

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 10 - IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE - PART 4

Chapter 10: IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE - PART 4

The carriage ride into Easthaven had been uneventful. Once they reached the little backwater hamlet, Merrick and a group of knights went in search of an inn to shelter them. There was only one, and it was already filled for the night. The proprietor of the establishment gave Merrick directions to an old farmhouse on the outskirts of town. He informed them a widow owned it, and she would occasionally take in borders. Then Merrick inquired if the town had a healer or doctor.

"Sir, I have another question. Where is the doctor or healer for the townspeople? We have one member of our company who is extremely ill and in need of help."

The silver-haired old man behind the counter slowly shook his head as he answered in a raspy voice,

"It has been sometime since we have had a healer. He passed away last year during Dhalhet (The season of winter). No one has been sent from the mage tower or the empire to replace him. We depend on the doctor from the Earl of Northbrook at present to heal our ailing."

"Unfortunately, the doctor won't be around again for a few weeks. The best you can do is speak with the old widow woman when you get to the farmhouse. She is the closest thing we have to a healer right now in these parts."

Merrick's face drained of color as he heard the old man's news. He nervously returned to the carriage, struggling to find the words to explain the situation. His stomach felt like a pit of despair. He assumed when he gave the news to the Duke. He would not be pleased because they couldn't find suitable shelter for his men. Merrick was fully aware of the dire situation that the new Duchess was in. He also knew that Sterling was completely clueless about the severity of her condition.

This reminded him of his own struggles with his daughter's illness.

The vice commander hesitantly knocked on the carriage door and heard the hushed tone from the Duke bidding him enter.

"Step inside, Merrick."

The older paladin entered and took his seat across from Sterling, observing the girl still slumbering in his arms. He could see her brow furrowed as if she was in pain. Although, her pallor and condition looked much improved since he last lay eyes on her several hours earlier. Merrick's musings were disrupted when the Duke asked,

2

"Have you secured the lodging for the men and a doctor?"

Merrick showed he was unsuccessful in his endeavor by shaking his head.

"There is no lodging available. The inn is full. The inn keeper said there is a farm near to here and the old lady who owns it might take us in. Also, the town healer is dead and they only have the old woman at the farmhouse that might help."

Hearing this information, Sterling ordered, "Then let's not tarry here any longer, Merrick, and be on our way."

The gracious widow woman at the farmhouse was delighted to open her home and see all the knights gathered around the table inside. She hurried about, making food and preparing tea with warmed brandy and honey to give to the exhausted group of men. It was nice to have visitors in her otherwise empty home.

1

Merrick was sitting next to the fireplace, attempting to soothe his chilled bones. He looked up as the old woman passed him a cup of the aromatic drink. The warmth that emanated from it was a pleasurable feeling to his frigid fingers.

He addressed the elderly woman as he accepted the cup of tea.

"Ma'am, do you have any experience in treating fire lung? It was told by the innkeeper who sent us this way you might be of aid to the woman in our group who has fallen ill."

A kind smile met her delft blue eyes as she gave the vice commander a gentle gaze and replied.

"I have treated it. The old healer that lived in town used to care for our daughter over the years. I observed and learned a thing or two from the man. It got to the point when she fell ill. I did not have to call on him and could treat it easily myself."

2

"Although it has been some time since I have been summoned to treat someone with fire lung. I am lacking the herbs I need to make the potion. If you and a few men are willing to hunt down the plants I require, I will assist her gladly."

2

Merrick gave the lady a brief nod.

"I appreciate your aid. Please tell me what you need and we will go now. Also, I am curious to ask, what is your name?"

Her reply was simple, "Helena Partridge,"

2

"Now come along, young man, let me show you what I require."

—

As Merrick, two knights, and Helena approached the old barn, they could hear the creaking of the wood as a gust of wind pushed against the walls. He could tell the deserted building was about to collapse at any time. The torches Helena had lit flickered brightly against the aged parchment. Helena pointed out the various plants described on the paper. She cautioned the men as they began their search.

