

# Love's Unexpected Awakening Elowen's Choice Novel

## Chapter 1: Chapter 1

chapter 1 "If there is someone you care for... say it." The King's voice carried across the great hall from the raised dais-steady, composed, yet touched with an uncommon gentleness. Every word was deliberate, leaving no room for doubt. "I want to hear it from you." Elowen Hale stood perfectly still. In that single moment, clarity struck her like lightning. She had returned. Reborn-back to the year she turned seventeen. Today was the royal banquet. Officially, it was called a "family gathering." In truth, everyone here knew better. The King had summoned her for one reason alone.

He intended to decide her marriage-with his own words. Elowen parted her lips. But no sound came out. A storm of emotions surged through her chest, tightening her throat until it hurt. Heat burned behind her eyes, blurring her vision. "You need not be afraid." When she failed to answer, the King's voice softened even further. "The Hale family has served the crown for generations. Your father, your uncles, your brothers... they all gave their lives for Avenlor on the battlefield." A pause. "And now, only you remain." His gaze rested on her, steady and solemn.

"I will personally see to your marriage. No matter whom you wish to wed, I will make it so." Even after living through it once-after dying and returning-just hearing the name of her family made Elowen's heart ache. The Avenlor Kingdom had not stood for long. Less than a century. Its roots were shallow, its enemies many, its future uncertain. Last year, the horsemen from the Northern Reaches had shattered the kingdom's borders. The Hale family had been sent north to defend it. She still remembered the day they left. Her father, her uncles, her older brothers- Laughing. Teasing her.

Full of life. So loud she found them unbearable. And when they came back... They came in coffins. Wrapped in torn, blood-soaked cloaks. Silent. Still. Her aunts and sisters-in-law scattered. Some returned to their parents' homes. Others remarried. Her mother, crushed beneath grief, fell ill and passed away at the start of the year. The once-lively Hale Manor- was left with only Elowen. The King had called this a "family banquet." But everyone understood. This was his way of honoring the fallen Hales. By marrying off the last surviving daughter. A soft laugh suddenly broke the heavy silence.

"Why even ask, Father?" A girl's voice rang out, light and teasing. "Everyone knows Elowen is hopelessly in love with Alaric. She's never exactly been subtle." Princess Maerwyn Valebourne. The King's most favored daughter. Elowen's fingers tightened slightly at her sides. In her previous life-Maerwyn had said these exact same words. Back then, Elowen had flushed crimson, lowering her head in shy embarrassment at the mention of Alaric Valebourne-the Crown Prince. The King had laughed heartily. "Then it's settled," he had declared with a wave of his hand. "We'll choose an auspicious day.

You and Alaric shall be married." And she had believed it. Believed that effort could win affection. She had poured herself into that marriage. Every detail of the wedding. Every preparation. She told herself that if she tried hard enough... He might notice her. Might care. But on their wedding night- Alaric had shut her out. He wouldn't touch her. Wouldn't even let her near his bed. By morning, Elowen was still there. Curled on the cold stone floor. Fully dressed. There was no warmth. No intimacy. No heir. Of course. At first, the King and Queen pitied her.

But over time, that pity turned into disappointment. The entire Crown Prince's Wing adjusted accordingly. Without favor... without a child... Elowen became invisible. Servants no longer bothered to hide their disdain. And she endured it all silently. Until one day- she overheard him. Alaric was speaking with a close companion. About her. Only then did she understand. Everything she had suffered- he had known. He simply hadn't cared. Or worse- he had allowed it. His voice was cold. Sharp with contempt. "She forced me to marry her," he said.

"Now she's getting what she deserves." His companion hesitated. "But Elowen is beautiful. She truly cares about you. Do you really feel nothing for her?" Alaric didn't even pause. "She disgusts me." The world had gone silent. So cold. I forced you? Is that what you believe? It was his father's decision. If he didn't want it, why didn't he say so? Why take it out on her? In that entire farce- The King was praised as benevolent. The Crown Prince gained favor. And Elowen... She alone paid the price. What had she done to deserve it?

The grief clawed at her so violently she thought she might be sick- but nothing came. Her eyes burned. But no tears fell. Numb, she went to him. She stood before him, lowered herself into a formal bow, and asked for their marriage to be dissolved. Alaric-who had always been indifferent- snapped. Without warning, he grabbed a cup and hurled it at her. Elowen didn't move. The porcelain struck her temple. Blood ran down her face. For a brief moment, he looked startled. As if he might stand. Instead, he clenched his jaw. "There's no need to act pitiful." He refused.

For days, he ignored her entirely. And then-without explanation- he agreed. On the eve of their separation, Elowen stood in those chambers and realized... She felt nothing. There was nothing she wanted to take. Not a single thing. In the mirror, she barely recognized herself. Married at seventeen. Four years later- she was hollow. Pale. Worn thin. Eyes empty. At least... She would be free. She fell asleep that night. And woke again- at seventeen. Perhaps even the heavens had taken pity on her. "Oh?" The King's voice pulled her back to the present. He looked thoughtful.

"She likes Alaric?" "Yes," Maerwyn replied with a playful smile. "Elowen is completely smitten. She's always baking pastries for him and bringing them over herself. Once she hurt her hand, but insisted it didn't hurt at all-though I ended up eating most of them." A few quiet chuckles rippled through the hall. "And not long ago," Maerwyn continued lightly, "when Alaric lost his favorite pouch, he was in a terrible mood. Elowen even came to ask me what kind of pattern he preferred- she wanted to make him a new one herself." As she spoke, Alaric's brows slowly drew together.

His discomfort was unmistakable. To him- This was nothing but an unwanted burden. Around the hall, more and more eyes turned toward Elowen. Curious. Amused. Waiting. Watching. Another girl might have felt humiliated. Elowen felt nothing. Compared to what she had already lived through- this was nothing. The King laughed. "So you like him that much? You grew up together. It must be mutual, then. In that case, I shall arrange the betrothal myself-" "Your Majesty." Her voice cut cleanly through the hall. The King turned. "Hmm?" Elowen's eyes were faintly red. But her voice was steady.

This time- she didn't even look at Alaric. She stepped forward and lowered herself into a deep, formal bow. "I did grow up alongside His Highness," she said clearly. "But I have always regarded him with respect." She paused. Then continued, each word calm and precise. "I have never harbored improper feelings toward him." Silence fell. Absolute. Though she couldn't see it- Alaric's brows tightened even further. The King frowned slightly. "Are you certain?" Elowen knew him well. If she didn't name someone- he would not let this go. She remained bowed, her posture unwavering. Then she spoke.

Calm and certain. "I have long admired the Duke of Duskmoor." A faint ripple moved through the hall. "If I may become his wife..." She lifted her head slightly. Her eyes were clear and steady. "...then I would have no regrets in this life."

Cedella Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes.

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