

Exchanging Vows: The Swapped Wife Is a Top Shaman

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Ivy's Point of View

I moved to the small writing desk by the window and pulled out paper and ink.

"I'll prepare a prescription," I said. "The medicines will stabilize his condition between my visits."

Physician Harlow stepped closer, curiosity overcoming his skepticism. Edmund stood nearby, watching my every movement with desperate hope.

I dipped the brush in ink and began to write.

Moonpetal root. Three parts.

Dried silvergrass. Two parts.

Crushed amber seed. One part.

Wolfsbane extract. Half a part.

Honeyed ginger. Four parts.

I continued down the page. Each ingredient was common. Available in any decent apothecary. Nothing rare or expensive. Nothing that would draw unwanted attention.

But the combinations were anything but ordinary.

Physician Harlow leaned over my shoulder, reading as I wrote. His breath caught.

"This is... this is highly unusual." His voice was strained. "Moonpetal root and wolfsbane extract together? They're supposed to cancel each other out. Every medical text says so."

"Every medical text is wrong."

"But the interactions—"

"Will be exactly what the professor needs." I added another line to the prescription. "Moonpetal root opens the spiritual pathways. Wolfsbane extract, in small doses, cleanses them of impurities. Together, they create a purifying effect that neither can achieve alone."

Physician Harlow shook his head in disbelief. "I've never heard of such a thing."

"That's because you learned from books written by people who had forgotten the old ways." I finished the prescription and set down my brush. "These combinations are ancient. Older than the academies. Older than the kingdom itself."

I handed the paper to Edmund.

"Give this to your apothecary. Have them prepare the mixture exactly as written. Do not let them substitute any ingredients, no matter how similar they think alternatives might be."

Edmund took the prescription with trembling hands. "How often should he take it?"

"Three times daily. Morning, noon, and evening. Always with warm water, never cold." I began packing my supplies. "The medicine will ease his symptoms and slow the progression of his illness. But it cannot cure him on its own."

"What else does he need?"

"Me." I met his eyes. "I will return once a week to perform direct treatments. The spiritual damage requires hands-on healing that no medicine can provide."

"Once a week," Edmund repeated. "For how long?"

"A month. Perhaps six weeks." I slung my bag over my shoulder. "By then, he should be well enough to leave his bed. After two months, he should be fully recovered."

Edmund's eyes glistened with unshed tears. "You truly believe this will work?"

"I don't believe. I know."

He grabbed my hand suddenly. Clasped it between both of his own.

"Thank you." His voice cracked. "Whatever you want in return, I swear I'll provide it. You have my word as the Aldwin heir."

"We'll discuss payment when your father is well." I gently withdrew my hand. "For now, focus on following my instructions precisely."

We made our way back through the cottage. The professor had fallen into a light sleep, his breathing slightly easier than before. The fresh air from the open windows was already making a difference.

Edmund insisted on escorting us out personally.

The walk back through the estate felt shorter than before. Perhaps because I was no longer studying every detail. Perhaps because a weight had lifted from my shoulders.

I could save him. I was certain of it now.

At the main gate, Edmund stopped and turned to face me.

"Physician Lin." He hesitated. "I realize I don't know how to reach you. If something happens between your visits, if my father's condition changes, how can I contact you?"

A reasonable question. One I had anticipated.

"I am a traveling physician," I said carefully. "I have no fixed residence. No permanent address."

Edmund's face fell. "Then how—"

"However." I held up a hand. "There is a shop in the main market district of the Silvermoon Pack. It's called the Azure Leaf. If you need to reach me urgently, send a message there. The proprietor will make sure it reaches me."

"The Azure Leaf," Edmund repeated, committing it to memory. "In the Silvermoon Pack's market district."

"Correct. The shop owner is... an associate of mine. Any message left with them will find its way to me within a day."

"Thank you." Edmund bowed deeply. "Thank you for everything, Physician Lin. I look forward to your next visit."

I nodded and led my group through the gate.

We didn't speak until we were well away from the estate. Until the grand walls had disappeared behind the trees and we were alone on the forest road.

