

The War Gods Favorite

By Jenny Fox

Chapter 1

The First Day of the Red Moon Festival.

The streets of the Capital were crowded with people from all over the country, as they all gathered near the Palace to celebrate. For the Dragon Empire, the Red Moon Festival was one of the biggest celebrations of the year, held to flaunt its power and wealth to the neighboring kingdoms. Every wealthy person in the country waited for this day, so they could display their riches, and those who weren't as prosperous found creative ways to appear to be. Warriors in shiny armor, officials in pretty carriages, women dripping in lavish jewelry, and even children in their best attire. If one had any assets, he was to proudly display them, or else, hide in shame. For in the Dragon Empire, money and possessions meant power and power was everything. In the middle of the crowd were those no one noticed, those no one cared for, following their masters with their eyes glued to the ground. Slaves.

Lines of slaves followed the processions of their masters in pitiful silence. Walking like shadows, the only sounds that could be heard were the clanking of their chains and shackles with each step they took. Among them, one young slave woman's eyes were not downcast like the rest. Hers were fixated on the blinding gold of the Palace roof.

The Palace. Earth's very own piece of Heaven. And while the people of the Capital may have been rich and powerful, there was a higher power above them all; the Emperor. Sovereign to all, the Emperor was the almighty, considered a living deity among mortals. With unrivaled power, he governed the country with an iron fist. No matter what, his word was law.

The Emperor never wanted for anything, as everything in the country was his already. He was loved, and worshiped by his people, but most importantly they knew to fear him. And on this Red Moon Festival, the Holy Gates of the Imperial Palace would be opened to those deemed worthy. A Palace envoy had gone out ten days earlier to deliver the coveted red envelopes; an invitation that any man would kill for.

The slave girl had watched her master hope and pray for this letter to arrive at his door. He was a Senior Minister, but even his seat at the court could not be guaranteed. He was so stressed that he had been treating his household even worse than usual;

his concubines, his servants, and especially his slaves. The girl had a fresh lesion on her back, attesting to his restlessness. Even now, she could still feel the stinging burn of the whip.

Finally, the letter had come. So on the first day of the Red Moon Festival, the old Minister was headed to the Palace in an expensive-looking carriage escorted by his entourage. Seven of his favorite concubines followed in their own carriages, accompanied by their attendants, while twenty slaves walked behind them.

The young woman didn't care for all the festivities around her. They walked past delicious smelling food stalls that awoke the painfully empty stomachs of the slaves. Hers was empty too, but it hardly bothered her. She was used to the dull ache of prolonged hunger. She ignored the shops, the food, even the common people admiring their procession, and continued walking. As usual, the Minister was welcomed to the Palace. He casually discussed the upcoming events of the festival with his peers and showed off his young and beautiful concubines. For the commoners who could not enter the Palace, the festival was celebrated with special box, facing south, was richly and lavishly decorated, waiting to welcome the Emperor, his family, and their attendants.

The slave girl had only heard rumors about what takes place in the large arena. Heavenly dances, chariot races, warrior fights, displays of mythical and bizarre creatures, elite performers... Anything that could not be witnessed by commoners was to be displayed for the Emperor and the most honorable guests of the Palace during the seven days of the festival.

For the first three days, she followed her master, attending to one of his concubines as usual. She didn't witness any of the shows, staying in the chambers to clean and await orders, speaking to no one. On the fourth day, the Minister's concubine suddenly sent her to be locked in a cold cage filled with other slaves. They were simply told that they had been taken from their masters to be given as offerings to the Emperor. The young woman stayed there for three more days, with no idea what was coming next. On the morning of the seventh day, all of the guests waited with bated breath. The last day of the festival was the only day where, along with the Emperor, all six Dragon Princes had to be present. For anyone attending the event, this was the sole opportunity each year to witness the whole Imperial Family together, as not all of the Princes lived in the Palace the rest of the year.

No one knew which one of these young men would succeed the Emperor. He was rumored to have his favorites, but had yet to name an official heir. From the firstborn

to the youngest, any one of the Princes could one day rule the Empire. Choosing which Prince to support and please was the most difficult decision for the aristocracy to make. Fear of backing the wrong Prince and losing their position was always present.

The seventh day held great importance, for it was also the only day of the festival where the guests could see all of the Imperial dragons. The sacred beasts were feared by all, the very epitome of the power held by the Dragon Empire. Though the Emperor's Golden Dragon could be seen occasionally in the Palace, every guest was waiting for the astonishing sight of all the Imperial Dragons gathered in one place.

They started arriving, one by one, in the Grand Arena, each Prince was accompanied by his dragon. Three of them came from the sky, flying their magnificent beasts. The remaining Princes entered the arena by foot, their dragons following close behind them. The sight of the enormous, scaled creatures frightened most of the crowd, yet they could not bear to take their eyes off of them. Each dragon was at least eight times the size of a man, up to twelve or thirteen times for the largest of them. Two of the dragons were brought in cages, while the others were chained or muzzled.

For each of these dragons, three to ten servants came to guard them, but the last dragon was led completely free and unattended. He wore only a chain collar around his neck and he followed his master closely like an obedient dog. Leaving them in the center of the arena, the Princes, one after another, took their seats, all aligned on a broad platform beneath the Emperor's throne.

As the crowd chatted about the six beautiful creatures displayed in the arena, some of the Emperor's sons joined the conversations as well. The Fifth Prince was bragging about how he had fallen for a minister's concubine the previous day, and had eventually beheaded the old man so he could have them all.

"How many did you get in the end, brother?" asked the Second Prince with a sneer.

"Seven. But I don't need that many... I will only take the most beautiful of them!"

"How generous of you..." muttered the Fourth Prince, looking bored.

"How about you leave some beauties for our third brother?" the Second Prince jested. "He has yet to take any women in."

"Not all of us need that much company, brother," grumbled the youngest Prince in defence of his brother.

They all waited to hear their third brother's response, but were greeted with silence. He was the one who had arrived upon the unrestrained dragon. The enormous beast obediently stood still and the Prince's obsidian eyes were set on the arena, ignoring his siblings completely. His brothers stopped chatting and followed his gaze.

A hundred feet beneath them, a young man was introducing the upcoming show, the first of the day: an offering to the Imperial Dragons. Behind him, a large group of people were waiting to be sacrificed, surrounded by armed men. Any time one of them dared to cry out, the guards would lash out and whip them, cutting deep into their flesh. So the group remained silent. They were all condemned to death. Criminals, war prisoners, and slaves - each of them were condemned to die that day. Some of the slaves present formerly belonged to an old Minister. As their master had died, the people of the Palace had just decided to get rid of them, along with the other slaves that had been offered as tributes.

Among them was the young slave girl with emerald-green eyes. She had just turned seventeen this past winter, but had the manner and charms of a woman. She was a diamond amongst charcoal, beautiful despite the dust and grime covering her. Under the layer of dirt, she had very pale skin and was so thin that her bones were clearly defined and protruding beneath her dress. Her long, disheveled hair fell from her shoulders to her hips, like a waterfall. Her face was beautiful, diamond-shaped with a small nose and thin cheeks. Her lips had taken on a light pink shade due to the cold, which had also left her shivering. Her temple was sporting a cut crusted with dried blood and surrounded by fresh bruising. A remnant from a guard who had struck her earlier while pushing them into the arena. Her name was Cassandra.

Amongst the terrified crowd, Cassandra alone remained completely calm and silent. Everyone else around her was trembling with fear, trying to avoid the gazes of the enormous dragons. The six beasts surrounding them were obviously intrigued by the large group, and two of them were already ferociously growling.

It was a common and eagerly anticipated spectacle called "The Offering". The public waited enthusiastically to see the gruesome display as the six dragons would maul and kill people. None of them were even given a weapon to defend themselves because the beasts were considered as sacred as their masters. They were here to die in the most horrendous way possible, and solely for the entertainment of the Dragon Empire's finest subjects.

They all knew it. Some had tried to escape their fate and were killed on the spot. Those who remained were terrified, but they had no choice. How could they hope to

survive this? The arena was fully enclosed and the lowest stairs still stood about thirty feet above them. Any second now, six winged monsters would hunt them down, even though one alone would have been enough to wipe them all out.

Someone from the Palace was announcing the upcoming entertainment, showering the Imperial Princes and their beasts with praise, pausing from time-to-time to let the crowd applaud and cheer loudly.

Yet, Cassandra could not hear a word he spoke. Too many people around her were crying or desperately praying. Most had their eyes on the dragons, wondering if they had any chance of escape. Some girls were even glancing up in the Princes' direction, hoping one might be enticed by their looks and save them.

In contrast to the hopeless despair around her, Cassandra was looking calmly towards the vast sky. It was a sunny morning with few clouds, but it was extremely cold. All she wore was an old shredded dress and chains showcasing her enslavement, but she didn't really care. Wasn't she about to die soon, anyway? Who would care about comfort or clothes now? Death was standing less than ten feet away, watching with six pairs of hungry eyes. All Cassandra wanted was for this massacre to end quickly.

Years of servitude had left her with no room for hope in her heart. The Minister was a cruel and violent man, and she had seen and suffered much worse before him too. Cassandra had been a slave for half of her life, witnessing more cruelty, hardship, and death than a girl her age should. Even now, the tight cuffs around her wrists were leaving her in pain. She envied the dead who were free from all the torment and suffering. Thankfully, soon, she would join them.

