

The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 121

#121 The Last Fights

As if he had understood his father, the little baby had a very serious frown on and was holding on the little plushie's tail fiercely. Despite the overall situation, Kairen's heart warmed up a little at that sight. That child was his son indeed... Brave and strong like his parents. He held him for a little while as if he could learn by heart all of his son's features. Kairen had never been interested in children, but Kassian was different. 5 He was a part of Cassandra and a part of him. Kairen could remember how his mother had been impatient to finally see her son, hold him. They only had one week together, and Kairen had a week away from his newborn. Fate was truly too horrible. He hugged the baby gently. He had never been trained to carry a baby, but somehow, all the right movements came to him naturally, as if it was his instincts guiding him. Kassian didn't seem upset to be carried in the strong, sturdy arm. The baby was actually focused on the plushie. He was holding onto it, but it was more like the toy was put on top of him. With his little mouth forming an O, Kassian looked like he was gauging the plushie. His expression was a bit amusing.

Kairen couldn't help recognizing some of Cassandra's features in Kassian. His little nose, and the shape of his eyes. His iris had hints of green in them, too, but his skin was just a shade lighter than his father, not nearly as white as his mother.

"Oh by the gods!"

Lady Kareen had just arrived behind him and was staring at the baby with eyes filled with emotion. For once, the Imperial Concubine's heart completely melted to the sight of the newborn in Kairen's arms. She seemed at a loss for words, and gently caressed the baby's hands for a few seconds. In Kairen's arm, the baby squealed in excitement upon seeing a new face. She kept smiling gently at him, but Kairen's mind was elsewhere.

“Mother, take him.”

He carefully gave Kassian to his mother, giving a little kiss on the baby’s head before doing so, and took out his weapon. It was unfortunate things were so dire already, but they had very little time for their moving reunion. Shareen was guarding the door for now, but Vrehan’s men knew where they were. Kairen could hear them banging against the doors. It would be a matter of minutes before they broke it and barged in, unless his sister lost patience and went to the other side first.

Kyun!

Kairen almost jumped at the little squeal and looked down. Against his leg, a little silver-scaled dragon was rubbing its back, and looking at him with big green eyes. The War God smiled once again and leaned down to take the little dragon. Kian immediately jumped on his shoulder, which was broad enough for him to hang on comfortably.

“Oh, by the great dragon, he is... perfect!” Exclaimed Lady Shareen on the verge of tears.

Though she wasn’t wrong, the new grandmother was also a bit blinded by the babies’ sight. With her knowledge on Dragons, she could have seen Kian was clearly a bit different from all the other dragons she had ever seen before. He had a longer and leaner body, and his wings were thinner and shorter, too. It was most likely that unless they grew bigger sometime soon, he probably couldn’t stand long flights or heavy weights like Krai did.

Kairen didn’t have time for this, however. Keeping the young dragon on his shoulder, he turned towards the women from before. They were both scared of the War God, but at least, they did not run away. They were already aware of his relationship to Cassandra and Kassian, but he was still an impressive man to see in the flesh.

“Where is Cassandra? He asked.

*L-Lady Cassandra went to the Imperial Palace,” explained one of the women, who was actually Yasora. “She wanted to find and heal the Emperor.”

“She went alone, like that?” Protested Kareen.

“She went with young Lady Missandra!” Added Yasora. “They wanted to find one of the herbal gardens or medicine there, as we didn’t have time to procure any here...”

“She’s not wrong,” sighed Kareen. “That rat Vrehan must have had all the Capital’s apothecaries watched the second he knew Cassie was back... And then?”

“We... we don’t know, your Highness. The girls left hours ago, and we haven’t heard any news since...”

“Hours ago?” Exclaimed Kareen, shocked.

She turned to Kairen, livid. Hours ago could be bad or good news, it was completely unknown. At least they haven’t found their bodies outside the Palace’s walls... But since then, they could very well have been caught, tortured or killed. There was still a chance the girls were very much alive, but still...

“Let’s go,” said Kairen, determined.

Kareen nodded and followed him, still carrying Kassian. There was no way the War God was going to part with his son for a single more minute, and the Imperial Concubine could very well protect him out. They left the room, and found Shareen and Anour in the garden, both watching the gate, which was still holding against their assailants, though it was obviously having quite a bad day.

“Oh, here’s my nephew,” said Shareen with a smirk, staring at the baby.

“Wow, you’re lucky he took after his mom. Even for a baby, he’s cute.”

“That dragon is amazing,” added Anour, his eyes on little Kian. “His tail is so long... He’s even leaner than Roun!”

Actually, all three dragons were quite intrigued right now. Kian jumped down from Kairen’s shoulder and ran to Krai. Though the black dragon looked a bit surprised, he carefully walked closer, his big red eyes wide open with curiosity.

To the side, Roun wasn’t as patient. The green dragon growled, almost jumping on the baby dragon, but Krai reacted immediately, growling

louder as a warning. The green dragon retreated, his head low. Between them, Kian looked like he hadn't even noticed the big green dragon. His eyes were focused on Krai, and he kept running to him, all excited. The black dragon clearly didn't know how to react, especially as the baby dragon easily disappeared under his big body. He kept trying to look down and all sides, but the excited Krai kept running around him, jumping on his paws playfully, making cute squeaks and chasing the big black tail.⁶

Finally, the big black dragon growled, and when Kian made another sprint close enough, he suddenly caught the baby dragon under his paw. Kian, surprised, squealed a bit, but Krai tilted his head, and carefully, grabbed him in his mouth. The baby dragon agitated its little paws, unhappy of this new position, but Krai ignored him, walking up to Kairen. He looked like a cat with its pissed kitten, making everyone smile.

"Don't you hurt him, Krai," warned Kareen with a frown.

It was unlikely he'd harm the baby dragon voluntarily, but keeping him in his mouth without biting with his sharp fangs must have been a bit complicated for Krai, especially as Kian was quite unruly. However, the black dragon looked like he controlled the situation (and his son) perfectly.

They didn't have much time to keep observing their cute interactions, however. The bangs were getting louder behind the door. Kairen cracked his neck, and his sister looked even more impatient. All the servants had run back inside the mansion to hide. A little army was surely waiting for them outside, but those people had Dragon Blood and two actual dragons with them! It was a lot of animation for the Residence. After a while, Shareen sighed.

"It's going to take all day..."

The Princess took a deep breath, stocking as much air as she could in her lungs, and, after a couple of seconds, she exhaled a massive fireball towards the door, sending it and everyone behind flying away. The Imperial Princess smirked.

“Now we will actually get to it.”

She ran into the crowd of soldiers still standing or trying to get back on their feet, a demonic smile on. Kairen glanced back towards him, but Kassian was perfectly safe in his grandmother’s arms. She had even protected him from the smoke by raising her sleeve, and the baby only seemed to care about his plushie.

The Imperial Prince ran to support his sister. Shareen didn’t need much help, but the faster they got rid of those soldiers, the fast they’d get to the Imperial Palace and to Cassandra. There wasn’t a single second to lose. Behind them, Anour and Krai began jumping to attack the soldiers, too. When Kian started growling at them angrily too, Krai finally let go, and though he was too small to attack, the baby dragon jumped on his head and back, sending growls left and right as if he was the one fighting.

