

Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess (Elowen Hale)

Chapter 821

“Let them riot,” Elowen said softly.

Turning to Valessa, she added, “If they don’t stir up trouble, how can Malkor feel bold enough to make his move?”

Valessa went quiet for a moment before catching her drift. “You set this up on purpose?”

Elowen gave a light chuckle, “Not entirely-just riding the tide.”

Glancing around, she asked, “Is Flowira here?”

“She’s inside,” Valessa answered.

Elowen stepped into the inner chamber to find Flowira.

Dressed in her full royal Nordan regalia, Flowira’s color looked much better than the night before. Spotting Elowen, she stood immediately. “My Lady.”

Gentle hands resting on her shoulders, Elowen pressed her back down, “Stay seated. You still look terribly fragile.

Flowira’s eyes fell on Thomas trailing behind, her expression freezing for a second.

Thomas caught her gaze just as quickly. Lowering his eyes, he offered a low bow, “Your Highness.”

Flowira offered no reply, turning her focus back to Elowen.

Taking a seat beside her, Elowen said, “We left in such a rush yesterday that I forgot to ask about the Crimson Lantern. To strike House Harrow through that place, we need every detail.”

Flowira hesitated, her cheeks flushing slightly, “I was locked away in the Moonlit Pavilion, unable to move around, so I know little of its inner workings. My escape was only possible thanks to a girl named Samantha.”

From by the doorway, Thomas snapped his head up, “What did you just say?”

Flowira looked baffled, “What is it? Is knowing little about the place such a crime?”

Elowen’s expression turned dead serious, “Forget the brothel. Which girl did you say?”

Flowira glanced between them, “Samantha.”

Elowen pressed, “Her family name?”

“Whitman.” Flowira added, “She mentioned she hailed from Willow Ridge.”

Silence fell over Elowen for a long beat and the color drained from Thomas’s face.

Sensing the shift in the room without grasping why, Flowira asked Elowen, “What happened? What’s wrong?”

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fiancée.”

Flowira froze in shock.

Valessa gasped aloud.

Thomas stood rooted to the spot, pale as a ghost. Samantha... my wife.

I’ve never accepted she was dead, never believed she would go silent without cause.

She really is alive.

Only she’s locked inside the Crimson Lantern, turned into a blind courtesan.

His fingers curled tightly into fists, nails cutting deep into his palm.

Flowira weighed her words carefully before speaking. “That night, Samantha drew the guards away for me. She’s blind, and I tried to pull her along, but she refused. She said she couldn’t leave, begging me to tell the outside world about the innocent women trapped inside...”

Before the sentence finished. Thomas pivoted toward the door.

Anticipating this, Elowen barked, “Anson!”

Anson stepped up, clamping a heavy hand onto Thomas’s shoulder. Bloodshot eyes flared in Thomas’s face, his voice raspy as broken gravel, “Let go!”

Anson didn’t budge an inch.

Elowen stated firmly, “Storm in there now, and you won’t even set eyes on her.”

Thomas glared at her with raw fury.

Elowen continued, “Flowira’s escape last night means the brothel is under lockdown. If Samantha aided her, she’s certainly not in her old room.”

Thomas’s throat bobbed hard, choking down the burning grief in his chest, “I came to Kingsport for Samantha! If I know where she is and do nothing, what was the point of any of this? She’s suffering in a brothel...”

Everyone in the room knew what kind of hell that place was.

Elowen frowned, “I’m not stopping you from saving her. We will breach that place, but you can’t go charging in like a headless fool.”

Thomas’s eyes burned red, “I can’t wait, and she can’t wait either!”

Elowen locked eyes with him, “I know, which is why your first step is meeting Malkor.”

Thomas blinked, stunned.

Elowen pressed on, “Claim your birthright and reveal yourself as his son. As the Archduke’s hear, every dowa in the Crimson Lantern will open for you. You can reach Samantha and extract her safely. It’s the only foolproof strategy.”

