

Exchanging Vows: The Swapped Wife Is a Top Shaman

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Ivy's Point of View

The silence after their departure was almost peaceful.

Luna Helena stood by the window, watching the procession of servants carry Seraphina's diminished dowry across the courtyard.

"Luna Helena," I said carefully. "May I ask you something?"

She turned, her gaze softening slightly. "Of course."

"It's about Lady Margot."

Something flickered across Luna Helena's face. Wariness, perhaps. Or resignation.

"What about her?"

I chose my words carefully. "I don't understand her. Alpha Alaric is only her stepson. Which means Dominic and Bastian are merely her step-grandsons. She has no blood connection to either of them." I paused. "So why does she favor Bastian so strongly? Why does she seem so eager for Dominic to die?"

Luna Helena was quiet for a long moment. She turned back to the window, her reflection ghostly in the glass.

"Margot Ashford is a complicated woman," she said finally. "And her history with this pack is... not a pleasant one."

"What do you mean?"

Luna Helena sighed. "She was not always the Alpha's stepmother. Before that, she was simply a servant girl with ambitions far above her station."

I waited, sensing there was more.

"The old Alpha, Alaric's father, was a good man. A faithful mate. He loved his Luna deeply and never once looked at another woman." Luna Helena's voice turned cold. "But Margot wanted power. Status. And she was willing to do anything to get it."

"What did she do?"

"She drugged him." The words came out flat. Matter-of-fact. "One night, she slipped something into his wine and climbed into his bed. By the time he realized what had happened, it was too late. The damage was done."

My stomach turned. "That's..."

"Despicable? Yes." Luna Helena nodded grimly. "The old Alpha was furious. He wanted to have her executed for what she'd done. But the pack elders intervened. They said killing her would only create more scandal. More whispers. So instead, they forced him to take her as a concubine."

"A concubine." I repeated the word, understanding dawning. "So she got what she wanted after all."

"In a way. But not entirely." Luna Helena turned to face me. "The old Alpha never touched her again after that night. He refused to acknowledge her as anything more than a servant who had overstepped. And they never had any children together."

That explained a lot. Margot had clawed her way into a position of power through manipulation and deceit, but she had no heirs of her own. No blood legacy to carry on her ambitions.

"So she attached herself to Bastian instead," I said slowly. "Because Vivienne is also a concubine. They're the same."

"Exactly." Luna Helena nodded. "Margot sees herself in Vivienne. Two women who used underhanded means to gain their positions. And she sees Bastian as the son she never had. If he becomes the heir, her faction gains power. Her influence grows."

"And Dominic threatens all of that."

"Dominic is my son. Helena's legitimate heir." Luna Helena's voice hardened. "As long as he lives, Margot's schemes mean nothing. That's why she's so eager to see him fail. To see him die."

I absorbed this information, filing it away for later. Margot wasn't just a nuisance. She was a genuine threat. A woman who had already proven she would do anything to get what she wanted.

Luna Helena seemed to read my thoughts. She stepped closer, placing a gentle hand on my shoulder.

"Ivy, listen to me carefully." Her voice was soft but serious. "I know Margot is difficult. I know she provokes you. But you must not engage with her directly. She is still an elder of this pack, and openly fighting with her will only make things harder for you."

"But she—"

"I know." Luna Helena squeezed my shoulder. "Believe me, I know. But right now, you need to be smart. Pick your battles. Don't give her any ammunition to use against you."

I wanted to argue. Wanted to say that letting Margot walk all over me felt like surrender. But I could see the wisdom in Luna Helena's words. I was new here. Vulnerable. I didn't have the allies or the influence to take on someone like Margot directly.

Not yet.

"I understand," I said quietly.

Luna Helena smiled, a hint of warmth breaking through her composed exterior. "Good. You're a clever girl, Ivy. I knew it the moment I saw you standing alone in that council chamber, refusing to back down." She released my shoulder and stepped back. "Take care of yourself. And take care of my son. I'll visit again soon."

"Thank you, Luna Helena. For everything."

She nodded once, then swept out of the residence, her attendants falling into step behind her.

The door closed, and I was alone.

I stood there for a moment, letting the silence settle around me. Then I turned and walked toward the master bedroom.

