

Chapter 18

Cassandra realized something was wrong a few days later, when, at dinner time, Lady Kareen barely ate anything, and looked extremely preoccupied. When she asked about it, the Imperial Concubine sighed.

“I don’t like this. I haven’t heard from the spy I sent to the Capital yet. He was supposed to be back last night, and he is usually never late. I sent another one to investigate, but I’m afraid Vrehan took this opportunity to purge his surroundings. I haven’t received any non-official news from the Imperial Palace in a while, and I don’t like it. I don’t like it at all.”

Missandra and Cassandra exchanged glances, worried. For Kareen to be this upset was not reassuring at all. What if something bad had happened in the Imperial Palace? No matter how she thought about it, Cassandra knew the worst that could possibly happen was the Emperor’s death. If the Dragon Emperor passed without having named an official heir yet, the eldest son would have to take over until the ministers elected the right heir. However, no one was blind. With Prince Sephir dead, Vrehan was the next in line, and while Kairen was away, he would definitely secure his position on the Golden Throne before his younger brothers could react. Cassandra was terrified just to think about this possibility.

“Don’t worry,” said Lady Kareen. “I will go there myself if necessary, but I won’t stay still! I already sent news of this to Shareen and Anour, just in case. Kairen is stuck on the battlefield at the moment, but even so, Vrehan won’t be stupid enough to try and act if Shareen is around.”

“Aren’t you afraid he’ll try to harm her?”

“He can try! My daughter is not so weak that she would submit to that snake!”

Cassandra sighed. She didn’t believe Vrehan would have acted if he wasn’t sure of himself. What was the point of killing Sephir now? Was it because Kairen was away? This felt terribly wrong. Things were not in the best state right now, and even at the Diamond Palace, they weren’t fully safe. Cassandra put a hand on her belly. She really didn’t need any additional stress right now. She took a deep breath. Anyway, the Second Prince wouldn’t be able to do much as long as the Emperor was alive and well. Prince Sephir’s death was truly sad, but for now, they had yet to confirm the cause. Perhaps they would hear it was a natural cause soon, and Kareen’s spy would return with a good explanation.

Despite Kareen doing her best to act normal and not show how uneasy she was, Cassandra knew this was only to keep them from worrying too much. For Lady Kareen to be worried meant something was really wrong, and Cassandra felt it too. She tried to convince herself that there was nothing more she could do, as she walked to the little garden where, as always, the dragon egg was steadily growing.

Her project with the medical boxes was going well too. Cassandra could just oversee it and let Missandra take care of managing the flow of supplies sent, their people, and the stocks coming in and out. There really wasn't much to do for her, aside from taking it easy for the last weeks of her pregnancy and taking care of her plants. Thankfully, the baby was doing well. Kareen had hired a midwife from the City to take care of Cassandra, and be ready for when the day would come, but once again, the young concubine didn't like all the extra attention. She could feel her son, very well, alive and kicking. It was probably what rejoiced her the most these days. Feeling her baby move. Every time he did, Cassandra took a minute to caress her belly. Sometimes, she would even talk to him. So much so that even Kareen, Missandra, and Dahlia had started talking about the baby as if he was here too.

Shareen's answer arrived a few days later in the form of a letter, around dinner. A servant brought it to Kareen, who put her cup down and opened it right away, reading the content quickly.

"Apparently, Shareen is busy in the North, too. The Barbarians heard of the Eastern Republic attacking and thought this would be an opportunity for them. Hpmf! Anyway, Shareen says she will have settled this soon and will arrive here in ten days. Oh, that letter is from four days ago, so less than a week now. Fine!"

Cassandra felt a bit better after hearing this. Even if it wasn't Kareen, Shareen's presence would definitely make her feel more secure. These days, she couldn't shake off the feeling that something bad was going to happen. However, now it would only be a matter of waiting a few more days and...

"My Lady!"

One of Kareen's servants rushed into the garden, out of breath. He almost fell on his knees at her feet, sweating and looking panicked.

"What is it?" asked Kareen, unhappy.

"The... The... His Highness the Second Prince just arrived at the Diamond Palace! He is here to arrest the Lady of the Mountain."

Next to Cassandra, Missandra jumped on her feet like a cat, all her senses alert. All the servants around too exchanged glances, and a couple of them ran inside to go and check.

“What is this nonsense?!” roared Kareen, slamming her cup on the table and getting up too.

“Th... They say she is an accomplice in the First Prince’s murder! I... I don’t have the details yet, but Madam, the Second Prince will really be here any second!”

“Cassandra, let’s go,” said Missandra, grabbing her sister’s hand.

“But...”

“No, the young one is right, dear,” said Kareen, gently pushing her towards the end of the garden. “Follow me!”

While the servants hurried to take the remains of their dinner out of sight, Kareen led the two girls further into the garden, rushing between the trees towards one side. They were almost running. Cassandra’s heart was thumping like crazy. What would she be arrested for! An accomplice to Prince Sephir’s murder? What had taken place at the Palace for this to happen?

The Imperial Concubine suddenly stopped in front of one of the walls surrounding the garden they were in and pushed some of the ivy covering it like a large curtain. To their surprise, it revealed a long and wide crack in the stonewall. It was tight, but definitely an entrance wide enough for them to sneak into. Missandra and Cassandra exchanged a glance, shocked. They had walked by that wall a thousand times but had never noticed this secret opening! Kareen pushed Missandra in, and they helped Cassandra get inside right behind her.

“Stay hidden here for now,” whispered the Imperial Concubine. “This is a secret passage only a handful of my servants know of. If things go wrong, start leaving through there immediately! This will lead to a secret room, I had everything prepared for you there, just in case. This place leads to the back garden. You can...”

Before she could finish that sentence, a ruckus was heard from behind her, and Kareen left quickly to see what was going on, while the two sisters retreated a bit. Missandra grabbed her older sister’s shaking hand. For a few seconds, everything was silent in the Palace. Then, soldiers barged into the garden, surrounding the Imperial Concubine. Cassandra retreated further as she could hear men stepping close to their hideout, but she could barely see what was going on behind the thick curtain of ivy.

However, the two of them were able to hear very well when Kareen started yelling furiously.

“What is this?! How dare you barge into my Palace!”

“Good evening, Imperial Concubine,” replied a cold voice.

Cassandra shivered and retreated another step. That was definitely Vrehan’s voice. Next to her, Missandra was livid, her hand covering her mouth. Everything was so calm just a few minutes ago, but now they were kept hidden while the Second Prince had taken control over the Palace!

