

Exchanging Vows: The Swapped Wife Is a Top Shaman

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Ivy's Point of View

"Please don't worry about me," I said, squeezing my mother's hands. "I promise I'm doing well. Alpha Alaric and Luna Helena have both been kind to me. They've accepted me as family."

My mother wiped her eyes. "Truly?"

"Truly." I smiled. "Luna Helena even stood up for me against Lady Margot. They're looking out for me."

Some of the tension eased from my parents' shoulders. But I could tell they weren't entirely convinced. How could they be? Their daughter had been swapped on her wedding night and married off to a dying man.

I took a deep breath. It was time to tell them the truth.

"There's something else you should know." I looked at each of them in turn. "What happened that night wasn't an accident."

My father frowned. "What do you mean?"

"The marriage swap. Seraphina ending up with Bastian while I was dumped in Dominic's bed." My voice hardened. "It was planned. All of it."

Silence.

"Seraphina had me drugged," I continued. "Someone knocked me unconscious and hid me under Bastian's bed while they consummated their marriage. Then they dragged me to Dominic's room and left me there like garbage."

My mother's face went white.

"Uncle Roland and Aunt Camilla knew about it," I added. "They had to. There's no way Seraphina could have pulled this off without their help. The maids. The timing. The cover-up afterward. It was all coordinated."

For a moment, no one spoke.

Then my mother exploded.

"Those monsters!" She shot to her feet, her whole body shaking with rage. "How dare they! How dare they do this to my daughter!"

"Mother—"

"I'm going to find Roland right now!" She was already moving toward the door. "I'm going to drag him in front of the elders and demand justice! They can't get away with this!"

Finn and I lunged at the same time. We caught her arms before she could make it three steps.

"Mother, stop!" I pulled her back. "You can't!"

"Why not? They deserve to be exposed! They deserve to be punished!"

"And who will believe us?" I kept my voice steady. "Uncle Roland is the Alpha. Aunt Camilla is the Luna. Seraphina is their precious daughter. We have no proof. No witnesses. Just my word against theirs."

"But—"

"If you go in there making accusations, they'll twist it around. They'll say I'm bitter about losing Bastian. That I'm jealous of Seraphina. That I'm causing trouble because I can't accept my fate." I guided her back to her chair. "You'll only make things worse for all of us."

My mother sank down, tears streaming freely now. "So they just get away with it? After everything they did?"

"For now." My jaw tightened. "But not forever."

My father had been silent through all of this. He sat in his chair, staring at the floor, his shoulders slumped.

"This is my fault," he said quietly.

"Father, no—"

"It is." He looked up, and I saw something broken in his eyes. "If I had more power, more status, they never would have dared to target you. But I'm just the Beta with no real authority. A title without teeth."

He laughed bitterly.

"My father was the old Alpha. But my mother was just a concubine. So even though I carry the bloodline, I've always been treated as lesser." His hands clenched on his knees.

"Roland has spent his entire life making sure I stay beneath him. Taking credit for my ideas. Blocking my advancement. Keeping me invisible."

"That's not your fault."

"Isn't it?" He met my eyes. "I should have fought harder. Should have stood up for myself. For our family. Instead, I just... accepted it. Kept my head down. Hoped things would get better on their own."

"Father, please don't blame yourself." I knelt before him, taking his weathered hands in mine. "You did what you had to do to survive. To keep us safe. There's no shame in that."

He didn't respond. Just sat there, looking defeated.

I glanced at my mother, at Finn. Both of them watching with worried eyes.

It was time.

"Father," I said carefully. "What if I told you there was a way out?"

He blinked. "What?"

"A way to escape Uncle Roland's control. To leave the Crescent Moon Pack entirely."

My mother leaned forward. "Ivy, what are you talking about?"

"The kingdom holds examinations every year." I kept my focus on my father. "Selections to find talented individuals from the packs and bring them to serve in the royal court. Administrators. Strategists. Advisors."

Father frowned. "I know about the examinations. Roland has forbidden anyone from our family to participate."