Dominic lay exactly where I had left him. Still as a statue. Peaceful as death. The afternoon sunlight streamed through the curtains, casting golden patterns across his pale face.

I pulled a chair beside his bed and sat down, studying him more carefully than I had before.

He really was beautiful. Even like this. Even after six months of lying motionless in this bed. His features were strong, aristocratic. The kind of face that would command attention in any room.

But something was wrong.

I leaned closer, my eyes narrowing. There, on the side of his neck, just below his jaw. The totem markings.

Every wolf had them. Sacred patterns that appeared at birth, connecting them to the source of their power. The markings were supposed to glow with inner light, pulsing gently with the rhythm of the wolf's spirit.

Dominic's markings were dim. Almost invisible. Like embers that had nearly burned out.

I remembered Bastian's words from that night. The night they'd stolen my wedding and dumped me under their bed like garbage.

"Dominic won't last much longer anyway. The healers give him weeks at best."

At the time, I'd thought he was just being cruel. Wishful thinking from a jealous younger brother who wanted what wasn't his.

But looking at those faded markings now, I understood.

Dominic was dying. Not just unconscious. Actually dying. His wolf spirit was fading, and once it disappeared completely, his body would follow.

The healers of the Silvermoon Pack had clearly given up on him. They were just waiting for the inevitable. Counting down the days until they could declare the heir dead and hand everything to Bastian.

But they didn't know what I knew.

They didn't know who I really was.

I reached out and touched Dominic's hand. His skin was warm but too still. No twitch of fingers. No flutter of pulse.

"You know," I murmured, a smile tugging at the corner of my lips. "You're really quite lucky."

No response. Of course.

I leaned back in my chair, my smile widening.

"Of all the brides in all the kingdoms, you ended up with me." I traced a finger along his knuckles, feeling the faint echo of power beneath his skin. Weak. Flickering. But still there. "A top shaman that comes once in a thousand years."

The room was silent except for the soft sound of my breathing.

"Everyone thinks you're as good as dead," I continued quietly. "Your brother is already measuring your throne for size. Your intended bride is moaning his name every night. Even your own pack has written you off."

I stood, looking down at his peaceful face.

"But they don't know what I can do." My voice dropped to a whisper. "And when you wake up, Dominic Ashford, we're going to make them all regret ever underestimating us."

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Ivy's Point of View

I was seven years old when I first discovered I was different.

The library of the Crescent Moon Pack was old and dusty, tucked away in a forgotten corner of the main estate. Nobody went there. Nobody cared about the crumbling books and faded scrolls gathering cobwebs on the shelves.

But I did.

I'd snuck in one afternoon, hiding from Seraphina and her friends who had made a game of chasing me through the halls. The library seemed like the perfect hiding spot. Dark. Quiet. Forgotten.

I pulled a random book from the shelf, expecting nothing. Just something to pass the time until they got bored and left.

But the moment I opened it, something sparked inside me.

Ancient symbols stared back at me. Diagrams of the wolf body. Lists of herbs and their properties. Incantations written in the old tongue that hadn't been spoken in centuries.

It was a shaman's book. A healer's grimoire.

And I understood it. All of it. Like the knowledge had been sleeping inside me, waiting to be awakened.

That was the day everything changed.

I started spending every free moment in that library. Reading. Studying. Memorizing. The shamans of the Crescent Moon Pack caught me once, huddled in a corner with three books spread open around me.

"What are you doing here, child?" The head shaman had looked down at me with a mixture of confusion and annoyance.

"Learning," I'd said simply. "This incantation here, the one for drawing out infection. What if you combined it with moonpetal extract? Wouldn't that amplify the—"

"You're too young for this." He'd snatched the book from my hands. "Run along and play with the other children. Healing arts aren't toys for little girls."

They never took me seriously. No matter how many times I tried to discuss theories with them, no matter how many questions I asked, they always dismissed me. Too young. Too inexperienced. Too presumptuous.

A Beta's daughter thinking she could understand the sacred healing arts? Laughable.

But I didn't stop.

I set up a small workspace in my bedroom. Grinding herbs in secret. Mixing powders. Testing combinations. The warriors who came back injured from border patrols became my unwitting patients. I'd slip them healing salves disguised as common medicine. Watch from a distance as their wounds closed faster than they should have.

Simple things. Basic remedies. Nothing that would draw attention.