Her eyes came down to contemplate one of the beasts. The large, unchained dragon was the calmest of them all. As she was not scared, Cassandra couldn't help but think that it was truly a beautiful creature. This one had completely jet black scales that shone like diamonds, and crimson-colored eyes. Unlike its restless peers, this beast stood still, nonchalantly looking around. It did not care about the scared humans close by or the loud audience. The magnificent dragon seemed to sense her gaze, because he turned his huge head towards the group, and his eyes wandered until they found hers.

They both calmly studied each other, mesmerized by one another. She, a weak human, and it, a powerful beast that was meant to take her life.

The exchange caught the attention of someone else. From his seat, the Third Prince took a while to find what his dragon was observing so intensely. After a few minutes, he finally found the skinny figure among the crowd, and watched her too, intrigued. The young woman appeared to be very frail, pale, and scrawny. She wore a ragged dress, her long hair a tangled mess, and chains binding her neck and wrists. His fingers started slowly caressing the pommel of his sword. There was something intriguing about this woman that made it impossible for him to take his eyes off her, though he couldn't name what it was. It would be foolish of him anyways. That slave was about to die. So he averted his eyes and let go of any further thoughts of the woman.

Soon, the speech came to an end and the speaker left the arena. Some of the slaves started screaming in fear as the guards left them too. The dragons' cages were opened, though three of them were still chained and their movements restrained. Hell was unleashed in the arena, and the crowd went wild. The massacre had started. Slaves started running, trying to avoid the predators. But, one by one, they were pinned to the ground by gigantic claws or torn apart by enormous fangs. The dragons were not even bothering to eat the humans. They just played with them, chasing the living and fighting over the bodies. Blood and screams flew through the air as five of the gigantic beasts massacred their prey. The carnage went on for a few more minutes before anyone noticed that something was amiss. One of the dragons wasn't acting like its peers.

The darkest beast was walking very calmly towards a lone slave. That woman, too, was acting peculiar. Unlike the other slaves, she wasn't screaming, running around, or showing any signs of fear. No, the young woman was standing very still on the sand, her eyes focused on the large dragon that was slowly approaching. But the beast showed no hostility towards her, nor did it seem eager to attack.

With few remaining slaves still alive, the other dragons started to settle down or bicker between themselves. Thus, most of the crowd's attention was drawn to the strange duo. Whispers started to grow in the arena. How was that woman still alive? Why wouldn't the dragons attack and kill her like the other slaves?

Everyone in the arena held their breath, waiting to see what the Black Dragon would do.

A hundred feet above, the six Princes were also watching the scene unfold with great interest. Their reactions to this unprecedented event varied. The Fifth and Sixth

Princes were wondering how this woman escaped the beasts' wrath. The Second Prince was annoyed.

"Why won't they kill her?! Stop playing and finish that woman! Brother, have your dragon kill her!"

The Third Prince ignored him, his eyes fixed on his beast. He was staring intensely, waiting to see what his dragon would do.

The reason the others didn't attack was evident to him. That woman showed no fear, no sign of panic. To the dragons, she wasn't some prey to kill, maybe just a guard that had been left there. After all, this 'hunt' was just a game, why would they pursue a human that didn't play? There was no reason for them to care about that woman.

Only the Black Dragon showed any interest in the slave girl. Almost everyone in the audience thought it would finally kill her as it slowly approached, but once it was close to the young woman, it became obvious that they were mistaken. Far from attacking her, the dragon was visibly curious and stretched its head out to sniff her. The young woman barely reacted, she just continued to observe him as well.

What was going on? People were waiting, eager to see if this slave was going to be killed or not. The prior massacre had been completely forgotten; what was happening now was far more interesting. After a few more minutes, the dragon suddenly laid down, curling up around the woman like an obedient pet. The stunned crowd started whispering, a wave of shocked voices growing louder within seconds. Surprise at the exchange was evident among all the Princes. The Second Prince was, more than anything, infuriated.

"That woman is a witch! Let's kill her right now!" he yelled.

"How interesting... I have never seen anyone survive The Offering before, but to think this frail woman would be able to stand next to the dragons..." said the First Prince.

"Enough! Brother! Order your dragon to-"

Before he could finish his sentence, he was left frozen by the Third Prince's ice-cold glare. The dark eyes scared him so much that he almost choked on his own words and quickly averted his eyes. The youngest prince chuckled.

"How bold of you, Brother Vrehan! Assuming you could actually give orders to the War God..."

He was absolutely right, but that only made the Second Prince flush red with anger. It was a well-known fact throughout the entire empire that out of the six Princes, the third-born was the best dragon-tamer.

Third Prince Kairen, whose perfect partnership with his black beast had allowed him to win many victories in the East for the Emperor as a General, and had earned himself the title of War God. There was no man stronger in the entire Dragon Empire, and certainly no man that could give him orders. Even the Emperor favored him greatly as the prodigal son. That was not the case for the Second Prince, and so he chose to remain silent. The First Prince Sephir, ignoring the short-lived dispute, was still observing the strange duo below.

“A witch...hmm... Whoever she is, brother, it appears your dragon is indeed under her spell. How interesting...”

He turned to observe his brother’s reaction, but much to his surprise, the War God’s eyes were already back to the arena. Kairen was contemplating over the woman who had subdued his dragon so easily. His fingers were still dancing on his sword. The Fifth Prince, Lephys, noticed it too.

“Brother Kairen, it seems like the dragon isn’t the only one entranced. Could it be that the woman has also captured your attention? Judging from here, she isn’t too ugly for a slave, is she?”

“Isn’t this the first time our brother is showing any interest in a woman?” the youngest brother, Prince Anour, asked excitedly.

“Correct, Anour. Brother Kairen barely acknowledged any of the women he has been sent in the past. Well...other than to kill them,” whispered Prince Lephys.

“What do you say, Kairen? Should we ask Father to spare this slave?” asked the First Prince, Sephir.

The Third Prince didn’t answer. Instead, he stood up, his eyes still fixed on the arena. He was a very tall man, with tan skin, and large shoulders. A number of people in the audience looked his way, noticing that one of the Princes was standing. But he didn’t care. The Black Dragon, still curled up around the woman, reacted to its master’s stare. Suddenly raising its chin in his direction, the beast growled loudly and stood up. Reacting to it, the other five dragons started growling too, but none of them dared to approach.

Cassandra, standing next to him, wondered what was going on. Was its master ordering the dragon to hurry up and kill her? She had no idea how they communicated, but it was evident that the dragon and its master were having a wordless conversation. All of sudden, the dragon turned to her and spread its black wings. In a split second, its large maw suddenly plunged in her direction, taking the chains that bound her into its mouth. Cassandra gasped in surprise. The dragon suddenly took off towards the skies, carrying her by her chains, rising higher from the ground and forcing her body to contort into a painful position from the pressure on her neck and wrists.

Thankfully, it only lasted a few seconds. She saw the arena move under her as she was quickly brought to a large stone platform. Some people in the audience screamed in horror, but the beast simply placed Cassandra there, releasing her gently to her knees.

The young woman painfully caught her breath before realizing where she was. The Imperial Family's platform! Still feeling the Black Dragon's hot breath close behind her, she conscientiously raised her head, only to discover a man was standing directly in front of her.

He was tall, and his bare torso was covered by a large, black fur cloak. He was obviously a warrior. Two large swords were attached to his belt, and out of all the Princes, he was the only one wearing barely any jewelry, and the least expensive fabrics. Instead, he simply wore black leather pants, large boots, and dragon scale bracers on his forearms.

At this man's feet, Cassandra appeared extremely vulnerable. Realizing that he was a member of the Imperial Family, she immediately averted her eyes. Why was she brought there? Would he kill her himself? Had she somehow offended the Royal Family?

"She is indeed quite pretty..." whispered one of the Princes.

"Brother, what do you want to do? Shall we get rid of her?"

"Just keep her, Kairen. You could use a few more slaves anyway."

She shivered. Prince Kairen, as in the Third Prince, the Empire's War God? Of all people, it had to be the most terrifying Prince! She bowed even lower, ready for a blade to slice her at any moment. But what were the Princes talking about?

A long and scary silence ensued. She waited, becoming more confused with each passing second, but it didn't seem like anyone was planning to kill her. What was going on?

"Alright, enough. Let's move on with the next performance before I get bored. Brother, you'll do whatever you want with her later. Who cares about a slave anyway."

The First Prince clapped his hands, and down in the arena, servants rushed to clean the bloodied sand on the grounds and prepare for the next show.

Cassandra was still frozen, kneeling at the Prince's feet. She knew she absolutely must not raise her head in front of the Imperial Family, but the Third Prince still hadn't moved. All of a sudden, a loud growl took her by surprise, and she turned her head, just slightly, to see the Black Dragon still behind her. It was close enough to envelop her in huffs of hot breath and for her to see its large fangs.

Suddenly, she heard the hiss of a blade. Before she could even move, the sword plunged towards her, and she prepared for the worst, closing her eyes. The manacles fell with a clang and her wrists no longer felt so heavy. He had severed the chain from her back! Cassandra slowly moved to look at her wrists. The iron bands were still around her neck and wrists, but they were no longer held painfully together from her back. Her arms were now free to move as she pleased.

