

## The White King's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 7

### #7 The King

For someone who was getting arrested right in front of them, Yassim seemed strangely calm and composed. Cessilia and Tessa exchanged another glance. They had tried to stop the soldiers with Tessa taking a step forward, but Yassim had asked them not to. It looked as if the old man had already anticipated all this, and was surrendering willingly, although it was odd. Moreover, none of the soldiers were actually acting rude to him, or had even tried to bind him in anyway. They simply flanked the former counsellor, a hand on each of his shoulders and the other on their spears. There was obviously some respect there; perhaps because Yassim was obviously not going to resist them in any way.

“My ladies,” he said very calmly. “I am sorry for deceiving you. However, this shameless old man would be very grateful if you could accompany me again.”

The two young women once again exchanged another glance with each other. It was obviously all part of his plan. From the way those soldiers had arrived right away and focused on Yassim rather than them or even their Dragon, there was something at play here... Cessilia nodded. She already trusted Yassim, although it was obvious he had deliberately hid some of the truth from them. She was also curious to see why he had risked everything just to bring her here.

“C-Captain,” whispered one of the men. “What about the... that...”

He was obviously sending worried glances towards the Dragon behind the two girls, although Krai didn't seem to care at all. The soldiers were visibly confused, and not prepared for such an issue. Tessa chuckled, crossing her arms.

“What? Never seen a Dragon before?”

Meanwhile, Cessilia turned around and walked back to Krai, gently petting his neck. She then whispered something to the Dragon, who took off with most of their luggage still on its back. The girls only had time to unload one bag each, but that wasn't an issue for now. Turning around, she smiled gently at Yassim, bringing some relief to the old man.

The soldiers were confused by the situation here, and were exchanging glances. The six of them were already doing an impressive job at trying to do their job while faced with a Dragon just a minute ago, and the arrival of the two foreign women with an exiled counselor... Sparing them any more questions, Yassim gave them a gentle smile and joined his hands down together like a benevolent grandfather.

“Alright, gentlemen. His Majesty should be holding the morning court right now... Shall we get going?”

“Counselor Yassim, those women...”

“Those ladies are my guests, and I believe His Majesty would like to meet them also.”

The soldiers were troubled, but at least, they knew what to do next. Would the King really be happy about the exiled old man coming back with strangers? They had no idea what gave him so much confidence, but they were willing to roll with it. It wasn't their heads that were at risk here...

The little group began moving, the six soldiers staying close to surround all three of them. Tessa was sending glares each time her eyes met with one of the soldiers, or they inadvertently came too close. Cessilia was more absorbed in the architecture around them. Unlike the Dragon Empire's Imperial Palace, this Castle was mostly composed of large, grey stones, and small spaces. The first corridor they walked through to get inside was surprisingly narrow to them, but it still had small little windows of tinted glass every three or four steps, which let plenty of light in. Unlike the white marble she was accustomed to, this castle had the same stones for walls and floors, and at times, a long jute rug would appear to cover the uneven stones. Everything in here felt foreign to the two young women, and they started walking close to each other without even noticing. Cessilia was surprised how little water fountains would sometimes appear randomly on a wall, or in a little sculpture in the middle of a crossway between corridors. The ceiling was lower than the high ones compared to their home, but it sometimes had strange openings that would give a little view on a floor below, or above, like a balcony.

At some point, they walked into a corridor that had the right wall half-open, and showed a large square room below. A handful of people were there, working on desks in what seemed to be a little library, or a study. It was very silent, and none of them even raised their heads as Yassim's group walked upstairs. It was obvious everyone was used to those little balconies, but it fascinated Cessilia. In her aunt's palace, all the corridors were very wide and had arches so one could see the gardens on either side of it, and the rooms had a ceiling high enough that no man could reach... In here, it felt as if her father would have only had to raise his hand to touch it.

“I'm very sorry I wasn't as honest as I had hoped to be with you, my lady,” suddenly said Yassim. “There are circumstances... I am grateful for your benevolence.”

Cessilia didn't answer. She understood that Yassim only meant to apologize, but wasn't asking for her forgiveness. It was too soon for her to judge. Instead, the young woman was a lot more curious about what was going to happen next.

Finally, the guards stopped in front of a pair of large blue doors. Although they clearly led to an important room, they still looked small to the two young women, and Tessa frowned, wondering if two big wooden panels were actually meant to protect anything... They could hear what was going on inside, too. Some people were loudly shouting at

each other, apparently trying to make a point. The soldiers hesitated for a little while, waiting until there was a bit less noise to bang the doors and enter.

