

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 111

### #111 The Minstrel in Gold

Both sisters almost stopped breathing. A drop of cold sweat ran down Cassandra's spine. She had been hoping to find the Emperor and his Gold Dragon, but this was definitely not Glahad. Where was this white one coming from! The sisters hadn't even heard anything until then.

Missandra didn't dare move either, but she sent a glance towards her sister. No words were exchanged, but her expression was clear. Which Dragon was that?

Cassandra tried hard to remember. She couldn't remember if the white Dragon was the fourth or the fifth Prince's, she had only seen it once! She couldn't even see its size, as only a little portion of his head was stuck against the window. The only thing that was a little bit reassuring was that he didn't seem to be unhappy at all. The white creature wasn't growling, and his eye just seemed... curious. Was he simply observing them? Either way, if he was there, his master definitely knew where they were. She didn't want to wait to see which Prince was about to show up! "Let's go back," she whispered.

Missandra nodded slightly, but neither of them could take their eyes off the gigantic beast staring at them. Both sisters started stepping back, very carefully. The big blue eye was following their every move. They hesitated. They definitely couldn't go back the way they came in, not with that one climbing on the tower as well. It would put them one arm away from the Dragon, and his maw was definitely longer than that. Moreover, they had already struggled to come in, Cassandra wasn't sure she would have the strength to go back the same way without making a mistake this time..

The main entrance, then? It didn't solve the problem of the guards on the other side. The Dragon or the Prince could warn them at any time. Cassandra was trying to gauge their options quickly, but no good idea came to mind, and Missandra was terribly quiet too.

“What the hell are you doing here, you two idiots!”

Cassandra sighed internally. It was too late...

Both sisters turned around, to find the fourth Prince standing there.

Opheus was very much like his brothers. Tall, with long black hair and fine musculature under his open shirt. His only marking trait was his strikingly blue eyes, both delicately circled by a trait of black ink. He was probably the most handsome of all the Imperial brothers, but he was making a sour face at the moment, his arms crossed. The long gold earring at his left ear kept dangling as he shook his head.

“Sorry, Your Highness,” said Cassandra, bowing instinctively. “We will leave and...”

“Oh, don’t you dare act like that! I recognized you, white witch!”

Retorted Opheus.

Cassandra went white under her makeup. She had the feeble hope that he wouldn’t recognize her, as she couldn’t recognize him either, until two seconds ago. It seemed impossible to pretend to be two clueless maids now...

The Prince let out a dramatic sigh.

“You are all driving me nuts here! Darling, I have a good memory for faces, and even if you were as skinny and bleached as a skeleton back then, I still vividly remember the unfashionable slave girl Kairen went nuts about! Lephys may have hundred of his little whores, I don’t care. But the one lady that proved my older brother wasn’t just a monk with a sword, despite his questionable tastes, that one I remember!”

Cassandra was utterly speechless. She hadn’t expected the Prince to have such a... colorful personality. Until then, he had only been described as someone with a lazy and easily bored personality. It was apparently more about his attitude. At least, it didn’t seem like he had given any alert yet. Unsure of what to say, Cassandra glanced Missandra’s way. However, to her surprise, Missandra was nervously chuckling, looking like she was focused on the fourth Prince’s face. He noticed it, too, and clicked his tongue, pouting his lips.

“You can stop staring like that, darling, we are not playing on the same level.”

“I know you,” suddenly said Missandra with a snicker. “You’re the Minstrel in Gold!”

“Oh,” said Opheus, raising an eyebrow.

Cassandra was completely lost. What was her younger sister talking about? The Prince himself didn’t seem very surprised, but his expression had completely changed after Missandra had said that. Cassandra turned to her, trying to understand what the hell she was talking about.

“Linue?” She called her.

“This Prince was a regular in the Red District!” Exclaimed Missandra.

“He was only known as the Minstrel in Gold, because his name was unknown and he always came dressed with lots of gold jewelry, and would always write stupid poems to his lovers.”

“Stupid poems? Watch your mouth, you little bitch! I’m a lyricist, and everyone always said I have a lot of talent!”

“Yeah, let me guess your Highness, the same people to whom you generously gave your gold whenever they said that?” Retorted Missandra with a snicker.

“Wait, ” said Cassandra. “You know him from the Red District?”

“Well, not all the workers are female,” explained Missandra with a shrug.

“Oh...”

Cassandra hadn’t thought of that. It did make sense though... The fourth Prince probably wasn’t given the kind of entertainment he wanted in the Imperial Palace. She clearly remembered his siblings talking about his lack of interest for his concubines, despite his mother’s desperate attempts to have him give birth to heir... Well, now that explained a lot. Cassandra gave a little glance, but the Dragon outside was still there, patiently watching. So they weren’t in danger with him, so far? Opheus flipped his hair over his shoulder.

“I was wondering what my darling had found here, but it turns out it’s just you two. You are quite stupid for coming back there, though. Do

you have any idea of what Vrehan wants to do to you? That psycho seriously went crazy this time.”

“What about you?” Asked Missandra. “You don’t look like you’re about to report us.”

“Oh, please, do you think I care about my brothers’ stupid game?”

“This isn’t just a game,” retorted Cassandra, almost shocked. “They are killing each other! Prince Sephir died!”

Opheus rolled his eyes over.

“He was unfortunate to have been born first, yes. But me? I’m the one no one gives two cents about, and honestly, I’m quite content with that.”

Cassandra understood that he was the one that no one could see as a threat, but that didn’t mean his brother’s crimes weren’t any less horrible! His own older brother had been murdered only a few days ago, he couldn’t be that insensitive as to not care at all!

However, he did look like he didn’t care. Opheus put a hand on his hip, gauging the two of them.

“I honestly don’t give a damn about reporting you, I don’t even care enough to yell,” he said. “However, I am curious about why the hell do I find Kairen’s favorite and her sister into my Father’s chambers.”

“We hoped to save the Emperor,” explained Cassandra. “I know he is sick, I want to see him.”

“We can heal him,” added her younger sister. “If you tell us where the old man is, we can...”

Opheus scoffed, interrupting her, and pointed at Missandra with his long nail.

“First, no offense darling but I wouldn’t even entrust you with a spoon.”

Missandra looked offended by his words, but the Fourth Prince ignored her, turning to Cassandra instead.

“Secondly, why do you two care about what happens to my father? Shouldn’t you be somewhere taking care of your brat you were pregnant with and waiting for your man to pop Vrehan’s dead off? Because honestly, I know I am.”

Cassandra was a bit surprised to hear that.

“You don’t like Vrehan... ? You support Kairen ?”

Opheus dramatically rolled his eyes once again.

“You may be a physician or whatever but you’re quite slow, darling, aren’t you ? Vrehan is a freaking sicko, his sister Phetra is the Empress of bitches, and trust me, I know more than they all think I do. Compared to him, Kairen is at least not bouncing around about murdering our family members and becoming Emperor.”

“So you can help us ?” Asked Cassandra, her hopes getting up again.

“You can tell us where the Emperor actually is ?”