Her relief was short-lived though as he suddenly grabbed her collar, pulling her to his side. She didn't have time to struggle, as he roughly dragged her to his seat. Cassandra was shocked to be placed against his golden chair, but even more surprised to see him simply sit without adding a word. She was on her knees at his feet, her shoulder against the throne, but the Prince didn't even look at her, focusing back on the arena again.

What was all that? He had placed her facing the arena so she couldn't even sneak a glance up at him. She was completely shocked and at a loss. Looking around, she realized she was the only slave on the platform. Aside from the Princes, only some palace attendants stood behind the seats, like statues, with no one paying her any more attention.

Cassandra was breathing erratically, and trying to understand her current situation. Suddenly, she felt warmth covering her shoulders. Surprised, she glanced to the side, only to realize that it was a part of the Prince's large coat! Did he purposely move it

so that it would cover her, too? Or was it mere luck? Her bare shoulders were now covered by the thick fur, shielding her from the wind and bitter cold.

“What is coming next?” One of the Princes suddenly asked.

“Dancers! I heard this group came from across the North Sea!”

It seemed like they had all forgotten the macabre show that had occurred just mere minutes ago. Cassandra kept her head low, silently praying they would ignore her for the rest of the day. As she knelt, frozen in place, she felt a hand caress her hair without warning. It took her a few seconds to realize, as the fingers that gently played with her long waves were so light she barely felt them. For a minute, she was dumbstruck, wondering if she was dreaming. No one but the Third Prince was close enough to be able to reach and touch her. His large hand slowly stroked her hair, almost touching her back. She could feel his warm skin flirting with hers.

Was the War God really petting her like this? She could barely breathe under his touch. She didn’t dare to move a muscle. On the arena floor beneath them, a splendid dance performance was taking place with dozens of performers, yet all she could focus on was the faint brushing of his fingertips on her slender nape. Did anyone else notice the Prince’s actions under the cloak?

When Cassandra finally dared a glance to the side, it didn’t seem like it. The other Princes seated to their left were solely focused on the performances down in the arena, not paying any attention to her or her new master. Because this was her situation now, right? Within minutes she had become property of the Third Prince. It was almost as if he had collected a stone from the sidewalk. But instead of a stone, he had picked up a slave.

All that Cassandra knew of him had come from rumors. When it came to the Third Prince, the gossip mill ran deep. The Emperor’s favorite son, he was said to be a dark, cruel, and merciless man. The Empire’s War God. Was he really the one who, against all odds, had spared the life of a slave? Did he just decide to do so because of the actions of his willful dragon?

The beast was now peacefully resting a few feet away on a lower step. It seemed bored, laying down while its peers had been brought back to their cages, or chained and seated at the sides of the arena. Cassandra observed the magnificent dragon again, mesmerized by the obsidian scales. She found it more distracting than any performance, especially since she couldn’t look at the owner of the hand that was playing with her hair.

Would the Prince order the dragon to kill her if she asked him to let her go? Cassandra didn't even dare to look at him or move. She was submitting to his hand, and the caresses in her long hair. A few times she shivered, not because of the cold, since she was now under the cloak, but from the contact of the Prince's hot hand against her skin. Moreover, his hand was venturing further and further down her nape, onto her shoulders. He wasn't touching only her hair anymore. His fingers were now moving further down, and she felt embarrassed.

She had never been touched like this by a man before. Slaves were not concubines, nor were they worthy to even be seen as women. They were often dirty and poorly dressed. Unlike the noblewomen who went to extreme lengths to have the prettiest dresses, jewelry, and the most expensive make-up available. Cassandra never had any of those luxuries, but she possessed a natural beauty that even years of enslavement and abuse could not take from her.

Like a flower in a bed of weeds, she had managed to stay beautiful. She was tall and thin, with pale skin that had been permanently scarred by a whip in several places. Her breasts were not large, but still round and full enough to make her look feminine. Had she been fed properly, she would have had a beautiful silhouette. But despite the years of malnourishment, the graceful beauty of her face was undeniable. She had large green eyes, a small nose, and thin but full lips. A pure, fragile beauty - like a water lily.

As the afternoon passed, Cassandra gradually grew accustomed to the Prince's touch. She couldn't ignore it, but she didn't shiver or overthink it anymore. After a dozen performances, the Prince suddenly stood up.

"Brother?" asked the youngest prince.

But Kairen didn't bother to answer. Instead, he simply left his seat. Cassandra, wondering for a second if she should follow, decided it would be better than to stay with the other five Princes on the platform she had no reason being on to begin with.

Leaving the balcony, the Third Prince walked through the many corridors so fast that she could barely keep up. To her surprise, the War God's quarters were located in the farthest wing of the Palace. By the time they arrived, she was exhausted.

He opened the double doors, revealing a very simple room, by a Prince's standards, that is. But to Cassandra, that place was still unbelievably large and luxurious with a canopy bed, large enough to welcome four people, and adorned in silk sheets. There were also two chairs and a table made of redwood, one of the most expensive

and valuable materials, an empty desk, a wardrobe containing a warrior's armor, and a bath. Cassandra was shocked by how bare the room was. Had it just been prepared to welcome him during his stay during the festival? She had heard each Prince lived in his own Palace after all.

Kairen left his large fur cloak on one of the chairs and massaged his neck. Cassandra suddenly realized that she was his only attendant! Did he come without any slaves or servants?

The War God sighed.

"I want to take a bath."

These were the first words he had spoken to her. Despite her surprise, Cassandra's years in slavery had her obeying right away. Leaving the room, she found the first palace servant she could and asked them for hot water to be prepared for the Third Prince, as well as several herbs for the water. The servant, not knowing the slave girl, was inclined to whip her and send her back where she belonged, but her words of "Third Prince" had the impulse stuck in his throat. If there was one man no one wanted to anger, it was the Third Prince. So, after a doubtful second, he nodded with disdain and turned on his heels.

A few minutes later, Cassandra was busy pouring the hot water into the bath along with a few herbs she had ordered.

"What are those?"

The young woman looked at him, meaning to answer, only to realize her master was undressing right in front of her! She only had a glance at the warrior's impressive musculature before she shyly looked down, yet the image was surely engraved in her mind. A War God, indeed! She blushed while answering.

"Those are medicinal herbs to... to relieve fatigue and muscle pain, my Lord."

Kairen frowned. How did this woman know of his strained muscles? He never showed any weakness. Is it because of the way he had stretched once they had entered the privacy of his quarters? As he pondered this, he realized his slave was looking down again with a flush of red in her cheeks. He snickered while entering the bath. Had she never seen a naked man before?

"Do you need more water, my Lord?"

"Come here."

Hesitantly, Cassandra walked the few steps back towards the tub, trying hard to refrain from taking a peek at him. Indeed, having served only women before, she was totally disarmed while facing a grown man's body. Kairen's body wasn't merely handsome. He was more like a dangerous alpha male, strong and imposing.

Watching her struggle to look away, he knew he was right.

"Massage me."

"...My Lord?"

He didn't bother ordering again. A bit surprised, Cassandra obediently stood behind him and started massaging his broad shoulders. Her fingers were trembling. She was touching a Prince! While trying to contain her inner turmoil, she focused on her movements. She knew what kind of being he was. In a split second, he could decide to end her life. For the young slave, this was infinitely more terrifying than standing in front of wild, scaled beasts.

As she kept massaging, she felt his muscles finally begin to relax, filling her with satisfaction. She moved on to his left arm, using her prior knowledge of healing to properly massage every muscle. When she finally looked back at his face, she realized he had closed his eyes as if he was asleep, allowing her to breathe a little easier.

Cassandra moved on to his other arm, skillfully kneading the bicep of the War God. She felt some pride to see that the medicinal bath she had prepared was so effective. Was the water still warm enough? She glanced down at the water and that's when she saw it.

Her Prince's member, fully erect. Cassandra gasped. Her fingers stopped moving, as she realized her master's cock was completely erect and standing tall under the water.

"Don't stop."

She jumped in surprise, as her master opened his eyes and caught her staring. She blushed and resumed massaging, but her hands were not as steady as before. The embarrassing silence and Kairen's staring were completely disarming her. No matter how much she tried, it was impossible to ignore both his dark eyes and his erection.

Cassandra kept her head down and tried to concentrate on her hands, but touching him didn't have the same meaning as before. The massage had become totally

indecent no matter how you looked at it! She tried to stop and step back, but Kairen's voice caught her.

"Stay where you are."

She had no choice but to obey as she blushed and tried to steady her trembling fingers. He was obviously doing this on purpose. The fire in his eyes could have consumed an entire forest. He didn't even smile or speak, he just kept his eyes focused on her, the young slave girl who was uncomfortably embarrassed.

Without warning, he moved his hand under her dress, causing her to yelp in surprise.

"Ma... Master," she protested, trying to pull her hips away.

"Don't move."

She opened her mouth in shock, but didn't know how to respond. The Prince's fingers ventured farther, reaching past her panties. From under her dirty dress, he forced his way to her slit, caressing the innocent slave with no trace of shame on his face. Surprised by the warm, intrusive hand between her thighs, she gasped, unable to hold her tongue.