The Imperial siblings fought their way to the Imperial Palace. It was a long, long fight to there as they couldn’t use the dragons on the trapped roofs. The residence was far from the Imperial Palace, and the number of men sent by Vrehan was endless. More importantly, they soon realized the Imperial Army was already there. The colors of the soldiers were codified, and Shareen and Kairen didn’t even need to talk to both realize who they were fighting. They just exchanged glances, and kept going. Fighting the Imperial Army was not easy inside the Capital, not even with two dragons helping. It was the same as the fight against the Eastern Republic’s Army: they had to be cautious of the locals, the dragons couldn’t use their fire. However, Kareen, Shareen, and two dragons were enough to fight their way through the whole Imperial Army, no matter how slow the progress was. The soldiers were obviously afraid of them but also trained to not retreat. Kairen and Shareen fought one man after another, slaughtering without stopping.

It was a dance of death. Blood flew in the air, and the violence spread terrified all citizens that dared to venture outside at that time. The siblings and the dragons only occupied a couple of streets, but those streets were a horror scene. They had no mercy and no time to lose doing

a clean job of this.

“Your Highness!”

Kairen turned to the left, taking his sword out of a man’s chest, and soon, realized they weren’t alone. Many soldiers in a different outfit were now standing or running in the same direction as they did, opposing the Imperial Army. One of the General ran to Kairen’s side, bowing with a military salute.

“Your East Army!” Exclaimed Shareen, surprised. “Already?”

“We came as soon as we got Lady Kareen’s message, Your Highness! We couldn’t sit still, especially with your Highness and Lady Cassandra in danger!”

Indeed, they soon heard the sounds of two armies fighting resonating in all the nearby streets. The fight was now taken much farther into the Capital’s streets. Screams and sounds of weapons striking filled the air. It was a war scene everywhere the eye would stop.

Kairen and Shareen exchanged a smile, despite their tiredness and the sweat and blood their armors were soaked with. With the East Army there, they could finally cut through the small fry and get to the Imperial Palace quicker...

The fight resumed, even more violent. Hundreds of men fighting to get the Imperial Palace or prevent them too kept fighting until sunset. The fight wasn’t over, but the siblings had reached their goal, finally. When the sun touched the ground, they finally presented themselves at the Palace’s door. Both Shareen and Kairen were a bit tired after all of that, but neither of them wanted to stop. They sent people to get Phetra, their hostage, and cleared the area around them, making sure no one would try to catch up. In the streets, the East Army was clearly winning, even establishing a clear perimeter around the Palace. Moreover, unlike the East Army, none of them had been trained to first aid, and they had to watch Kairen’s men help their people while they suffered.

What happened in the streets was no long Kairen’s issue. He was glaring at the doors, impatient to finally get a hold of Vrehan’s neck. He glanced

at his sister, who nodded. Just like before, Shareen took a deep breath, and used her fire on the large doors. It wasn't as efficient, but after that, both siblings only had to use brute strength on the doors for it to finally collapse. 3

Leaving the armies to fight each other outside, they walked in. Kareen was following, a few steps behind, Evin and Anour with her as bodyguards, though she probably didn't need them.

"Where to, mother?" Asked Kairen, unsure.

"I don't know... Let's just head for that rat's apartments first."

They kept walking through the corridors, but everything felt quiet.

Strangely... quiet. They had to leave the dragons outside, as both Anour and Krai were too big to squeeze through the door, but it was still to quiet in there, dragons or not. They didn't spot a single servant for a long while. The Imperial Palace had changed a lot since their last time there, and none of them like this atmosphere

"Brother."

Kairen followed her glare. They were still on their way, but something strange was happening to the side. Several Imperial Soldiers were guarding the Lake, their weapons in hand. The siblings exchanged a glance. Men guarding the Lake? They decided to ignore it, and instead, rushed inside. That's when a long sound resonated. A long, long blow. Kareen froze.

"The Emperor..." She whispered.

All of them knew that sound. It was only used in the event of an Imperial Death. Their blood froze in their veins, and without thinking, Shareen and Kairen started running towards the Emperor's Hall.

When they barged in, they were welcomed with a hundred soldiers, pointing their weapons at them. The Hall was filled with Imperial Soldiers, but at its very end, facing them, Vrehan was sitting on the golden throne, his dragon sitting behind him. The red beast had both eyes completely destroyed, like two big black holes. He was obviously blind. However, the Dragon wasn't their main worry at the moment, neither

were the soldiers.

Vrehan was holding Missandra by her hair, a knife clearly held against her throat.

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#122 The New Emperor

A strange silence followed their arrival in the room.

Kairen and Vrehan were fiercely glaring at each other from across the dozens of soldiers between them. They could have been alone, the atmosphere wouldn't have gotten an inch colder. The poor men stuck between the two Imperial Princes even felt a bit out of place, exchanging worried glances at each other. After all, none of them had signed to be standing up against the Empire's War God himself! Those men were Imperial Guards, trained to obey the Emperor only, and they would do so until their death, but this situation just didn't feel right for any of them...

Princess Shareen, who was known for her own military merits, was glaring at them like she was seeing a crowd of vermin. She couldn't believe the nerve of those idiots to side with Vrehan...

The Imperial Princess had a sour expression on. She had abandoned her sword to steal a spear from one of the Imperial generals she had defeated. That weapon was heavy and meant for a man, but she had no problem carrying it nonchalantly on her shoulders. Her stare went to Missandra with a sigh. So things had turned that bad there... Anour, too, was staring at Missandra non-stop, unable to say a word, only scared. 1
"You're a bit late, brother," said Vrehan, speaking first. "You missed my coronation."

Kairen didn't bother to answer, but Shareen stood forward, furious.

"What coronation! You're no more worthy of the title of Emperor than you are worthy of putting your dirty ass on that throne, Vrehan!"

Her words angered him, and he suddenly pulled more on Missandra's hair, making her groan in pain. She was keeping herself from crying, but

the young woman was teary-eyed, as he was keeping her neck torn in a weird position, and that blade was held on her skin. Shareen clenched her teeth, annoyed. If he had captured Missandra, it didn't mean anything good for her sister either... Anour almost stepped forward, but she quickly held his arm and pushed him back towards her mother.

“What happened to that old man?” Suddenly asked Kareen.

For the first time, her voice was cold as ice, but she was strangely calm and composed. The second Prince answered with an annoyed expression.

“He is dead. I am the Emperor now. You're no longer the favorite!”

This was such a weak insult, it wouldn't make the proud Imperial Concubine flinch. Kareen's glare was much fiercer, and it looked like nothing could make her waver, not even the news of her past lover's death. Either she didn't believe it, hid her emotions perfectly, or wasn't affected, one couldn't tell. She was just standing there, an empty look in her eyes.

From glaring at the concubine, Vrehan's eyes got down on the baby she was holding. His black eyes opened wider, in a horrified, disgusted expression as he discovered Kassian. Kairen moved right away to stand between Vrehan's line of sight and his son, glaring right back at him.

