

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 106

### #106 The Capital's Gate

The wait in the line was awfully long. There were a lot of people waiting to get inside the Capital, a lot of them getting impatient too. Cassandra and Missandra did their best to keep their heads low, the younger sister trying to mimic her older sister. The big rings of metal around their neck were actually old slavery collars that Verna had retrieved from girls that had bought their freedom. The lock was broken, and they could easily be opened, but it wouldn't be visible to the guards, as they were wearing shawls and covering their napes with their hair.

Verna was the worst actress of the three. She kept glancing down at Kassian, looking very awkward. The baby didn't seem to care much for who carried him, his eyes were constantly following his mother.

Meanwhile, the one supposed to return as his mother looked like she was horribly embarrassed to be carrying a baby. Thankfully, Kian was quietly staying in the forest. Cassandra was scared, though. Even if, after several attempts, she had managed to have him stay behind, actually ready for a little nap, she was afraid the baby dragon would come out at any .

moment and betray them. She was counting on the crowd, though. Kian had never seen so many humans in one place since he was born and stayed away from strangers too. Hopefully, he would find something to distract him long enough in the forest before she called him to fly over... When they were only a few people away from the guards, both sisters tried to pay close attention to the guards. The men were obviously not paying much attention and bored with that job. Moreover, people were angry about waiting, several officials didn't even hold back on complaining and scolding them. Hence, the soldiers were doing their best to check on the people quickly and move on to the next one. This was a piece of good news. They probably wouldn't check too long either.

"You, with the baby," called one of them when Verna stepped forward.

"Is that your kid?"

"It's my niece, I'm bringing her back to my brother, his wife couldn't

take it anymore and left him alone with the kid. Can you believe that?"

"What bitch. Your niece is cute! My wife just had twins, all they do is cry... You look lucky, she's quite behaved. Can I see your bag?"

"Sure, here. So far so good, but it's almost her milk time. Gotta give her back to her dad..."

"Oh, sure. Wait, are those slaves with you?"

Missandra and Cassandra, keeping their heads down, stepped closer to Verna. They could barely breathe, but everything was going well so far...

"Yeah. Is there anything wrong?"

"You have two slaves? You don't look that wealthy..."

Missandra felt a pearl of sweat going down her spine. That damn guard, couldn't he just mind his own business!

"Hey, I don't have the looks but I work hard. Red District pays well, hun. I actually got those two from their masters, at a good price too. Just check the bag, you'll see I have plenty of what I had prepared left."

"Oh... I see. Be careful though, they're being stricter on the laws about the slaves. Well, those two look pretty fat, probably not too bad, eh?"

Cassandra went red. That was her first time being called fat! She had just given birth, but still! Missandra, making sure to keep her head down, could keep herself from rolling her eyes. Stupid soldier.

"Alright, you're free to go. Come on people, let's get moving!"

Finally, they were able to get in, making sure to walk away from the crowd and get into one of the narrower streets. Cassandra let out a long sigh of relief.

"I can't believe that worked..."

"Me neither, but anyway," said Verna. "Just take back your kid anyway..."

Cassandra happily opened her arms. She was glad to finally take back her son, and the baby immediately gripped a strand of her hair. She smiled at him, but Kassian really didn't look upset in any way, his eyes riveted on the strand of black hair with a familiar little frown on.

“Good one, making him pass for a girl,” chuckled Missandra. “You’re smarter than you look.”

Verna glared at her while taking the bag away from Missandra, furiously starting to rummage through its content.

“Oh, shut up. Now, where the heck is my money! You better...”

Before Verna could finish her sentence, a sudden ruckus was heard behind them. Cassandra went white. People were screaming towards the gate, some pointing fingers towards the sky. Someone yelled about a horrible monster flying. Missandra grimaced.

“I think the other baby decided not to wait for the cue...”

Sure enough, they soon spotted Kian, quickly flying their way, shedding off some of his fake feathers and his wings flapping off a lot of dust too. Somewhere behind him, the girls heard some soldiers scream about a chase. They would have no problem chasing the dragon now!

“Oh, crap!”

Reacting immediately, Missandra grabbed her sister’s hand, and they ran away, taking a different street. Verna didn’t follow them and ran in another direction, holding their bag closely. The two sisters had no time to care about that theft. They started running across the streets, trying to hide from the soldiers. Behind them, Kian had fun flying to follow them, but Missandra quickly caught the baby dragon, making sure his flying above their heads wouldn’t give away their position.

Cassandra was holding Kassian tightly, completely panicked. She had no idea where they were headed, she was blindly following her younger sister and praying. They ran for a while, until Missandra suddenly grabbed Cassandra’s hand, pulling her into her hideout. It was a garden’s little back door, who looked locked from the outside, but only needed a little push to be opened on an abandoned garden. It was a very small one, where Krai wouldn’t even have been able to lend on. Both sisters ran in, and Missandra quickly closed the door behind her. They put their backs against the door, immediately getting quick, listening to the soldiers’ steps. It was hard to know their position, the men kept yelling orders at

all times. They heard them running past the door, and waiting, trying to control their breathing and hold on to both babies.

Kassian was wiggling around in Cassandra's arms, looking uncomfortable, probably unhappy about the race from earlier. Kian, too, didn't like being kept. He struggled in Missandra's arms, his tail wagging angrily. Thankfully, she had learned better about how to handle a baby dragon and kept her hand tight around his snout to avoid any bites.

The sisters waited like this for a few more minutes. They needed to catch their breaths, and they were both terrified. Those men had seen Kian, and they would probably realize Cassandra was back into the Capital too... After a while, everything was back to being quiet around them.

Cassandra fell on her butt, her back still against the door, sighing. She couldn't believe it... They really made it with her sister's crazy plan. She took off the fake collar, leaving it there, and rubbed Kassian's little hands to calm herself.

"I'm so exhausted," sighed Missandra. "I hope your people have a good bed for us..."

"Me too. That woman took our money..."

"Verna? No, she didn't. I have it there."

Missandra suddenly pulled out the little purse from under her shawl.

Cassandra had lost hers while they were running, but that didn't matter much anymore. She frowned.

"But she had it while we were checked. How did you..."

"When she grabbed the bag away from me, ironically."

Cassandra sighed.

"Mie..."

"What? We need that money, just in case. Plus, she won't even know where we are going now, so..."

Cassandra kept shaking her head. Missandra was truly another level of mischievous. Well, at least they had some money left for them not to worry in case something happened at the residence. Cassandra didn't know what to expect there, but she hoped her friends would be able to

help them out. They had been sleeping in the woods for a week with a baby and a dragon baby, and they could use a good night's sleep...

"How did you know that door wasn't locked?"

"I know several good hideouts like these throughout the City... It's kind of useful when you need to run away."

"Missandra..."

"What? I already told you I really pissed off a lot of people!"

"We need to talk about your debt once this is all over," sighed Cassandra.

Missandra shrugged.

"Anyway. Do you know how far we are from your residence?"

Cassandra took a deep breath, trying to remember which part of the Capital they were in, first. It was such a large city, and they had run through several streets, too. Cassandra wasn't familiar with all the districts, but she could remember the way from the gate. Judging from how much they had run earlier, they probably weren't too far.

"About ten minutes away..."

