

The Healer Bride: Awakening the Ruined Dragon King

Chapter 5

Aspen POV:

The heavy carriage came to a halt before the towering obsidian gates of Blackwood Keep.

The fortress was carved straight into the dark volcanic rock of the northern mountains, its colossal walls bearing deep, jagged gouges from centuries of dragon wars.

Tattered banners bearing the Carlisle twin-headed dragon sigil fluttered weakly in the bitter northern wind.

There was no celebratory procession. No heralds. Only an elderly, stone-faced man who introduced himself as Mr. Price, the castle steward, waited by the frozen steps alongside two nervous servants.

His bow was strictly formal, but his sunken eyes held the dull resignation of someone managing a tomb.

He led us across the vast, silent courtyard.

Once a formidable seat of military glory, the fortress now felt hollow, choked with dust, ice, and slow decay.

"Where is Lord Boyce?" I asked, pulling my woolen cloak tighter against the frost.

Mr. Price hesitated, his voice dropping to a somber murmur. "Lord Carlisle... is in a critical state, my lady. You should prepare yourself before entering."

He led me up the spiral stone stairs of the main keep, stopping at the master chambers on the highest floor.

The moment he pushed open the reinforced oak door, a suffocating stench slammed into me.

It was a vile, nauseating cocktail of dried blood, festering flesh, stale liniments, and rot.

Behind me, Penny gasped, her face draining of color as she gagged.

"Wait outside, Penny," I commanded quietly, keeping my voice steady. "And close the door."

I stepped inside.

The chamber was swallowed in gloom, its towering windows blocked by heavy velvet drapes.

In the center of the vast room, resting upon a massive four-poster bed carved with archaic dragon motifs, lay the broken war god of the empire.

My husband. Boyce Carlisle.

He was younger than the court rumors had led me to believe-perhaps twenty-seven or twenty-eight.

Even in this state of severe emaciation, his features were strikingly sculpted, with high cheekbones, a sharp jawline, and pale, platinum-blond hair that seemed to catch the faint candlelight like spun silver.

Yet the devastation wrought upon his body was horrifying.

Stripped to the waist, covered only by a thin, soiled wool blanket, a monstrous, jagged scar tore diagonally across his chest down to his abdomen.

The wound was severely infected-blackened necrotic tissue lined the edges, oozing foul fluids where primitive ointments had failed, with maggots visibly squirming along the edges of the rotting flesh.

My stomach did not turn with disgust.

Instead, my blood ran cold with intense, professional fury.

Having spent decades at the pinnacle of modern surgery and trauma care, I recognized gross medical malpractice the instant I saw it.

This wasn't merely the aftermath of a catastrophic battlefield injury-this was deliberate, systemic neglect masquerading as treatment.

I stepped closer to the bedside, my trained eyes instantly cataloging the physiological indicators: shallow, erratic respirations, cyanotic nail beds indicating severe tissue hypoxia, and petechial hemorrhages along the gumline.

Beyond the shattered Dragon Core and dragonfire backlash, there was an unmistakable foreign toxin suppressing his central nervous system and paralyzing his autonomic reflexes.

Black Widow's Tear.

The precise, lethal neurotoxin my mother had detailed in her private journals.

It was completely colorless and odorless, systematically destroying neural pathways while mimicking the natural systemic collapse of a mortal injury.

Someone in this keep had been feeding him micro-doses for months, making sure the fallen hero never woke up to speak.

This wasn't a slow demise.

This was a calculated, cowardly assassination.

I looked down at the motionless man on the bed.

We were cut from the exact same cloth-discarded by our families, judged as worthless by a corrupt empire, and thrown into the cold to die.

A cold, fierce ambition ignited in my chest.

I wasn't just going to keep him alive as a passive shield against House Reynolds.

I was going to surgically excise every inch of rot, flush the venom from his veins, and reconstruct his shattered body from the inside out.

When the kingdom thought they had buried a dead beast, I would hand them an invincible dragon.

I turned back to the doorway where Mr. Price stood hovering in distress. "Steward, I will be staying in this chamber."

Mr. Price stared at me, dumbfounded. "My lady, this room... it is unfit for a noble bride. The smell alone is toxic! We have prepared clean quarters for you in the East Tower."

"I am his wedded wife," I cut him off, my voice ringing with cold, absolute authority that brooked no debate. "From this second onward, his life, his room, and his medical care belong entirely to me. Now, listen carefully: bring me the cleanest boiled linen in this castle, basins of steaming water, sharp silver shears, and your highest-proof distilled grain spirits. Immediately."

The steward froze, visibly stunned by the command in my voice. He swallowed hard, bowing low. "At once, my lady."

As the heavy door swung shut behind him, I turned back to the bed and gently pulled the blanket away from the wounded warrior.

"Rest a little longer, my husband," I murmured, my fingers lightly testing his faint pulse. "Your executioners think they've won. But the scalpel is in my hands now."

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