“That little bastard...” hissed Vrehan.

Kian who had followed them jumped on Kairen's shoulder at that moment, and growled at him, arching his back.

“Where is Cassandra?” Asked Kairen, impatient.

This time, the second prince's face broke into a nasty smile, looking quite happy. He chuckled, his chuckle turning into a crazy laugh. His voice echoed along the walls, making everyone but him rather uneasy.

“You crazy ass...” Hissed Shareen.

“She's dead!” Yelled the second Prince.

Kairen didn't move, but his fingers tightened around his weapon.

“You damn, precious witch is dead! That bitch killed herself to escape me!”

“You're lying...” muttered Shareen.

She couldn't help but send worried glances at Kairen. If Cassandra was really dead, her brother was really going to lose it... Facing them, Vrehan kept laughing like crazy, amused by the War God's furious expression.

"You were a War God, Kairen, but now you're so affected by that bitch's death? Well, your woman is dead. She dived into the Lake and she never came back." 1

"It's Cassandra, Kairen," whispered Kareen behind him. "She can stay underwater for a long time..."

"Oh, you think she could still be alive? I will break it to you: she is not coming back, you idiot. Your women dived into that lake hours ago. Even that witch can't survive hours under the surface! It's a pity. I would have loved to show you her dead body, just for the pleasure to see your face..."

Whatever he had hoped to see, Kairen wasn't going to give him that pleasure. Whether he believed it or not and despite his sister's worried glances, all of his rage was contained inside. However, they did hear the furious growls of a Dragon coming from the outside. Unlike his master, Krai was going rogue outside the Palace's walls. Yet here, his master was only clenching his jaw and his fists and glaring like a tiger at Vrehan. He slowly raised his sword.

"You're going to die," he whispered.

That simple sentence erased all smiles from Vrehan's lips. The second prince stood up, and showed Missandra, his blade on her throat tracing a thin red line on her skin. Shareen clicked her tongue.

"Oh, no, I don't think so. You are going to throw your weapons, or I'll slice that woman like a pig in front of you. Both of you," he added, glaring at Shareen as well.

"You scum. And what happens if we refuse? You only have one hostage, once she's dead we would have no problem killing you!"

"Oh, I don't need to kill her right way," chuckled Vrehan. "I can slice her pretty skin little by little, until you obey. Her skin is way to neat,

compared to her older sister, isn't she? I could even chop off a few limbs..." 1

"We have Phetra," declared Shareen. "How about we do the same thing to your precious younger sister?"

Vrehan laughed loudly again, his horrible laugh making Shareen roll her eyes.

"Do you think I care about my sister? She was only useful for some time! Princesses aren't as watched as the Princes, you see. She was very helpful in making more allies within the Senate..."

"I knew that bitch opened her legs..." hissed Shareen.

"You two are such idiots," continued Vrehan. "All you can do is fight, you are not fit to be Emperor!"

"Oh, right, we are not some vile scheming rat like you!"

Just as she said that Vrehan got even madder, and his dragon growled furiously, too, taking one step forward. They couldn't have missed his eyes, both completely covered in a dry dark liquid that ought to be blood...

"Your dragon doesn't look in top shape, Vrehan," snickered Shareen.

That sentence didn't help make him any calmer, and without warning, he suddenly raised his weapon and carved a long, deep line on Missandra's arm. The young woman screamed in pain, closing her eyes and crying out.

"You bastard!"

"Keep making me mad, Shareen. I still have plenty of surfaces to keep on that little bitch's body!"

That's when Kairen recognized the weapon Vrehan was holding. It was Cassandra's dagger, the one that formerly belonged to Phetra. This time, the War God saw red and stepped forward. However, Vrehan was quick to react and put his sword back against Missandra's throat.

"Uh-uh, no, Kairen. If you take another step, I swear I'll butcher that little bitch!"

The third Prince stood there for a second, his eyes on the young girl.

Missandra was crying in pain, her blood dripping from her injury. That bastard had cut her deep on purpose, to make her injury more painful and impressive. He didn't want to give him any victory, but she was still Cassandra's younger sister... He glanced at the blind dragon and snickered. He threw his weapons.

The two swords resonated on the marble floor, and even the soldiers in front of him looked confused. The War God was giving up on his weapons, to save a woman? Behind him, Shareen was just as annoyed, but after hesitating, she was about to throw her spear when Missandra spoke.

"Don't! Please don't care about me! I'd rather die than let this scum survive!"

"Missandra!" Called out Anour, horrified, a second too late. 2

"Shut up, little vermin! Or I shall cut you some more!"

Vrehan put his threat to execution right away, stabbing Missandra's shoulder. She screamed again, and fell down on her knees, in a horrible state of pain. Her voice resonated throughout the Palace's walls, making even the soldiers uncomfortable. This situation was really not one they wanted to be in...

Meanwhile, Shareen's hands were almost turning white from holding her spear so tightly. In her head, she was already playing the scenarios of what she'd do to that scum once he was dead... Next to her, Anour was the most horrified. The young boy looked like he was about to faint, his eyes on Missandra, in utter shock. He couldn't do anything but watch that horrible display of violence on her.

"Vrehan, enough!" Yelled Kareen.

"Shareen still has her weapon," he retorted, staring at his half-sister.

"Don't!"

To everyone's surprise, despite her tears, Missandra still looked fierce and determined. Down on her knees, holding her bleeding shoulder, her lips trembling, she was still able to look at Shareen from across the hall. The

girl ought to be in an excruciating state of pain, but she still acted as if she wasn't.

"D-don't," she begged. "Don't let that bastard win..."

"Shut up, I said!" He yelled.

Vrehan kicked her injury and pressed his shoe on it, forcing Missandra to bow lower and lower, in a horrible position. His shoe sole was soon completely red, but the girl did not avert her eyes from the little group across the room. Never had she looked so much like her older sister.

"That bastard murdered my sister and raped his own sister!" 2

"Shut the fuck up!"

"He did what...?"

This time, even Kareen looked utterly shocked and baffled.

"You rotten rat... What did you do...?" Muttered Shareen.

"I said shut up! Shut up, shut up, shut up!" Yelled Vrehan, absolutely furious.

He kicked Missandra restlessly until the girl was completely lying underneath him, half-conscious.

A heavy silence followed that horrible scene. Even if he hadn't said a thing, Vrehan's anger at the girl's word made the truth obvious.

Everyone in that hall could understand that.

Suddenly, Kian squealed, and jumped down Kairen's arm, running in the opposite direction, leaving the room.

"Kian, no!"

"Lady Kareen!"

The baby dragon disappeared in the corridors, while Lady Kareen ran after him, still holding Kassian. Evin immediately ran after her too. He didn't have his place in a fight against so many soldiers anyway, and the Imperial Servant was concerned about Cassandra's baby. Anour glanced at them leaving, hesitant.

"...Go with them," said Kairen, his eyes still glaring in Vrehan's way.