Hearing her plan, a strange sense of composure washed over Thomas.

His respect for the woman before him surged once more.

Seeing him settle, Elowen added, “Surrendering your identity now is risky. You traveled north with me leaving breadcrumbs he might uncover. To earn his trust, every detail must be bulletproof.”

Clenching his jaw, Thomas lowered his posture, “Please guide me. My Lady.”

Elowen gave him a deep, searching look, “When you stand before Malkor, don’t weep or beg for his favor. You must make him believe you’re driven by raw ambition.”

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Pausing for a second, she continued, “Ronan abandoned Flowira to claim the title of Archduke’s heir. Malkor didn’t despise him for being ungrateful; he saw it as proof of his own blood. To Malkor, power trumps love every time.”

Beside her, Flowira’s face paled slightly, though she showed no deep heartache.

Elowen pressed on, “So when you approach him, don’t look like a love-struck fool. Make him/realize that showing your face at the Crimson Lantern last night exposed your wolf emblem. You aren’t begging for s mercy-you’re warning him that disowning you creates a bigger scandal.”

Thomas nodded softly.

“Once he buys your story and welcomes you as his son, that’s when you ask to inspect the Crimson Lantern. The excuse is simple: you want to see House Harrow’s true assets and prove you’re worthy of the heir’s seat.”

After a long silence. Thomas finally said, “I understand.”

Elowen shook her head, “I doubt you truly do.”

Thomas looked up.

Elowen said, “When you see Samantha, you cannot acknowledge her.”

Thomas’s breath caught in his throat.

Elowen’s voice turned cold, almost merciless, “At least while inside that brothel, you can’t show her an ounce of favor or special treatment. Do so, and you’ll get her killed alongside yourself.”

Thomas turned paper white. It took seconds for him to force a single word past his gritted teeth. “Fine.”

Right then, a guard entered to report. “Your Highness, Ronan has awakened.”

Flowira’s fingertips quivered.

Valessa’s face darkened, “Perfect timing.”

Elowen glanced at Thomas, “Let’s move.”

Thomas blinked, “Me too?”

Elowen smirked, “Aren’t you learning how to be Malkor’s son? Might as well inspect his other one.”

Down in the secret chamber, Ronan was awake.

Bound tightly to the cot, his lips were cracked and his face pale, yet dark defiance still burned in his eyes

Seeing Valessa and Flowira walk in, a violent tremor shook his eyes.

“Flowira...”

Flowira stood rigid near the entrance, remaining silent.

Ronan struggled against his bindings, the chains rattling softly.

He murmured weakly, “You escaped... How did you get out?”

Elowen strolled in with a lazy posture, “Never mind how she escaped. You’d better figure out how you’re getting out.”

Ronan narrowed his eyes as his gaze landed on Elowen.

“Oracle.” He let out a bitter sigh. “I underestimated you. You really have some tricks up your sleeve.”

Leaning back against the pillow, his voice rasped. “Save your breath. Archduke Malkor has only one son and he’s satisfied with me. He will never abandon me, and he’ll tear this place apart to fetch me, even if it means war with the Oracle.”

Elowen burst into a dry chuckle, “Keep holding onto that dream.”

Ronan’s gaze darkened, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Elowen offered no explanation, merely smiling. She simply turned her eyes to Flowira.

“Your Highness, anything else to say to him?”

Flowira shook her head, “Nothing. My fiancé died long ago.”

A flash of sharp pain glinted in Ronan’s eyes.

Flowira turned on her heel and walked out.

Elowen cast a fleeting glance at Ronan before turning to leave as well.

Behind them, chains clashed wildly. Ronan screamed hoarsely, “Flowira! Elowen!”

But the heavy door slammed shut, sealing all cries inside the chamber.

Once outside, Thomas suddenly spoke up, “I know how to handle Malkor now.”

Elowen raised an eyebrow, “Do you now?”

Thomas nodded.

Elowen gave him a lingering look, “Good. You may go then.”

