

## **The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 3 - REGRETABLE VOW - PART 1**

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Faye watched as her adopted father's pallor paled at the Duke's words. From the way he shrank back, she could tell he was terrified of this man. Inside, it made Faye a little happy to see Theo Montgomery frightened and groveling before this formidable knight that could snap his neck like a twig.

The baron twisted his hands anxiously as he made up a lie for why the Duke's bride was not dressed in the appropriate bridal attire. There was a tremor in his voice when he spoke.

"We did not have the funds to waste on such extravagance, Milord. I have just buried my wife and what little money we had was taken by the doctor and undertaker."

2

The Duke tipped his head forward in a nod. His jaw set firmly.

"Hmm...I see. Then shall we get on with this farce of a marriage?"

4

At those words, any hope Faye had left of getting out of this union vanished. She was going to be looked at as nothing more than a tarnished possession. A ball and chain attached to his ankle that he was forced to accept by Royal decree. Faye knew there would never be a chance for love to develop. The man was not interested in her in the least.

She felt the Duke firmly tug at her arm.

"What is your name, girl?"

Her response was immediate, as if spoken without thought.

"Faye—Faye Montgomery."

The Duke stepped forward and spoke his name in a deep, bold voice.

"I am Duke Evan Sterling Thayer. From this day forward, you will call me Sterling. Do you understand?"

2

Faye tilted her head and gave a soft, affirmative response to his question.

"Yes, Milord—I mean Sterling."

The Duke watched as the woman before him stayed silent, her posture stiff. She remained tight-lipped until he encouraged her to speak. He was content with that. He did not need a girl who would be a constant burden, her nagging voice ringing in his ears with his hard-earned money slipping through her fingers. Like the girl, Alice, who was trying to hang off the front of him earlier.

5

Sterling addressed the priest, "Excellent. Now that introductions are complete, you may proceed, Padre."

The priest opened his book, and the light from the chandelier glinted off the gold-leafed pages as he stood before Duke Thayer and Faye. When he spoke, the priest's words drifted aimlessly in Faye's mind. They were hollow and empty and held no meaning. She was following the age-old tradition of becoming an Eastcarin Empire consort, a role that was often unappreciated. Just as her mother had done before her.

3

"Witnesses, we have come together in the sight of Iahn, the soul creator, of all life. We are gathered to observe this man and woman swear an oath of marriage to one another."

The officiant lifted the winter willow branch, glistening with sacred oil and its silver leaves, and showered the blessed essence over everyone gathered.

4

"In the sight of Iahn, the great creator, Duke Thayer, do you take this woman Faye Montgomery to be your betrothed? Will you revere her and cleave her to you? Cherish her, protect her from harm and not forsake her in sickness, and remain faithful until she is called to heaven by the creator, Iahn?"

Sterling replied to the vow.

"Before Iahn, I vow to make Faye mine."

In the sight of Iahn, the great creator, Faye Montgomery, daughter of the Baron of Wintershold. Will you take this man, Duke Evan Sterling Thayer, to be your betrothed? Will you revere and obey him, Cherish him, bear his heirs, and not forsake him in sickness and remain faithful until he is called to heaven by the creator, Iahn?

Faye's bright blue gaze locked with the Duke's ruby-red one as she spoke her answer.

"Before Iahn, I vow to make Sterling mine."

"I ask all witnesses and betrothed, is there a reason this union cannot be consecrated before the creator, Iahn?"

Everything was still, and the atmosphere was heavy with tranquility. The silence inside the parlor was deafening.

She stood contemplating. Even if she spoke up now and contested the marriage, it would not matter. The king was commanding the union between two houses, and if she protested, all that would result would be her death as an imperial traitor.

The priest finally broke the silence with no one objecting.

"Then, by the authority of the Eastcarin empire and Iahn, I now pronounce this marriage sanctified. You may exchange the rings."

2

Faye was dumbstruck hearing the words. Her expression was as if she was a deer in the archer's sight. She had no ring to exchange with Sterling. Her face beamed a bright hue of scarlet, embarrassed by the fact.

The silence was cut when Sterling's dark voice reached her ears.

"Rings are not exchanged in my house. Because of the constant grip of my sword, I cannot wear them. It is to prevent injury. I don't want to lose a finger."

The relief Faye felt was short-lived when he spoke up again.

"In my land, we exchange a necklace, bracelet, or anklet. For you, my bride, I have chosen an anklet."

1

He knelt before her and raised her dress just enough to see her tiny foot. Then, as he was about to place the anklet on her, Sterling noticed the calloused red marks around her lower leg. She had recently been in an iron cuff and chained to something.

6

Seeing this on his new bride made him boil with fury. He wanted to know why she was in this condition. But there was no time, and he was here to take a bride. Not start a war. He pushed back his rage and slid the dainty chain around her ankle, fastening it on. Faye heard a tiny chiming noise when she moved her foot.

2

It was an uneasy sound as it made her feel like an animal wearing a bell so its master could keep track of it.

2

When he was done, Sterling gracefully raised himself from the floor and stood before Faye, waiting for her offering. She bowed her head in shame. She had nothing to give.

Faye apologized, "I am sorry, I have nothing to offer you."

Sterling's stern voice rang out above her head

"Look at me, Faye. It is no large matter. I do not need trinkets."

2

He tenderly raised her chin with his finger, locking eyes with her. His view of her face was hidden beneath the curtain of her soft, blonde tresses. He reached out to tuck the strands of hair behind her ear, but she flinched away from his touch.

In response to her reaction, Sterling pulled her close to his side and frowned at her.

"We have not finished the ceremony. We must seal our pledge with a kiss."

2

Faye's throat tightened, and her mouth felt like cotton as she tried to process his words of 'a kiss', taking her completely off guard.

5

The\_Sweet\_Sparrow

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