His younger brother hesitated. He wasn't comfortable letting their mother and the babies run away, but War God or not, Kairen was in an

unfavorable position there. Moreover, he had already thrown his weapon, and he knew he and Shareen wouldn't risk Missandra getting killed either. Vrehan was a poor fighter, but he still had his dragon... Yet, he had trouble leaving. When Missandra was like that... (1

"...Are you sure?" He whispered.

Kairen didn't answer, which was the equivalent of a definite answer from him. Shareen gave him a nod, too. Anour swallowed his saliva, a bit bitter to have to leave them. However, he wasn't stupid. He wasn't on his older siblings' level, he would have been no better than a hindrance here... After one last glare towards Vrehan, trying not to look at the injured Missandra, Anour finally ran out, to catch up after Lady Kareen. Once he was gone, the War God and his sister were suddenly left alone with an army of Imperial Soldiers, Vrehan, and his dragon.

Shareen sighed.

"About two hundred men? Really, Vrehan, you're such a coward..."

"Drop your weapon, Shareen, and recognize me as the Emperor," hissed the Second Prince. "Or I swear I'll finish that girl and you'll have to watch her bleed out!"

Shareen glanced down at Missandra. The young girl was still not moving, one couldn't tell if she was still breathing. Only her eyes were still teary, turned towards them. After a few seconds of staring at each other, she very distinctly saw Missandra nod.

Shareen sighed.

"You're not too rusty yet, brother?" She said, her eyes on Vrehan, making her spear turn between her hands.

"Stop playing.

She snickered. Suddenly, her eyes went up on the Red Dragon.

"Enough!" Yelled Vrehan, feeling what was going to happen. "I am the new Emperor! The council already agreed! You can't kill me, I am the Emperor!"

Shareen laughed.

"Oh, Vrehan, you're really the Emperor of rats. The council you said?

You convinced a bunch of scum like you to sign some paperwork, and just like that, you think we should leave you Father's throne? Don't worry about the council. I think it will be time for some serious Spring cleaning once we are done with you!"

Vrehan's eyes opened wide, and he stepped back. Shareen was still smiling like a cat about to eat a bird.

"You know what? I think we need fresh blood on the Council's seat. How about we start with yours!"

Just like that, she suddenly threw her spear across the room. Her weapon flew far above the head of the soldiers and, with a horrible sound, dug deep in the red dragon's shoulder.

The gigantic beast growled furiously in pain and anger and jumped to attack, coming their way. The first ranks of soldiers, distracted by the dragon, turned their heads back a second too late. They met Kairen's furious glare from up very close and, a second later, the War God's fist began wreaking havoc around him.

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#123 The Old Legend

Cassandra slowly woke up to the sound of something dripping next to her. She suddenly felt a horrible sensation in her throat and started coughing out some water, almost suffocating as she was trying to get some air back. She felt exhausted, and a bit dizzy, though she was lying down.

Underneath her, was something cold... and wet. It wasn't very comfortable either. She struggled to move her body, pushing on her numb arms to help herself sit up. Her hands met with cold rocky ground. Cassandra coughed a little, spitting some water again. She felt exhausted, but her instincts quickly reminded her of the dangerous situation.

She sat up, looking around anxiously. She had no idea where she was, but somehow, the presence of light disturbed her. Her memories were slowly coming back, and she was almost sure she had lost consciousness

in the deep, dark waters of the Lake of the Imperial Palace. So the question was, where was she now? Against all expectations, she was alive, but with no idea where she had ended.

As her eyes got used to the blinding light coming from above, Cassandra slowly started realizing she was surrounded by rock walls. In all shades of grey, sometimes silverish, the undefined walls of this cave were making a semi-sphere above her head. She could still hear water clearly dripping all around her. How far was she under the surface level? If there was this much light, she couldn't be too deep...

She barely had any strength left to remain seated, but somehow, she could just stay still either. How had she even gotten there? A few meters away from her, there was what looked like a large pond, or a little lake. It was completely still and quiet, and everything else was echoing inside the cave. She could almost hear her own heartbeat echoing. Cassandra realized her body was cold, but not as wet as someone who had just gotten out of the water. How long had she been there? She was completely at a loss and even more panicked due to that. What of Opheus, and Missandra? What about the Old Emperor?

Her head was aching a little bit. She touched her forehead and felt a vivid pain. It was a bit swollen... So she had bumped her head into something, on top of the headache. Cassandra sighed. What had she gotten herself into this time? She looked around, trying to look for the creature from before, just in case, but she was obviously completely alone. After much effort, she finally got back on her feet. She was in a poor state... Her legs and arms were covered in bruises as if she had been dragged around on that same rocky ground. Cassandra looked at the water again. Had she been taken out of there, then? By whom...? She was obviously alone here.

She tried to walk to the walls, checking if there wasn't some opening she may have missed. It was a bit tricky because the walls and the ground were a heap of thousands of little stones, and she couldn't see all of the different levels of the wall. It was sharp, too, but some had iridescent

reflections, like pink or blue. They almost looked like dark gemstones... Cassandra's eyes were attracted to the light above again. What she had taken for a bright light was actually some long slit in the ceiling, letting in what was most likely natural light. Cassandra squinted her eyes, trying to see anything. She was almost sure she had seen some movement up there. Was she actually that close to the ground floor?

Suddenly, something moved in the water. She retreated towards the wall as a reflex, but there was nowhere to run. Slowly, scales started appearing at the surface. Cassandra felt her blood go cold again. She could see parts of the body undulate in the water and surface at some places like a snake swimming around. How big was it really? She had been unable to see the whole body in the water, but now, she could see it move in so many places, she was only starting to get the reality of this creature's real size. Then, the head slowly merged out of the water. First, the two horns she had seen, one of them broken at half its length. Then, the silver eyes appeared. They were so clear, if it wasn't clearing staring at her, Cassandra would have wondered if it wasn't actually blind. Then, the nose and maw came out of the water, dripping. She tried to keep breathing normally, but no matter how she looked at it, this creature was part dragon.

A very, very large and strange dragon. With an elongated head and neck, there was plenty of space for the many gills moving with each breathing the creature took. Cassandra didn't even know if she should have been surprised, scared, or amazed, but she was all of that at the same time.

The dragon let out a long, high-pitched growl that echoed along the cave's walls, and more of its body came out.

The front limbs weren't like what she had seen before. She had thought they were short, but unlike the Dragons short paws, those were longer and more retractable. Moreover, they were obviously half-way between arms and fins. Even the "fingers" of the creature had curved claws and were tied together like palmed. Moreover, he didn't actually use his limbs to move around, his body was more crawling like a snake's.

Cassandra retreated further, not even daring to blink for one second. She

felt like her own breathing was way too loud.