Offering her a final look, Thomas bowed low to her, Valessa, and Flowira, then turned and departed without another word.

Watching his figure vanish down the hallway, Valessa murmured, “Do you trust him that much? If he turns on us, we’re finished.”

Elowen gave a sweet smile. “My judge of character hasn’t failed me yet. Thomas won’t betray us.”

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That afternoon, Thomas headed to House Harrow alone.

Shedding the servant garb Elowen provided, he changed into a narrow-sleeved Nordian rohe bound with a thick belt, tying his hair high with leather cord.

In his palm, he gripped the wolf-head pendant tightly.

Spotting the unfamiliar face at the gate, guards barred his path immediately. "Halt! Who goes there?"

Thomas raised his eyes, his tone bone-chilling. "Tell Malkor that Aguna's son is here."

The guard's face drained of color. "What did you say?"

Thomas held up the wolf-head pendant in his hand. "Tell him to come see for himself."

Half an hour

Malkor his e

Thomas was escorted into the main hall of House Harrow.

gh seat draped in a heavy dark cloak, his eyes sharp as a searching hawk. Yet the moment Thomas's face, his expression flickered.

ily alike. Just like Aguna in her youth. Especially those cold eyes, mirroring Aguna's exact rdened.

se, mirroring himself. A reflection of his own fierce, sharp-edged youth.

gaze dropped onto the wolf-head pendant.

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Chapter 823

"What was your mother's name?" Malkor demanded.

"Aguna," Thomas replied.

Malkor's fingers tightened on his seat.

"When did she pass?"

"When I was ten."

"What were her final words to you?"

Thomas stared back, his tone flat to the point of hostility.

"She told me my father was Malkor, and if I ever hit rock bottom. I should take this pendant to Kingsport to find you."

A complex flicker crossed Malkor's eyes, "Then why show up only now?"

Thomas let out a cold sneer. "Because I never wanted to see you before."

Malkor narrowed his gaze.

Thomas pressed on, “My mother waited decades for you, yet you never searched for her. On her deathbed she claimed you had your reasons, but I never bought it.”

The surrounding attendants paled; no one had ever dared speak to Archduke Malkor like that. Yet Malkor showed no rage, merely staring at Thomas, “Then why present yourself today?”

Thomas raised his eyes, cold gloom gathering inside them, “I was forced into Nordia as a servant by Lady Elowen. Last night, I had to reveal myself at the Crimson Lantern.”

Malkor’s expression shifted dramatically.

“To complete her tasks, I was forced to present the pendant and invoke my mother’s name. If Lady Elowen catches wind of this, she’ll turn on me. I refuse to die at a woman’s hands. Besides, if you disown me, word will reach the streets sooner or later anyway.”

Malkor slowly burst into laughter, “Are you threatening me, boy?”

“Not a threat-a reminder.”

Malkor scrutinized him, the lingering complexity in his gaze morphing into intrigue. Cold enough, brave enough. Far more like him than Ronan ever was.

“What do you want?”

Hidden inside his sleeve, Thomas’s hand clenched tight, though his face remained stone-cold. “I want to see what House Harrow truly commands.”

Malkor asked, “Such as?”

Thomas answered, “The Crimson Lantern.”

Silence blanketed the grand hall.

Malkor locked eyes with him, suspicion creeping back, “Do you even know what that place is?”

“I know enough.” Thomas replied without haste, “Which is why I want to see it with my own eyes.”

Malkor stayed silent.

Thomas continued, “Since you can reclaim one son, you should know sons evaluate their fathers too. If yo only heir is a weakling trapped in Princess Valessa’s prison over a woman, I might not even want you as father.”

The words cut brutally deep. Everyone in the hall held their breath. Yet instead of raging, Malkor broke into a grin.

“You’re far more entertaining than Ronan.”

Thomas remained indifferent, “I was born to your lawful wife. A bastard like him isn’t fit to stand beside me.”