“Why would I ? I told you, I’m fine as long as neither of them thinks I’m against them. Why would I give you two any help ? I am already quite generous in not giving you little rats away to the guards, I hope you’re taking notes about that.”

Cassandra’s hopes melted immediately. So he wasn’t going to help them at all ? Were the sisters condemned already ? There was no way they were going to be able to walk out of here, not while the two guards were still standing guard outside these apartments ! Moreover, they couldn’t stay hidden here forever either !

Next to her, Missandra took a deep breath and crossed her arms, looking surprisingly quite confident.

“Well, it’s a bit too late for that, isn’t it ? You’re already an accomplice.”

“What ?”

“You have seen us. As you said, you didn’t denounce us right away and you have no intention to. So, that means you’re on our side.”

Opheus frowned, looking a bit confused.

“Didn’t you listen to anything I just said, you little pest ? I am not on anyone’s side ! Unless I go walk around naked into the throne’s room, I won’t be considered a target by Vrehan either ! I am the invisible Prince and I like that !”

“Oh, but you have seen us already. So now, you’re technically hiding our existence to the Second Prince. If we get caught and say you had actually

found us, it will be bad for you, isn't it? You won't be so invisible anymore..."

Cassandra couldn't understand. What was Missandra thinking by provoking him like that! Despite her doubts, she remained quiet to let her younger sister talk. After those few weeks together, Cassandra knew that Missandra was better than her for those kinds of things. Missandra was what they called smart-street, she was better at getting out of a situation when she was cornered.

"What are you talking about!" Screeched the fourth Prince. "I am not helping you, I'm just keeping my mouth shut!"

"Oh, I bet the second Prince will think the same when he learns that you had us right under his nose and did not let his soldiers know. He'll probably overlook this and think you just didn't care..."

Opheus opened and closed his mouth twice, completely taken aback.

Finally, he scoffed, outraged by Missandra's words and her confident smirk. Putting his fists on his hips, he was now glaring at her.

"Why shouldn't I give you away right now, then, you little pests? I am extremely generous already to let you go without saying a word! Why the hell are you threatening me for right now!"

"I am not threatening you," replied Missandra with an innocent smile.

"Of course, you're very free to rat us out to the Psychopath's men if you prefer. However, I cannot guarantee that the War God won't be back first..."

Once again, the fourth Prince was rendered speechless and blinked several times.

"Kairen? He's coming back here? Seriously?"

Missandra nodded. Whether she was truly convinced or lying through her teeth, her older sister couldn't tell. However, they clearly weren't sure that the War God was really on his way back, or even how far he was at the moment. That was a heavy bet her sister was putting up right now...

"Yes. His Favorite Concubine is here, after all," she said. "The War God will be back in the Capital at any time. I mean, you could give us up, but

it would truly be a too bad timing if the Third Prince came back meanwhile. If the

War God learns that you sold out his Favorite concubine... If my older sister dies just like that, I wonder who he will get mad at? I mean, obviously, the second prince is the first choice, but I wonder who he will get angry at then? It gets pretty bloody when the War God gets mad, you know.”

Cassandra was once again completely speechless. Her younger sister was truly shameless! She was putting the fourth Prince into a horrible place, torn between the fear of the second or third brother’s wrath. It was too late for him to pretend he hadn’t seen them, not after everything Missandra had just said. The poor man looked like he was about to vomit, too, completely stunned by the teenage girl.

“You... You... By the great Dragon, you’re the worst little swine!” He yelled. “That was me being nice!”

“Oh, it’s nice of you to not rat us out, but now we would like to know where the Emperor is. So now, you can pick a side. Because either you help us and we can get out of here without making any waves and with potentially a chance to save the old man, or my sister and I will get caught as soon as we try to get out of there by your sicko brother’s men, tortured and most likely die in horrible circumstances; Your choice, your Highness.”

## The War God’s Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 112

### #112 The End of the War

The man stood up, leaving out an exhausted sigh.

He was drenched in blood. His blood and the one of the two dragons he had just fought. The dragons weren’t dead. One was lying down on the ground, a sword pinning his wing, and the other was cornered, growling furiously while trying to hide his injured leg. The War God’s body was covered with black scales, struggling to heal the many cuts on his body.

All of his armor had been torn away, leaving him only with his pants on. He put his hand on his neck, checking the fresh injury. His own blood tainted his fingers as he snickered.

They had really given it their all at trying to kill him... However, those two young dragons were mostly afraid, trapped in a tight room with him. In a more open ground, they probably would have had more chances to succeed in killing him. However, in here, they were as trapped as he was and unable to use their wings. They even hindered each other quite a few times, mistakenly biting or scratching their skins. Without that, maybe they would have succeeded in killing him.

“Kairen!”

He heard a long bang on the door behind him and turned around. His sister violently burst in, sending the locked doors flying. Shareen’s hair was all over her face, and she seemed angry. She had her sword out, too, for the minute it took her to assess the situation. Kairen, standing alone in the vast room, with two young dragons cornered at each end of it. She clicked her tongue, shaking her head and putting her sword back.

“So that was that trap of his... Using young dragons,” she growled, approaching the two beasts. “I fucking knew it...”

“You know those?” Asked Kairen.

Shareen rolled her eyes, pointing the two dragons.

\*Do an effort, brother. You can’t even recognize your own nephews’ dragons? I know we haven’t seen them more than a couple of times, but still... This one is Vrehan second son’s, and this one is Sephir’s son’s... Damn it, that asshole really used the kids...”

Kairen frowned.

“...Shareen, what are you doing here?”

“You could at least pretend you’re happy to see me!”

“You should be in the North,” he insisted, frowning.

Shareen nodded, putting her hands on her hips. His sister had come wearing her armor and, seeing how stained it already was, she had probably fought her way there as well. She didn’t have a scratch on her,

though. Only a few pearls of sweat and her ruined outfit.

“I would still be in the North if it wasn’t for that dead ass Vrehan making a fucking ruckus at the Diamond Palace.”

“What?”

The War God’s anger rose immediately, scaring the two dragons in the room into retreating even further away from him with whimpers. Kairen didn’t give a damn about those two, however. The Diamond Palace was where he had left his mother and his concubine. The mere mention of his half-brother anyway near them was not something he wanted to hear. Shareen didn’t make the suspense last either.

“Yeah, it is bad. That rat face walked into mother’s Palace, claiming to be under our Father’s orders to arrest Cassie.”

The vein at his temple was violently thumping as his eyes darkened in anger. Kairen’s murderous intent had never, ever been anywhere near that bad before.

“He took Cassandra...?” He hissed.

“No, thank the Gods. She and her sister managed to run away, but Vrehan is definitely after them. That’s why I came to get you back as soon as I could. Anour stayed back with Mother, I didn’t want to leave her alone.”

Kairen was absolutely furious, even if his concubine hadn’t been caught yet. He loathed the idea of anyone near her, let alone those who wanted to harm her. His blood went cold, thinking about something else.

“What of our son?” 5

“Apparently, he’s been born and well, from the last news we got of them. Congrats, I guess.”