"Alright, then let's wait a bit more to be sure those soldiers are gone and go..."

Cassandra nodded. She got up and, as all gardens had one, went to wash away the tan from her hands and face. With her shawl and their spare clothing gone, there was no use trying to walk around with her hands and face being darker than her arms. She quickly washed all of the dye away, Missandra doing the same after her. They still both had black hair, but their skin was back to their original porcelain color.

Meanwhile, the young Prince and young Dragon had been playing next to them, on the shawl Missandra had laid down for them. The human baby was still too young to move around, but he'd grab Kian's tail and hold on despite the young dragon's attempts to waggle him off.

Cassandra chuckled about catching that scene, and took Kassian in her arms, kissing his plump little cheek gently. The baby grabbed her dress with a pout on.

"Alright, let's go," she sighed.

They couldn't put Kian in the bag anymore, as Verna had run away with it, so Missandra wrapped the little dragon in her shawl, trying to cover his head as much as she could like he was some package. Thankfully, it was dusk now. The sky was getting darker, and hopefully, their chances to be spotted as well. Both sisters carefully walked out of their hideout, Missandra walking ahead to check each street first. They were extremely careful, but luckily, they didn't run into any soldiers. Following Missandra's directions, they went to the most crowded streets, hiding among the people, acting as if they were just passing by. Cassandra was afraid to be spotted the most. Holding Kassian against her chest, she desperately tried not to look up the sky. If only a black dragon could have appeared now...

Finally, after waiting in a narrow street for a bunch of soldiers doing their patrol to leave, they arrived in the street of Cassandra's residence. She felt a bit nervous. What if Vrehan knew about this place? What if something had happened while she was away? What if they were locked out, without any help and only a bit of money left?

Cassandra took a big breath, and knocked at the door, while her younger sister was watching around. The street was deserted, thankfully, but at first, no one answered her knock. She tried again, worried. She hadn't come here in ages...

"This is a private residence!" Yelled a voice from behind the door. "State your name and your business!"

Despite the rude answer, Cassandra smiled immediately.

"Yasora! It's me, Cassandra. Open please!"

"Don't yell that!" Missandra said, looking worried.

"Oh, by the Gods! Finally!"

Finally, the woman opened the door, and grabbed Cassandra's wrist, pulling her in. Yasora was wearing a green dress, her hair was braided down, with some white streaks in it. She seemed to have aged a bit, but she actually looked much healthier than the last time Cassandra had seen it, with a bit more weight on.

As Missandra and Cassandra walked in, they were surprised to see several lights on in the residence. Yasora wouldn't let go of Cassandra's hand, almost shaking.

"We were waiting for you two!" said the older woman, her eyes looking as if she was about to cry. "I was starting to fear something had happened to you! Now, come in!"

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### #107 The Bad News

After one last glance around to make sure they hadn't been followed, both sisters were pulled inside, and the door tightly closed behind them. Kian, who apparently had enough of being carried by Missandra, let out one of his little high-pitched chirps and jumped out of the shawl she had been trying to keep him wrapped in. He landed on the ground, more in a little tumble than gracefully, but quickly got back on his feet to start sniffing and looking around.

Meanwhile, the exhausted sisters finally let out a long sigh of relief.

Cassandra turned to Yasora, confused.

"You were expecting us? How come?"

She knew that, next to her, Missandra already had her hand on her little dagger, just in case this turned out to be a trap of some sort. However, it was very unlikely. Officially, there was nothing tying Cassandra to this residence, Kairen had just gotten rid of its owner and freed all the slaves, but in the facts, probably no one had stopped to take care of the paperwork.

The middle-aged servant lady looked better than the last time Cassandra had seen her, except for her tired eyes. Yasora took her hand, nodding.

"We were so worried! Two days ago, a man showed up at the door out of the blue, saying he had come under the orders of Imperial Concubine Kareen! He told us you would likely arrive here soon, with your younger sister and a newborn, and to be ready to help you! He said we had to do

anything we can to help you here as soon as you arrived, and make sure no one found you. Oh, he gave us plenty of money and food to fill our storage, too! Oh, and we have a letter that came for you, carried by a messenger bird, from an Imperial Servant named Evin.”

“Evin!” Exclaimed Cassandra, surprised to hear about him now.

“Someone you know, Hinue?” Asked Missandra, confused.

“My Lord appointed him as my... attendant back when we were in the North Camp. He accompanied me all day back then, he’s a good man.”

Just then, Kassian started getting agitated in his mother’s arms. A bit unhappy, the baby started moving his closed fists and cry a bit, upset.

“Oh, come in! Let’s take care of you first, you must be exhausted! Don’t worry, we have everything ready!”

Yasora guided them inside the residence.

The

Cassandra had lived several years in this place, and she could tell the changes since the last time she had come here. First, the roof that Krai had torn had been repaired, though the place seemed to have been renovated as some storage place. Moreover, the lack of actual master in the house, leaving all the servants in charge, made the house look livelier than ever before. Plants were happily growing in the gardens, with some cats playing around, and a lot of doors were left open, the young servants rushing from one place to another without worry.

However, as Yasora had promised, everyone had been waiting for them.

As soon as they came in, Cassandra was immediately surrounded by many familiar faces. The young servants and former slaves she had worked with years prior surrounded her, greeting her and being amazed by her baby. However, Kassian wasn’t in the mood for introductions. The young little prince kept crying and fussing until Yasora yelled for the young ones to clear the area and get to work. She was apparently naturally appointed as the head of the house until Cassandra returned.

First, both girls got to take a bath in one of the large indoor bathtubs of the residence. As if they were some valued guests, the two sisters and



Kassian were given every little attention by the servants. After about a week of leaving in the wild, Cassandra and Missandra enjoyed being able to properly relax in some hot water with fancy soaps. They washed off the black ink from their hair too, and let Kassian play in the water a bit. Just like Kian, they had already noticed that the baby liked water a lot. As soon as he would be in, he'd naturally try to paddle a bit with his feet, and wiggle around. Kian was swimming around in the bathtub until they got out, too. His wings were still not fully developed, but he could make short little flights and jump out of the water before diving again.

Once they were done bathing, the sisters were given some big bathrobes, and someone had even gone to buy new diapers for the baby. Kian was a bit harder to take out of the bath, though. Despite Cassandra's many attempts to call him, he ignored both sisters, and Missandra had to struggle against a mischievous baby dragon that had fun making her chase him around until she finally grabbed him by the tail.

"Come, while you were bathing we got some dinner ready for you," said Yasora. "I feel like you have a lot to tell us!"

Indeed, a large table had been prepared with food, making them immediately hungry despite their current fatigue. Missandra almost jumped to get some steamed bun. Meanwhile, Cassandra carefully laid Kassian down between in a little basket with a blanket that Mira, the young servant girl, had prepared for him. As soon as he got on his back, the baby yawned, and Kian jumped next to him to curl up for a nap, too.

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"So?" Said Yasora. "I'm very confused, Cassandra. Last time we saw you was at the slave market, and after that, we barely heard anything..."

"I'm sorry, things got... hectic."

Cassandra went on to explain everything that had happened to her since the last time she had come here to free the slaves, and Kairen had killed her previous master. It was a lot from when she had left the Palace, and Missandra helped her fill some blanks as well. Both sisters were also

trying to eat while talking, as the sight of cooked food was making their stomachs beg for more. With all the stress, Cassandra hadn't realized how tired and hungry she really was.

