

Epilogue

“The new commercial road is a success, Your Majesty. The number of permits registered for traveling merchants has doubled, a third of them coming from the Dragon Empire. We expect a dozen new shops to open this month alone in the new district of the Capital, and probably twice that in the neighboring cities.”

The King nodded, looking down at the paper full of information in front of him. The data was detailed and quite positive, as usual. He turned to the General.

“What of the recruitments for protecting those merchants?”

“It’s going well, Your Majesty,” Sabael nodded. “We have a hundred knights who volunteered as patrol units, and even though we haven’t finalized the candidates registration for knightship next year, we expect it to be higher than the previous years. As you predicted, we are also seeing the new Mercenary Guilds offering their services as security escorts for the roads that aren’t covered by the patrols; we plan to work with them to make sure everything goes well.”

“Make sure only registered mercenaries can establish contracts with the merchants, and that the process is simple but safe. I do not want some fake guilds robbing those merchants the minute they’re on the roads.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

The King nodded, and turned to the next page with a serious expression. While he wasn’t looking, everyone around the table exchanged looks. Next to him, the Royal Counselor cast her eyes to the door on their left, biting her fingernail nervously as she exchanged a glance with the General.

“The next subject is about the new crop fields in the south. I know the new river digs are almost completed, how are the architects doing? We’re supposed to have the village ready for the farmers by next month.”

“It will be ready in time, Your Majesty,” Nana smiled, “but the remaining matters of today’s session aren’t urgent and could wait a couple more days.”

Ashen finally lifted his eyes, glancing at Nana. She gave him a little accomplice smile. He hesitated, then glanced around the table. All the people seated gently smiled at him, some hardly repressing a laugh. Others were even looking at the King with proud expressions. After a few seconds, Ashen nodded, then put the documents down on the table.

“Then, if you’ll excuse me...”

He stood up first and quickly left the room. As soon as he was gone, several people who couldn’t repress it anymore laughed, including Nana. Lady Bastat, more elegant, hid her smile behind her long sleeve.

“It seems our young King really did his best to hold on until now.”

“You guys are too mean,” pouted Nana. “We could have let him leave earlier...”

“What fun would there have been in that?” chuckled her brother Sabael. “His Majesty is too serious all the time, we have to tease him.”

“I agree,” smiled Hephrael, leader of the Hashat Tribe. “His Majesty should learn to be more open.”

Nana pouted, slightly disagreeing with them. She glanced at the door with a faint smile. In fact, she thought the King’s self-control was to be praised, given the situation.

A few corridors away from these people already, King Ashen was hurrying up the stairs, breathing quickly to keep up the pace. He had been dying to do this for a while, but now his nerves were reaching a peak. The quietness as he got close to their private apartments worried him more than anything. Never before had he hated the silence so much. He knew

he was the one who had ordered anybody unnecessary to stay away from their living space, but now, he was worried he'd made a terrible mistake. What if—

“Daddy!”

He stopped and turned his head to see a little silhouette running toward him. Ashen only had time to turn before she landed right against him, grabbing his waist and lifting her head toward him with a big smile.

“Daddy, you're back!”

“Daddy!”

He glanced behind her. A smaller silhouette was also coming toward him, with much more unstable but determined steps. He smiled, and gently shifted his older daughter to the side so he could squat down. Immediately, the toddler facing him smiled, even more confidently.

“Daddy!” she exclaimed with the cutest voice.

“Come here, baby,” he smiled.

His daughter waddled toward him. She had only learned to walk recently, but she could already run, which was quite an exciting challenge. A young maid behind her was watching her every step, her hands ready to grab the young Princess as soon as she'd show any signs of potentially falling. She wouldn't do anything unless she was absolutely certain, though. The little dark-haired Princess had made huge progress with her running, and moreover, she hated to be helped when she didn't need to be. As they had learned, letting her fall was actually better than a maid catching her, as she hated to be surprised. Hence, with cautious, small but sure little steps, his second daughter waddled all the way to him, and once she got close enough, she landed face first in his arms, with a cute happy sound of relief. Ashen smiled and lifted the baby girl up in his arms, putting a big kiss on her plump cheek. Somebody had put her hair up into two cute little buns today, her favorite hairdo since she had started copying everything her godmother said and did.

“Well done, my princess.”

The baby girl smiled and happily nestled her head against her dad's neck, wrapping her chubby arms around it. Ashen then turned back to his oldest child, who was patiently waiting while holding his available hand.

“Not yet?”

Neridie shook her head.

“No... I asked again and they said soon!”