Kairen was furious. He had broken his promise to Cassandra. She had given birth alone, and he had missed their child’s birth... For now, he didn’t want any congratulations until his concubine and son would be with him to receive them. Furious, he turned around and walked towards the two terrorized dragons. They tried to growl back, warn him not to approach, but he ignored them and came closer.

“Which one?” He asked.

“This one is Seban’s,” said Shareen, pointing at the dark blue Dragon with its wing half-ripped.

Without adding another word, the War God walked to the other dragon. The tall brown beast growled furiously, trying to retreat as much as he could in his corner and show his fangs. When Kairen got close enough, the Dragon jumped forward, trying to attack in a desperate attempt. The War God sliced its head. 5

The Dragon’s head rolled away from its body, while the other dragon whimpered in fear from that scene. Shareen didn’t react much. This was legitimate, in their world. She was even surprised that he had apparently decided to spare Seban’s Dragon, despite the already poor state of the creature... She glanced down, but the indigo creature was pitifully shivering, its eyes fixated on Kairen in sheer fear.

“You poor one,” she sighed.

However, the War God didn’t have time for another glance at the young dragon. Kairen walked out of that building, walking back into the battle; Despite his absence, his men were not at a loss.

The Imperial Army was well-trained and perfectly capable by itself. The absence of their Commander in Chief for a few hours had not stopped them at all, as they finished the fight against the invader. There were a lot of victims and bodies, but few from the Dragon Empire’s people. On her way there, Shareen had been surprised to see how many common people were actually helping the soldiers, using those strange little boxes to tend their injuries. It was even more obvious now that the battle had died down, and the last enemies alive were brought together.

The War God had no time to waste. Ignoring all the men that tried to enquire about his situation or rejoice about their victory, he walked straight into the building where his generals had been put together.

“Your Highness! How come you’re...”

“Where is their leader?” Growled Kairen, ignoring all of them.

One man was dragged forward, and his fancy uniform clearly gave away

his high ranking among his army. Despite the large, ugly open injury on his head, he still had a defiant look while facing Kairen.

“Long live the Eastern Republic! We shall not obey the barbaric...”

Shareen gave a violent kick to his jaw before he could finish that sentence. The sound of his teeth breaking against one another made several men grimace. The man coughed up some blood, looking horrified.

“A w-woman! How dare you! A woman cannot hit a man!”

“Sorry, darling, wrong Empire for your fucking chauvinism. Now, talk before I break how many teeth and bones you got left one by one.”

“I won’t talk! I will die for my country!” Shout the man, despite his mouth full of blood and his missing teeth. “I will never...”

“Oh, fuck you and just die like an idiot then.”

Just like that, Shareen took out her weapon and killed the man right there. No one around was really surprised, as the Generals had witnessed this kind of thing countless times from the Imperial Family within the Palace all their meetings were held. Kairen turned to them.

“Who else did we get?”

“No one that will talk, Your Highness,” sighed one of the Generals, shaking his head. “All the leaders we caught either committed suicide or swore they’d never display any of their country’s military secret. We are still interrogating them at the moment.”

“This is annoying,” hissed Shareen. “We need proof of that rat face’s involvement in the war.”

“We have no proof that the second Prince...”

“We have one already,” interrupted Kairen.

The men turned to him, a bit flustered.

“W-we do, Your Highness?”

“There are two dragons left inside a building at the south-west,” he said.

“Get them and make sure they make the trip back to the Capital with us.”

He turned around to leave the building, while the Generals and Shareen followed after him.

“You want to use those two as proof?” She said. “Vrehan will pretend

his son acted by himself!”

“Then we’ll just have to make his son and Sephir’s talk.”

“Kairen, Sephir is dead.”

Kairen stopped and turned around to face his sister. Around her, the high-ranked soldiers that had just heard that news looked shocked, all of them exchanging glances with their eyes wide open. Kairen was focused on his sister. Shareen’s expression was cold and serious, making him realize this was the truth.

The War God was shocked, more than he let on. Though they weren’t particularly close, he had always considered Sephir as a real older brother. Maybe the one he was the closest to, after Anour. His fists clenched, Kairen resumed walking, not saying a word on what he thought about that news. That was just another crime added to the already large debt of what Vrehan would have to pay for...

“I need to go back to the Capital right away,” he hissed.

“Your Highness, you can’t!” Pleaded one of the Generals, running after him. “I’m most sorry about the First Prince’s passing, but we need to officially end this war, fortify the border, and have the Eastern Army acknowledge they attacked us! We need to make their leaders pay for the damages, and sign a treaty at least!”

The War God suddenly turned around, grabbing the man by the collar under everyone else’s astonished eyes.

“My Concubine and my child are in danger. My older brother just got murdered and you’re fucking talking to me about damn paperwork. You don’t need me for that,” he growled. 2

“Your Highness!”

He threw the man away, ignored them, and kept walking, followed by his sister. No one else dared to follow him.

“Kairen, we have to stop by the Diamond Palace to get mother,” declared Shareen.

“She can wait. I need to find Cassandra.”

“Kairen, stop a second and listen!” Urged his sister. “Kairen, I know you

just want to find them, but things are bad. There are rumors that Father has fallen ill, and Vrehan is acting in his stead. That little rat shit can have himself named Emperor the minute father dies if he wants. Now that Sephir is gone and you're away on a battlefield, he'll give no choice to the ministers. No one knows your son is born, and Vrehan will definitely try to kill him and Cassie before it is known. We need to get Anour and mother to help us deal with all that crap. We caught Phetra at the Diamond Palace. That bitch can still spill the beans about Vrehan."

"...Where is Cassandra?"

They were hurrying outside of the City, Kairen's eyes on Krai that was flying a few paces away. His Dragon was not done hunting and killing the few survivors trying to flee the battle. Some of them were desperately trying to get to the frontier, but the Dragon wouldn't even let them anywhere close to it.

Shareen sighed.

"According to mother, Cassie and Missandra decided to head to the Capital. Thank the Gods, they managed to win some time by making that idiot Vrehan think they were headed North to the Onyx Castle instead. They are on their own with your son and its dragon, though, and we don't even know if they are there yet. And Dahlia was killed by Vrehan, too..."

"Dahlia?"

"That servant girl mother placed by her side, the one that was always around Cassandra, remember? She died trying to protect your woman... Poor girl."

Kairen nodded vaguely. He did remember a young servant girl that was always around Cassandra. He didn't know she was one of his mother's many spies, though. Not that he cared about that fact at all, his mother was definitely the type to do that kind of thing. All he could think about right now was finding Cassandra and their son, and make sure they were both safe. Anywhere far from Vrehan would be enough.

Roun, that had been waiting at the entrance of the City, stood up as soon

as he saw them. Shareen had come on his back, so he had been expecting her to return. Meanwhile, Kairen waited for Krai to arrive, and jumped on his back for their trip to the Diamond Palace. By the time they had arrived at the Diamond Palace, Shareen had just finished telling him in detail everything that had happened on her side.

When they landed in their mother's garden, Kareen ran out to greet them. She hugged Kairen with a sad and angry look, and he noticed that she was holding something.

"That..."

"Oh, Cassie was working on it before all this happened," said his mother.

"She wanted to give it to your son after his birth..."