“We are looking for a criminal, and I have the Emperor’s permission to do anything in my power to bring her to the Imperial Palace...safe and unharmed.”

From his voice, Cassandra wouldn’t even have trusted him for a second. How could the Emperor trust Vrehan with that task?! She knew that, despite the Emperor’s best intentions, Vrehan would have no second thoughts in killing her and the baby she was carrying at the first opportunity he’d get, and any witnesses along with her. She could easily imagine him reporting some unfortunate incident to the Emperor. There was no way Cassandra would ever give that man any chance to touch her, no way.

“What does it have to do with me? This is my Diamond Palace! How dare you come and chase some criminal here! On what grounds?!”

Cassandra realized Lady Kareen was trying to play dumb on purpose, to get more information on what was really going on. It may win them some time, too. Behind her, Missandra was gently pulling on her hand, trying to bring Cassandra away from the opening, but she wanted to listen to what was going on.

“The said criminal is none other than Kairen’s favorite, Imperial Concubine. I know she is here. Your son wouldn’t entrust his woman to anyone else!”

“Oh? And what did she do for you to arrest her?”

“She is suspected of taking part in the First Prince’s tragic death. One of his concubines poisoned him with some plants that the slave gave her!”

Cassandra was astonished. The recipes she gave the concubines? Is that what Vrehan was chasing her for? Even if one of the concubines had meddled with the content of the teas, she had nothing to do with it! This was obviously his scheme to capture her!

Did he poison Sephir's drink himself? What had happened to his concubines? Were they to be interrogated, too?

"How ridiculous! What would Cassandra poison Prince Sephir for?"

"Well, anyone can be greedy at some point. Who knows what a woman..."

"How dare you speak about greed! If anyone has that kind of dirt in their mind, it would be anyone but my son or his concubine! You, of all people, are the last one who can accuse others of that!"

"Watch your words, Kareen! I am not..."

"It's Imperial Concubine Kareen to you, little runt! Or do you think you can insult the Imperial Dragon's Favorite to her face? Huh?"

A tense silence reigned after her words, but Cassandra could feel Vrehan's anger from here. Lady Kareen's nerves were really made of steel, to confront him like that. Cassandra was fearful for her, but she was well aware the Imperial Concubine would never submit to Vrehan, or do anything other than protect her children.

"Enough, bring that woman here!" yelled Vrehan.

"Have you heard anything about a pregnant woman being here, Vrehan? Did you question the people? Investigate? She isn't here. Kairen took her to the Onyx Castle!"

Cassandra could barely breathe. What if Vrehan's soldiers really interrogated the people of the Diamond City? Would they say the Lady of the Mountain was indeed here? Or had they tried already? She knew the local folks liked her very much, but would they lie to an Imperial Prince?

"You're lying!" suddenly yelled a feminine voice. "I already know you wanted that slut to stay with you until she gave birth, their dragon egg is here!"

Cassandra's heart dropped. Phetra was here too? That woman was already able to travel? Cassandra suddenly froze at the mention of the dragon egg! They could never leave this Palace with it if they had to flee this place!

"Do you see a concubine here, other than me? How dare you bother this old woman without any proof!"

"I will have my proof once I find this damn woman! I know you're hiding her here, in this Palace!"

“Oh? Fine, you can look then. The sooner you find yourself empty-handed, the sooner you leave me alone, you arrogant little boy!”

As soon as the soldiers started running and searching through the whole Diamond Palace, Missandra pulled Cassandra’s hand towards the rear of that secret passageway. Even for their small frames, it was hard to go through the whole passage. They had to be as silent as possible to not be noticed by the men searching for them. Cassandra had never been so scared before, but it became even worse when they heard a dragon’s screech. Both sisters froze, realizing the situation was more dire than what they had thought.

Missandra gasped, and turned to her.

“That wasn’t the black one,” she whispered.

“No,” whispered Cassandra, shaking her head. “That was... Vrehan’s Dragon.”

The two girls were absolutely terrified. That crazy Red Dragon was looking for them.

Suddenly, they heard the stones above their heads making an awful noise, and for a second, they froze, fearing that the walls around them were going to collapse on top of them. This would be a horrible way to die, buried alive under meters of rocks! Missandra shivered, but she pulled Cassandra’s hand again, to take her out of there. If this dragon was able to smell them or hear them, they had to get out of this secret passage as soon as possible!

Both sisters kept walking, slowly and silently, until it turned completely dark. Missandra, in front, had a better vision, but she had to walk very slowly. Both arms extended in front of her, to make sure they weren’t hitting something. She was scared Cassandra would bump into something with her big belly, but thankfully, she soon found the end of the passage. It seemed closed, in front of them, but she recognized a fabric under her fingers, instead of rocks. They were behind some sort of curtain. Missandra waited for a second, hesitating. What if soldiers were already in the room, searching? She took a deep breath and waited a second. With her eyes blinded by the darkness, she could easily focus on her hearing.

After a full minute, she was sure there was no one on the other side. She very carefully pushed the curtain aside and glanced behind it. Then, when she was sure this place was safe, she pulled Cassandra in. This place wasn’t exactly a room, more like a large wardrobe, or a tiny storage room. There were dozens of clothes and large fabrics hung here and there, like the one they had come from behind. Missandra’s first instinct was to run to the door, making sure it was locked. It was, but she could hear

people running on the other side. Was the door hidden on the other side? It seemed like no one was stopping to check it.

“Missandra!” whispered Cassandra.

The older sister had just found a big bag with some clothes, dried food, and a lot of money. This was definitely meant for their escape. Missandra nodded, and walked up to her, away from the door, but they had another issue.

“How are we supposed to leave?” she whispered as well. “They’ll catch us the minute we go out of that door! Shall we stay here?”

“There has to be another exit.”

Both sisters started checking the whole room, until finally they found it. This one was actually on the floor, hidden under several piles of heavy rugs. Missandra and Cassandra quickly worked together to clear the way to their escape route, both keeping an ear out for what was happening on the other side. They could hear the dragon’s growls every now and then, but it seemed further away from their current position. Cassandra wasn’t even able to think, at the moment. She just focused on getting to that exit, and silently prayed for Lady Kareen to be alright.

Finally, they cleared the path, but just as they were about to get in, someone slammed on the door.

“Here! There is some secret entrance!”

Cassandra froze. They were just about to get out! Within a split second, she made her decision. She threw the bag at Missandra and pushed her sister towards the opening.

“What? Cassandra!”

“We don’t have time to both leave! Take the bag and meet me outside the Palace!”

“But...”

