

Chapter 3

That night, Cassandra slept in one of the servants' rooms. There were several available, so it was no inconvenience for her to take one. Even if Nebora insisted she sleep upstairs, being all alone in the Prince's chambers was too intimidating for Cassandra. Moreover, the bedroom she was given was quite decent. It was simple, with wood furniture, like a bed and a desk, just enough for someone to sleep in comfortably. From what she had seen in Nebora and Bina's rooms, they were free to decorate as they wished, too.

She slept well, but because she had already slept so long the day before, Cassandra was up early. Quickly getting dressed, she went to the kitchen, not thinking she'd see anyone at this early hour. But Bina was there along with another girl and a boy, all standing around chatting. They all looked younger than herself, around fourteen or fifteen years old. Upon seeing her come in, Bina stood up.

"Cassie!"

She walked up to her and turned to the others.

"This is Cassandra, who I just told you about! She's the one with the fruit peels!"

Cassandra recognized the other girl as well. She was the one who was scared of the dragon the previous day in the inner court with her cart.

"Hi... I'm Prunie." She nodded shyly.

"I'm Helmond," said the boy.

"Prunie is a servant like me, Helm works at the stables!" said Bina, joyously.

"Nice to meet you both."

"Hey, Cassandra, do you know how to make breakfast? We're so hungry, but none of us can cook..."

"Would you show me where we keep the food?"

"Sure!"

For the next half hour, Cassandra made breakfast for everyone while she listened to them gossip. Those three, being the youngest, were quite chatty and lively. She quickly learned that Prunie and Bina had been recruited around the same time this year, while Helmond was Patrina's nephew. By the time Cassandra was done making breakfast, Nebora had appeared too, her black curls all tangled.

"The kids made you make breakfast?" she asked while yawning.

"It's fine, I like cooking. There's enough for everyone."

"Great. I'll make some tea..."

Soon enough, all five of them sat around the table to eat, everyone complimenting Cassandra's cooking. Curious, Helm and Bina asked Cassandra lots of questions about the Capital, as they had never been before. She politely answered their endless questions for a while, as the others ate silently.

Suddenly, the roof over their heads made a terrifying noise, like it was about to cave in. Everyone froze as the walls trembled, too. Nebora was petrified.

"What was that?"

"There aren't any earthquakes here, right?" asked Bina, scared.

Cassandra got up as the roof shook again, like some storm was over their heads. When she heard a loud growl, she finally understood and walked outside.

Indeed, Krai's gigantic front paws were on the roof of the building, and the Black Dragon was growling, its claws scratching the walls. Krai didn't even seem to realize the whole building was about to collapse from the extra weight. Cassandra walked all the way to the inner court until she could see the dragon's head. Behind her, all the other servants who had left the kitchen to follow her were petrified.

"It's the Master's dragon!" Bina whispered.

Prunie kept looking at Cassandra as Nebora grabbed her arm, trying to hold her back.

"Don't approach, Cassandra. His Highness' dragon will kill you!"

However, she kept walking until the dragon finally turned its head and spotted her. Immediately, it jumped down from the building and trotted towards her with a loud growl. She heard the screams of fear behind her, but didn't turn around. Instead,

Cassandra stayed very still until Krai stopped in front of her, sniffing and tilting its head to the side. She took a peek at its empty back.

“Did you come back alone? What about your Master?” Cassandra asked the dragon, while scratching its head.

If Krai had understood her, it didn’t bother to give her an answer. Instead, it was just growling quietly and turning its head from one side to the other, begging for more scratches. Behind her, she heard Nebora speak.

“I can’t believe you...”

“He’s quite nice,” said Cassandra.

“Nice? I saw that dragon eat ten men at once! It didn’t even chew! And you’re petting it like some cat... What kind of woman are you?”

Cassandra couldn’t help but chuckle. Indeed, she had seen Krai kill people, quite gruesomely, in fact. But, for now, the Black Dragon just laid down in the inner court, closing its eyes and letting her scratch its head.

“I wonder why His Highness didn’t come back as well?” Cassandra asked.

“They are not always together. That dragon pretty much does whatever it pleases most of the time,” said Nebora. “Our Lord is probably still at the Military Camp.”

“Is it far from here?” asked Cassandra.

“By foot, it would take a few days. On the dragon’s back, maybe an hour or so. The Military Camp is quite large, almost like a city itself, and right at the Empire’s border too. Around two hundred thousand men.”

That was a rather large number considering this Castle appeared quite... empty. For such a large beast, that number of soldiers probably didn’t even compare, though, as Krai could probably protect the castle on its own. Cassandra looked down at the dragon that was about to doze off under her pets.

No wonder this Empire was so powerful compared to the others. With seven dragons, they could probably take over any country on a whim.

“I don’t know how you can stay so close to it. It could eat you in one bite and use your bones as toothpicks!”

Nebora was still being very brave, standing a few paces away while all three of the others had literally run away. Cassandra, however, wasn't scared at all. Despite its gigantic size, the hot breath, and sharp fangs, she didn't feel any animosity coming from the dragon. She waited until it seemed like Krai was asleep and snoring in the middle of the inner court, to walk back to Nebora, who had her arms crossed.

"I don't know if you're insane or lucky."

"I could be both? Come on, we should get to work," chuckled Cassandra.

