

Awakening Love Reborn to Be His Duchess (Elowen Hale)

Chapter 826

The confidant bowed, “At once.”

On the other end, Thomas played the part of a newly acknowledged heir desperate to gauge his power boundaries, allowing the steward to tour him around the manor—inspecting the front yard, council hall, armory, and stables while dropping questions at every turn.

“Are all these guards loyal directly to my father?”

“Is a pass token required to enter and exit the manor?”

“Where are the financial books from the brothel sent?”

Dreading any disrespect, the steward answered each prompt while Thomas pretended to take careful mental notes.

He knew today’s move was a dangerous gamble; pulling Samantha out of the Crimson Lantern preserved her, yet placed him right under Malkor’s watchful eye.

Malkor would inevitably investigate his past, and tracing it to Willow Ridge to discover Samantha was once his fiancée would unravel everything, though it required time—a journey between Kingsport and Willow Ridge took several days even at top speed, whereas the Rite of the Oracle drew near.

He wagered on this small window of time, believing that as long as he worked with Elowen to shatter the brothel and crush House Harrow before Malkor uncovered the truth, all would be settled, making any late revelation utterly useless.

Elowen soon received Thomas’s secret cipher: safely inside House Harrow, Samantha extracted from the brothel, and Malkor dispatching spies into his past—all moving as she had anticipated.

Elowen turned to Anson with an order, “Assign two men to intercept the Archduke’s scouts along the road, slowing their reach to Willow Ridge discreetly without raising suspicion. Still, don’t worry excessively—the Rite of the Oracle is almost upon us, and even their fastest riders might not make it in time, though caution never hurts

Anson gave his word.

Later that evening, Valessa arrived at the embassy under cover of darkness, bringing only two personal guards through the rear gate, where Elowen had Mira serve tea in the side parlor.

Valessa cut straight to the point, “The rumors on the streets are growing vile.”

‘Elowen showed a flicker of amusement, “How vile?”

Valessa recounted every detail, “Some brand you a foreign sorceress from Avenlor, others claim you’re a fake Oracle heir, and many accuse my brother of plotting with Avenlor to hijack Nordia’s divine seat.”

“That’s milder than I expected-Nordians are rather polite.” Tilting her head, Elowen asked, “And inside the court?”

Talking about court, Valessa betrayed a hint of surprise, “Strangely enough, pushback inside the court is niminal; in fact, numerous nobles are voicing approval.”

Elowen gave a light

Nordian tribes lies fragmented. Raising a new Oracle offers a unified faith-a far easier tool for rulers to govern.

“Moreover, for many nobles, cooperation with Avenlor yields more gain than harm; as Ulana Ogu’s bloodline and Duchess of Duskmoor, my ascension solidifies ties between our realms, so while mobles might not love me personally, they favor the outcome.”

Valessa nodded faintly, “Everyone except Malkor.”

“Indeed, he despises it.”

Elowen’s eyes crinkled in a smile. “Because reinstating the Oracle suppresses his influence first, forcing hin to incite the masses. Unable to crush us in court, he stirs the streets to paint me as an foreign witch and the rite as a sinister conspiracy, hoping public unrest at the ceremony will prove I lack the people’s favor.”

Murderous resolve flared in Valessa’s eyes. “We can’t let him succeed.”

Elowen offered a tranquil smile, “If he craves chaos, let him have it.”

Valessa looked up in query.

Elowen added, “I’d like to bother you to ask the Khan to move the ceremony’s location to Oracle Peak.”

Valessa froze. “Oracle Peak?”

“Yes.”

Valessa’s brow furrowed, “Have you forgotten what that place looks like now?”

Elowen nodded softly, “I remember.”

Mass graves choked the base of Oracle Peak, its mountain trails lay long desolate, and the shrine at the summit was reduced to crumbling ruins.

Valessa warned her, “Holding the ceremony there will only strike the commoners as ill-omened.”

Elowen countered, “The abandonment of the peak and the loss of the Oracle were orchestrated by House Harrow, who piled corpses at its base out of sheer malice to inflict maximum humiliation upon the holy site and the Oracle. Now that we stand against House Harrow, restoring Oracle Peak to its former dignity is our duty.”

Valessa felt a tremor in her chest, releasing a long, slow breath, “I understand...”

