

## The White King's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 3

### #3 The Republic's Fall

"Ask Nebora if you need anything else," said Cassandra as Tessa took the bags from the servants' hands.

"I will. ...Are you s-sure this is f-fine, mom?" Muttered Cessilia.

Her mother smiled gently, and caressed her hair a bit more.

"I have a good feeling. Plus, you're going with Tessa. What should I worry about?"

Behind Cessilia, Tessa gave her aunt a confident nod, and walked up to the black dragon, leaving the poor old Yassim in awe. It couldn't be... Those girls were preparing to ride this beast? With him!

Cessilia gently hugged her mother, and walked up to Krai, gently patting his snout, while her cousin was already climbing on the dragon's back. Once on top, the young woman put down the two satchels, and held out her hand to help Cessilia join her.

"Hurry up, old man!" She suddenly shouted at Yassim.

"M-my Ladies, you're not expecting me to... mount this deity creature!"

"The deity creature will be twenty times faster than a horse," sighed Tessa. "And I promise he won't eat you unless we ask him to!"

Yassim let his jaw down without thinking, and turned to Lady Cassandra.

"...The d-dragons really eat humans?"

"Don't worry," chuckled the Princess. "This one's been on a low-human diet for a few years already."

Yassim needed a few seconds to process those words, wondering if she was simply toying with him. They wouldn't really have let a creature that could eat human beings near the Imperial children, right?

Seeing the two young ladies ready to go and waiting for him, Yassim had no choice but to move, and he did so very, very carefully. The old man took a long detour around the mighty black dragon, although Krai visibly had no interest in him. Instead, he was raising his head high for Cessilia to scratch behind his horns, making high-pitched sounds of satisfaction; Yassim had to gather all the courage he had left in his body to take Lady Tessa's help and set foot on the onyx scales. The height once on the

dragon's back was impressive, but he didn't have time to look down; He was seated right behind Tessa, who quickly explained to him where to hang on.

"K-Krai, let's go," gently said Cessilia, patting his neck.

The dragon turned his head to Cassandra, who gave him a gentle pat on the hip before standing back.

Yassim was terrified, but he thought to himself he was a blessed mortal to ever be given a chance to climb on a dragon's back, and ride it! The large black wings spread far on the sides, showing off the dragon's unexpected width, and Krai flapped it twice before suddenly taking off. The climb was so sudden, it felt like the dragon had jumped up, and forgot to get down. Yassim gasped loudly, and held on, frozen by fear. He was riding a dragon!

"Close your mouth, Old Man," chuckled Tessa. "You won't like it if something flies in!"

"Lord Yassim," said Cessilia. "We can make s-stops if you need. D-Dragon flying can be d-difficult for Elders..."

"Our Grand-mother hates flying now," nodded her cousin. "She always says she'd rather walk all the way from the Diamond Palace to the Imperial Palace if she has to, rather than mount a dragon again!"

"I am alright, my Ladies," lied Yassim with a grimace. "I am honored to be allowed to... fly this wonderful creature. D-do you mind if I ask a few questions, though? The old man I am still holds much curiosity for the wonders of the Dragon Empire, and now that I have seen this, I can't help but to wonder..."

"Ask away," nodded Tessa. "Most people in this Empire don't get to see the dragons often either, to be honest."

"Only my little s-sister goes out with hers."

Yassim nodded. He had understood the young Lady Kiera was one to run away, but it looked like the younger siblings were usually watched by this adult dragon.

"M-may I ask about this... magnificent dragon? I wonder about the size difference with... The younger ones from earlier..."

"K-Krai is Father's d-dragon," said Cessilia.

"The dragons you saw earlier were babies," explained Tessa. "Dragons don't grow like humans, they undergo major growth spurt when their master matures, around teenage years. We don't know much about the reasons behind the size differences from one dragon to another, but the stronger their master, the bigger the dragon. You saw auntie

Shareen's golden dragon earlier right? It's Glahad, our grandfather's dragon. He's getting smaller with the years because his owner passed..."

"When I was a b-baby, Glahad was much b-bigger than Krai... K-krai still grows, t-too."

Perhaps because of hearing his name, the black dragon let out a long growl, and Cessilia gently patted his neck.

Yassim was stunned. So this red-eyed dragon was the War God's Dragon itself? Moreover, if the Golden Dragon from earlier used to be bigger, he couldn't even imagine that mountain of scales moving like a creature! It was worth ten armies! The old man took a few minutes to re-think everything he had ever learned on the Dragon Empire's dragons, but he had just learned more in a few minutes than in years of study. Somewhere in his heart, the old Yassim felt incredibly grateful to have lived to this day.