Malkor stared at him for a long silence before barking. “Guards! Escort the Heir to the Crimson Lantern.”

The advisor gasped in surprise. “My Lord?”

Malkor shot him a side glance, “My son wants to inspect House Harrow’s assets. Why shouldn’t he?”

Hearing the phrase “my son,” Thomas felt no warmth inside, only icy detachment, a frozen blade had finally been placed directly into his hands.

Half an hour later, Thomas stepped into the Crimson Lantern.

Stripped of its nighttime shimmer, the brothel by day reeked of decay hidden beneath layers of powder. The stench of thick perfume made him sick.

Ursula rushed out in person, wearing a plastered smile. “And this esteemed guest is...”

The Archduke’s trusted confidant leading the way snapped, “This is the Heir.”

Ursula’s eyes flickered, not daring to ask why a new heir had suddenly replaced the old one, bowing even lower. “This way, my Lord.”

Thomas cast a sweeping glance across the courtyard. Every inch of red silk, every hanging lantern, and every echo of fake laughter made his stomach turn. Yet he could not betray a hint of disgust.

Stepping into the private parlor, Thomas asked casually, “I heard someone broke out of the Moonlit Pavilion last night.”

Ursula’s smile faltered before recovering, “Just careless guards. The staff responsible have been handled.”

Thomas said, “What about the blind courtesan who helped her escape?”

Ursula’s smirk froze, “Why does the Heir ask of her?”

Thomas turned his gaze onto her. That single glance made Ursula's heart skip a beat in fear.

"I ask, you answer."

The confidant frowned as well, "Answer the Heir's question directly!"

Ursula's eyelids twitched violently, dropping all pretenses, "She's locked in the back courtyard, awaiting execution."

Inside his sleeve, Thomas's fist clenched tight, though his face stayed unreadable. "Bring her here."

Ursula hesitated, "That blind girl brings bad luck. I fear she'll ruin your mood..."

Thomas scoffed, "It seems an old madam holds higher authority than the Archduke's Heir. Shall I take orders from you from now on?"

Ursula turned pale as ashes, apologizing profusely before dispatching guards to fetch the girl.

Moments later, footsteps echoed down the corridor. Two maidservants escorted a woman in plain attire into the room.

Head bowed, a white silk band covered her eyes, her skin translucent pale as she leaned on a thin oak cane.

Sitting in his chair. Thomas froze completely. He recognized her in an instant.

Samantha. His fiancée.

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Chapter 824

Staring at her, Thomas barely heard a sound around him.

She had grown terribly thin.

Once, her laugh lit up her entire face, eyes curving like the brightest moon over the river.

Now, covered by white silk, she stood eerily still, her face numb with flat despair.

A lump of glowing iron seemed wedged in Thomas's throat, searing him silent with pain.

Sensing eyes on her, Samantha tilted her head slightly. "Didn't you say I committed a terrible crime and would be executed in a few days? Why bring me out to serve another noble?"

Ursula's face darkened, stepping up to deliver a heavy kick. "Is that how you address a lord?!"

Samantha crashed to the floor unprepared, a sharp cry of agony breaking from her lips.

Thomas wanted to surge forward, using every shred of will to suppress the impulse. His fingernails dug deep into his palm, drawing blood.

Ursula spat on the ground. "Spill everything about last night, and keep it honest!"

Struggling back onto her feet, Samantha ground out word by word. "I've told you-I'm blind. I don't know who escaped."

Ursula's face twisted, raising her boot again. Thomas broke the silence with a cold snap. "Come here."

Samantha's entire body went rigid.

That voice... Could it be Thomas?

She turned her head toward the sound. Yet having been blinded, only a vast, empty gray filled her sight. She saw nothing at all.

Then another thought crossed Samantha's mind, Perhaps being blind is a blessing.

Trapped in a place like this, ruined and broken, how could I ever face him again?

Thomas dropped his pitch, "I said, come here. Must I drag you myself?"

Ursula barked, "Move it!"