"My... My Lord..."

She meant to ask him to stop, but the words wouldn't come out. Her stomach was filled with something intense as his fingers caressed against her opening. Cassandra had no idea how to react. She was completely inexperienced, and he was just playing with her!

"P...Please..."

"Are you a virgin?"

Already dying of shame, she couldn't even bring herself to answer. But her red cheeks and flustered expression were enough of an answer.

The Prince tilted his head, his face still completely unreadable. It was as if he was merely testing her, yet his fingers left her unable to answer. She tried hard to suppress her moans, but his large hand was pressing and rubbing against her most sensitive spot, driving her crazy. She knew he could feel her getting wet and she wanted to die of shame. She was standing on her toes now, her hands on his wrists, trying to discreetly move away.

Cassandra was panting when he suddenly pushed one finger inside her. Taken by surprise, she let out a startled moan. She tried to muffle her voice with her hand, but it was useless as he started moving and stirring his finger both inside and out. His thumb pressed on her clitoris as his middle finger repeatedly penetrated her, causing her to cry out. The worst part was that he seemed completely casual while he was subjecting her to this! She desperately wanted to step away, but he held her close to the tub with his hand confidently moving between her thighs and leaving her no chance of escape.

“Do you like this?”

His composed voice had her feeling like a little pet he was toying with. She had never even been touched by a man before, and now he had her fluids running down her thighs. Why was her body reacting to this man’s touch after seventeen years of innocence?!

Cassandra couldn’t contain her moans, and he was enjoying it. He found her desperate state, and vain attempts to hide it, extremely tempting and sexy. She was dripping wet, and obviously enjoying his finger, so why was she trying so hard to hide what her body seemed to enjoy so thoroughly? He wanted to see her cheeks flush with color, the sweat pool on her skin, and her legs tremble under his skillful touch. He inserted a second finger, making her cry out. She was definitely a virgin...

How had she remained untouched until now? She was young, beautiful, and very alluring. He kept going, pushing his fingers to make her moan even more. She was covering her mouth, trying to stay quiet. He pressed his thumb on her little button, teasing her to get a reaction. Under her dirty, once white, thin, and ragged dress, her nipples had started standing out. Did she have any idea how alluring she was at that moment? Her hands gripped tightly onto the bathtub, as she could barely stand on her own anymore.

Accelerating his fingers in and out of her, he pushed her further to the edge. Cassandra’s thighs quivered as she whimpered.

“Ma... Master, p... please...”

Her eyes were teary, she couldn’t take any more of this torture and embarrassment. She wanted to beg for him to stop, but her voice was no longer under her control. Instead, she was moaning and panting heavily. She felt a fire raging from her intimate parts to her stomach, overwhelming her with new sensations she couldn’t handle anymore.

“My Prince?”

A servant had knocked on the door, waiting for permission to enter. Kairen let her go, much to his annoyance, his fingers wet with her juices, and Cassandra

immediately fell to her knees. She was dazed and trembling, her entrance throbbing as if she could still feel the Prince’s fingers inside her. The wetness between her legs was impossible to ignore as she tried to compose herself and move her dress back into place.

“Come in.”

Completely ignoring her embarrassment, Kairen called the man in. The servant didn’t seem to realize she was there on the other side of the bath, still reeling from what had just happened.

“The buffet is about to begin, my Lord. The Emperor looks forward to your presence.”

“I’ll get ready. Leave.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

The servant left promptly, leaving the two of them alone again. Cassandra had no idea how to react, but Kairen left the bath as if nothing had happened. He grabbed a towel and started drying himself, and she wondered if his... member had gone back to normal, but didn’t dare to look. Instead, she pulled herself together and grabbed his clothes to help him dress. Though she remained silent as she assisted him, her mind was in overdrive, trying to comprehend what had just happened.

“Stay here...and clean yourself, too.”

Those were his only words before he left for the banquet. As soon as she was alone, Cassandra let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding.

What had just happened? She knew some men kept their slaves to have sex with, but... that was not quite the same, was it? The War God had surprised her, almost as if he had done it completely on a whim. But for her virgin self, this had been the most impossible experience. Within only a few hours, her status had changed from that of a sacrificial nobody to a Prince’s slave!

She pushed her hair out of her face, trying to gather her thoughts. Until now, the Imperial Family had never been something that she would have dreamed of seeing,

even from afar. Yet somehow, she found herself sitting on the floor of the Third Prince's chambers, trying to recover from his little playtime with her most intimate parts.

She looked around. Why did the Third Prince not have any attendants? He seemed to be the only one without anyone to serve him. Did he come alone and just leave them all at his own Palace?

The room wasn't messy though, proof that the Palace servants were still doing some chores in here. What was she supposed to do now? The banquet would most likely last a few hours. Cassandra suddenly remembered his order to clean herself. Her eyes fell immediately on the tub. Would it be alright for her to use it? No one would punish her for using the Prince's bath, right?

Cassandra undid her dress and quickly submerged herself in the water. The thought of washing in the same water he had bathed in left her cheeks flushing a vivid crimson. She could still feel the lingering sensation of his fingers inside her. No one had ever touched her there before! The concubines were always too jealous to let the noblemen even look at the female slaves. Cassandra had been whipped many times by her previous mistress just for crossing the Minister's path. She had learned to stay away from men. But there was no way to refuse or ignore this Prince who had claimed her as his own.

Afraid someone would come, she bathed quickly, washing the blood from her back as best as she could and drying her long hair. After hesitating a bit, she decided to wash her dress too. As old and ragged as it was, it was her only piece of clothing. Despite Cassandra's best efforts to take care of it over the years, it was impossible to make it look like anything more than what it was; an unflattering piece of linen, shredded and left brown and grey from years of wear. Once Cassandra was done cleaning it, some of the dust had come off and only a bit of dried blood still remained. She sighed helplessly.

"You! What are you doing in the Prince's chambers?!"

Cassandra jumped. Two Palace servants had entered the room just as she finished dressing. Before she even had a chance to explain herself, one of them violently grabbed her by the hair and dragged her to the ground.

"You wench! Who is your master? Speak!"

"Lord... Lord... the Th...Thi...Third Prince..." she stuttered, despite the pain.

“You liar! Do you take us for fools? The Third Prince didn’t bring any attendants with him, you lying whore! Show us your identification!”

The first man ruthlessly slapped her face, before jerking her up by the collar around her throat. Cassandra cried out in pain as she was strangled by the iron while he read the inscriptions engraved on it.

“Lady Lyria of the Green Narcissus Family... Isn’t that one of the Fifth Prince’s new concubines?”

“It is. She belonged to that old Minister who was beheaded three days ago. I’ve seen her wearing the red dress. She’s quite a looker.”

“You little wench, did you really think you could escape your mistress while you were in the Palace?”

They slapped Cassandra again, continuing their insults as they dragged her out. Holding her between them, they ignored her fearful pleading as they forced her through the corridors of the Palace, slapping her mercilessly to stop her gasping sobs and feeble pleas. She tried hard to hold back her tears despite the pain and agony she was in. They had no pity for a runaway slave.

After being brutally hauled through countless corridors, she was suddenly thrust out into the Imperial Garden, where a few concubines not attending the Imperial Banquet were drinking and partying together. Tables were set up for a moon-viewing, and a handful of servants were pouring wine for the ladies present. The concubines all wore elegant dresses paired with expensive and glittering jewels, each determined to outdo the other. As they ate and sipped wine together, they showered each other with backhanded compliments behind beautiful, fake smiles.

The servants violently hurled Cassandra to the ground, at Lady Lyria’s feet.

Cassandra was petrified. Lyria had been her mistress for five long and torturous years, since the day she had entered the Minister’s House. Though that woman was stunningly beautiful, behind the alluring face she was a cruel and malicious bitch. She never hesitated to whip her slaves, even without a reason. She threw tantrums whenever she didn’t get attention, and cried fake tears to manipulate any situation to her benefit.

The Minister had fallen for her graceful beauty when she was only fifteen, raising her from the modest position of her birth, to that of noble status, and she had been ridiculously arrogant ever since. She was truly as ugly on the inside as she was

beautiful on the outside. Cassandra knew her wickedness had no limits, recalling how she poisoned one of her rivals merely because she was jealous, and how that same jealousy had led her to physically disfigure another.

Being brought back into the presence of Lyria was a nightmare for Cassandra. The concubine glared down at her with disgust and turned to the servants.

“What is this?”

“We found her in a Prince’s chambers, my Lady. She lied to try and escape us, but we saw her identification collar and brought her straight back to...”

“Why would I care about that bitch?! She should be dead! I was tired of her, so I gave her as a tribute to His Highness! How the hell is she still alive?! Where was she?”

The two dumbfounded servants looked at each other, both left feeling ill by the concubine’s unexpected reaction. Lyria, on the other hand, was absolutely infuriated to have been disturbed while she was gloating about her new status to the lower-ranked concubines. Seeing Cassandra alive fueled her anger. She had hated the slave from the very beginning, and had sent her to her death to finally be rid of her once and for all.

“She... she was in the Third Prince’s chambers...”

Cassandra was trembling in both fear and pain. Lyria’s unpredictable anger was something that scared her more than anything.

