

## The War God's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 86

### #86 The Storm

Cassandra smiled against her Prince's lips, enjoying this little minute of intimacy with him. There was something unique about being able to act like this with her lover, in the middle of a busy street... Like she could show her love to the world, without fear of judgment. Back a few weeks ago, she was always so afraid of what people would say, what people would think. Now, she was able to act however she wanted with him. Somehow, she had become so comforted by Kairen's feelings, she knew nothing could stop her love for him anymore. Cassandra didn't care much if he wasn't vocal about it. He was telling her just enough when she actually needed it.

"Hinue! Look!"

Missandra ran up to them, and, ecstatic, put a big flower crown on her older sister's head. She had a wide smile on and had apparently forgotten all her hatred for the Imperial Family. Cassandra was so happy to finally see her act her age. She had one of those big flower crowns on, too, and behind her, Dahlia was playing with some flower bracelets, too.

"Aren't those pretty! Should you get one for the ceremony? Come!"

Missandra pulled her to come to the flower stall, and check all of the flower crowns. It was the first time she showed interest in the Rain Ceremony, so Cassandra was happy to check out the items displayed with her. For once, they felt like a pair of sisters hanging out naturally, having fun with their friends, and chatting happily over trivial matters.

Cassandra was made to try several crowns by Dahlia and Missandra, so many that her hair was covered in petals after a while. The merchant was happy to have caught the girl's attention and was overdoing it with the flattery.

"Those white lilies are so fresh, and suit your Highness so well! You should try it! Your hair is so beautiful, any of those look perfect on you!"

Cassandra chuckled. White lilies again! She picked the flower crown, made of ivy, white lilies, and pink lisianthus among some filler leaves. Putting it on in her hair, Cassandra checked herself in the mirror, blushing a bit. She rarely felt so pretty... That evening, her hair was down, she was wearing that pale dress that complimented her rosy cheeks so well, and radiating with happiness.

She turned to Kairen, standing behind her, to show it.

“Do you like it?” She asked.

He nodded, but he was clearly looking at her instead of the crown.

Cassandra smiled and turned to the merchant.

“Could you pack this up for me?” She gently asked.

“What are you talking about! You should keep it on...” Said Missandra with a cute pout, Dahlia nodding behind her.

“Your sister is right.”

Behind them, Kareen and Shareen walked up to them, both looking at the crowns of flowers. The merchant immediately bowed politely to Lady Kareen, like many people around them, recognizing the ruler and owner of the City. The Imperial Concubine handed him some money.

“You young ladies should have fun. Have your sister and that servant of yours pick some too.”

Immediately, Missandra and Dahlia’s eyes shined in excitement. Those flower crowns were expensive, not something they would have been able to spend their pocket money on. However, the shiny gold coins the Imperial Concubine had handed the merchant were more than enough for them to pick anything they wanted. (1)

They both thanked Kareen profusely, and started picking some flower crowns for themselves, even bullying Anour into trying some too.

Shareen chuckled, crossing her arms while watching the scene.

“A prince being forced to wear a flower crown by two servant girls... This world is really changing faster than I thought! Mother, you can’t spend it all on Anour and the girls. What about your actual daughter?”

The Imperial Concubine sneered.

“What about her?” 2

Shareen frowned, crossing her arms and pouting.

“Aren’t you going to buy me anything, mother? With this heavy purse of yours? When do you ever gift me something?”

“Gift you something?” Said Kareen, turning to her with her eyebrow lifted. “When does this daughter of mine ever visits her mother? I’m already this old, yet neither of my children pampers me or worry about me. What should I buy you anything for? You heartless children seem to be doing well enough without me!” 13

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Cassandra had the hardest time repressing her laugh while Kareen walked away, looking as proud as ever, and pushing Dahlia and Missandra to come and see some food stalls, probably to spoil them more and anger Shareen.

Meanwhile, the Princess stayed speechless.

“That old witch! Old, Her? Who is old! She’s going to bury us all!” 5  
Kairen didn’t seem much surprised or affected by their mother’s rant, but Shareen went on to sulk and complain about Kareen’s attitude. Cassandra chuckled. Despite acting like this towards each other, it was obvious they loved their mother... Even more so watching Krai’s attitude with the Imperial Concubine. 2

She grabbed Kairen’s hand and pulled him to follow the group, though they walked slowly, keeping a little intimacy space around them.

“Why don’t you visit your mother more often?” She asked.

“I don’t know... I’m usually spending my time at the Military Camp most.” (2

Cassandra nodded. Shareen had mentioned before that their mother was a bit too nosy about her private activities”... And from what Cassandra herself had seen or experienced, she was sure Kareen wouldn’t have approved either.

She caressed her little tummy that was sticking out more and more every day.

“What are you thinking?” Asked her Prince, seeing her lost in her

thoughts.

“I hope our son will visit me often when I’m older... I’d be sad if he didn’t.”

Kairen frowned a bit, looking concerned about her words. Cassandra wondered if this was making him reflect on his attitude, but didn’t ask. They walked a bit longer, in silence, following the little group ahead that was enthusiastically checking the stalls. Apparently, Lady Kareen was only too happy to spoil the younger ones, probably a bit to piss off Shareen too...

“Who will you love more?” 3

“What?” Asked Cassandra, surprised by his sudden question.

“Who will you love more? Between our son and me?” 3

She was so stunned by his question, she stayed speechless for a while.

However, Kairen couldn’t have looked more serious, with his usual frown on and dark eyes. Cassandra sighed, trying hard not to laugh.

“My Prince... You can’t compare love like that. A mother’s love is something unique.”

“...Does that mean you love him more?”

Cassandra chuckled this time, shaking her head.

“Do you think your mother loves you more than the Emperor?”

“Yes.”?

Well, maybe that wasn’t the best example to take... Cassandra thought for a minute. 3

“What about Princess Shareen then? Do you think your mother loves her more?”

This time, Kairen looked baffled by her question. He glanced his mother’s way, frowning a bit more, and Cassandra waited for him. It was amusing that he would be so baffled by such a simple thing as a mother’s love... Sometimes her prince had this incredibly childish side of him. He could fight and win any battle in this world, but jealousy or matters of the heart were a real problem for him to understand.

Cassandra got on her toes and kissed his cheek, ending his deep thinking

with a gentle smile.