Uncertain who stood before her or what was unfolding, Samantha trembled as she shuffled two steps toward the voice.

Thomas calculated the distance, ensuring he could shield her instantly if necessary.

Only then did he ease up, stating coldly, "Someone escaped the Moonlit Pavilion last night, and you aided her."

Samantha answered instantly, "I did not."

Ursula sneered, "Still stubborn."

Thomas shot her a sidelong glance, "With a mouth that loud, perhaps you should take the Heir's seat instead?"

Samantha gripped her oak stick tight.

The Archduke's Heir? But...

She had encountered the Heir before, and his voice sounded nothing like this.

Ursula stammered nervously. "Forgive me, my Lord... I meant no offense..."

Thomas sneered. "I merely asked for the blind girl, yet before I could speak, you took it upon yourself to abuse her. It seems years in this brothel have given you grand ideas, making you think you can walk all over a newly returned heir!"

Ursula gasped in horror, dropping to her knees with a loud thud.

"Forgive me, my Lord! I wouldn't dare, not in a thousand years!"

Thomas glared down at her, the memory of her boot landing on Samantha stoking a roaring fire in his chest.

The woman he treasured above his life-how dared this scum brutalize her!

He wanted nothing more than to flay her alive and burn this cursed brothel to ash!

Just then, the confidant assigned by Archduke Malkor spoke up. "If you wish to discipline Ursula, you can do so anytime. Why bring the blind courtesan here?"

Thomas froze for a beat. Blinded by rage, he had almost forgotten the handler watching his every breath.

The confidant paused, his tone turning suspicious, "Unless you hold some special interest in her, My Lord?"

It was hard to tell if he had sniffed out a clue.

Thomas's heart thudded hard in his chest. If he blew his cover now, his death wouldn't matter, but Samantha would suffer unimaginable horror.

Fortunately, having served beside the Duchess of Duskmoor in Avenlor, he had absorbed a thing or two about playing mind games.

Showing zero panic, Thomas let out a cold laugh, “Even if your heart still bleeds for Ronan, I am the only son standing beside the Archduke right now.”

The confidant’s expression flickered instantly.

Reversing the pressure, Thomas smoothed his sleeves, “Bringing her here is for interrogation. Did you think I intended to take her as my bride?”

The confidant fell silent, unable to counter.

Yet as those words struck Samantha’s ears, a strange sensation washed over her.

The rhythm, the cadence.

It sounded unnervingly like her betrothed.

As Samantha lost herself in thought, Thomas turned his gaze back to her, his voice heavy and gold. “Tell me what did you say to her, and what did she ask of you?”

Shaking off her daze a beat late, Samantha replied, “I... truly saw no one, so I had nothing to say.”

Thomas gazed deeply at her. She stood there, white cloth over her eyes, pale as snow, yet holding her spine straight.

Though her trembling fingers betrayed her terror, she refused to yield a single confession.

His Samantha was truly brave, noble, kind, and resilient.

Swelling affection, pity, and pride surged through Thomas’s chest, yet his features remained frozen in stone

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Chapter 825

He demanded in a harsh tone. “Where were you at two in the morning yesterday?”

Samantha replied promptly, “I couldn’t sleep, so I took a walk.”

“Walked where?”

“I don’t recall.”

Thomas pressed further, “How much do you know about the secret passage behind the Moonlit Pavilion

Samantha lowered her eyes, “I know nothing of secret passages.”

“You know nothing?” Thomas’s tone dropped several degrees colder. “Then why did witnesses spot you wandering near the back building?”

Samantha spoke quietly. “The Crimson Lantern isn’t that large. A blind girl taking a wrong turn isn’t unheard of.”

Thomas rose abruptly, crossing the floor in a stride to snatch her by the wrist.

Pain surged through her, forcing a quick intake of breath, yet Samantha uttered no outcry.

Leaning down, Thomas gritted his teeth right against her ear. “Stubborn tongue.”