Her fear was justified when, without warning, the concubine suddenly hurled her full glass of wine at Cassandra’s head. One of the concubines screamed as the glass shattered on the ground. A shard reopened the bruised gash on Cassandra’s temple, courtesy of one of the Palace guards earlier that morning.

“You slut! How dare you! How did you even survive The Offering?! And then, to hide in one of the Prince’s chambers! You unworthy little leach! I will finish you myself. You won’t escape death again! You...”

She fisted a handful of Cassandra’s hair and started jerking her head violently, as she screamed at her. But she suddenly froze. Everyone in the garden had heard it too.

A dragon’s angry growl, right above their heads. Everyone present turned their heads towards the north wall and held their breath in fear.

Standing there was a large, furious dragon. Glaring at them with its red, reptilian eyes, while one large paw was grasping the muraled wall, the other scratching the stone one. The black beast growled menacingly again in their direction; no one dared to move an inch. But Cassandra raised her head, despite Lyria's grip, to look up at the dragon.

"The... the Th-Third's Prince's...dragon," stuttered one of the terrified concubines.

None of the other servants or concubines said a word, petrified into silence. The Black Dragon couldn't possibly be mistaken as any other. It was the biggest among its peers and the only one of its color, with its obsidian scales and blood red eyes. It moved, stepping effortlessly over the wall and stalking towards them. Garden statues and lush plants were crushed under its huge feet as it continued forward, growling angrily.

A few concubines and half a dozen servants ran off, screaming in fear. Those who remained were frozen in their spots.

All except one.

"Ha! See! His own dragon has come to finish you off! Why would the Third Prince have any interest in a worthless slave like you?!"

Lyria was so sure of herself, she brutally shoved Cassandra into the arms of a nearby servant.

"You! Give her to the beast!" she ordered, as if she knew what was going on.

The servant, who knew very little about the dragons, nodded obediently and yanked Cassandra's arm, forcing her closer to the beast. Terrified, Cassandra tried in vain to free herself. Tears slid silently down her face, as the pain from her fresh injuries made themselves known. After all the violent manhandling from Lyria and the servants, within the past fifteen minutes, she didn't even have the strength to break free. Within seconds she was face to face with the Black Dragon for the second time that day.

The servant kicked her in the side, forcing her down to the dragon's feet. As they had been working or resting in the Palace, none of them had witnessed the earlier scene in the arena. He genuinely believed Lyria was right and was doing what the dragon wanted.

He didn't even get the chance to gasp before a giant claw brutally pierced through his chest. In one movement, he found himself pinned to the ground in a pool of his own blood.

People began to scream in panic at the sight of the limp body, pierced by the gigantic claw. Cassandra, also shocked, brought her hand to her mouth in disgust.

"What is going on here?"

His voice thundered out, silencing the screams. Still in front of the dragon, Cassandra turned her head toward him.

The Third Prince Kairen had just stepped into the courtyard. His arrival had almost the same effect as that of his beast. However, some of the concubines were also flustered, too. He was a warrior indeed, and a well-sculpted one at that. Wearing only his large fur coat, part of his muscular chest was left exposed, just enough to leave many women blushing.

As he stepped forward, Lyria, as arrogant as ever, turned towards him. She knew perfectly well who he was, but her new status as one of the other Princes' concubines clearly gave her enough confidence to address the War God.

"My Lord! Please excuse the ruckus, this shameless slave of mine has angered your beast, I fear."

It was hard to say if she was acting seductively on purpose or not. Her pink dress was very sexy, flattering her voluptuous curves, and her hair and makeup were flawlessly done to enhance her beauty. Anytime she talked, her red lips would pout a little, a quality that made many men succumb to her charms.

Kairen, however, only glared at her.

"Who is this whore?" he asked in his low, cold voice.

"It's one of my slaves, my Lord," mumbled Lyria. "A simple..."

"I was not talking to you."

In a split second, anyone who had not caught on already, realized that he was actually addressing the slave, not the mistress standing between them. While Lyria flushed red in embarrassment and anger, Cassandra lowered her head, stifling her sobs.

"She... she is Lady Lyria, my... mistress..."

Maybe she should have added “former”, but that didn’t seem necessary at the time. The dragon suddenly growled again, impatient, and moved to approach Cassandra. Its obsidian scales felt warm as it clumsily curved its enormous body around her. It was hard to ignore all the blood on its paw, but Cassandra turned her head towards its face - the red eyes were fixed on her. People around them were completely shocked by the scene that was unfolding. The War God’s dragon was acting like a clingy pet towards a worthless slave!

Kairen suddenly drew out his sword.

“I told you to stay in the room.”

Afraid that he was mad at her, Cassandra bowed her head. Her cheeks were still wet with tears as she struggled to explain herself with her hoarse voice.

“I... I meant to, but... I was brought here...”

“By whom?” he asked, impatiently.

Before Cassandra even answered, the two men who had dragged her all the way here screeched in panic. The idea of the Prince’s wrath directed at them was so terrifying that they had given themselves up without even realizing. Kairen’s glare caught them right away, and they started to run away in fear.

The Prince clicked his tongue and raised his head to exchange a glance with his dragon. As if obeying a silent order, the beast moved, crushing one of them under his paw, and chomping down on the other one. It was over within seconds. A rain of blood fell from his maw, spilling on some of the concubines and servants, who screamed again in fear and disgust. Cassandra got some on her shoulder too and she brought her hand over her mouth to hold back the strong nausea that rose in her stomach from the smell; the gruesome sight of the beast chewing on the servant still fresh in her mind.

Lyria, splattered in blood too, screamed. She was finally catching up with the reality of this situation and turned her terrified eyes towards the Third Prince Kairen, who was silently walking towards her, like a deadly shadow.

“Your Highness! This slave was mine! She... she is just an insignificant slave! I am your brother’s doted concubine! You can’t...”

Her voice died as the sword pierced her chest, right between her perky breasts. Her eyes were still open wide, in surprise, as she fell back like an inanimate doll.

With this final act, the bloodbath had scared the last of the remaining crowd away, with the exception of a few servants who were still frozen in fear. Cassandra was shaking.

She watched Kairen calmly retrieve his sword and wash the blood off in a fountain. The War God was acting as if killing one of his brother's concubines had been a totally normal occurrence. Once his weapon was cleaned and back in his belt, he turned toward Cassandra. As he was walking up to her, her mind turned over, she had no idea how to react. She was scared of this man. Her eyes went from the body of the woman she had feared the most for years, to him, who was now even scarier.

"Are you injured?"

His question took her by surprise. Cassandra stared blankly at him, but the Prince was looking at her dress, which was covered in blood. She quickly came to her senses.

"No. No, my Lord. This blood isn't mine..."

She meant to get up, but while leaning on her wrist, a sharp pain made her cry out. Did she twist it when she fell? Or was it from her earlier struggling? Her thin wrist was painful whenever she moved it, and was a bit blue too. Cassandra held it against her chest trying to ignore the pain, but just as she moved to try to get up again, the Prince knelt by her side.

"My... my Lord?" she gasped in surprise.

"Silence."

The familiar feel of a warm coat suddenly enveloped her as Kairen's sturdy arms reached around her shoulders and beneath her knees, gently lifting her up as if she were a fragile child. Instantly, Cassandra's face flushed a bright crimson. A Prince carrying a slave? And like a Princess, too!

She wanted to protest and tell him that he shouldn't do this, but she didn't dare to speak. Thus, she found herself held against Kairen's hard torso, carried like some precious package, wrapped up in his cloak. Above them, the Black Dragon tilted its head and growled quietly. Kairen clicked his tongue.

"You shut up, too."

Cassandra watched the huge beast sulk a bit while following them slowly. Its gigantic body was too big for the courtyard, destroying anything that got in its path,

but neither it nor its master seemed to care. Behind them, what had been a nice little banquet not long ago, now resembled a bloody war zone.

Kairen walked away from the scene, unbothered, carrying Cassandra close to him. When they were almost back to the courtyard door, a group of people suddenly arrived. Embarrassed, she stayed still in his arms, completely at a loss of what to do.

The people who had arrived seemed familiar, too. After a few seconds, she recognized two of the five other Princes that had been on the platform, and became even more scared. But none of them, nor their attendants, paid any attention to her. Instead, the Fifth Prince took a glance over his brother's shoulder to see the mess.

"Brother, didn't you go a bit too far? I had just acquired that concubine! Did you have to kill her right away?! Didn't you see how pretty she was?"

Next to him, the youngest Prince Anour, rolled his eyes.

"Brother Lephys, don't you have enough women already? Who cares? If she displeased our older brother, that woman had to die."

"Still... Oh well, I guess I'll write a letter to her family or something. But brother, isn't that the slave from earlier? I thought you had killed her already."

Cassandra was appalled at how easily they talked about someone's death. Unlike Kairen, the two younger Princes were dressed in ceremonial clothing with colorful silk and gold embroidery. Not to mention the lavish jewelry in which they were both adorned. Each had a crowd of servants following closely behind them with their heads lowered.

Both Princes looked around her age, between fifteen and twenty years at most. But they didn't seem to have much in common with their third brother.

"Enough, Lephys, enough," sighed Prince Anour. "If our brother finds this woman to his taste, who cares? But Brother Kairen, Father was angry that you left the banquet so early. He wanted to introduce two new concubines to you."