Kairen had recognized the little dragon plushie, despite the pretty embroideries his concubine had added to mend it. Even Krai, curious, sniffed the toy a bit before running to another aisle of the Diamond Palace. Kairen ran inside after him. They were both headed exactly to the same place.

In the remote garden, everything had been left as it was. Krai was growling, looking at the scene, his back arched furiously. Kairen, too, squeezed the little plushie in his hand. They were both staring at the scattered remains of a dragon's egg.

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 113

### #113 The Armies

The War God's thoughts at that moment were unfit for words. He was just boiling inside, his eyes dark as obsidian.

Krai, too, kept sniffing the remains of the egg, restless. The Dragon had felt that birth, yet he wasn't there for his offspring. He felt just as defeated as his master. To Kairen, this was a bitter defeat. Though Cassandra had survived and managed to flee his brother's clutches, she was still on her own and unsafe. He hated not being with his Concubine. He wanted her here, right by his side, where he could hold her and

protect her. Cassandra was many things, but she was not a fighter, and she would never be. His blood was boiling when he dared to imagine his brother or any other man near her. He couldn't stand the idea of a single scratch on her soft, fragile white skin. She already had so many scars he could never do anything about. What did she have to go through again because he wasn't there?

She had been reluctant to send him, yet she knew it was his duty. Kairen had never loathed his title as a War God as much as now. He should have been there. With her, with their child. He didn't even know what his son looked like!

"Son, come," gently called Lady Kareen, appearing behind him. "We need to talk."

He nodded, and though his eyes had a hard time losing this horrible vision of the destroyed egg, he stepped back and joined her back inside. Krai was left there.

They reunited in one of Kareen's salons, but he just wanted to hurry up to the Capital. He had followed his sister only because Shareen had insisted on the best strategy to attack Vrehan back and help Cassandra. Otherwise, he'd be miles away already. Their mother was seated on one of her throne-like chairs, but at her feet, Phetra was on her knees. As soon as she had seen Shareen and Kairen, her eyes had widened in absolute horror. She was a cunning woman, but outside of the Imperial Palace and without her brother to protect her, she was pitifully defenseless. Not that any of the people present felt an ounce of pity for her, though.

Anour and Evin were standing a few steps away, too. Kairen recognized the Imperial Servant, but only frowned a little and did not ask. He could easily imagine his sister had dragged him here from the North Army Camp. He was most interested in Phetra, that treacherous snake that had, according to what his sister had told him on the way there, injured Cassandra. Though she was already in a pitiful state, the War God slapped that woman.

The sound made by that slap was terrifying. The strength of those hands

shook Phetra's whole head, and she was thrown on the floor once again, half of her face burning. She had felt several bones cracking, and her scream that resonated made no doubt about the amount of pain she was in. Anour and Evin couldn't bear to look. Despite their education in this cruel environment, they couldn't help but feel bad witnessing the difference of strength between the War God and a woman. Kareen clicked her tongue.

"Kairen, we need that little rat alive."

"She's alive," said Shareen, her arms crossed.

She was staring at Phetra with a disdainful look. In Shareen's eyes, Phetra was already very lucky to be alive after angering their family and harming Cassandra. If it wasn't for Kareen, her brother would have most likely not stopped until she was slapped flat as a rug. Phetra's wailing was the only sound heard around, as all the Diamond Palace had scattered away.

Kareen put her chin in her fist.

"Anyway. While you were gone, I got some annoying news from my spies in the Capital."

"News from Cassie and Missandra?" Asked Shareen.

"Sadly, no. They hadn't arrived yet, but my men informed the Residence that guy told us about," said the Imperial Concubine while pointing at Evin. "In any case, they will be ready for their arrival, and of course, I appointed some men to watch the house and let me know as soon as they finally arrive."

"I'm going to the Capital."

"Kairen, I know you want to hurry there my son, but wait a minute. There is more. First, my spies confirmed your father is ill. No one has seen the Emperor in days, the last councils have all been held without him or Sephir."

"Those damn Ministers," growled Shareen. "They are probably dancing around our treasury and doing whatever shit they want while no one is there..."

“Those your brother won’t have corrupted, you mean,” said her mother. “Vrehan had always been very smart in politics, he probably has half of those greedy men ready to bow for him, and the other half scared to have him get some spring cleaning done while his father’s not there to stop him. In other words, he has the whole Imperial Palace working for him.”

“Is that going to be a problem?” Asked Shareen.

“A dragon alone can’t solve everything, Shareen. If he has the Imperial Palace working for him, he’ll kill your father as soon as he returns there and be named Emperor. Then, he’ll raise both his army and the Imperial Army against you two. I know how strong my children are, but against two armies, even you won’t be able to get inside the Imperial Palace that easily!”

“We can just fly inside,” shrugged Shareen. “Who cares about the armies on the ground if we come from above...”

\* You think that snake Vrehan won’t have thought about that? Either he will have a trap ready or hide himself somewhere you can’t get to him so easily. He’s just the type to let others do the dirty work for him while never getting a drop of sweat himself.”

Shareen rolled her eyes over, annoyed.

“Let’s get to it, mother, what do you suggest.”

Kareen pushed Phetra with her foot, making her wail again. The Princess was gagged though, and unable to speak. Her jaw was probably broken anyway, with those two trails of blood that were now rushing out her mouth. She was almost curling up against the throne, like a terrorized animal.

“While you children were gone, miss Phetra here and I had an interesting talk. Your older brother is expecting you to come flying. That useless little swine didn’t know the details, but her brother will have all of the skies filled with traps, most likely with catapults, giant crossbows, and so on. He is expecting Kairen to show up by himself with Krai. He will focus all of his men into stopping you, my son, no matter how much he’ll sacrifice. He is already days ahead of us, he will get to the Capital first

anyway, and I bet everything is already ready to welcome you there, on his orders. We have to think he will kill your father as soon as he can and have the Imperial army return to do his deeds.”

“Then...”

“Get the Eastern Army to the Capital. He knows Kairen is not one to bother waiting and summoning his army, he won’t expect the Eastern Army to show up and fight Vrehan’s militia or the Imperial Army with him.”

“True... He would expect Kairen and I to show up alone without the Army...”

“Exactly. Vrehan may be a coward but he’s annoyingly smart. He will do whatever he can to delay Kairen’s return to the Imperial Palace, even throw a whole army at him. Make sure that little rat is distracted enough about what goes on outside that he won’t have time to get to Cassandra. She is our best chance from the inside. If that smart girl manages to heal your old man or at least win us some time, we can even hope to get rid of Vrehan without too many issues. Though, if your father passes first, it will be much more difficult to get to Vrehan and Cassandra...”

Shareen wouldn’t say it out loud, but they all knew. The next victim in this conflict would most likely be their father... He had to be Vrehan’s first target upon coming back. They didn’t know why he wasn’t already dead, but since Cassandra and her son had escaped, the Second Prince would have no choice but to get rid of the Old Emperor as fast as he could to be named Emperor, and get full control of the Imperial Army.

“But the Imperial Army went with Brother to the battlefield in the East,” said Anour. “Brother just returned, they can’t go back to the Capital faster than a Dragon...”