"That went well," Ash said finally.

"Better than expected." I pulled off my half-mask and took a deep breath of fresh air. "The professor's condition is serious, but not beyond saving. With proper treatment, he should recover fully."

"And then we'll have a powerful ally," Stone observed.

"Exactly."

Nell hurried to walk beside me. "Young Madam, the shop you mentioned. The Azure Leaf. That's the property you asked me to reclaim, isn't it?"

"It is. I hope the previous tenant was cooperative?"

"Very cooperative." Nell smiled. "Once we offered him compensation, he was happy to end his lease early. He moved out three days ago."

"Excellent."

We made our way directly to the shop.

It was located on a busy street in the market district. Not the most prestigious location, but respectable enough. The building was two stories tall with large windows facing the street. A faded sign hung above the door, the previous name already removed.

The interior was dusty and cluttered. The former tenant had been a cloth merchant, and bolts of fabric still lined some of the shelves. But he had left behind the display cases. The counters. The basic furniture that would cost a fortune to replace.

"It needs work," Ash observed.

"It needs transformation." I walked through the space, already envisioning the changes. "This will become a medicine shop. An apothecary. The base of operations for Physician Lin."

"An actual shop?" Nell looked around with new eyes. "You want to sell medicines?"

"I want a legitimate front." I ran my hand along the dusty counter. "Anyone who comes looking for the miracle doctor will find a respectable establishment. Shelves stocked with herbs and remedies. A proprietor who can take messages and arrange appointments."

"And behind the scenes?" Ash asked.

"Behind the scenes, we continue our real work." I turned to face them all. "Saving Dominic. Building allies. Preparing for whatever comes next."

I spent the rest of the afternoon organizing the renovation.

Workers were hired to clean the space from top to bottom. Every surface was scrubbed. Every window was polished until it gleamed. The cloth merchant's leftover goods were sold off to fund the transformation.

I sketched designs for new shelving. Cabinets to hold medicinal herbs. A consultation room in the back where I could meet with patients privately. Living quarters upstairs for whoever would manage the shop day-to-day.

By evening, the shop was transformed.

Fresh paint covered the walls. New signs hung in the windows. The shelves were still empty, waiting to be filled with inventory, but the bones of the apothecary were clear.

I stood in the center of the main room, surveying my work.

"This is it," I said quietly. "This shop will be my face to the world. Anyone who wants to find Physician Lin will come here. Anyone who needs a miracle will know where to look."

Ash stepped up beside me. "It's a good plan, Young Madam."

"It's a necessary plan." I turned toward the door. "Now let's go home. I have a husband to check on."

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Ivy's Point of View

The carriage ride back to the Silvermoon Pack was quiet at first.

I could see the questions on their faces. The confusion. They were loyal, but they didn't fully understand my plan yet.

"You're wondering why I'm going through all this trouble," I said.

Ash nodded slowly. "The shop. The disguise. The elaborate deception. It seems... complicated."

"It is complicated. But necessary." I leaned back against the carriage seat. "Let me explain."

They all leaned in, listening intently.

"Right now, Dominic is dying. Everyone in the pack knows it. The physicians have declared him beyond saving. Margot and Vivienne and Bastian are all circling like vultures, waiting for him to take his last breath."

"We know this, Young Madam," Stone said.

"What you don't know is how dangerous it would be for me to heal him openly." I paused, letting the words sink in. "If I suddenly walked into his room and cured him with shaman techniques, what do you think would happen?"

Nell's eyes widened. "People would ask questions."

"Exactly. They would want to know how I did it. Where I learned such skills. Why I had hidden them." I shook my head. "Within days, my secret would be exposed. And once people know I'm a top shaman..."

"They would use you," Ash finished grimly. "Just like your uncle would have."

"Worse. Margot would see me as a threat. Someone who could undo all her schemes with a wave of my hand." I met their eyes one by one. "She would have me killed before I could save Dominic. Or she would find a way to control me. Use me for her own purposes."

"So the miracle doctor persona..." Blade began.