"Because he knows you would succeed." I squeezed his hands. "You're brilliant, Father. Everyone knows it. You managed our pack's finances for years. You negotiated trade agreements that doubled our wealth. You solved disputes that no one else could figure out."

"That was a long time ago."

"The skills don't disappear." I pressed on. "If you took the examination and passed, you would be offered a position at the royal court. You wouldn't need Uncle Roland's permission. You wouldn't be under his authority anymore. You could take Mother and Finn and start a new life."

My father stared at me like I had grown a second head.

"Ivy, it's not that simple. Roland would never allow me to even register for the examination. He has spies everywhere. The moment I tried, he would find out and stop me."

"He doesn't have spies in the Silvermoon Pack."

The words hung in the air.

My father's eyes widened.

"I have connections now," I continued. "Luna Helena trusts me. Alpha Alaric has given me resources. I could arrange for you to register through Silvermoon territory. Uncle Roland would never know until it was too late."

"You would do that?"

"Of course I would. You're my father." I smiled. "But it won't be easy. If Uncle Roland finds out what we're planning before the examination, he'll try to stop us. He might even try to hurt you. Or Mother. Or Finn."

My mother reached over and took my father's arm. "Edwin, maybe we should consider this."

"It's dangerous," Father said slowly.

"Living under Roland's thumb is also dangerous," Mother countered. "Look what he allowed to happen to Ivy. What's stopping him from doing something worse to Finn? To us?"

Finn spoke up from his corner. "I want to leave too. I hate it here. Everyone looks at us like we're dirt."

My father was silent for a long moment. I could see him thinking. Weighing the risks. Considering the possibilities.

Finally, he spoke.

"I need time to think about this."

"Of course." I stood and brushed off my skirts. "I'm not asking you to decide right now. Just think about it. And when you're ready, send word to me at the Silvermoon Pack."

I pulled a small token from my pocket. One of the guard insignias that Ash had given me. "Show this to any Silvermoon messenger. They'll make sure your letter reaches me safely."

Father took the token and studied it. His fingers trembled slightly.

"You've changed, Ivy." He looked up at me with something new in his eyes. Respect. Maybe even pride. "You're not the same girl who left here."

"I'm still me." I leaned down and kissed his forehead. "I'm just done being pushed around."

My mother pulled me into another tight hug. "Be careful, my darling. These games you're playing are dangerous."

"I know." I hugged her back. "But I'm not playing alone anymore."

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Ivy's Point of View

A servant appeared at the door. "Beta Edwin, the Luna requests everyone's presence for the midday meal."

My mother quickly dried her eyes and smoothed down her hair. My father straightened his clothes, tugging at his collar like it was choking him. We all knew better than to keep Alpha Roland waiting. Even a few minutes of tardiness would be seen as disrespect.

The walk to the dining hall felt longer than I remembered. Every corridor brought back memories. Some good. Most painful. The corner where Seraphina had once tripped me in front of visiting dignitaries. The staircase where her friends had "accidentally" spilled ink on my dress before an important ceremony.

This place had never been kind to me.

The dining hall was already full when we arrived.

Alpha Roland sat at the head of the long table, looking every bit the powerful leader he believed himself to be. His robes were made of the finest silk, embroidered with the Crescent Moon Pack's crest in silver thread. He surveyed the room like a king surveying his subjects.

Luna Camilla occupied the seat to his right, dripping with jewels and false smiles.

Bastian sat on the Alpha's left side, dressed in Silvermoon black and silver. He looked comfortable. At home. Like he belonged at the head of the table rather than near the bottom where my family was relegated.

And Seraphina was glued to him as always. Her hand rested on his arm possessively. Her smile was radiant. She was playing the role of devoted wife perfectly.

The elders filled the seats closest to the main family. Gray-haired men and women who had served the pack for decades. Important. Respected. Valued.

And my parents?

They were shoved near the end of the table. Almost at the very last row. Like afterthoughts. Like servants who had been grudgingly allowed to dine with their betters. My mother's face was carefully blank, but I could see the tension in her shoulders. The way her hands gripped her napkin too tightly.

Finn and I were placed even further back. Our seats might as well have been in the hallway. My brother's jaw was clenched with suppressed anger. He was young, but he understood the insult perfectly.