The two women went back to the kitchen, cleaning the dishes, and talking. Compared to the cold shoulder she had given her the previous day, Nebora's attitude had completely changed. She was still very blunt and a bit rude at times, but as she showed Cassandra everything they did in the Castle, all hints of hatred were disappearing. Instead, she seemed to treat the young woman like a peer and explained to her how everything was handled patiently.

"There aren't many rooms to take care of," Nebora explained as they were bringing clean sheets upstairs. "But there are only a few of us and Patrina is always making sure everything is spotless. She will even have us clean a room three times a day if she sees a little speck of dust."

"Has she always worked for His Highness?"

"No, she used to work for His Highness's mother at the Palace. Her daughter was murdered in one of the jealous schemes between the concubines. After that, she asked to be sent away from the Palace and ended up here."

Cassandra was shocked to hear such a story. Seeing a woman as resilient as Patrina, she had no idea.

"You're lucky to have been brought here," continued Nebora. "You would have been killed within a week back at the Palace. It's famous for being a nest of snakes."

She nodded slowly as they placed new sheets on the Prince's bed. She had already seen it herself. The violence, the death... Not only for the slaves. Even a concubine like Lyria, who was untouchable in the Capital, had been killed on the spot only a week after entering the Palace. It was truly a scary place.

"So, no one comes here?"

Nebora seemed to think for a bit, while folding a fur cloak.

“Aside from his sister, not really.”

“Princess Shareen?”

“You know her?”

“I’ve...met her.”

Cassandra couldn’t help blushing as she remembered the incident. That Princess Shareen was truly one of a kind! Thankfully, Nebora didn’t notice her cheeks going red as she was taking care of the dust on the curtains. Meanwhile, Cassandra changed the candles and added a batch of herbs in a basket.

“Those two are close, from what I’ve seen. Even if she is a total weirdo... Don’t get close to that woman, she’s really dangerous. There are some crazy rumors about her, and I wouldn’t be surprised if half of them are true. But that’s pretty much it for visitors. Our Lord isn’t the social type...What is that?”

She was pointing at the basket of dried herbs Cassandra was putting next to the window.

“Just so the room will smell good. I’ll open the window a bit, too, so it’ll smell even better.”

“Oh, I see. I’ll open the other one then. Do you need to... Ah!!!”

Nebora’s scream resonated throughout the room, making Cassandra almost drop her basket. She turned around to see what was wrong, only to discover that the big window Nebora had tried to open, now had a wall of scales blocking it, with a red eye moving around in the middle.

Cassandra rushed to Nebora’s side, making sure she was alright, but it was hard not to laugh. Krai’s big muzzle was trying to get inside, and the dragon was making odd growls; its eyes looking around.

“No, no, you’re too big!” she scolded. “What are you doing...?”

She could only imagine what it was like from the outside. Had it tried to climb up the Castle to get to the tower? Its head was still too big for the window, though it kept trying to maneuver around to fit through. Cassandra felt helpless.

“You’re too big! Oh, come on...”

She tried to push its muzzle away, until it was completely out. It kept looking at her though, with a disappointed look. Next to her, Nebora was still trying to stop her legs from trembling and get back up. Cassandra helped her, trying to ignore the loud growls.

“I can’t believe that dragon! It scared the shit out of me!”

“Do you think the whole tower could collapse...”

“It should be fine, it’s not the first dragon to live here. None of them tried to actually get inside though! Let’s just hope its Master will call it back soon. I don’t think I can work if it keeps popping up at every window!”

“Can he call from so far?”

“What? Oh, yes. Dragon tamers have some special bond with their dragon. Even if our Lord was all the way back at the Palace, this one would fly to him anytime he needs him.”

Cassandra was completely astonished at that fact. She had never heard about any of this before. The dragons were considered deities here. It was already very rare for anyone to be able to spot one, as they always stayed with their Masters.

Ignoring the annoyed growls, she closed the window where Krai was lurking.

“I had no idea...”

“That’s normal, they don’t leak much information about the Palace to the outside. Here, Our Lord doesn’t really care, I guess. Come on, let’s finish quickly here, that big red eye is creeping me out...”

Krai eventually got bored and went away long before they were done cleaning the room. The dragon had probably gone to hunt somewhere. When they got back downstairs, it was nowhere to be seen.

The two women went to the kitchen, where Prunie and Marian were sorting out vegetables. Cassandra walked up to them, taking what looked like a carrot from the basket.

“Is it fresh enough?”

“Not really,” said Marian with a sigh. “But it’s hard to get fresh ones around here. The closest farmer is still quite far away.”

“Why is no one cultivating the soils around the Castle?” asked Cassandra.

She had wondered this while flying over the land, too. Aside from scattered houses, the whole area around the Castle was pretty much deserted. She kept looking at the vegetables, but no matter how she looked at them, they just weren’t very good. Especially not when compared to what she had seen in the Capital.

“They say the soil is not good for cultivating here.”

Cassandra frowned. Her native land was much worse than this, yet they still had always been able to provide for themselves. The vegetables gathered in the baskets were definitely ones that fit warmer climates though, like the Capital, not what they should have been growing here.

“What about the pastures? The livestock?”

Next to her, Nebora sighed.

“Cassandra, the livestock were not too happy to be here, they left ages ago. Did you forget? We have the biggest predator flying around the area!”

Cassandra was still thinking about the farming problem that night as she cooked with Patrina and Nebora. The food they were slicing and mashing wasn’t so bad, but it wasn’t particularly fresh either. With no proper farmers around to tend the land and provide food, no wonder the whole area was deserted.