Once she was done, both for explanations and eating, she turned to Yasora, worried.

"What about the letter?"

"Oh, right. Give me a minute..."

She left and came back, handing to Cassandra the letter she had mentioned earlier.

"This arrived a couple of days ago, though I didn't open that letter, as it was destined for you. Just like I said, that letter arrived the next morning after the unknown man that had a lot of gold and food to give us had come by, delivered by another man. He warned us we'd better...

Welcome you properly and make sure you were safe."

Missandra and Cassandra exchanged a glance.

"Definitely one of Lady Kareen's spies," said Missandra.

"Probably," agreed her older sister, opening the letter right away.

Cassandra read the lines so fast that she had to go over a second time before handing them to Missandra.

In this letter, Evin was true to himself, wishing Cassandra was alright as well as giving her a detailed report of the situation in the North Army Camp, how he had persuaded Shareen to bring him back with her to the Diamond Castle, and the situation until he had sent this letter in a hurry. She let out a sigh of relief, though she wished it contained some better news.

"So, Lady Shareen is at least back to the Diamond Palace, with Prince Anour," sighed Missandra.

"However, they still had no news of my Lord when that letter was sent...

What is going on..."

Cassandra couldn't hide how worried she was for Kairen.

She was happy about Shareen's return to the Diamond Palace, as now, Lady Kareen had an extra ally by her side. The mother-daughter duo was

that strong that it had actually chased the second prince. She didn't care much about Phetra's fate for now, but Cassandra was worried to know where that treacherous brother of hers had gone. Did he follow the fake leads into the north? They hadn't heard anything about the Second Prince's army on the way there, but this could have been because moving his army was slower. Maybe he was only a couple of days behind... Missandra gently put a hand on her older sister's leg, feeling her worry. She then turned to Yasora.

"How is the situation here? We heard some bad rumors about the Emperor on our way here..."

The middle-aged woman sighed and nodded, grabbing one layer of her brown attire with a sour expression.

"I fear it was all true... The piece of news has been all over the streets for a couple of days, now. The Old Emperor suddenly fell very sick. We don't know what is really going in the palace, the security was increased all of a sudden, there was a big ruckus. They tried to prevent people from coming in, or coming out, which made the people really suspicious. Some ministers and scholars were even executed publicly, people are terrified!" 1

Cassandra went livid. How come so much had happened in just a week? Just because Sephir had died? Now, the Emperor was in such a dire situation, too? People being executed... That sounded like someone was purging. Her heart sank. What if Kairen didn't come back in time to stop his brother? She exchanged a glance with Missandra. Her younger sister didn't look worried, but angry.

"That rat face probably put his plan in motion as soon as your man was sent to war," she said. "What a snake..."

"So no one was able to enter the Palace since then?" Asked Cassandra.

"What about the fourth and fifth Princes?"

"I haven't heard anything about those two."

Cassandra bit her lower lip. That meant the fifth prince Lephys and fourth prince Opheus were probably still inside the Imperial Palace. The

problem was, she had no idea if they would side with their second brother or Kairen. Cassandra had only met the two of them very briefly. Lephys didn't give her a good impression at all, and she couldn't even remember seeing Opheus aside from his presence during the Red Moon Festival. He was known to be very secretive and avoided his father's banquets almost as much as Kairen and Shareen. Could he be a potential ally? She couldn't approach any of them without being sure...

"What about the battlefield?" She asked, her throat a bit tight. "Tell me you have news?"

Yasora seemed to hesitate for a few seconds and nodded.

"I do, but... they are not much better. The last thing we heard came from some soldiers, yesterday. Ethen went to buy some groceries and heard them... Apparently, they said the War God was ambushed in the last City, and the fight isn't doing too well. I don't know if that's true, but... the Eastern Empire had dragons."

Cassandra stayed speechless. Dragons? How could the Eastern Empire have Dragons? None of their people had dragon blood! Were those dragons captured? Or conveniently given to them, by another one of the Prince's schemes? Cassandra tried to remember.

"Vrehan has two sons, but he wouldn't send his own sons' dragons to war..." she muttered.

"Maybe he took some of his brothers?" Said Missandra. "Didn't the first prince had some too?"

"Sephir had one son, and other than Vrehan's sons, I think the fifth Prince Lephys had sons as well... Oh, God, the first Prince's Concubines, and their children!"

Cassandra had almost completely forgotten about those two. What had happened to them after Sephir's death? She clearly remembered the two concubines who had tried to befriend her, back at the Imperial Palace. Kareen had stated those women and their children would be in danger as soon as their Lord died. What had Vrehan done with them, and with the children? Would he use his nephew's dragon?

She remembered those women, Berissa and Chiara, when they had come to her. Cassandra hadn't thought too much about it since then... She hoped they were fine. Did they manage to leave the Imperial Palace? Maybe they were fine for now, as the Old Emperor was still alive. "I hope they are doing alright... You said the man brought gold and food. Did he say anything else?"

"No. He was very discreet, probably a spy."

It made sense. Cassandra wished Lady Kareen had left more information. At least she had found a way to provide them some assistance.

"Lady Kareen probably didn't want you to move from here until they arrive," said Missandra. "Without the third Prince, you're just a target for them. Especially with those two."

She was pointing at Kassian and Kian, both peacefully sleeping already. Cassandra sighed. The last thing she wanted to do was put her baby and his dragon in any danger. This house was probably safe for now, but the word that she was hiding in the Capital would definitely spread around now that Kian had been spotted at the gate. Moreover, she couldn't help but worry about everything going on. The concubines and their children, and the Old Emperor... The battlefield, as well. What was that story about dragons! This was supposed to be an easy victory, but now, her dear War God could really be in trouble...

"Shareen will probably go to help him if she came back to the Diamond Palace," said Cassandra. "However, I think this sounds too much like a giant trap."

"Definitely," sighed her sister. "I told you since the beginning. What do we do though? We should stay still until they arrive, right?"

Cassandra hesitated a bit. Could she stay put, though? The time was planning against them. If that letter had arrived two days ago through a bird. If everything Evin had said was right and Shareen had to go help her brother to the battlefield before they could come back here, her Prince most likely wouldn't be able to return to the Capital for at least a couple more days. That was only the most optimistic estimate, too... 1

Meanwhile, his father was dying in the Imperial Palace, only a few paces away from Cassandra. She bit her lip, making Missandra frown.

“Oh, no, no, Hinue.”

“This might be our only chance to save the Emperor,” she said.

“Or our one mistake to get killed! Why would you go to the Imperial Palace when this is exactly the first place we could get ourselves killed!”

“The second Prince isn’t in the Capital at the moment, right?” Asked Cassandra, turning to Yasora.

“No...”

“See? Missandra, if the Emperor dies, we will be in much more trouble than now. We are losing time, the Old Emperor could die any minute from whatever they did to him!”

“Yes, and maybe that old man is already dead and done for, Cassandra! In any case, I’m pretty sure Lady Kareen didn’t want you to go there expose yourself! They freaking closed the Imperial Palace for a reason, they don’t want you in!”

“Maybe we can find a way around that...” whispered Cassandra, Missandra was about to retort something, but before she did, Yasora raised her hands, putting an end to their dispute.