\*Loves doesn't need to be shared, compared. It's unique and endless. I love my baby so much, and I love you too. I love you both, but differently.\* 5

The Prince nodded, and replied to her kiss with one on her forehead, then her nose, until he got to her lips. She wasn't sure he had fully understood, but at least, he wasn't frowning anymore, her lips were keeping him busy enough...

Suddenly, Cassandra felt some droplets falling on her. She looked up and, surely, rain was starting to fall. She smiled wide, exchanging a glance with her prince.

"The rain!"

However, the little drops were now starting to come by hundreds, as the rain was rapidly increasing around them. Kareen and the rest of their group quickly gathered, everyone trying to cover themselves.

"We should head back," said Shareen. The locals say this isn't just going to be some light rain, there's a storm coming, and they get nasty in this area!" 3

Everyone agreed and, quickly, they walked back to the Diamond Palace. No one had been expecting that rain. The streets were quickly cleared, as the merchants were closing up their stalls and putting their merchandise to a safe place.

The Palace wasn't far, but by the time they got there, everyone was soaked. The servants ran to hand them some towels to wipe themselves with, but the Imperial Concubine was a bit upset at her disheveled hair and messy clothes.

"What a mess..."

Like the locals had said, it wasn't just a downpour. Above them, the wind picked up, and the claps of thunder and lightning flashes cloaked the sky in no time. This was truly a thunderstorm, not just rain. In the Diamond Palace, so many rooms had open roofs, Cassandra could hear the rain all around them. Of course, the servants had quickly moved the

furniture where it needed too, being used to the rain, but so many rooms were now unusable.

“Well, someone wanted rain...” sighed Shareen.

“Should we wait until it calms down, Cassandra dear?” Asked Kareen.

The young Concubine nodded, looking a bit sad.

“It can’t be helped. It would be too dangerous to go out in this weather...”

If it wasn’t for the wind and thunder, this rain would actually have been perfect for the Ceremony, but Cassandra had to admit, the current conditions weren’t good. The wind would have blown things away, and that thunder would be dangerous for anyone outside.

Feeling her deception, Kairen suddenly lifted her up. (2)

“Kairen?” She asked, taken by surprise.

However, without explaining a thing, the Prince slowly walked out of the room, leaving everyone else behind, and took Cassandra deeper inside the Diamond Palace. She couldn’t help but wonder where he was taking her... She could hear Krai climbing the walls around them and following their path from the outside, but those rooms around them were some she had never been to before, she couldn’t tell where they were. Kairen was obviously very familiar with the Diamond Palace. He was navigating easily, avoiding the rooms being flooded or taking corridors where they could avoid the downpour from the open roofs.

Finally, he put her down in front of a large door and pushed it open. Cassandra took a minute to understand. It was obviously a bathroom and a very large one at that. Actually, the large basin was being overflowed with water. This room didn’t have a fully open roof per se, but some openings in the walls were letting the heavy rain through, and it was slowly adding up. However, the most interesting part of that room was that instead of being surrounded by four or six walls like most rooms, this one had only five. One part of the wall had been left open, giving her an incredible view of the city, and access for Krai to sneak his head in. The large basin was actually going all the way to that open part, and the

excess water was being poured down below, overflowing the border of the basin.

She was amazed... This was such a strange room, and that tub was almost working as a large natural fountain, being filled by rainwater and flowing on the lower levels... She wanted to get in and go see the full view, but with this windy weather, it was obvious she should stay in the covered part.

To her surprise, Kairen walked in first, taking off his clothes and going into the water. Behind him, Krai growled, and without warning, spat fire. Cassandra was afraid, seeing him do that for the first time, but the Dragon wasn't doing that in her direction. Actually, he was burning the water next to his master, and, shortly after, some vapor was visible. Cassandra chuckled, and put her feet in the water. It was warm! Krai's fire had heated the water, turning this place into some hot pool... She chuckled and took the hand Kairen was offering her to walk in.

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### #87 The Names

Cassandra took his hand, blushing slightly but following him into the water. She had only taken off her shoes and newly bought flower crown. Her dress was already wet after all, and she was a bit too shy to venture on a ball open bath completely naked. Even if her Prince had taken off all of his clothes, he didn't say anything about her not doing the same, and gently pulled her in.

Kairen was carrying Cassandra on his lap, making her chuckle, She had no idea how deep this bath really was, but she could tell her Prince was navigating around easily. He took her as far as he could in this pool before the curtain of rain. She was amazed. Not only the view on the Diamond City was absolutely breathtaking, but the majesty of this infinity pool was amazingly beautiful. Cassandra felt that, if her Prince was to swim a bit too far, they could fall off of it. She couldn't see the

edge, as the rain was actually blurring the real limit of the water and confusing her perception, making it both exciting and scary. “They stayed far enough, though, remaining under the roofed part.

The Black Dragon, standing outside but with his head in, didn’t seem to mind the downpour much. The rain was rolling down his scales, while his red eyes were focused on the couple. Cassandra, her arms locked around her Prince, couldn’t stop smiling. Her whole body was floating in this warm water. It wasn’t nearly as hot as the hot springs from the North, but the difference in temperature with the cold rain still made a thin layer of vapor, or mist, float around. It was such a unique scene. Even the room itself was somewhere between eerie and ancient, as if, before them, no one had come here in years. Cassandra absolutely loved it.

“This is amazing...” She whispered.

“You like it?”

She nodded, and turned to her prince, brushing his hair gently.

“How did you think of bringing me here?”

“You enjoyed the hot springs... and you seemed sad we couldn’t hold the Ceremony yet.”

Cassandra’s heart melted once again. How could this man always surprise her with this extreme gentleness and consideration he was hiding under his armor... She nodded, and gently kissed him.

She loved any form of bath, and he knew it. She loved when they took baths together, the simple sensation of her body immersed in water was one of the most comforting in this world to her. Of course, it was even better when her Prince was by her side like this. They kept kissing for a while, tenderly, though their bodies were obviously really close to one another. The layers of her dress were floating around her in the water, while she curled her legs around Kairen’s, holding on to him.

A low growl distracted them a bit. They both turned heads, and Krai was putting the lower part of his maw in the water, staring at them. Cassandra couldn’t see it as his body was outside, but she was sure he was wagging his tail. She had learned to recognize that playful look in his eyes.