Rising to her feet, she stated, “I shall head to the palace at once.”

Remembering another detail, Elowen looked up. “By the way, Malkor doesn’t fully trust Thomas yet, so his thoughts remain tethered to Ronan. He will attempt a rescue for his son.”

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Valessa nodded, “I’ll bolster security around my manor.”

Elowen cautioned, “Don’t make the additions too obvious. He still needs to feel a glimmer of hope!

“Understood, I’ll handle it carefully.”

When Valessa reached the palace, the Khan was reviewing memorials from court ministers-rumors fillin the capital, noble petitions piling up, and undercurrents surging before the Rite of the Oracle even bega

Learning Valessa's purpose, he couldn't help frowning. "Does Lady Elowen... truly wish to relocate the ceremony to Oracle Peak?"

"She does."

The Khan let out a thoughtful sign, "Lady Elowen possesses incredible foresight indeed."

Valessa looked at him. "Do you grant permission then, brother?"

The Khan nodded, "Of course. The Oracle's wishes must be honored. However, shift the Royal Guard troop in secret without alarming Malkor."

Valessa asked, "Do you believe he will make a strike as well?"

The Khan gave a light laugh, "If he refrained, he wouldn't be Malkor."

Valessa raised a brow in quiet assent.

When news broke out, all of Kingsport shook; the Rite of the Oracle was moved from the Royal Palace to Oracle Peak, setting off furious chatter in every confectionery, tavern, and alleyway-some baffled, some terrified, and others deeming Elowen recklessly foolish.

"Oracle Peak has been abandoned for decades! How dares a foreign woman from Avenlor claim the Oracle's mantle there?"

"The mountain's base is choking with mass graves!"

"Isn't she terrified of provoking vengeful spirits?"

Rumors swept through Kingsport like wildfire.

Inside House Harrow, Archduke Malkor received the news in silence at first, before breaking into a sudden 'chuckle.

The advisor looked at him, "My Lord?"

Malkor remarked slowly, "This Oracle certainly possesses bold nerve."

The advisor whispered, "She seeks to make a grand statement using Oracle Peak."

'I know

Sarcasm flared in Malkor's eyes, "What is Oracle Peak? A place of ruined trails, shattered shrines, and a graves at its feet. Does she truly believe standing there will earn her the hearts of the people?"

He sneered, "Foolish arrogance."

The advisor probed carefully, "What is your command, my Lord?"

"Since she dares to offer herself up on Oracle Peak, I shall naturally grant her wish."

Stepping over to the map, Malkor pressed his finger onto the trail leading up Oracle Peak, "Deploy our troops there. Also, keep eyes glued to Princess Valessa's residence-I want daily reports on Ronan's locati guard shifts, and every visitor."

The advisor bowed in compliance.

A servant entered to report that the Heir had arrived.

Malkor showed keen interest. "Send him in."

Draped in the opule the combined shad

Catching sight bloodline an home. Hoy

Tho

Heir with sharp brows and a cold countenance, Thomas looked every nd Aguna.

t a flash of satisfaction-he cherished having a son, a testament to his of his domain. Donning the mask of a caring father, he smiled, "Welcome s he craved, "Just as my mother said. House Harrow is noble beyond measure."

ood brightening considerably.

visor asked out of nowhere, "I hear the Heir brought a blind courtesan back from the m a cool glance, "She allowed Princess Flowira to escape."

smiled, "The brothel interrogated her multiple times without breaking her silence; has the Hei o extract anything useful?"

replied indifferently, "She keeps her mouth shut for now, but not forever. Confining her in the el keeps her terrified and resistant; changing her environment and leaving her isolated for days will er her guard, making her far more willing to talk."

the advisor offered polite praise, “A brilliant tactic, my Lord. Then he pressed, “Growing up far from the Archduke, you’ve acquired impressive sharpness. You must have studied under a remarkable master over the years?”

As the advisor’s will instantly.

Unshaken meticulously genuinely curious: was Ronan subjected to such or?”

warm smile fading from Malkor’s features.

Thomas pressed on. “I thought my return would bring my father joy, given

Staring at Thomas, Malkor suddenly remembered Aguna-the proud woman who never bowed her head to him in her lifetime.

