

The Healer Bride: Awakening the Ruined Dragon King

Chapter 8

Aspen POV:

The night's surgical debridement had left me physically drained, but as dawn broke over the jagged mountains, a very practical-and undeniably awkward-crisis presented itself.

A comatose patient cannot control their autonomic functions.

The previous staff had simply left Boyce lying on coarse, damp sheets, which was the primary catalyst for the necrotic ulcers eating into his lower back and hips.

In a sterile modern hospital, this was routine nursing care.

In this primitive fortress, surrounded by hostile eyes, if I allowed him to sit in moisture and contaminants, my hours of surgical effort would be undone within a day.

Sepsis would claim him before the week was out.

I needed an absorbent, secure, moisture-wicking barrier.

A modern word surfaced in my mind: an adult diaper.

"Penny," I turned to my handmaiden, my voice crisp and matter-of-fact. "Go to the castle storeroom. Find the thickest, softest boiled cotton fabric you can lay your hands on, along with a sheet of flexible waterproof oilcloth or finely treated deerskin. Bring sharp shears, needle, and waxed thread."

Penny stared at me, blinking in sheer bewilderment. "My lady? What on earth are we sewing?"

"A proper clinical undergarment to protect his skin," I replied without missing a beat. "Hurry."

While Penny ran off, I returned to the bedside.

Boyce lay in rigid silence, the pale morning light cutting across the sharp, aristocratic angles of his face.

His jaw was clenched tight even in unconsciousness, and his platinum-blond hair lay damp against the pillow.

When Penny returned with an armful of clean fabrics, I had her assist in cutting the cotton into a wide, contoured T-shape, layering the absorbent fibers over the waterproof deerskin base.

Once the makeshift garment was assembled, I pulled back the linen covering his waist and lower body.

Penny immediately let out a strangled squeak.

Her face flushed a violent, mottled crimson that reached the tips of her ears.

She snapped her head toward the ceiling, holding both hands over her eyes while trembling from head to toe.

"M-my lady!" Penny stammered in utter horror, her voice rising an octave. "You... you can't! He's... he's a man! The Lord of the Keep! This is... this is so shameful! Shouldn't we call a male stable hand or a manservant to handle this sort of... of thing?!"

"To a healer, there is no gender, Penny. There is only a patient, anatomy, and a life hanging by a thread," I answered calmly, pulling on fresh, sterile cotton gloves I had boiled earlier. "And inviting strangers into this chamber when poisoners are lurking about is an invitation to murder. Now stop staring at the rafters, step forward, and help me support his hip."

Penny whimpered, mortified, stepping forward on tiptoe with her eyes squinted nearly shut.

My movements, by contrast, were precise and completely clinical.

Yet when my hands slid beneath his lower back, the sheer physical reality of the man was impossible to ignore entirely.

Despite months of deliberate wasting, Boyce Carlisle possessed the formidable, heavy build of a legendary warrior: a lean waist, defined abdominal muscles scarred from ancient battles, and long, powerful legs.

"Gently roll him toward you," I instructed.

As I cleaned the raw skin around his pelvis with a warm, antiseptic herb rinse, my knuckles brushed against his burning flank.

A sudden, involuntary tremor rippled through Boyce's muscular frame—an instinctual nerve response to the physical contact.

Penny gasped softly, biting her lip until it turned white, her cheeks burning with pure embarrassment.

"M-my lady... did he just move?!"

"A spinal reflex," I replied evenly, though my eyes remained laser-focused on his pulse points.

Working with practiced efficiency, I slid the contoured padding beneath his hips, wrapped the soft, moisture-trapping deerskin securely around his waist, and fastened the side bindings so they provided a snug fit without constricting his femoral circulation.

I pulled the clean linen back over him, smoothing the blanket over his chest.

"Done. He will remain dry and safe from necrosis for the next twelve hours," I said, peeling off the gloves and tossing them into the waste basin.

Penny let out a long, shuddering breath of pure relief, pressing both cold palms to her burning cheeks. "Praise the heavens... My lady, I don't know how you can do that with a straight face. I thought my heart was going to burst from sheer shame!"

I washed my hands in fresh water. "Dignity is a luxury. Survival is not."

A sharp rap on the heavy door interrupted us.

Mr. Price entered, bringing a dust-covered courier who had ridden hard from the capital.

The messenger dropped to one knee, handing over a sealed scroll bearing my father's wax crest, alongside the latest reports from the high nobility.

The letter from Fredrick Reynolds was a venomous diatribe, accusing me of casting a dark curse over the family name.

I didn't even bother reading the second paragraph before tossing the parchment directly into the roaring hearth.

The courier's verbal dispatch, however, was pure gold.

During the grand engagement feast, right before the assembled royal court, Deena's face and neck had erupted into a grotesque, weeping scarlet rash.

Prince Krishna had recoiled in absolute horror and disgust, shouting that she was afflicted with an unclean plague.

He had immediately banished Deena from the royal quarters, canceling her court privileges and sending her weeping back to the Reynolds estate in disgrace.

The glorious alliance on which House Reynolds had staked everything was now the laughingstock of the empire.

I tossed three silver coins to the messenger, who bowed profusely before retreating.

"It serves her right, my lady!" Penny beamed with triumphant, vengeful glee. "That vile snake got exactly what she deserved!"

"That was only a taste," I murmured.

I turned back toward the bed-and my smile vanished in an instant.

The air around Boyce's bed had grown stifflingly hot.

I rushed to his side and pressed the back of my hand against his forehead.

The heat radiated through my skin like a blistering iron.

His breath had turned shallow and ragged, his chest heaving violently as droplets of sweat poured from his temples.

Beneath his skin, the jagged edges of his blackened wound pulsed with a faint, chaotic reddish glow-the volatile remnants of suppressed dragonfire clashing violently against the neurotoxin in his blood!

His core temperature was skyrocketing into the danger zone.

"Penny! Fetch two basins of mountain-fed ice water and every clean cloth in the room! Now!" I commanded, my voice sharp with emergency.

His immune system was collapsing under the dual strain of the purge and the fever.

If I didn't break this temperature within the hour, his brain tissue would cook from the inside out.

The battle for his life had just entered its deadliest phase.

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