, or was she sent by the Crown Prince's escorts?" The maid hesitated. "It... it was people from Duskmoor Manor who brought her back..." Duskmoor Manor?" Seline was puzzled.

"What does the Duke have to do with this?" One of the visiting ladies tittered, "They say His Highness respects his uncle greatly. He probably invited the Duke along to assess his future bride!" Seline found this reasoning delightful and smiled wider, "His Highness truly values Daphne so much! I'm almost worried it'll make others jealous." The maid opened her mouth, then closed it. Seline gestured. "Since she's back, have her join us! She can greet her aunts and share her experiences today with the Crown Prince and the Duke. Give them all something to brag about." The maid looked pained.

"But..." She bit her lip and blurted out, "She's unconscious!" Seline stared. The other ladies gasped. One asked, "But... how could a healthy young lady faint?" Seline forced a laugh. "It's my fault. I wanted her to look slender, so I didn't let her eat much. She must have fainted from hunger." "No, my lady..." The maid's face was grim. "The men from Duskmoor Manor said she

offended the Duchess-again. The Duke punished her with two hours of kneeling. She couldn't take it and lost consciousness..." "What?!" Seline shrieked, shooting to her feet. The gathered ladies exchanged stunned looks.

Seline, forgetting all decorum, rushed outside. The sight of her daughter, disheveled and unconscious, and the imposing guards from Duskmoor Manor, nearly made her faint on the spot. 1/3 2:30 pm ppp. Chapter Be Fallen Pride 0:45 Finliche Seeing the curious ladies trailing behind her, she flushed a deep red and ground out through clenched teeth. Take her inside! To her room! Now!" It was a humiliating retreat. Later, the ladies reconvened elsewhere to gossip. "She's always boasting about that daughter of hers.

That mediocre 'talent, calling her a modern-day literary genius." "She's always so miserly-I wondered why she'd suddenly offer to host us today. Turns out it's just so she can brag about her daughter dining with the Crown Prince. And look what happened! Offended the Duchess and got herself punished! Ha!" "Speaking of which, the Duchess is the Hale girl, isn't she?" "Poetic justice. I say. The Garretts rose on the Hales' backs. Without the Hales, where would they be? And after the Hales fell, they climbed over their corpses, bad-mouthing them all the while.

Now look-Elowen is the Duchess of Duskmoor!" "Well, word is the Duke is temperamental and has a true love elsewhere. Elowen's good fortune might not last... Back at the tavern. Elowen finished her meal and dabbed her lips with a napkin. Cassian addressed the manager. "Settle the bill with Bran." The manager bowed deeply. "Your Grace's presence is honor enough. I wouldn't dare accept payment. Please, consider it my humble offering." Cassian gave him a sidelong glance. "Charge what it's worth. Settle it with Bran." His tone implied he had the money and would pay.

The manager understood and forced a smile. "Yes, Your Grace. As you wish." After seeing the Duke's party off, the manager finally relaxed, the tension draining from his shoulders. A servant nearby sighed. "The Duke is different Generous! Not like the one upstairs. When we said we wouldn't charge, he actually left without paying a single coin" The manager snorted, "The one upstairs still has to ask his parents for allowance. Of course he pinches pennies. The one downstairs-he's different... He trailed off meaningfully. The servant leaned in, eager for gossip.

The manager's expression turned stern. Is your work done? Gossiping on the job? Get back to it!"

23 30 pm ppp. Chapter 86 Fallen Pride The servant grinned and scurried away. Finished Norried Sylvia might be hungry. Elowen had the tavern prepare a bowl of barley pottage and two small platters-one of roasted meat, one of stewed greens-to take with them. When they met Sylvia back at the hillside, the girl's cheeks were faintly flushed, whether from the heat or something else. For the first time, she offered a small, shy smile. "Your Graces." Elowen sensed her improved mood.

can eat on the way back." she handed over the food hamper. "We brought this for you. You Sylvia accepted it. "Thank you, Your Grace. I'll finish it all." Elowen was now certain. Sylvia was in a very good mood indeed. 1.7K !I 373 admin

but definite undercurrent of animosity, subtle but present. Cassian's gaze kept drifting to Elowen. His tone was even as he asked, "Where is your mother?" "She's in the reception hall. I just... I missed you so much. When I heard you were back, I came straight here. Cassian, aren't you happy to see me?" Cassian didn't answer that. Instead, he turned fully to Elowen, his voice softening. "Go and rest first. Our visitors are the wife and daughter of a former lieutenant of mine.