The Dragon couldn't enter more than up to his shoulders inside, but it was still plenty enough. Cassandra smiled, and detached herself from her Prince to go play with the Dragon. Krai growled happily, seeing her approach. She gently rubbed his snout and, to play with him a little, dived underneath the surface. She felt the dragon's snout, looking for her in the water, but Krai wasn't a water creature. When she emerged, a few feet away, he turned his head, surprised, making her laugh. He growled, and put his snout in the water, suddenly throwing a whole wave at her. Cassandra laughed and dived again. ( 2

This little game between them lasted quite a while. However, after a few minutes, while she was in the water, Cassandra felt some human hands grab her.

Kairen lifted her up, pulling her in his embrace again. She chuckled.

"Were you feeling lonely, my Prince."

"Don't just play with him."

Cassandra laughed and kissed him, focusing on her Prince despite the jealous growls. With the rain in the background, the sounds of the water, and her dripping hair, she almost felt home. Her Prince and her kept kissing, lovingly, swimming around in the water as if they were alone. However, Cassandra suddenly paused their kiss, frowning.

"What is it..."

"I..."

She went silent again, with a confused expression. Did she just imagine it?

She grabbed Kairen's hand, and pulled it next to hers against her tummy.

He touched her right in time and, a second later, it was his turn to have a shocked expression. Cassandra chuckled again, ecstatic. 5

"Did you feel that? She whispered.

The Prince nodded, keeping his large hand widespread on her stomach.

He had felt it. A little bump under her skin, so weak he had almost missed it. He stayed there again, waiting.

"I feel him again," she whispered. "Oh, God... He's moving...."

Kairen frowned. He couldn't feel it anymore, or maybe it was too faint.

Yet, Cassandra was completely absorbed in the baby's faint movements. She hadn't thought she would be able to feel them so early! However, it wasn't a mistake. This wasn't her stomach, but her son, she could feel some little movements. Sometimes, they were too faint for her to be sure, and sometimes, she was sure. They stayed like this for a while, but nothing else happened.

It was plenty enough, though. Cassandra couldn't stop smiling from ear to ear. Kairen grabbed her hair, and gently pulled her closer to him, for another kiss. Somehow, he didn't seem to want to take his hand off of her belly, as if he was still hoping for another little hit.

"You have to come back to see our son, Cassandra whispered, suddenly becoming much more serious.

"Why are you so afraid?"

"I don't know... I have a bad feeling, she confessed. "Maybe it's just my pregnancy making me more worried. I just don't like that you won't be here."

She sighed, and snuggled against his neck, closing her eyes, feeling the warmth of his skin. Kairen frowned, caressing her gently. He hadn't realized how much Cassandra needed him more because of her pregnancy. Somehow, she was a bit needier, looking for more of their cuddling than before; He wasn't sure if it was due to their relationship growing or part of the pregnancy, or both...

He kept caressing her, letting her rest against his shoulder. He had thought of bringing her there to comfort her, but truly, comforting a pregnant woman was harder than expected. Would she really be alright staying here with his mother? The Prince was a bit afraid the young concubine would be lonely or feel too bored. He definitely couldn't bring her on the battlefield, though. He wouldn't even have let her anywhere near a military camp, not when she was pregnant.

"I will be back as soon as I can."

"I know... And it's your duty. I know it can't be helped. I just don't like that we will be separated again."

“I’ll stay with you as long as you want after the war is over... I’ll take you back to the Onyx Castle.”

Cassandra chuckled. How did he know she missed that place the most? Somehow, she had grown so attached to that lonely, isolated castle so much in the last few months, she was surprised herself to be missing it so much. She nodded against his skin.

After a while, however, the wind picked up even stronger, and Krai flew away, annoyed. Without the Dragon to heat it up, the water was going to get cold soon. Cassandra and Kairen got out of the water while they were still feeling warm. Somehow, right behind the doors, the servants had already brought some thick towels. Cassandra abandoned her dress there, knowing someone would come and pick it up, and wrapped herself in one of the very large towels. Once again, the War God, who never seemed to fear the cold, only wrapped it around his hips, letting his natural heat dry him.

He picked Cassandra off the ground, and carried her gently back to their room to change into her nightgown. She was now dry, but the young concubine still took her time brushing her messy hair and put it up into a long braid

for the night. The servants had brought a little tray of food, including her favorite green grapes and cheese cubes, with some mulled wine. Surely, Lady Kareen had ordered this...

Cassandra felt a bit guilty for wanting to eat again, but she couldn’t help it. She sat on the bed, grabbing the little bowl of grapes, and pouring some of the cheese cubes on top. For some reason, she almost wanted to see that cheese melted on top of it... Kairen, laid down next to her, had already helped himself to some wine and was caressing her back, letting her eat all she wanted.

“It’s really impressive, I’m hungrier than I ever was, even when I was unable to eat for days... Babies are truly something,” she whispered.

“Are you tired? Or your back painful?”

Cassandra stretched her back a bit. It was true her lower back pain was constant those days, but it was a really mild pain, not something she

would complain about. At least, she was grateful to be over her nausea. She hadn't had any in several days in a row.

"I'm fine... Just hungry like a dragon."

Kairen chuckled and kept rubbing her back. When Cassandra leaned to take the mulled wine, however, he frowned.

"Cassandra..."

"Just a little sip on my tongue," she promised. "For the taste..."

Despite his frowning, he let her take a little bit, as promised. He was afraid his mother's bad habits would slowly detain on the young concubine somehow... Hence, Kairen was quick to take the glass off of her hands and finish it in one go. Cassandra didn't even protest, however. Her thoughts were already elsewhere.

"The Baby... Maybe we should find him a name already."

"You can pick whatever you want."

"Really?"

Kairen nodded. He didn't really care and trusted Cassandra fully. The young concubine wasn't surprised or disappointed. She slowly smiled, trying to think. She would have loved to give the baby a name from the Rain Tribe, but this was future Dragon Prince they were talking about. She couldn't risk picking something too odd... What about a Dragon Empire name then? She quite liked them.

"How did your mother picked your name? And Shareen's? Do you know?" (2

"...She just took hers and twisted it. Concubines like to give names similar to theirs to their children.",

Cassandra could understand. Among the many, many children of the Emperor, this was a way to remind him of themselves, through their children. She doubted Kareen had exactly the same idea, though. It was probably her own possessiveness over her children, rather than her relationship to the emperor, that had prevailed.

