

The Dragon King's Substitute Bride

Epilogue

HERA.

“No...No...No!!”

“Calm down.”

“I cannot be calm”

“It is not that bad”

She gasps in horror, her hand flying to clutch the pearls around her neck.

“Bad?...bad?...it is not simply bad your highness, it is hideous”

I wish to laugh but I am afraid it will give her a heart attack.

“It is still a lovely dress. Are you absolutely certain I cannot just...wear it?”

“Most certainly not. For an event this important...”

Literally sneering at me, the castle seamstress snatches the dress from my hands. “Forgive me your grace. I must correct this error at once. Do not move an inch...”

“Honestly you do not have to....”

But she is already rushing out the room.

Her assistants swaddled with lace and silk run out after her and leave me behind.

Half dressed and only in my chemise.

I laugh and step down from the dressing stand, thankful for a moments respite to catch my breath.

But if I thought it would be time to rest then I was wrong

Without the seamstress here, the other maids left behind decide to acost me.

Sitting me in the chair and braiding my hair into complicated designs that I can never seem to replicate on my own.

I swallow hard and resist the urge to twist my fingers in my laps least my nervousness is betrayed on my face.

It does not matter that I have done it numerous times now.

Just the thought of going out, facing all those thousands of dragonkin people who look up to me.

Who see me no longer as the Human Bride of the dragon king.

But as their queen.

It could be... overwhelming.

And in all likelihood, almost always will be.

I close my eyes and tell myself to breathe.

Deep breaths in and out. Until I cannot longer feel my nerves or even the hands on my hair.

“Do you know, why it is that I like to catch you with your eyes closed?”

Eyes still closed, a foolish smile starts to spread across my face but I catch it...turn it into a smirk.

“I have a feeling you are about to tell me”

The voice behind my hair tsks. “This seeing the future thing is beginning to become a real hassle.”

I laugh even though we are both aware that that is not how it works.

“Stay focused.”

He turns the seat around so that I am facing him..

“It is because I can watch you open your eyes and get to discover how incredibly beautiful you are all over again.”

This time the smile does escape and I can sense my cheeks start to heat up. I look behind him, an effort to hide the blush no doubt spreading everywhere.

“Where are the maids?”

“Sent them away.”

I blink up at him.

“You do know dragon king that you aren’t supposed to be in here.”

I get up and make to move around him but he grabs me by my wrist before I can even take a full step and pulls me closer to him.

“I know but I do not care. Besides...”

I let out a startled yelp as he plants his hands firmly on both sides of my waist and lifts me up and around to place me on the dressing table.

“... This is our chamber and I missed you.”

“You saw me but a few bells ago...”

“My point exactly.”

He kisses the corner of my jaw and I struggle to keep my eyes open and my breathing level.

“Is that enough reason to steal into my room and send my maids away?”

“Oh most definitely.”

I gasp lightly when his hands brush upwards to graze the sides of my barely covered breasts.

He raises one amused brow, very much aware of what he is doing.

Well two can play that game.

I drop my eyes to his mouth...then to his eyes...and back to his mouth again.

And I am rewarded when I see the movement in his throat and the way his gaze darkens.

He starts to lean in and as always my breath quickens.

“Midas...”

Our lips are a mere hair’s breadth apart.

And then just before they can touch... I pull back, a satisfied grin plastered across my face.

He scoffs, staring at me from beneath half lidded eyes and then suddenly he jerks me back towards him with the arm wrapped around my middle and presses our bodies together.

“Do that again Hera...”

His voice drops, becoming thick and rough around the edges “...and you’ll have yourself to blame for whatever follows.”

Oh...

The knots in my stomach drop to become an ache between my thighs.

A highly improper way to feel when one is mere moments away from attending a near kingdom wide gathering of her subjects .

I press my lips together.

Both to hide my smirk and the effect he is very obviously having on me.

“Should you not be getting ready?”

“I am ready.”

And he is. Very...very much so.

I can barely bring myself to stop looking at him.

The dark velvety blue of his shirt, the gold detailing on his sleeves and the glistening crown on his head.