They likely have matters to discuss." The girl seemed to remember herself. "Oh, Duchess, please don't misunderstand! There's absolutely nothing between Cassian and me! He's only good to me because he sees me as a little sister" Elowen nodded with a smile. "I get it" The girl insisted on pushing Cassian's wheelchair to the reception hall herself Bran couldn't dissuade her.

Fortunately, she lacked the strength and soon grew tired, wiping her brow and handing the task back to Bran. She walked beside Cassian, chattering in a playful, slightly petulant tone.

Elowen listened to the fading sound of her voice as she led her own attendants back to their courtyard. 13 2:30 pm ppp. Chapter 87 Stay The Night Finished Your Grace, please don't take it to heart, Cora said softly, hurrying to walk beside Elowen. She worried for Elowen. That young lady's surname is Wrenner. Her father was His Grace's first lieutenant, and also one of his martial instructors." Elowen glanced at her. "If I recall, Lieutenant Wrenner is currently in Nordia, isn't he?" Cora nodded. "Yes..." Elowen knew the story.

Cassian's most seasoned lieutenant had pursued enemy forces deep into Nordian territory on his orders. only to be captured in a trap. The Nordians, impressed by his skill and loyalty, had tried to persuade him to switch allegiance. He had never yielded and had remained under house arrest in Nordia for years. Since then, Cassian had taken care of his wife and daughter. Cora watched Elowen's expression. "His Grace doesn't feel anything particular for Miss Wrenner. They must have something important to discuss with him today.

Miss Wrenner is young, probably doesn't fully understand the boundaries between men and women yet, so she's a bit too familiar with His Grace..." Elowen nodded. "I know. I understand." Back in their courtyard. Elowen inspected the newly furnished rooms, found no issues, and sat down with the household ledgers again. Evening fell. Elowen grew tired from the accounts and

longed for bed. But then she remembered Cassian's words about "getting accustomed" to each other.

She pushed the thought aside and forced herself to keep reading at the table, She didn't know how much time had passed when she found herself propping up her head with one hand, her eyelids feeling like lead weights, irresistibly closing. Your Grace Mira's voice was soft. Elowen opened her eyes, looking at her wearily. "What is it?" Mira looked slightly troubled. "A maid from Miss Wrenner's entourage is at the courtyard gate. She says His Grace sent her with a message. Elowen rubbed her face. "Let her in, then." With her permission, a young, pretty maid was brought in.

She smiled cheerfully, "Greetings, Your Grace. His Grace sent me to inform you that he will not be returning to sleep tonight. He asks that you retire without him." 2.3 Chapter 87 Stay The Night 0171 Frished Elowen stifled a yawn. It was exactly what she wanted. Still, she asked, "Where will he be staying tonight?" The maid's smile widened. "His Grace is escorting Miss Wrenner and Mrs. Wrenner home, so of course he'll stay the night." Escorting MissWrennerhome. Stay the night. The phrasing finally cut through Elowen's drowsiness. A sudden thought struck her.

Could this MissWrennerbe Cassian's true love? "All right, the message is delivered. I shall take my leave. Rest well, Your Grace." The maid curtsied and departed. 1.7K ◦ admin

Chapter 88 A Midnight Return Elowen watched the maid's retreating back for a moment, but exhaustion won out. She yawned again, got up to wash, and went to bed. She truly was worn out from the long day. Her head had barely touched the pillow before she sank into a deep sleep. In her dreams, someone was pinching her cheek, not gently. Rough fingertips were rubbing

insistently against her lips, a tingling, annoying sensation. Finished Elowen finally stirred awake, her eyes blurry. She saw an exceptionally handsome face looming over her. In her groggy state, she didn't immediately recognize him.

"I... Im married." she mumbled. "You... should keep your distance." The beautiful man in front of her gave a short, incredulous laugh and pinched her nose harder. "Tell me then, who did you marry?" Elowen blinked slowly, recognition dawning. A sleepy smile spread across her face. Oh... my lord. It's you." Her tone turned placating. "I married you. I married you." Cassian raised an eyebrow. "Do you remember what you promised me? About getting accustomed to each other?" Mhm..." And you went to sleep without waiting for me again?" Elowen blinked slowly.