However, he couldn't just be stunned by the moment, and forget his mission... As beautiful and impressive were the wonders of the Dragon Empire, his heart was solidly chained to the Eastern Kingdom's fate. Those dragons were a magnificent gift, but a much more important creature was riding it at the moment. He ought to be sure of who he was tying his fate, and perhaps his King's, to.

"Lady Tessa... M-may I ask how come you're also... Speaking as one of the former Emperor's granddaughters...?"

"My Father was one of his sons, and auntie Shareen's half brother," Tessa explained. "But like our other uncle and aunties, my dad abandoned his title as an Imperial Prince after auntie Shareen took the throne, to simplify the succession of Cessi's big brother. I have no title, I'm merely a relative of the Imperial Family and merchant's daughter, although Cessi and I are cousins from both our mothers and fathers' sides."

The two girls smiled at each other, looking as close as sisters indeed. Yassim was impressed. All of his teaching about the Dragon Empire had shown centuries of bloody fighting between all the previous Emperors' many concubines and children for the succession. For each new Ruler, a long trail of blood had to be spilled for him to access the golden chair, his hands dirtied by many of his siblings' blood. It was no secret that most concubines weren't afraid to kill to protect their progeny, when the said progeny didn't kill their own siblings instead once they were old enough. Even Empress Shareen's generation had been the theater of an impressive war between her father's six sons. Yassim thought he had come prepared, knowing that Empress Shareen had been placed despite three out of her six brothers still being alive, but now, it turned out this was all in a peaceful agreement between the remaining siblings? His scenario of the War God scaring his two younger siblings into obedience was completely wrong! As it turned out, both had willingly forfeited their lineage for their nephew to become the heir apparent? This was truly an amazing Empire!

"Isn't... his Highness your Father retaining any desire to return to the Imperial Palace?"

“My dad?” Scoffed Tessa. “He’s better off away from it! He only goes once in a while to deliver our aunt her favorite alcohol from our Family Brewery my mother established, and that’s it!”

Yassim was speechless. A former Imperial Prince was now a family man and an alcohol merchant? How unbelievable!

“Our turn to ask questions!” Exclaimed Tessa with a big smile, brushing her flying hair and little braids out of her face. “Tell us about your King that wants to marry Cessi. How is he? You said he’s young, isn’t he!”

Yassim’s expression fell before he could remember to control it, and he bowed instead, as he could while riding a flying mount, to hide his face.

“Yes, my Lady. Our King Ashen the White is young, but an admirable young King. Our Kingdom has suffered many difficult years...”

“Your Kingdom used to be a Republic, didn’t it?” Scoffed Tessa. “We were taught about your civil wars too. You guys fell for one tyrant after another, and you called us barbaric because we are an Empire.”

“Tessa...” Muttered Cessilia, pulling her cousin’s sleeve.

“It’s true, my Ladies,” sighed Yassim. “Our system was failing long before we sought war with the Dragon Empire, that is the truth. The gap between our poor citizens and the rich elites brought the Goddess of War upon our nation... Our once wise leaders were then no better than an assembly of greedy people, seeking to put the blame for failure on each other, with only a handful daring to take responsibility and find better solutions. And those who did were quickly blamed for any new failure to bring back the equilibrium, and killed as an example, until no one dared to speak anymore.”

“...Was there n-no leader to t-take a d...decision?” Asked Cessilia.

“There were leaders, my Lady, but most were too worried about protecting themselves from our angry people to dare to speak up and act! The issue with our former Republic Nation was that once a leader stood out, he didn’t have enough power to carry his actions efficiently. Thus, all the good men who could have brought change found themselves powerless, and were considered as failures instead of given the support they needed!”

“But you still managed to decide on the war with our Empire, twenty years ago,” said Tessa.

“Yes, my Lady. A lot of those said leaders were... blinded by the promise of treasures, and better days. Many of our famished citizens enrolled in that war hoping to get money to send to their families.”

Yassim sighed, and shook his head.

“Once we lost the war, and the army returned, utterly defeated, anger rose once again, and our Republic definitely fell in the hands of the Goddess of Chaos. Our angered citizens attacked the noble houses to steal what they could, good citizens became bandits overnight, and no power was strong enough to stop the chaos. The... Goddess of Chaos kept her power over our lands for ten years, like this, whilst many tried to stop this madness.”

“Ten years...” Grumbled Tessa.