“What about trading then?”

“You’re thinking about that again?” sighed Nebora. “Trading is what we do. Usually we can only buy at the nearest village, but it’s two hours from here using the horses.”

“Is the village big? Could we go there?”

“Certainly not now!” said Patrina, frowning. “Just focus on your task and stop chatting so much!”

Having said that, she left the kitchen to go to the storage room. As soon as she was gone, Nebora moved closer to Cassandra and whispered.

“She’s not wrong, you know. You may not know this because you came from the Capital, but this area is terribly unsafe at night. As soon as the sun sets, a lot of dangerous beasts start to roam around. You would get killed and eaten in minutes.”

Cassandra had no idea. Indeed, the Capital was a large and highly guarded City, as most of the Empire's officials were located there. Only the Governors had residences on their designated territories, though some high-ranked nobles had built secondary residences outside of the Capital walls. She also knew of a few other big cities that existed and were doing quite well on their own, but from the day she had been sold to her first master, she had never taken a step out of the Capital.

"I'm also not sure when His Highness will come back, but if I were you, I would stay close to the castle."

Cassandra couldn't help but blush a bit when she heard those words. She wondered when he would be back too.

Krai also hadn't come back. Wherever the Black Dragon had gone, it must have been pretty far, because it was nowhere to be seen; not even from the Prince's tower. The two women kept chatting until Patrina came back with a grumpy look on her face.

"We have to make an extra portion."

Nebora frowned.

"What? That pig is eating here again?"

Patrina just nodded, and went outside again to call Prunie and Marian. Cassandra finished cutting her vegetables and turned to Nebora.

"Who are we talking about?"

Nebora rolled her eyes.

"The Governor, Grovah. The man is a fucking pig. He acts as he pleases here, and if His Highness is gone, he likes to order us around. He has his own manor but this is where he spends most of his time. He even took a room here!"

"Why does he stick around?"

"Because he is so full of himself and likes the Castle better. And because he gets to act like a fucking pervert with the servants here, too. I heard he touched all of his servant girls back at his manor, despite having a wife and five concubines!"

Cassandra almost dropped the pot she was carrying.

"What? Even here?"

She thought of the young girls like Bina and Prunie, who were only fourteen and fifteen years old. Sadly, it was not uncommon for officials to abuse their powers and have their “fun” with the servants, but this was the Prince’s Palace!

“Don’t worry, he wouldn’t dare touch you. You belong to His Highness, and the dirtbag is way too scared of him.”

Cassandra was certainly not satisfied by that. She wasn’t thinking about herself. She worried for the servant girls here, being subjected to that kind of treatment.

“Does this happen often?”

“Don’t think too much about it, Cassie. He just messes around with us when we bring him his food, or when he sees us in the corridors, that’s all.”

“Are you talking about the pig?”

Marian, Prunie, and Bina had all just entered the kitchen to help, with their hands full. Cassandra and Nebora immediately stood up to go and help them. Marian frowned.

“That man is such a pig! He is so fat and ugly, and...”

“That’s not the point here, Marian,” sighed Nebora.

“I hate him,” murmured Prunie. “He always tries to touch my butt...”

“He does that with me too,” added Bina. “He’s really horrible. He always talks about how he has sex with his servants when I’m in the room giving him his food, and he says I’m wearing too many clothes for a girl.”

Cassandra felt so utterly disgusted hearing all this, she suddenly slammed the pot on the table, making everyone jump.

“I will do it.”

“Do what?”

“Bring him his food.”

Nebora looked at her as if she was stupid.

“Cassandra, no. He may be a pervert, but the man is a Governor, and you’re a slave. If you do anything he doesn’t like, he can have you imprisoned, and His Highness is not even here to protect you!”

“He cannot rape or kill me, Nebora. No matter what, I don’t have as many risks as you, and honestly, I don’t really care about being imprisoned. Regardless, I’m not letting any of you approach him.”

“Cassie...” muttered Bina, worried.

“What if he tortures you?” sighed Nebora. “If he gets reckless and His Highness is not here...”

Cassandra shook her head.

“He won’t. Don’t worry about me. Now, let’s just cook as usual.”

The girls listened to her, but they still tried to talk her out of it. Even if they seemed scared, Bina and Prunie said they could take it themselves, but Cassandra refused. When the tray was ready, she asked where she was supposed to go, and headed to the Governor’s self-designated chambers.

A man’s voice ordered her to enter. Cassandra noticed the room was probably the most furnished and richly decorated in the whole Castle. It really was as if the Governor owned the place, except that this was only the third floor. A big dog suddenly barked at her, and Cassandra stood to the side. Thankfully, the dog was chained and couldn’t reach her. It just kept growling and barking, loudly.

“Who are you? Where are the usual girls?!” the man suddenly yelled.

Cassandra frowned. He wasn’t even properly dressed, wearing only some sort of bathrobe that looked ridiculously tight on him. It was the man whom she had seen run after the Prince upon her arrival at the Castle. He was short, fat, and even a bit bald. As she came closer, Cassandra couldn’t help but be repulsed by him and his greasy skin. She dropped the tray on the table, a bit loudly.

“The girls are eating, Sir. Here is your meal.”

“I want the little one to bring it! With the soft skin.”

“She is eating, and your meal is already here.”