“Ladies, I think you are both very tired and in need of some decent sleep. So, even if you want to come up with a plan, I suggest it waits until tomorrow.”

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### #108 The Sisters’ Plan

Despite all her worries and the thoughts she had, the exhaustion from the journey allowed Cassandra a long and deep sleep. She and Missandra were finally able to sleep in a real bed after a long bath, a real meal, and also, without having to get up to tend to the babies. Kassian and Kian were carefully watched by Yasora and the young Mira and Ethen, who made sure the two young babies didn’t miss a thing. Cassandra wouldn’t

have entrusted them to anyone else, but she really needed one night of interrupted sleep.

When she woke up the next morning, she was feeling refreshed, and her mind was clearer, too. However, Cassandra's opinion hadn't changed. She was only left to trying to convince Missandra to participate. This wasn't just about having her sister concur, it was also because she realized her younger sister's wits may be a life-saving skill if she had to infiltrate the heavily guarded Imperial Palace. Missandra had demonstrated that she had her own resources over the past week, and the points she and Cassandra were different about might be crucial. Hence, when she walked in the little room that had breakfast waiting for them, Cassandra tried to think about how to approach her sister. Carrying Kassian, how was a bit grouchy from having just woken up, she sat next to her.

"Good morning..."

"Morning," yawned Missandra, her hair still over the place on her shoulders.

Somehow, Yasora seemed to have understood that the two sisters would have important topics to discuss because none of the younger servants were around, and everyone around them was simply busy with their tasks, not staring or asking any questions. They started eating in silence, only Kian and Kassian making little noises. While the baby was being breastfed, Kian was devouring a full plate of meat buns, apparently his new favorite food.

Cassandra waited a bit before opening her mouth, trying to gauge her sister's mood, but Missandra was being a bit too quiet.

"Missandra..."

"If this is about last night, Hinue, my answer is still no."

Cassandra sighed. She knew how stubborn her sister was. This wasn't going to be an easy one...

"Missandra, we cannot stay passive."

"Yes, we can. We are not going to get ourselves killed by infiltrating a Palace guarded by hundreds of guards under this maniac's control just to

save an old man who, if were that unlucky, might even be already dead.”

“The Emperor isn’t dead yet,” retorted Cassandra. “Missandra, I cannot stay hidden here while he might be dying when I can probably save him.”

“You don’t know if he’s really dying, if he’s fine or dead already! You don’t know if you’ll be able to save him either, Cassandra, and that might actually cost your life! The only thing we do know for sure is that the crazy second prince wants to kill you, and Kassian. That’s about it. We don’t even know if your Prince is fine and still alive!”

“I know Kairen is fine,” retorted Cassandra, almost angry now.

Missandra shook her head. She didn’t like to be scolding her older sister, but she was terrified that Cassandra was about to put herself in danger, once more, and she wouldn’t be able to stop her. Missandra put down her plate and turned to Cassandra, looking very serious.

“You barely escaped him once, Cassandra,” she said. “You barely did. If it wasn’t for the Diamond People, or for Lady Kareen buying us some time, we would already be dead, or worse, dead in his dragon’s stomach. This psychopath might even have taken his sweet time and tortured you, just to piss off the War God. In any case, I will not abide by anything that might put you and I anywhere near that guy. Not until we are sure to be safe, and that includes the Second Prince or Lady Shareen being around.”

Cassandra sighed. She understood Missandra’s reasons and, in many ways, her younger sister was actually right. It was a miracle that they had been able to come here safe and unharmed. Cassandra had gotten a new scar on her arm, but it was healed already, and probably not a too bad outcome considering what the sisters had been running from.

However, something was telling her to go to the Imperial Palace. Not only for the old Emperor, but she felt like something much bigger was going on, and they had to stop it before it was too late. If her Prince was still caught up in a war, how could she stay here and drink tea?

“Missandra, I can’t. I can’t stay hidden here. We already made the biggest of the journey, our goal was to arrive in the Capital.”

“Yes, because we thought the Old Emperor could save us. We had no



idea he wasn't doing well! If we go there, we can't be sure he will protect you or Kassian!"

"What if he can? What if we can save the Emperor and end this?"

Missandra, another thing we know almost for sure is that the Second Prince isn't there, right?"

The younger sister frowned, but before she answered, Yasora cleared her throat.

"He is not. Actually, news came in very early this morning. Two of our people who were in the market said the second Prince was on his way here, but still a couple of cities away."

"See?" Said Cassandra. "We will know right away if Prince Vrehan comes here, Missandra, his..."

"He is on his way back!" Yelled Missandra, getting on her feet.

"Cassandra, this cold blooded murderer, and his crazy bitch sister might be only a few hours away from here!"

"This is exactly why we have to move now! The longer we hesitate, the more time we will lose! What if this is our chance to beat him, heal the Emperor and punish Vrehan and Phetra for what they did?"

Missandra stayed silent for a few seconds. This was really too crazy. She was the one trying to hold Cassandra back, and her sister the one who wanted to take action? This was truly too much! This was a life and death kind of decision, and she was scared they were running into a trap.

"What if they expect us? What if we run into a trap? Have you thought about Kassian? And Kian?"

Cassandra looked down at her son and took a deep breath.

"I'm thinking about him. If his grandfather dies, what do you think will happen? Maybe something will happen to his father, maybe Kairen won't be able to keep Vrehan from becoming Emperor. I am done letting Kairen fight every battle for me. I am good at one thing, Missandra, it's healing people. If the Emperor is sick, this is my call. This is up to me to do what I can. I will let Kairen deal with Vrehan, but the Emperor's health became my responsibility the moment I heard about it. Doing

nothing is the worst thing. I'd rather die attempting to do something than stay here and close my eyes, hoping someone else will solve the problem for me."

Missandra opened her mouth, but she found no words to respond to that. She was annoyed. Annoyed, as her older sister was probably right. No man could save the Emperor better than Cassandra at that time. The second Prince wasn't expecting them to be there. He wouldn't know until he returned to the Capital, and they still were a little bit ahead. Moreover, they had a chance that the War God would return, too, but they didn't have more information on his whereabouts. Actually, the information they had was that neither of the princes was there, and the old Emperor, however, was there, and sick. She let out a long sigh of frustration.

"...What about Kassian?"

"We can watch him here," immediately replied Yasora.

"What tells me you can trust you?" Retorted Missandra, a bit too coldly. The middle-aged woman put her fists on her waist. She knew that the young lady was Cassandra's younger sister, but she could use some manners!

"Well, you're still alive, miss doubtful, aren't you? Also, there isn't a single human being in this Residence that don't owe their life to Cassandra. She freed us from slavery or servitude that was just as bad. Everyone here would die for her."

Missandra pouted. Why was it that Cassandra always had that kind of effect on people? The North people, the Diamond people, and now those servants, everyone loved her. Was it okay to trust them? If it was Missandra, she wouldn't even have entrusted them with a single hair of her nephew! She let out a long sigh, turning to her sister once again.

"I suppose we don't have any better option?" She asked, totally ignoring Yasora's glare.

"I'm afraid not," said Cassandra. "No one knows where I came from, or that I'm in any way related to this place, aside from the Prince. At least Vrehan won't be able to find them here, even if something happens to

us.”