The creature too didn't lose her for a second. It was all focused on her as it was coming out of the water, more and more of its body crawling out. Cassandra had wrongly judged it's size. If she had to compare it with the dragons

she had seen before, it's head was about as big as Glahad's, but there was no real comparison in terms of its body. It would have been like comparing a cat and a snake. While its neck was very thick, the rest of its body didn't grow in size at all. It was all the same width, but very, very long. It felt like the end was never coming, and the body almost had to spiral on itself to find enough space, as Cassandra kept retreating further and further away. She was grateful was so vast, because there were few rooms inside the Imperial Palace that could have welcomed that creature comfortably. How old was that creature to have gotten so big? Its body was meters and meters long! When she finally spotted the little legs, she realized those were in no way meant to walk either, but just to stabilize the end of the body. They were thinner and shorter than the front paws. Finally, the tail came out, almost ridiculously little and simple compared to the rest of that majestic creature. Cassandra was at a loss for words as they were just staring at each other. This thing was not a dragon as the Dragon Empire knew them. It was something alike, maybe a related species. Cassandra exhaled, realizing she had been holding her breath for a while now. Thank the gods, this creature wasn't menacing at all. It only stared at all, and had only growled once, if a growl that was.

Cassandra had seen much scarier dragons, so she wasn't exactly afraid. More like cautious. She could tell when a beast was angry or menacing, and that creature wasn't. Moreover, she highly suspected it had actually saved her life by bringing her here, which showed a high form of intelligence.

She decided to take a slow step forward, seeing how the creature would react. It didn't seem panicked in any way, and actually, came gently to her. She could see it's thin nostrils moving a bit, smelling her. Cassandra

suddenly realized what was that shimmering on its scales that had been disturbing her for a while now. Salt! Was that water salty? Could it be linked to the actual sea? The creature kept moving its iridescent scales and, just like its size, Cassandra had been wrong about its color as well. It wasn't dark, but actually, of a shimmery grey. There were some other colors shimmering at some moments, making her think those scales opal-like. Just like the stones of that cave. Was it this Creature's lair? An idea was beginning to grow in Cassandra's mind, and somehow, she started to really believe in it. She remembered what she had been taught when she was much, much younger. She hesitated, putting an arm out and extending her hand, though she was a bit scared and probably crazy to do so.

The Creature didn't try to sniff it as Krai would have. Instead, it slid its long body past it, making Cassandra touch its strange, polished scales. She chuckled, impressed. The Creature began circling around her, making one, two rings with its body, keeping Cassandra inside. It still wasn't menacing, but she felt like it was establishing some sort of protection around her. Cassandra smiled.

"I think I know who you are..." she whispered, amazed.

The Creature didn't react to her word but, after taking a deep breath, the young woman started singing.

She used her native tongue, careful about her voice and her words, and sang the Mermaid's Requiem. After listening to her for a few seconds, the Creature started making a high-pitched song too. It sounded like a wind blowing against some glass, a high-pitched but gentle sound. When she was done, the Creature put its head closer to her, and, after a hesitation, Cassandra gently caressed its head. Her heart was beating crazy, almost sure she was right. All the legends from her childhood were taking form in this amazing creature in front of her.

"You're really... The Water God..." she whispered.?

She was submerged with emotion, almost to the point of crying. She had never questioned its existence, but having the deity-like being right next

to her was an amazing sensation. The Creature sang softly again, making Cassandra chuckle, a tear escaping her eye. She took a deep breath. Though it was a beautiful moment, she didn't have much time for that. She couldn't forget the crisis that was going on outside this cave, and how her family needed her. She extended her arm to caress the scales again.

"I need your help," she whispered in her native tongue. "I really need to get back to the others... to my family."

She wasn't sure he would understand her, but, just then, the Creature looked up, at the long slit in the ceiling. Just as she thought, there was something up there. The exact moment when Cassandra looked up, she very clearly saw a shadow for a second. What was upstairs?

"Kyun!"

Cassandra jumped, as the baby dragon suddenly jumped out of the water, flapping its little wings and chasing the water.

"Kian? How did you get here!"

She ran to the baby dragon, who happily jumped in her arms with many little squeaks. Kian kept rubbing its head against her chest while Cassandra looked at the pond again. This was definitely connected to the lake somehow! If so, how deep and wide was the lake under the surface, and beneath which room could it have spread?

"Kyuuuu..."

Kian seemed to have just noticed the gigantic Creature, and very boldly jumped from Cassandra's arm to run to it. Without any fear, the little dragon hopped onto the first ring of the body, under the Creature's eyes. Its white eyes were on Kian with a bit of interest, watching the baby dragon's moves. Kian jumped higher, onto the second and higher ring, and glanced at Cassandra. Was he showing off? She tried to call him, but the little dragon ignored her and turned to the head of the body he had just climbed.

The Water God seemed interested in the baby dragon and brought its

head closer, sniffing him. However, a sniff from such a big creature was like a gush of wind to Kian, and he was ejected away. Just as Cassandra feared he might fall, he started flipping its little wings and looked up. Now that she saw them together, there was a bit of resemblance in their bodies' shape, though Kian was still more like Krai.

“Kyun!”

The baby dragon started flying higher, looking suddenly attracted to that slit in the ceiling. The Water God, looking curious about the baby dragon, followed his flight up, extending its body to raise it. Cassandra immediately saw her chance. With a silent apology, she climbed on the creature's body just like Kian had done before. She was bigger than the baby dragon, but still no bigger than a kitten compared to the gigantic water creature. If it felt her climbing on its scales, it didn't show any discomfort at all. Cassandra struggled to keep going, with her aching muscles, overall exhaustion, and the climb that was going more and more vertical and abrupt. Whatever was above them, she silently prayed it wasn't going to be another terrible place to fall into.

Just when she had finally climbed past the second ring, she realized she wouldn't be able to climb up the “neck” of the Creature. Just then, it seemed to finally spot her and, before she could do a thing, pushed her to be on its head, hanging on to its horns! Cassandra couldn't help but let out a little scream in fear, but Kian apparently took it for an excited cry, and made a similar high-pitched noise, all happy and flying around her. The Creature kept going higher, understanding her goal and Kian's. As they finally reached the breach, Cassandra realized it would be just large enough to let her in, but there was no way the Creature could follow her. She bit her lip, and Kian jumped above, disappearing between the two edges. She was worried for him for a few seconds, but then, she heard him happily squeak from somewhere above. With a sigh of relief, she found a grip as soon as she could, ready to climb up. Just then, she looked at the Creature, whose eye was very close. She smiled at it.

“Thank you...” She whispered, and then, with a push from the Creature’s head, she climbed up.

The War God’s Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 124

#124 The Dragons Vault

Despite the Creature’s push, Cassandra pained to finally reach the upper level. She was really tired, hurting all over and not sure about what she should expect next. She just hoped that crack in the ceiling wasn’t going to have her in another deadly trap. She had already almost died too many times today... The only reason she was feeling just a little bit better was Kian. Though she had no idea how the little dragon had found her and gotten there, him being all jumpy and fine meant Kassian ought to be safe and sound somewhere out there as well.

Cassandra had no idea how long she had stayed unconscious, but she felt like it had been a few hours at least. She hoped things had moved up there, and in a good way at that. She was silently dying to see Kairen again... Cassandra didn’t want to get her hopes up too soon, but she hoped he was somewhere near. She had that strange conviction in her heart that the War God had returned to the Capital...

*Kyun!

“I’m coming,” she sighed, trying to pull herself up and catch up with the excited baby dragon.