"But weren't you going to stay the night at Miss Wrenner's?" Cassian said, "You're my duchess. Why would I spend the night with her?" Elowen whispered, her voice slurred with sleep, "Because she's your true love or something... She was too far gone, her words indistinct. Cassian didn't catch it. "What was that?" Elowen didn't repeat herself. Her eyelids, heavy as lead, began to drift shut again. Irritation flickered in Cassian. She shows no reaction to me spending time with another woman. Doesn't even send someone to check on me. Goes to bed this early.

And now, even with me here, all she wants is sleep. Have I been too gentle with her? A sudden, perverse impulse took hold. His gaze fell on her lips. 1/3 Chapter 88 A Midnight Return Finished They were already full, now even rosier from his earlier ministrations. His eyes darkened. Elowen found herself in a rare, pleasant dream. Her brother. Julian, was taking her riding on her favorite, a fiery chestnut horse. The grasslands stretched endlessly around them. Excitement bubbled up, and she kept urging him. "Hurry!"

Hurry, hurry!" Her aunt appeared from somewhere and popped something into her mouth.

Elowen felt something rough grinding against her lips. It was uncomfortable. She frowned and tried to twist away, but the sensation continued. It felt like one of her aunt's pastries. Perhaps a lifetime of acquiescence had conditioned her. Thinking she should humor her aunt, she stopped resisting. She even sat down and willingly picked up the 'pastry' to eat. After what felt like a long time, the discomfort on her lips finally faded. Relieved, she sprang up and turned to Julian.

"Julian! The horse!

Let's ride!" Julian just smiled silently. So Elowen went to fetch the horse herself. For her seventh birthday, her grandfather had gifted her a horse, brought all the way from the western steppes. It had been a small, fine-boned filly then, whose sweat looked like blood when it ran. Elowen had adored it, even wanting to sleep with it at night. Later, after injuring her knee saving Alaric, even after it healed, riding always brought pain. She'd forced herself a few times, each leaving her limping for days. Eventually, it was Daphne who suggested sending the horse away.

"Out of sight, out of mind," she'd said Elowen had grieved for a long time. Now, in her dream, she saw her beloved horse again and pressed her forehead against its neck Suddenly, she couldn't breathe. It felt like her nose was being pinched shut Confused, Elowen tried to shake off the feeling and jolted fully awake Her eyes met Cassian's deep, intense gaze. And it was indeed Cassian pinching her nose. "Awake now?" Seeing her eyes open, he slowly withdrew his hand. Elowen made a muffled sound of affirmation. Outside, it seemed to be dawn, light filtered through the bed curtains.

273 1:30 pm ppp. Chapter 88 A Midnight Return 017 Finished Cassian looked down at her, his expression deliberately cool. "Explain yourself." Elowen was bewildered. "Explain what?"

"Going to sleep without waiting for me again?" "I did wait!" Elowen protested, innocent. "I really did!" Cassian simply watched her, waiting. Elowen told the truth. "Miss Wrenner's maid came to tell me you would escort them home and stay the night. I... I even sent someone to check afterward. They said you had indeed left the manor.

I thought since you wouldn't be coming back, I might as well sleep." Cassian let out a short, exasperated laugh. "So you just believed whatever some maid told you?" "I mean. why wouldn't I? Why would she lie to me?" 1.7K B :30 pm admin

Chapter 89 Clarifications And Confusion To steal your husband," Cassian pointed out dryly. Elowen blinked. Steal my husband? Finished Weren't the rumors that Miss Wrenner was Cassian's true love? If anyone was stealing, wouldn't Elowen be the thief? Seeing her confusion, Cassian felt a fresh wave of irritation. It was obvious. Even though she called him "my lord," she didn't truly see him as her husband. But then he remembered-Elowen didn't love him. She had waited. She'd just been tricked by a maid.

Believing the maid's words-it wasn't a lack of wit, just a sign of her trusting, guileless nature. With that thought, he managed to calm himself. He let out a slow breath. "Do you want to know what we discussed yesterday?" Elowen wasn't curious, but sensing his lingering displeasure, she played along. "What did discuss?" you Cassian explained. "Lieutenant Wrenner's wife came to Vanelle for two reasons. First, she received a letter from her husband. Second, she wants to arrange a marriage for her nephew." Elowen was surprised. "Lieutenant Wrenner is in Nordia, under such strict watch.