Ashen nodded, but soon was not soon enough in his eyes. He glanced at the doors, not the one the girls had come from, but the large, heavy doors on his left. He wished those weren't so big and soundproof... There wasn't anything he could do, though. Hence, he simply paced in the corridor with his two daughters, trying to ease his anxiety and theirs by chatting with them both. Neridie was approaching her seventh birthday already, while Shelie was two years old. The two girls couldn't have been more different: Neridie was chatty, outgoing, and brazen, while Shelie was always seeking the comforting refuge of familiar arms, and not much of a talker either. The younger sister was happy staying seated in her dad's arms, while Neridie kept walking around, pacing twice more than her dad did. For the maid who watched on the side, it was a cute sight to see father and daughter sharing their nervousness with similar habits.

After a while, movement was finally heard from the other side. The door opened, and Shelie's godmother came out first, looking a bit tired. Her little belly was starting to show, but it was too small yet to be of any inconvenience to her. The real reason she was tired was probably not in her body.

“Tessandra,” Ashen exclaimed, walking up to her immediately. “...So?”

“Everything's fine,” she smiled. “Congratulations, Your Majesty. It's a healthy boy, and Cessi is perfectly fine too.”

“Can we go in now?” Neridie exclaimed.

“Yes, but be quiet, baby. Your little brother just stopped crying.”

“I will!”

After hearing this, Neridie ran into the room first, but in silence. Ashen let out a faint sigh of relief.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Don’t thank me,” Tessandra smiled. “It’s family, after all. Go and enjoy your family time now. I’ll send everyone else out.”

Indeed, Tessandra took all the maids out with her, leaving the little family of now five alone. When Ashen walked in, still carrying Shelie, Neridie was already on the bed, chatting happily with her mom. A huge wave of relief washed over him as he saw his wife smiling. She was beautiful, leaning against a huge colored pillow with her chestnut curls in a mess all around her head. Little pearls of sweat were still dripping down her temples and hairline. He had been worried because she had to give birth in the middle of a hot, humid summer, but she seemed just fine.

“Mommy!” Shelie said as he gently put her on the bed.

“Hi, my baby,” Cessilia smiled, letting the little girl climb up to her other side. “Do you want to meet your little brother?”

The two girls were already fascinated by the young baby boy sleeping in their mother’s arms. Ashen, however, first went to his wife, caressing her head and putting a kiss on her forehead.

“How are you?”

“I’m alright,” she smiled.

She caressed his cheek with her free hand, and they exchanged a long, gentle kiss. Then, they turned their heads toward the newborn baby in Cessilia’s arm.

“He’s so small!” Neridie exclaimed.

“You were smaller than that when you were born,” Ashen smiled, “and you said the same thing when Shelie was born. Do you remember?”

“No.” His oldest shook her head.

Ashen smiled and glanced back toward the baby. Hesitantly, Shelie held out her hand, and took her baby brother's. The little baby opened his eyes, making the two girls react. He made a cute little movement with his head, and looked at the faces above him.

"And his dragon?" Neridie asked.

"He's with Cece," Cessilia smiled.

She turned her head, and just then, they heard a loud flap of wings. Silver scales appeared on the balcony, and a large eye stared at the little family.

"Cece!" Neridie exclaimed, already jumping down from the bed to go and greet the dragons.

While Cece was too big to come in, three little dragons flew onto the balcony. The biggest of the three was Didi, Neridie's Pink Dragon, who ran toward her to spin around her. Then came Shelie's little Dark Green Dragon, Lish, who was followed by an even smaller one. The baby dragon was still barely learning to flap those tiny wings, but was moving around making cute little jumps at its older siblings, and constantly glancing back toward Cece. Neridie walked first to the new baby dragon. This one was of a beautiful light blue color, like the morning sea. It sniffed Neridie's hand before letting her grab its small body and carry it back to the bed, where the young dragon met its owner.

"Hello," Shelie said, her big black eyes riveted on the baby dragon.

The dragon rubbed its long body against the baby girl, making her giggle, and curled up in front of her on Cessilia's lap. The little girl happily pet the new baby dragon. Meanwhile, Ashen put a leg down on the bed, sitting next to his wife and putting an arm under her head for support.

"Hold him," she said, passing him the baby.

He smiled and took his newborn son in the crook of his arm without hesitation. The baby still had his eyes open, but could hardly decide on the little movement of his face. Twice, his little tongue peeked out cutely, making his mom chuckle. His dad gently held him, effortlessly, his eyes riveted on his latest child.

“...We have to name him,” she whispered.

Ashen nodded. Cessilia tilted her head, waiting for him to say something, but her husband only had his eyes on the baby, seeming a bit nervous.

“Tell me,” she encouraged him.

He glanced at her, frowning.

“...How do you know I already have an idea?”

“I’m your wife,” Cessilia chuckled. “It’s my duty to know what my husband thinks... You reacted when I said it would be nice to have a son sometime. Even now, you’re very quiet compared to when the girls were born. You let me choose both of their names. So, what’s his?”