He pointed a finger at Cassandra, his eyes gleaming with anger.

“You insolent little whore! You think you can talk back to me? You may be His Highness’ favorite, but you’re still just a slave! Just wait until I whip the hell out of you!”

The Governor got up and seized a whip that was on his bedside table and quickly walked up to her.

“Go ahead.”

He suddenly stopped, surprised by Cassandra’s calm tone. His fingers were trembling on the whip. He had never seen a slave unafraid to talk back to him, let alone stand tall and look directly at him like this woman was!

“W... What did you say?”

“I said go ahead. You can whip me.”

The Governor was utterly confused. The woman had way too much confidence! What was she hiding? Was she waiting for him to whip her so she could complain to the Prince? With the wounds as proof? He stared at her for a while, hesitating. Cassandra wasn’t moving at all, or betraying any fear. After a long pause, the Governor lowered his hand with the whip.

“You arrogant whore... You think you are higher than me? You’ll see! Guards!”

Immediately, two of the Palace guards, whom Cassandra had not interacted with yet, ran into the chambers.

“Take her to the dungeon! Have this wench stay there for three days and three nights! You’ll see what it costs to be arrogant to a Lord like me! His Highness will understand!”

And just like that, Cassandra was taken away to the Castle’s dungeon, showing no resistance.

The guards brought her underground to the cells, all aligned down a long hall, and put her in the farthest one. It only had a bed made of straw and a very small window at the very top of the wall that allowed in a very small amount of natural light. The guards weren’t rude, but they also didn’t say a single word to her. Instead, they just left.

Cassandra sighed. She had been in worse situations, but still... Her own stubbornness had landed her in the dungeons. She checked her cell for any rats or stagnant water,

and arranged the straw to sit on. She sighed again. No doubt the Prince would be mad about this upon his return.

“Cassie!”

She had only started dozing off when she heard Nebora. She raised her head, and saw her new friend standing on the other side of the bars as she walked up to her.

“What are you doing here?”

“I should be the one asking you that, you stubborn woman! I told you this would happen! Don’t you have any instinct of self-preservation? You would be dead if you weren’t His Highness’ concubine!”

“Did he do anything else after he put me in here?”

Nebora sighed deeply.

“No... I think you scared him a bit. He chased everyone out. I told the girls to ignore him for now, but... Girl, you have to spend a long time in here!”

“I’ve been in worse places. What is this?” she asked, pointing to the little basket Nebora had brought.

“It’s for you. I brought you some food, and a blanket too. It gets cold here at night...”

She handed her everything through the bars, under Cassandra’s surprised eyes.

“How were you allowed to...?”

“It was easy, the guards aren’t bad guys. They let me through without arguing when I said you were His Highness’ concubine. Well, that, and I promised them each a kiss.”

Cassandra chuckled. She was truly grateful, and thanked Nebora for all she had done to make her imprisonment better.

“Just wait until His Highness gets back... I hope his dragon will chew that damn Governor slowly!”

“I just hope he leaves you alone for a while...”

“Don’t worry, we are used to it. And Patrina is pissed you got thrown in the dungeon, she isn’t going to let him act as he pleases.”

“Nebora! Five minutes!” yelled one of the guards from down the hall.

She sighed.

“I have to go, girl. Take care of yourself, alright? I’ll be back tomorrow, I promise.”

She left quickly, leaving Cassandra completely alone again.

The night was extremely cold. If it wasn’t for the blanket Nebora had brought her, she would probably have gotten sick, but at least there weren’t any rats. Cassandra fell asleep remembering the warm embrace of the Prince, and the soft feel of a fur cloak...

“Where is she?”

A cold voice suddenly woke her up. She heard a scream, and a dragon’s furious growl. Cassandra stood, keeping her blanket around her, totally confused. It was still the middle of the night, but countless lights were lit up outside.

She heard several people walking quickly through the dungeon towards her cell. A bit wary, she took a couple of steps back into a corner.

The Prince suddenly appeared in front of her.

“My Lord...”

He drew his sword and, without warning, brutally shattered the hinges holding her cell’s door, breaking through them as if they were as flimsy as a sheet of paper. He was clearly furious when he walked up to her.

“What are you doing in here?”

Without letting her answer, he suddenly swooped Cassandra off her feet, carrying her like a princess, as usual. They left the cell, followed by two panicked soldiers. She hadn’t even spent one night there!

The Prince took her out to the inner court which was brightly lit despite the late hour. Krai was there, growling furiously. All the servants, and a few guards, were gathered with worried expressions. Nebora and the others seemed relieved to see her when she appeared though.

“Your... Your Highness!”

Cassandra suddenly realized the Governor was there too, only he was being crushed under Krai's gigantic paw. The man's mouth was covered in blood, like someone had beaten him.

"S...see! She's fine! I just put her there to teach her a...a lesson!"

But Kairen didn't bother to look at him or even stop. He kept walking back to the main area of the Castle without a single glance behind him.

"My... My Lord!"

Krai growled even louder at the whimpering man and the next second, the disgusting sound of flesh and bones being crushed was heard, before a new scream resonated.

Cassandra didn't even see the Governor's last moments. Carried by Kairen against his chest, she only heard and that was enough. Very quickly, she was whisked all the way to his bedroom and thrown on the bed.

"My Lord... I didn't think you'd be back so quickly."

"What the fuck were you doing in his chambers?"