I sat down without complaint. I had endured this treatment for almost twenty years. The pointed looks. The whispered insults. The casual cruelty disguised as tradition. The way people's eyes would slide right past me like I didn't exist.

But today it felt different. Heavier. More suffocating.

Maybe because I had tasted something different at the Silvermoon Pack. Luna Helena treating me with respect. Alpha Alaric acknowledging my worth. Guards bowing before me and calling me Young Madam.

Going back to being invisible was harder than I expected.

I looked at my father, sitting stiffly in his low-ranking seat. His back was straight, his expression carefully neutral. He had been enduring this for over forty years. Four decades of being pushed down. Overlooked. Dismissed. Watching his younger half-brother rise to power while he was kept in the shadows.

Please say yes to my plan, Father. Please.

I wanted so badly for him to be free. For all of us to be free. To never have to sit at the end of a table again, eating scraps while others feasted.

The meal began. Servants brought out dish after dish. Roasted meats glistening with fat. Fresh vegetables arranged in colorful patterns. Delicate pastries dusted with sugar. The best the Crescent Moon Pack had to offer.

Not that any of it reached our end of the table. By the time the platters got to us, they were half empty. The choicest cuts of meat had been taken. The freshest bread had been claimed. We got the leftovers.

I picked at my food without tasting it. Watched the main family laugh and celebrate. Listened to them toast Seraphina's good fortune and Bastian's promising future.

Like my wedding night humiliation was just a minor inconvenience. A bump in the road on their path to glory.

Seraphina caught my eye once across the table. She smiled sweetly and leaned closer to Bastian, whispering something in his ear. He laughed and kissed her cheek.

The display was clearly meant for me. Look what I have. Look what you lost.

I looked away. She wasn't worth my attention.

When the meal finally ended, the servants cleared the plates and brought out more wine. The atmosphere grew more relaxed. More raucous. Voices rose as cups were emptied and refilled.

Alpha Roland was already flushed from drinking. His voice grew louder. His gestures more expansive. He loved an audience, and today he had a captive one. Every elder, every family member, every servant was there to witness his glory.

"A toast!" He raised his cup high, wine sloshing over the rim. "To my wonderful son-in-law, Bastian Ashford!"

Everyone raised their cups obediently. Even I lifted mine, though the wine tasted like ash in my mouth.

"This young man is a true blessing to our pack," Alpha Roland continued, his words slightly slurred. "Handsome. Capable. Destined for greatness." He beamed at Bastian like a proud father looking at his favorite child. "He is the future Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack. And through him, our two packs will be united in harmony!"

Bastian smiled modestly, dipping his head in acknowledgment. Seraphina preened beside him, basking in the reflected glory.

I wanted to vomit.

'Dominic isn't dead yet,' I thought bitterly. But everyone's already given his position away.

"With Bastian leading the Silvermoon Pack, our alliance will be stronger than ever," Alpha Roland declared, warming to his subject. "The Crescent Moon Pack and the Silvermoon Pack, working together as one. A new era of prosperity and power for both our peoples!"

More cheers. More toasts. More nauseating displays of sycophancy. The elders nodded along like puppets on strings. Luna Camilla smiled her frozen smile. Seraphina looked like she might burst from happiness.

I stared at my untouched wine, fighting the urge to throw it in someone's face.

Then Alpha Roland's gaze swept down the table. Past the elders. Past the lesser families. All the way to where my father sat in his humiliating position.

"Edwin!"

My father looked up, startled.

"Come here and pour wine for our honored guests." Alpha Roland gestured impatiently with his cup. "Don't just sit there like a useless lump."

The hall went quiet. Conversations died mid-sentence. Every head turned toward my father.

Pouring wine was a servant's job. Everyone knew that. It was menial work, beneath even the lowest-ranking pack member. Something you ordered slaves to do, not family.

And Alpha Roland was ordering my father, his own half-brother, his Beta, to do it in front of everyone.

My hands clenched under the table so hard my nails bit into my palms.

This wasn't just a casual insult. This was a deliberate humiliation. A public reminder of exactly where my father stood in the pack hierarchy.

