

Chapter 24

Haven Kramer POV:

The first light of dawn was filtering through the window when I woke. A deep exhaustion still clung to my bones, but my mind was sharp and clear.

I walked to a sealed metal box and opened it. Inside were the blood-and-pus-soaked gauze pads I had removed from Demetri's leg last night.

Phoebe entered with a breakfast tray and nearly dropped it. "My lady, what are you doing? That's... filthy..."

"Shh." I held up a hand to quiet her. With a pair of tweezers, I carefully lifted a small piece of the gauze.

I placed it on a clean slide of glass and added a few drops of a revealing agent I'd found among my mother's things.

Phoebe crept closer, her expression a mixture of curiosity and revulsion. Under the agent's effect, tiny, silver-gray crystals began to precipitate out of the dark, purplish fluid on the gauze. The crystals caught the morning light, gleaming faintly with an unnatural metallic sheen.

There it was. My heart leaped.

I held the glass slide up to the window, tilting it slowly. The angle of the light changed the crystals' appearance—some facets reflected pure silver, others caught a faint greenish glow that no ordinary metal should produce.

Not just silver, then. Something else is bound to it. Look at the way the light splits—green at the edges. That's an organic marker.

I brought the slide closer, examining the formations with my naked eye.

The crystals weren't smooth like pure silver precipitation. Their edges were jagged, irregular, almost runic in shape. I'd seen crystallization patterns like this before—in my mother's old notebooks, where she'd sketched the effects of various alchemical compounds.

I held the slide at a different angle, letting the sunlight stream through the glass from behind. The greenish tint intensified in certain spots, clustering around the crystal cores like a halo.

Wolfsbane. Yes. That green fluorescence is unmistakable. My mother's notes described it perfectly—the way wolfsbane binds to silver particles and changes their crystalline structure. And the way the silver stays suspended... it's been stabilized. Something is keeping it active in the bloodstream far longer than plain metal ever could.

I set the slide down and reached for a small, leather-bound book from my mother's trunk—one I'd pored over as a child, filled with her meticulous handwriting and hand-drawn illustrations of herbs, minerals, and their reactions. I flipped to a dog-eared page near the back.

There it was. A sketch of a moss-like plant with glowing annotations beside it. Moonlight moss. Binding agent. Used in alchemical poisons to slow the body's natural filtration. Toxic only when combined with silver.

I looked back at the slide, then at the book. The match was unmistakable.

Silver as the weapon. Wolfsbane as the paralytic. Moonlight moss as the binder. And there's something else—something I can't quite name. Another component, maybe a catalyst, that I'm not seeing in the crystal structure itself. Something that makes this poison specifically target the bond between a wolf and their inner self.

I closed the book and pressed my fingers to my temples, thinking.

If I can neutralize the silver with a chelating agent, and the wolfsbane with a counter-alkaloid, the moss loses its binding target. The whole

structure collapses. The unknown catalyst will be harder—but if the rest of the poison is broken, it won't have anything to catalyze.

The pieces clicked together in my mind like a lock finding its key.

I almost laughed out loud. Now that I knew the components, formulating a targeted antidote was just a matter of time. Silver, wolfsbane, moonlight moss—all of them had counteragents I knew from my mother's teachings and my own experiments. The unknown catalyst would be trickier, but if I could neutralize the other three, the poison's structure would collapse. It was like dismantling a house by pulling out the load-bearing walls.

A profound sense of intellectual satisfaction and joy filled my chest. It was the first time since coming to this world that I felt the full, unadulterated power that was truly my own. Not borrowed status. Not a title. Just my mind, working the way it was meant to work.

My triumphant moment was cut short by Phoebe's anxious voice.

"My lady, it's terrible!" She held a list in her trembling hand, her face pale. "I went to Mrs. Villarreal this morning to request the herbs and supplies you listed. She... she refused to give me a single thing!"

The smile vanished from my face. "What?"

"She said the items you requested are too precious to be wasted on some woman of unknown origin." Phoebe was shaking with anger. "She also said... she said you should know your place and stop dreaming of becoming the lady of the manor!" ①

I took the list. It contained all the critical ingredients for the antidote and subsequent treatments—high-purity moonstone powder, dragon's blood resin. Without them, my plan was dead in the water.

A cold fire ignited in my gut. That fat, greedy old witch. She was testing my limits.

I had told Demetri to handle the supplies. Clearly, he hadn't, or he was

waiting. Waiting to see how I would handle this. Another one of his damn tests.

"I went to Mr. Silas, the butler," Phoebe said, her voice choked with tears, "but he just mumbled something about it being Mrs. Villarreal's decision and that his hands were tied." ☹

I let out a cold laugh. Silas, that spineless weasel. He was useless.

It seemed some people would never learn the meaning of the word "respect" until it was beaten into them.

I carefully stored the glass slide and took off my stained apron.

"Phoebe," I said calmly.

"Yes, my lady?" She looked at me, her eyes wide with worry.

"Lead the way." My voice was devoid of any warmth. "I'm going to pay a 'visit' to our esteemed Mrs. Villarreal."

Phoebe's eyes lit up. Fear was replaced by a surge of fierce excitement. She straightened her back. "Yes, my lady!"

I walked to Demetri's bed. He was "sleeping," but I could feel the alert consciousness beneath his steady breathing.

I leaned down, my lips close to his ear, and whispered in a voice only we could hear, "It seems your housekeeper doesn't hold her Alpha in very high regard. Don't worry. I'll teach her some manners."

I felt his body go rigid. I straightened up and walked out of the room without looking back.