“Missandra, I don’t have enough time to get in, and if I do and they forcefully pull me out of there, I’m afraid they’ll hurt me and the baby. Don’t worry about me, go. You’re tiny enough, you can escape and I’ll close it behind you.”

“Hinue!”

“I promise I’ll find a way to leave, but if they catch you, Vrehan can kill you on the spot. He can’t kill me inside the Diamond Palace, there are too many witnesses. Linue, I promise I’ll find a way to get out of here. Now, go!”

Missandra hesitated, but another violent slam resonated from the door, and no matter what, it was now obviously too late for Cassandra. She bit her lower lip and squeezed through the little opening. As soon as she was in, Cassandra pulled the rugs next to her, making a pile collapse to hide it. If they found her here, with the first entrance exposed, they wouldn’t think of looking for someone else through a second exit. She took a deep breath, and retreated to the back of the room, waiting for the door to be broken open.

It only took a few more seconds, then soldiers barged in, yelling and grabbing her forcefully.

“Who were you talking to?”

“Let me go! I was praying, now let me go!”

“Your Highness! We found the criminal!”

Cassandra kept thinking of a way to free herself without struggling too much and risking getting hurt. However, both men were obviously stronger than her, and she couldn’t find a solution before Vrehan arrived with his sister a minute later. Lady Kareen was there, too, and she became livid when their eyes met.

“Let go! How dare you brutalize a pregnant woman!” she roared.

“Who cares,” hissed Phetra. “She’s a criminal!”

“She is a suspect, you damn bitch, and she carries a Dragon Prince, too!” yelled Kareen.

Even if her shouts only angered Phetra more, the Imperial Concubine’s stance was enough to terrorize the two guards holding Cassandra, as they realized she was right. Despite their Master being right there, they both eased their grip on her arms, their face a shade paler than before.

Meanwhile, Cassandra was trying to assess the situation as quickly as possible, despite being scared. Because the corridor they were in was rather narrow, there were only a dozen guards, plus Vrehan, Phetra, and Kareen. No large dragon could squeeze in there, and Srai was probably hiding somewhere. Cassandra was not a fighter, but

she was sure of one thing: if she left the Diamond Palace with the Second Prince, she wouldn't be able to survive. No matter what, she had to find a way to escape before they brought her out of the Palace and Kareen's protection.

"I wonder why a suspect was hiding," hissed Vrehan.

"Who said I was hiding, Your Highness? This is a storage room, I had come to look for some fabric," replied Cassandra.

She wasn't used to lying through her teeth, but those few weeks with Kareen had taught her a couple of things. The Prince was obviously glaring at her round belly, and Cassandra really felt uncomfortable under his murderous stare.

"You damn, little witch," said Phetra.

"You look like you're doing well, Your Highness," retorted Cassandra.

That was an obvious lie this time. Phetra still had bandages all over, and some large scars on her body. She had obviously been in a lot of pain, but if she angered her, Cassandra was hoping to win some more time, or create an opportunity that would allow her to escape.

However, she didn't expect what happened next. Phetra stepped forward, with a little smile.

"Oh, you think so?"

Then, she slapped Cassandra. The slap wasn't very strong, but if she hadn't been held by the two men, she might have fallen down. Phetra was smiling wide, but behind her, Kareen went mad.

"You crazy little bitch! How dare you injure Cassandra, the War God's Favorite! In my Palace!"

"Injure her? This was merely a little slap!"

With that, Phetra slapped Cassandra a second time before Kareen could react, on the other cheek this time. Cassandra felt the pain resonate from her cheek through her whole body. Even her baby reacted, kicking her stomach. A strange worry crossed her mind. Was her baby feeling her pain? Was he okay? She could handle a few slaps from Phetra, but if anything happened to her baby!

"Phetra, enough! Stop it!" yelled Kareen.

“What? Does it hurt? I think she needs another one!”

However, to her surprise, someone pushed her away from Cassandra, taking the slap a second later. The Princess was so surprised that she stepped back, looking at who she had slapped this time.

“Dahlia!” exclaimed Cassandra.

Her handmaiden was standing in front of her, in a protective stance. Cassandra had no idea where she had come from, but the young maid was obviously resolved in protecting her at any cost.

“Please don’t touch her!” she claimed, despite shivering in fear.

However, Phetra was too furious to listen to the young servant at the moment. She glared at her.

“You want to protect her, you little rat? You think you can oppose me?”

A red flash appeared in front of Cassandra’s eyes. She didn’t understand what had happened. Dahlia collapsed at her feet, her eyes opened wide in surprise, her throat sliced wide open. Cassandra’s ears went deaf, and she started feeling numb. She wanted to scream, but no sound came out of her mouth. She couldn’t speak, only watch the girl dying at her feet. Somehow, the rational part of her brain knew that this was not an injury anyone could heal from. It was cut wide open, and bleeding way too much, way too fast. The shock got her completely numb, her blood leaving her face, and she didn’t even react to what happened next.

It wasn’t until Phetra screamed that she looked up. Vrehan had brutally grasped his sister’s throat, throwing her to the ground, and it was her scream of pain that made Cassandra come back to her senses.

“I said not to kill anyone yet! Are you so stupid that you can’t understand such orders?!” he yelled.

His brutal yelling surprised Cassandra, and she looked their way, still stunned, barely understanding what was going on around her now. Then, Vrehan brutally kicked his sister, who was already on the ground. The incredibly violent situation gave Cassandra another shock, waking her from her slumber. She had never seen Vrehan being violent before, but he kicked his sister’s injured leg twice, making her scream in pain.

“Brother, stop it!” she screamed, tears running down her face, terrorized. “Stop it, please! You can’t kill me, Brother. I know your secret! You can’t kill me!”

“I will kill you if you disobey me again, you useless bitch!”

Cassandra felt like she was dreaming. The two siblings she had always seen as perfect accomplices were fighting, and Phetra was crying on the ground, next to Dahlia’s dead body. This was so unreal. This had to be a nightmare, one she was going to wake up from.

This only lasted a minute, however. Vrehan stopped kicking his sister, out of breath and glared at her one last time before taking a deep breath, returning to his normal stance. Cassandra had never seen a scarier attitude than that. He was abusing his own sister just a few seconds ago, but now, he was turning to her, looking perfectly calm and composed. This man was worse than a monster.

“Now, enough of you women, fighting. You’re coming with me,” he hissed at her.

After that scene, there was no way Cassandra was going with him. She was terrorized, in shock, but her survival instinct was screaming in her head telling her not to go with that man, no matter what happened. She couldn’t get the vision of Dahlia’s death out of her mind, but now, her eyes were focused on Vrehan’s hand, which was coming close to grab her. Cassandra retreated, even pulling the two soldiers who hadn’t expected her to resist, with her.

