

The Healer Bride: Awakening the Ruined Dragon King

Chapter 2

Aspen POV:

The heavy oak door to my chambers was kicked open without so much as a warning knock.

Deena swept into the room like a gilded peacock, her silk gown shimmering with radiant Dragonflame embroidery.

It was the ceremonial gown crafted for her upcoming royal engagement feast-a celebration that was supposed to have been mine.

Two handmaidens scurried behind her, balancing velvet-lined jewel cases laden with royal rubies and enchanted dragon-gold.

I didn't look up from my desk.

My fingers remained steady as I traced the fine botanical sketches in my mother's worn leather journal, cataloging the neurotoxic and restorative properties of high-altitude mountain moss.

I treated Deena's arrival as nothing more than a passing, filthy draft of wind.

My absolute indifference was a sharper slap than any shouted curse.

Deena's smug smile tightened into a brittle grimace.

Striding across the room, her clawed hand shot out, snatching the leather journal from under my fingers and hurling it violently onto the stone floor.

"Still playing with dirt and dried weeds?" Deena sneered, kicking the book against the baseboard. "A No-Dragon should learn how to beg at a real master's feet, not grub around like a peasant in the mud."

I stayed still for a moment, then slowly bent down.

I retrieved the book and gently brushed the dust from its weathered cover, keeping my face entirely blank.

My silence only fed her twisted arrogance.

Deena tilted her chin up, deliberately stroking the magnificent teardrop ruby resting against her collarbone.

"A gift delivered from Prince Krishna himself," she purred, her voice dripping with vanity. "He calls it The Dragon's Blood. He told me its fire only belongs on skin as pure and noble as mine."

She took two steps closer, leaning down until her breath felt hot and cloying against my ear.

"Do you want to know what else my sweet prince said about you, Aspen?" she whispered viciously. "He said you were a bore. A cold, defective No-Dragon whose very touch felt like handling dry clay. He said keeping you by his side made him feel like he was dragging a rock."

I slowly closed the leather journal, setting it back on the desk.

Seeing that I still didn't shed a tear, Deena's eyes flashed with venomous frustration.

Needing a heavier blade to draw blood, her lips curved into a wicked, deliberate sneer.

"Then again, this whole pathetic, dirt-scrabbling existence makes sense," Deena said, flicking her golden curls. "You're the spitting image of that dead wretch you called a mother."

My pulse stopped.

The air inside the room turned instantly frigid.

"She was nothing but a lowborn apothecary slave who used cheap herbalaphrodisiacs to crawl into Father's bed," Deena hissed, stepping closer and jabbing a sharp finger toward my chest. "A worthless parasite without a single drop of dragon blood! The moment Father took my mother, your mother was thrown into the freezing courtyard like discarded garbage, coughing up her own lungs until she died alone in the dark. That's the blood in your veins, Aspen. A lineage of beggars destined to rot!"

The entire world fell into a dead, suffocating silence.

Before Deena could even draw her next breath, my arm moved like a striking viper.

My fingers clamped around her throat with crushing force.

With a single, violent motion, I drove her backward.

Her back slammed against the heavy stone wall with a sickening crack, shaking the candle sconces above us.

Deena's eyes bulged in instant terror.

Her breath choked off into a strangled, wet wheeze as her hands frantically clawed at my wrist.

But my grip was forged of unrelenting steel; she couldn't move my fingers a fraction of an inch.

I leaned in close, my silver-gray eyes locking onto hers with a lethal, absolute killing intent.

"Deena Reynolds," I whispered. My voice was quiet, smooth, and colder than the frozen peaks of Blackwood Keep. "You can take my former betrothed. You can parade your stolen jewels. You can play whatever games you want in this house." I tightened my fingers slightly, feeling the violent tremor racking her entire body. "But if you ever drag my mother's name through your filthymouth again..." I leaned an inch closer, each word slicing like a razor blade across her skin, "...I swear on her grave, your grand royal wedding will be the day they bury you in the dirt."

For the first time in her pampered life, Deena saw true, unhinged danger.

She realized with terrifying certainty that I wasn't bluffing.

I wouldn't cry, and I wouldn't beg.

I would simply end her.

Her face flushed a deep, mottled purple as tears of pure panic streamed down her cheeks.

The two handmaidens dropped the velvet cases in horror, trembling in the doorway, too paralyzed by fear to scream for the guards.

I held her there for three agonizing seconds, letting the cold terror sink deep into her bones, before releasing my grip.

Deena collapsed onto the stone floor like a sack of silk and jewels, clutching her bruised throat, gasping desperately for air in ragged, terrified sobs.

I stood over her, casually smoothing out the cuffs of my dress.

Then, a faint, chilling smile touched my lips.

I stepped over her trembling legs, reached down into one of the open cases scattered across the rug, and picked up a small, crystal jar sealed with gold wax.

It was her prized royal beautifying balm-an expensive concoction of moon-lily oil and crushed pearl that she religiously applied to her neck and face every evening before any grand banquet.

A perfect scheme for vengeance formed in my head.

I weighed the cold crystal in my palm, and then, right before her terrified, tear-filled eyes, I slipped the jar into my pocket.

"Get out of my room," I said softly.

The spell of pride was utterly broken.

Deena scrambled to her hands and knees, clawing at the doorway before stumbling out into the corridor, her frantic weeping echoing down the stone halls as her maids fled behind her.