Nowhere.

My father sat frozen in his seat. I could see the conflict on his face. The shame burning in his cheeks. The anger he was trying so hard to suppress. His hands trembled slightly on the table.

My mother reached over and touched his arm. A silent plea. Don't make it worse.

Seconds ticked by. The silence grew heavier.

"Well?" Alpha Roland's voice sharpened with impatience. "Are you deaf, Edwin? I gave you an order. Or have you forgotten who is Alpha here?"

Still, my father didn't move. Something had shifted in his eyes. Something that looked almost like defiance.

Alpha Roland's face darkened. His hand tightened around his wine cup until his knuckles went white.

Then he hurled it to the ground.

The cup shattered against the stone floor. Wine splashed across the tiles like blood. Shards of ceramic scattered in every direction. The crash echoed through the silent hall, making several people flinch.

"HOW DARE YOU DISOBEY ME!" Alpha Roland roared, rising from his seat so fast his chair scraped against the floor. "I AM YOUR ALPHA! WHEN I GIVE A COMMAND, YOU OBEY!"

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Ivy's Point of View

I watched my father take a deep breath.

His hands pressed against the table. His muscles tensed. He was going to stand up. Going to walk over there and pour wine like a servant while his brother watched with that smug, satisfied smile.

Forty years of humiliation. Forty years of being treated like dirt beneath his own brother's feet. And he was about to add one more moment to the pile.

No.

Not today.

Just as he started to rise, I pressed my hand firmly on his shoulder and pushed him back down.

"Ivy, what are you—"

I didn't answer. I was already on my feet.

The hall fell silent as I stepped away from my seat. Every eye turned to follow me as I walked toward the head of the table. My footsteps echoed against the stone floor. Steady. Unhurried. The sound seemed impossibly loud in the sudden quiet.

I could feel my mother's panicked gaze on my back. Could sense Finn half-rising from his chair before someone pulled him back down. But I didn't turn around. Didn't hesitate.

I had originally planned to use Alpha Alaric's influence to help my father escape this pack. To arrange for his examination registration through Silvermoon territory. To give him time to prepare. To let him make the decision on his own terms.

But watching Alpha Roland throw that cup, watching him scream at my father like he was less than dirt, I realized something.

There was no time for careful planning. No time for subtle maneuvering. No time for patience.

My father needed to leave this place. Now. Today. Before his brother destroyed what little dignity he had left. Before another forty years passed in misery and servitude.

It was time for me to make the decision for him.

"Ivy!" My father's voice called out behind me. Worried. Confused. I heard his chair scrape against the floor as he tried to stand.

I glanced back and gave him a small shake of my head. Trust me. Please.

Then I kept walking.

The distance between my seat and the Alpha's seemed to stretch forever. I passed elder after elder, their wrinkled faces twisted with shock and confusion. I walked by Luna Camilla, whose painted smile had frozen into something ugly. I moved past Bastian, who watched me with narrowed, calculating eyes.

I could feel the weight of everyone's stares pressing down on me like physical force. Dozens of eyes. Dozens of judgments. The entire pack watching the Beta's worthless daughter march toward their Alpha like she had any right to be there.

And Seraphina. Her face had gone from smug to confused to angry in the span of seconds. Her perfect composure cracking like thin ice.

Alpha Roland watched me approach, his face still flushed with rage from his outburst. The shattered wine cup lay at his feet, ceramic shards scattered across the floor like broken teeth. Wine pooled between them, dark as old blood.

I stopped before him. Looked at the mess on the ground. Then reached out and picked up the wine jug from the table.

And poured.

The wine flowed into his cup, dark red and fragrant. I filled it to the brim, my hand perfectly steady. Not a single drop spilled. Then I set the jug back down with a soft clink.

Gasps rippled through the hall. Whispers broke out like wildfire.

"What do you think you're doing?" Seraphina shot to her feet, her chair clattering behind her. Her voice was shrill with indignation. "How dare you! You're not a servant! This is completely improper!"

I ignored her. Kept my eyes fixed on Alpha Roland.