"Is my shield." I nodded. "If a mysterious traveling physician appears and cures Dominic, no one will connect it to me. The credit goes to Physician Lin, a wandering healer with no ties to any pack. And Ivy Calloway remains exactly what everyone believes her to be. A weak, ordinary Beta's daughter with no special abilities."

Understanding dawned on their faces.

"It's brilliant," Wolf said quietly.

"It's survival." I looked out the window at the passing trees. "The noble families of this pack are not harmonious. Everyone is watching the heir position. Bastian wants it. Margot wants it for him. Half the elders have already chosen sides. One wrong move, one moment of carelessness, and Dominic could be killed before I have a chance to save him."

"We understand now," Ash said. "The deception protects both you and the Young Master."

"Exactly."

Silence fell for a moment. Then Stone spoke up.

"Young Madam, what happens when people come to the shop looking for the miracle doctor? If word spreads about Professor Aldwin's recovery, there will be others seeking treatment."

A good question. I had been thinking about it.

"We'll establish a schedule," I said. "Physician Lin will be available for consultation one day per week. No more. And house calls will be limited to four days per month."

"That's very restricted," Nell observed.

"It has to be. I can't spend all my time playing miracle doctor. My primary focus is Dominic." I tapped my fingers against my knee. "Besides, scarcity creates value. If Physician Lin were available every day, people would take him for granted. But if he's rare, mysterious, only appearing occasionally... that builds reputation."

"And makes people desperate for his services," Ash added with a knowing look.

"Desperate people pay well. Desperate people become loyal allies." I smiled slightly. "Professor Aldwin's son has already promised me anything I want. Imagine having a dozen such promises. A hundred."

The carriage rolled on.

By the time we reached the Silvermoon estate, the sun had begun to set. Orange and pink streaked across the sky, painting the clouds in brilliant colors.

We passed through the main gate and made our way toward my residence. The grounds were quiet at this hour. Most people were preparing for dinner.

But not everyone.

I spotted her before she spotted me. Seraphina. Strolling through the gardens as if she owned them. Her silk dress caught the evening light. Her hair was arranged in an elaborate style that must have taken hours.

She turned at the sound of our approach. Her eyes narrowed.

"Well, well." She walked toward us, her lips curving into a mocking smile. "Look who finally decided to come home."

I kept walking. "Seraphina."

"Out all day again, I see." She fell into step beside me, uninvited. "Early morning until evening. What could possibly keep you so busy?"

"Nothing that concerns you."

"Oh, but it does concern me." Her voice dripped with false sweetness. "As a member of this family, I have a responsibility to uphold our reputation. And your behavior lately has been... questionable."

I stopped walking. Turned to face her.

"Questionable?"

"A woman running around from dawn to dusk. No chaperone except servants. Coming and going as she pleases." Seraphina clicked her tongue disapprovingly. "It's not proper for a Luna-to-be. People will talk. They'll wonder what you're really doing out there."

"Let them wonder."

"You should learn to behave appropriately." Her smile sharpened. "Stay home. Tend to your dying husband. Act like a respectable wife instead of a wandering vagabond."

I stared at her for a long moment.

Then I laughed.

"You know what, Seraphina?" I stepped closer, dropping my voice. "If my behavior bothers you so much, there's an easy solution."

"What solution?"

"We can swap back." I tilted my head, watching her expression carefully. "You can have your precious Dominic. Tend to him day and night. Watch him waste away while you sit by his bedside like a proper wife."

Her face went pale.

"And I'll take Bastian." I smiled sweetly. "I hear he's still recovering from the bond-breaking. Maybe I should go check on him. Bring him some soup. Fluff his pillows. Since you're so worried about proper wifely behavior and all."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I?" I leaned in closer. "Don't forget, cousin. Dominic is still the heir. Still the firstborn son. Still worth more than your precious Bastian in the eyes of the pack. I'd be trading down, not up."

Seraphina's hands clenched into fists at her sides. Her face had gone from pale to bright red.

"You're disgusting," she hissed.