This way, even if something happened to Cassandra, Kairen would immediately know where to look for their son. She didn't say that at loud, though, as Missandra was already rather upset.

“Fine, admitting that I do agree to all of this, what's the plan? How do we get into the Imperial Palace? Because the heavily guarded situation is still pretty much there.”

Cassandra took a minute to think about it. Unfortunately, there was no way the dragon they had could have the two of them fly into the Palace. This was the way she had most used, recently. The only exception had been with Shareen when she had gone downtown, but they had used the main gates and this was out of the question. 1

“You could use the servants' entry?”

They turned around. The young Mara had just come back, carrying a big bowl of meat buns since Kian had happily emptied the previous one. She carefully put the new bowl close to the young dragon, making sure to keep her fingers away from him, and sat on her knees, close to Cassandra. “The servants' entry?” Asked Cassandra.

The young girl nodded.

“Do you remember, when you came back and the Dragon ate the master? A lot of the other servants left, but some are still my friends, and now, they work at the Imperial Palace. They said the servants' entry is not well-guarded, there are only two guards!”

Cassandra and Missandra exchanged looks, a bit doubtful. Only two guards? That almost seemed a bit too good to be true. She actually had no idea there was a different entry for the servants but, remembering her days at the Imperial Palace, Cassandra had indeed noticed that they always seemed like they would come out of literally nowhere... They had to stay out of sight as to not annoy the many members of the Imperial Family. The Imperial servants were often invisible to most people, walking quickly and keeping their heads lowered. In a strange way, it almost made sense that how they got in and out of the Imperial Palace

would be a bit less tightly secured. So

bother with the lower-class people?

“We are still white,” Missandra reminded her.

“Well, we are already good at disguising ourselves, aren’t we? If you managed to have us fool them once when we only had a bit of makeup and a few trees to hide, you should be able to do it once again, right?”

Missandra was bitterly starting to regret her display of makeup skills now. She sighed and turned to Yasora and Mira.

“Do you think you could get us some servant outfits and makeup?”

“Anything you need! We have servants going to the market and shops every day, no one will suspect a thing...”

Just like that, Missandra and Cassandra started reviewing each step of their plan, with Yasora and Mira’s help. The more she heard her sister, the more Cassandra knew she was going to accept this. Missandra was making sure every detail of their plan to infiltrate the Palace could work, and there was no end to her questions. Just from hearing her talk, she could tell her younger sister had much experience in dealing with all kinds of people. She was talking about the guards’ rounds and breaks, the servants’ schedules, the rotations and tasks inside the Palace.

However, they didn’t have that much time to lose in talking, and no matter how long they planned this, they wouldn’t be able to prevent everything that could go wrong from happening. Hence, Yasora sent a couple of servants to go and grab the things Missandra listed her, and while they waited for their return, the sisters agreed to go to the Palace early that afternoon. Cassandra didn’t want to lose any more time and, right after lunch, the activity inside the Palace would probably be lesser, as it would be time for court. Cassandra only had a glimpse of the Emperor’s activities, but with his illness, she expected the ministers and generals to have even more work to make up for his absence. Also, asking Mira and what she knew from her friends, they roughly knew which areas to avoid. They agreed that neither the fourth or fifth princes were to be trusted. Cassandra wasn’t too sure about Opheus, but she

definitely didn't want to meet with Lephys. Missandra's opinion was simply to avoid anyone wearing purple and get as quick as possible near the Emperor's quarters.

When the servants came back with all the makeup, they ate a quick lunch and started getting ready, being even more cautious about the tan and re-dying their hair of a deep black once again; This felt all too familiar, but this preparation time was necessary. Once the sisters were ready, Yasora nodded.

"You do like our people now... except for your eyes, of course."

"We'll have to remember to look down," said Missandra.

Meanwhile, Cassandra was hugging Kassian. The baby hadn't been very noisy during their preparations, but now, as if he knew what was going on, he was starting to cry and get upset. This broke Cassandra's heart. She had been with her son for a full week now, and if this wasn't so important, she wouldn't have separated for him, even for a short while. She hugged him closely, kissing his forehead, whispering to calm him down. At her feet, Kian too seemed nervous, walking in circles and emitting quick little high-pitched sounds, trying to get her attention. "It's going to be fine, my love," she whispered. "Your mom will be right back, I promise..."

Kassian started crying even louder, and she had to take a deep breath before hugging him and the baby dragon one last time. It was hard, to feel their warmth and part with it. She gave her baby to Yasora, and promised to herself internally. This wasn't going to take long. She'd definitely be back soon for her son.

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 109

### #109 The Machinations

Cassandra had the urge to cry when they left the residence, and did her best not to. Even Missandra had her little good bye moment with her nephew and his dragon, but she didn't say anything. She knew she

couldn't afford to be emotional now, they had to focus on this plan and ensure their survival. Even if she had agreed to it, Missandra was still not feeling anywhere near confident enough. Anything could get them killed, the slightest mistake could end their lives in a split second.

At least, they looked different now. With green dresses on, their skin darkened to match those of the people and their hair completely black as ink, they would be harder to spot for the soldiers. Not having a baby or a young dragon definitely made it easier to move around, too. They also had an extra asset, as Mira had warned some of the former servants of the house. They quickly met the three girls in the middle of the market, where no one would be suspicious. They were all familiar to Cassandra, as they had worked under the same roof briefly. Moreover, these three had been there the day she had freed the residence, and even if they were now working on the Imperial Palace, they were happy to look out for her and help the sisters as repayment.

This was also a good point in Missandra's opinion. The two sisters would be less likely to be noticed if they walked into the Palace as a group of five servants instead of a duo. They still had no idea if the second Prince was looking only for Cassandra or for the two of them, but in any case, this was still working in their favor.

They walked towards the Imperial Palace, and seeing the high walls from up close gave Cassandra an unexplicable feeling of nostalgia. She hadn't come to this place in weeks and, this time, she wasn't with Kairen. She had never liked this place, but this felt even worse. To Cassandra's surprise, the soldiers weren't very familiar with the servants going in and out all day. They checked their belongings in detail, but they didn't find Missandra's hidden dagger or hers. She realized there were truly too many servants for the soldiers to bother recognizing all of them. The Imperial Palace was gigantic, with all of the Imperial Concubines, Princes and Princesses, that the servants probably knew a lot of changes every single week. It was probably the same for the soldiers as well. Unless the same soldiers would be affected to the same doors every

single day for weeks and weeks, it seemed hard to think they'd remember the faces, unless they were memorable.

Ironically, one of the soldiers even smiled at Missandra, though his eyes were focused a bit lower. Cassandra had a little fright, but to her surprise, her younger sister even had the guts to wink at the soldier! She kept her head low, trying to pray silently until they were inside, and away from the soldiers. All the girls smiled at each other.

"I can't believe we're in that easily..." whispered Cassandra.

"That's because the Imperial Family isn't actually in danger all of the time," sighed one of the girls. "You know, the danger usually comes from the inside. They poison each other and find excuses to murder each other more efficiently than any assassin out there. Even so, they have dragons! Like, those creatures are terrifying!"

Cassandra and Missandra exchanged glances. The two dragons they had been living with over the past few days weren't exactly terrifying, though they did understand the girls' concern. They probably didn't picture Kian and his meat buns while saying that...