They hadn't expected to see such a big room, after all they had seen so far. Yet, this was obviously the heart of the Castle. A big round room, with large windows with blue-colored glass, and an impressive mosaic under their feet. Their entrance caused everyone present to go suddenly quiet.

There were only nine beautifully sculpted dark wooden chairs, arranged in a circle, and two of them were empty. Only seven people were seated, but each had a little group behind them, from two to as many as seven people. It was clear the people present were all some sort of nobility, or at least wealthy in some way. Tessa glanced over their wooden or silver jewelry, the colored fabric of their clothes, and the few fur capes. Yassim clearly hadn't lied about the wealth difference. The two young women were like walking treasures, compared to everyone else who were present. Aside from theirs, the only gold items in the room were a couple of rings, a necklace and a bracelet, all worn within the same group of people.

Everyone was staring at them in awe as they walked up to the center. Tessa wasn't afraid to hold their gaze either. Their appearance was causing a commotion, and those people were already watching in awe, glaring and whispering conspicuously. Because they were standing behind Yassim and four of the soldiers, they could only see more and more of the room as they walked further in. Unlike her cousin, Cessilia was more absorbed in the architecture around them than the dozens of stares they were getting. This was the only room with a high, round and vaulted ceiling, and the mosaic up there, similar to the one under their feet, was a breath-taking piece of art.

"How dare you come back."

The deep voice resonated within the room, sending a chill down everyone's back.

Tessa and Cessilia stopped walking, and glanced at each other. The King. They couldn't see him because he was right ahead, and their vision was blocked by the five men in-between. Yet, even without seeing him, they could feel the weight of his presence by everyone else's reaction. Cessilia glanced around them. Everyone in the room was tense, and were suddenly looking down, as if they had been scared to make eye-contact with the King, even by chance. Only the people seated were looking in their direction, their eyes going on either Yassim or the two girls, visibly worried.

But worried for whom...?

"Greetings, my King," said Yassim, sounding strangely composed.

"You were banished," hissed the King, his words as sharp as blades. "How dare you defy your King and come back!"

“This humble servant didn’t disobey, my King. I merely followed your own orders.”

“Ha,” scoffed the King. “Then, who is it? Are you aware you brought a woman to be killed by my hands, Yassim? Do you think I’d indulge them for the sake of you?”

Tessa put a hand on her bag, where her blades were hidden, frowning. In any case, she was ready to defend her cousin and kill that King if necessary. She wasn’t scared of these people... However, as she glanced to her right, Cessilia’s expression didn’t seem to hold anything like fear either. Instead, she had her green eyes riveted right ahead, looking almost... expectant. Her cousin’s chest was rising up and down to her accelerated breathing, and her lips were slightly open. Tessa released the fingers on her bag, wondering what was going on...

“My king charged me with the heavy task of finding him a prospect wife. Your Highness, you said this old counselor of yours was allowed to bring one, and, if she became your majesty’s Queen among all the possible candidates, you would spare my life and retract my banishment.”

“I didn’t think you’d dare try, you senile old man. So you’ve chosen death.”

“I believe I have chosen to try and remain by my master’s side, my King. Please, will you allow this senile old man to introduce his candidate.”

“This is inadmissible!” suddenly shouted one of the men seated. “How dare this traitor come back! Your Majesty, you don’t have to listen to this decrepit traitor! The candidates have already been chosen! This-!”

The man suddenly went mute, as he had turned his head towards the King, and his eyes opened wide in fright. He immediately went back to looking down, visibly terrified.

They all heard a scoff.

“See Yassim, no one wants you here. Did you think I was being kind to you because I gave you reason you’d be allowed back? Fine, then. Let’s see who was insane enough to follow your lies all the way here...”

Yassim bowed slightly, and every soldier stepped aside, letting the two girls appear.

Only Cessilia stood forward, unafraid. She walked ahead, past all the men and to the center of the room, facing the King. She was stunning in her own way, standing tall and facing the sovereign, unafraid. Her skin was lighter than anyone else in the room, and yet it was a warm, beautiful brown-copper shade that contrasted with those amazing green eyes. Not only that, but she wore a striking purple dress under a white fur coat, and all that gold...

All eyes turned to the King, waiting to see his reaction to the foreign woman.

It wasn't anything like they expected.