“Don’t touch me,” she said, with a cold voice.

Her emerald eyes had never been so determined, so defiant. Even the Prince was shocked for a second, but soon enough, Vrehan frowned.

“Don’t you dare oppose me, you damn witch.”

He tried to extend his arm to grab her again, but just as he reached out, a white shadow brutally jumped from behind Cassandra. It took a quick leap onto her shoulder and pounced on the Prince’s arm. Vrehan screamed and stumbled back as horrifying sounds resonated in the room. Blood splattered, the flesh brutally ripped open, and as he pulled back, his hand was covered in blood, some fingers missing or chunks ripped off. Cassandra looked down, but whatever it was had just jumped in a flash onto one of the soldiers holding her, attacking him violently. The small creature was biting the man, and growling furiously. The other soldier let go of her arm, terrified, while Cassandra looked down at it, speechless.

When the man stopped moving, the little dragon turned its head towards Cassandra. Its two big emerald eyes stared at her for a second, and, without warning, it jumped towards her with a cute little squeak. Cassandra barely had time to open her arms and receive it. It was so heavy! However, she was more stunned by the gorgeous, adorable, silver-scaled creature in her arms, rubbing its little head against her chest. The little silver dragon was growling softly, just like Krai would do whenever she was scratching its snout.

“Oh, by the Lord... Don’t tell me you’re...”

“The Baby Dragon,” whispered Lady Kareen, on the verge of tears. “He hatched already! To protect his mother!”

Cassandra was rendered speechless.

Her baby dragon was in her arms! Now! When had it even hatched? Was it because of the slaps earlier? Or, because her baby had felt her fear? She kept staring at the adorable creature in her arms, growling softly and rubbing its head against her chest innocently. In front of them, Vrehan was holding his head, covered in blood, looking at the newborn dragon with a horrified expression.

“No, no! Capture her! Now!”

“Cassandra, go!” yelled Kareen.

The Imperial Concubine’s voice was what Cassandra needed to wake up from her inner turmoil of emotions. There were so many things going on, but for now, she stuck to the one thing she had to focus on, escaping Vrehan’s grasp, no matter what. She turned around and started running, despite her heavy belly. The Baby Dragon jumped out of her arms to follow her, jumping around, almost looking excited. Cassandra heard Vrehan yell orders somewhere behind her, but she didn’t listen. All she needed was a way to leave the Diamond Palace and hide. She had to find Missandra and escape, escape at all costs. Her heart was bleeding for poor Dahlia, but she couldn’t stop to mourn her friend now. She trusted Lady Kareen to take care of her.

Moreover, she had other problems now. She could hear the soldiers running after her, and Vrehan’s voice still shouting orders. The birth of the baby dragon had apparently made the Second Prince absolutely furious. No wonder. He had been on the verge of killing Kairen’s pregnant concubine, but now, she was about to escape and have this baby! That sole thought motivated Cassandra more than anything. The Baby Dragon’s birth wasn’t a coincidence, her baby was going to come out soon, and she would do

anything to protect her child. However, she was still heavily pregnant, and unable to run fast enough to escape anyone. She needed a way out, quickly. She was already deep inside the Palace, where could she escape to now? Cassandra found the solution after recognizing one of the corridors. It was a bit of a crazy idea, but it was the only way out she knew of, and the only way that neither Vrehan nor his soldiers would be crazy enough to follow her.

Just as she recognized the door she was looking for, one of the soldiers grabbed her. Not for long, though. The baby dragon furiously jumped on the man, attacking him ferociously. Cassandra heard the man's screams, but she couldn't look, as she was busy opening the doors. The large room finally appeared in front of her, with her way out.

She had returned to the infinity pool room. The wide pool in front of her, Cassandra walked in quickly. She heard the man hurrying behind her when the water was already up to her waist.

"Baby! Come!"

The Baby Dragon immediately dived in the water, not looking afraid at all, and disappeared under the surface somewhere around her. Cassandra didn't have time to check where it had gone to. The men were starting to follow her into the pool, with their swords, and Vrehan yelling at the entrance of the room.

"Catch her! If you let that crazy bitch die here or escape, I'll kill you!"

Cassandra glared at him, and kept walking and swimming inside the water. Once in her element, she had a big advantage in speed over the soldiers chasing her. None of those men were good swimmers, and with their heavy armors, each step was a struggle. For Cassandra, however, she was faster than on the ground.

"Don't you dare!" yelled Vrehan.

Oh, yes, she would dare to. Cassandra was almost at the wall's end, at the great opening towards the waterfall, when she heard a loud growl. She retreated just in time, as the red dragon's head appeared. Thankfully, she had seen how far Krai was able to reach inside and had evaluated right. The Red Dragon was smaller than the black one, but it encountered the same problem. Only its head could fit in. That saved Cassandra's life.

However, with Vrehan behind her, and his dragon guarding the exit and the waterfall, she was trapped inside the water, with the soldiers closing in on her. Cassandra

hesitated. Should she dive in? Krai couldn't find her in the water, but if that dragon decided to attack blindly, her chances to go unnoticed were not that high. She had to make a decision, and quickly. She knew she couldn't go back anyway. She had to try.

“Don't you dare! You...”

Cassandra dove beneath the water before hearing Vrehan's curse. Like her people, she had the peculiar ability to see underwater and keep her eyes open without trouble. Hence, as soon as she dived in, she saw how deep she could go, and where the large claws of the red dragon were resting. However, as she had predicted, he started moving as soon as she disappeared. She could see his fangs and claws attacking blindly, making waves underwater. Cassandra tried to stay away for a while, but she couldn't stay underwater for too long, and her pursuers were still coming.

To her surprise, the baby dragon suddenly appeared next to her. It tilted its head, and she realized, just like her, it had no problem seeing or swimming underwater! Was it because of her? Did the silver dragon get some of her characteristics? Was that possible? Cassandra didn't have much time to wonder, though. While the baby dragon was comfortably swimming around, the bigger, older version was furiously looking for them. Cassandra took her little dagger out. They had to secure their way out, one way or another. If she could get the timing right ... Next to her, the silver baby dragon suddenly stopped swimming around, too, fixated on the red dragon's movements, agitating its butt like a cat about to jump.

That's when Cassandra decided to attack. Judging its position from those large paws, she waited for the next attack, and just when its maw appeared in the water next to her, she jumped with her blade to attack. She got the red dragon right in the eye, and on the other side, the baby dragon jumped too.