"I don't even think they ever bother to hire assassins..." added the other with a nod. "You know, sometimes, those women scare me more than the dragons themselves; On a tantrum, they can have you tortured or killed!"

As the girls kept agreeing, Cassandra realized this was the reality, for them. She had always been protected by Kairen, his dragon, and his family, but for any servant working in the Imperial Palace, they were risking their lives every day. This wasn't normal, and it also probably explained the big turnover and high salaries...

After reaching one of the servants' resting rooms, Missandra and Cassandra parted with the girls, thanking them for their help until now. Somehow, Cassandra felt like they were now in the part of their plan where everything could go wrong very fast...

Walking with trays of food as if they had been asked to deliver them somewhere, they tried to find their way through the corridors. The sisters had previously agreed to not go anywhere near Lady Kareen's apartments,

or Kairen's or Shareen's, as they would be very likely watched. Those would be the first places Vrehan would expect her to hide, so they had to avoid this aisle at all costs. Another thing Cassandra was worried about were the concubines.

Though there weren't a lot of Princesses hanging around, the concubines were often going from one place to another, chatting with each other in the gardens and wandering around. Cassandra was afraid one of them would recognize her if they crossed ways, and this was bound to happen. She made sure to keep her head down, hoping her appearance and green dress would do the trick. Moreover, as Missandra had reminded her, even Cassandra's body shape had changed a lot over the past few weeks. The only thing that may give her away was her green eyes, and she kept them down all of the time they walked.

It worked. Despite a few frights on the way, Cassandra made sure to walk behind her sister and, indeed, none of the concubines they crossed paths with recognized her. Most of those women didn't even give spare them a glance, they were used to the servants getting out of their way and crawling away...

The Imperial Palace was so vast, it took them some long minutes to finally get to their first destination.

Prince Sephir's apartments.

Despite Missandra's words, Cassandra just couldn't come here without checking what had happened to the first prince or to his concubines and children. Moreover, if she had any allies left between those walls, it would most likely be those women. She vaguely remembered the configuration of the first Prince's apartments, and the sisters quickly moved.

The atmosphere was heart-wrenching in here. Some of the women were still silently crying and mourning the death of the Prince, but at least, most of them seemed safe, the children also. Cassandra was extremely careful while moving around. She wasn't sure where the two concubines she was looking for resided exactly, so Missandra eventually asked



another servant they met, pretending she was new in the Imperial Palace. Once they found their rooms, Cassandra knocked, a bit afraid. To their surprise, a little girl in a purple dress came to open. She was four or five years old at best.

“Silena, don’t just... Oh, by the great Dragon!”

The young concubine ran to them and pushed the sisters inside before hurriedly closing the door. Then, she turned around, completely stunned.

“What are you doing here...” she whispered.

She had obviously recognized Cassandra, so she put down the tray on a table. They were alone, too, and the room was now closed, despite Missandra sending regular glances towards the other openings.

Lady Chiara walked to Cassandra, staring at her as if she had seen a ghost, looking on the verge of tears.

“By the great Dragon, Lady Cassandra, I can’t believe you’re here...” she whispered.

“Are you alright?” Asked Cassandra, as the young woman seemed completely in shock.

The young concubine immediately shook her head, look horrified, and about to cry.

“You shouldn’t have come here! The Second Prince wants to kill you...”

“Noted,” said Missandra, rolling her eyes.

“No, no, this is serious!” Insisted Chiara. “He... he said you poisoned my Lord...”

“What happened?” Asked Cassandra, hoping she would calm down a little bit to explain.

The young concubine shook her head and fell on her knees. Her daughter immediately ran into her arms to hug her, and she held her child, crying silently.

“I’m not sure... It all happened so fast! Everything was just as usual, and one evening, I heard people yelling, screams... The other concubines kept saying our Lord had died. Prince Vrehan came out of his room, all of sudden, dragging Lady Berissa by

her hair, calling her a murderer! He yelled at everyone that he had caught her poisoning his brother with something the white witch had given her! Everyone started screaming, we knew Lady Berissa was innocent, but... His dragon... he killed her there, and... They said my Lord was dead..." The poor concubine was bawling out in front of them. Cassandra exchanged a look with Missandra, horrified. What had Vrehan done? How could he push all the blame on Berissa and kill her there without a proper trial, or even any decent proof!

"How could the Emperor let that happen?" Said Cassandra, shocked.

"It happened so fast..." cried Lady Chiara. "When his Highness the Emperor came, he was devastated... about my Lord's passing, and he was furious at Prince Vrehan, but the second Prince said he had acted impulsively out of anger."

"That's the most bullshit excuse I've heard, even coming from that dickhead," hissed Missandra.

Cassandra was in complete shock. She hadn't thought things had been so tragic here! The poor Lady Berissa, she had been the cruel victim of Vrehan's machinations to get rid of her and his brother... Cassandra was completely revolted. This was so unfair! Those people were innocent, Prince Sephir had never even been a threat to him! Vrehan's cupidity was absolutely disgusting! Had Kassian's birth really made him panic and kill his own brother? Did the news of her pregnancy accelerate the second Prince's agenda.

"Lady Cassandra, you shouldn't be here... They all think you're a murderer, the soldiers will arrest you..."

"What about Prince Sephir's son?" Asked Cassandra, ignoring the Concubine's plea.

"I don't know..." cried Chiara. "We haven't seen him since our Prince's death... By the great Dragon, if something happened to Prince Seban too..."

The poor concubine hugged her daughter closer and cried even more.

Cassandra and Missandra exchanged a silent glance; They wouldn't say it

in front of this poor woman, but they feared the young prince's fate was unfortunately already sealed... Vrehan may have taken the young dragon, too.

After all this, no wonder this whole aisle of the Imperial Palace felt so abandoned and at a loss. The Second Prince had wreaked havoc in his brother's entourage. Cassandra felt like it was a miracle that little girl in the concubine's arms was still alive. If she had been born a boy, her uncle would have gotten rid of her, most likely...

"What about Prince Sephir's Dragon?" Asked Missandra, frowning.

"He's here, but... He hasn't been able to fly," said Chiara, her voice hoarse. "Prince Vrehan had Sire locked down in the dungeons, saying he could be dangerous for everyone in the palace without his master to guide him. I'm not sure... He didn't even try to free himself when they took him!"

The cells! Cassandra remembered seeing some of the dragons behind bars, the first time she had been in the Imperial Palace. Those who were too unruly had to be chained or placed in cages for their sizes. However, she clearly remembered that the pale blue dragon wasn't among those who had to be put in an actual cage! That was definitely another one of the second Prince's horrible lies.

"So the Prince is dead for real, and his dragon is grounded," sighed Missandra. "Anything else we need to know?"

"What about the Emperor?" Asked Cassandra. "Have any of you seen him lately?"

"No... Most of us haven't dared to leave those apartments! Everyone is so scared since our Prince died! However, some of the other concubines came and said he's ill... The Emperor fell sick soon after my Prince... They say he was so depressed with my Lord's death that the Emperor fell sick too... We haven't seen him in days..."

"How convenient," muttered Missandra.