She had no idea what to expect once she had climbed out of that breach, but anyway, she wouldn’t have been able to imagine that. This looked like another cave, only much, much bigger, and actually carved to have a roughly square shape. The walls were definitely made of the same material as the one below, though, that shining grey stone... Cassandra had no idea what it was, and she couldn’t remember having seen anything similar within the Palace’s walls. So where in the world were they?

She felt a bit too tired to stand, but she remained seated to look at her

surroundings. Kian was already happily running around and sniffing everything with curious eyes. It looked like a much bigger cave, and it continued past her line of sight as if she had emerged on one end of it. More curiously, she noticed some strange, black spherical shapes. A lot of them were broken open, and looked so old they could crumble and fall into dust at any second. Stones? Their shape was a bit intriguing, and Kian too kept sniffing them with curious eyes.

Everything there was really quiet, but Cassandra could hear some sort of faint wind coming from the other side. The light was coming from a little hole in the ceiling, too. This was definitely sunlight, and this opening was too round to be a natural one. Who would have carved a window in a cave, and why? In any case, it was too high for Krai to carry her up there, and actually, she wasn't even sure it would be wide enough for her to get through. The distance was blurred with all her surrounding looking like the same rocky walls.

She finally stood up, and the baby dragon immediately ran back to her to rub his body against her leg, somehow like a cat. Kian was apparently determined to stay around her, and though he kept venturing everywhere, he was coming back to her every ten seconds or so. Since the young Dragon looked so fearless and enthusiastic, Cassandra walked further into the cave, intrigued. There was nothing but those countless, countless broken spheres. She couldn't understand what they were. They were not made of the same material as the stones, they were darker but gave off a similar feeling.

As she kept walking, the echo of her own steps made her slowly realize how big this new cave actually was. Unlike the one from before, this one continued for miles like some tube getting wider and wider. The breach she had come out through was already far behind her when she found another window above her, throwing light on bigger broken spheres. She suddenly realized she had been wrong. Those things weren't spheres. They were empty shells.

Now that she could see some more complete ones, the shape wasn't so

round but similar to Kian's dragon egg. She hadn't noticed before because even the material looked different, and none looked alive or illuminated like Krai's egg once was. She was baffled. What were those dragon eggs doing here? Moreover, there were hundreds of them! Some looked so old they were almost turning into stones...

The baby dragon squealed, sniffing one of the eggs and putting his little front paws on it to look inside, but Cassandra grabbed him and carried him instead. Somehow, she didn't like the idea of Kian playing with empty Dragon shells, this whole place felt like... some cemetery. There was a really uneasy feeling growing in her heart from seeing those empty shells. From the looks of those, they must have belonged to dragons that lived years and years ago, maybe centuries...

Cassandra kept walking, and as her arms got tired, Kian jumped out of those to walk ahead. However, this time the baby dragon didn't look so curious anymore. He actually had his wing close to his body, and looked more cautious than before. Was he feeling something she didn't?

Cassandra hoped they wouldn't meet anything dangerous in there. She kept trying to understand the Emperor's purpose. Did he know she would find the Water God in the lake and understand what that Creature was? Did he even know about it? Or was he hoping she'd find that breach and get here? She hoped the old man was alright...

"Kyuuu?"

Kian had stopped, looking a bit wary of whatever was ahead. Cassandra caught up with him with a frown, and indeed, there was a noticeable change in their surroundings. The eggs around them were considerably bigger, and unlike the previous one, they still had some color on them. They were getting closer to the end of that strange tunnel, she could feel it.

Moreover, she was starting to realize where they were standing. She had forgotten about this place, actually. Suddenly, Kian froze, and ran back towards her, hiding behind her leg. Something was scaring him? He

wasn't growling, but his eyes were focused on something right after the next turn... Cassandra walked over. The wind she had heard before was getting louder, and coming in little waves. It wasn't wind, but breathing. They finally met with an impressive mountain of golden scales.

"Glahad!" She exclaimed.

What was the Emperor's Dragon doing there? Recognizing the magnificent creature, Cassandra ran to it, but the gigantic dragon looked uninterested. He was curled upon himself, his ruby eyes half-open, looking incredibly passive. He didn't even seem to care about them and didn't react. Seeing that Cassandra wasn't scared, Kian came out, too, and carefully scurried over to look. The difference in size between the two was impressive... Kian was like a big cat, while Glahad was like a little mountain by himself.

However, the baby dragon kept looking around the giant dragon and poking at him curiously, and the older one didn't seem to care. Cassandra realized he was somewhat his grandfather, but the golden dragon looked completely disinterested in anything. He was so calm that Cassandra had no fear approaching him.

"Glahad, what is it...?" She asked.

He could answer, but the ruby eyes shortly shifted to her, without any other kind of reaction. It looked like he was... depressed. That realization carved a hole in Cassandra's heart, as a scary thought sprouted in her mind. She shook her head, chocking up a little, and tried to look around. There was nothing else but empty dragon shells here. This was definitely the Emperor's Dragon Vault, but what was Glahad doing there? (3
Abandoning the old dragon for a few seconds, Cassandra made the detour around his body which occupied half of the way, to check what was past him. She gasped.

A gigantic door. It was made in the same stones as all the walls there, but this square shape and the gigantic handle on it couldn't be mistaken.

Cassandra was amazed. So they really were in the Dragon's vault!

Moreover, didn't Shareen say before that this place was right behind the

Throne's room? Meaning they were just a few steps away from getting back inside the Imperial Palace! Cassandra hurried over, but somehow, she couldn't even understand how to open that door. That handle was way too heavy! She couldn't even move it at all, how was she supposed to pull on it? She suddenly realized this was how the Imperial Family members were the only ones who could get in. It took superhuman strength to get that lock open... or a Dragon's help. Lady Kareen was human, yet she had been here before to retrieve Kian's egg. She couldn't have done it by herself. However, with the help of a dragon...

Cassandra turned back to Glahad. Would the Emperor's Dragon help her? Opening that door would be a matter of seconds for him, but how to convince a dragon?

She walked over to him. Kian, a bit lost by her back-and-forth, decided to sit down and tilt his head, observing her movements. Cassandra didn't have time, she just went back to face the dragon's head. She knew Glahad wasn't going to hurt her, as the Emperor did like her. Would he help her, though? She wasn't sure of the situation outside, but it was very probably Glahad had somehow been forced in there. He was the Emperor's Dragon, though. Even if there was something locking him in here, he was the only one strong enough to break out! He only needed the will to.

"Glahad, please, you have to help me get out of here," she said.

This time, he didn't even move an inch. The golden dragon looked like he had absolutely no intention to do anything. Even if he was depressed, he couldn't simply stay here! Cassandra walked closer, desperate.

"Glahad! I don't know what happened to his Highness, but..."

This time, the golden Dragon growled as a warning, his ruby eyes opening wide. Cassandra jumped back in surprise. She wasn't prepared for the Emperor's dragon to actually get mad at her once she'd mention his owner. Kian, upset at Glahad's growling, jumped between her and his dragon ancestor and growled back. His attempts to growl were once again no more than a kitten's meow compared to the fierce growl of a

proper adult dragon. Still, it at least got Glahad's attention on him.