"And you're in my way." I brushed past her without another word. "Have a lovely evening."

I could feel her glare burning into my back as I walked away. Heard her furious footsteps as she stormed off in the opposite direction.

Good, I thought. *Stay angry. Stay distracted. Don't look too closely at what I'm really doing.*

I reached my residence and headed straight for the private bathing chamber.

"Nell," I called. "Prepare the large tub. And bring the herbs we purchased this afternoon."

"Yes, Young Madam."

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Ivy's Point of View

Ten o'clock at night.

The pack home had fallen silent. Lights extinguished one by one across the estate like stars winking out of existence. Servants retired to their quarters, exhausted from the day's labors. Guards settled into their posts for the long night ahead, their eyes heavy with the promise of uneventful hours.

No one was paying attention to the heir's residence.

Perfect.

Inside my chambers, the real work began.

Nell and the other maids worked quickly and quietly, moving with practiced efficiency. They had been preparing since sunset, following my detailed instructions to the letter. Grinding herbs into fine powder with mortar and pestle. Boiling water in massive kettles over the fire until steam filled the room. Measuring ingredients with careful precision, ensuring each proportion was exactly as I had specified.

One wrong measurement could ruin everything. They understood the stakes.

The medicinal bath was ready.

Ash and Stone carried in bucket after bucket of steaming water, their muscles straining under the weight. They filled the large wooden tub that sat in the center of the bathing chamber until it was nearly overflowing. The liquid turned murky green as Nell added the prepared medicines, swirling them through the water with a wooden paddle. Steam rose from the surface in thick clouds, carrying the sharp scent of healing herbs throughout the room. The fragrance was intense. Almost overwhelming. Moonpetal and silverleaf and a dozen other ingredients blending into something ancient and powerful.

"It's time," I said.

The guards moved to the bed where Dominic lay. They worked efficiently, stripping away his sleeping clothes with the detached professionalism of soldiers performing a duty. No hesitation. No awkwardness. Just the focused determination of men completing an important mission.

I had seen Dominic's body before, of course. But always covered. Always hidden beneath blankets and robes. Always protected from scrutiny.

Now, bare and exposed, the extent of his deterioration was painfully clear.

He had lost weight. Too much weight. His muscles had wasted despite Marcus and Theo's daily massage regimen. His skin was pale as paper, stretched tight over prominent bones that shouldn't have been visible. His ribs stood out like the bars of a cage. His collarbone jutted sharply beneath his throat.

Six months of sabotaged treatments had taken their toll. Six months of a physician slowly killing him while everyone believed he was trying to save him.

The sight made my heart ache with anger and determination.

Ash and Stone lifted him carefully and lowered him into the medicinal bath. The moment his body touched the water, he went completely limp. Like a puppet with its strings cut. His head lolled to the side. His arms floated uselessly on the surface. His legs folded beneath him without resistance.

No tension. No reaction. Nothing that indicated any awareness of what was happening to him.

"Prop him up," I ordered. "Don't let his head go under."

Stone positioned himself behind the tub, his strong hands keeping Dominic's head and shoulders above the waterline. Ash stepped back to give me room to work, taking up a guard position near the door.

I knelt beside the tub and rolled up my sleeves, exposing my arms to the elbow.

"Everyone out except Stone," I said. "Guard the doors. Make sure no one enters under any circumstances. I don't care if the Alpha himself comes knocking. No one gets in until I say so."

They obeyed without question. The door closed softly behind them.

When only Stone remained, I closed my eyes and began to chant.

The words came from deep within me. Ancient syllables that resonated with power. They vibrated in my chest like a second heartbeat, spread through my limbs like liquid fire, gathered in my palms until I could feel them burning against my skin.

I placed my hands on Dominic's chest, just above his heart. His skin was warm from the medicinal water. His heartbeat was faint but steady beneath my fingers.

The spiritual energy flowed.

Golden light spread from my fingertips, seeping through his skin like water into parched earth. I could feel it moving through him. Through his blood. Through his organs. Through the damaged pathways that connected his body to his soul.