Ashen the White was seated on the simplest throne in the room, although his was in silver metal, without any decoration, cushion or embellishment of any kind. Even the King himself didn't wear any jewelry, crown nor any expensive fabric. He was even half-naked, the scars on his exposed torso visible to all. Yet, he was standing out more than anyone else in the room. His white hair, as white as snow, was falling in irregular waves on his large, muscular shoulders, a striking contrast to his dark skin. His face was sculpted with thick lines, and a square jaw with a few spikes of a growing beard sticking out. Despite him looking no older than thirty, there was something scarily deep, ancient and scary in his dark eyes. The dark circles beneath them made it even worse, burying his irises deeper in the shadows. He didn't seem human, or like he was the same kind as the other people standing in the room. He exuded an aura of death and danger like a resting predator. The silver chair may as well have been a god's throne... A god of death. Any one with an experience of battles could tell he was a warrior, and a merciless killer. The way all the other people in the room physically reacted to his presence reeked of sheer terror.

Cessilia was the only one not to display an ounce of fear.

Instead, as she appeared before him, the King's previous irritated expression fell. An incredible silence befell the room, as if they had all been transported to a sacred place. In fact, they were witnessing an epic scene, a living painting. There seemed to be no one else but those two people, and all the others were quiet witnesses. No one could understand what was happening, but it felt breathtaking. The complex emotion on the cold-blooded King's face, and the Princess' pure, candid gaze she held without fear.

Even Yassim was shocked by what he was seeing. Before any of them had realized, the King was standing, his eyes riveted on the young woman as if he couldn't believe his eyes. There was something happening between those two people, something deep, complex and... personal.

"Y-your Highness," mumbled Yassim. "This is Princess Cessilia, daughter of the Dragon Empire, niece of her Highness the Empress."

The King didn't reply. In fact, it was as if he hadn't heard the old man at all. His eyes were still riveted on Cessilia, as if he was seeing a ghost, or a monster.

The Princess was the first to react. Very slowly and gracefully, she bowed, her long hair sliding down her shoulders as she lowered her head to him.

"King... Ashen," she simply said in a delicate voice.

That was it, yet those words looked as if she had slapped the King. In utter shock, his subjects saw him take a step back. Something felt wrong about all this, something no one else could understand. However, the King didn't reply anything to the Dragon

Empire's Princess. He clenched his fists, and instead, directed his furious glare towards Yassim.

"You cunning old snake..." he hissed, looking like he was about to murder the elder.

Everyone in the room was trying to make sense out of this situation. Was the King sparing the Princess because of the Dragon Empire? Why was that young woman completely unafraid? How was the old Yassim even still alive after daring to do such a thing? More importantly, what was that reaction earlier...?

"Y-your Majesty," said one of the nobles. "You don't have to add the... Princess to the candidates. If you refuse her, we can... send the lady back to her homeland."

As he said that, the man had watched Cessilia, but she hadn't reacted at all. In fact, he should have watched his King instead. Ashen suddenly turned his murderous glare to him, and the man felt his lifespan vanish at once. Normally, after that, there would have been no way to keep his head on his shoulders. Not when the King was visibly about to have him pay for those words with his life.

Yet, nothing came. The King looked stuck where he was, unable to unleash his usual display of complete violence.

"...She stays," he hissed between his clenched teeth.

Everyone there was once again rendered speechless. What was wrong with the King? He could have obviously refused Yassim's offer, sent those women back where they came from and killed the old man once and for all! In fact, that was the most optimistic ending everyone had foreseen the minute Yassim had reappeared!

Being unable to grasp the King's reactions was certainly scarier than his usual murderous ones. Everyone in the room kept staring, in utter disarray. No one would dare to say a thing anymore. Instead, they were trying to make sense out of this, or ready to give up as long as they'd keep their heads. Even Tessa, a few steps behind her, was staring at her cousin and the King in confusion. She had known Cessilia since they were children, and she found something unusual in her cousin's behavior. She had never been one to step forward like this, or stand out at all. Yet now, she was dominating the room, almost equal to that ruthless King. Even more intriguing was the way that ruthless King was staring at Cessi...

With everyone deeply involved in this odd situation here, and those two people who kept staring at each other as if a world belonged between them, they all failed to notice the new appearance.

She silently stepped out from the shadows behind the King. Her red dress floating around her, the young woman walked with a smile on her lips, stepping fearlessly next to the King. She had deep red hair, a hint of sharpness in her black eyes, and was

amazingly beautiful. Her chuckle resonated as she stood very close to the King, her cleavage almost touching his arm. With a smile on her red lips, she leaned to whisper in his ear.

“Do we have guests, my King?”

The King didn't react or answer her, but she didn't seem offended at all. Instead, she kept a perfect smile, and put a hand on his shoulder, staring at Cessilia with him.

Cessilia had stopped staring at the King to shift her green eyes to the woman standing next to him. It wasn't just that woman's attitude that was shocking.

It was her olive skin tone.