She was surprised by his question. Kairen started undoing the thick armor he was wearing, the cold metal loudly falling to the floor. Cassandra was searching for words, trying to gather her thoughts while sitting there.

"I brought him his dinner..."

Kairen looked furious. Wearing only his pants now, he threw his shirt across the room and crawled on the bed until he was facing her. He grabbed Cassandra's waist, pulling her against him, and kissed her forcefully without warning. She didn't even have time to breathe. With his tongue on hers, she awkwardly held on to his shoulder to keep her balance. She was sitting a bit on top of him, and he grabbed her hair, keeping her close to him.

When he finally let her go, Cassandra's lips were numb from the intense kissing. She tried to catch her breath.

"Your lips are cold," groaned Kairen.

"The dungeon was cold..."

He clicked his tongue, annoyed, and kissed her again, even more intensely. Cassandra was completely unprepared. It was only moments ago that she was still alone in that cold prison cell. Now she was on his bed, in his chambers, illuminated and warmed up by candles and a roaring fire. She did her best to answer his kiss, still getting used to his savage intensity. The way he played with her tongue was restless. Cassandra could feel her skin warming up, the change so fast she shivered under his fingers and the sensation of his hot palms caressing her body.

Kairen's lips weren't stopping. He kissed her lips, her cheeks, her jawline, her neck, moving lower and lower. Cassandra struggled to undo her dress, taking off the laces and getting rid of it before he would rip it apart again. It was an embarrassing position for her to be in, straddling her master, her arms behind his back while he was caressing and kissing her breasts. She caressed his short black hair, closing her eyes as he kept kissing her breasts, sucking her little pink extremities.

"My... Lord..." She gasped.

Her cheeks were red, and she was flush from excitement, a fire burning within her. Kairen, his hands on her hips, finally raised his head up to kiss her again, a bit gentler this time, as if he had been appeased. Cassandra answered his kiss, almost guiding it as she was on top, and able to keep up. One of his hands climbed up to hold her neck's nape, while the other went down, caressing her entrance slowly.

She shivered at the sensation of his fingers between her legs, rubbing against her sacred parts. He caressed her slit thoroughly, reaching out for her entrance in slow motions. Cassandra moaned faintly, her desire flowing as soon as his fingers penetrated her. She held onto his back, biting her lower lip as the feeling grew stronger. She could feel the bulge in his pants against her thigh, and that only made her more excited. Was she really already used to these sensations? A bit ashamed, she couldn't help but react and move against his fingers. Kairen smiled faintly.

He undid his pants, freeing his dick, and positioned it against Cassandra's entrance. Guiding her, he slowly pushed in, enjoying her long moan. She held onto his shoulders, breathing hard and adjusting to the sensation, the fullness....

"Move," he suddenly whispered into her ear.

Cassandra felt the blood rushing to her cheeks and ears. He wanted her to move? On him? She could barely endure it already... But Kairen waited, only moving slightly under her, and that was far from enough. She bit her lip again, and progressively, moved her hips on him. She could feel his cock rubbing inside her, and panted heavily from the sensation. She liked it, and she wanted more.

Forgetting her embarrassment, she kept moving, finding her rhythm, guided by his hands on her hips. Kairen matched his movements to hers, grinding his pelvis fiercely each time, Cassandra moaning with each collision.

He kissed her neck after each thrust. She was crying out so loudly from their passionate love making. Cassandra felt like this was surreal. She could feel him under her, responding to her movements, filling her up as he held her firmly yet gently. She gasped and moaned, widening her legs over him, feeling the pleasure grow and her rationality wane.

As she started to lose some energy, Kairen took over in full force, forcing his hips up, thrusting faster, leaving her no room for rest. She couldn't control it. Cassandra felt that urge, that explosion coming, and moaned harder with each of his thrusts. He held her by the waist so she wouldn't get away. She clenched around his thick cock. she exploded, her orgasm overtaking her in a huge wave of pleasure. She cried out, long and loud.

A couple of hours later, she was laying on her side, exhausted, her head on the Prince's shoulder. Her lower body was completely numb after their passionate sex. Of course, just once hadn't been enough. She blushed thinking about all the positions she had taken to satisfy her Master.

Kairen had his eyes closed, but his fingers were lazily caressing her shoulder.

"Don't ever go to another man's chambers again," he suddenly said.

Cassandra looked at him, confused.

"My Lord, could it be you're..."

But before she could end that sentence, Kairen suddenly leaned to face her, looking angry.

"You are mine. All of you. I told you, if another man touches you, I'll kill him."

Right after that sentence, he leaned over to kiss her, pinning her to the mattress. She couldn't help but answer his kiss, like a conditioned response. Cassandra was starting to like his forceful ways. She felt warm in his embrace, and safe...

She fell asleep shortly after as Kairen held her tightly against his chest. Cassandra almost didn't need the blanket, as the Prince's body was hot enough naturally.

When she woke the next morning, Kairen was already up. Grabbing the fur cloak to cover her bare chest, Cassandra slowly sat up, feeling some back pain. The Prince was putting on his pants, and noticed she was awake.

“You can sleep more.”

“I’m fine... Are you going back to the Military Camp?”

“Yes. You’re coming too.”

Cassandra took a few seconds to process what he had just said.

“With you? My Lord, I can’t go to a military camp!”

“Why not?”

“It’s not a place for... women...”