I pushed deeper. Sent my awareness into the very core of his being. Let myself sink into the spiritual landscape of his broken body.

And I saw the damage.

The blood clots in his brain pulsed with dark, stagnant energy. Masses of congealed blood blocking vital pathways. Pressing against delicate tissue. Slowly suffocating his consciousness like hands around a throat.

The bone fragments were worse. Sharp splinters of skull lodged deep in the soft tissue of his brain. Each one a tiny knife, cutting and tearing with every heartbeat. Each one pushing deeper with every passing day.

Stone watched me work with growing concern. I could feel his nervous energy even with my eyes closed.

"Young Madam," he said hesitantly. "Are you certain this is safe? Perhaps we should inform Alpha Alaric. If something goes wrong—"

"If something goes wrong, Alpha Alaric can't help." I kept my hands steady on Dominic's chest, never breaking my concentration. "He's not a shaman. He wouldn't understand what he was seeing."

"But surely—"

"Do you want to wake the entire pack?" I opened my eyes and fixed Stone with a hard stare. "Do you want Margot to know that I'm treating Dominic? That he might actually recover?"

Stone's mouth snapped shut.

"Think about it." I returned my attention to my patient, my hands resuming their gentle glow. "The moment word gets out that Dominic is improving, what happens? Margot panics. Vivienne schemes. Bastian takes action."

"Action?"

I continued working as I spoke, my voice cold and hard.

"That physician the king sent. Aldric." I spat the name like a curse. "His treatments weren't designed to heal Dominic. They were designed to kill him. Slowly. Methodically. Every single week, he pushed those bone fragments deeper into the brain tissue. Let the blood clots grow instead of dissolving them. Made the damage worse while pretending to make it better."

Stone's eyes widened with horror.

"Someone has been murdering the heir right under everyone's noses," I continued, my voice dropping to barely above a whisper. "Using medicine as a weapon. Disguising assassination as care. And they've been doing it for six months."

The words hung in the air like poison.

Stone stared at me, his face pale with shock. His grip on Dominic tightened protectively, as if he could shield the unconscious man from threats that had already done their damage.

"Who would do such a thing?" His voice was barely a whisper.

"Who benefits most from Dominic's death?" I met his eyes steadily. "Who has been waiting for him to die so they can seize his position?"

The answer was obvious. We both knew it.

I turned back to my work, letting the horrifying truth sink in.

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Ivy's Point of View

The silence that followed my words was deafening.

I wanted only Stone to be inside, while the rest guard the doors. But I realized that there is much work to be done. So, the rest of the guards came in to assist me.

Ash stared at me with wide eyes. Stone's grip on Dominic tightened protectively. Even Nell, who had seen much in her years of service, looked pale with shock.

"Someone tried to murder the heir," Ash said slowly. "Deliberately. Using a physician as the weapon."

"Yes."

"And they've been doing it for six months."

"Yes."

"Right under the Alpha's nose."

"Yes."

The guards exchanged dark looks. I could see the anger building behind their eyes. The outrage. The protective fury that warriors felt when one of their own was threatened.

No one questioned my treatment methods after that.

The medicinal bath continued. Dominic's body absorbed the herbs through his skin, strengthening his weakened systems from the outside while I worked from within.

I placed my hands on his temples. Closed my eyes. Sent my awareness deeper into the damaged tissue of his brain.

The clots were stubborn. Resistant. They clung to his neural pathways like parasites, feeding on the stagnant blood that had pooled there for months.

I pushed harder. Channeled more energy. Wrapped the largest clot in golden light and began to draw it out.

"Young Madam!"

Shadow's voice cut through my concentration. I didn't stop working.

"What is it?"

"His eyelid! I saw it move!"

Everyone's gaze snapped to Dominic's face. They stared intently, barely breathing, waiting for another sign.

Nothing happened.

His face remained slack. His eyes stayed closed. His expression didn't change.

"I swear I saw it," Shadow insisted. "Just a twitch. A tiny movement."

"You might have imagined it," Stone said doubtfully.