Both Vrehan and his dragon screeched in pain. She saw the Red Dragon panic, moving recklessly, and suddenly, one of its claws brutally scratched her arm. Cassandra didn't have time to scream in pain. Taking a deep breath, she dived right back in, and this time swam to the edge. She felt the border and jumped over.

This was the craziest thing she had ever done in her entire life. She felt the water rushing all around her, and for a second, she thought she was jumping to her death. She could literally smash herself on the soil or hit the surface brutally. However, as she arrived towards the end of her fall, she felt something pulling her dress, and her fall was slowed down. She couldn't see, but she heard the baby dragon's flapping wings, and they both dived into the river underneath a second later. Her fall hadn't been nearly as brutal as she had imagined, but it took her a second to find her way up.

She broke the surface, and caught a new, deep breath of fresh air, swimming away from the waterfall.

Cassandra hadn't jumped into the unknown. She had visited Diamond City enough to know that the waterfall ended at a river, and that the river was large and big enough. Struggling a bit, she kept swimming, using the strength of the current to spare her strength a little. She had to get out of the water quickly, though. She could hear the dragon still screeching in pain, far above her head. It may have gone blind, but it still had its nose to find her.

After she felt like the river had taken her far enough, and she was out of strength, Cassandra swam to get out of the river. She was exhausted when she finally got on all four on the riverside. She heard the baby dragon jumping to her side, and sure enough, it walked up to her, rubbing its little head against her arm. That sensation made her smile. The Silver Dragon was so tiny, just a newborn, but it had just saved her life multiple times. She caressed its head. It was smaller than she had imagined, just the size of a big cat, plus its long tail. It was a bit leaner than Krai, and its wings were longer compared to its body size, too. Just as she was taking a minute to caress the baby dragon, and catch her breath, she felt a sharp pain between her ribs.

"Oh, God..." she whimpered.

She knew it would come soon, now that the baby dragon had hatched, but she didn't expect it that soon! Cassandra took a deep breath and got up. She still wasn't safe. She was on the outskirts of the Diamond City, but Vrehan would send for a search party soon enough, and she couldn't stay around. Moreover, she had to find Missandra. She had no idea where the secret passage had taken her younger sister! Cassandra tried to think of where Missandra would go. Surely, she wouldn't leave without her, but where could she wait for her?

The two sisters had gone to the Diamond City several times in those last weeks, they both knew this City well. Where could they meet up? As she started walking towards the City, out of strength, the rain started falling heavily. Cassandra was grateful. This would make her harder to find. However, she still had no idea where to go. Missandra had a few favorite shops inside the Diamond City, but there was no way Cassandra was going to find her in time if she had to search through all of them!

Cassandra kept walking until she reached the first houses, and hid against the walls, hoping the roofs could keep her safe from the rain. The Baby Dragon was following her closely, rubbing its back against her ankles so she could feel it being here from time to time.

However, Cassandra was out of strength. She was absolutely exhausted, devastated by Dahlia's death, and desperate to find Missandra. Yet, just when she thought she was going to pass out, she heard a door opening nearby.

"By the Great Dragon! It's really her!"

"What are you waiting for, go help her!"

A man ran to Cassandra's side, and before she could even react, she was taken inside a house. The Baby Dragon followed her from afar, growling at the humans, but not sure if it should attack or not. It watched Cassandra being taken inside a large room and sat on a bed by the man who had taken her inside.

Cassandra was having a hard time understanding what was going on. She was on the verge of collapsing.

"My... Sister... I need to find my sister," she whispered.

"Don't worry, Your Highness, we will look for her! Son, go spread the word!"

Cassandra heard a door open and close, and a young woman gently helped her lie down. She felt a wet towel on her forehead, and someone helped her take her dress off. She had no strength to resist while two women helped her change into some other clothes.

"Mother, she has a fever..."

"My baby..." said Cassandra.

"Don't worry, Your Highness," said one of the young women. "We will take good care of you, and we will find Lady Missandra, too. You're safe with us. Please just rest, you are safe here."

Cassandra nodded. She really was too weak to protest. So many things had happened, she just wanted to lie down. She could feel another contraction, which worried her. She had felt some in the past few days, but never as strong as this one. She knew it was a sign.

"My baby... I felt..."

"Did your water break? Mother! I think she's in labor..."

Cassandra felt someone sit at the end of the bed and examine her. The Baby Dragon jumped next to her, between her shoulder and her face, and growled a bit, as a warning.

“She still has time, she doesn’t seem to be having too many contractions for now. You should rest, Your Highness. Try to sleep a little while we look for Lady Missandra. You’ll wake up when the labor starts for real.”

“Don’t worry, Your Highness,” repeated the woman next to her, gently caressing her wet hair.

“We will take care of you,” said the other, covering her with a blanket.

Just like that, Cassandra couldn’t resist anymore and fell asleep.

It was another sharp pain that woke Cassandra up. She frowned and opened her eyes, her hands going unconsciously to her belly. A part of her had to touch it, make sure her baby was still there. She was cold and afraid, but she could feel her belly. However, the first sensation that reassured her was the warm little body curled up against her cheek.

“Hinue! Are you awake?”

Missandra was next to her, holding her hand with a worried expression. Cassandra frowned, confused. It took her a few seconds to remember everything that had happened. She felt like she had slept too profoundly to reconnect with reality, as if she had just had a terrible nightmare, where dreams and reality merged.

However, reality was quick to catch her. She realized it hadn’t been a nightmare, but the sad truth, when she saw the unfamiliar surroundings. They were in a common house, with a lot of people moving around. Cassandra, still lying down on some bed, turned her head. A little group was there. Women and men, several adults of all ages, all watching her with worried expressions. Missandra was quick to explain to her.

“Apparently, you arrived here about an hour ago, drenched. Those nice people found you and brought you here. They changed your clothes, too, and you fell asleep right away. You have a fever, but you are fine. We are safe here for now. I was hiding in the market, but all the inhabitants spread the word that you were looking for me, so I was able to come here a few minutes ago. How are you? Is that... the baby dragon is...”

Cassandra nodded, lifting her hand to caress the little one next to her. With Missandra's help, she sat up, still feeling tired. So she had slept only an hour? The baby dragon immediately walked to her side, rubbing its head against her hip. Cassandra caressed the young creature and stared at the people around them.

"You...I don't understand. I remember someone pulling me here."

An old woman nodded and stepped forward.