How could a letter get through? That's precisely why Mrs. Wrenner was uncertain and came to consult me." Elowen nodded thoughtfully. "My father always said the current Nordian king is

cunning, a master manipulator. That letter can't be simple." Cassian agreed. "Last night, I went to the palace specifically to inform His Majesty." He gave her a meaningful look. "That's why I came back late. I had zero plans to spend the night somewhere else" Elowen's mind was on the political implications. "You absolutely should have told His Majesty immediately.

That way, whatever scheme Nordia has, we can counter it quickly" She completely missed the emphasis in his last sentence. Cassian tried again, gently. I'm telling you this for another reason as well." Elowen's eyes lit up. "Oh, right!" Cassian's lips began to curve. Elowen said excitedly, "Mrs. Wrenner's nephew wants to marry! And your cousin wants to marry, too! It's 1/3 Chapter 80 Clarifications And Confusion perfect! Why not let them meet?" Cassian's smile vanished. 649 Finishe Elowen was already planning. "It's actually a wonderful idea! Lieutenant Wrenner served the kingdom.

His wife, upon receiving the letter, rushed to tell you-she's got principles. Her nephew must be a fine young man. If they meet and suit each other, Sylvia's marriage could be-mmph!" Her words were cut off as Cassian's thumb pressed against her lips. The pad of his thumb was rough, and the sensation was... unexpectedly familiar. Hazily. Elowen recalled the "unpleasant pastry" from her dream last night. No... That's not right! That wasn't a pastry! She suddenly realized that the persistent pressure on her lips last night had been Cassian's fingers!

The realization brought a wave of acute embarrassment, flushing her face a deep crimson.

Cassian looked down at her from his position. He figured if he stayed gentle, she might never get it-like, ever. A sudden, mischievous idea occurred to him. He arched an eyebrow. "You know, His Majesty gave me another instruction last night." Elowen asked cautiously, "Wh-what?"

Cassian leaned in close, his voice dropping to a murmur. "His Majesty said... we should have a

child soon." Elowen stared, her face burning. Cassian found this much more gratifying. She finally looked alive and interesting.

It felt like a small revenge for her earlier denseness. After enjoying her flustered expression for a moment, he released her lips. "Any thoughts on that Elowen felt a pang of helplessness. The King's instruction-what could she possibly say? After a long pause, she stammered, "I... I don't understand such things. Should... should we hire an instructor? Cassian's expression turned perfectly serious. "His Majesty suggested that no instructor is necessary h should teach you myself." Elowen's face flushed an even deeper, mortified red. "Your Grace." Mira's voice came from outside the door.

"Miss Wrenner is here. She says shes comme u Chier 9 Clarifications And Confession 0191 Finished her respects Elowen was puzzled Mirenner? Paying respects to me? Cavan gave her cheek a light pinch. Want me to send Elara away? Elowen whispered, "Her name is Elara?" She'd only known the surname. It was the first time she'd heard the given name. She had to admit it was pretty. Cavian made an affirmative sound, continuing to pinch her cheek. "Need my help?" His pinching was making her check tickle. She shrank back slightly. That's probably not good, right? She is, after all.

Lieutenant Wrenner's daughter... But this exchange suggested Elara wasn't the rumored true love' after all. She paused. If you drive her off, she'll be hurt Cassian chuckled, his voice warm. My Duchess has such a kind heart He released her cheek Strangely, Elowen's face grew even hotter She sat up. Ill go see her. What about you, my lord 1.7K 1 2:30 pm ppp. admin

Chapter 90 Do You Have Romantic Feelings For Her? Cassian replied lazily. "I'll rest a while longer." Elowen acknowledged this and began to get up. Finished Before she could finish

dressing, she heard Mira's flustered voice from outside, "Miss Wrenner! You can't just- Elowen stepped out of the bedchamber to see Elara striding purposefully into the outer room. Mira followed, slightly breathless and looking apologetic. Elowen gave her a reassuring glance. "Your Grace!" Elara greeted her warmly, reaching for her hands.