"Cousin, have you lost your mind?" She moved toward me, her silk skirts swishing angrily. Her face was twisted with fury. "You can't just walk up here and pour wine like some common maid! Do you have no shame? No sense of propriety? Do you not understand your place?"

I still didn't look at her. She wasn't worth my attention. She had never been worth my attention.

Alpha Roland stared back at me with undisguised fury. His jaw was clenched so tight I could see the muscles jumping beneath his skin. His eyes had taken on that dangerous red tint that signaled his wolf was close to the surface. The air around him seemed to vibrate with barely contained violence.

"You insolent little whore," he snarled, his voice dripping with venom. "You think you can take your father's place? You're not even worthy of breathing the same air as me, let alone pouring my wine. You're nothing. Less than nothing."

He reached for the cup I had just filled. His intention was clear. He was going to smash it on the ground just like the last one. Another display of dominance. Another humiliation. Another reminder that he held all the power and we held none.

My hand shot out and grabbed his wrist.

The hall went dead silent. Even the servants stopped breathing.

No one touched the Alpha without permission. No one. It was an unspoken rule that every pack member learned from birth. To lay hands on an Alpha uninvited was an act of defiance. Of challenge. Of war.

And I had just done exactly that.

Alpha Roland's eyes widened. Shock flickered across his face before rage consumed it completely. His muscles bunched beneath my grip. I could feel the heat of his skin, the tremor of his wolf fighting to break free.

"You dare—"

"If you still care about your reputation," I said quietly, leaning in so only he could hear, "I suggest you send everyone else away. I have something important to discuss with you."

For a moment, he just stared at me. Like he couldn't quite believe what was happening. Like a mouse had suddenly turned around and bitten the cat. Like the world had stopped making sense.

"You're threatening me?" His voice was low. Dangerous. A growl building deep in his chest. "You, a worthless Beta's daughter, are threatening the Alpha of the Crescent Moon Pack? In my own hall? At my own table?"

I could feel his wolf pressing against his skin, fighting for control. The air around us grew heavy with his power. His dominance. The weight of his Alpha authority crashed down on me like a tidal wave, trying to force me to submit. To kneel. To beg.

He was seconds away from exploding. From shifting. From tearing me apart in front of everyone.

A year ago, I would have crumbled. Would have released his wrist and fallen to my knees, begging for forgiveness. Would have accepted whatever punishment he deemed fit.

But I wasn't that girl anymore.

I had been drugged, beaten, humiliated, and discarded. I had woken up under a bed while my husband rutted with my cousin. I had been thrown at a dying man like garbage. I had survived things this Alpha couldn't even imagine.

He didn't scare me. Not anymore.

I met his crimson gaze without flinching.

"Your daughter knocked me unconscious on my wedding night and climbed into Bastian's bed." My voice was barely above a whisper, but each word landed like a blade. "Did you really think I had no evidence? If you don't believe me, you're welcome to let everyone here stay and listen."

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Ivy's Point of View

Alpha Roland's eyes locked onto mine.

For a long moment, neither of us moved. Neither of us spoke. The tension between us was thick enough to cut with a knife.

I could see him calculating. Weighing his options. Trying to figure out if I was bluffing.

I wasn't.

Finally, he let out a slow breath through his nose. His jaw unclenched slightly. The crimson faded from his eyes, replaced by something colder. More dangerous.

Calculation.

"Everyone out," he said.

His voice wasn't loud. But it carried the weight of absolute authority.

Luna Camilla rose from her seat, confusion written across her face. "Husband, what's going on? Surely you don't believe this girl's—"

"I said out."

"Father, she's lying!" Seraphina rushed forward, grabbing Alpha Roland's arm. "Whatever she told you, it's not true! She's just jealous because I married Bastian and she got stuck with a dying man!"

"Don't listen to her nonsense," Bastian added smoothly. "She's clearly unstable. The stress of her situation has affected her mind."

Alpha Roland's hand slammed down on the table.

"SHUT UP!"

The roar echoed through the hall. Seraphina flinched back. Bastian went pale. Even Luna Camilla took a step away from her husband.