...but you can't abandon Kairen, continued Cassandra, careful with her words. "You know he is the... the favorite son, the one that should take the golden throne. He and Shareen ought to be out there. You can't let Vrehan and Lephys do this!" 2

Despite her plea, the golden dragon didn't move much. At least, he kept his scarlet eyes on her, looking like he was listening, but not reacting much to it. Cassandra was desperate. She wasn't even sure how much Glahad understood her words. Krai had always seemed able to understand her, but maybe he was just imitating his master and reacting to her words. Cassandra wasn't sure of anything anymore, but she glanced down at Kian. Kassian was in danger out there, and so was his father. Maybe convincing the golden dragon was the last chance to save them.

"Glahad! You know the Emperor didn't want this!"

The golden dragon resumed his furious growling, but despite her fear, Cassandra continued.

You can't stay there and do nothing. Kairen needs you, Shareen too. The Emperor has a new grandson, Kassian, my son, and you can't let him die!"

This time, the dragon stopped growling, apparently having heard her. Cassandra grabbed Kian off the floor, though the baby dragon was still fearlessly growling at Glahad.

"You have to help me get out of here, please. Vrehan will kill them! Kairen, Shareen, even Prince Opheus, Prince Anour, and Lady Kareen too!"

Having heard about the Imperial Concubine, Glahad finally raised its head, making Cassandra sigh in relief. The Emperor's love for Lady Kareen may save their lives, after all? Her name had definitely made his dragon react.

"I know... I know His Highness wanted Lady Kareen to be safe. He loved her, and wherever she was, he was fine with it because she was

safe, right? As long as Vrehan is out there, she won't be safe anymore, Glahad. You can't give up on the one love His Highness wanted to protect. 1

The Dragon suddenly emitted a long higher-pitched sound, that sounded like a wailing to Cassandra. She was actually crying. She didn't want to admit the Emperor may have been dead, but the thought was making it's way in, ineluctably. So many things were pushing her towards it, no matter how much she didn't want it to be true. She wasn't ready to hear it, but neither was Glahad, and yet the golden dragon knew.

"Glahad, please..."

With a growl, the golden dragon finally moved. His humongous body slowly rose up, and Kian made himself very small in Cassandra's arms, obviously as impressed as he was scared. Glahad was incredibly big, and once he was standing, his body occupied more than half of the space there. Cassandra had to retreat against the wall to not risk being crushed. It seemed like he knew exactly what to do. The golden dragon turned around, his ruby eyes

going to the gigantic door. Cassandra couldn't imagine how Glahad had been made to stay there, but she doubted there was anything that could efficiently contain the most powerful creature of this Empire.

He growled and raised his paw to grab the giant handle. The size of his claws made that only two of those could pull, but still, he had no trouble lifting it unlike Cassandra earlier. She felt a wave of hope as the door started making an awful ruckus from the pressure. However, it wasn't moving so easily. After a few seconds, it became obvious Glahad had to use considerable strength to try and open it. Something was blocking it, but the golden dragon was not giving up. He started growling furiously, determined.

"Come on, Glahad... Please..." whispered Cassandra.

In her arms, Kian started cheering too with excited little growls and squeaks, his eyes riveted on the adult dragon. Glahad struggled more and more. The dragon growled furiously against that door that was not

opening and kept pulling. Cassandra god worried to see the base of his claw starting to bleed, but he wouldn't stop. He kept using all of his strength, arching his back and putting all of his body into it. Cassandra felt the tension as if she had been pulling too, and silently cheered for him, praying that this was going to work.

Finally, the door moved.

The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 125

#125 The Throne Room

Strangely, an awful noise was heard as the door finally moved. The sound of something incredibly massive and heavy resonated in the fault, and Cassandra had to protect her ears. Yet, Glahad growled even more furiously, pulling the handle even more. The Golden Dragon was determined, and the door was still resisting, but it was almost done.

Cassandra could finally see that opening. At her feet, Kian chirped excitedly and ran to jump on the golden dragon's back. The little dragon escalated the body at least ten times bigger than his, peaking at what was going on behind that door.

He suddenly made another one of his high-pitched sounds, and in a split second, Cassandra saw him jump and fly away in the interstice.

"Kian!" She called, but he had disappeared.

Where had he gone to! Cassandra didn't like losing her son's dragon now, she was scared something would happen to him. She knew that door had to open up to somewhere behind the Emperor's giant golden throne.

However, soon enough, she heard another furious growling, and this time, it wasn't coming from Glahad. She froze, but those growls were coming from wherever Kian had gone to, and even scarier, she could tell those weren't Krai's.

She was terrified to go there, but even more terrified that something would have happened to the baby dragon. Running to the other side of Glahad, she went to face the interstice, and almost immediately, stepped

back, terrified by what she had seen behind it. Red scales.

The thought had crossed her mind while seeing where they were headed. She had heard the horn and seen Glahad's misery. She could only think of one scenario to explain all that, but she had been pushing those dark thoughts to the back of her mind until now. She just didn't want to think about such a horrible outcome, and yet...

The growls of both dragons went louder and louder, and terrifying. The more Glahad was pushing the door, struggling to open it, the more Vrehan's dragon was trying to prevent him from going out. Despite the difference of strength between the two, Glahad was somehow weaker than usual. Cassandra bit her lower lip. The Emperor's state definitely had an effect on his Dragon...

She couldn't stay here though, not when she had lost sight of Kian. The interstice was now wide enough for her to slip through, actually, two men could have fit in, but not a full-grown dragon. Cassandra tried to position herself around the dragon, watching both creatures' actions. This was extremely risky. Kian had quickly flown his way out, but she would have to make a run and pray. It would take only a second for the Red Dragon to notice her and kill her. Hopefully, she could escape him, and even perhaps make him distracted enough that Glahad could finish opening that door and extract himself.

Moreover, she was concerned about all the ruckus she could hear on the other side. Cassandra wasn't familiar with battlefield, but the horrible sounds and screams she could hear coming from behind the wall of red scales looked very much like a war was going on out there. What was happening in the Throne's room, who was fighting who? Her heartbeat was accelerating fast. If Kian had flown so confidently, he ought to know who was behind that door. And there weren't many people the baby dragon would go to fly to...

Raising her green eyes on the red Dragon, Cassandra took a deep breath and prepared herself to make a run for it. Glahad was still struggling and growling furiously, and hopefully, the ruckus would hide her escape even

more. The Red Dragon probably hadn't even noticed her. She remembered she and Kian had worked together to make him blind, permanently perhaps. She took a deep breath, and started running. This short distance felt like miles away.

Cassandra had no idea what she would find behind, but she couldn't stay back and wait to be caught in a fight between two adult dragons. She just ran in a straight line, her eyes riveted on the little space where she could see an actual wall behind Vrehan's Dragon. Her heartbeat went even crazier when she ran past the door. Just a bit more! She kept running, even stumbled on something, a rock or a claw, and got back up to keep running again.