"I didn't imagine it!"

"Quiet." I kept my hands steady on Dominic's temples. "Both of you. Let me work."

They fell silent immediately.

I refocused on the clot. Pulled harder. The dark mass resisted for a moment longer, then began to move.

Slowly, agonizingly slowly, it traveled through the damaged pathways. Following the channels I had created with my energy. Moving toward the surface.

I shifted my hands to the back of his skull. Pressed down firmly.

Black blood seeped from his scalp.

Nell gasped. The guards made sounds of alarm.

"Don't panic." I kept my voice calm even as more dark fluid emerged. "This is supposed to happen."

"But... but that's blood..."

"Old blood. Clotted blood that's been trapped in his brain for months." I continued guiding the extraction, letting the contaminated fluid drain away. "This is what's been keeping him unconscious. These clots have blocked his brain's ability to function properly."

The black blood dripped down his neck, staining the medicinal water. It was thick. Sluggish. More like tar than liquid.

"Every week, the physician pushed these deeper," I explained as I worked. "Made them worse instead of better. That's why Dominic never improved. That's why he kept getting closer to death."

"But now you're removing them," Ash said slowly.

"One at a time. It's delicate work. Too fast and I could damage his brain permanently." I pressed down again, and another small clot emerged. "But if I can clear all of these out over the next few months..."

"He'll wake up," Shadow breathed.

"There's a very good chance, yes."

The atmosphere in the room shifted. The fear and uncertainty that had lingered since we began was replaced by something else.

Hope.

I could see it on their faces. In their eyes. The realization that their Young Master might actually survive. Might actually recover. Might actually return to them.

"The goddess has blessed us," Stone murmured. "To have you as our future Luna..."

"It's not the goddess." I extracted another small clot. "It's training. Study. Practice. And a great deal of luck."

"Even so." Ash dropped to one knee beside the tub. "We are honored to serve you, Young Madam. More honored than we ever knew."

The others followed suit. Even Nell bowed her head.

I was touched by their devotion. But this wasn't the time for ceremony.

"Get up. All of you." I withdrew my hands from Dominic's head. "The treatment is finished for tonight. We need to move quickly now."

They rose immediately.

"Lift him out. Dry him thoroughly but gently. Don't rub too hard on his scalp." I stepped back to give them room. "Dress him in clean clothes and put him back in bed."

Ash and Stone worked efficiently. They handled Dominic's unconscious body with surprising tenderness, patting him dry with soft cloths, careful to avoid the places where the black blood had emerged.

"His color looks better," Nell observed. "Less gray."

She was right. There was a faint flush to Dominic's cheeks that hadn't been there before. His breathing seemed slightly deeper. Slightly stronger.

Small changes. Incremental improvements. But progress nonetheless.

"Now clean everything," I ordered. "The tub. The floor. Every cloth and towel. I don't want a single trace of this treatment left behind."

"What about the water?" Stone gestured at the murky liquid in the tub. "It's full of blood."

"Dump it in the garden behind the residence. Tell anyone who asks that we were disposing of old medicine." I rubbed my temples, fighting exhaustion. "Make sure no one sees the color."

They set to work immediately. Within an hour, the bathing chamber was spotless. Every trace of the treatment had been erased.

I collapsed into a chair, utterly drained.

"You need rest, Young Madam," Nell said worriedly.

"I know." I forced myself to stand. "Help me to bed."

I slept beside Dominic that night, my hand resting on his chest. Feeling the steady beat of his heart beneath my palm.

One treatment down, I thought drowsily. *Many more to go.*

The next morning came too quickly.

I dragged myself out of bed, still exhausted from the previous night's work. But I had commitments to keep. Appearances to maintain.

Luna Helena was expecting me for breakfast.

I dressed carefully. Applied powder to hide the dark circles under my eyes. Arranged my hair to look presentable.

Then I made my way to Luna Helena's residence.

She greeted me warmly, as always. We settled into our usual seats at the breakfast table. Servants brought out the morning meal.

I took my first bite.

And froze.