Now her son stood before him, possessing the noble title of Heir yet wearing hurt over a single line of suspicion. A pang of guilt stirred in Malkor’s chest, sparking irritation toward his advisor.

Catching the advisor opening his mouth to speak again, Malkor snapped at him, “Enough! The Heir just returned, and you grill him like a traitor! Does my son’s return require your personal blessing?”

the advisor turned pale, “That was not my intent, my Lord...”

Not your intent?” Malkor sneered. “Then what do you mean? My son suffered far from my side for years don’t know the full extent of his pain, and do you think you know better?”

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The advisor quickly lowered his head. “Forgive my misplaced words.”

Malkor let out a cold snort. “Get out.”

Dreading further wrath, the advisor bowed out immediately.

Thomas then spoke with thoughtful restraint. "Father need not punish him on my account; in the end concern lies with House Harrow."

Looking at him, Malkor let out a heavy sigh. "You truly show maturity."

Thomas lowered his gaze. "I grew up at my mother's side, and she taught me that a person cannot afford tantrums without backing-I could rely only on myself."

A tremor passed through Malkor's chest, his mouth opening without finding words to offer.

Thomas deftly shifted Crimson Lant

Malkor's eyes

Just then

Crimson the topic. "By the way, Father, though the blind girl is retrieved, many stay at the door. House Borealis dig deeper, they might uncover something."

He grimaced, "Your concern is valid..."

He rushed in with an urgent report. "My Lord, messengers from the palace entered the city sharp as ice. "The palace?"

Healers from the Khan to audit the brothel's recent operations."

He remained silent.

He blurted aloud, "It appears their suspicions are aroused."

He offered generous praise, "It is fortunate you retrieved the blind girl early; had she fallen into House Harrow's hands, matters would be far worse."

Operating the brothel for decades provided not only crucial wealth, but harbored countless dark secrets would prove disastrous if exposed to House Borealis.

Thomas creased his brows with gravity, "It seems the brothel's assets must be relocated without delay- ledgers, rosters, and communication logs."

Malkor nodded, "My thought precisely." Looking at Thomas, a lingering guilt over the advisor's doubts prompted him to say, "I intend to entrust this task to you."/

Thomas froze, "Me?"

Malkor gave an affirmative nod.

Thomas replied, "I will react worse.

motive, so Fa ommand no authority; if your own advisor doubts me, others the madam and my escorts questioned every order and is for this transfer."

sch 378 Tightening the Noose

Listening to him. Malkor couldn't help frowning. You're wffered unfair doubt. You are my wow, bu legitimate blood, and my poor anned the grievance: take it not to beart, for I shall d them personally, and anyone doing you an tall pary dearly"

Lowering his head. Thomas gave a respectful bow. Thank you. Father. With that he turned to lea

At the doorway, he paused suddenly. Father'

Malkor looked at him warmly. Is there another difficulty?"

Thomas shook his head. No difficulty merely a reflection-over the years. I saw powerful then force dance to another's tune, while men owning everything endured endless indignities because they com control their own fate A life like that. I hope never to taste it again"

Having spoken, he took his leave

Left alone in the room. Malkor's gaze transformed over a long beat: to cease submitting to others, wis choice remained? The answer lay glaring before him-to claim the throne of the Nordian Khan, a seat rightfully belonged to House Harrow from the start!

The next morning at daw dark currents surged a

Seated high upon t approaching, cus Oracle possesse

Turning his command

Malko port hummed with excitement for the upcoming Rite of the Oracle, al court.

than scanned his assembled ministers. With the Rite of the Oracle ving Royal Guard forces to secure the ceremony. In ancient times, the s before they were reassigned elsewhere."

added, "If memory serves, a significant force rests under the Archduke's ted subtly.

Thus, five thousand troops shall be transferred from the Archduke's command to urned once the ceremony concludes."

tly silent, every noble realizing this was no routine deployment-military power was hield, and the Khan was stripping it away under the guise of temporary duty, knowing d never return to House Harrow.

srage behind a deep breath, Malkor gritted out, “Your servant... obeys.”

at morning court ended, Malkor returned to his manor and unleashed his fury, smashing his feces.

rable arrogant tyrant!”

trips away my assets piece by piece!”

Ar intends to erase House Harrow’s very right to exist!”