But I knew I was capable of more. I could feel it. A power coiled inside me like a sleeping serpent, waiting for the right moment to strike.

That moment came when I was fourteen.

The border skirmish with the rogue wolves had been going on for weeks. Small attacks. Hit and run tactics. Nothing the pack couldn't handle.

Until that night.

I was in my room when the commotion started. Shouting. Running footsteps. The heavy thud of the main gates being thrown open.

Then someone screamed my father's name.

I ran.

The healer's hall was chaos. Warriors covered in blood. Shamans rushing between patients. And at the center of it all, my father lying on a stone table, his body broken and bloody.

His neck had been torn open, the wound so deep I could see the white of bone beneath the mangled flesh. Blood pooled beneath him, dripping onto the floor in a steady stream.

He wasn't moving. Wasn't breathing.

The shamans surrounded him, their faces grim. The head shaman pressed his hands to my father's chest, then pulled back with a heavy sigh.

"There's nothing we can do." His voice was flat. Final. "The wound is too severe. His wolf spirit is already fading. Take him to his quarters and prepare for the funeral rites."

No.

The word echoed in my head like a war drum.

They carried my father to his private chambers. I followed, staying in the shadows, waiting until the shamans finished their preparations and left. They placed candles around his bed. Laid out the ceremonial cloths. Everything ready for a man they expected to die before morning.

When the last shaman closed the door behind him, I slipped inside.

The room was silent except for the shallow, rattling sound of my father's breath. Each inhale seemed weaker than the last. Each exhale might be his final one.

I rushed to his side and placed my hand over his chest. Beneath my palm, I felt it. The faintest flutter of his heart. The weakest whisper of his wolf spirit, clinging to life by a thread.

"You're still here," I breathed. "You just need help finding your way back."

I ran to my room and grabbed the book I had hidden beneath my mattress. The one I had stolen from the library years ago. The one containing the most dangerous healing techniques ever recorded.

My hands trembled as I flipped through the pages.

The Soul Anchor. An incantation so old it predated the founding of the packs themselves. So dangerous that it had been forbidden for centuries.

The shaman who performed it had to offer their own essence. Their own life force. Pour it into the dying patient and use it as a bridge to pull their soul back from the edge.

If it worked, the patient would live.

If it failed, both would die.

I didn't hesitate.

I locked the door to my father's chambers. Drew the curtains tight. Made sure no one could see or hear what I was about to do.

Then I climbed onto the bed beside him, my hands finding his wound, pressing against the torn flesh.

I began to chant.

The words came from somewhere deep inside me. Ancient. Powerful. Words that hadn't been spoken aloud in a thousand years.

"In the name of our ancestors, I summon the spirit veins to return."

The air in the room changed. Grew heavy. Electric.

"By blood given freely, I anchor the wandering soul."

I pulled a small blade from my belt and slashed my palm. My blood dripped onto my father's wound, mixing with his.

The pain was immediate. Excruciating. Like my very essence was being ripped from my body and poured into his. I felt my vision blur. My strength drain. My consciousness flickering like a candle in a storm.

But I didn't stop.

I kept chanting. Kept pouring my life into his. Kept holding on even as the darkness clawed at the edges of my mind.

The last thing I saw before I collapsed was my father's chest rising. Falling. Rising again.

He was breathing.

I smiled.

Then everything went black.

I woke up three days later, weak as a newborn kitten, barely able to lift my head.

My father was sitting beside my bed. Alive. Whole. A fresh scar on his neck the only evidence of how close he'd come to death.

His eyes were wet when he looked at me.

"My daughter," he whispered, his voice cracking. "What did you do?"

"Saved you," I managed weakly.

"The shamans said it was a miracle. That you stayed by my bedside praying for three days and nights." He took my hand, his grip trembling. "But that's not what happened, is it?"

I shook my head slowly.

"Show me your palm."

I turned my hand over, revealing the healing cut across my skin. The mark of the Soul Anchor.

My father's face went pale. "Ivy... do you know what this means?"

"I'm a shaman."

"Not just any shaman." His voice dropped to barely a whisper. "A top shaman. The kind that comes once in a thousand years." He pressed his forehead to my fingers. "And no one can ever know."

That was the day my father became my greatest ally. My fiercest protector. The one person in the Crescent Moon Pack who truly understood what I was.