She had wanted to say concubines at first, but that term was still too new for her to use it for herself. Indeed, it was truly unheard of for a woman to visit a military camp! It was a place for men only, soldiers. Women were never allowed to be warriors or to be inside military camps.

“If I leave you here, who knows which man’s chambers I’ll find you in next...”

“My Lord! I wouldn’t...”

“I don’t care. You’re coming with me.”

His sentence was clearly an order, and Cassandra didn’t dare argue any further. She couldn’t believe he was so jealous and distrusting after that stupid incident. A bit unhappy, Cassandra grabbed her dress and put it back on. While doing so, she suddenly remembered Nebora’s words about asking for some clothes.

“My Lord... Madam Patrina mentioned I would need more clothes if I stay here. There’s only this one dress.”

For a moment, Kairen hadn’t seemed to have listened to her, as he was putting his boots back on. However, the Prince got up and walked to the other side of the room, opening one of the big chests.

“Just take whatever you need.”

Cassandra left the bed and walked over to the chest thinking she may find an extra dress or two, but to her surprise, the chest wasn't filled with clothes but with... gold bars! She was speechless as she looked down at dozens of perfect gold bars, lined up in several rows. She had never seen so much money in her entire life!

One gold coin alone could buy several meals for a family - exactly how much money was there? Just a single gold bar could buy hundreds of dresses!

“My Lord, this is far too much!”

“Then just take one and buy what you need.”

She looked at him, truly shocked. Did he really think she would need more than one in the first place? Cassandra didn't even know what to say. She knew the Imperial Family was richer than most, but this was truly too unbelievable. She tried not to think about the two other chests in the room, and just quickly grabbed one of the bars. Even its weight was impressive. Would she even be able to use that in a normal shop? She probably could ask Patrina later.

She quickly closed the chest, wondering why he had such a thing in his room, when someone knocked at the door.

“Your breakfast, Your Highness.”

Marian walked in, carrying a large tray of food. A bit embarrassed to have the young girl serve her, Cassandra walked over to help her. Her friend faintly smiled as Cassandra handed her the gold bar. Marian had exactly the same expression as her, eyes wide open and fixed on the shining bar before her. She glanced at the Prince, worried, but Kairen was putting his shirt back on, not even looking in their direction.

“Marian, can you give this to Patrina and tell her it's for buying new clothes for everyone?”

“F...For everyone? But...”

“Just ask her to handle it until I come back, all right?”

“Y...Yes...”

Marian held the gold bar with the tip of her fingers, as if she was afraid it would explode in her hands. Then, she ran off. Cassandra wasn't only doing this because it was too much money just for her. She didn't feel right being the only one to receive

new clothes when she had noticed the other servants had some that were a bit too used, or in the case of Bina and Prunie, too short. She trusted Patrina would know how to allocate the money fairly.

Cassandra turned to Kairen, hoping he wouldn't be mad at her for sharing the gold bar, but the Prince didn't seem to care at all about the conversation. He had just finished dressing as he went to sit on one of the armchairs in front of the food.

"Aren't you hungry?" he asked as she stood there.

"Ah, yes..."

She walked over and took the seat next to his so she could start eating. After a few minutes of silence between them, she suddenly remembered something she had been meaning to ask for a while.

"My Lord, how come you came back so soon? Nebora said you usually stay longer at the Military Camp."

Kairen frowned a bit.

"It was boring. And Krai was annoying, too."

"He came back before you did..."

"That stupid dragon flew back here on his own. He was too bored at the camp and kept looking for you."

Cassandra couldn't help but smile at that, thinking about how Krai had missed her. She bit her lip, hesitating slightly before asking.

"Did you miss me as well?"

Kairen suddenly stopped eating, and turned to her. His black eyes on her were making her blush. Oh, how he was scrutinizing her! Cassandra, too embarrassed to endure his gaze any longer, looked down. That's when Kairen grabbed her wrist and brought her onto his knees, so abruptly she didn't have time to resist. Her face was suddenly very close to his, and she blushed even more, unable to avoid his stare.

"Why do you think I'm taking you with me this time?" he suddenly whispered.

Grabbing her hair, he brought her closer and Cassandra, overwhelmed, put her arms around his neck, slowly kissing his lips.

“So, His Highness is taking you there? To the Camp?” asked Nebora.

She was helping Cassandra fold some clothes to pack for the journey. They had no idea how long she would be gone, so Nebora had decided to lend her some of her clothes again. Cassandra hesitated, looking at one of the dresses.

“Yes... Nebora, are you sure I can take these?”

“Yes! Patrina will get us new clothes in no time with all that gold you gave her, so don’t worry about it. It’s a pity we only have one red dress, though. Maybe you could try to preserve it?”

Cassandra shook her head.

“It’s fine either way. I’ll just get new ones when I get back.”

“True...Oh, what about jewelry? Do you want us to buy you some?”

“I’m going to the Military Camp, not a party!” sighed Cassandra.

What would jewelry be good for? She was already wearing the slavery collar anyway. Plus, it would only make things heavier and harder to carry. It would probably look weird too. A slave wearing jewelry, that would probably be a first!

Nebora pouted. “Oh, fine. We’ll dress you up once you’re back. Make sure you take some warm cloaks though, it’s freezing up there. You make sure not to get wet, and if it snows, stay inside, all right? And make sure to keep the wood dry. It’s a pain to light up otherwise.”