"When I give an order," Alpha Roland said through gritted teeth, "I expect it to be followed. Now get out. All of you. Guests, elders, servants. Everyone except the Calloway family."

The hall erupted into confused murmurs. People exchanged uncertain glances. No one wanted to leave. Everyone wanted to know what was happening.

But no one dared disobey the Alpha when he used that tone.

Slowly, reluctantly, the guests began filing out. Elders shuffled past with curious looks. Servants scurried away with their heads down. The whispers followed them out the door like a swarm of insects.

Within minutes, the great hall was nearly empty.

Only two families remained.

Alpha Roland and his wife and daughter on one side. My parents, my brother, and me on the other. Bastian lingered near the door, clearly uncertain whether the order applied to him.

"You too," Alpha Roland said without looking at him.

"But Father—" Seraphina started.

"He's not family yet. Out."

Bastian's jaw tightened, but he bowed and left. The heavy doors closed behind him with a boom that seemed to seal our fate.

Now it was just us.

Alpha Roland turned to face me fully. His expression had shifted from rage to something more controlled. More calculating.

"Speak," he commanded. "What do you want?"

I released his wrist and took a step back. "I want you to allow my father to participate in this year's kingdom examination."

Silence.

Then Alpha Roland laughed. It was not a pleasant sound.

"That's what this is about? You're trying to help your pathetic father escape his duties to the pack?"

"I'm trying to help my father live a life free from your tyranny."

"Watch your tongue, girl."

"Or what?" I met his glare without flinching. "You'll humiliate me? Insult me? Treat me like garbage? You've been doing that my entire life. It doesn't scare me anymore."

"Ivy." My father's voice was tight with worry. "Please, don't—"

"Stay out of this, Father." I didn't look away from Alpha Roland. "This is between me and him."

"You have no leverage here," Alpha Roland sneered. "Whatever lies you're planning to spread, no one will believe you over my daughter."

"Then let me make myself clear." I stepped closer to him. "Either you agree to let my father take the examination, or I will tell everyone what really happened on my wedding night. Every detail. Every word. Every disgusting thing your daughter did to steal my husband."

"SHE'S LYING!"

Seraphina lunged at me, her hand raised to strike.

My father moved to intercept her, but I held up my hand to stop him. "I can handle this."

Seraphina's palm came flying toward my face. Fast. Vicious. Aimed to leave a mark.

I didn't move. Didn't flinch. Just stared directly into her eyes.

"I'm still the future Luna of the Silvermoon Pack." My voice was ice. "Are you really going to hit me?"

Her hand stopped inches from my cheek.

"Think carefully, cousin." I tilted my head slightly. "Striking the wife of the Silvermoon heir would be an insult to the entire Ashford family. Do you really want to start a war between packs just to satisfy your temper?"

Seraphina's face contorted with fury. Her hand trembled in the air. But she didn't swing.

She couldn't.

After a long, tense moment, she lowered her arm and stepped back. Her eyes were burning with hatred, but there was fear there too.

Good.

She retreated to her father's side, clutching his arm. "Father, make her stop! She's spreading lies about me! You have to punish her!"

Alpha Roland stroked his daughter's hair soothingly. Then he turned his cold gaze back to me.

"You speak of evidence," he said flatly. "Where is it? Anyone can make accusations. Prove what you're saying is true."

Bastian's voice came from somewhere behind me. He must have snuck back in. "She's clearly delusional. Jealousy has rotted her brain. She can't accept that Seraphina and I are happy together, so she's making up stories to destroy us."

I laughed.

The sound echoed through the empty hall. Bright. Sharp. Slightly unhinged.

Everyone stared at me like I had lost my mind.

Maybe I had. But I didn't care anymore.

"You want proof?" I smiled. "Fine. Let me show you something."

I closed my eyes for a moment. Took a deep breath. And when I opened my mouth again, it wasn't my voice that came out.

It was Seraphina's.

"Bastian... stop talking and hurry up. I've waited long enough."

The hall went dead silent.

I continued, shifting seamlessly to Bastian's deeper tones. "Are you sure you want to be with me? There's no turning back after tonight, Sera."

My mother gasped. My father's face went white.