Trembling under the Archduke’s rage, servants stood frozen, fearing to utter a single word.

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Chapter 829

Fird

Thomas arrived at the study right at that moment, stepping past a tea cup Malkor threw that shattered a feet, pausing briefly.

Spotting him, Malkor’s features softened slightly, “Why are you here?”

“The matter at the Crimson Lantern is handled, so I returned to report to Father.” Thomas asked, “What upset Father so?”

Malkor let out a bitter laugh, “What else? Someone feels I’ve occupied the Archduke’s seat før far too lon

Thomas fell silent for a beat, “Father, have you considered that if someone seeks to strip your power, yo shouldn’t grant them the chance in the first place?”

As Thomas’s words echoed, silence blanketed the study while night winds outside chimed the bronze bel beneath the eaves.

Malkor stared at him, his gaze darkening-not with anger, but because Thomas's sentence struck like a blade directly into his deepest lifelong grievance.

Malkor spoke slowly, "Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Your son speaks from the heart."

Malkor's expression turned unreadable, "Spreading those words to court would execute you ten times over

Thomas knit his brows lightly, "Yet keeping silent, can Father truly sit comfortably as Archduke for a lifetime?"

Malkor's eyes turned sharp as ice.

"Today the Khan claims five thousand troops; what about tomorrow, or the day after? After the Rite of the Oracle, should court demand an audit of House Harrow's military rosters under the guise of reorganization will Father yield or refuse? Yielding leaves House Harrow an empty shell, while refusing hands House Borealis an excuse for treason."

Raising his eyes to Malkor, his voice stayed calm yet cut with crystal clarity, "Father, do you truly believe they leave us a way out?"

Veins bulged along the back of Malkor's hand as he fought the urge to curse Thomas for reckless insolence, yet every word stuck in his throat because he knew Thomas spoke the unvarnished truth-the Khan's public summons was no test but a warning from House Borealis to make him bow, yet bowing meant House Harrow could never hold its head high again.

Taking a deep breath, Malkor stated coldly, "Were your mother alive, she would never wish to hear such madness from your lips."

A flicker crossed Thomas's eyes before he let out a light laugh, "Father is mistaken."

Malkor frowned.

When Mother married you, House Harrow commanded glorious power, yet what followed? She was forced from the manor to wander alone with me; despite being your wedded wife, she was denied return through your gates."

Malkor's color shifted dramatically.

Thomas continued, "Mother often told me that men of House Harrow were meant to be the fiercest we upon the plains."

Malkor closed his eyes, asking in a raspy whisper after a long silence, "What else... did your mother say?"

Thomas lowered his eyes, "Before passing. Mother said if I ever reunited with Father, I should tell you that she loved you and harbored no hate, yet felt regret that you had the power to win, but lacked the courage to grasp victory."

Malkor slammed his fist onto the desk, sweeping the remaining inkstone onto the floor where it shattered, ink spreading like black blood.

His chest heaved as ruthless resolve flared in his eyes, "Fine." His voice rasped terribly, "Since House Bor pushes us to the edge, I have no reason to endure!"

Malkor looked at him, "During the Rite of the Oracle, House Borealis will attend at Oracle Peak while the Royal Guard is drained and the capital stands empty; he uses the rite to strip my command, so I shall use the rite to send him off!"

Thomas's eyes narrowed slightly as he dropped to one knee, "Father's wisdom is absolute."

"My Lord!" the advisor urged frantically, "Taking this step leaves no path for retreat!"

"We lost our path of retreat the moment House Harrow lost the royal throne!"

Malkor spoke with grim resolve, "Be it today or tomorrow, we either strike to reclaim the throne, or die slowly as our power is bled away."

-The advisor stood speechless.

Malkor issued swift commands, "Starting tonight, transfer all brothel ledgers into the secret vault and silence every loose tongue; assemble our personal guard, contact old loyalists, and recall our kin scattered across army camps. On the eve of the ceremony, I shall order our forces to seize the western trail of Oracle Peak, while for the eastern slope..."

Cold malice gleamed in his eyes, "A mass grave where the dead rest is the finest place to stack more bodies."

Thomas stated, "Your son is ready to execute your will."

Malkor declared without hesitation, "Good. This time, I place the future of House Harrow in your hands."