And the one who made me swear to hide it from the world.

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Ivy's Point of View

A top shaman.

The words still echoed in my mind, even after all these years.

My father had held my hands that day, his grip tight enough to leave bruises. His face was pale despite his recovery. Not from weakness. From fear.

"Ivy, listen to me carefully." His voice had been low, urgent. "You must never tell anyone what you are. Not a single soul. Do you understand?"

"But Father, if I can heal people—"

"That's exactly the problem." He'd pulled me closer, his eyes boring into mine. "Do you know what would happen if your uncle found out? If Alpha Roland learned that his brother's daughter was a top shaman?"

I'd shaken my head, confused.

"He would use you." My father's voice turned bitter. "He would chain you to the pack like a prized dog. Every war, every skirmish, every foolish injury caused by his reckless decisions. You would be there to fix it all. To bring back the dying. To clean up his messes."

"Would that be so bad? Helping people?"

"You almost died saving me, Ivy." His grip tightened. "The Soul Anchor nearly killed you. And that was just one person. Imagine being forced to do that over and over again. For people who don't care about you. Who see you as nothing but a tool."

The weight of his words had settled on my shoulders like a stone.

"Your uncle is not a good man," my father continued. "He's spent his entire life suppressing me, taking everything I had, making sure I never rose above my station. If he knew what you were capable of, he would do the same to you. Worse."

"So I just... hide it?"

"Yes." He'd cupped my face in his hands, his expression fierce. "You hide it. You pretend to be ordinary. You let them underestimate you. And when the time comes, when you're free from this pack and safe from your uncle's reach, then you can decide how to use your gifts."

From that day forward, I became invisible.

Not just meek. Not just weak. But completely unremarkable. A Beta's daughter with no talents, no ambitions, no value. I stopped visiting the library. Stopped asking questions about healing arts. Stopped everything that might draw attention to what I really was.

It was suffocating. Like holding my breath for years on end.

But I survived. And now, looking down at Dominic Ashford's pale face, I was grateful for every moment of that suffocation.

Because no one in the Silvermoon Pack knew what I could do. No one suspected. No one would think twice about the quiet, unremarkable bride who had been dumped on the dying heir's bed.

I closed my eyes and began to chant.

The words were soft, barely above a whisper. Ancient syllables that vibrated in my chest and spread through my fingertips. My hands hovered over Dominic's head, not quite touching.

"Show me," I murmured. "Show me what's broken."

The world behind my eyelids shifted. Colors bloomed in the darkness. Shapes formed. I could see Dominic's body laid out before me like a map. His bones glowing white. His blood flowing red. His organs pulsing with faint light.

And there, in his skull, I found it.

Blood clots. Dark masses pressing against the delicate tissue of his brain. And worse, fragments of bone. Tiny shards that had broken off during the impact and lodged themselves against his nerves.

That was why he wouldn't wake up. The pressure on his brain was too great. His body had shut down to protect itself, retreating into unconsciousness rather than facing the damage.

I moved my focus downward, scanning the rest of him.

His heart was strong. His lungs clear. His organs functioning normally. The daily massages from Marcus and Theo had done their job well. His muscles hadn't atrophied. His circulation remained healthy.

Only his leg showed significant damage. The bone had been shattered and reset, but it had healed wrong. He would walk with a limp when he woke up.

When. Not if. When.

I opened my eyes, letting the vision fade.

"You're lucky," I told Dominic's sleeping form. "If they'd left you alone for another few months, the clots would have spread. The bone fragments would have caused permanent damage." I brushed a strand of hair from his forehead. "But they didn't. And I'm here now."

The treatment plan formed in my mind.

Spirit Vein Guidance. It was the only technique powerful enough to dissolve the clots and shift the bone fragments without surgery. I would have to channel my own spiritual energy into his body, using it to guide his healing from the inside.

But there was a problem.

I was weak. The years of suppressing my abilities, of hiding what I was, had taken their toll. My spiritual reserves were a fraction of what they should be. Like a muscle that had been left unused for too long.

I could perform the technique once a week. Maybe twice if I pushed myself. But no more than that. Any more and I would drain myself completely. End up unconscious for days. Or worse.

At that rate, it would take three months. Three months of weekly treatments before Dominic would open his eyes.