Cassandra didn't believe this lie at all either. For something to happen to the old Emperor so soon after his first son's death was nothing but the result of some vile plan. He wasn't such

a weak man, even if his son's death was depressing indeed. Whatever sickness had fallen upon the old Emperor was definitely not the result of sadness or even an accident. Missandra shook her head, disgusted once again.

"Hinue," she said using their native tongue. "I'm pretty sure he won't be as stupid as to leave his old man without any sort of security around him. What if this is a trap? I can't believe no one was able to see the Emperor. This guy definitely has something up, and I'm not sure we should run into this mess. We can still go back!"

"We can't, Missandra. We haven't learned anything we didn't already suspect, but the second prince still isn't here. I'm still sure this is our only chance to save the Emperor if that is still possible. If the second Prince comes back and is somehow crowned before my Prince comes back, the situation will be even worse than this! Not only Sephir, but he will also get rid of all of his brothers and their concubines! This will be a slaughter!"

"He can't just..."

"Missandra, he killed Sephir! He killed the first Prince and his favorite, and probably their son too, unless he's captured, but I'm pretty sure he doesn't care about anything but that boy's dragon! If we go back now, Vrehan might be able to kill his father even faster, and what then? He'll just do what he did here to all the concubines! The only people left will be the ones who didn't oppose him, his concubines, and his sisters!"

"This is too dangerous! That psycho had no problem killing his own brother under the Emperor's nose. If the Emperor is too ill to protect you, what do you think will happen to you? He's capable of feeding you to his dragon and stating his damn lizard mistook you for a beefsteak once the third Prince comes here! There is no one here who can help you!"

"Actually, we might have another ally..." sighed Cassandra.

"Who?" Asked Missandra with a frown.

"...Glahad, the Golden Dragon."

## #110 The Sassy Prince

Missandra stayed quiet for a while, looking more and more livid. After a while, she glanced down at the concubine that was still in the room with them and took a deep breath.

“I knew the situation was dire, but I didn’t think it would be that bad that our best hope would rely on the Emperor’s freaking Dragon! Hinue, we are talking about an actual dragon and not a cat-sized one like Kian! I know the third Prince’s black Dragon is basically your pet, but this is another Dragon we’re talking about, the Emperor’s! I’m pretty sure the most dangerous creature in the Empire hasn’t been trained to do paw tricks!”

“Dragons only mimic their owners’ feelings. Krai is like that because of Kairen’s feelings for me. The Emperor liked me too, you’ve seen it. He’s been nothing but nice and...”

“He is an Emperor! Who knows what that old man was thinking! Gifting you a tiara and some stupid nickname . doesn’t mean you’re his favorite daughter-in-law! I trust you, but I don’t trust a pervert that has taken dozens of concubines, got kids left and right while his favorite woman has to live in a different castle to ensure her kid’s survival!” Cassandra sighed.

“I know this is the same refrain coming back again and again,” added Missandra. “But I stand by my words, I don’t trust the old man’s dragon! We can’t just walk in there and hope he’s going to become our bodyguard! That’s a rather big bet and I’m pretty sure we’re running out of extra lives just by standing here!”

“Do you have a better idea, perhaps? We were going to see if the Emperor can be saved anyway, Missandra. Perhaps Glahad won’t move a... claw to help us. At least it’s better than anything, right?”

“This is us reducing our chances of getting killed by a dragon’s hair! And I know they don’t have any!”

Next to them, the young concubine stood back up again, shaking her head. She grabbed Cassandra’s hand, as she was trembling herself,

looking at her right in her eyes.

“I heard the Imperial Dragon’s name, are you going to see the Emperor? Please, Lady Cassandra, you have to save him!

Both sisters were flustered to see the young woman suddenly begging, but neither of them could react to her new burst of tears, as she held on desperately to Cassandra, her lower lips trembling. She didn’t look anything like the elegant young woman Cassandra had met only a few days ago. This was just a desperate girl, a mother begging her to save her and her child.

“Please, you’re the Imperial Physician. You have to save his Highness! If the Emperor dies, I know he will kill us! The second Prince will have us all exterminated, our children too!”

Against her leg, the young girl started crying too, echoing her poor mother’s distress. Cassandra’s heart broke. This little girl was so young, and she had just lost her father. How many of those children would have to grow without their father now? They were already all so terrorized already, but they were now living in the fear of their uncle finishing the job... Cassandra turned to her sister again, a determined expression in her eyes. Missandra couldn’t say anything anymore, not when they were so frantically begged like so. The younger sister kept shaking her head in disbelief, but she didn’t voice her opinion anymore.

“I... I’ll go see the Emperor, Lady Chiara. Stay here with your daughter, it will be safer. Do not tell anyone you’ve seen us, please?”

“Of course, Lady Cassandra. Please, be careful... Some of my Prince’s concubines are desperate. We are not stupid, none of us think Lady Berissa would have ever tried to harm our Prince...! Even some of the Princesses are afraid!”

“What about the other Princes, by the way?” Asked Missandra.

“We don’t know...”

Cassandra frowned. This was one thing she wished she could have resolved now. Not only they were in such a den of wolves, but they couldn’t even be sure who was their enemy or not... She nodded, and

gently retrieving her hand, she turned to Missandra.

“We should go, now.”

After checking their appearance, making sure nothing had been undone, the sisters left Lady Chiara, the heart a bit heavier than before. Cassandra couldn't get that little girl's face off her mind and realized that, somehow, she vaguely looked like her own son. Maybe it was because they were young, but those two children still had the same grandfather. That child was Kairen's niece. So many innocent young lives were trapped here!

The concubines were more or less circled in the Second Prince's residence. None of them had the means to leave, and they had no dragon to defend them either! With Sire locked in the cells underground, those women were nothing but prey for Vrehan to play with!

“We need to stop this,” muttered Cassandra, as they walked alone in a corridor.

“Let's stay focus, we cannot make a mistake now,” whispered Missandra.

“We're lucky no one has recognized you yet, and that psycho isn't here... Now, where is the old man?”

“The Emperor's quarters were behind the room used for the banquets.”

“Why is this place so damn big!”

As they were about to turn left on a corridor, the sisters heard a ruckus, and stopped their steps at the exact same time, both frowning. They listened for a few seconds, but the situation was rather heated.

“You damn little bitches! I'm so fed up with that crap! You sluts! Get the fuck out of my way, go back to my pervert brother before I ruin my nails on your ugly faces! Uglies!”.

Cassandra and Missandra absolutely froze. Though they had their doubts, this masculine voice and the mention of a pervert brother were enough clues to guess which character they had almost run into. They waited to see if he was coming this way, but it didn't seem so, the sound of the man's steps and whoever was following him were getting further away. Cassandra let out a silent sigh, while Missandra raised an eyebrow.

“Well, that explains why that one doesn’t have kids...” she muttered.

“Why?” Asked Cassandra, confused.

Missandra rolled her eyes.

“That guy is definitely not into women... Trust me, I’ve seen a lot of guys like that in the Red District. This one is definitely a man-player. Plus, the only person I’ve heard being sassier than that guy is Lady Shareen, and that alone says a lot.”

“Oh...”