"Kairen?"

"Hm?"

“What about... your siblings? The others? Do you know their names?”

He nodded.

“My mother has them buried here... I saw their names on the stones.

Suiren, Shaneen, Kassen.”

Cassandra felt her heart pinch a bit at each name. She couldn't forget the painful words of the Imperial Concubines over her children's death...

There was one question she had been curious about, though.

“How come... Srai is alive? I thought a Dragon died after his tamer passed, but things are different, aren't they?”

“He was old enough. Newborn Dragons are more fragile. Most die with us if we die young.

Cassandra nodded. That explained why Srai had been the only one to survive... According to Kareen, The young Suiren, her firstborn, had died at six. Apparently, it was enough for his Dragon to survive, even disabled. But her second and fourth children had died as infants... She put protective hands around her belly. How did the abandoned Dragons feel? Missing a part of themselves... She couldn't imagine Krai without Kairen, or the other way around.

Would her baby be as close to his Dragon? She couldn't wait to meet both of them. Her two babies, the human and the dragon one. Cassandra silently promised herself. With or without Kairen, she would protect their child. She would do anything for that.

“Cassandra.”

He gently pulled her in his embrace, taking her away from her deep thinking. Cassandra chuckled, putting her half-emptied bowl to the side, and snuggled against him.

“I'm tired,” she said.

“Then sleep. If the rain calms down, we will have our ceremony tomorrow morning.”

“I hope so...”

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## #88 The Green Gown

Cassandra had no problem falling asleep that evening. She was soothed by the sounds of the downpour outside, the wind shimmering in the leaves, and the slow breathing of her Prince against her ear. A peaceful sleep after a nice evening outing and a long, warm bath was just the best. (022)

When she woke up, the next morning, her senses immediately picked up the sound of the downpour, still ongoing outside. She smiled and turned around to face Kairen. However, she was surprised to find her Prince still deeply asleep. This was a first! He would usually wake up the second she moved. Yet, Kairen was still obviously sleeping, with his slow, steady breath, and serene expression. Cassandra bit her lip, only too happy to secretly witness such a precious moment.

He was looking a bit younger when he wasn't frowning, or glaring with those dark obsidian eyes of his. She loved being able to scrutinize him from up close... She often forgot their age difference. He was a grown man, while she had just barely gotten into adulthood. She brushed his beard with her fingertips. He hadn't cut it in a few days, but she liked it. His hair, too, was steadily growing to get down his nape. (10)

As Cassandra was still caressing his beard as gently as possible, Kairen swiftly moved to wrap his arm around her, his eyes still closed. The young concubine pouted a bit.

"So you were awake after all..."

"Hn."

She chuckled and came a bit closer to gently kiss his lips. Kairen smiled, but for once, didn't give in, letting Cassandra spread her kisses on his lips, on his beard, on his cheekbones. He could tell she was just having fun teasing him. He let her do until she got bored, and pushed him over, to get on top of him. Only then did the War God consent to open his eyes, to see the face of his smiling concubine.

"Good morning, my Prince," she whispered.

"Good morning."

“It’s still raining,” she said with a smile.

“I hear that...”

Cassandra chuckled. She knew his faint answers were part of his character, not a lack of interest. She kissed him once more, and got out of the bed. She was a bit more excited than she thought about this. The gentle music of the heavy rain outside was making her happy, and the thought that they could finally do the Ceremony...

As always, the servants came in shortly after they had woken up, bringing some new set of clothes and disappearing as soon as possible. Cassandra wondered how they always knew. She put on the new dress and tried to sort out her messy curls. The rain had done no justice to her chocolate brown hair... She had to spend some extra time taming it, and left it untied, knowing it was no use with that humidity.

“Lady Cassandra?”

Dahlia was gently knocking at the door, bringing in another large tray of food, for breakfast surely. The young girl smiled upon entering.

“Lady Kareen sent me to give you your breakfast! Did you sleep well?”

The young servant was apparently only too happy to be back to her old habits of assisting Cassandra. She even helped her arrange her hair a bit and put on the flower crown they had bought the previous day. As they discussed, chatting about the previous evening, behind them Kairen was getting up and getting ready too. He walked to Cassandra’s side to give her a quick kiss and grabbed some of the meat on the tray before leaving.

Dahlia’s shoulder relaxed a little as soon as the War God was out of the room, making Cassandra chuckled. (1)

“Are you still scared?” Asked Cassandra.

“It cannot be helped, Lady Cassandra. I’ve been raised to always fear the Imperial Family. I understand that Imperial Concubine Kareen, and the Third Prince and Lady Shareen are different, but still...”

“Old habits die hard.”

Cassandra understood that better than anyone else. It had taken her weeks to fully trust Kairen, his sister and mother, and even now, she was unable

to approach any member of the Imperial Family without that fear automatically growing in her stomach.

She had no idea where he had gone, but Cassandra enjoyed the bit of time she had alone with Dahlia. Apparently, she and Missandra had gotten quite close, and stayed together late in the night to chat. Her sister was still asleep, but the rest of the inhabitants were all up already. Most couldn't sleep well because of the storm from the previous night. The thunder had only calmed down late in the night, but Cassandra was among those few people it hadn't bothered at all. (1)

"Lady Kareen has been very busy preparing everything for the Rain Ceremony!" Explained Dahlia, her hands busy braiding some of Cassandra's hair. "She said she wants to have it done before the rain stops. I don't think it will stop so soon, but..."

Cassandra nodded while eating breakfast. She didn't think so either. She could recognize when a downpour was going to last, and this was definitely one of those. The actual storm was over, and the wind had calmed down, leaving only regular sounds of heavy rain.

She closed her eyes, letting Dahlia finish her hairdo and eating in silence, just listening to the rain. This sound was so familiar... She was born during a storm like the one of the previous day. Now that she thought about it, her baby had mostly been conceived during a snowstorm. This was such a cute coincidence... Maybe it would take another of those for him to be born. 6

"Lady Cassandra? What are you smiling about?" Asked Dahlia.

"I was just thinking a bit. Are we finished?"

"Just a little bit more! I want to see if I can adjust this..."

"Hinue!"

Missandra showed up at the door, looking tired but tightly wrapped in a big fur cloak. She looked a bit cold, but her cheeks were of a rosy shade. She walked up to them, looking happy.