Kairen snorted, visibly annoyed.

"Tell that old man he can keep those greedy sluts for himself."

Cassandra frowned. Never mind the concubines, how could he talk about the Emperor like that? Kairen ignored both of his brothers as he walked past them, still carrying her. She was embarrassed beyond words to be transported like this in the

Palace's corridors, but did not dare to move. Behind them, she heard the dragon's disappointed growl. The large beast could not follow them inside.

As the Prince climbed some stairs, she realized that they were not going back to his chambers. They were heading a bit further into the Palace, and Cassandra was worried as to where he would take her and why. Not to the Palace's cells, right?

After a few stairs, he finally stopped and Cassandra read the little sign - The Green Jade Palace. Who was living here? A servant hurried to welcome the Prince, bowing down countless times.

"I will inform my Lady of your arrival, my Lord..."

"No need."

Just like that, Kairen forced himself through, despite the servant's attempts to hold him back, and his continuous pleas to allow him to inform his Lady first. The little man seemed panicked, trailing after the Prince. Cassandra felt a bit sorry for him.

Finally, they arrived at what seemed to be a bedroom door. As soon as they got close she heard some very explicit sounds and Cassandra blushed immediately. Whoever was behind that door was obviously busy! A woman's moans were echoing loudly along with some deeper male ones, however, that didn't stop Kairen. With a kick, he forced the door open and entered the large bedroom.

Cassandra couldn't help but peek. As she expected, it was terribly obscene! On the red silk sheets of the bed were two women and a man. The two women were riding the naked male servant; one was straddling him, her pussy being hammered by his savage and relentless moves. She was moaning and crying, begging for more as their flesh pounded loudly. Facing her, the other woman was on her knees on either side of the man's head, moving her hips as the male servant licked and sucked her pussy. She was caressing and forcefully kissing her female partner, while the man underneath was working hard on pleasuring both women at the same time.

"Who dares to...!" One of the women reacted angrily.

Her expression changed when she saw Kairen standing there holding a blushing Cassandra. She smiled and kissed the other woman who was panting hard and being forcefully penetrated by the man's cock. She seemed younger than her mistress and answered her kiss clumsily. She was having a hard time balancing between her breathing and moaning. Under her, the male servant was pounding vigorously, holding her waist while pleasuring their mistress with his mouth.

“My little brother has come to visit! Are you bringing me a new toy, Kairen?” she asked, her eyes going down to Cassandra.

She couldn't have been more embarrassed. It was impossible to ignore the wild sex displayed in front of her, the servant's cries, or the Princess's lusty eyes on her. However, Kairen was as still as marble in front of the scene.

“Enough of your little game.”

The Princess pouted, moving her hips a bit more before finally getting up. She sighed and grabbed a large robe to cover herself before turning to the two servants.

“Keep fucking her. If one of you comes before I return... I'll punish you.”

“Yes, mistress,” answered the man.

He kept thrusting vigorously and the young woman's cries got louder. Satisfied, she turned around to face her brother. Cassandra figured from their physical resemblance, that she was Kairen's full sister, one who also shared the same mother as him. They had the same black eyes, dark hair, and tanned skin color. Even most of their facial features were shockingly alike as if they could be twins. The only difference was that the Princess had a very feminine body, with voluptuous curves and sexy lips.

“Follow me.”

Shareen took them to another room. This one was filled with bookcases and a large desk covered in paper. There was a strange smell and some smoke floating in the air, and with the curtains closed, it wouldn't go away. The whole room was dark despite the few candles the Princess had lit.

Pushing her long black curls behind her shoulders, she crossed her arms, displeased.

“What did you interrupt my good time for? Is it because of this slave? You both reek of blood.”

“Give her some clothes.”

The Princess clicked her tongue.

“To a slave? I'm not that generous.”

“You have spare clothing for your whores.”

“My servants, Kairen. Even if I play with them, they are still proper servants. What would I get in exchange?”

Impatient, the Prince glared at his sister without answering. But to Cassandra’s surprise, his sister didn’t seem to take offense. Instead, she suddenly smiled like a feline and walked over to a wardrobe. She took her time before picking a silky emerald dress. It wasn’t as fancy as the clothing made for the royal family, but still much better than the rags slaves would usually wear. She held it up to Kairen.

“How is this? I’ll give it to you if you have her change here.”

“Fine.”

Kairen had answered before Cassandra even understood what the Princess had asked for. He put her down letting her stand by herself while still holding on to the fur cloak. Cassandra blushed as the Princess handed her the dress with a mischievous grin. She was already feeling shy for some reason and so she was hesitant to let go of the cloak to take it.

However, she couldn’t let the Princess stay like this forever. The fur cloak fell to her feet revealing her bloodied rags, and she took the dress while bowing. Thankfully, most of the blood was on her rags and not herself. The Princess clicked her tongue while taking a seat in one of the leather armchairs.

“I guess Krai made a mess again...”

Cassandra took a few seconds to realize she was talking about the Black Dragon. So it was named Krai? That piece of information, however, was soon overshadowed by her current situation. She didn’t know when Kairen had taken a seat next to his sister, but both Imperial Siblings were now staring at her. She became even more red knowing what they were expecting. She looked down.

“My... My Lord, can I change outside?”

“You can undress here,” his sister answered with an imperious tone. “See? There’s some water for you to wash up with too.”

She pointed her finger towards a little basin of water to the side, while she was obviously enjoying the sight of Cassandra’s blushing cheeks. Seeing the Prince ignore her query, she felt helpless. Those two really wanted to watch her undress here! She hesitated for a few seconds, but their forceful stares were pressuring her. Slowly, Cassandra reached for the laces on her back, undoing them one by one.

In front of her, Kairen was as still as a statue, but his stare was hot and intense. She felt like he was undressing her from his seat. With trembling fingers, she finally undid the last knot, and the dress was now only held up by her hand. With the injury to her other wrist, she was struggling to keep it together and hide behind the rags.

In front of her, the Princess bit her lip and turned to her brother.

“A virgin?”

He didn’t bother to answer, but she knew that she was right. She turned her feline eyes towards Cassandra again.

“Interesting... Keep going,” she ordered.

Cassandra would have given anything to hide, but there was no way, not with those two in the room, waiting for her to undress. She had no choice but to let go of the sullied clothing, leaving her in her panties in front of them. She tried covering her breasts with her arm while looking away. With her free hand she reached over to the basin of water, grabbing a little sponge to try and wash quickly, but she saw the Princess stand up and walk her way. Cassandra took a step back but within seconds the woman was standing in front of her, her black eyes sparkling.

“So adorable... Look at these cute breasts, Kairen.”

Without warning, she stood behind Cassandra and pushed her arm away to grab one. Surprised, the young slave let out a whimper under her touch.

“Hands off, Shareen,” growled Kairen.

Ignoring him, his sister kept going. She took the little sponge from her hand and started caressing Cassandra’s chest with it while gauging her brother’s reactions. The cold water was dripping down her pink nipples. Wandering over her pale skin, caressing her stomach, Shareen’s fingers finally reached out for Cassandra’s last piece of clothing.

“M... My Lady...” murmured Cassandra.

“What is it, sweetie? Are you embarrassed? Don’t be, it’s just your master here... Come on, show him. Let’s get you all nice and clean for him to enjoy.”

Without listening to her plea, Shareen got rid of the sponge and kept going, fondling the white breasts and sliding her fingers down to her underwear. Cassandra was trying to escape her futilely, her unhurt hand on the Princess’s wrist, but she couldn’t

possibly risk angering a member of the Imperial Family. Moreover, the difference in strength was obvious between them. Instead, she looked to Kairen for help, her eyes pleading to him.

“My Lord...Ah!”

Without warning, Shareen had started kissing the skin of her neck, sending shivers all the way down her spine. Her entire body felt electrified. Cassandra tried to catch her breath, but Shareen had no intention of letting her rest. The Princess’s fingers found her little button of pleasure over her panties.

“Uh... Oh! Hm... My... Lady, please stop...”

“Oh my, you’re so cute and innocent... Won’t you give her to me, Kairen? You’re such a stiff! Since you haven’t fucked her yet, I have so many ideas for her.”

The Third Prince didn’t seem amused at all, but that didn’t stop Shareen from teasing and caressing Cassandra relentlessly. Plunging her fingers deeper, she played with her slit over the fabric, making her squirm. The Princess pushed a little further each time, forcing her to spread her legs further apart. Cassandra couldn’t take it any longer; something hot and unbearable was brewing in her stomach, making her legs tremble and her skin shiver. Her eyes were tearing up as she tried to hold back her voice. With the Princess behind her, she was exposed to her master, almost naked, standing only a few steps from him. He could see everything. Her pointy nipples, her trembling legs, her panties getting wet under Shareen’s treatment - it was unbearable.

“Shareen!” he suddenly called out.

His tone was undoubtedly angry this time. The Princess, annoyed, clicked her tongue and stopped her movements.

“So selfish! I am just trying to help out my stiff little brother, Kairen. Do you even know how to play? I was just starting to have fun, too. Look, a bit more and I would have made her come.”

Shareen, still holding her by the waist, displayed her wet fingers to Kairen.