“Not all of the Army was sent here. The Emperor wouldn’t have left the Capital with no defense.” (2

“Father probably sent at least about half of it from what I saw,” said Shareen.

“Then let’s assume half of the Imperial Army is still in the Imperial

Palace with that little rat. Vrehan may have acted impulsively but he definitely knows Krai and Kairen will be his biggest problem. If you got there, expect a trap.”

“Mother, you can’t ask us to wait for the Eastern Army to get there!”

“They are already on the way,” retorted Kareen. “Who do you think I am? I sent a message as soon as you left to get your brother! They will meet you in the Capital.” 1

The brother and sister exchanged a glance and a nod.

“So we are good to go, right? The army will meet us there.”

“Yes, but do you children even know what to do once we get there?” 4

“We? Mother, you’re coming?” Asked Shareen, shocked.

“Of course! What, you think this old lady will stand in the sidelines while your old man is in danger? You’re taking me for more heartless than I am!”

She had honestly nothing to answer to that. So; instead, she pointed at Phetra.

“What about her? Do we kill her now? As she said everything she had to?”

“Well, probably not,” said Shareen, standing up. “At least, I know how Vrehan managed to come here without your father’s approval. That little snake. He left the Palace with this annoying sister of his under the pretense of accompanying her to her wedding! Of course, they changed their course to come here and pretend they were arresting Cassandra under the Emperor’s order. I can’t believe I got floored by those two... I bet they barely just had the information back in the Imperial Palace that he was already half-way there!”

She grabbed Phetra’s hair, dragging her mercilessly.

“You little bitch...” Hissed Kareen. “She spilled all the names of the people Vrehan corrupted in the Imperial Palace, so I will have to do a thorough cleaning once we get there. She’s also the one who smuggled the poison that killed Sephir, though she didn’t know it was going to be used on her father as well...”

“So she knows the remedy?”

“That idiot? She can’t even tell the difference between blood and wine! She just did Vrehan’s dirty work, as always. Probably ordered from some market. 3

“What about that abortion potion?”

“She kept saying it was intended for Cassie. Pretty sure she’s lying about that, but... In any case, she may be more useful once we get to the Imperial Palace and argue with her brother. She probably knows more dirt on him than she’ll say for now. She will talk once he abandons her for real. Who knows...”

Shareen shook her head. She had enough of all that. Kairen was the first to step out, calling his dragon to come. Krai was just as impatient and kept growling furiously. Both the black dragon and his master wanted to hurry back into the Capital, as there was close to no time to lose.

Cassandra was in danger, especially if she had decided to try and go save the Emperor from Vrehan’s clutches...

Kairen helped his mother get on the Black Dragon, forcefully pulling Phetra there too. Truth was, both Roun and

Krai attempted to kill her until their masters had them stop and keep their fangs away. The black Dragon was unhappy about carrying that woman, but Kairen put her like a sandbag at the rear, on her stomach, the most uncomfortable position possible. She could still see Roun growling at her, as Shareen, Anour, and Evin were mounting him. Then, both Dragons took off.

With each Dragon carrying more people than usual, the flight took a little while longer. As Kareen had predicted, the two big dragons’ appearance in the sky caused quite a commotion. Many soldiers pointed at them, and just like the information spilled by Phetra, catapults and giant crossbows appeared all over the Imperial Palace’s roof. Both Dragons growled, but before they were within reach, they dived towards the south of the Capital. Evin’s directions were only necessary for Roun: Krai and Kairen knew exactly where to go. By mere luck, that residence was far enough

from the Imperial Palace, and both Dragons landed in the garden under the servants' shocked eyes. They could already hear the yells of soldiers outside, ordering the men to gather. Most likely Vrehan's militia.

Shareen and Kairen each jumped down from the dragons first and ran in opposite directions. While the sister took her swords out to go and guard the entrance of the residence, the Prince ran inside.

Kairen couldn't tell if he was imagining it, but the cries of a baby were guiding him inside the residence. His heart was thumping like crazy in his chest, as he could only focus on that sound. He finally found a door, and stopped behind, almost out of breath. He was suddenly scared to open that door. He listened to the voices inside, almost covered by the baby's screams.

"By the Gods, won't he stop crying... He's been at it for hours and hours, no one slept a wink since..."

"His mother left! Poor thing... He probably doesn't understand..."

Kairen opened the door wide with a bang. The two women turned to face him, scared by the noise and the sudden appearance of that tall man at the door. However, it was hard not to know who that man was. Tall, with his tanned skin, black hair, and black eyes. And that strange hair...

Kairen barely noticed the two women. His eyes fell right on the baby that was there, his eyes all teary and his little fists clenched. He stepped forward, a bit at a loss. That not how he had imagined their first meeting. None of this was what he wanted, not when his mother wasn't there... The baby had a little hiccup from all his crying earlier. However, his wailing had stopped, and he was only making an upset pout, his eyes riveted on the big man that was coming towards him.

That baby felt ridiculously small compared to Kairen. However, there was no doubt. He had a little patch of dark hair, and skin barely one tone lighter than his. Kairen hesitated. Then, he slowly took out the little dragon plushie he had on him all this time. The baby's eyes went right for the toy. He opened his hands and stretched a bit to grasp it, holding on tightly to the little plushie his mother had sewed back in shape.

It was a strange situation, but the beginning of a smile appeared on the War God's lips. He gently took his son into his arms, though one hand would have been enough to carry all of him. The baby whined a little bit, squeezing the toy with an upset expression.

"... Let's go get your mother back."

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 114

### #114 The Quiet Apartments

The Prince glared at them, annoyed. He kept shaking his head, already sulking.

"You're really one hell of a little pest!" He hissed. "Oh, fine! I never liked that dumb ass anyway..."

Missandra gave a triumphant smile to her sister, but it was way too early to rejoice, in Cassandra's opinion. Could they really trust this Prince? So far, Opheus hadn't been the most cooperative, and Missandra was basically forcing him to help them now. However, the sisters were short in options. Moreover, the threat of the War God's wrath was probably their best weapon at the moment...

The fourth Prince rolled his eyes over, ignoring Missandra to turn to Cassandra with a frown, his fingers twiddling with his long earring.

"Can you really heal Father?"

"I hope so," said Cassandra with a little nod. "I can't say before I've actually seen him, though... Do you know where he is?"

"Well, Vrehan wasn't extraordinarily discreet about it. Father was moved to his Chambers, under the pretense of guarding him against any more assassins..."

"They let him do that?"

"Sweetie, in case you haven't been following, there is no one left to oppose that douche here. Sephir died, Kairen is gone to play with his toys on some faraway battlefield. Who else do you think will show up to tell him what he can and cannot do? He's the second Prince!"

“You could have stopped him,” noticed Missandra, upset. “You could have saved your own damn Father if you had said something.”

Opheus sighed.

“Just you try growing up in a family where everyone happily serves each other poison for breakfast while the adults watch, darling. I have nothing against my father, but I’m far from being his favorite son, if he remembers me at all, and I have a long list of siblings who’d only be too happy to feed my ass with a sword if they remembered I exist. So sorry about daddy, but I value my life a tad more.”