"I love those flower crowns... Hinue, did you have your breakfast? Do you want more? Prince Anour showed us where to find the kitchens



yesterday!”

Cassandra chuckled.

“Aren’t you close to Anour now? For him to show you around?” ]

Missandra pouted.

“Don’t start treating me like a child!”

Sulking a bit, she grabbed some of Cassandra’s breakfast, biting into one of those cheese cubes hungrily. The older sister chuckled. Actually, she was happy whenever Missandra acted her age. Moreover, she was obviously a lot more comfortable now that they were in the Diamond Palace, enough to befriend Anour at least. The rain probably had the same effect as on her in raising her younger sister’s spirits, too.

After bickering a bit more, all three young women headed out of the room. Cassandra only had to follow Dahlia, who had apparently been woken up early too to prepare for the Ceremony.

Finally, they reached a large room. Cassandra recognized it instantly. It was one of lady Kareen’s Favorite colons one with an open roof and lots of green plants sprouting wildly from all sides. This time though all the furniture had been taken out as the rain was pouring in. It was alright, though, the floor had some crevices where the water would flow in, as dozens of little rivers headed towards the outer parts or the fountain on the side Carcandra had always wondered how the Diamond Palace could have so many open rooms, but now, it was obvious that those rooms were properly conceived for the water to be expelled one way or another. This one was actually rather perfect for the Ceremony. It had a square shape, was letting the computer, and the floor wasn’t completely flooded, only a thin layer of water remained under their feet.

“How is it, dear?” Asked Kareen, walking up to her in one of her gorgeous burgundy dresses.

“It looks perfect, Lady Kareen. But do we have everything?”

The Imperial Concubine clicked her tongue.

“Don’t you dare underestimate me, young Lady! Dahlia, take her to the other bedroom where we have everything And someone goes wake up that sleepyhead daughter of mine!”<sup>4</sup>

Cassandra was swiftly pushed to another room. She had thought she should get ready in her room, but once she walked inside, she understood why she couldn't. In front of her, a gorgeous green and gold dress was displayed. It was the first time in years she saw what looked like a real ceremonial outfit from her Tribe, and the tears came to her eyes right away. There was even the veil, and all the golden embroideries had obviously been handmade!

"Do you like it, Hinue?" Asked Missandra, excited. "Dahlia and I stayed up late last night to finish it!

"We had some help from other servants of course," added Dahlia. "But we all followed Missandra's instructions down to the letter to have it as close to your real ceremonial outfit as possible... Do you like it?"

"It's gorgeous," whispered Cassandra, unable to find any more words to describe it.

Indeed, the dress was divine and had nothing to envy her usual pink dresses. The gorgeous green silk was of the best quality, shimmering with several shades as she touched it, and the gold threads had been embroidered so well, to retrace the traditional arabesques she remembered, all over it. The piece of cloth didn't have a single ground in it, but it was shining and glowing better than any treasure.

The girls had even prepared, with Lady Kareen's help, prepared some jewelry to add to her outfits

"Hinue, look! We couldn't find borean ink, but I made something similar.

Ah, I tested it, so your skin should be able to bear it just fine!"

Indeed, the blue ink in the little pot she was handing her looked very similar to proper borean ink. Cassandra put the pot aside, and took the two girls in her arm to hug them. 2

"Thank you so much... Dahlia, Missandra... Thank you for preparing all this for me."

Both Missandra and Dahlia were surprised by this sudden hug, but happily responded to it. After that, all three of them chuckled, excited, and it was high time they helped Cassandra get ready.

A while later, Kairen was waiting outside, wearing a similar green silk piece of clothing. For the tall wantor, the girls had only made some large cloak, which he was wearing over his shoulders, with some black pants. Karen wasn't very familiar with anything about the Rain Tribe's ceremonial, but when Missandra came up to him, he listened to her. "Could you just stand there... Right there, please. Alright, and if you can wait a bit, my sister is coming!"

She went back running inside and, suddenly, Cassandra appeared. Everyone suddenly got completely speechless. The young concubine was more beautiful than she'd ever been. The long green dress was tightly wrapped around her body, showing her curves more than the usual pink dress she was wearing. It was only covering her chest belly, and legs, so her back and arms were nude, only her hair running down. The visible pieces of her skin were

actually shining of a strange light, like some thin silver shimmer...

Anyone in the room with eyes to see found that emerald dress was absolutely gorgeous on her and, with that flower crown, and the painting on her skin, she looked like she had just stepped out of one of those large paintings, like a nature goddess. Several male servants had their mouths wide open in surprise, and even the girls were blushing, shocked by how pure yet sensual she looked at that moment.

However, the one most stunned of all was Kairen. The War God was looking at his young concubine with such a deep expression on his face. His deep black eyes were mesmerized by the vision before him. He was like struck, not shocked by how beautiful she was, but how even more beautiful she could be. For maybe the first time, he wasn't quiet. He was speechless.

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### #89 The Water God's Love

Cassandra had always a gorgeous young woman, a flower that bloomed in adversity, but that day, for the first time, she was able to shine in all of

her glory. The War God, behind his impassible facade, was properly stunned. In terms of natural beauty, Cassandra was indisputably beautiful. All the jewels and attires of the concubines of the Imperial palace couldn't beat such a natural beauty.

Though they were of different shades, the deep green of her dress was complimenting her eyes perfectly. Her brown hair, too, was falling in natural curls on her shoulders and down on her back and belly, with that crown they had bought together on top. Several of the servants whispered about her looks, but the rain covered any sound, and, anyway, the War God wouldn't have been able to hear. All of his senses had gone numb, as he could only focus on the holy vision in front of his eyes. (2  
Cassandra gracefully walked up to him, like a nymph, a gentle smile on. He could barely recognize the woman he held in his arms every night. There was something unspeakably different about her, as if she was from another world, another realm. She took his hand.

"Kairen? Are you alright?"

"...You're beautiful," he whispered, as if saying that truth would deliver him from this trance.

Cassandra blushed, as always, feeling a bit proud. She hadn't thought she would be able to cause such emotion in her usually undecipherable War God. The rain was falling around them, but they didn't care. It was just as if the two of them had been alone. The green clothes were slowly getting wet, but they were still very pretty to observe.

Missandra walked up to them.

