

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 2 - A TIME TO GROW UP - PART 2

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She watched with a chill as the cloaked man outside the window slowly disappeared from view like a wraith. Faye felt as if this was another one of her horrid nightmares when she would fall sick and become plagued by high fevers.

The entire affair seemed surreal.

The family had only buried her mother hours earlier, and now here she was about to take her wedding vows to a man she knew nothing about. Then there was also the King's shocking order that she bear a child with this stranger.

2

The anxiety Faye felt right now was overwhelming. She took a deep breath to calm her mind and tried to remember happy thoughts from her childhood. She had always hoped for a marriage of love. Since she was the daughter of a royal knight, Faye had imagined herself falling for a brave Paladin and marrying him just like her mother and father had done.

However, that dream died long ago when her father was murdered, and her mother was forced to marry Baron Montgomery to keep them out of the poor house.

At this point, there was nothing more she could do now. It was too late.

Faye had to accept her fate of becoming a contract bride to the Duke. She had nowhere else to escape, and her adopted father, the Baron, had squandered her inheritance many years before on his debauched activities in the gambling houses and brothels. This left Faye and her mother destitute, with no way to support themselves.

In the end, the Baron accumulated so much gambling debt that he had no money to pay a decent doctor or buy medicine for her mother's illness. That was the reason the Baroness was no longer alive.

4

Now here Faye stood, On a king's accord. Being sold like common goods to the Duke in exchange for erasing the family's debts, and giving them a meager monthly stipend to support the indigent Barron and his heathen brood.

1

As Faye nervously stood in the parlor, her heart raced rapidly. She heard the Duke's heavy foot strides once he entered the home and marched in her direction, her anxious heart keeping pace with each of his steps. They sounded loud and confident on the wooden floor while he and her adopted father, Baron Montgomery, briefly chatted as they came closer to the parlor.

All of this made it feel as if she were awaiting execution.

When the entourage of men entered the room, she first observed the priest following behind them with his red leather-bound holy book, ready to officiate the ceremony. It was the same man who had presided over her mother's funeral. Seeing the priest, Faye felt a lump rise in her throat, and panic took hold. She clenched her fists tight by her side and swallowed hard while struggling to maintain control and not cry in front of those gathered.

She heard the clanking of armor as her eyes scanned the area, spotting two knights in their cloaks. She assumed they were the Duke's subordinates here to witness the wedding vows. Beside them was her father, who seemed quite diminutive next to their burly stature.

Faye sucked in a lungful of air, her heart still pounding in her ears, as her gaze eventually fell on the Duke. The cloak he wore covered him completely. She watched with anticipation as his calloused hands reached up to remove his hood.

5

His back was to her, so she could not get a clear view of his face. Although, Faye noticed a thick, luxurious mane of shoulder-length black hair cascading down his nape. The waves of his tresses glowed with blue highlights in the soft, dim light of the room.

2

She looked around her to gauge her siblings' reactions to the man, as they were turned where they could see his face. Aaron stood stoic with an

impassive expression as he glared at the Duke. Then Faye turned her attention to Alice, and she recognized the lewd, desirous look in Alice's bright hazel eyes as she scrutinized the Duke's appearance. For her stepsister to react this way, the man must have been remarkably handsome.

5

As Faye watched, Alice stepped closer to the Duke. She noticed how her sister delicately unfolded the fan she held in her right hand, covering her face. Then she gave Duke Thayer a polite curtsy and seductively flirted with him. Alice's coquettish expression held a come hither look as she introduced herself and held out her hand for him to kiss. It was more than apparent to those around her what she was doing.

"Greetings, Milord. I am the Baron's daughter Alice Montgomery."

Any other man in the empire would have fallen all over himself to receive such attention from Baron Montgomery's daughter. She was admittedly one of the most exquisite women in the empire. However, that was not the reaction she received from Duke Thayer. Instead, he turned his back on her, ignoring her greeting altogether, and mumbled with ire in his voice.

"Get away from me, filthy slut."

21

There was a shocked look of disbelief on Alice's face, and words of rebuke escaped her momentarily.

While Alice was trying to recover from being rejected, the Duke turned his moody impassive gaze on Faye. She stared back at him with the same quiet, vacant expression and wondered if he was as uncertain about this union taking place as she was.

Then she was distracted after spotting his eyes. The rare crimson-red color with serpent-like pupils gave him the appearance of an evil creature. Her gaze wandered down to his upper body, taking in the ropey muscles of his neck, stout shoulders, and broad chest under the cloak. It was difficult to get a better view of the rest of his body hidden beneath the mantle, but she imagined from what she had already seen, the Duke was powerfully built.

The silence of the moment was broken when Alice regained her senses and furiously articulated her displeasure of being insulted and disregarded by the Duke.

"Well, how crude you are, Sir! Never have I felt so utterly belittled!"

Baron Montgomery's face blanched at the situation. He quickly retrieved Alice and hushed her up with a warning glance before she could cause any further disturbance.

3

"Shush! Alice," He scolded, "Stop being inconsiderate and bothering the Duke on his wedding day."

Alice's eyes grew wide with incredulity that her father was not standing up for her after she had been so offensively insulted. She stood beside him; her eyes narrowed, and her lips pursed with a pouty expression. It was the first time Faye had ever seen someone put Alice in her place.

3

A wide grin tugged on Faye's lips at the scene of her stepsister's fit of rage and the worry it was causing the Baron. the Duke was certainly winning points in her eyes right now for ignoring Alice's overtly repulsive advances. Conceivably, he might not be as bad as she first perceived. Faye knew it would not be advantageous for the Baron to start a squabble with the Duke. It wouldn't be a battle he could win.

2

In a flash, Duke Thayer strode forward and, in a swift motion, aggressively clutched Faye by her upper arm and dragged her to him. He glared at the Baron and, with a harsh voice, inquired.

"Is this my bride?"

2

His actions and coarse words removed all doubts from Faye's mind.

The man was deplorable. The Baron was right when he called him a barbarian. He had not even introduced himself and placed his hands on her

without permission. This was not going as Faye had momentarily imagined. He was a rash brute. She was about to speak up and put him in his place when she was once more rudely interrupted.

1

"Priest! Let's get on with the ceremony. Once we are finished here, my bride and I are leaving. We must return to the Everton Fortress so that I may attend to my duties before the next demon horde attacks. I have no time for trivial celebrations."

1

The clipped tone in his dark voice made Faye clamp her mouth shut.

Clearly, he was in a foul mood and wanted to leave this gloomy land as fast as possible.

Although Faye did not like how things were developing, she, too, could not agree more about leaving this place and not looking back. This home had been a prison for most of her young life, and now there was a glimmer of hope. She had a perceived chance at freedom.

1

In Faye's mind, the sooner they left Wintershold, the better. At the very least, the Duke was saving her from being further mistreated by the Baron and his children. Especially, since her mother was no longer alive to protect her from the Montgomery clan.

Faye suddenly felt Duke Thayer's scowl on her skin as she stood beside him. The tension in the air was heavy with animosity. He took in her disheveled appearance with a critical eye. The Duke rounded on Baron Montgomery. His lips curled in a snarl as he growled.

"Where is the girl's wedding dress and veil? Is she not to be given as a presentable bride?"

4

The Baron, Faye's stepfather, was stunned into silence, his eyes wide with surprise at the Duke's outburst.

"..."

The_Sweet_Sparrow

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