Though Missandra made a disgusted face, Cassandra couldn’t really say she didn’t understand his point of view, for she had witnessed it herself many times. All the siblings were in danger since even before their birth, especially the Princes. Some had to grow with strong personalities, while some like Anour and Opheus, remained quiet and unnoticed. It was one way like any other to try and survive in such an environment.

Cassandra stepped forward to address Opheus, speaking softly.

“I understand your position, and I know that what we are asking is putting you in danger, too. But you can’t ignore that Vrehan will not stop there. He won’t have enough of killing his father and only one or two of his brothers.”

Opheus shrugged after a hesitation.

“Why should I care? It’s not like I’m a threat to him, I have no children and no will to have any!”

“Do you have no one you care about in this Palace at all?” Retorted Cassandra.

This time, her words silenced him. He looked baffled for a few seconds and lost in his thoughts. Opheus had grown in this Palace. There was no way there was no one here that he didn’t hold dear. Maybe he had younger sisters, or lovers that Vrehan could potentially harm. Moreover, heirs or not, his own safety wouldn’t be guaranteed either. He couldn’t ignore what usually happened to the New Emperor’s siblings....

After a long while, he sighed.

“Oh, fuck it, we are all going to die anyway...”

The Prince walked past them, shaking his head, and actually walked towards the window his dragon was peeping at them from. He scratched his dragon’s chin, making the white beast growl softly, and turned to them.

“Come on, I’ll give you a ride. Unless you want to walk out into the two idiots my brother has planted there...”

Cassandra and Missandra exchanged a quick concerned look. They weren’t exactly fond of the idea of hopping onto a Dragon they didn’t know and had never seen behave at all before, but it was still better than climbing their way back or risking it in front of the guards. Moreover, the white Dragon hadn’t been very menacing since the two of them had seen him. He hadn’t even growled once at them, only peeking on their every move without showing animosity. (2

Cassandra walked his way first, and to her surprise, Opheus actually held out his hand to help her get on his dragon’s back. She took it after a hesitation, and exchanging a glance with him. Somehow, she hadn’t noticed before, but he had some features in common with Kairen, though his face was leaner and his forehead more prominent. It was strange to meet all of Kairen’s brothers, and all she was concerned about was which ones did not want her dead...

Somehow, Opheus decided not to extend the courtesy to Missandra, and got on his Dragon’s back right after her, leaving the younger sister to climb on however she could. His white dragon was smaller than Krai, but his build was about the same, and he was among the biggest of those Cassandra had seen, roughly about the same size as Vrehan’s dragon. He seemed of a quiet nature, as he took off quietly as soon as all three of them were seated. 2

It felt strange for Cassandra to fly again after such a long time, and on a different dragon’s back. She had never flown on any other Dragon than Krai. The white dragon didn’t need any directions. He quietly circled the large Imperial Palace, leaving the girls to see what was going on on all

the roofs. Catapults, giant crossbows, iron nets extended over some of the gardens... The Imperial Palace was clearly preparing for an attack coming from the sky. Opheus, too, had his eyes on there and shook his head. 2

“What a moron,” he sighed. “Come on, Phe, let’s get away.”

His Dragon growled softly in response, but his big blue eyes were also riveted on all the weapons below. He took them down to one of the aisles of the Imperial Palace, one Cassandra had never been to before. She had no idea where they were, but Phe, the white dragon, landed quietly in a large garden filled with purple flowers. It was extremely quiet around. Opheus jumped down and, once again, helped Cassandra get off his dragon. Whether he hadn’t liked Missandra’s attitude earlier or was just acting petty, the younger sister had to get down herself.

“Where are we? Asked Cassandra.

“My chambers. Luckily for you, I happen to be living not far from Vrehan’s apartments. I don’t know where exactly our father was taken, but at least from here, you shouldn’t have any trouble accessing his place. If you can get past all the guards, that is...”

Cassandra’s throat tightened a little. It would have been stupid to think the second Prince would have left his father completely unguarded. Not only the Imperial Soldiers, but it was very likely that his own militia would be keeping the Emperor locked in there. She sighed. They had found where the Emperor was and got closer to his position, but the hardest part was still to come.

Opheus walked back inside, and the girls naturally followed, as they were completely lost on their position within the Palace. After walking past a few rooms, Cassandra couldn’t help but notice a strange detail.

“It’s very... quiet in here,” she said. “You don’t have any Imperial servants in here?”

“No. I hate noise and noisy people. I don’t trust any of those little rats either, they are all working for someone in there... I’d rather take care of myself.”

Cassandra was impressed. Besides his excessive attitude they had witnessed earlier, he actually seemed like quite a sensible being. Everything inside the rooms and corridors they walked across actually seemed strangely bare. Actually, it reminded Cassandra of her first days in Kairen's apartments in the Imperial Palace. Just like his older brother, Opheus didn't seem to spend much in decorations or filling his apartments with luxurious items. The bit of furniture they saw was in pastel colors, adding to the quiet atmosphere around. Cassandra spotted a couple of instruments, too, meaning he probably liked music more than noise....

"Opheus? What's going on?"

Two women suddenly emerged from a room on their left. Both looked around their thirties, and were very pretty. The first had short brown hair, almond eyes, and thin lips, and was wearing a long purple dress. Behind her was a younger girl, in purple too, who was almost hiding behind her. Opheus frowned.

"We have guests," he sighed.

"Guests? Are you kidding? Aside from your crazy mother, you never..." She stopped talking, frowning at Cassandra.

"I know you. Aren't you the Third Prince's Favorite? The White Lily. Why do you look like that..."

Cassandra wasn't sure what to say. Should she confirm her words, was there a danger in unveiling her identity to that woman? It seemed a bit late, though, she had clearly recognized her. As she hesitated, Opheus sighed.

"Relax, darling. This is my wife, Mariana, and my younger sister hiding behind her. They won't talk. Yes, Mari, that's Kairen's woman."

Cassandra was a bit surprised to hear Opheus actually had a wife. He was probably the only one among the Princes, and she had never even heard that one of the actual princes had a wife at all. Was it recent? Before she could wonder more, that woman, Mariana, glared at her husband,

looking shocked.

“Are you kidding, Ophe? Didn’t you say we should lay low? With the Emperor being sick and all? And now you bring that woman here? Are you crazy!”

To Cassandra’s surprise, before the fourth Prince could even answer, Mariana turned to her.

“No offense to you, really, but the situation is freaking tense here, and that idiot said it himself!”

Opheus rolled his eyes.

“I know what I said, but I found those two in Father’s apartments! Also, the little one basically threatened me into helping them, mind you!”

Mariana glanced towards Missandra, and put her hands on her hips.

“Awesome, so now you get bullied around by teenagers? Really, Opheus? I already have to handle your crazy bitch mother, give me some slack!”

“We are not staying,” declared Cassandra, stepping up. “His Highness just helped us not get caught, but we only want to get the Emperor. We won’t bother you any longer, we don’t want to put you in danger.”