"Since I'm the only aside Hinue who knows about the Ceremony, I'll tell you two what to do... Dahlia, bring the thread please!"

While Missandra took the silver thread and started gently wrapping it around both of their wrists, in a complex ensemble of knots, Kairen's eyes were on Cassandra's skin. The shimmering from earlier was actually that strange ink that she had used to paint herself with. From the look of it, those weren't simply lines and strange shapes, but this was obviously some foreign language he couldn't decipher at all. He frowned.

“What do those say?”

Cassandra blushed a bit, looking down, and her younger sister was the one to answer.

“The partners can paint whatever they want on their bodies as a sign of affection. Hinue put your name and titles with the symbols of protection, health, and strength.”

Kairen was surprised. He kept looking at all those strange scriptures on her skin, unable to decipher what was which.

“Do it on me too.”

“What?”

“With that ink. I want to write her name.”

Missandra sighed.

“But I’m almost done with the silk thread! Hinue, you didn’t tell him earlier about the borean ink?”

“Just bring it to me, please,” said Cassandra, with an apologetic look.

While Missandra pouted and kept doing her knots, Dahlia ran over, with an umbrella in hand, and the little bowl of ink and a brush in the other.

There wasn’t much left of what Missandra had prepared, as Cassandra had painted a lot on herself already. She took the brush with her available hand and pushed the cloak a bit to access his torso.

“What do you want me to write?” She whispered to him.

“Your name.”

“Are you sure? Just my name?”

“Yes.”

Cassandra chuckled, and proceeded to do as asked. It was so like him. No prayers, just her name. She knew Kairen wasn’t a man to believe in prayers, or divine will. He only trusted himself and the people he cared about. She wrote her name on his skin, as many times as she could before running out of ink. The ink Missandra had made wasn’t as good as the real borean ink, and was already starting to drip a bit because of all the rain, but this was good enough. The silver ink shined strangely on the War God’s torso and arms. Maybe because of his natural musculature,

they looked more like tribal fighting signs than his Favorite's name...

"Alright, I'm done!" Said Missandra, looking satisfied. (4)

Dahlia swiftly walked away, going under the little porch to shelter herself from the rain, close to Shareen and Kareen. Mother and Daughter were standing side by side and watching attentively the Ceremony, not saying a word. They were aware that, although there wasn't anything official about this, this ceremony was sacred to Cassandra's people. As they knew nothing about this foreign custom, they were silently watching, curious.

Cassandra and Kairen's wrists were now tied together by that silk thread. The gentle fabric wasn't any painful on their skin, but their wrists couldn't move, being tied so tightly together with those complex knots. Cassandra looked at her left wrist and Kairen's right wrist, with a smile. She had never thought she would get to make that ceremony ever, let alone with a Prince, and a man she loved... Kairen chuckled. 8

"Are you so happy?" He said.

"Yes... I feel a bit like it's a dream."

"Sorry, we can only do this for now..."

"No, it's plenty," Cassandra whispered, her cheeks blooming with pink.

"Alright, if you two are done being so mushy," said Missandra. "I'll start... How, should I translate into our tongue or theirs?"

"Just do it in our tongue and I'll translate in the Dragon Empire's tongue, Missandra."

"Understood. Then..."

Missandra took a deep breath, and took a couple of steps back, opening her hands, palms towards the sky, and closed her eyes. She started speaking, and Cassandra repeated in words everyone else could understand, both sisters talking at the exact same rhythm, one echoing the other.

"Today is the day of Rain, the Sacred Day. As the Sky God is showering the Earth Goddess with love, their children are born with the rain. We are children of the rain, children of sacred love. O, God of Water, let your

rain pour and hear your children today, for they carry their faith, love, and joy in their heart too. O, God of Water, son of the Sky and Earth, If love as your eyes, let them see. If love as your tongue, let it speak. If you can hear us, hear your children's pledge of love today, as we share it with you."

Cassandra was talking softly while staring at Kairen, their eyes not leaving each other's a single second.

"O God of Water, our ancestors taught us Love. Help us teach our children too. We'll share that love to all of your children, from all rivers they come, from all seas they come. Let us speak of love, and let our hearts beat together. Let your love flow in our veins and words, for you showed us how to love with your rain. Gather your children together under the rain, gather us, and remind us how to love if we forget. Teach us to be patient, kind, sincere, and truthful. Teach us Love, teach us how to cry and pray. Fill our lives with love, water, and grace. O God of Water, your children are thankful today, as with love you teach us the way again." (

On the side, Kareen shed a little tear, impressed. Even the servants were all feeling sensible to the words of Cassandra, and the prayer that echoed in the walls despite the rain. Both sisters took a little pause, breathing deeply before reciting again. 2

"O God of Water, your children will remember. We will remember your love is patient, kind, sincere, and truthful. We shall not give in to anger, and we shall not give in to evil. We shall not lie, and we shall not betray. Your children promise to remember, each day the rain falls, how love is patient, kind, sincere, and truthful. O God of Water, your love has no beginning and no end. Your love is blind and deaf. Your love is infinite." Missandra's voice suddenly broke into tears. Something in her memories kept her from going on. She kept hanging her hands in front of her, but she was crying, unable to continue. Cassandra understood why it hurt so much for her sister. She took a deep breath, and continued alone, while Kareen walked over to gently hug Missandra's shoulders.

“O God of Water, your children of the rain shall not lie, and they shall not hurt. I will be blind and deaf if I can’t see or hear love. O God of Water, your children gather today, in harmony, to love again. O God of Water, hear our prayer. Your children will give up their wealth, their bodies, and their mind for love.”

Cassandra took a deep breath and gestured for Kairen to take one of the ends of the silk thread, while she took the other,

“Rain has come to us blind and deaf. Rain will witness our love today. I give my wealth, my body, and my mind for this love of mine.” 3

She mimicked with her lips for Kairen to repeat her words.

“I give my wealth, my body, and my mind for this love of mine.”

“I will love eternally, in the eyes of my beloved, and in the eyes of the Water God.”

“I will love eternally,” repeated Kairen. “In the eyes of my beloved, and in the eyes of the Water God.”

“I swear to keep my love patient, kind, sincere, and truthful until I die. I swear to honor the Water God in every way until I return into his arms, side by side with my beloved.”

Once again, the War God repeated without flinching.

“O God of Water, Love is infinite. Love is mine. You are mine.”

