

The Dragon's Fated Bride Chapter 32 - COME, GENTLE KNIGHT - PART 2

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They returned to the farmhouse quickly and in silence. Faye said nothing during the journey back, and Sterling noticed her expression was indifferent. The news of the smithy's young apprentice's death had caused a change in her. She clasped her purse to her chest, and Sterling thought she might start weeping for a moment.

When they arrived at the farmhouse, there was a flurry of activity. Some town's people had gathered at the widow woman's home. It looked like they were fearful of returning to Easthaven and sought to seek shelter. However, Sterling and his men had already rented the entire home.

2

Sterling dismounted Helios, taking Faye with him as he climbed off the steed. Her face showed exhaustion and a sour mood. He gave his stallion's reins to the coachmen, who had come out to welcome them. The Duke picked up Faye in his muscular arms and took her to the house.

She didn't object to his affectionate move and even snuggled into the breastplate of his armor. He realized she felt sad about the boy's passing and was seeking comfort from him.

4

They passed through the kitchen, and Helena pursued the Duke and Faye up the stairs. Her expression showed one of extreme worry. She noticed Faye in the Duke's arms, her face buried from everyone's sight.

"Milord, is there anything I can do for you?...Is the Duchess okay?"

He did not turn to speak with the old woman. Sterling continued slowly down the corridor to the room he and Faye were sharing.

"Yes, please bring us food, and a bottle of pear brandy if you have any on hand. Hot tea for Faye and her potion for her lungs. She has had a difficult evening and needs her rest. We will not be coming down for the rest of the

night. Tomorrow we will leave. I am concerned about my men who left here and my lands. I must return to Everton after seeing the monster raid today."

"One more thing. If you have a tub, we would both like to bathe."

Helena replied, "Yes, Duke. I will have everything prepared right away."

3

Sterling toed the door of their room open with his boot, then kicked it shut. He strolled to the bed and placed Faye in a seated position on the edge. He knelt before Faye to take in her face.

The Duke was eager to see if she was crying. Faye's eyes were raised to meet his, and they looked sullen and pale. Like the life had been drained from them, the sparkle they had held earlier when he intimately kissed her was missing. Her expression was vacant.

His finger pushed her hair behind her ear so the light from the candles could illuminate her face. He wanted to be sure she was not injured anywhere else after seeing the damage to her hands.

Sterling scanned Faye's face while she sat lifeless. He then tried to remove her cloak, but she clenched it tightly and refused to surrender it to him.

"Faye, let go of the cloak. I need to check you over. I want to make sure you do not have any serious injuries that need tending."

It wasn't long before Sterling realized Faye was in shock. Her skin had grown cold, and she shivered fiercely. Each breath she took was slow and shallow. Faye's eyes drooped. He had seen this on the battlefield when men were fatigued or had seen too much death and gore.

However, he knew the remedy for this was food and a nice hot bath. She sat motionless as he slid his arms around her to keep her warm. Sterling brought his lips to her ears and whispered tenderly.

"I will take care of you, my sweet butterfly."

She rolled her eyes to the side to meet his. Then turned her face to stare at him head-on in the eyes.

"...I...I want you to touch me again like we did on the road. I have never felt more alive. The kiss..." Faye stopped, and Sterling watched her touch her bottom lip with her fingers tips as if remembering how his mouth took hers. They were still puffy and swollen from where he had sucked hard on them. She stared at him with a dazed expression and slowly spoke.

"I have been nothing but a shell...existing with a dead soul inside. Today, you woke me up and showed me something beautiful. You held me, kissed me, showered me with gifts and affection. Something I have not had since I was a very young child. You gave me hope that my life will change for the better."

6

She leaned closer to Sterling and softly mumbled into his ear, "Yes, to answer your question from earlier. I will share your bed with you tonight, my husband."

4

Sterling felt his heart racing as warmth spread through his body. His face lit up with a broad smile, and his eyes sparkled with joy. The Duke's hands trembled slightly as he reached out to take hers in his own. His breath quickened, and his pulse pounded in his ears. He felt a sudden rush of energy and a deep sense of contentment. He knew at that moment that he had fallen for this girl.

7

Sterling tilted his head in curiosity. "Before we move forward, what changed your mind?"

"...You did." Her voice trembled as she explained. "The sound of your voice tonight in the woods wound around my soul. You made my heart swell in my chest and flutter every time you spoke or touched me. It was beating so loud—it drowned out all my worries and sorrows" She took a deep breath. "I...felt no other emotion except for what you were conveying to me through your touch and words."

"With you by my side tonight, all the loneliness and feelings of being unwanted were wiped away with that single passionate kiss. The fear of being hurt again disappeared the moment you scooped me into your arms and rode me away from the chaos." Her eyes shook from side to side as she continued. "You told me to breathe...I...I felt reassured because you were taking each intake of air with me. I trusted you."

"Being with you in your powerful embrace makes all the bad things fade away. I can feel my heart racing and...my body trembling as I'm held tightly in your arms. I can feel a warmth radiating through me as waves of comfort and security wash over me. The cares and worries of the world just seem to melt away in that moment. All that matters is that I'm in your arms, safe and loved—It's just you and me, together."

2

"Don't you see—Sterling Thayer? This is how you make me feel inside here." Faye picked up his hand that clutched hers and placed it over her chest so he could feel the fierce thrumming of her heart.

"I never want to let you go. If this is how love feels with you, ...it's all I want."

3

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A/N: Three days, and the contest ends. Results will be posted a week from now. Fingers crossed!

7

The_Sweet_Sparrow

Your gift is the motivation for my creation. Thank you, readers, for all that you have given.