Three months of keeping my secret. Three months of pretending to be the helpless bride everyone thought I was.

And there was another concern.

The accident.

Everyone said Dominic had been injured protecting the king. That a rogue wolf had knocked him against a rock during battle. A tragic but honorable wound.

But looking at the damage now, something didn't add up.

The bone fragments in his skull were too uniform. Too precise. Like they'd been caused by a single, concentrated blow rather than a chaotic impact against stone. And the placement of the clots suggested the injury had been worsened after the initial trauma. Like someone had hit him again while he was already down.

What if it wasn't an accident?

The thought sent ice through my veins.

If someone had deliberately tried to kill Dominic, they might try again. Especially if they learned he was recovering. That he might actually wake up and reclaim everything they'd tried to steal.

I thought of Bastian's smug face. Margot's eager eyes. Vivienne's calculating smile.

Any of them could be responsible. All of them had motive.

Which meant my treatments had to remain secret. Absolutely secret. No one could know what I was doing. No one could know that the dying heir was slowly, quietly, being brought back to life.

I sat back in my chair, my mind racing through possibilities.

The servants couldn't be trusted. Not all of them, anyway. Marcus and Theo seemed loyal, but I couldn't be certain. The fewer people who knew, the better.

I would need to perform the treatments at night. When the residence was quiet. When no one would notice me sitting at Dominic's bedside, channeling power into his broken body.

I would need to hide any signs of improvement. Keep his condition appearing unchanged to outside observers. Let everyone continue believing he was on death's door.

And I would need to build my own strength. Meditate. Practice. Slowly restore my spiritual reserves so the treatments could become more effective.

Three months.

It seemed like an eternity. So much could go wrong in three months. Bastian could make his move. Margot could scheme her way into power. The bond-breaking ceremony would happen in just three days, and after that, I would be even more vulnerable.

But I had no choice.

I looked at Dominic's face. Peaceful. Unaware of everything happening around him.

"I'm going to save you," I whispered. "But you have to stay alive long enough for me to do it. Can you do that for me?"

No response. Just the steady rise and fall of his chest.

I took a deep breath and began to plan.

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Ivy's Point of View

I didn't remember falling asleep.

One moment I was sitting beside Dominic's bed, planning his treatment. The next, I was waking up to sunlight streaming through the curtains and Nell's voice calling my name.

"Miss Ivy, you need to wake up. It's almost time."

I blinked, disoriented. My body felt heavy, still drained from the spiritual assessment I'd performed on Dominic last night. I'd pushed myself too hard, too fast. My limbs ached and my head throbbed with a dull pain.

"Time for what?" I mumbled, rubbing my eyes.

"Your weekly visit to Luna Helena." Nell was already pulling clothes from the wardrobe, her movements quick and efficient. "You can't be late on your first official visit as the young madam. It would look terrible."

Right. The weekly visit.

Every wife in the Silvermoon Pack's main family was expected to pay respects to the Luna once a week. It was tradition. Protocol. A way for the Luna to keep tabs on all the women in her household while maintaining the appearance of familial harmony.

Missing it would be seen as disrespect. And right now, I couldn't afford to give anyone ammunition against me.

I dragged myself out of bed and let Nell dress me. She chose a simple blue gown, modest but elegant. Nothing that would draw too much attention. She braided my hair and pinned it up, then added a touch of color to my lips.

"There," Nell said, stepping back to admire her work. "You look like a proper young madam now."

"I feel like I haven't slept in days."

"You did fall asleep." Nell's voice carried a hint of worry. "You shouldn't push yourself so hard, Miss Ivy. You need rest too."

"I'm fine." I stood and smoothed my skirts. "Just not used to all this excitement."

Before leaving, I stopped by Dominic's bedside. He looked the same as always. Pale. Still. Peaceful. His chest rose and fell in that slow, mechanical rhythm. His totem markings remained dim against his neck.

But I knew what lay beneath that stillness. The blood clots. The bone fragments. The damage that was slowly killing him from the inside.

'Three months,' I reminded myself. 'Just hold on for three months.'

"Marcus, Theo," I called.

The two guards appeared instantly, standing at attention.

"Take good care of him while I'm gone. Make sure to massage his limbs regularly. Don't skip any sessions."

