

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 15 - THROUGH HER EYES - PART 1

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A/N: Apologies for the chapter post being delayed. We had a power outage due to the extreme Houston heat, and it took me forever to finish the chapter on my phone.

9

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The cool, crisp air of the night was a refreshing change from the recent rain. The sky was now clear, and the stars shone brilliantly, casting a soft glow on everything below. As Sterling took in the beautiful sight, he couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment. The Hartesk (Fall) was a time of change, and he relished the feeling of the brisk breeze on his skin. Looking up, the Duke could see the constellation Draco twinkling in the sky above.

The sound of crickets chirping in the distance added to the peaceful ambiance. As he breathed in deeply, he could smell the fresh scent of wet grass and leaves. The sight of Draco always brought back a flood of memories, both good and bad, but for now, he was content to simply bask in the night's beauty.

1

The eerie howls of wild dogs in the woods beyond the clearing caused the Duke's senses to go on high alert. He tore his gaze from the starry firmament above and scanned the area, searching for any signs of wild beasts.

With every step closer to the woods, the muddy ground beneath him squished, dirt clods stuck to his boots and made them heavier with each stride. A pungent smell of wet earth lingered in the night air.

While Sterling ambled through the enormous expanse of land behind the farmhouse, He noticed it had seen better times. His eyes squinted in the darkness and made out the dilapidated barn. It appeared to be on the verge of collapse. All it would take is one fierce wind burst, and it would lie in splinters.

He imagined in its day; this farmstead produced a lot of food for the local markets. He thought it was a shame, such a place was left to rot away. Although he knew the elderly lady of the farm was in no condition to work this land on her own. And hearing her speak about her daughter, the Duke also surmised the town's people had shunned them, abandoning the widow to fend for herself.

He stretched his arms high above his head and yawned. The night was on the edge of fleeing as the sun would soon rise, and Sterling had barely slept the last few days with the travel, wedding, and the excitement from yesterday's fray with the Osvol demons.

A roguish smile pulled at Sterling's lips. He perceived another person was attempting to sneak up behind him. Someone had come to disturb his inner reflections. He grasped his dagger and, faster than lightning could flash, he had the stalker by the throat, ready to slice it and watch their lifeblood ebb before him.

He heard a man's breath hitch, and then the Duke listened to Merrick as he stiffly greeted him.

2

"Good morning, commander."

He replied, "It is, isn't it? The rain has stopped, so you should have a pleasant trip. Hopefully, it will stay at bay until you reach the fortress."

1

Sterling relaxed his taut muscles and released Merrick from his clutches. The vice commander swung around to face the Duke.

"I am pleased that you came to find me. There are a few details I wanted to be sure you are clear on before you depart. It is imperative that the rest of the wheat be sowed in the next three days."

"That means if you have to recruit our own soldiers and household servants to get it done, then do so under my direct command. No one is excused from this duty. We are working on a very precise schedule."

"Also, watch the back south-western corner of the Steppes, near the foothills. When I last rode through that area, I noticed evidence of sprite wigs. I tried to track them, but they evaded me. Make sure an extra detail is sent to watch over the workers. They are hiding in the mornvines back in the Hallan forest. The verge is too thick to cut through. The recent rain has given them a good foothold. After harvest next year, I might have the men build a firebreak. We can try to burn them out.

Merrick listened intently as the Duke finished with his instructions.

"Milord, is that everything?"

The Duke paused, as if in profound thought, and Merrick could see he was pondering on something.

"Mmm...No,"

Sterling's hand rubbed his stubbled cheek while considering what was necessary for his new wife's arrival.

"Have the house parlour maid prepare a chamber for my bride and direct her to select two servants from the staff to be her attendants. And while I am thinking about it, I have a letter for you to deliver to His Majesty's niece. He has new orders for her. She will no longer be an ambassador to Everton Fortress. She is to become the Duchess's lady-in-waiting."

1

Merrick's humorless eyes narrowed when his commander made the last request. He didn't find it funny.

"Are you sure that is such a good idea?"

An impish smile crept across Sterling's lips as he explained.

"It is an exquisite idea, and the beauty of it. Is I did not decide. Lady Lena has no choice but to abide by the royal decree. If she refuses or puts up a fuss, this will be our opportunity to dismiss her. This will anger his highness and most likely cost Lena her life. I now have some leverage over her and her movements, since we all know she has been placed at the fortress as a spy for the king."

3

Sterling shot Merrick an inquisitive expression.

"Did your man intercept her last correspondence to the palace? Was it replaced with the forged letter?"

2

Merrick fixed a gaze upon the commander and let out a chuckle.

"He certainly did, and it proved to be an intriguing one this time."

The vice commander's remark made Sterling's brow raise in fascination.

"Tell me, what did she relay to the old man?"

Merrick replied, "It was not what she relayed, as you say, but rather what she asked of the king that is so interesting."

3

The_Sweet_Sparrow