"We heard something was going on in the Diamond Palace, My Lady. We all know that the relationships are bad between the Diamond Lady and the Second Prince. So, when the word was spread that they had come to arrest the War God's Concubine, we knew something was wrong. We hoped the Diamond Lady could do something, but when my son spotted you, all alone on the City border...We immediately brought you here to hide you."

"The soldiers are searching for you...I mean for us," said Missandra. "That crazy Prince is furious you escaped. What happened?"

"The...waterfall. I escaped through the waterfall."

"You jumped from that height while pregnant? Are you crazy!"

"Missandra, we don't have time for that... ugh!"

Cassandra grimaced, holding her stomach. Her contractions were getting more intense. She took deep breaths, while the young woman brought her some warm tea.

"The baby dragon being here means you're going into labor?" asked Missandra, visibly worried. "Cassandra, the soldiers are searching for us everywhere. If they hear of a woman giving birth..."

Cassandra nodded. This was the worst possible situation. She had made it out of the Diamond Palace, but the Prince would do anything to find her. He was going to search every house in the Diamond City for sure. Cassandra turned to the old woman.

"Thank you for helping us, but we...we can't stay. If they find us here, you will be punished too."

The old woman shook her head.

"Your Highness, we know who we are saving here. You're the Lady of the Mountain! Do you know how many of our sons have gone to the war in the east? You have no

idea how everyone felt here when we heard the Lady of the Mountain and the Diamond Lady were sending those survival kits to the front. Concubines caring about soldiers! We already knew our Diamond Lady was one very strong and brave woman, but to hear that the War God's Concubine was a healer, and doing what she could for our families?"

"My brother and my husband were summoned to go to war, Your Highness," added one of the young women behind her. "I'm fearing every day that they won't return, my Lady, but not being able to do anything was the worst! When we heard what you were doing from the Diamond Palace, everyone started working to send what we could to the front!"

"That's right," added another woman. "We prepared packages of food, and started cultivating the same medicinal herbs as you, Your Highness!"

Cassandra was astonished to hear all that. She had no idea so much was going on in the Diamond City recently. She had noticed that people were respecting her a lot when she would go out with Lady Kareen, but she thought that was because of her status as a concubine, not because of her actions. The old woman bowed politely.

"Your Highness, there is no one in this City who isn't ready to protect you. I can tell you that absolutely no one will talk if the soldiers interrogate them. We have our own dignity as the Diamond citizens. You have worked hard to help our sons that were sent to war, Your Highness. Now let us help you."

Cassandra was on the verge of tears, listening to the old woman's words. She couldn't believe it. She had never imagined that the Diamond City's people were aware of her actions, let alone that they respected her that much. Cassandra knew very well how feared the Imperial Family usually was, but now, she was surprised how she had even made such a strong impression on those people without having ever met them. Missandra, too, was blushing a bit and exchanged a look with her sister.

"We are very grateful that you are all willing to help us, but...This Prince is really, really crazy. Even if no one talks, he will search everywhere for my sister. If she is about to give birth here... Even with the rain, the baby's cries will be heard outside."

One of the middle-aged women stepped forward.

"Don't worry, Lady Missandra, we have already come up with a plan. This is our City, we know where we can hide the young concubine where they won't find her, or hear the baby."

“We will also distract them,” added one of the young women. “The word is already spreading to keep the soldiers busy in another part of the City. Our neighbors went to signal a woman in a pink dress fleeing on the other side of the City.”

“We actually did take your dress to make a decoy, Your Highness, I hope you don’t mind.”

Cassandra was speechless. She had slept for a mere hour, and so much had happened already? They had sent a decoy with her dress! How many risks were those people willing to take for her? She wanted to protest, but another contraction came, and she had to stay quiet for it to pass.

“Thank you so much,” said Missandra in her stead. “So... Where do you think you can hide my sister?”

“We are almost done preparing!”

That’s when Cassandra noticed. Aside from the four women, there were two teenagers, twin boys from what she could see, and one older man behind them, getting a whole bunch of things ready on the table. It looked like they were packing things in big bags. There was a bit of food, but mostly blankets and tissues, a couple of bowls and basins, even some baby clothes.

“I will accompany you with my youngest daughter and my niece, Your Highness,” said the old woman. “I have been a midwife for forty years, I can help you give birth safely to the little Prince.”

“We will take good care of you,” promised one of the young women behind her.

“The young ones will just help us carry everything and go back to make sure no one follows us.”

“Where are we going?” asked Missandra.

“You’ll like it, young Lady,” said the old woman with a wink.

Missandra and Cassandra exchanged a look, but after that, there wasn’t much time left to wonder. In a few more minutes, the five women and the young twins were ready to leave. Cassandra realized how careful they were. First, in a short time span, there were no less than five young people, from children to teenagers, who came and went to the house to let them know how things were going, where the soldiers and the dragon were focused on.

Cassandra realized how close all of the inhabitants were to be working together like this. They were sending the young ones from one house to another to relay the information, making sure the information traveled through short distances to not catch someone's attention. No soldier would care about young people running around in their own city. They were so busy interrogating the adults that they didn't care for the kids rushing in and out.

Hence, they made sure the soldiers were really busy elsewhere and proceeded to move Cassandra and Missandra quickly from one house to another. The two sisters had changed clothes and left behind any piece of jewelry or piece of clothing they were wearing previously, to hide their smell. Even the Baby Dragon was carefully hidden in a basket, carried by one of the teenage boys as it would have been too heavy for the women. Cassandra, staying next to it, kept tucking the little blanket around it to keep it hidden. The Baby Dragon was very curious and kept trying to pop its head or tail out. Cassandra was most scared that it would make a sound or growl. She didn't know how the red dragon's hearing was, and even with the rain, everyone was very careful to move around silently until they reached another house.

However, the one Cassandra had found herself in was already very close to the border, and to her surprise, she found they were headed right back to the waterfall.

Their little group moved very carefully until they reached the house closest to the waterfall. Then, they left it and went next to the Diamond Palace's wall. Though, instead of going for the entrance, they were headed in the completely opposite direction, towards the forest. They stayed almost against the wall, off-road, everyone checking the sky from time to time with the fear of spotting a dragon's silhouette. Finally, the old woman suddenly turned right, and Missandra was shocked for a second, as it seemed she had disappeared between the rocks. However, it soon appeared that there was an entrance there, to a cave. Missandra was speechless. Only a local could indeed know about this little cave! The Diamond Palace was old, but so were its foundations. Everything had been built on large rocks, and with the waterfall and the river crossing the Diamond Palace, it appeared that some natural caves had appeared underneath.