"Yes, young madam," Marcus replied. "We'll follow the usual schedule."

"Good. And if anything changes, anything at all, send someone to find me immediately."

"Understood."

I took one last look at Dominic, then left.

The walk to Luna Helena's residence took about fifteen minutes. The central wing of the Silvermoon estate was grand but tasteful, decorated with fresh flowers and soft silks. Servants moved quietly through the corridors, heads bowed, eyes averted. The kind of place that felt warm despite its size.

When I arrived at the receiving room, I was surprised to find I wasn't the only visitor.

Seraphina was already there.

She sat on one of the embroidered cushions, dressed in pale pink silk, her hair arranged in an elaborate updo that must have taken hours. She looked every inch the noble Alpha's daughter. Beautiful. Refined. Completely at ease.

Our eyes met.

The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees.

"Cousin." Seraphina smiled. It didn't reach her eyes. "What a pleasant surprise."

"Seraphina." I kept my voice neutral. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"Luna Helena invited me for breakfast. After all, I'm still family now." She tilted her head, her smile sharpening. "Even if the circumstances are... unusual."

"How kind of you to come."

"I'm always kind." Her eyes glittered with barely concealed malice. "Unlike some people."

Before I could respond, Luna Helena entered the room. Her presence immediately commanded attention. She wore deep green today, her silver hair pinned back elegantly.

"Ah, wonderful." She looked between us, perhaps sensing the tension. "Come. Let's eat together. I've had the kitchen prepare something special."

We followed her to the dining room, where servants had laid out an elaborate breakfast. Fresh fruits glistening with morning dew. Warm bread still steaming from the oven. Delicate pastries dusted with sugar. And several steaming dishes arranged in the center of the table.

Luna Helena sat at the head of the table. Seraphina and I took seats on either side of her.

"It's good to have company," Luna Helena said, picking up her tea cup. "This house gets too quiet sometimes. Especially with Dominic..." She trailed off, her expression flickering with sadness.

Seraphina jumped in quickly. "We're honored to join you, Luna Helena. Truly. Your hospitality is legendary throughout the kingdom."

"You flatter me, child."

"It's only the truth."

I said nothing. Just watched. Observed.

The servants began serving the food. A bowl of porridge was placed before me, along with several side dishes. Pickled vegetables. Sliced meats. A small pot of honey. Everything looked delicious. Smelled delicious.

I lifted my spoon and took a bite.

And froze.

There was something wrong with the food.

Not poison. Nothing that obvious. But there was an undertone to the flavor. A subtle bitterness hidden beneath the sweetness of the honey. A medicinal quality that most people wouldn't notice.

But I wasn't most people.

My senses, honed by years of studying herbs and remedies, picked up on it immediately. I had trained myself to identify hundreds of substances by taste and smell alone. It was a skill that had saved my life more than once.

I took another small bite, analyzing the taste. Letting it sit on my tongue. Trying to identify the familiar bitterness.

Then it hit me.

Silervine root.

My blood ran cold.

Silvervine root was a powerful tonic. In small doses, it could strengthen a weakened body, restore energy, improve circulation. Healers often prescribed it for elderly patients or those recovering from serious illness.

But for a healthy woman of childbearing age?

It was a contraceptive. A permanent one.

Prolonged consumption of silvervine root would damage the womb beyond repair. The woman would become barren. Unable to ever conceive children. The effects were irreversible after just a few months of regular consumption.

I looked at Luna Helena, my mind racing.

Was she ill? Did she have some condition that required this medicine? That would explain why it was in the food. Perhaps her healers had prescribed it for her health.

But something didn't sit right.

Luna Helena looked perfectly healthy. Her complexion was good, her movements strong, her eyes clear and alert. There was no sign of the weakness or fatigue that would require such a potent tonic.

So why was silvervine root in the food?

And more importantly, who had put it there?

I glanced at Seraphina, who was chatting pleasantly with Luna Helena about the weather and the upcoming festival. Completely unaware of anything wrong. Her spoon hovered over her bowl, ready to take a bite.

Should I warn her?

Part of me wanted to. Despite everything she'd done, she was still my cousin. Still blood.

But another part of me hesitated. Seraphina had drugged me. Had me knocked unconscious. Stole my wedding night and left me under a bed like garbage.

Did she really deserve my protection?