"Take care near the edge of the woods. I have seen a few osvol poking about."

1

Merrick and the other two knights nodded, acknowledging her warning. She watched them depart in the hunt for what she had asked for.

It wasn't more than an hour before they returned with the ingredients they had gathered for the potion. The old woman set straight away to prepare it.

Duke Thayer looked around the tiny room with the low ceiling that the old woman had brought him to. As he examined the space closer, he immediately noticed the signs of neglect. Cobwebs lurked in every corner, and a layer of dust had settled over everything. It was clear that no one had stayed here in quite some time.

Although the place was not well kept, Sterling knew it was the best shelter they could find. His priority was to make sure his men were protected from the elements. Once that was done, he could focus on helping Faye recover before they continued their journey.

As he laid his sick bride on the bed, he couldn't help but notice the scratches on her face and arms. The thorns of the brambles had dug into her flesh when the osvol had absconded with her.

1

Her dress was in tatters, barely recognizable as clothing that was covering her frail frame. She shivered and curled into a ball. Sterling knew he had to act quickly. He had to get her undressed and out of the wet clothing before she became even sicker than she already was.

He had a sinister grin on his face as he procured the dagger from his back. Now he could actually see what he had purchased in his marriage contract. Lecherous thoughts crossed his mind of seeing his new bride naked. He was eager for her to awaken so he could ravage her body and claim her virginity as his own. He couldn't wait to hear her gasps and cries as her body would writhe beneath him.

15

The sound of her clothing being shredded by the blade was a pleasurable symphony to Sterling's ears and made him excited. It was as if he was opening a gift for only his eyes to see. In his hurry to look at Faye's naked body, his fists clenched the remaining fabric of the bodice on her dress and wrenched it open.

2

His muscles tensed as he felt a wave of fury wash over him while he tried to process what he had just seen. He could not move or speak, completely overcome by the shock of the situation.

Any excitement Sterling had felt earlier about seeing his bride unclothed vanished. The front of Faye's body was covered in long linear welts and dark bruises. There were fresh cut marks where he could see a leather belt had been used to whip her.

3

He muttered furiously under his breath.

"Those Montgomery Bastards!"

His eyes burned, and his face was red as he suddenly felt his anger boil over. The Duke's entire body quivered in uncontrollable rage. Someone had damaged what belonged to him. Sterling was furious and would be sure to report this transgression to the king when they met again. He would ask for the Winterhold stipend to be reduced as a reparation for the damaged bride he was given.

13

Then, in a sudden moment of conscience. He inwardly questioned what kind of life had this poor girl been living under the roof of the Montgomery family?

4

Faye moaned, drawing Sterling's attention back to her. He looked on as she turned her naked body on its side. That is when the Duke noticed more marks and, this time, old scars from past abuses she had received. Faye was terribly emaciated. He could see the bones from her spine poking through her pale

flesh. It looked as if the Baron had been withholding her food, and she was being starved.

4

He had seen healthier corpses on the battlefield.

His icy heart throbbed painfully in his chest at the sight of her. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and exhaled to regain his composure. He tried to shake the feelings of sympathy from his mind.

Why was he feeling sorry for her? He should be overjoyed she was being treated so poorly. It was driving him insane. He could not rationalize why he kept feeling compassion for this woman, the one whose family had caused him so much heartache and pain as a child.

2

A loud pounding noise from the bedroom entry jolted him to his senses. Without wasting a moment, he grabbed a nearby blanket from the mattress and covered her body to prevent anyone from seeing it.

Dear Readers,

Thank you for taking the time to read my newest novel. I hope you have enjoyed the first ten chapters. I would really appreciate it if you could leave a review of the book. It would be a tremendous step in supporting me for this month's WPC competition.

Thank you,

The_Sweet_Sparrow