Cassandra was astonished. This natural cathedral of stones was gorgeous. After walking for a while, the roof was getting higher and higher above them, and they almost couldn't hear any more of the rain. Instead, Cassandra realized that they were walking around the actual waterfall. She would have never imagined there was a large cave hidden behind that waterfall! The floor was actually half little lakes, half rocks. It was rather flat, and completely safe for everyone to move around. Hence, when they reached a large area, the young women and teenagers immediately worked together to unpack everything.

“This is incredible,” whispered Cassandra, still in awe of this cavern.

“Isn’t it?” replied the Old Woman. “No soldier from the Capital would know of this place, we only show our young ones when they are old enough. It’s a secret of the Diamond People. In times of war, people would come and seek refuge here, many, many years ago, when the Dragon Empire didn’t yet own the land completely. Nowadays it’s just for young ones to bathe in the lakes, and lovers to hide.”

Cassandra was indeed amazed. With the waterfall a few meters away, it would definitely cover any sound better than the rain outside. It was noisy even from where she was.

In front of her, the Diamond People were carefully laying several blankets on the ground, boiling some water with what they had brought, and preparing everything for the birth of her son. Cassandra was overwhelmed with emotions. This was nothing like she could ever have imagined. In her imagination, she would have been in one of the Diamond Palace’s bedrooms, with her Prince holding her hand. Now, she was hiding several meters underneath, with complete strangers who were doing all they could to help her and her baby.

Another contraction came, and Cassandra had no choice but to lay down, helped by the young women present. Missandra immediately sat by her side, taking a deep breath.

“Everything will be fine, Hinue,” she whispered. “You and your baby will be blessed by the Water God, giving birth under a waterfall!”

Cassandra chuckled and nodded.

“You know, my baby was conceived during a snowstorm. And now he will be born under a waterfall. Isn’t it amazing?”

The baby dragon suddenly jumped out of the basket with a cute little squeak, catching everyone’s attention. It looked around, but its little paws were naturally taking it to Cassandra. It walked up to her and curled up by her side. Cassandra caressed the silver scales, taking a big breath.

“I’m so sorry their father can’t be here,” she whispered.

Missandra shook her head and grabbed Cassandra’s hand.

“Don’t worry. With this crazy family of yours, I bet your baby will be big enough to kick his own dad’s butt for missing this in no time!”

Cassandra laughed, but just as she did, another contraction came, and she grimaced instead. The teenagers soon left, as they had planned, and they were left with the old woman, her daughter, and her niece, all getting ready to help Cassandra give birth.

“I don’t... even know your names,” said Cassandra, a bit sorry for not asking earlier.

“This old woman is named Chantra, Your Highness. Those two young beauties are Elianne, my daughter, and Sunel, my niece. Now, let’s take deep breaths and focus on this baby. We have a little Prince to take care of.”

The cries of the newborn echoed inside the cave’s walls.

“The little Prince is born, Your Highness!”

Cassandra was exhausted. She had no idea how long it had been, or how exhausted she truly was, but the cries of the baby were all she needed to hear. It took a few more minutes for them to clean the newborn and Cassandra to catch her breath, but then she could finally relax, and that’s when she saw him.

The old lady put the baby in his mother’s arms. He was carefully wrapped in a blanket and had already stopped crying. Cassandra was amazed. Her son. Kairen’s newborn son. The baby she had carried for months, was finally in her arms. He was so small. Compared to his father, he was so tiny and fragile, just a defenseless newborn. His skin was still a bit pinkish, but she could tell he had gold-colored skin, a perfect mix between hers and the Dragon Empire’s tan. He already had a little bit of hair, a dark patch on his tiny head. She couldn’t tell his eye color yet. It seemed dark, but her baby was barely opening his eyes, just squirming a little in his blanket.

Next to Cassandra, the Baby Dragon stood up, staring at the baby, and rubbed its head against Cassandra’s arm. Was it curious about its other half? Or maybe a bit jealous to not be in Cassandra’s arms? She couldn’t tell. The bond between those two was so unique.

“He is so tiny,” whispered Missandra next to her, staring at the baby in awe.

“He’s actually quite big for a newborn, Lady Missandra,” said Chantra with a smile. “Are you alright, Your Highness?”

Cassandra nodded, but she was absolutely mesmerized by the sight of her son. She had never thought such a precious existence could even be in her life one day. She had dreamed of having children and a loving husband one day, but nothing could compare to this feeling. It was her baby. This little, precious being she had created, with Kairen's love and hers. She gently kissed the baby's forehead, and he moved a bit, reacting to her touch. Cassandra smiled. She was glad he was finally born safely, the baby dragon as well. Despite the circumstances, it was all that mattered.

While the women were cleaning everything, Missandra stayed by her side, looking at her newborn nephew, amazed.

"He is really cute. Have you thought of a name already? For the baby dragon, too?"

Cassandra nodded.

"I discussed it a bit with Lady Kareen before. I wanted something that resembled his father's name and mine, like the Dragon Empire tradition, and yet was inspired by our Rain tribe. His name is Kassian."

"Oh... You're writing it with their letters, then?"

"Yes. And this little one here..."

The baby dragon squealed when Cassandra caressed its head, growling softly as Krai would.

"This little dragon is Kian."

Missandra chuckled.

"Kian? It's rather cute. It suits him. Actually, it suits them both. Kassian and Kian."

Cassandra chuckled, caressing the baby dragon's head. It was so similar to Krai's build, but a bit thinner, and a magnificent silver color. Its emerald eyes were like big jewels, too, making it cuter than the adult dragons. Cassandra was exhausted after giving birth, but she couldn't forget about their current situation. They had been hidden in this cave for several hours.

The teenage boys had come back twice to give them information about the situation outside. As she had expected, the Second Prince was absolutely furious. His men were raiding the Diamond City, looking everywhere for her, searching every house, and threatening people. As Chantra had promised, none of the villagers would tell them a

thing about the young concubine hidden behind the waterfall. However, Cassandra knew it wouldn't be that easy.

While the three women were busy cleaning their hands nearby and chatting about how to go back without being noticed, the two sisters exchanged a look.

"How did you manage to leave?" asked Missandra. "You said you jumped from this crazy waterfall... Is Lady Kareen alright?"

"They caught me right after you left. Princess Phetra was there, too."

"That crazy bitch! ...They didn't hurt you, did they? How did you escape then?"

Cassandra took a deep breath.

"Missandra, I need to tell you something..."

The younger sister frowned.

"What is it?"

"When they caught me, Phetra tried to attack me. Dahlia got between us, and she... Missandra, Dahlia was killed."