There it was again. That familiar bitterness hidden beneath the other flavors. The subtle medicinal undertone that most people would never notice.

Silvervine root.

The same fertility-destroying herb I had tasted before.

I kept my expression neutral. Continued eating. But my mind was racing.

"Luna Helena," I said casually. "I've been curious about something."

"What is it, dear?"

"Who prepares our meals? The breakfast, specifically."

Luna Helena set down her tea cup. "Everything comes from the main kitchen. There's a dedicated team that prepares food exclusively for the Alpha family members."

"A dedicated team?"

"Yes. They handle all meals for Alaric, myself, Dominic's residence, and Bastian's residence." She tilted her head curiously. "Why do you ask? Is something wrong with the food?"

I hesitated.

The poison was definitely present. And if the kitchen served everyone in the Alpha family...

Who is the target?

It couldn't be Alpha Alaric. He was already past the age where fertility mattered. Luna Helena was the same.

"Ivy?" Luna Helena's voice pulled me back. "Is something wrong?"

I forced a smile onto my face.

"No, nothing. I was just curious about how the household operates." I took another bite of my food. "Everything is delicious."

Luna Helena seemed satisfied with the answer. She returned to her meal, chatting about upcoming pack events and social obligations.

But I wasn't listening.

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Ivy's Point of View

The realization hit me like a bucket of cold water.

Luna Helena only had one son. Dominic.

If I became infertile, there would be no children from Dominic's bloodline. No heirs to continue Luna Helena's legacy. No grandchildren for her to dote on.

The silvervine root wasn't just about preventing pregnancy. It was about ending a family line entirely.

Someone wants to make sure Dominic's branch dies with him.

Even if I healed Dominic, even if he woke up and reclaimed his position, what good would it do if I couldn't bear his children? The heir title would eventually pass to Bastian's line anyway. Just delayed by a generation.

It was a long game. A patient scheme.

And I had almost fallen for it.

I pushed away my breakfast plate, my appetite gone.

"Are you feeling alright, dear?" Luna Helena looked concerned. "You've barely eaten."

"Just tired." I forced a smile. "The bond-breaking ceremony took more out of me than I realized."

"You should rest more. Don't push yourself too hard."

If only she knew what I was really doing at night.

I excused myself and returned to my residence with new urgency.

"Ash," I called the moment I walked through the door. "I need to speak with all of you."

The guards assembled quickly. Nell joined them, sensing the seriousness in my tone.

"From now on, I want extra security around this residence," I said. "No one enters the kitchen without supervision. All food deliveries are to be inspected. Nothing gets to my plate without being checked first."

"Has something happened, Young Madam?" Stone asked.

"Someone is tampering with the Alpha family's meals." I didn't elaborate further. "I want every precaution taken. Understood?"

"Understood."

Over the next few days, I focused on Dominic's recovery.

The nightly treatments continued. Each session drained me completely, but the progress was undeniable. More clots dissolved. More bone fragments shifted. The color slowly returned to his cheeks.

But he was still unconscious. Still trapped in that endless sleep.

I needed to do more. Push harder.

And I needed people to see him.

"I want a wheelchair," I told Nell one morning. "Something comfortable. With good wheels."

She looked confused. "A wheelchair, Young Madam?"

"For Dominic." I glanced at his sleeping form. "He's been confined to that bed for six months. It's not good for his body or his spirit."

"But he's unconscious..."

"His body still needs movement. Fresh air. Sunlight." I met her eyes. "And the pack needs to remember that their heir is still alive."

Nell nodded slowly. "I'll find one."

By afternoon, a sturdy wooden wheelchair sat beside Dominic's bed. It had been crafted for a noble who had broken his leg years ago. Well-made. Comfortable. Perfect.

Ash and Stone carefully lifted Dominic from the bed and settled him into the chair. His head lolled to one side. His arms hung limply. But he was upright. Dressed in proper clothes. Looking almost like himself.

"Let's go for a walk," I said.

We made quite a procession. Me pushing the wheelchair. Four guards flanking us. Nell following behind with blankets and water.

