

# The Healer Bride: Awakening the Ruined Dragon King

## Chapter 4

Aspen POV:

Three days later, my wedding day arrived.

There was no grand ceremony, no guests, just a plain black carriage without even a family sigil parked at the side gate.

It was a stark contrast to the golden, dragon-guarded procession that had carried Deena to her wedding.

My luggage was a single small chest containing my mother's things and a few changes of clothes.

Penny followed me, clutching a small bundle.

My father, Fredrick, stood at the door to "see me off."

He was dressed in the formal dark robes of the Elder Council, his expression as impassive as if he were attending a minor public function.

He held out a small coin purse.

"This is my wedding gift," he said, his tone impatient. "When you get to Blackwood Keep, behave yourself. Do not bring shame to the Reynolds name."

I didn't take the purse.

I just looked at him, my voice flat. "Father, you seem to forget. From the moment I step into this carriage, I will be Lady Carlisle. My honor, and my shame, are no longer connected to House Reynolds."

His face hardened.

He hadn't expected such direct defiance.

I turned without another word and climbed into the carriage with Penny's help.

I didn't look back at the prison I had called home for twenty years.

As the carriage moved through the capital, I could hear the buzz of conversation about the prince's wedding, people praising Deena's beauty and Krishna's grace.

Penny watched me with worried eyes, but I just closed mine and leaned against the carriage wall, a faint smile on my lips.

By now, Deena would have applied the "special" cream, eagerly awaiting her glorious wedding night.

The carriage headed north, leaving the bustling capital behind.

The roads grew rougher, the landscape more desolate.

We traveled for five days, stopping only at small inns.

The journey was tedious, but I used the time to study my mother's notes, my mind racing, combining her knowledge with the medical memories that were slowly awakening within me.

On the sixth day, we stopped at an inn in a small border town.

And there, we finally heard the news from the capital.

A group of drunken merchants were talking loudly.

"Did you hear? The prince's grand wedding ended in a complete farce!" one of them exclaimed.

"What happened? Tell us!"

"On the wedding night, when the prince lifted the bride's veil, her face was covered in a disgusting red rash! They say the prince was so horrified, he threw up on the spot!"

The inn erupted in gasps and laughter.

"Gods! Is that true? She's an Elder's daughter, said to be a great beauty!"

Penny clapped a hand over her mouth, her eyes wide with shock as she looked at me.

I calmly took a sip of my ale.

It was bitter.

The rash was my design.

The effect was even better than I had hoped.

The merchants continued their gossip.

"The prince was furious! He threw her out of the bridal chamber! Lady Deena is now under house arrest at the palace, and Elder Reynolds has lost all face!"

I left a silver coin on the table and led Penny back to our room.

"My lady," Penny whispered once the door was closed, "was that... was that your doing?"

I looked at her, neither confirming nor denying.

"Sometimes, Penny," I said softly, "the gods deliver justice in unexpected ways."

Her awe of me deepened.

I felt a grim satisfaction.

Deena's rash would fade, but the stain on her reputation-and my father's-would last a lifetime.

His plan to use her for the family's glory was in ruins.

With that settled, I could focus on the challenge ahead.

The carriage started again.

In the distance, under a grim, overcast sky, the black silhouette of Blackwood Keep was becoming visible.

It looked like a great beast, waiting to devour me.

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