Ashen smiled. Of course she’d read him... as always. He glanced at her, still hesitant.

“Please tell me if you hate it.”

“I doubt I will.”

“Just tell me. I’m not sure yet. ...I thought I’d like to call him Yassim.”

Cessilia smiled, without saying anything.

“...What do you think?”

“That’s really sweet of you to want to honor him.”

“He saved my life,” her husband muttered.

Cessilia felt proud of her husband. He had never been one to be able to thank people, for a long time... His survival instincts had been pushed to such extremes that he couldn’t trust anyone. Even when his mentor had sacrificed himself for his sake, it had taken Ashen a long time to be at peace about it. Now, he wanted to honor this man through his son... She found that adorable. Especially since Yassim had no children of his own, no one left behind.

“I’m still not sure,” Ashen frowned. “I tried to come up with other ideas, but I really wanted... If I had a son... to honor him in some way. But I

couldn't come up with anything better. And that name was specific to his tribe..."

"I like your idea," Cessilia nodded. "How about Yashen, then? He's your son, after all."

Ashen smiled.

"Are you sure? It really is similar."

"My mother named my first brother Kassian, and my fourth brother Kassein. It's quite similar as well, yet nobody confuses them. Yashen is cute, and it clearly says he's your son too."

"...Yashen. I like that."

He put a little kiss on the newborn's forehead, who yawned in response. Cessilia smiled in relief, and then directed her green eyes to the baby dragon sleeping on her lap.

"I guess you'll be... Ashe, then."

"Ashe!" Shelie repeated, also pleased with the names.

The other young dragons then came to the huge bed, gathering around the newborn and their mom. Ashen placed the baby boy back on his mom's chest, where she could hold him against her skin. Yashen was already back to sleep, his cute mouth making a little "O". Ashen turned his eyes back to his wife, gently caressing her long chestnut curls.

"Are you alright?" he asked again, visibly worried.

"Yeah," Cessilia smiled, leaning against his shoulder. "Everything went pretty smoothly this time... Were you outside all this time? What about the Council?"

Ashen sighed.

"I think they took pity on me... Nana suggested they let me go early. Thankfully. I don't think I could have listened to more about trading routes while thinking you were giving birth just a few floors above. I'm fine

waiting outside the room, but to be asked to think about politics and make decisions...”

“Everyone probably understood,” Cessilia smiled, amused. “They know our King works a bit too hard at times.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” he sighed, “and the baby.”

“He’ll be a good boy, with his two big sisters to take care of him. Let’s make sure he grows strong but not too willful.”

“You’re thinking of your cousin’s son?” Ashen chuckled. “I think he inherited his mom’s temper...”

“You and I have quite the tempers as well. Yet, our girls are like this. That’s all because their dad is so gentle with them. Everybody knows this King is only a fool for his little Princesses...”

“Isn’t that any king’s privilege? You can dote on our sons, I’ll be spoiling our girls.”

“Our sons? Is that your not so subtle way to say we shall grow the family some more?”

“Only when you’re ready,” he said, giving her another kiss on the forehead, “but yes, I want a big family. Our family. We can make your parents happy with more grandchildren.”

“More grandchildren? Ashen, don’t you know I have seven siblings already? How many grandchildren do you think my parents will need?”

“...Let’s just beat your brothers to it, then.”

Cessilia laughed.

“Look at you, you have to make it a competition with your brothers-in-law now... Fine, I’d love a big family too. As long as you don’t pick up on Darsan’s rhythm...”

Ashen laughed while their two girls were a bit confused.

“Will we have another sibling?” Neridie asked, her eyes shining with optimism.

“You just got a new little brother,” Cessilia said. “Just take care of Yashen for now, hm? Mom and Dad will give you more siblings if you two girls are good big sisters.”

“We will!”

The two girls were obviously already fond of their younger sibling anyway. As soon as they were done talking, all of their attention went back to the baby and his dragon. Cessilia smiled, and turned her head to kiss her husband. The two of them turned back to the three siblings, with no need to talk anymore. Their little family would have some time off now, to celebrate the birth of the baby Prince. The Kingdom would probably hold a little festival as well, a new tradition their citizens had spontaneously started at the birth of the first Princess. Cessilia would hold a small party in a few days at her grandmother’s palace, just with their close friends and family. Even far from her own family, she was more than happy in the Kingdom, surrounded by everyone’s love. Whenever she felt a bit too nostalgic, she would fly to the Dragon Empire with Cece. However, nowadays, it was the Eastern Kingdom she called home...

The Dragon Empire Saga will continue in

The

Wild Prince’s Favorite

(Coming Soon)