The moment we stepped outside, the staring began.

Servants stopped in their tracks. Guards turned to gape. Nobles passing through the grounds froze mid-stride.

No one had seen Dominic outside his room in half a year. Most had probably assumed he was already dead, just waiting for his heart to stop beating.

But here he was. Out in the sunlight. Being wheeled through the gardens like any other recovering patient.

Whispers spread like wildfire.

"Is that the heir?"

"He's alive!"

"I thought he was on death's door..."

"Look at his wife. She's actually taking care of him."

I kept my expression serene. Pushed the wheelchair at a leisurely pace. Let everyone see us. Let them talk.

Let them remember that Dominic Ashford still exists.

We had circled the main garden twice when a messenger approached.

"Young Madam." He bowed hastily. "Alpha Alaric requests your presence in the council hall. Immediately."

My stomach tightened.

"Did he say why?"

"No, Young Madam. Only that it's urgent. All family members are required to attend."

All family members. This is it.

I knew what was coming. Had been expecting it since the day Alpha Alaric promised to make a decision about the succession.

"Very well." I adjusted my grip on the wheelchair handles. "I'll bring my husband with me."

The messenger blinked. "Young Madam?"

"He's a family member, isn't he?" I smiled sweetly. "Lead the way."

The council hall was packed.

Elders lined the walls in their formal robes. Pack officials stood at attention. Servants hovered near the doors, ready to serve.

At the center of the room sat Alpha Alaric in his high-backed chair. Luna Helena stood beside him, her face drawn with tension. Margot and Vivienne flanked the other side, barely containing their excitement.

And there, standing tall and healthy, was Bastian. Seraphina clung to his arm, practically glowing with anticipation.

Everyone turned when I entered.

And stared.

Not at me. At Dominic.

Alpha Alaric rose from his chair. "What is this?"

"I brought my husband." I pushed the wheelchair to the front of the room. "He should be present for important family matters."

Luna Helena's eyes glistened. She moved toward us, reaching out to touch Dominic's face with trembling fingers.

"My son." Her voice cracked. "I haven't seen him outside that room in..."

"Too long." I positioned the wheelchair beside her. "He needed fresh air. I've been taking him out every day."

"You've been..."

Margot's sharp voice cut through the moment.

"What do you think you're doing?" She strode forward, her face twisted with disapproval. "Dragging a comatose man around like a puppet? Have you no shame?"

"I'm caring for my husband."

"You're torturing him!" Margot turned to Alpha Alaric. "This is disgraceful. She's parading him around to manipulate sympathy. It's disgusting."

Alpha Alaric held up a hand.

"Enough, Margot." His voice was tired. Heavy with the weight of what he was about to do.
"The girl means well. Let her be."

Margot sputtered but fell silent.

Alpha Alaric returned to his seat. His eyes swept across the assembled crowd, lingering for a moment on Dominic's motionless form.

"I've called you all here today because a decision must be made." His voice carried through the hall. "A decision I have delayed for too long."

The room went silent. Every breath held.

I gripped the handles of Dominic's wheelchair tighter.

"My son Dominic has been unconscious for six months." Alpha Alaric's jaw tightened.
"Every physician has confirmed that he will not recover. Every treatment has failed."

Luna Helena made a small sound of distress.

"The Silvermoon Pack cannot remain without a functional heir. The uncertainty weakens us. Makes us vulnerable to our enemies." Alpha Alaric paused, his gaze dropping to the floor. "It is time to accept what I have been refusing to accept."

Bastian straightened. Seraphina's grip on his arm tightened.

"Today, before these witnesses, I hereby declare..." Alpha Alaric's voice faltered for just a moment. "I hereby declare that the heir title will be transferred to my second son, Bastian Ashford."

The words echoed through the hall.

Margot's face split into a triumphant smile. Vivienne clasped her hands together in barely concealed joy. Bastian bowed his head in false humility while Seraphina beamed beside him.

And I stood there, my hands on my unconscious husband's wheelchair, watching everything he had been born to inherit slip away.