Cassandra listened to Nebora’s advice carefully, as she had never been so far north before. She was a bit excited at the prospect of seeing snowfall for the first time in her life, but a bit worried about the cold as well. She didn’t even know what a military camp was going to be like.

“Do you need anything else? Patrina packed up some food too, but the trip there will be short with His Highness’ dragon...”

“No, this should be fine. Thank you, Nebora.”

Her friend smiled as they both got up, Cassandra holding her little bag. She only had her dresses, a pair of shoes and a few balms and soaps that Nebora had insisted on her taking. As they left the room, Nebora followed her closely, giving her more advice about the cold.

“And eat more meat,” she said as they reached the inner court. “It can’t be bad for you, skinny girl.”

Cassandra chuckled.

“I got it, Nebora, don’t worry.”

“Why wouldn’t I worry? You’re way too nice and clueless. Oh, and watch out for the men! I mean, they should behave with His Highness around, but...”

“Nebora, I will be fine,” said Cassandra with an amused smile.

To think she was so hostile to her only a couple of days ago. Now Nebora was acting like a worried, older sister. It was a first for Cassandra, but she truly appreciated it. When they walked back into the kitchen, Marian, Prunie and Bina were waiting for her. The three younger girls said goodbye to her, and Cassandra felt her heart tighten a little, seeing that Prunie and Bina had already gotten so attached to her and were sad to see her leave.

“Do you know how long you will stay there?” asked Bina.

“No, His Highness hasn’t said anything.”

“Stop whining, she will probably be back next week,” said Nebora.

“We will pick up some pretty dresses for you!” said Prunie, with a big smile.

“Thank you, Prunie.”

Cassandra gave each of the girls a hug before she went out to the inner court again, all three of them following behind her. The Prince was there, putting a large saddle on Krai’s back. The dragon was waiting patiently, its head turning to Cassandra when she arrived. It had big bags on its back as well, though they still looked like nothing compared to its actual size. Krai let out a loud growl, looking excited. Except for Cassandra and Nebora, all the other girls froze and stepped back from hearing that. They were still terrified by the mere sight of the gigantic Black Beast, and didn’t dare approach. Nebora wasn’t looking so good either, but she didn’t look as afraid, and still managed to follow Cassandra a few steps closer.

“A toothpick...” she grumbled.

“It’s fine, Nebora,” said Cassandra with a little laugh. “I’ll see you later, all right?”

Nebora sighed and stopped staring at Krai to look at Cassandra. Her heart warmed a bit when she looked at the young woman. She was too proud to admit it out loud, but her heart had done a one-eighty about Cassandra, and though she knew why she had hated her at first, she now thought it was silly. Cassandra was loving and lovable, unlike her own prideful personality. She sighed and stepped forward to hug her.

“Be careful, alright?”

“I will,” said Cassandra, hugging her back a bit shyly.

The two girls separated, and Cassandra walked over to Kairen. The Prince immediately took her bag from her hands to put it among the others on Krai’s back and without a word, helped her climb up over the dragon’s sharp scales. He sat behind her, Cassandra right against his chest, and covered her with one of his familiar fur cloaks. It was a bit too warm and stuffy, but Cassandra knew she would need it for later. Kairen didn’t wear anything other than his usual armor, though. Without a glance towards the servants watching them from the ground, he gave a silent signal to Krai, and the dragon took off immediately.

Cassandra watched the others below, but just like before, she was just too frightened and as they got higher, she ended up closing her eyes. Her lips started to feel cold, and she wrapped herself even tighter in the cloak. Would this really be enough in the North frontier? Kairen held her tighter, too. Cassandra was amazed by the warmth of his skin. Did he ever get cold?

Under her, Krai’s scales went from lukewarm to cold, too. Despite it’s natural temperature, the icy wind was even having a cooling effect on the dragon. Cassandra was happy to have the fur and the saddle between her bottom and the dragon’s back, unlike last time.

“How long will it take, My Lord?” she asked when she felt safe enough to open her eyes again.

“Not long,” Kairen replied simply.

Cassandra didn’t ask anything further. Instead, she decided to rest against his chest, and watch the incredible scenery. She was still lacking a few hours of sleep, but she fought against the tiredness to take in the view. It was a breathtaking sight, just like before. She could already see the range of mountains they were headed to, which were much higher than the mountain the Onyx Castle was built on.

Behind them, it was an ocean of green, a forest so vast Cassandra already couldn't see the castle anymore. And to the east, the Great Sea. Cassandra couldn't help but remember her long lost childhood when she saw that dark blue sea. Would she ever be reunited with her younger sister? She was only two years younger... Was she still alive? What did she look like now? Cassandra had tried to search for her for a while back in the Capital, but as a slave, it was just too difficult. Maybe she would be luckier now... Deep in thought, she sighed and caught Kairen's attention.

"Are you too cold?"

"No, my Lord, I was only lost in my thoughts."

"What thoughts?"

Cassandra hesitated for a bit. The Prince's concerns were probably far from her own. Seeing how he was frowning and waiting for her answer, she decided to be honest. Nebora had advised her to be a bit more selfish afterall.

"I wondered if it was possible to look for someone? If we go back to the Capital?"

"Who are you looking for?"

"My younger sister... I lost track of her many years ago."

Kairen stayed silent for a while, and Cassandra wondered what he was thinking. Did he find this annoying? But she had that little glimmer of hope in her heart, and now, she knew it wouldn't disappear anytime soon.

