

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 11 - HELL'S PARADISE - PART 1

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Since their arrival at the farmhouse, Sterling had noticed Faye's bizarre powers had faded. After hearing the knock on the door, he made sure his wife was modestly covered. He strode to the bedroom entry and abruptly swung it open.

His unsettling red eyes narrowed at the widow woman as he grumbled in ire.

"It's about time you have brought the medicine. She is still struggling to breathe."

Despite Duke Thayers' unpleasant mood, the old woman paid him no mind as she focused on tending to the young girl who lay asleep on the mattress.

She waltzed over to the bed with a tray full of items. There was hot tea and the potion she had created Faye with a few crackers—also, a washbasin, cloth, and pitcher of fresh water so the young woman could cleanse herself.

2

Helena treated Faye like a mother would a child, gently pushing her filthy, sweat-soaked hair from her face and carefully picking out a stray leaf, placing the dead foliage in her apron pocket.

2

She tenderly cooed to Faye, "Open your eyes sweetie. I have brought something that will make you feel better."

Faye's eyes flitted as she struggled to open them. She stretched her limbs and could feel the warmth of the blanket draped over her tired body.

The old woman tenderly caressed her bruised cheek. Faye nuzzled her face into the soft touch of the old woman's wrinkled hand. It had been years since anyone had shown affection for Faye when she fell ill. It reminded her of when she was a young child, and her mother would care for her.

3

Helena whispered in a soothing voice.

"That's it dear, you are going to be alright now. What's your name?"

Blinking away the blur of sleep, Faye's eyes slowly adjusted to the dimly lit room. She fixed her light blue eyes on the old woman sitting on the bed's edge beside her.

Helena could see there was a confused, frightened look of uncertainty in them.

Faye attempted to tell the elderly woman her name, but no sound left her lips. The fire lung had once more robbed her of her ability to speak.

A dark voice bellowed the answer from across the bedchamber. It was Duke Thayer's.

2

"Her name is Faye. She is my wife and Duchess Thayer of Everton Fortress."

The old lady's eyes grew wide at the discovery of her guest's true identity. She raised from her chair and bowed respectfully to the Duke.

"Milord, I apologize for not recognizing who you were when you entered my home. Please forgive my ill manners."

Sterling waved his hand at her.

"Enough of the pleasantries and honorifics. I am uneasy with people fawning over me as if I am some royal from Minbury. Just fix my wife, so we may be on our way."

Helena wrung her hands as she looked back and forth between Faye and the Duke. The woman's wrinkled face was etched with worry lines, and her eyes darted around anxiously. There was a tenseness in the room as she spoke.

"I regret to tell you it will be at least three days before the Lady may travel. It is perilous for her to be moved about in this cold weather. It could worsen her condition or kill her."

Duke Thayer groaned and rolled his eyes at the news. He ran his fingers through his thick locks of raven-black hair in frustration.

Their battalion was expected back by tomorrow evening at the latest. In the morning, he would have to send most of his men back to the fortress on their own. The territory was grossly under-protected without him and his troops there to fight off any monster attacks.

His biggest concern was protecting the villagers of Everton and the new winter wheat crops that were currently being sewn.

Sterling had discovered a year ago that the steppes of the Dannaemora plane had extremely fertile soil, and it was perfect for growing wheat. If this harvest was successful, he was poised to take over the millers' guild contracts and become the top producer of wheat and flour in the Eastcain empire.

1

That would mean they would no longer depend on a foreign nation for the stores of their principal food supply. It would make the empire self-sufficient. The result would make Sterling the richest and most powerful noble in the Eastcain empire, just below the king and his son.

5

He could sell more wheat at a lower price since there would be no tariff accessed for importing and shipping fees. Add to that. He would own and control all the mills, making further income for Everton's treasury. The Duke had plans on turning Everton into a capital city one day with the money he earned, making life better for the citizens of his territory.

3

The situation could be risky for the king of Minbury. The reason is that if they stop purchasing wheat from overseas, it could impact their finances and even lead to conflict. This is because it would make them a rival to the other countries' main income streams.

The entire scenario made Sterling smile deep inside. He was ready to take the reins of power and run roughshod over the emperor and his son, the first prince. It was time for all those who had wronged him to receive payback.

Faye's uncontrollable cough broke Sterling's thoughts. He watched and was dismayed as she vomited the potion the old woman gave her. Within moments, Faye passed out.

2

The old woman cleaned up the Duchess and gathered the tray she brought. She turned to Sterling and addressed him.

"Your wife is in terrible shape, Milord. I can only hope she kept enough of the potion down. I will return in the morning and we will try again."

Sterling stood solemnly as he listened to Helena. Then he made a request of the widow.

"There was an earlier incident before we arrived and my wife has nothing to wear. He pointed to the tattered rags of what had once been a dress he had thrown in the corner. Do you, perchance, have something she can wear?"

A gentle smile accompanied her response to his question.

"I think I may have a dress or two of my daughters here. I will search her room and see."

"Thank you Ma'am. I am sorry about my abrupt manner earlier."

3

Helena patted his arm.

"It is understandable. Your lovely wife is sick and sometimes worry can make us do weird things. I believe she will be alright. When I return, I will bring more supplies so that you can clean up. Have you eaten?"

"I appreciate your offer, but I'm not hungry," he replied politely. "However, if there are spirits available, I could use a glass."

"Then I will return in the swish of a cat's tail with your drink and a basin."

Sterling watched Helena disappear into the darkened corridor. He made his way to the bedside. His roulettes jingled with each step. He took off his armor, leaning it against the wall. Once he removed everything, he was only left covered by a tunic and his trousers.

As he was about to take a seat, he heard the elderly woman's footsteps approaching. Without a word, she hastily handed him the requested items, and he could hear the soft thud of the door as she departed.

The room was still except for Faye's raspy, labored breaths. He moved toward the bed and examine his new bride. He frowned at her disheveled appearance. Sterling picked up the washcloth next to the basin. He found Helena had left a bottle of lavender oil.

Sterling poured a few drops of the sweet-scented extract into the water. He then soaked the washrag in the warm water that was meant for his bath. He wiped the grime and dirt from Faye's face and worked his way down her entire battered body until she was spotless. The water in the basin was dark grey when he finished.

1

He reflected on the day. It had been a complete disaster, and he was now left with a multitude of mixed feelings and the prospect of an unknown future with this enigma of a woman beside him.

Sterling was utterly exhausted, his mind a jumbled mess of incoherent thoughts. All he yearned for was to slip into the sweet embrace of slumber. He shed the last remnants of his clothing and slid into bed beside Faye.

Her body was like ice. But soon, he felt her slender form seeking his warmth, and she shifted to press against him, her skin fragrant with the soothing scent of lavender. As the Duke pulled her into his massive arms to share his body heat, he savored the softness of her skin, reveling in the sensation.

Cradling Faye in his embrace was the most comforting experience Sterling had ever encountered in his life. He thought maybe the contract marriage to this woman was not so bad after all.

3

Before he closed his eyes to join his wife in their first night's slumber as man and wife, Sterling reached for the glass of whisky on the nightstand and lifted it to his parched lips. The amber liquid burned as it ran down his throat, warming him from the inside out. He felt a sense of calmness wash over him as he settled in, his worries fading away in the gentle atmosphere.

The_Sweet_Sparrow