To stop thinking about how badly I want them all off.

I slide my arms up the bulging hardness of his arms and lock my fingers behind his neck.

“Well you might be ready but I am not.”

His eyes drop down to the edge of my almost non-existent attire, only to climb back up at a pace that sets my heart racing and forces me to press my legs together

“Hmmm...I do not know what you mean.” His finger tip trails slowly up between the tight gap of my thighs. “You appear very ready to me.”

And then he turns his finger upwards, one smooth swipe across my wetness.

“Very ready.”

My eyes start to fall shut of their own accord and I have to stop my head from tipping backwards.

“Midas we really shouldn’t...”

But his hands are in my hair and his mouth is already on mine and every other thought flies out the window.

Like ash before the wind.

All my attempts at resistant forgotten the moment he pulls my lip between his teeth and slides his tongue across it.

I moan into his mouth, not caring that my maids are probably waiting outside the door or that his hands in my hair are most likely ruining all their hardwork.

It should frighten me.

The amount of power he holds over me.

The way I wake up thinking about him, how just looking at him reduces me to a bubble of indescribable happiness.

How when he touches me absolutely nothing else matters.

Without breaking the kiss, he pulls me even closer and slightly off the table so he can pry my thighs open by slipping his knee between them.

He kisses the corner of my mouth, the angle of my jaw...the hollow of my shoulder, pulling my hair back so I am forced to give him access.

To let him scrape his teeth against the tender skin of my neck.

“I am surprised the chief steward let you slip away.”

My voice is breathless with need and I am very certain he can hear it.

“I may have told him I had something...urgent to attend to.”

My laughter turns into a gasp when he flicks at a stiffened n****e with his thumb, rolls his between his fingers and then before I can recover, closes his mouth around it.

Skies above...

“Midas...”

He swirls his tongue around, wetting it and then blowing softly and I feel the shock of the coolness of it all the way to my toes.

He kisses his way back up to my mouth.

“You know I thought about doing this all day.”

“Even when we were sitting with the council?”

“Oh most especially then. Do you have an idea what it does to me to see you sitting in that chair, making decisions....”

He kisses me again, deeper this time.

And I think f**k it.

Our tongues touch, dance, struggle for dominance.

Kissing him feels like getting drunk.

The good kind of drunk.

But before I can throw all caution to the wind and give in, a knock, sharp and insistent rattles the heavy doors and the castle seamstress' voice floats through.

"Your highness!!"

Blast it all to Hades.

I pull gently away from the kiss, my eyes still barely open.

"Your highness!!"

The chief steward this time, sounding very much like he has been scouring the castle looking for the king.

"Looks like they found you after all."

Midas' hands however do not stop moving.

"Do you think if we say nothing they will go away?"

But the chief steward is relentless.

"Your Highness, I know you are in there. The ceremony is about to start and the council members are already seated."

"And I must finish with this dress your grace."

The dragon king straightens to gaze down at me, his golden eyes still dark with want.

"Do we have to go?"

I nod. "Not really, but and I'm just guessing here, it might be rather odd if we did not show up to our own anniversary ceremony."

He sighs exaggeratedly and with one last kiss backs away from me.

Somehow he has managed to get out of this still looking every inch the courteous king.

While I no doubt know my lips are red and swollen and that my once braided hair is now undone and flowing down my back.

One look and the castle seamstress was going to kill me.

I push off the table.

"Stop frowning, you'll scare them."

"Good."

He lowers me to the floor and casually lifts up the sleeve of my underdress like he had not been the one to push it down.

I laugh. "It'll be over before you know it."

"And what I want will be right next to me the entire time, torturing me."

"Your highness!!" Both voices in unison calling out from behind the door.

"We are coming!!"

He shakes his head in mock disbelief.

"They have no respect any more."

"Of course they do."

I start, standing on the very top of my toes so I can lift my thumb and brush against the red stain on his lip.

"...They are simply no longer afraid. To them now you are King and not just the ruthless bloodthirsty ruler than had always known. Now they respect you because they love you and not because you might get angry and loop their heads off."