Back to Seraphina's voice. "I've been planning this for so long. You have no idea how much I wanted you, Bastian. Not that vegetable brother of yours."

Bastian's confident expression crumbled. His face drained of all color.

Seraphina looked like she might faint.

I kept going. Bastian's voice again, dripping with arrogance. "Dominic won't last much longer anyway. The healers give him weeks at best. And when he's gone, the heir position falls to me."

Then Seraphina. Breathless. Theatrical. "She never deserved you. A Beta's daughter... pathetic... you were always meant to be mine..."

I stopped.

The silence that followed was deafening.

Everyone was staring at me with wide eyes. My parents. Finn. Alpha Roland. Luna Camilla.

No one had ever known about this ability. I had kept it hidden my entire life, just like my shaman powers. Another secret weapon, saved for exactly the right moment.

And this was that moment.

"That's... that's impossible," Seraphina stammered. Her face was bright red. "You're making it up! You're putting words in our mouths!"

I smiled sweetly at her. "Am I? Then how do I know exactly what you said? How do I know the pet names you used? The promises you made? The way you moaned his name while I lay under the bed, listening to every disgusting sound?"

Seraphina's mouth opened and closed. No words came out.

Bastian still hadn't moved. He stood frozen like a statue, his eyes wide with shock and horror.

I turned back to Alpha Roland.

"That's my evidence," I said calmly. "I was there. I heard everything. And unless you want me to perform this little show for every pack in the kingdom, you will give my father what I'm asking for."

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Ivy's Point of View

Alpha Roland stood in silence.

His jaw was tight. His hands clenched at his sides. I could see the war raging behind his eyes. Pride versus survival. Arrogance versus fear.

He wanted to refuse. Wanted to put me in my place. Wanted to remind me that he was the Alpha and I was nothing but a Beta's daughter who had gotten too bold for her own good.

But he couldn't.

Because I had his daughter's secrets. And secrets, in the right hands, were more dangerous than any weapon.

"Well?" I pressed. "Do you agree to let my father participate in the kingdom examination or not?"

The silence stretched. Luna Camilla wrung her hands nervously. Seraphina clung to her father's arm, her face still flushed with humiliation. Bastian had retreated to the shadows, trying to make himself invisible.

Finally, Alpha Roland spoke.

"Fine."

One word. Spat out like poison.

"Say it clearly," I said. "I want everyone in this room to hear it."

His eyes flashed with fury. But he swallowed his pride and forced the words out.

"I agree to let Edwin participate in this year's kingdom examination. He has my permission to register and compete."

Relief flooded through me, but I kept my expression neutral. Showing weakness now would be a mistake.

"Thank you, Alpha Roland." I bowed my head slightly. Just enough to be polite. Not enough to be submissive. "I'm glad we could come to an understanding."

Having his formal permission would make everything easier. The registration process required an Alpha's approval for any pack member to participate. Without it, my father would have been blocked at every turn.

And now Alpha Roland couldn't take it back. Not with the leverage I held over him. Unless I died, that permission would stand.

I turned to my family. "We're leaving."

My father looked stunned. My mother was still processing what had just happened. Finn was practically bouncing with excitement, his eyes shining with admiration.

We walked out of the great hall together. I didn't look back. Didn't give Alpha Roland or his family the satisfaction of seeing any uncertainty on my face.

The moment we were outside, Finn grabbed my arm.

"Sister, that was incredible!" He was grinning from ear to ear. "How did you do that? The voice thing? You sounded exactly like them! It was amazing!"

"It's just a talent I have." I allowed myself a small smile. "I've always been able to mimic voices. I just never had a reason to use it before."

"You have to teach me! Can you do anyone? Can you do Father? Can you do me?"

"Finn, calm down." But I was laughing now. His enthusiasm was infectious.

My father caught up to us, his expression serious. "Ivy, what you did in there was incredibly dangerous. You threatened an Alpha in his own hall. If he had decided to attack you instead of negotiate..."

"But he didn't."

"He could have!" Father ran a hand through his hair. "I thought you were going to wait. Use Alpha Alaric's connections to help me register quietly. That was the plan."