Just as Seraphina lifted the spoon to her lips, the dining room doors burst open.

A maid rushed in, looking flustered and out of breath. I recognized her as one of Lady Margot's personal servants.

"Miss Seraphina!" The maid hurried to Seraphina's side. "Lady Margot requests your presence immediately. There's an urgent matter to discuss."

Seraphina frowned, lowering her spoon. "Right now? I'm having breakfast with Luna Helena."

"Lady Margot insists. It cannot wait."

"But surely it can wait until after—"

"Now, Miss Seraphina." The maid's voice was firm. Almost commanding. Surprisingly forceful for a servant addressing a master's wife. "Lady Margot was very clear. You must come immediately."

Seraphina looked at the maid, then at Luna Helena, clearly torn. Her breakfast sat untouched before her. "Perhaps I could finish eating first and then—"

"Lady Margot said immediately." The maid grabbed Seraphina's arm. "Please, miss. She'll be angry if I return without you."

I watched this exchange with growing interest. Why was Margot so desperate to pull Seraphina away? And why now, right when we were about to eat?

Seraphina set down her spoon with a frustrated sigh. "Luna Helena, I apologize. It seems I have no choice in the matter."

Luna Helena's expression cooled noticeably. She clearly didn't appreciate having her breakfast interrupted by Margot's servant.

"Go then," Luna Helena said. "If Lady Margot's business is so urgent that it cannot wait for a simple meal."

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Seraphina's Point of View

I followed Margot's maid through the corridors, irritation burning in my chest.

What could possibly be so urgent that it couldn't wait until after breakfast? I had been making progress with Luna Helena. Building rapport. Trying to repair some of the damage from the past few days.

And now this.

Margot was waiting in her private sitting room, seated in a high-backed chair like a queen on her throne. Vivienne stood beside her, looking equally serious.

"Close the door," Margot ordered the maid. "And make sure no one disturbs us."

The maid bowed and left.

I stood there, confused. "Lady Margot, what's this about? You pulled me away from breakfast with Luna Helena."

"That's precisely why I called you here." Margot's eyes were sharp. "Sit down, child."

I sat.

"You must never eat at Luna Helena's residence again."

I blinked. "What? Why not?"

"Think about it." Margot leaned forward. "You are not her real daughter-in-law. You were supposed to marry Dominic, but instead you married Bastian. Her stepson."

"I don't understand what that has to do with—"

"Helena despises Bastian," Vivienne cut in. "She always has. He's a constant reminder that her husband took another woman to his bed. And now you've married him instead of her precious Dominic."

Margot nodded. "In her eyes, you've betrayed her son. Abandoned him for his half-brother. Do you really think she wouldn't hold that against you?"

My stomach twisted. "You think she would... tamper with my food?"

"I think she's capable of many things when it comes to protecting her son's interests." Margot's voice was cold. "She may seem gracious, but Helena is a wolf like the rest of us. And wolves bite when threatened."

I thought about the breakfast I had almost eaten. The porridge sitting in that bowl, untouched.

A chill ran down my spine.

"I understand," I said quietly. "I'll be more careful from now on."

"See that you are." Margot waved her hand dismissively. "You may go."

Ivy's Point of View

After Seraphina left, the dining room felt strangely quiet.

I stared at my bowl of porridge, my mind racing. The timing of Seraphina's departure was too convenient. Too precise. Almost as if someone had planned it.

Margot pulled her away right before she could eat.

Why? What did Margot know that we didn't?

I pushed the bowl away, my appetite gone. The silvervine root in the food troubled me deeply. If Luna Helena was being poisoned, she might not even know it. The effects were subtle at first. Easy to miss.

But who would want to make Luna Helena barren? She was already past her childbearing years. It didn't make sense.

Unless...

Unless the poison wasn't meant for Luna Helena at all.

The thought hit me like a punch to the gut. The weekly breakfasts. The tradition of the Alpha family wives gathering to eat together.

What if the poison was meant for us?

Before I could pursue this line of thinking, a servant knocked and entered.

"My Luna, Young Madam," she announced. "Physician Aldric from the royal palace has arrived for Young Master Dominic's weekly treatment."

Luna Helena set down her tea cup. "Already? Very well. Have him proceed to Dominic's chambers."