"Maybe," he eventually said.

However, he didn't add anything else to that enigmatic answer. Cassandra only nodded slowly. She wasn't expecting much, but she felt a bit disappointed. She probably wouldn't be able to hear about her younger sister's whereabouts anytime soon... It probably wasn't a good time, either. She had just been brought to the North and most likely wouldn't be back at the Capital again for a while.

"Cassandra."

She looked at the Prince wondering what he wanted, and without a word, he silently kissed her. Cassandra was completely taken by surprise. Kairen's lips were warm and passionate, as he plunged his tongue between hers. She moaned, trying to catch her

breath while responding to him. It was so sudden, if he wasn't holding her so tight she might have fallen off.

Yet, the kiss felt somewhat different, a little sweeter than their usual ones. Cassandra felt his warmth, and her heart felt a bit lighter while answering him. Cassandra was surprised by his sudden display of tenderness. Was he trying to comfort her?

After a while, their lips parted, Cassandra blushing. She was expecting him to say something after that, but he didn't, and only looked forward. She was trying to figure out what it meant when Krai suddenly let out a loud growl.

Cassandra looked down. Far below them, she could see a long building. It took her a while to realize it was actually a very, very large wall, affixed between two mountains. As Krai started descending, she noticed a myriad of tents of various sizes lined up a few kilometers behind the wall, with a few buildings throughout. The Military Camp!

The Black Dragon's growl caught the attention of the army below. As they got further down, all the soldiers lined up in perfect rank, their armor shining under the sun. Cassandra was astonished by the sheer number. How many men were there? A few thousand? She couldn't even try to come up with a number as there were just too many! She even saw flags in front of some ranks, probably to separate them into groups. As Krai was about to land on a large platform, she could hear the men yelling orders.

"Get in order for His Highness' arrival! Faster!"

The Black Dragon finally reached the ground with a loud growl and a few flaps of its wings that sent mini gusts of wind about. Cassandra saw five men in front, all standing perfectly at attention. They were doing a salute and standing tall, waiting for Kairen. The Prince got off the dragon first, climbing and stepping down effortlessly.

"Welcome back, Your Highness. How was your..."

Before the man finished his sentence, he noticed Kairen was already busy helping Cassandra down, ignoring him. The old man, who seemed to be in his fifties, was completely speechless. His eyes were set firmly on Cassandra, wondering if his eyes were deceiving him, before going back to the Prince.

"Your Highness, this woman..."

"She is mine," simply stated Kairen, as if that was enough of an explanation.

Of course, it clearly wasn't! Cassandra felt a bit sorry for the soldiers, and bowed politely, facing them with grace.

"I am Cassandra, My Lord."

Anyone with a military grade high enough to address the Prince was worth calling a Lord, so she decided to use that designation until she could learn their proper names and titles. Hearing such a pretty young woman introduce herself, the old man couldn't avoid introducing himself too, and did so a tad awkwardly.

"Wel... Welcome." That was the best he could do in this strange situation. Who was she? What was she doing with their Commander? Her collar clearly indicated that she was a slave, but the Prince's attitude was nowhere near what it should have been toward a simple slave woman! None of the lieutenants, waiting to salute him, could hide their confusion either.

But Kairen gave them no explanation. He walked away, headed for the camp with Cassandra following close behind him, and Krai right behind her. Even among the soldiers, a large chattering was rising until the old man yelled at them to shut up in front of their Lord.

Cassandra was a bit intimidated following Kairen into this unknown place, but she had already introduced herself and couldn't do anything else about it. With the Prince walking in front, the old man and the other lieutenants had to speed to catch up with him.

They walked past several tents that all seemed to be deserted, but Cassandra figured it was because everyone had come out to welcome the War God back. It was an impressive camp. There were many fire pits, tents, and training grounds. They had clearly been established here for a while and from seeing the perfect cleanliness and order of the place, one could tell this army was trained flawlessly. Not only were the weapons perfectly stored, but the horses were housed quite well, and there were still plenty more spaces available.

Kairen led her to the biggest of all the tents; large and red. Once she entered, Cassandra was impressed by how big and luxurious it was. It could have been a very decent place to live all year round. There was a bed, a large chair that almost seemed like a throne, and a table full of maps and books. In a corner, there was a wardrobe with weapons stored right next to it. Kairen headed for the table to look at the map while Cassandra stood to the side.

She heard some noise outside, and figured it was probably Krai laying its heavy body down next to the tent. For once, it was not fussing about not being able to see her. Maybe the trip had exhausted it enough to need a nap.

“Your Highness!”

The high-ranked soldiers from earlier barged in, and Cassandra stepped further away, retreating closer to the bed. Several of them were looking at her, some even glaring. The old general then spoke up for everyone.

“Your Highness, could you explain this situation? You left without warning and came back with a... a slave woman?”

“My concubine,” rectified Kairen.

The shock was even bigger than before. It was just getting more awkward for Cassandra.

“Your... Congratulations, Your Highness, but I don’t believe this woman should...”

With one glare from Kairen, he suddenly shut up. Whatever he was about to say stuck in his throat from the Prince’s black eyes. The warning was clear.

“Do you have something to say?” Kairen hissed.

After a few seconds of reflection, the old general sighed.

“Can I do...anything for the Lady’s comfort, My Lord?””