Finally, Cassandra jumped over a red paw, and fell on all fours, next to the Emperor's throne. Her eyes tried to grasp a hold of the situation as quickly as possible. Dozens of men were fighting in the Hall, but many of them were down on the ground already. The whole room had its soil covered in blood... It truly was a battlefield, all contained in one room. She looked up, trying to find who the assailants were when she finally saw him. Kairen.

She lost her breath for a second.

He was standing there, a few meters away from her. As if he had felt her stare on him, his black eyes rose up to look for hers too. For a couple of precious seconds, they found each other. She was shocked, her heart couldn't even contain this much emotion at once. Tears appeared in her eyes. He really was there. Her War God, her Prince. Kairen was there, standing proudly, his body covered in scales and blood, but alive. She smiled, almost nervously, in such relief her mind couldn't formulate a thought strong enough. Kairen, Kairen, Kairen. She could barely believe it, but it was his obsidian eyes riveted on her.

"Kai-..."

She tried to call him when a wave of pain tore her scalp. Cassandra felt pulled back, as a large hand was holding on by her hair. She suddenly felt the cold metal of a blade held on her throat, and she gasped in horror.

She had almost forgotten every Dragon ought to have his master close. She tried to fight herself, but a sharp pain on her neck prevented her from trying any further.

“Look, look, Kairen... Your precious little witch came right into my arms...”

Cassandra’s heart went from relief to horror in a split second. After she had tried so hard to fight him, she had ended up in Vrehan’s hands! She wanted to scream in despair. She couldn’t believe it, all of this for nothing! She could hear the two dragons still struggling behind her, Glahad fighting his way out, but this seemed like a detail compared to the fight between the brothers.

Kairen’s face had gone white as soon as Vrehan touched Cassandra. She heard the second Prince laugh horribly, catching the attention of not only Kairen but his sister, too. Shareen let go of the dead body she was holding and glared at Vrehan.

“You rat face...”

“Oh-oh, be careful Shareen, I killed one of them, I’ll happily make it last longer for the other one.”

Cassandra’s blood went cold. Killed who? Who had he killed? She felt like she was missing an important piece of information, and her eyes searched through the room.

She saw it. She hadn’t even seen it when she was so close. Missandra, laying in a pool of blood right at their feet. Cassandra immediately screamed in horror. No, no, not her younger sister, not Missandra. Not Mie. She couldn’t even stand that horrible vision. Her sister was lying, not moving, her body circled and covered in red. She couldn’t even see her face, as she was lying on her stomach, her face in the blood and covered by her hair. Cassandra couldn’t stop crying. She couldn’t even check if Missandra was really dead! She couldn’t even see if her sister wasn’t alive. She couldn’t stand it, she kept shaking her head and struggling against Vrehan.

“Enough!”

On her right, another figure appeared. Cassandra glared as she had never glared at anyone before. Lephys, with his neck perfectly fine. The fifth brother chuckled, amused by her glare, and walked over. He pushed Missandra with his feet, looking bored.

In horror, Cassandra saw her younger sister's body roll down the stairs. She gasped and cried, fighting Vrehan to try and go see her. Across the room, Shareen was just as horrified.

"Lephys, you son of a..."

"Shut the fuck up, Shareen", protested the fifth brother. "You are not in charge anymore, and if you don't want that bitch of a witch dead yet, shut the fuck up for once."

The Princess glared at him, but for once, she truly had no choice. Vrehan was holding Cassandra, a blade clearly held against her throat, and they knew he wouldn't have the slightest remorse killing her.

Kairen was facing his worst nightmare. He was too far to do anything without risking Cassandra killed. From far away, they heard the furious growls of Krai adding to those of the two dragons already present. Kian, who had flown to Kairen prior, looked worried too, retreating behind Kairen's legs but still growling a bit.

This situation was a nightmare. Cassandra knew Kairen could kill his brother if she wasn't there. It may even explain why her sister had been... like this already. She gasped, and struggled again, furious.

"You won't be emperor," she hissed, her eyes full of tears and her voice hoarse.

"Oh, I already am, little bitch. The council agreed to make me the Emperor just an hour ago."

"You are no Emperor," she protested, "and you won't become one. You'll be dead. This Empire needs no Emperor. like you, no one would allow that. Not the Council, not the former Emperor, not your siblings, no one. The Gods themselves will punish you. You have no right but those of a cheater, a coward!"

“Shut up, damn witch!” Yelled Vrehan.

Out of anger, he rose his blade, and cut a long line on Cassandra’s back, making the young woman scream in pain. She had her tears in her eyes, but compared to everything she had undergone before, this was nothing. She couldn’t allow this.

She had come here to make sure Vrehan wouldn’t be the Emperor. She knew this would mean her son’s death, Kairen’s death, and if she was the obstacle to their safety, Cassandra didn’t care.

“I am the strongest Emperor! Kairen is nothing but an idiot!”

“You’re about to die, you asshole...” Hissed Shareen.

“You can’t be Emperor when your Dragon is wicker,” added Cassandra. “Everyone will know the Emperor had the weakest Dragon out of his brothers. You can’t fight Krai, and you can’t fight Kairen! You even locked up the Emperor’s Dragon because you couldn’t see that!”

Behind them, a horrible ruckus suddenly rose as Glahad suddenly broke free from the Vault. The door exploded behind them, and everyone near the throne lost their ground. Cassandra pushed Vrehan and, instead of trying a run she could never make, she jumped to get down the stairs. Her body violently hit the stairs one after another, but finally, she found herself above Missandra just in time to protect her.

The exploded door sent rocks raining on them, and she tried to protect her head. She felt suddenly vivid pains assaulting her body, but she tried to withstand it.

It only lasted a few seconds, after which she found herself covered in dust and, more importantly, caught between the fight of two dragons. Glahad, finally free, attacked the red dragon furiously despite the little space. She turned her head around, trying to spot Kairen in this mess. The first one she saw was Lephys, screaming something she couldn’t understand. His eyes were riveted on the two dragons fighting.

Cassandra knew she had to make use of every second she had. She touched Missandra, and, much to her relief, her sister seemed alive.

Barely, but the younger sister was still breathing weakly. Cassandra tried

to stand up next, but a sharp pain kept her seat. She turned her eyes and realized her left leg was stuck under a large piece of rock. She couldn't even move it! How come she hadn't even felt the pain earlier? She tried to stop her tears and looked around for help through the cloud of dust.

“Kairen!” She yelled. “Shareen!”

She called, again and again, even coughing when she breathed in too much dust. Cassandra was absolutely desperate. With the stones of the door exploding all ways and the dragons fighting, this room had gone from a war zone to complete chaos. She saw imperial guards running all directions, and she couldn't stop Shareen or Kairen. She couldn't move Missandra, but she searched her sister, checking all of her injuries and pockets.

“You damn witch!”

Cassandra reacted as soon as she heard the voice coming from behind her. Had he not yelled, he may have avoided this, but the young woman rose her dagger in a split second to protect herself.

Vrehan screamed, covering his face and the blood that was flowing.

Cassandra was satisfied she had injured him, but she was still stuck there, in front of that murderer.