She rose from her seat and looked at me. "Come, Ivy. You should observe the treatment. As Dominic's wife, you need to understand his condition."

I followed her through the estate, my mind still churning with questions about the poisoned food. But I pushed those thoughts aside for now. Dominic's treatment was more important.

We arrived at the heir's residence just as the physician was being escorted inside. Physician Aldric was an older man, perhaps sixty, with gray hair pulled back in a severe knot and deep-set eyes that had seen too much. He carried a leather bag filled with instruments and vials.

"Luna Helena." He bowed respectfully. "And this must be the young madam I've heard about."

"Physician Aldric has been treating Dominic since the accident," Luna Helena explained. "He's the best healer in the kingdom. The king himself sent him."

"An honor to meet you," I said politely.

Aldric's eyes lingered on me for a moment, assessing. Then he turned and entered Dominic's bedroom.

We followed.

Dominic lay exactly as I had left him this morning. Pale. Still. The totem markings on his neck barely visible. Marcus and Theo stood at attention near the door, watching the physician's every move.

"Has there been any change since last week?" Aldric asked, setting his bag on the bedside table.

"None," Luna Helena replied. Her voice was tight with barely concealed grief. "He's exactly the same."

"I see."

Aldric began his examination. He checked Dominic's pulse, listened to his breathing, examined his eyes. His movements were practiced and efficient. Clearly a man who had done this many times before.

"His body remains stable," Aldric announced. "The physical wounds have healed well. But the damage to his brain..." He shook his head. "That is another matter entirely."

He pulled several items from his bag. A small silver bowl. A vial of dark liquid. A bundle of dried herbs that I recognized as moonshade fern. And a crystal pendant that hummed with spiritual energy.

"I will now perform the neural restoration technique," Aldric said. "Please remain quiet during the procedure."

He placed the crystal pendant on Dominic's forehead and poured the dark liquid into the silver bowl. Then he began to chant, his voice low and rhythmic. Ancient words that resonated with power.

I watched intently, analyzing every movement.

The crystal began to glow, pulsing in time with Aldric's words. Energy flowed from the pendant into Dominic's skull. I could sense it moving through his brain, touching the damaged areas.

At first, everything seemed normal. Standard healing techniques. Basic energy manipulation.

But then something changed.

Aldric's hands shifted position. His chanting altered subtly. The energy flowing from the crystal took on a different quality.

My eyes widened.

That's wrong.

I could see it clearly now. The energy wasn't targeting the blood clots. It was avoiding them. Moving around them instead of through them.

And the bone fragments...

The energy was pushing them deeper. Not removing them. Not dissolving them. Pushing them further into the delicate tissue of Dominic's brain.

He's making it worse.

My hands clenched in my lap. Every instinct screamed at me to intervene. To stop this so-called treatment before it caused more damage.

But I couldn't. Not without revealing what I was. Not without exposing my abilities to everyone in this room.

So I sat there, watching, as Aldric systematically sabotaged Dominic's recovery.

The procedure lasted another twenty minutes. Each minute felt like an eternity. Each pulse of energy drove those bone fragments a little deeper, made the clots a little more entrenched.

Finally, Aldric stopped.

He removed the crystal pendant and wiped his brow. His face was arranged in an expression of practiced solemnity. The perfect picture of a healer who had done everything he could.

"I'm afraid the news is not good."

Luna Helena's hands tightened on her skirts. "What do you mean?"

"The heir's condition has not improved." Aldric sighed heavily. "In fact, I fear it may have worsened slightly since my last visit. The damage to his brain is extensive. Far more extensive than we initially believed."

"But you've been treating him for six months!" Luna Helena's voice cracked. "Surely there must be some improvement?"

"I have done everything in my power, Luna Helena. But some wounds are beyond even the most skilled healer's abilities." Aldric began packing his instruments. "The heir may not have much time left. Days, perhaps. A few weeks at most."

Luna Helena made a choked sound. Tears spilled down her cheeks.

"I strongly suggest that Alpha Alaric and yourself begin making preparations." Aldric's voice was gentle but firm. "It is better to be ready than to be caught off guard when the time comes."

He bowed and left the room, leaving devastation in his wake.

Luna Helena collapsed into a chair, sobbing. I went to her side, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

But inside, my mind was racing.

The physician is working against Dominic.