Her sister stayed speechless for a moment, completely shocked. Cassandra knew this was a huge toll for her. The two girls had bonded a lot in the last few weeks, and even Cassandra herself still couldn't believe this had happened. Missandra's lower lip trembled.

"W... what?"

"Missandra, I am so sorry. Phetra killed her while she tried to protect me."

"Are you sure she's...?"

Cassandra nodded. There was no way Dahlia had survived. Cassandra even suspected the poor girl was already dead when she had fled the scene.

Missandra took a deep breath in, shaking her head. Cassandra could tell she was trying hard not to break down. A few tears ran down her sister's eyes, as Missandra nodded frenetically.

"I...I see."

“Missandra, I’m sorry.”

“Why are you the one being sorry? Dahlia tried to protect you from those monsters, Hinue. Don’t be sorry when she died to protect you! You should be sorry those people aren’t paying a heavy price for that now! How... How did all of this even happen! Everything was fine just hours ago.”

Cassandra still couldn’t believe everything that had happened, either. It felt unreal. She couldn’t understand why she was a suspect in Prince Sephir’s death, or why the Emperor would send Vrehan to get her. The old Emperor definitely knew what was going on between the Second and Third Princes. Why would he send Vrehan, of all people? Something didn’t feel right about all of this.

“For once, I wish Lady Shareen or the Prince were here to slaughter them!” growled Missandra. “Those horrible siblings deserve worse than death, even the God of Death ripping their limbs apart would not be enough!”

Cassandra wished Kairen or his sister were there, too. She missed her Prince more than ever. His baby was brought to this world, and they were already in so much danger. Had Krai felt the egg hatching? Was the Black Dragon on the way back already? The latest news they got from Lady Kareen was not too bad. Her medical kits helped the war efforts a lot, but there was no clue about the War God being able to leave the front. Kairen was probably fighting on the very frontline, not the kind of place one could walk away from just like that. Cassandra didn’t even know if any of her letters got to him. Probably some general was collecting them halfway, but there was no way to call him there now.

Either way, the young concubine had to accept the fact that she would have to survive without her Prince’s protection for now.

“Where do we go, now?” sighed Missandra. “We can’t go back to the Diamond Palace or the Diamond City, this horrible Prince is already everywhere looking for you, and that horrible dragon of his too. Shall we go to the Onyx Castle you had mentioned? You should be safe there, no? We can try to hide while we travel to the North.”

“No,” replied her older sister, shaking her head. “That will be the first place Vrehan will look for me. He will definitely send men to all the routes to the North, thinking I’ll be seeking Shareen’s help.”

“But Lady Shareen will know of the situation by now, won’t she? If we just waited a bit longer.”

“Lady Kareen said Shareen would be coming in a few days, but we can’t wait that long. The longer we stay here, the more we put these people in danger. Even if these people are very nice, there is no guarantee one of them won’t give up and talk about this waterfall. Plus, they will need to do a lot of travelling from here to the City to bring us necessities. What if Vrehan or his dragon find us before Lady Shareen arrives? We can’t stay hidden here, and we cannot do nothing either. Plus, I’m worried Lady Shareen might not be able to stop Vrehan and Phetra, even if she comes here, he’s a Prince after all.”

“What then?”

Missandra was really worried. She understood Cassandra’s reasoning, but how far could they go with a newborn baby and her sister who had just given birth? Moreover, a baby dragon wasn’t small enough to be hidden so easily!

“We can’t stay here. I escaped the Palace from this very waterfall. We are so close, if they think about checking nearby they might find us just like that. Even in Diamond City, they will keep looking through every house to find me. They know Lady Kareen’s people would help me. No, I think we should head to the Capital.”

“The Capital? Are you crazy! Vrehan already controls everything there!”

“That’s exactly why. First, he won’t expect us to go there. Secondly, we both have friends who can help us once we reach the capital. Also, my priority, for now, is to see if the Emperor is fine, and find out what happened there. I don’t believe the Emperor sent Vrehan to catch me, I think there’s something going on. Don’t you think it is strange that Princess Phetra is here too?”

“Now that you mention it... Wasn’t that crazy bitch supposed to be imprisoned or married?”

“Exactly. Something doesn’t feel right about all this. I don’t understand why the Emperor would even allow them to be here, and I’m worried something happened in the Capital. I need to check if the Emperor is okay, and also, he’s the only one, other than Kairen, who can stop Vrehan!”

“But... Lady Shareen, maybe with Prince Anour...”

“We don’t know if Anour will come with her, Missandra, and even if he does, I doubt he can stop Vrehan. He’s less than half his age, and certainly not as cunning as Vrehan. Even Lady Kareen wasn’t able to oppose him! I really have a bad feeling about everything going on. We can’t risk staying here, we don’t know exactly when

Lady Shareen will be here, if she will be able to stop them from capturing me, and they can find us any minute.”

Missandra kept shaking her head, thinking this was a terrible idea. It felt like going straight into the snake’s nest instead of running away! However, Cassandra had never looked so determined. Maybe it was because she had just become a mother, with a baby to protect, or because she was pushed to her last resort, but her older sister looked stronger than ever before.

“Listen, Missandra. We need to get out of this territory unnoticed. You and I both know how to survive in the wild, and with a young dragon with us, we won’t have to worry about predators.”

“You’re saying we should travel off-road?”

“Exactly. There are mostly forests from here to the Capital, and it’s less than a week’s journey if we walk fast, this way. Prince Vrehan won’t think two women and a baby will make it without traveling through the usual routes, he will have every road checked. As long as we can get far enough from Diamond City, he won’t know how we got away, and we will be able to rest in smaller cities and villages.”

Missandra nodded, understanding Cassandra’s plan. The two of them kept talking for a while, thinking of how to secure their escape and go unnoticed. Chantra, and her daughter and niece had listened to everything and stepped in.

“Are you sure you will be alright, Your Highness? I wish there was something more we could do for you.”

“Actually, you can,” said Missandra, determined.

She took out her knife and, without warning, suddenly cut off her long hair, leaving only a very short bob cut. Cassandra was speechless, but just like her, Missandra was determined. She watched the big strand in her hand, still tied in a braid, and nodded before giving it to the woman.

“This is almost the same color as my sister’s, they won’t be able to tell the difference. Disperse this in the North, in the river or the forest, anywhere as long as they end up finding it and think we went there.”

“Missandra...”

“It’s just hair,” she said, turning to her sister. “I don’t care at all. I get your point, Cassandra. but this time, it’s my turn to protect you, okay? If there’s one thing I’m good at, it’s tricking people. I promise I’ll get us out of here.”