“... Love is infinite. Love is mine... Almien.”

Cassandra was surprised to hear Kairen had translated by himself the last word. She was shocked and incredibly overwhelmed. 1

They stayed silent for a little while, staring deeply into each other’s eyes. There was no sound around but the rain, falling quietly around them, the downpour slowly turning into a gentle rain. Cassandra smiled and took his other hand, linking her fingers with his. Then, she stepped forward, and they exchanged a long, deep kiss.

Their kiss had a fresh taste of rain, and eternity. Despite the cold around them, Cassandra’s heart had never felt warmer than at this moment. They exchanged that kiss in a religious atmosphere as if they were sealing their promise. When they gently stepped back, a drop rolled on her cheek, but



no one would have been able if it was a tear or the rain. Cassandra was smiling, and it didn't matter much.

Then, they both pulled on the silk thread at the same time, and, to their surprise, it separated perfectly, leaving two little bracelets wrapped around their wrists. The people watching were confused. How did that long thread separate into two so easily, and in such perfect knots, too? "We're done for today," whispered Cassandra.

"Done? Already?" Repeated Shareen, surprised.

The young concubine walked over to her sister, hugging Missandra in her arms to try and calm her down. They went to shelter themselves under the roofed part of the room, where the servants rushed to bring them thick towels.

"Yes. Both partners usually keep this thread around their wrists until the next rain, and it is done..."

"I was expecting something much bigger! Do you have any idea what hassle the wedding ceremonies are here? Let alone the ones in the Imperial family!"

"The Rain Tribe isn't the... showy type. As long as the God of Water has been able to witness it, any kind of ceremony is holy and perfectly valid. We don't need grand ceremonies, decorations or a lot of people. As long as both parties were sincere, we are now acknowledged as lifetime partners. It's all that matters."

"It was a beautiful ceremony, Cassandra," said Kareen, glaring at her daughter for her to shut up. Your tribe has a beautiful tradition. I prefer it the ones here, we are all about the grand celebrations and showing off, this feels much more intimate and sincere. That prayer was beautiful... Missandra was still weeping silently. Cassandra kept hugging her and caressing her hair until she would calm down. This may have been a bit too much for her... It brought back painful memories of a time where their friends and family were alive, and they were both living very differently. Missandra had lied, stolen and hurt other people, and hearing the whole prayer again made her feel ashamed and disgusted at herself.

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As the ceremony was over, Kareen ordered for them to move to another room to sit comfortably and rest a bit, while the servants brought large trays of food, once again. It was something like brunch, probably, as it wasn't really early enough or late enough for a proper meal. To help everyone warm-up, some tea was brought, and Missandra insisted on being the one to prepare it and serve it to everyone.

Cassandra sat on a couch, with Kairen's arm around her shoulders, as she snuggled under a large fur blanket. She hadn't really realized how cold she was until then. However, she also didn't want to change into normal clothes yet. She was happy to wear the traditional green of her tribe, even if all of the fake Borean silk had already been washed away by the rain. If it had been a real one, it would have lasted several hours at least, but it couldn't be helped. Cassandra kept caressing the little silver thread around her wrist, feeling a bit numbed by happiness. 2

Meanwhile, Shareen was gazing at Missandra, frowning a bit. The young girl's tears had dried, but her eyes were still red and she would sniffle from time to time.

"What were you crying for? Marrying your sister away?" She asked. (3)

Missandra answered with a glare, though she quickly stopped to go back to preparing the tea. Kareen slapped her daughter's thigh, frowning.

"You insensitive daughter! When did I raise you to be so heartless?"

"...Do I have to answer that?"

Shareen got another slap and shut up after that, only making annoyed faces and sulking on the side.

Aside from Shareen, most people in the room actually understood the real reasons behind Missandra's tears, though they wouldn't have been so blunt about it. The prayer they had recited taught about love, being true and selfless. Missandra had lost all of that at a young age and grown into someone far from those ideals. For the first time in a while, she felt sullied by her past as a prostitute, and the thefts she had committed. That

ceremony had been too much of a brutal reminder for them.

“Did your parents held that ceremony too?” Asked Lady Kareen, trying to pull the topic away from Missandra, as she distributed the tea.

“No... Our father died when our mother was pregnant with Missandra,” confessed Cassandra.

“May I ask how?”

“He was in an accident,” replied Missandra. “Our mother said he died when they were building houses. There was an accident, and our father got badly injured.”

“One of the houses they were building got unstable because of a storm... Our father wanted to go and help secure his friend’s house, but it collapsed on them,” said Cassandra. “Our uncle too was there, and he saw three men die with him, the house collapsed in the river and just... washed them all away. Our mother got the news once it was all over. Only our uncle returned, but he was severely injured. He passed a few hours later.”

“By the great Dragon,” whispered Kareen. “I can’t believe how sad your mother must have been...”

Cassandra was about to say something, but a loud growl interrupted her. They all heard Krai land loudly next door, and a few seconds later, Roun too, his growl higher-pitched than the black dragon’s. The little Srai showed up in the room, as the only one small enough to sneak in, and went to curl up at Kareen’s feet, his eyes watching the wall behind which they could hear his siblings bickering again.

“I don’t remember him,” said Cassandra. “Our mother told us about him many times, though. He was one of our tribe’s best architects, and he had built our house too.”

“I wish I could see our house again.”

“Maybe you could go there again?” Asked Shareen.

Cassandra shook her head.

“It would be very dangerous. The swamps we lived in are now under the Eastern Republic’s territory. I don’t even think there’s anything left of it,

they probably destroyed it...”

Missandra nodded sadly. Even Lady Kareen didn't dare to ask about their old tribe again. She was aware that, despite the fact that their rival had taken over the former tribe's parcel, it was the war between the Dragon Empire and the Eastern Republic that had destroyed those girls' homeland.

Somehow, it was only luck that the Dragon Empire hadn't been the one to destroy the Rain Tribe. If they had, it would have made this conversation even more awkward and added another gap between Kairen and Cassandra.

This conversation had gone a bit sour after such an intense ceremony. Somehow, the Rain Ceremony had been so solemn, it had brought up so deep-buried memories to the surface. The nostalgic feeling that hovered Cassandra's heart made her feel a bit bittersweet. For a while, everyone focused on eating, and an awkward silence filled the room until Shareen spoke.