Thomas bowed his head, fire flickering deep within his eyes like a smothered flame. "Your son shall not fail you"

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Chapter 830

As night deepened, hallway lanterns were lit one after another across House Harrow.

Guards were summoned in batches, secret ciphers sent through the rear gate, and brothel ledger overnight, while stewards who handled shady dealings were marched into the back court, never their blood stench masked under thick incense.

Standing beneath the eaves with a cold expression, Thomas recalled his mother's stories of Kingsp his father's heritage.

Yet she had long grown weary of Malkor's reckless wandering and refused to return, never uttering like "regretting that you had the power to win, but lacked courage"-all of which Thomas fabricated Malkor a reason to rebel.

Guilt made men foolish, and ambition made them foolisher; though he used his mother's memory, would surely cherish a woman as wonderful as Samantha, understanding and supporting his choice known it saved her life.

On the morning of the Rite of the Oracle, Kingsport came alive before dawn-festive banners lining avenues, livestock presented at the sacrificial ground, and priests in white robes chanting all the way to the city gates to Oracle Peak..

Oracle Peak stood at modest height, once the holiest sanctuary in ancient Nordia where the first Oracle prayed for snow to save an entire tribe, and whose soul allegedly dissolved into mountain winds to bless land annually,

Yet following the decline of the Oracle lineage after Ulana Ogu's death, the mountain grew forgotten, its base devolving into a mass grave choked with desolate spirits and abandoned headstones that locals loved to speak of.

Not until the Khan personally ordered a cleanup for this year's ceremony were mass graves relocated. mountain trails repaved, and the ancient altar washed clean, though a faint chill still brushed the mountain base whenever the wind blew.

By the time Elowen arrived, royal carriages were parked outside the sanctuary.

Dressed in Nordian attire layered with a ceremonial fox-fur cloak and a jade pendant at her waist, her robe fluttered gracefully in the wind.

Mira followed closely at her side, whispering, “My Lady, the people from House Harrow have arrived.”

Elowen gave a slight nod, “I see them.”

On the opposite side of the grounds, House Harrow’s banner unfurled against the wind-black with gold patterns, fierce and ostentatious-yet leading them today was Thomas instead of Archduke Malkor, clad in dark ceremonial dress with a silver crown binding his hair; across the crowd, his cold gaze locked onto Elowen with explicit hostility.

Elowen withdrew her gaze calmly.

Behind her. Valessa’s voice sounded. “Oracle.

Turning around, Elowen saw Valessa in full princess regalia with silver ornaments cascading thru hair, looking far sharper and more regal than usual, flanked by Flowira and Zachary.

Spotting Elowen, Zachary’s eyes lit up instantly, his delight compounding when he noticed Cassia absence.

“Oracle,” Zachary stepped forward, his handsome face beaming with flattery, “The wind is fierce an mountain is freezing today; why not join me in the heated pavilion behind us for warm ginger milk

Elowen maintained her composed demeanor, “Thank you, Prince, but I must decline the milk-tod Rite of the Oracle.”

Zachary opened his mouth to press further, wondering what harm a cup of milk could do during th ceremony, but Valessa cut him off without ceremony, “Enough! Today is a sacred rite, not the time fo foolish courting.”

Zachary paused awkwardly.

Behind Elowen stood not only Mira and Cora, but also Elara, whose eyes remained glued to Flowira f long time.

“Flo-” Elara caught herself on the verge of calling out, suppressing her voice abruptly due to the settin and offered a proper greeting, “Your Highness.”

Flowira offered a gentle smile, her distant demeanor melting like spring snow, “Miss Wrenner, it has be long time.”

Elara nearly wobbled on her feet at the sight of that smile-what a beauty, breathtaking whether dressed as man or a woman!

Nearby, a burst of harsh laughter erupted out of nowhere; turning around, they spotted young Nordan nobles gathered together, whispering while casting malicious glares toward Elowen's party.

Having picked up bits of the Nordan tongue, Elowen grasped the gist of their chatter.

"Is that woman named Wrenner?"

"Right, the daughter of that Avenlor lieutenant we captured back then."

"How do they still have the nerve to show up?"

"Her father even groomed horses for my family; I wonder if the daughter knows how to shovel dung too."

Reborn to Be His Duchess