Samantha went rigid. The proximity was overwhelming. So close she could smell the crisp, snowy scent clinging to his robes.

It bore no resemblance to the cheap wine and heavy powder of patrons, nor the foul sweat of Ursula’s thugs,

A scent so foreign, yet strangely familiar.

Samantha’s heart quivered. She dared not move, let alone ponder the truth.

Thomas lowered his voice to a dangerous whisper, “You’ll sing eventually.”

With a sharp shove, he released her hand. Samantha stumbled backward, barely steadying herself on her oak stick.

Turning to face Ursula, Thomas commanded, “From now on, she comes with me.”

Ursula’s jaw dropped in panic, “My Lord, this...”

The confidant’s expression flickered as well, “My Lord, this breaches protocol.”

Thomas shot him an icy glare, “Uncomfortable with it?”

The confidant choked on his words.

Thomas added with biting sarcasm, "If you're uneasy, feel free to report it to my father. If he decides I lack authority to claim a single blind courtesan, I'll happily leave her behind."

The confidant's face stiffened.

Kicking her knees to the floor, Ursula pleaded, "If my Lord desires company, we have scores of obedient girls! This one is rebellious and disgraced-she'll only displease you..."

Thomas broke into a faint chuckle, "Did I say I needed her to serve me?"

Ursula froze.

Brushing past her, Thomas's voice dropped to pitch black, "I simply want to see how long that stubborn mouth of hers holds out."

Ursula dared not utter another word.

Flanked by two maidservants, Samantha was led out behind Thomas.

A carriage waited at the rear alley of the Crimson Lantern. Thomas boarded first, and Samantha was assisted into the interior after him.

The carriage interior was cramped and quiet. Tucked in the corner, Samantha clutched her oak stick tightly her knuckles turning stark white. Thomas sat directly opposite her.

He watched the cracked, frostbitten skin on her hand, the faded scars on her wrist, and the white silk covering her eyes. A suffocating pressure crushed his chest.

Yet with Malkor's men riding right outside the curtain, he could say nothing, do nothing.

After an eternity, he forced a harsh tone. "Once at the manor, stay put. Cause trouble, and I have endless ways to make you suffer."

Samantha kept her head down, "I have nowhere to run."

Pain pierced Thomas's heart; he turned his face away, growling, "Keep it that way."

The carriage rattled toward House Harrow.

Meanwhile, the confidant had ridden ahead to submit his report.

Inside the study, Archduke Malkor was conferring with his advisors. Hearing the report, his expression barely shifted.

"He took a blind courtesan?"

Lowering his head, the confidant said, “Yes. I find it suspicious. That girl was tied directly to Princess Flowira’s escape last night. For the Heir to demand her the moment he stepped into the brothel is too convenient merely a blind girl.”

Heir was establishing authority. Ursula has run rampant at the brothel in position as the newly returned lord.”

ved.

“Yet his attitude toward her...”

Before he could finish, an attendant knocked and entered.

“My Lord, the Heir has returned. The blind girl was placed in the west wing quarters. The Heir hasn’t visited her, merely ordering servants to keep her fed.”

The confidant paused. Now even he felt uncertain.

If Thomas had a secret connection to her, why leave her untouched after taking such a risk? Yet if no connection existed, why single her out?

Malkor let out a quiet chuckle. “What did you expect him to do?”

The confidant bowed. “I dare not guess.”

Malkor stated, “A young man who just discovered he’s my son is bound to flex his muscles. Claiming a defiant blind girl from the brothel asserts his power while testing if I truly back him.”

Leaning back against his leather chair, he added, “Now that is Aguna’s boy.”

The confidant offered no further objections.

Pondering for a moment, Malkor added, “Still, your caution is warranted. Investigate him.”

The confidant snapped his head up.

Malkor instructed, “Dig into his past: where he lived, who he met, and every alliance he forged. Especially recently-why he arrived in Kingsport and why he lurked near the brothel alley. Bring me a full report, and we’ll see what game my new son is playing.”

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