“That’s right, my Lady. For ten years, our Nation slowly fell into Chaos. The fights stopped at times, all trying to find what they could of a normal life, hoping a new leader would emerge soon to bring back the peace, but... For many, the anger was too strong. The nobles who tried to seize the power were overthrown one after the other by citizens who couldn’t stand to see their former masters yield the power again. Until, twelve years ago, a man who could finally lead us rose. He declared himself the new King, former General Ashtoran.”

“Ashtoran...?”

“General Ashtoran was no noble like the previous men who had tried to conquer our land. He had once been one of the Noble’s servants, and had risen through hard work and devotion to his position. Hence, our citizens liked this man much better than the previous nobles, and when he took over the power, no one tried to stop him.”

“To stop him?” Repeated Tessa, frowning. “You make it sound like this General wasn’t such good news...”

Yassim shook his head slowly.

“...To this day, this Old Servant still believes the cost for bringing back the peace was too highly paid. The General gathered many of those who had once been his men, and created a new army with his own colors.”

“You’re saying he stopped the chaos through more violence, then.”

“...Yes, my Lady. The new King’s rule was cruel, ruthless and terrified our citizens into obedience. However, somehow, this new regime worked into stopping a lot of the bandits who were constantly harassing the defenseless, so, slowly, our people abided by it, fearing our new King as much as those he protected them from.”

Yassim glanced towards the green-eyed Princess. She was obviously listening with a hint of sadness in her eyes, but in silence. Was it because of her speech impairment, that this princess was much quieter than her cousin? He could see in her eyes she was very captivated though, like listening to a fascinating story, her breathing a bit more

intense... The Old man resumed, his old heart still with the hope that this young woman could one day too, shift the fate of their Kingdom.

“The... Harsh policies of King Ashtoran brought him to more and more extreme ends. The image our new King had was extremely conflicted. Some saw him as a tyrant... others as a hero. In the fear that civil wars and in-fighting would destroy our Nation from within again, the new King let absolutely no mistake slip through. Some were grateful about how efficient his policies were at cleaning our streets, but others... tried to plead that the King was far too merciless. Any crime resulted in a death sentence, even the smallest thefts. As one of his servants myself, I witnessed the long, long lines of people coming to be given their death sentence, every day. It didn't matter the age, gender or wealth of the ones who had been said to be criminals. King Ashtoran's men were all – judge, jury and executioner, and leaving no time for people to get back on their feet on their own. Many people only had the choice to starve or be killed as a thief...”

“That's depressing,” grumbled Tessa. “...Alright, we get the picture, but how does that go from the General to your present King? You said the new one rose to power only five years ago. Is he his son or something? We're certainly not going if he's another blood-thirsty tyrant.”

“King Ashen is the General's son indeed,” Yassim slowly nodded. “But unlike what you think, our King didn't take his father's succession. A few years later in the General's reign, more and more people, seeing he couldn't be reasoned with, and had no intention to bring back the democracy or Republic system, tried to murder him. It was said... That one of his sons, Prince Ashen, was one of the victims of those murder attempts.”

The two young women exchanged a glance.

“Wait. You're saying your King... died? Is this a joke?”

“No, my Lady. Rumours had it that Prince Ashen died, seven years ago. After his death, the King got even more ruthless... And with more people protesting against him, new civil wars began, even worse than the first time. Our nation was torn between the security provided by a tyrant leader, and our desire for peace and freedom. However, everything stopped five years ago, upon Prince Ashen's return.”

“He returned? From... the dead?” Said Tessa, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes, my Lady. The prince came back, out of nowhere, after two years. He was the General's mistress' son, and, if I'm allowed to say such a thing, the only one of the General's sons our people had sympathy for, or didn't care about at all. Yet, he returned from the dead, his hair white like the Goddess of Death, and killed the General, his own father.”

“He... did what?”

Yassim took a deep breath.

“That is the truth, my Lady. After many fights had happened already, at dawn, a White King rose, on the Castle’s walls, holding the Tyrant’s head, and threw it to the angry citizen’s feet. That White King was the former Prince Ashen, as many recognized him easily. That morning, he spoke loudly, and said he had been sent to the Gods, but the Gods had only taken him to their realm for the sake of the Eastern Kingdom’s people. The Gods themselves had trained him into becoming a worthy King for our Kingdom. As proof, the Gods had sent him back with his hair completely white, a legendary armor made of a dragon’s skin, and the strength of a God.”

The cousins exchanged a glance, both visibly surprised and doubtful.

“...Well, congrats,” scoffed Tessa. “It sounds like you guys traded a Tyrant for a Psycho.”