"Plans change." I stopped walking and turned to face him. "Father, did you see what he did in there? He ordered you to pour wine like a servant. In front of everyone. He threw a cup at your feet and screamed at you like you were a dog."

Father's jaw tightened. The humiliation was still fresh.

"Relying on others takes time," I continued. "And I realized today that we don't have time. Alpha Roland will keep pushing. Keep humiliating you. Keep grinding you down until there's nothing left." I took his hands in mine. "I couldn't watch that happen anymore."

"But going against him directly—"

"Was necessary." I squeezed his hands. "He needed to feel what it's like to lose for once. To have someone stand up to him and refuse to back down. Even if it was just his worthless niece."

Father was quiet for a long moment. Then he pulled me into a tight embrace.

"You're not worthless," he murmured into my hair. "You never were. I'm sorry I couldn't protect you better."

"You did your best." I hugged him back. "And now it's my turn to protect this family."

We walked back to my parents' residence together. The afternoon sun was beginning to fade, casting long shadows across the path.

"The examination is in three months," I said as we entered the house. "That should give you plenty of time to prepare."

Father nodded slowly. "It's been years since I studied for anything like this."

"You'll do fine. You're the smartest person I know." I turned to Finn. "And you, little brother. Next year, when you turn sixteen, you'll be old enough to take the examination too."

Finn's eyes went wide. "Really?"

"Really. So I want you to study hard this year. Learn everything Father teaches you. If both of you can secure positions in the royal court..." I smiled at the thought. "Our family will never have to bow to Alpha Roland again."

"I'll study every day!" Finn declared. "I'll be the best student Father has ever had!"

"That's the spirit."

My mother emerged from the kitchen with tea and snacks. Her eyes were still red from earlier, but she was smiling now. A real smile, not the forced one she wore in public.

"Stay for dinner at least," she pleaded. "It's been so long since we've eaten together as a family."

I glanced out the window. The sun was getting lower.

"I can't, Mother. I need to return to the Silvermoon Pack before dark. But I promise I'll visit again soon."

She looked disappointed but nodded. "Take care of yourself, my darling. And be careful around those people."

"I will."

I hugged each of them one more time. Held on a little longer than necessary. Then I gathered my guards and Nell and headed for the carriage.

The journey back to the Silvermoon Pack took several hours. By the time we arrived, the sky had turned deep purple and the first stars were beginning to appear.

I was exhausted. The confrontation with Alpha Roland had drained me more than I wanted to admit. All I wanted was to collapse into bed and sleep for a week.

Nell helped me change into my nightclothes while I went through the motions mechanically. Brush hair. Wash face. Remove jewelry. Each action automatic, requiring no thought.

Finally, I dismissed her for the night and entered the master bedroom.

Dominic lay exactly where I had left him. Still as always. Peaceful as always.

But something was different tonight.

Marcus and Theo had recently bathed him. His dark hair was still slightly damp, brushed back from his face. His skin looked clean and fresh. And there was a faint scent clinging to him. Something herbal. Pleasant.

I climbed into bed beside him and pulled the covers over us both.

"You missed quite a day," I murmured, settling into the pillows.

No response. Of course.

"I went back to my pack for the return banquet. Seraphina tried to humiliate me by locking me outside the gates. Can you believe that?" I laughed softly. "But I got the last laugh. I made her mother give me the Moonfire Pendant. You should have seen Luna Camilla's face."

Silence. Just his steady breathing beside me.

"Then Alpha Roland tried to humiliate my father in front of everyone. Made him pour wine like a servant." My voice hardened at the memory. "So I threatened him. Used some evidence I had against Seraphina. Now my father can finally take the kingdom examination."

I turned on my side to face Dominic's profile.

"I know you can't hear me. But it feels nice to talk to someone." I reached out and touched his hand. His skin was warm. Alive. "Everyone else wants something from me. But you... you just listen."

His chest rose and fell in that slow, mechanical rhythm.

"Three months," I whispered. "That's how long before I can heal you completely. Just hold on until then. Please."

No response.

But somehow, the silence felt less lonely than before.

I closed my eyes, still holding his hand.

And drifted off to sleep.