That did solve one mystery about the lack of descendants on the fourth Prince’s end... However, that didn’t give any insight into his position towards his brothers, though. Was he affected by Sephir’s death? On Vrehan’s side, or uninterested? What of Prince Lephys? After what they had just heard, Cassandra crossed out any thought she ever had of asking help from one of the other Princes. The relationships between all the siblings were too complicated, she had no idea who could be trusted or not at this point. Neither of the fourth or fifth Princes had seemed close to Kairen or even Sephir from her experience... Nothing said they would agree with Vrehan becoming the Emperor either, though.

Waiting a bit for the path to clear, the sisters kept walking, until they finally arrived in the Banquet Hall. It was desert at that time, and, most importantly, that area was completely unused at the moment. It would have been suspect for two servants to walk in with food trays, so the two sisters had to act quickly and not linger around.

Cassandra had already noticed that, when one of the Banquets was over, the Emperor left through a door behind his golden throne. The Emperor’s seat was so large and impressive that it seemed like a wall behind him, but Cassandra clearly remembered seeing Glahad curled up in that space, between the actual wall and his owner’s seat. No one wanted to go anywhere near the Imperial Dragon’s favorite spot, but she knew the doors to the Emperor’s apartments had to be behind that throne.



However, as soon as the sisters pretended to walk through the Banquet room, both noticed the men guarding that door. They pretended to chat and leave the room, but as soon as the door was closed behind them, Missandra shook her head.

“So, no big dragon, but two guards. I wouldn’t have been surprised if that psycho had put more men than that. How are we supposed to get to the Old Man now!”

However, Cassandra wasn’t listening to her. She was already staring away, at one of the windows more precisely. She walked to the opening, and stuck her head out, looking down. Missandra frowned, confused.

“Hinue, what are you doing...?”

“When my Prince had... Well, when he injured Princess Phetra, he threw her out of one of the banquet room’s windows. Lady Karen had mentioned there were only three or so floors below, and she’s right, there’s actually a roof. I can see it from here, and the building below goes all the way down the actual Emperor’s apartments...”

Her sister shook her head in disbelief. That was it. Her older sister had officially gone crazy! 1 )

“I’m not breaking my ankles today to go save a dying old man,” said Missandra, coming next to her at the window to check what was below. Cassandra chuckled and pointed fingers.

“We don’t have to fall if we can climb... Just like I thought, the stones in the walls are very uneven. Which means we could possibly climb laterally until we reach it. We would use the outside instead of walking inside and past the guards.”

Missandra was astonished. This idea was easily taking the first place as the most dangerous idea her sister had that day, and that was saying a lot! Moreover, they were good swimmers, but not good climbers! Missandra was about to protest heavily, but for once, she didn’t. Instead, she scrutinized the wall Cassandra was thinking of climbing, with a frown. Those were typical rock constructions of the Dragon Empire indeed: it was mostly uneven and, even more interesting, the years and years of

dragons trying to climb on the buildings had left some deep marks on the wall, where the big claws had easily scratched off some of the stones, giving both sisters even more spots to put their hands and feet on.

Technically speaking, it wasn't impossible, and both girls were in good shape, physically speaking... Missandra hesitated a second, sending a glance towards the room. The guards didn't look the nice kind at all. That damn second prince had probably chosen very carefully the dogs that would keep his father's room. She really tried coming with another idea to get rid of them, but Missandra was somewhat afraid someone would recognize her, she just resembled Cassandra too much.

That climb in comparison, strangely didn't look as dangerous and crazy to try. They had the physical condition for it, a stable and hidden path, and they even had the luxury of a rooftop below them to fall on in case of failure. Of course, they'd probably suffer major injuries like Phetra if they did fall, but at least, the chances of survival were decent, given the situation.

Missandra did try to convince her sister to let her distract the guards while she'd make the trip from the outside, but Cassandra's refusal was firm. No matter what, they had to stick together.

Checking the corridor was empty, Cassandra climbed out of the window to get outside, carefully hanging on to the window's rail, and now she moved to the first target, a larger hole in the walls; She had never liked the Imperial Palace, but that place was old enough to have many, many Dragons' claws leaving their imprints on the walls. The indents in the stones gave her some easy spots to move around, and sure enough, Cassandra made her way until she got more or less in the external walls of the previous corridor. Biting her lower lip, Missandra watched her sister's progress, but indeed, every place she rested her foot or hand on seemed stable. Not even a spark of dust moved. Checking her surroundings, Missandra climbed out of the window too to follow her. Quickly and silently, the sisters moved around the external walls, keeping their heads below the windows. The main danger would be that someone spotted them from another window. However, from what they

had seen so far, not many people were hanging around the premises. Hence, they kept moving, climbing the wall sideways until their position was past the guards they had seen insight. There were two problems, though. Cassandra had no idea how many rooms there were inside, their configuration, or who would be inside. They would have to take a guess on which window to climb back into, but they had to decide quickly. Climbing was a difficult exercise, and neither of them was very experimented at it. Their arms were starting to get painful, their muscles aching. A pearl of sweat was growing on Missandra's forehead, threatening to take away some of the fake tan covering her. When she finally found a position right under one of the windows she could stay in without too much strain, Cassandra stopped, trying to listen to what was going on inside. Seemingly, nothing. The other side seemed strangely quiet, though she couldn't tell if this was a good sign or not. She exchanged looks with Missandra, who nodded. In any case, the longer they stayed there, the more risks they were taking to be found by someone. They had to climb back inside.

Carefully, Cassandra climbed up, glancing inside. It looked like she had actually picked a bathroom window! Luckily, that room was small, and with the door facing the window, she could immediately tell that place was empty. With a sigh of relief, both sisters climbed inside, and finally, took a rest from their aching muscles.

Missandra stretched with a grimace and even went to the little basin of water to drink. Their arms were sore, but at least, they had made it inside the Emperor's apartments. Cassandra, walking as quietly as she could, went to put her ear against the door. It was complete silence on the other side... Very carefully, the sisters came out of the bathroom. This was truly a strange atmosphere, almost like the inside of a church. The aisle was beautiful, all made of marble and white stones, but it was as silent and intimidating as a mausoleum. In such an environment, each step or breath the sisters took seemed too noisy.

"Alright, now to find the Old Man..." whispered Missandra.

Cassandra nodded, and they started walking down the corridor. They had no idea which door to push and were terrified to run into someone that would give away their position. However, after a while, it looked like this place was truly abandoned... They pushed many doors, each time to find an empty room.

“Are you sure this is the Emperor’s apartments?” Asked Missandra, frowning. “There’s nothing going on there!”

“I don’t understand,” muttered Cassandra. “If he’s sick, the Emperor should definitely be kept in his apartments!”

“That’s the rule of the Imperial Palace? Well someone needs to learn them again, because the old man isn’t here! Cassandra, this place is completely empty! There’s not even a single servant, those two idiots outside are guarding nothing but air!”

Cassandra shook her head in disbelief. Where was the Old Emperor, then? If he was sick, the Emperor should be resting here in his quarters! Finally, the sisters turned to each other, Missandra shaking her head.

“That damn second Prince expected someone would come and he probably hid the old man elsewhere!”

“But where? It’s the Emperor, he can’t simply vanish this way!”

“We...”

A sudden movement was felt from somewhere behind Missandra. Both sisters froze. Something was moving outside of the room they were in. They slowly turned around, and it was there, at the window.

One reptilian blue eye, surrounded by white scales. Staring right at them.