Cassandra, almost unable to stand on her own two feet, was dying of shame. However, she slowly regained her senses and grabbed the green dress to hurriedly put it on. It was a bit loose on her, but it was definitely the prettiest piece of clothing she had ever worn before. Meanwhile, Shareen was still annoyed at her brother and

walked over to his seat. Putting her knee down between his legs, she leaned over Kairen with that feline smile of hers.

“You’re such a bore, Kairen. You know, we could have fun together sometimes. I have a couple of girls I would love to watch you fuck... with that.”

She was hinting at her brother’s obvious hard-on under his pants. Cassandra was completely red just from hearing her. The Princess was so... so shameless! Were all the members of the Imperial Family so loose in morals? Even if they were all-powerful, this was too much! And her new master was obviously excited too, even if he ignored most of his sister’s theatrics.

But once again, Kairen stayed cold and silent. Eventually, Shareen sighed.

“Oh, well. You still owe me for that dress, I won’t let you forget it. Can you try not to kill this one, at least? I like her.”

Cassandra frowned. Not kill her? What did that mean? Why was she expecting the Prince to kill her at some point? But she didn’t get any answers as Shareen finally stood to the side to let her brother stand up. Kairen walked over and Cassandra suddenly felt completely embarrassed. She had been standing there just a few seconds ago, naked and being fingered by his own sister!

Once he was in front of her, Cassandra looked everywhere but in his direction. She was so ashamed of the scene from just moments ago! How could he let his sister toy with her like some object! While avoiding her new master’s eyes, she missed the moment he grabbed her again, lifting her like she didn’t weigh a thing. Wrapping a new fur cloak around her, Kairen carried her out of the room, closely followed by Shareen.

“Did you really leave the banquet early?” she asked.

“You didn’t even go,” her brother growled back.

The Princess shrugged and walked ahead to open the doors to her bedroom. Cassandra had almost forgotten about the two servants having wild sex in there. They had now changed position and the man was savagely taking the young servant from behind, keeping her bent over the mattress. His movements were fast and relentless, yet the woman couldn’t even cry out, her screams muffled by his hand. Her eyes were closed and her hair was a mess on her shoulders. She opened her eyes

again upon hearing her mistress coming back and began to moan louder while staring at Shareen with a pleading look.

The Princess ignored her and turned to Kairen.

“Why would I go? I’m having so much fun here. My favorite brother even brought me a little toy to entertain myself with. Well, if you’d actually leave her here...”

She said all that while looking down at Cassandra, with her feline eyes. Inside Kairen’s arms, Cassandra tried to avoid the Princess’s stare, already deeply embarrassed.

“You’ve had enough,” Kairen replied coldly.

“Never! If you...”

But before Shareen could finish her sentence, several people were heard outside. Judging by the weight and metallic sounds in their steps, there were soldiers among them and when they stopped right outside, Shareen crossed her arms, visibly annoyed.

“His Highness Prince Kairen, Her Highness Princess Shareen, this lowly Imperial servant is here to inform you that your presence is requested by the Imperial Dragon.”

Shareen rolled her eyes, not hiding her displeasure.

“He had to send his Imperial pains in the...”

“Your Highnesses, the Imperial Dragon insisted!” exclaimed the servant.

Shareen growled and turned around. She snapped her fingers and both servants ran out of the bedroom while another young lady came in to help her change. Very quickly she was dressed in a magnificent outfit, wearing the Imperial purple silk of her family, a large gold belt, and lots of fine jewelry. Even her black hair was now swept up into an impressive bun by two gold hairpins adorned with several gemstones.

Cassandra thought about how even her former mistress would never be able to wear such delicate and expensive items. Lyria was one of the Minister’s favorites, yet even for her, he could never get his hands on these kinds of priceless treasures. The Imperial Family was on a totally different level indeed, and Shareen was wearing those like they were mere trinkets.

Cassandra suddenly remembered that the emerald dress she was wearing herself was far above her own status. What if someone else saw her like this? Her iron collar and clothes were so mismatched, what if she was called a thief again? Thinking about this, her stomach twisted in pain from worry.

However, Kairen didn't seem to care about any of this. He walked out of his sister's chambers, first to meet with the group of servants and soldiers that were waiting outside. The one leading them, a humble man with the blue attire of a Palace servant, opened his eyes wide upon seeing Cassandra in the Prince's arms.

"You... Your Highness, who is this slave?"

He was obviously at a loss for words, but Kairen dismissed it in an instant.

"Didn't my father want to see me?"

"Certainly, Your Highness, but..."

Cassandra knew exactly what the attendant was thinking. A slave like her shouldn't even step into the Imperial Court! The Emperor should never face slaves or lowly servants. Of those that were not nobility, only those who worked in the Imperial Palace were permitted to be in the same room as the Imperial dragon, and even for them, it was considered the greatest honor to be able to bow in his presence.

Yet, here she was, a lowly slave being carried in by a member of the Imperial Family! Cassandra had no idea how to act, but she fruitlessly tried to release herself from Kairen's arms.

"Master, I shouldn't come with you..."

"Why not?" growled Kairen.

"It is not...permitted."

Shareen finally came out of her chambers followed by three ladies in waiting, all wearing similar dresses to Cassandra's, the only difference being that she had the slave collar.

The Imperial servant was almost choking. How could a slave possibly argue with one of the Princes like that? She shouldn't even have been able to be so near him, let alone open her mouth with such defiance!

Shareen walked past them impatiently.

“We decide what is permitted or not. If my brother wants to come with a slave or thirty, it would serve you well to shut up,” she said to the Imperial servant, with an imperious tone.

Immediately, everyone else bowed lowly.

“Y...yes, Your Highness. Please, this way.”

Cassandra was baffled. How could it happen as easily as that? As they kept walking through the corridors, they saw many servants’ faces. All those who bowed a second late and saw her, couldn’t hide their shock, but of course, it was likely she was the only slave to ever be spotted inside the Inner Palace!

As they approached the Imperial Rooms, Cassandra was so worried that she couldn’t handle it anymore. She turned to Kairen again, whispering with a pleading voice.

“Please, Master, can’t I at least walk by myself? Please...”

“Last time I left you alone, you ran away.”

Cassandra was taken aback. He was still angry about that? It wasn’t even her choice to leave his chambers! She shook her head.

“No, Master, I swear I did not mean to. Please! I promise, I won’t go anywhere. Please...”

Kairen clicked his tongue, but after a few more steps he finally stopped to let her down. Cassandra seized the occasion to swiftly put the fur cloak back onto his shoulders, getting it away from her before anyone else saw her with it.

The Third Prince gave her a skeptical look, but she made sure to stand right behind him, as close as she could without touching him. Shareen, watching the little scene unfold between the two, chuckled.

“Look, Kairen, your new pet isn’t going anywhere, and you can always have Krai chase her down if she tries anyway.”

He took a long moment before taking his eyes off Cassandra and walking with his sister again. Cassandra let out a deep sigh right after, feeling a bit relieved, and started walking behind him with her head low until someone next to her gently tapped her elbow.

One of Shareen’s ladies-in-waiting had subtly taken a few extra steps behind her mistress to be right next to Cassandra and gave her a gentle smile.

“No need to bow so low. Just do it like me,” she whispered with a smile.

Cassandra realized she was indeed bowing too low. She had naturally taken her slave posture, but it wasn't appropriate with what she was wearing now. Was it alright to mimic the ladies-in-waiting? She still had her collar on, so her current status was probably closer to a servant than anything else.

But the young lady gave her an encouraging smile, making her feel a little more at ease, so Cassandra did as she suggested. This way, she wouldn't stand out as much, and she was already hoping people would ignore her.

They finally reached a large door. Even without the gold adorning the redwood, Cassandra would have concluded it was their final destination by the loud growls coming from behind it - dragon growls.

“Emperor, this lowly servant has successfully come back with Their Highnesses Prince Kairen and Princess Shareen.”

The large doors had opened and Cassandra, without lifting her head, felt a breeze, hinting that they were heading into an open area - a very, very large one. She followed Kairen while hearing a lot of people present around them. As she stole peeks to her left and right, she realized several members of the Imperial Family were there, all accompanied by their respective courts. From the myriad of voices and sounds, she could tell at least fifty people were present.

“Finally! Kairen, what do I have to do for you to stay at my banquets? Are they too boring for you, my Son?”

Cassandra couldn't believe she was hearing the Emperor's voice! She was surprised; he sounded more like a doting father than an all-mighty ruler too!

“What about me, Father? Do I not get a proper welcome just because my dear little brother is here?” asked Shareen with a sulk.

“What are you talking about? You know you are the most precious gem in my eyes, Shareen! Come here, my daughter!”

The group suddenly split, with Shareen and her attendants going straight to the golden throne, while Kairen took a left. He walked to a large seat and took his place, spreading his fur coat on it. Cassandra, observing how the other servants were positioned, took a small spot a few feet behind him and knelt on the floor.

She was now partially in the shadow of his seat and had the freedom to observe the room. It was an immense, circular hall with several golden chairs, each sitting atop several steps. Like this, the Royal Family could clearly see the center of the room, where dancers were currently performing a piece no one seemed to care about. Behind each seat, servants were busy attending to their masters, handing them cups of wine or plates of food. Only the concubines were sitting down on the stairs in front of them, with a good view of the show, but no seat of their own.