Hearing her actually speak seemed to calm that woman a bit. After one more glare at her husband, Mariana turned to Cassandra, crossing her arms.

“Sorry for the yelling, I have nothing against you, Lady Cassandra. I’m just worried about that crazy Vrehan. He’s fucking lost it and killed Prince Sephir, no one here is blind enough to think you’re guilty. I remember seeing you with the other concubines, I thought you were a smart but harmless woman. We also heard about the Lady of the Mountain, all the concubines talk.

Cassandra was somewhat touched to hear that most people didn’t believe in her being an assassin. That woman,

Mariana, seemed to have a lot of common sense and nothing in common with the other Concubines Cassandra had met. After scratching her head, Mariana turned towards the Prince again.

“So, what was the idea there?”

“They get out of here and try to find and help my dad, that’s it! Nothing I’m going to concern myself with... hey!”

Before he could end his sentence, Mariana had slapped his shoulder with an angry look.

“Stop being such a baby! You can’t let them get in there alone, are you crazy?”

“You’re the one who said you were fine with us laying low!” He protested, rubbing his painful shoulder.

“That was before I knew there was someone in that crazy Imperial Palace capable of helping the old man! Stop being a coward, or are you going to let your father die? And your brother’s woman, too? What do you think the War God will do to your skinny ass once he finds out!”

Once again, Opheus let out a long groan of exasperation. Behind Cassandra, Missandra had a hard time not laughing. However, Mariana was not done with him.

“I’m so fed up with you! Do you want Vrehan to get on the throne, perhaps? Because I know I don’t! He’s just going to have us all lined up and make a fucking slaughter!”

“Fine, fine! Stop hitting me you crazy woman, I get it!”

If the situation hadn’t been so dramatic in itself, it would have been quite funny to witness the Prince being bossed around by his wife... Mariana stopped, though she did threaten me into another slap, making Opheus take one step away from her. She then turned to Cassandra, taking back a serious and gentle expression scarily fast.

“Sorry about that. Anyway. Of course, we will help you, especially if there’s a chance you can help the Emperor; We don’t know much, though, except for the fact that he’s in Vrehan’s apartments. No one opposed it when they moved them, so I guess he already has most of the people in the Palace working for him... There are guards, too. Don’t worry, though, we can find a way.”

“Are you serious?” Whispered Opheus, though everyone there could hear him.

Mariana nodded and smiled at him.

“They just need to be able to get in, right? All we need is a distraction. Looks like your crazy mother is going to be useful for once...”

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 115

### #115 The Forbidden Area

The six men guarding the door to the second Prince's apartments were bored.

They didn't quite understand why a simple entrance door within the Palace was so heavily guarded, as absolutely nothing was going on in that area of the Imperial Palace. Of course, the death of the First Prince had caused quite a stir, but since the funeral that had been held in a hurry, and the second prince had left, it had been rather quiet over there. Those men actually had no idea what was going on behind those doors, or who they were truly guarding. They were aware of some rumors that the emperor had been placed in the second Prince's apartments, but they had no confirmation of it. The servants always talked a lot between themselves, while the soldiers were supposed to keep their tongue tied unless they wanted to lose their position.

Becoming an Imperial Guard was such a prestigious position, with a heavy salary yet not much actual work to do, that many envied their position. It took either a lot of work, a lot of money or good connections to get there. . Sometimes a bit of all of that, but in any case, they had done the hardest part. Unless they were aiming to a higher position, those men could spend their days guarding doors and simply wait for their paychecks to come. They didn't need to guard the inside of the Princes' or Princesses' apartments, either: most of them had their own militia, and the others hated any intrusion on their privacy. Plus, there was a long history of concubines getting into some bad fighting over rumors of one another sleeping with the personnel and since the latest scandal that had the Emperor see red, all of the Imperial Guards had been strictly banned from entering the private chambers of the Imperial Family unless

explicitly being told otherwise.

Those men didn't have much to entertain themselves with. They would lurk at the pretty young servant girls going by, but that was pretty much their only entertainment all day long.

Hence, when the two women appeared at one end of the corridor, they turned heads as soon as they heard the first screaming. Those among the soldiers who recognized them frowned or chuckled nervously, already aware of what was going on.

"You useless little bitch!" Was yelling the middle-aged woman. "You can't even give me one heir, one! What did you marry my son for if it's for just standing here like a decorative vase! You're useless! Useless!"

"Take it down a notch, you old harpy! Fucking get a clue! Because Ophe agreed to marry me doesn't mean I'm gonna pop out a kid within the year!"

"Don't call him so familiarly before you even get pregnant! I don't know why my son was so adamant about marrying you, but you better give me a grandson quickly, or I'll have your head!"

"My head? And what are you going to do with it? Did you forget that I am his wife? He can't get another woman, now, I'm never allowing it, so you better be happy with who you got and suck it up!"

The soldiers were trying hard not to laugh at the scene. Aside from the Imperial Concubine, no one was blind as to why the fourth Prince had agreed to marry Lady Mariana. Certainly not to produce any heirs, for one. It was even quite surprising that his mother was still holding on to the pitiful illusion that Prince Opheus could ever produce any children, given his tastes. Lady Mariana was actually doing a good job of acting as his fence against his delusional mother, but even the Emperor had completely given up on his fourth son... and his hysterical mother.

"I should have never agreed to that! You're just a useless little scheming swine! You did it all for the money! And to kill me! You're going to kill me!"

"Yes, yes... Aren't we getting a little big on the drama, mother-in-law?"

Said Mariana, ignoring her to keep going towards the soldiers.

“You’re useless! Useless!” Kept screaming the woman behind her.

“Old hag,” sighed Mariana, approaching the men with a smile. “Sorry about the ruckus, soldiers. Can I go in? I was supposed to have tea with Concubine Gloriata, but I can’t find her.”

The men felt a bit flustered for one of the Princesses to address them so politely and gently. They were more used to the rude and mighty attitude of the concubines. Moreover, Mariana was a very pretty woman, and she was standing a bit closer than naturally in her flattering purple dress.

“S-Sorry, Princess Mariana, we are not supposed to let anyone in...”

“What? Really?” She said, looking surprised. “Is everything alright in there? I...”

“You swine! I’m not done talking!” Yelled the woman behind her.

“Oh, shut up!” Roared Mariana, turning to her; “Can’t you see that I’m talking to those gentlemen? Do you have to make a fuss all the time? I don’t know how Ophe put up with you all those years!” (1

“He is my son, you little bitch! I am his mother, he’s nothing without me!”

“Isn’t it the other way around?” Sighed Mariana. 1

The Imperial Soldiers chuckled, some blushing a little bit too. As soon as she saw that, the Imperial Concubine glared at them, and became even more hysterical, agitating her cane all around.

“How dare you laugh! You punks! You useless men! You good-for-nothing!”

At each word, she was dangerously swinging her cane around, making the Imperial Guards dodge it or experience painful hits. She was one of the only concubines older than the Emperor, and though she had lost his favors long ago, the Imperial Guards were completely flustered at how to deal with her.

“Imperial Concubine, please calm down...”

“Calm down? You’re telling me to calm down?” Yelled the Imperial Concubine. “I’ll have you hung! Or beheaded! And then drowned!”