“So... After that ceremony, what is changing, exactly? You mentioned something about giving up your mind, body, and all. Is it for real? That sounded a lot like you two were going to commit suicide.”

Cassandra chuckled.

“No, not at all. It had a deeper meaning than that. The Water God teaches us to not hold on to material things, not even our body.”

“But your mind?”

“It means we have to elevate ourselves from earthly things. We only see through the eyes of those we love. It means we must care about others before ourselves.”

“Well, I like to care about myself more,” said Shareen. “Others can come after. Your people had a very selfless way, but I still think this is a bit odd.”

“I agree,” replied Cassandra with a chuckle. “Since I grew up in the Dragon Empire after that, I do see our differences, but I've also grown to love both. I like the dedication of the Rain Tribe to others, but I also like

how living in the Dragon Empire is teaching us to care about ourselves. It's a very different environment, after all."

Cassandra had already thought about this before. Somehow, she felt that having met Kairen had allowed her to grow as a person. She was afraid of her own shadow anymore, but she cherished her own life more. She was miles away from the slave girl who had lost all her will to live in that arena. She had grown a lot more in those few months, more than in the previous few years... 2

After her words, Missandra and Shareen started an argument about the different ways of life between the Dragon Empire's people and the Rain Tribe, but Cassandra was too tired to take part. Somehow, all this rain had gotten her a bit sleepy, and she just enjoyed this long brunch, her head onto Kairen's shoulder. She just kept snacking on those cheese cubes and green grapes, but also some slices of dried and smoked meat, which Missandra quickly took notice of.

"Hinue, you're eating meat again?" She said with a frown.

"Sorry, it's... the baby..."

Cassandra couldn't see it, but Kairen glared at Missandra, warning her. The War God put a hand around his concubine's belly. Kareen, too, clicked her tongue.

"Let her eat. Your sister is pregnant, she can eat and drink whatever she wants as long as she stays healthy!"

"Is that why you sent that bottle of wine to our room, mother?" Growled Kairen, annoyed.

It wasn't that often that the third Prince would get mad at his own mother. All the servants in the room froze up, their eyes going to the Imperial Concubine with a bit of worry. He wouldn't do something to his own mother, would he? However, Kareen was not impressed at all. The War God was her own son, after all, his obsidian eyes had no effect on her. "Why can't I? I know Cassandra is reasonable. You would drink most of it by yourself anyway!"

She wasn't wrong, but Kairen still glared at his mother, a bit annoyed.

Cassandra chuckled. Truth was, she really didn't mind that little taste of mulled wine before sleeping. It may have helped her sleep better, even. However, she wouldn't dare to say that in front of the War God...

Moreover, she had noticed, throughout the lunch, Kairen didn't take his hand off of her belly. Even while he was eating, the War God would only use his right hand. It wasn't that surprising that he would easily hold her and cuddle, but Cassandra was starting to wonder if there hadn't been a bit of change since the previous night. Maybe it was only her imagination, but they had slept in a spooning position, and at that time, he also had his hand covering her little baby bump. Was it because he had felt the baby kicking? Cassandra silently hoped that the father of her unborn child would slowly grow more attached to this child... Until then, Kairen had shown care for her more than usual since the beginning of the pregnancy, but not much care about the baby at all. Maybe he hadn't realized much before? She was the one carrying their son, so maybe, to Kairen, she still came before a baby that had yet to come to this world...

She secretly wished this large hand spread in a protective way around her tummy was a good sign for their future as a family.

As they finished their lunch, the rain kept falling continuously. It probably wouldn't stop for a while, either. Cassandra secretly hoped all this rain and the storm would slow the Imperial army as much as possible before they arrived there. Shareen, however, was sulking.

"As soon as that damn rain is stopping Anour, we're leaving," she announced.

"Already?" Asked the teenage boy, sulking a bit.

"We are not going on a Holiday trip, remember? Moreover, I want to hurry and go to the Camp to whip those damn idiots' asses."

"Aren't you just going there to play!" Said Anour.

Kareen chuckled, but Shareen didn't answer that. Of course, the War God's Army was probably doing just fine without her or even their Commander in Chief. The real threat would be the East, and Cassandra was in no hurry to have Kairen go there.

Once their lunch was finished, Kairen and his sister had to talk over

military matters, so Cassandra went back first to finally change into warmer clothes. She carefully hung her green ceremony clothes, however, to where she could see them as if that could make the dream last a bit longer. She took a bath to clean and warm herself up first, and put on a new pink dress, with a light fur cloak, as the rain was keeping the temperature low. Between the hot and dry weather of the Capital, the humidity of the Diamond Palace, and the cold of the Onyx Castle, Cassandra felt like she could get sick very easily. Hence, she made sure to cover herself, and drank some more warm tea.

She had another intention while going back to her room, and that was writing her letters. She asked for some ink and parchment. She wrote a long note to Evin first, wondering if the Imperial Servant would be happy to hear any news from her. He was the most severe man she had ever met, but she kinda liked him. He had been of great help back when she lived at the Camp with Kairen. Moreover, she was hoping to get some news from the Red Room as well, see if her medical teaching had done some good there. What she had heard from the Emperor in the Capital wasn't enough. Cassandra was hoping to hear more from Evin directly. She also added some more recommendations, about some herbs she remembered seeing there but hadn't taught them the use yet. She ended her letter wishing him well.

After that, her next letters were for Orwen, the Blacksmith apprentice, and the servants of the Onyx Castle. She was curious to know how they were all doing. She missed Nebora most, as her first friend there. They had a rocky start, but she truly appreciated her honest nature. Cassandra took her time to let her friend know most of what had happened to her and realized that, once it was put on the paper, it was indeed quite a lot. Finally, Cassandra wrote some shorter letters to the younger servants, and Patrina, the Head Maid there.

“You look busy...”

She smiled, feeling sturdy arms around her waist as she was writing the last couple of sentences. Kairen put his face into her neck, letting her

finish. Once she was done, Cassandra put her letters to the side for the servants to collect and turned to him. (3)

“What about you, my Prince? Did you finish discussing it with your sister?”

Kairen suddenly put on a grumpy front, surprising her a little.

“Don’t you have something else to call me now?”

“You mean Almien?” said Cassandra with a chuckle.

Kairen nodded and leaned in to kiss her, satisfied.

“That’s right Your man...

I man