I step back to inspect my work. "There... Now you look perfect again"

He stares at me until I feel myself start to turn red once more.

"What?"

And then he leans in and kisses me hard until my knees start to feel weak again.

"I love you."

I bite my lip and blink up at him.

"And I love you. Now go away before they think to break down our door"

It goes without saying that the seamstress made sure to poke new holes in me as she and her apprentices dressed me up for what was to be the one year anniversary of the binding ceremony between the dragon king and I.

But when they were done, and I finally looked in the mirror, it was all totally worth it.

"You look amazing ...your highness."

I gasp and turn around, the heavy lilac train of my dress nearly sweeping away everything on the floor.

“Henette!!”

She staggers slightly when I fling myself at her, almost knocking my crown off my head.

“Oh Henette...How I have missed you.”

“As have I your grace.”

I pull her away from the door and into the room.

“I did not think you would make it”

“And miss the anniversary celebration of my best friend, I do not think so. Besides as the queen’s right hand, it is my duty to be here.”

“Look at you...you are positively glowing “

I laugh as I say the words but there are tears in my eyes.

When she had found out what happened to Garwith, she had quite literally fallen apart.

She would not sleep, would not leave her quarters and were it not for my constantly coaxing and sometimes threatening her, she would not even eat.

It had broken my heart to see her that way.

Especially knowing that he died saving me.

But to see her now, smiling and laughing again, it makes me want to laugh and cry all at once.

I wiggle my brows at her.

“So...how soon will it be”

She rubs her very large stomach through the folds of her gown.

“The midwife says anytime now.”

“Skies above...and you are busy climbing up stairs?”

I lead her to the edge of the bed.

The first few weeks had been tough. But slowly she had started to feel better, to be able to say his name without crying.

But it wasn’t till a few moons later, when we found out about the pregnancy, had she started to truly heal.

“Can you believe it, you are going to be a mother Henette.”

A single tear rolls down her eyes.

But it is a happy tear. I can tell.

“They say it will be hard. To raise a child all on my own.”

At that I say nothing.

Simply taking her hand and sitting besides her as well as my corset will allow.

“That it will demand of me everything. I laugh and tell them I was your maid when every minute was spent plotting how to escape the dragon castle. I think I will do just fine.”

I gasp in mock horror, my hand flying to my chest.

“How dare you?”

And then we both burst into laughter.

“You are going to make a wonderful mother Henette.”

“And you an amazing godmother.”

“Your highness...”

I glance at the Ryder who has just appeared in the open doorway.

He bows low. “It is time.”

I rise and smooth down the petals of the thousand purple flowers that flow out to make the flowing skirt of my gown.

“Henette?”

She bows her head.

“I shall be right behind you.... Your grace.”

I take a deep breath and walk out the open doors.

Down the winding steps of the tower I escaped from more times than I can count.

Past stone passages and under arching doorways.

Past the courtyard in garden and the fountain with its stream of crystal blue.

Past smiling faces of castle inhabitants and servants alike.

He is standing at the golden double doors.

The ones that lead into the great hall.

I place my hand in his and he lifts it to his lips.

“Are you ready?”

With one hand I adjust the crown on my head.

” As ready as I shall ever be. Are we going to tell them?”

The dragon king glances down at my belly and the smile that lights up his face sets my entire world to right.

“Not just yet. They’ll find out soon enough.”

The doors swing open and a hundred trumpets blow.

“Presenting the King and queen of the 5th realm, Master of dragons and the mistress of the unknown. King Midas...and Queen Hera

He steps in first and then reaches out to me.

I think about the first time I ever walked through these door.

All the fear and uncertainty.

I think about the family I would never see again.

About Averia and my brother and the home I gave up for them.

About Er’gan the First who Midas tells me now exists on the planes of the seventh realm.

A god in its own right.

I think about Leo... about how his absence affects the dragon king more than he would care to admit.

About Henette...

About Garwith.

I think about the little one growing in my belly that will some day open their eyes into a realm we fought so hard to protect.

And without another moments hesitation...

I slip my hands in his and take the first step into my forever.