“Oh, really...” sighed Mariana.

While the men were flustered and trying to control the old lady, behind them, they didn't notice the trio that was walking on their toes to get to the door. Opheus' mother was so awfully noisy and agitated that even she didn't see her own son sneaking behind the Imperial Guards and into the second Prince's apartments. Mariana smiled, seeing that they had succeeded, but she got hit by the cane right after, making her remember that she had inherited the worse part of the plan... 3

As soon as they were inside, Opheus guided Cassandra and Missandra towards a quiet room, apparently familiar with their surroundings. He checked inside to verify it was empty before letting the girls in. All three of them released a long sigh of relief.

“That's one crazy old woman...” Said Missandra, immediately getting a glare from her older sister.

“You have no idea,” sighed Opheus. “If it wasn't for Mari, she'd be still sneaking girls into my bedroom every night. A nightmare, I swear. Oh, anyway, we are in. Now we need to find Father.”

“Do you have an idea where he could be?”

The fourth Prince shook his head with a frown.

“Not really... I've only been here a few times when I was younger. My mother and his were close a long time ago, though it might just have been to try to get rid of each other. They did end up trying to kill each other until Lady Kareen became the favorite and they changed objectives. Lovely ladies. Anyway, I think the bedrooms were that way, but it is definitely going to be guarded by Vrehan's personal militia.”

“Any way around?”

Opheus took a few seconds to think, fidgeting with his earring again.

“There are some rooms that were only used for storage back in the day...” he said. “Mari and I used to sneak in there when the Imperial Concubines were having tea, to be alone.”

“Mariana is a childhood friend?” Asked Cassandra, surprised.

“She's been an Imperial Servant here since she was young, and my best

friend. If my mother wanted to punish me, she'd take it out on her..."

Cassandra was surprised. She hadn't thought some friendships could actually occur between members of the Imperial Family and the servants since the gap between the two was so large... However, seeing how Opheus had always gone against his family's usual patterns, it wasn't too surprising. So he had probably married Mariana so they could protect each other... It was a rather touching story, not something she would have suspected to occur inside the Imperial Palace.

Once again making sure there was no one ahead of them, Opheus and the two young women walked out of the room, cautious. They could actually still hear the screams of the Imperial Concubine from time to time, and Opheus made a grimace every time. They carefully took one corridor after another, but if there were any servants around, they had probably gone to see what was going on at the entrance. After a while, though, Opheus started frowning a lot.

"It's strange... I don't remember this place being that deserted when I was young..."

That sentence made the girls worried, but it was a bit late to turn back. Indeed, the atmosphere in that area was a bit unusual. Most of the doors were locked, and it felt like no one had ventured there in a very long time. Cassandra realized that she was getting the same feeling from when she had seen Kairen's childhood bedroom. It felt sad and desolate around there, but she couldn't tell why. It was rather clean, but there was no soul around. The further they walked in, the more than uneasy feeling grew. 3 All the doors they walked by on their left side were locked, and there was barely a couple of windows on their right for the light to get in. They had slowed down their pace, since their steps resonated in that silence. Even Opheus kept a sour face on.

"It's weird," said Missandra. "We haven't come across a single servant or guard since we came into that area. If that crazy prince is so on guard, why is there absolutely no one here?"

Cassandra didn't have an answer, but she felt just the same. Something

was strange. It was as if no one was allowed here at all, even if that area was completely deserted, there should at least have been a couple of guards or a servant sweeping the dust.

However, they had no time to stop and check what was going on behind those closed doors. In a tacit agreement, they kept going, following Opheus' lead.

Suddenly, an old maid appeared out of the blue at one of the intersections. She was carrying a tray with food, and she froze upon seeing them, looking shocked. Opheus moved immediately to stand between the sisters and that maid, preventing them to see their faces.

However, the old woman looked more shocked to see him, her hands shaking on the tray of food.

"W... What are you doing here... That... This area is forbidden..."

"Sorry, I was coming to see my brother," Opheus lied. "Who is that food for?"

The maid went even paler, stepping back as he was stepping closer.

"Ah... No... no one, sir..."

"No one? This is a large detour for someone going to the main area. You're carrying a lot of food too."

Opheus was stepping closer and closer to the old maid, but she kept stepping back, visibly terrified. She had the face of someone who didn't want to get caught, and from the direction of her feet, was probably considering

running away. Yet, before she could take another step, the fourth Prince suddenly grabbed her, and the tray of food fell loudly.

"Who was that food for?" He insisted.

"I... I'm sorry, your Highness, I can't tell..." whimpered the old woman.

"Is it for my father?" He asked.

"N-no..."

Opheus asked her again, insisting, but Cassandra had her eyes on the food she had left on the ground. This didn't look like a meal that would have been given to a sick old man... but to a pregnant woman. She

recognized some of the food Kareen had been insistent on having her eat while she was pregnant with Kassian, at the Diamond Palace.

\*P-please let me go,” said the old woman. “If her Highness k-knows...”

“Her Highness ? Who ?”

Either she had talked too much or not enough, the old woman was now bitterly regretting it. Moreover, Opheus was tightening his grip on her wrist and threatening her with a glare. Just like the rest of his family, the Imperial Prince was well aware of his power, and he kept going until the old woman got teary and talked.

“L-Lady... Madeen...”

Cassandra frowned. She knew that name, it was the name of Vrehan’s Favorite, the mother of his first son. If there was someone else that they should fear crossing paths within that place, while Vrehan and Phetra were gone, it had to be that woman.

Opheus wasn’t done interrogating the maid, however.

“Who was that food for, then ? Madeen isn’t pregnant!”

This time, the old maid stayed resolutely mute. However, her eyes slipped to one of the doors for a second, and Missandra caught that. She ran to the said door, trying to open it, but it wouldn’t.

“She must have a key!” said Missandra.

“Ah, no!” Screamed the old woman.

Before she could yell anymore, Opheus grabbed her chin, and brutally flipped her head around, killing her immediately. Cassandra let out a shocked cry, while Missandra frowned.

“Did you really have to kill that poor old lady ?”

“She would have been killed by Madeen anyway,” retorted Opheus, crouching down to search her. “If you want to cry, find a corner darling but do it later.”

Missandra sighed, but he probably wasn’t wrong... He suddenly found a key and walked up to her with a sigh.

“Why are we doing this, anyway ?” He said.

“Because whatever that sicko wants to hide is good for us to know,”

retorted Missandra, opening the door.

The door gave in with a creaking, despite Missandra's attempt to open it quietly. Inside, it was awfully dark. There was no window, and the only light came from behind them, the corridor they were standing in already rather dark

itself. Cassandra frowned, and stepped forward, past her sister to venture inside, while Opheus stayed behind them with a frown.

Though they could barely see anything, she could feel a presence. She waited a few seconds for her eyes to get used to the dark and looked for the source of the faint breathing she could hear. This was a room with nothing but

a bed. On the bed, was a young woman, curled up against the wall, staring at her with a frightened expression.

She had long black hair, black eyes, tanned skin, and was heavily pregnant.