

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 18 - GOING HOME - PART 1

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Sterling entered the room intending to appear as though he had just arrived. It was essential that he didn't alert the women to what he had witnessed. He needed to avoid offending Faye and making her feel untrusted. The Duke was eager to learn more about his new bride, but if Sterling betrayed her, she would be less likely to share any information with him.

2

"My apologies ladies, for the interruption, but the men have gathered, and I need to get ready for their inspection before they leave."

He reached out and grasped his armor from the corner, the cold metal clinking and clanging as he pulled it towards him. Sterling deftly donned it, one piece at a time, the weight of each section settling on his shoulders and chest as he fastened and tightened the leather straps.

With practiced ease, he quickly attached his sword to his belt. In mere moments, he was finished. Faye watched intently as he reached into the inner pocket of his cloak. The soft fabric gave a slight rustle under his touch. As he pulled out a letter, she spotted the royal seal affixed on the papers and assumed it was the marriage decree. She was curious about what he was doing with the document.

The women watched motionless, their eyes fixed on him as he hastily stormed from the room. They listened to his heavy footfalls, scrambling down the wooden hallway. With each passing second, the noise grew fainter, until it rapidly faded into the distance.

Helena turned to Faye once she was sure Sterling was not in listening range. She gave her a heartfelt smile.

"I can see you two are going to have a long road ahead of you. But if you will both try to compromise with one another, you'll see things will work out. I think beneath the surface, your new husband has a fondness for you."

2

"Otherwise, he would not have brought you here for help and he would have let you suffer and die. Keep that in mind when you feel like being angry with him. I have lived quiet sometime and gained a good deal of knowledge about human nature."

"It is evident to see the Duke has had little experience with women and does not know how to talk with them. Give him sometime to learn. Be gentle with your responses and he will soon pick up on how to treat a lady."

1

Faye pursed her lips in a flat line as she commented on Helena's remark.

"Or we could skip all of that and I could just whack him on the head with a rolling pin. Maybe it would knock some sence into him. I am not sure I can handle his constant mood swings and bullying."

8

The old woman's shoulders dropped with a frustrated sigh as she fluffed Faye's pillows and helped her lean back on the bed. Then she spoke in a motherly fashion, "I think we have chatted long enough today. You seem overwrought with emotion. I know it is daylight, but you are still sick and need your rest. I think you will see things from a better perspective once you are well rested."

Helena hoped Faye would get more rest and relax so that she wouldn't be so uptight around Sterling.

Faye nodded her head in agreement and replied, "Yes, ma'am." She slid beneath the blanket and shut her tired eyes.

6

Helena returned to her kitchen work. She had a lot of cleaning to do after the men left. She was rather surprised at how well-mannered they had been. Her home was much as it was before they entered.

She looked out the back window and saw the troop standing at attention as Sterling walked among them, fulfilling his role as their commander. She counted at least forty men with horses neatly aligned in the back pasture.

The elderly woman watched as the men mounted their steeds, the sun glinting off their armor. She heard the clatter of their weapons and the jingling of the horses' tack.

The sight of the knights in their orderly formation, with their horse's heads held high, gave Helena a feeling of respect and admiration for their dedication and bravery. She knew these were the men of the Roguemont cavalry. The knights who were charged as the empire's protectors against the monsters that plagued Eastcarin. It had been an honor to open her doors to these soldiers for the night.

Once the Duke finished his inspection and gave his orders to the men, he watched as they filed two by two toward the path to leave. Sterling searched for Merrick at the head of the procession.

"Merrick!" He bellowed across the field to his vice commander, catching his attention.

"This is the letter we discussed earlier. Please be sure this is delivered by you directly to Lady Lena's hands. I only trust you to do this."

"I will be sure to do so, commander. Is there anything else before we depart?"

The Duke replied with a dubious grin. "I have a need for another of your men. It is a special assignment for Carter."

Merrick asked, "Will he be returning with in a few days?"

"I doubt it, this may take him some time. I have three gutter rats that need dispatching."

2

The vice commander nodded, "Hmm... I see,"

Sterling squinted as he watched Merrick's tongue press against his bottom teeth. He blew fiercely, producing a sharp whistle that sliced through the air.

The sound echoed off the nearby trees, causing birds to take flight. Sterling's ears rang with the high-pitched sound. Merrick shouted for the knight named Carter, his voice carrying the weight of command.

"Carter Van Toth!"

"Aye!" a powerful voice barked from the crowd of horses and knights, answering to his name being called, drowning out all other sounds. The young knight weaved his way through the crowd of men and horses until he reached the two commanders, who stood side by side.

Sterling observed the young recruit, who had joined them a year earlier. He recently learned his story from Merrick.

The young paladin was tall. His head was level with that of his shire stallion. He had fine wavy blond hair and dark azure eyes. His frame was not overly muscled, and he had an ideal physique that women found attractive. His charming smile added to his appeal. He was agile and could move quickly if cornered.

Carter Van Toth was an expert in spying and secretive activities.

Plus, it didn't hurt that he received the most comprehensive education in espionage while he served under King Minbury as the emperor's hound (personal spy) for three years before he found himself involved with a scandal inside the palace.

Unfortunately, he was falsely accused of having an affair with another knight commander's wife. The accusation was not based on any truth or evidence. It was solely a political ploy of the other man to gain a position that Carter was set to gain amongst the royal knights.

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So avoiding any embarrassment to the noblewoman, and his respectable family name. He resigned his commission and rode his horse until he reached the Everton fortress.

That is where he was found drowning his miseries in a tankard of ale by Merrick and his men at the local pub. It was an advantageous meeting for sure, since they needed someone to monitor Lena.

"So, I know you have been working under Merrick's direction for sometime now, tracking Lady Lena's activities. However, I have need of your specialized skills—Carter, have you ever been asked to assassinate someone?"

5

Carter's lips curled upward into an unscrupulous smirk at the question.

"I would say, by that look you're telling me yes. So, let's talk about my strategy."

As Sterling and Carter were about to return to the house, the Duke stopped and whirled around to see the vice commander still waiting atop his horse.

Sterling stood at attention and saluted him and placed a blessing on him and the troop.

"My Iahn's blessed sight guide you all home safely."

Merrick sat tall at attention in his saddle. He saluted the Duke with a solemn expression, not uttering a word. Sterling and Carter watched as their vice commander reined his horse hard to the right, swiftly disappearing among the other men and steeds.

The gentle touch of the breeze made the red banners with Everton's emblem's flutter, while the sound of galloping hooves thundered, making the ground quake. The smell of leather and horses enveloped them.

2

Sterling observed with honor, as his second in command, Merrick, led his knights back on their journey to the fortress. There was a deep feeling of pride and camaraderie that filled their hearts as they observed the brave paladins ride off into the distance, their mission clear, to protect the steppes of the Everton fortress.

Across the table, Carter maintained an emotionless expression as he faced the Duke. He listened attentively, catching every detail of what the Duke had planned for the Montgomerys.

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He could sense there was a deep source of hatred burning inside his commander. Carter pondered if had something to do with his new bride's current condition, as everyone understood that this marriage was to unite the houses, not tear them apart.

Whatever it was, must have been significant to make him break the king's decree and commit an act that would be paramount to treason.

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The_Sweet_Sparrow

It sounds like the Montgomery family should start to worry.

Thank you to all who are currently supporting this novel. I am maintaining my lead in the top three of the contest. This could not have been done without your support. I appreciate all you do.