“You, take this.”

A male servant handed Cassandra a glass of wine and a large plate with fruits and meat. She quickly realized she was the only one there to attend to Kairen. She took it, ignoring the pain in her wrist. Her fingers were trembling under the extra weight on her injury, but she took a couple of steps forward and handed the cup to Kairen while he ignored the food.

When she descended back to her position, the male servant was looking at her with furious eyes.

“You idiot, slave! You were supposed to try the wine before your Master! What if there is poison in the cup?”

Cassandra had no idea. She looked at the man, speechless, and went back to Kairen wondering if she could take the cup back. Thankfully, he hadn’t drunk from it yet, but as she was about to ask, he put the cup down and showed no interest in it. She swiftly grabbed it, took a quick sip, and put it back where it was before returning again. The male servant sighed.

“Useless slave...”

“I am very sorry,” she whispered.

“Save your apology for your Master! What if he died because of an idiot slave like you? Tsk...”

While cursing her, he stepped away. Cassandra sighed. How could she possibly have known? She had never had any training on attending to the Imperial Family.

After reflecting on her mistake, she went back to listening to what was going on. As expected, only the Imperial Family spoke while the concubines whispered amongst themselves, but none seemed very happy to be there.

“Kairen, my son. Can I never keep you entertained enough that you would share a bit of your time with your father?” asked the Emperor.

“Our brother would rather spend his time with his slave,” snickered the Second Prince.

A loud growl suddenly resonated throughout the hall, and Cassandra finally understood why the servants and concubines didn’t feel at ease. Next to the Second Prince’s throne, what she had mistaken for a statue was actually a very alive Red Dragon. She took a quick look around; aside from the red one, two other dragons were sitting next to their masters. While one of those was caged, the other two were merely muzzled and chained, but they were still at the Imperial Family’s level, and close enough to scare anyone around.

It took all of Cassandra’s willpower to not stare at the dragons, to keep looking down and wait behind Kairen. They were like his majestic Black Dragon, but smaller ones and differently colored. She remembered the slaughter they had inflicted just hours earlier in the arena and shivered. They weren’t calm. Even while standing right next to their masters, one could tell that only the chains were really holding them. They were agitated, glaring at the people around them, and pulling on their restraints. The purple one in the cage kept growling for no reason, frightening the Fifth Prince’s concubines each time.

“That’s right, Kairen. I heard you were enchanted by a slave from today’s games?”

Cassandra jumped. She had almost forgotten the “slave” in question was herself! What would the Emperor say? She didn’t dare move from her spot, waiting to see how Kairen would respond. But instead, the Second Prince clicked his tongue.

“To think, after presenting him with countless concubines, our brother’s interest would be a slave...You really do have odd tastes, Kairen.”

“Brother, is that true?” A young, feminine voice suddenly asked, “A slave?”

Cassandra hadn’t realized Princesses, other than Shareen, were there too. From what she recalled, there were six Princes and at least twice as many Princesses, but she only counted five women present, each with their own golden seat like Shareen’s. The one who had spoken appeared to be among the youngest. Kairen ignored her, but another Princess, this time in a seat closer to him, raised her voice.

“This is inappropriate. How can we allow lowly, filthy slaves in our presence? Brother, you are far too lenient. That kind of dirt belongs to the lower classes. You should have proper concubines and proper servants.”

From where she sat, Cassandra could see the Princess’s black hair and as she turned her head, Cassandra looked down just in time. She hadn’t been caught staring, but nevertheless, she felt the cold glare of the Princess.

“As high and mighty as ever, Phetra...” sneered Shareen, while taking a seat close to the Emperor.

“You and Kairen should be ashamed of yourselves. Meddling with lowly servants and, worse, slaves!”

But Shareen snickered at her angry sister.

“Someone needs to stop talking out of her ass...” she muttered.

She had said it just loud enough for most people to hear. A few concubines and servants chuckled. But what happened next silenced them all.

In a sudden and swift movement, Phetra took out a whip and lashed it in the direction of one of the servants. She caught a man by the throat and his laugh died right away, leaving only an expression of pure terror on his face. Phetra snapped her whip and threw him right into the cage of one of the colored dragons. The Purple dragon inside jumped on the man, instantly ripping his body in half. All the concubines nearby were splattered with blood.

An ice-cold silence befell the room, apart from the dragon’s loud chewing. Cassandra was frozen in complete shock. She only dared a glance towards Kairen and Shareen. While her master hadn’t moved an inch, both he and his sister were glaring at Phetra.

But the Princess looked satisfied with herself as she pulled back her whip. The Emperor sighed.

“Phetra, not while we’re eating.”

“Sorry, Father.”

She didn’t look apologetic at all though, only giving her siblings a prideful smirk. Meanwhile, Cassandra was still terrified. This family was far too scary. They killed without a shred of remorse or restraint, and for such ridiculous reasons too.

Moreover, she felt like Phetra had only done this to infuriate Shareen, whom she couldn't confront directly.

Princess Shareen was glaring at Phetra, not hiding her annoyance very well. Cassandra had a feeling that the hatred between all the siblings had deeper roots than a mere confrontation about servants and slaves. She observed them more carefully now. Phetra had a lot of common traits with the Second Prince. Just like Kairen and Shareen, could those two be siblings from the same mother?

"Enough killing already, all of you. Let's see the next dancers. And Phetra, do not kill your siblings' servants. I'm fed up with your little squabbles."

"Yeah, how about you just kill your own servants instead!" protested the Fifth Prince, clearly annoyed.

Cassandra looked around. Despite staying silent, the other Princesses seemed either shocked or annoyed at Phetra's display. It wasn't just Shareen. It didn't seem like that Princess was particularly popular amongst her siblings at all.

"Mine know their place, Brother. But Kairen seems to need help teaching his," stated Phetra, before turning to Kairen. "Do you need help, Brother?"

Cassandra immediately felt the Princess's venomous glare and wicked intent. Even if she was only a disposable slave, that woman's bloodlust was definitely not normal! But Kairen just glared back.

"Mind your own business, Phetra."

"I only mean to help. Maybe, Kairen..."

A growl suddenly resonated through the hall. Cassandra looked up by reflex as the sky was suddenly covered by a dark shadow. Around her, several people gasped or shrieked. The Black Dragon landed right behind its master, next to Cassandra, and growled furiously at Phetra as if it was echoing its master's anger.

"Try me again," threatened Kairen.

But this time Phetra stayed silent. Her proud attitude from earlier had disappeared as soon as she had fixed her eyes on the Black Dragon. The Princess gulped and stopped boasting, her head and shoulders dropped down as the dragon continued to growl at her.

Shareen snickered.

“That’s my son!” exclaimed the Emperor, visibly proud. “Kairen, why didn’t you summon him earlier?”

“I didn’t have a reason to...” Kairen hissed, still glaring at Phetra.

Shareen and the Emperor were the only ones happy with the Black Dragon’s arrival. Everyone else seemed uneasy or scared and for good reason. Its size was far more imposing than the other beasts, as were its claws and fangs. The other dragons became agitated seeing their peer. Cassandra wondered if they naturally feared it.

“How impressive... She really isn’t scared at all.”

Cassandra suddenly realized one of the Princesses was talking about her. She felt several eyes on her and looked down hard, feeling anxious. Indeed, the large dragon was standing with its head right next to her, its huge body so close that she could feel the heat. Its presence wasn’t scary for Cassandra. She was more frightened by the human beings in the room than the beast who had its red eyes on her - eyes filled with the same curiosity as before.

“That’s an interesting one you have there, Kairen,” said the Fifth Prince. “To be able to stay so close to your beast and not be scared at all.”

Cassandra again felt several stares on her, wishing she could hide, when a low growl suddenly got her attention. Curling himself up around her, Krai, the Black Dragon, gently pushed her with its head and rubbed its warm scales against her arm. How could she ignore the beast? She dared a glance towards Kairen but he was ignoring her, his eyes focused on his siblings. For once, she wished her master would spare a glance her way, giving her some clue as to what she was supposed to do.

Krai nudged her arm again and, with a discreet movement, she gently caressed its scales. He growled, a very deep sound that was an obvious display of satisfaction. Cassandra blushed slightly, surprised to have a dragon almost purring from her touch!

“Look at this! The woman is obviously a sorceress! To charm an Imperial dragon like so! Let’s just behead her now and put an end to this...”

“Silence...”

Before the Second Prince could finish his sentence, Kairen’s words cut him off.

“Or would you like to try and take her from my dragon?”

Hearing this, Krai growled threateningly. Several women cried in fear and the whole place dissolved into chaos with the other dragons growling back and the servants trying to calm everyone down. Still, they all avoided the black beast. Krai was getting agitated, standing guard over Cassandra, and growling at the Second Prince.

The Black Dragon was so large that it didn't even realize it was shoving Cassandra around. Forced to the ground, she suddenly feared it would stomp on her like a mere ant under its claws. The scales over her were moving so frantically, she couldn't tell what was going on.

Suddenly, a large hand grabbed her out of the chaos, pulling her from under the dragon. It took her a second to realize Kairen had brought her to safety, holding her against his chest. Behind them, the Black Dragon was still growling and stomping around, but she barely noticed it now. All she could hear was her own heart, beating too fast in her ears.