

## **The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 19 - GOING HOME - PART 2**

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After discussing the plan Sterling had devised to rid himself of the Montgomerys. He watched as Carter rode out for his assignment in Wintershold.

He was going to have the handsome paladin use his good looks to seduce Alice Montgomery and get closer to the family. Before he had Carter destroy these detestable people, there were a few things he wanted to know, and some of this information pertained to Faye's past.

5

It was now late afternoon, and the Duke had yet to return and check on Faye.

Although he worried little about her as the old woman hovered over his bride like a mother hen.

He stood outside the back of the home, knocking the thick layer of mud from his riding boots. The brisk Hertesk (fall) breeze carried whispers that Dalhet (winter) was nearing.

Sterling's limbs felt weighted down with exhaustion, and he yearned for a moment of rest. A brief nap would do him good, he thought as he imagined returning to his bed and lying next to Faye once more.

The memory of her soft skin and faint floral scent lingered in his mind. He had slept so soundly next to her the night before, lulled into slumber by her gentle fragrance and warm skin. This was rare for him, as he barely ever slept well.

As Sterling stood there staring at the empty pasture where not a couple hours before his troops had assembled, he couldn't help but wonder why he had any feelings for such a waif of a girl. It was as if her very being had placed an enchantment on him.

The Duke shook his head in exasperation. Instead of babysitting a sick woman, he should ride back to Everton with his men. This was not supposed to happen. It was a marriage of convenience, a union of business and politics. He was not meant to fall for her.

6

All of this was testing his patience. He had no time for such foolish pursuits. He inwardly admonished himself, 'This was an order he was told to follow by the king and nothing more.'

3

"GRAHHHH!"

He clenched his fists and growled as he repeatedly berated himself. He needed to get his errant emotions reined in. Sterling stopped internally struggling with his psyche and took a deep breath to calm down. He paused for a moment to compose himself before opening the door to the farmhouse.

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Upon entering the kitchen, the Duke's nostrils were met with a tantalizing aroma of freshly baked bread. He spotted the two knights, and the coachman huddled together around the wooden table, conversing as they devoured a warm loaf of bread drizzled with sweet honey and slathered with creamy hand-churned butter.

3

The table was set with silver tankards of chilled ale. The men stopped eating and stood from the table to greet their commander. Sterling waved his hand for them to stop and continue with their meal.

The Duke's mouth watered at the sight of them. He had not eaten in sometime.

2

In the far corner of the kitchen, Helena was busy preparing the evening meal. The sound of her knife rhythmically chopping vegetables filled the air. Sterling's stomach rumbled and the widow woman turned and gave him a polite grin.

She gestured with the knife still in her hand toward the empty seat at the table.

"Please, Milord, have a seat."

Within moments, the aroma of braised beef and steamed vegetables filled the room as Helena returned with a plate in her hands. The sizzling sound of the food and the sight of the steam rising from the plate increased his hunger. There was also a warm, freshly baked loaf of bread on the side, which was his favorite.

11

As he dug into his meal, the savory taste of the tender beef combined with the fresh, crisp vegetables made his taste buds dance with joy. The bread was soft and warm, with a crispy crust that made a satisfying crunch with every bite. He washed it all down with two mugs of cold beer, which had a refreshing but bitter taste. With his hunger sated, he felt a sense of contentment. He thanked Helena for the meal.

1

"Dear lady, thank you for this excellent meal. I will now go upstairs to look in on my little butterfly."

"It was my pleasure, Milord. Do you have a moment to speak? It is important."

He responded with a curt nod. "Certainly."

Helena placed the knife she was chopping vegetables with on the cutting board and wiped her hands on the apron around her waist.

She mumbled in a low voice, "I would like to speak privately if possible."

Sterling followed the woman from the kitchen into the farmhouse's parlor. There was already warmed pear brandy and honey cake on plates. She swung around once they entered to speak to him. He saw her severe expression.

"Please sit down. We need to talk for a few minutes. Your men mentioned you enjoy pear brandy, so I've poured you a glass and warmed it. You should also try the honey cake. It complements your drink nicely."

1

They sat across from each other at the tea table. Helena's eyes flicked nervously around Sterling's scarlet gaze, and he could tell she was uneasy with what she wanted to say.

She commenced the discussion.

"I normally do not involve myself in other people's business."

The Duke responded tersely to her first sentence.

"Then you shouldn't get involved."

After shrugging off his comment, she continued, "However, I have a soft spot for your young bride and for you, too. I cannot stand by and see her come to harm. She reminds me so much of my sweet Abigail. And with age occasionally comes wisdom and good advice if one will listen and take it into consideration."

As Helena spoke, her eyes narrowed and her voice became sharp. The woman's sweet, motherly demeanor vanished as she took on the expression of a stern parent.

2

"I need to give you counsel in this situation. Whether or not you take it is up to you."

2

The immediate change in her attitude took Sterling aback he did not expect this kind woman to be so pointed. He straightened himself in his chair, taking a sip of the sweet brandy and listened to Helena's words respectfully, not wanting to offend the lady in her home.

Once she noticed he was paying attention, Helena continued with her conversation.

"Today, Faye told me that your marriage is a contract, not based on love. You and your wife don't know each other well, but with time and communication, that could change. You could become friends and maybe even fall in love."

"Try to be affectionate when you speak to your wife. She may respond in kind. Your wife doesn't know much about what happens between a husband and wife in the bedroom. I explained some things to her, so please be gentle."

"I broke a promise to your bride. I swore not to tell you about these things because they're sensitive. But I couldn't stand by and watch her suffer. After meeting you, my only wish is love and happiness for you both."

1

Sterling could feel the pear brandy taking effect and he was more relaxed. His placid gaze was still on her face. When he remarked.

He said, "Love." But it was clear that he was disgusted by the word.

"Love is an unforgivable sin. It brings only desolation and destruction. My life's mission is to not let that emotion ever sway my heart. I am sorry your words have no meaning to me. Love is an enigma in my world."

7

"If you will excuse me, I need to check on Faye now. I would like not to be disturbed."

He got up gracefully from where he was seated and retreated from the parlor. This left Helena's heart feeling sad and desolate. She wished he would have listened to her words.

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When he entered the bedroom, Sterling noticed the curtains were drawn to keep the light out. He saw Faye slumbering in bed. Her breaths were gentle as she slept peacefully. The old woman had warned him about the elixir last night. It would make Faye drowsy, but it was good for her to get rested. It would help her heal faster.

1

The Duke slipped out of his garments and peeled back the covers to crawl in beside Faye. With a plush mattress and cozy blankets, Faye's body enveloped him with a comforting warmth as he lay beside his wife. The subtle

fragrance of lavender mixed with the fresh linen bedding created a soothing atmosphere.

As he lay down, he heard the rustle of the sheets and the soft sigh that escaped Faye's lips. Just like last evening, she curled up to him. The peaceful ambiance enveloped them, and he knew it wouldn't be long before he drifted off into a tranquil slumber of his own.

He pondered if things could stay this way without adding love into the equation.

5

The\_Sweet\_Sparrow