"I've come to pay my respects!" Even as she said this, her eyes darted past Elowen toward the inner chamber. "Hmm? Where's Cassian?" Elowen maintained a polite smile. "He went to the palace last night-" "I know that," Elara cut her off. "He escorted us home, and it was very late. I asked him to stay with us, but he said he had to go to the palace. I was worried, so I sent a guard to check later. I heard he didn't stay long at the palace and came back to the manor instead."

Elowen watched her quietly. Elara's gaze swept over Elowen appraisingly. "Your Grace, are you just waking up too?"

That's rather late. The manor is so large, with many matters awaiting your attention. You really should rise earlier." Elowen kept her smile, finishing her earlier sentence. "He returned from the palace very late and is still resting. She then added gently, "He came back so late, I had to tend to him, so of course I slept late too. But you're unmarried, Miss Wrenner, so you wouldn't really get it." Elara faltered, a sharp pang of jealousy twisting inside her. She was unmarried, but she was no child. Her mother had taught her about marital relations.

And her favorite book-Tales of Luminara-she had read it more than a dozen times. She knew exactly what Elowen was implying-that even though Cassian returned late, he'd still had his way with her, and it was all that carrying on that had her sleeping in so late this morning. Elara's smile barely held. Her grip on Elowen's hands loosened. Elowen smoothly withdrew her hands.

"Miss Wrenner, please go ahead and have some refreshments. I'll join you shortly." Mira stepped

forward smoothly. "Miss Wrenner, this way, please." Chapter 90 De You Have Romantic Feelings For Her?

Elara bit her lip lightly, deflated by Elowen's words, and followed Mira out with slumped shoulders. Elowen let out a quiet sigh of relief and returned to the bedchamber. As soon as she entered, she heard a low chuckle from the bed. The voice was deep and magnetic. It was from Cassian. He had heard everything she said to Elara. Finished Elowen's face flushed instantly. Gathering her courage, she approached and lifted a corner of the bed curtain. Cassian looked back at her, a faint, knowing smile on his lips. He said nothing, yet seemed to say everything.

Overwhelmed by embarrassment, Elowen averted her gaze and forced herself to speak. "I... have a question for you, my lord." Cassian made an encouraging sound, amusement still in his voice. "Ask away, my dear." Elowen took a deep breath. "I want to know your true feelings toward Miss Wrenner." "Hmm?" "Is your care for her purely out of duty and guilt toward Lieutenant Wrenner and his family? Something you feel compelled to do? Or... do you have romantic feelings for her?" Her expression was earnest. "If you care for her, I'll treat her with extra consideration.

When you feel the time is right, I can arrange for her to enter the household-" Cassian's hand shot out, covering her mouth. Such a beautiful face, such soft lips-how can they utter such painful words? Elowen's eyes widened in confusion. She blinked up at him. What's wrong? Cassian stared at her. "If I liked her, you would bring her here to serve me?" Elowen nodded. I could even give her the title of Duchess. Cassian laughed, a sound tinged with exasperation. Elowen felt utterly innocent. Why is he upset? Cassian enunciated each word clearly.

"I do not like her." Elowen gave a slow, hesitant nod. So Elara isn't the rumored true love' either
"Now, it's my turn to ask you," Cassian said, releasing her mouth. "What?" Elowen's lips still felt
slightly numb. 2.1 Chapter 90 Do You Have Romantic Feelings For Her? Finished Cassian
looked deeply into her eyes. "If Elara were to beg you, asking to become my concubine, how
would you answer her?" Elowen offered him a placating smile. "You just said you don't like her.
Of course I'll refuse her." Cassian let out a soft, satisfied snort. Finally, a somewhat pleasing
answer.

"If you're worried, you can come with me and watch," Elowen ventured. "I trust you," Cassian
replied. Elowen didn't press further. She let the curtain fall and went to wash and dress. By the
time she was ready and arrived at the reception hall, she found not only Elara but also a well-
dressed middle-aged woman-clearly Elara's mother, Rowena Wrenner, the lieutenant's wife.
Rowena appeared to be quietly reprimanding her daughter. From the fragments Elowen caught,
Elara had accompanied her mother today, but upon arriving at the manor, had impulsively left
her side and barged in on her own.

1.7K 2 3/3 admin