

## The White King's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 9

### #9 The Cerulean Room

The two counselors kept exchanging intrigued glances, even as they were leading the way to the Cerulean suite. There was definitely something going on between the King and the Princess. Was he simply trying to act polite to a foreign Princess by giving her the best room in the Castle? Was it an attempt to show that they could still rival with the Dragon Empire's luxury? No, it couldn't be; Perhaps, if it had been anyone but their King, they would have seriously considered such theory, but... This was King Ashen they were both thinking about. The cold-blooded, heartless King with no consideration for anyone. He didn't even treat any of his vassals with that much consideration, not even his oldest servants! Why would he suddenly give the best room to Princess Cessilia...?

Neither of them had even been allowed to see that room. The rumor was that it was the most beautiful place in the whole Castle, prepared by the previous Kings to welcome their favorite wives or mistresses. Yet, rather than that devious red-haired woman, the King was giving this to a young woman he had, supposedly, seen for the first time today...? Yassim kept frowning and trying to think, but he was still thinking this had to do with his initial theory about his King, and the truth about his death. Unfortunately, it was still way too soon to confirm any of it...

Two young servants were waiting when they arrived in front of the blue gates. In fact, those blue gates were already very eye-catching, painted in a magnetic cerulean blue, with gorgeous arabesques of a shiny white surface that Cessilia first thought to be some polished marble, but it was shinier than what she knew.

"Welcome, Princess," saluted the two servants, who appeared to be identical twins. "We were sent to serve you."

They were both wearing white outfits, and a bob-haircut with a fringe, but their eyes couldn't be seen while they continued bowing.

"By whom?" Immediately asked Tessa, defiant.

"By His Majesty," answered one of the twins. "The three of us will be at your entire service from now on."

"T-three?" Repeated Cessilia, confused.

"Yes, your Highness, our sister is already inside," said one of them, stepping forward. "We shall open the gates to the Cerulean Suite for the Princess, now. The Counselors aren't allowed to enter unless the Princess requires them so."

Cessilia and Tessa exchanged a glance, surprised. They were the one to say if Yassim and Yamino couldn't enter? They were the guests here, and those two old men were obviously the Royal Counselors, how could they be the one to decide whether they could enter or not!

"Ah, please don't be surprised, my Ladies," said Yassim, noticing their confusion. "In our Kingdom, no man can enter a woman's apartments unless she agrees to it first, regardless of his position. The only one allowed to do so is the King, to whom no door shall remain closed."

Tessa made a grimace. That was one distorted way to say things, but she understood the general idea. Basically, just like in the previous ways of the Dragon Empire, any man of noble or Imperial Title could take any woman as a concubine. However, the Empress had abolished that rule, and put new ones in place to protect young women against rapists.

"The C-Counselors are allowed in for n-now," said Cessilia.

"Understood," nodded the two servants.

Then, they each pulled one of the doors' golden handles, opening it wide for Cessilia.

She was stunned by the vision inside. This room felt like a completely different world from the rest of the Castle. In fact, it reminded her of those magical places described in her books. The floor was suddenly so well polished that all of the round pieces of rock were completely even and smooth under her feet. She shyly walked in, her heart beating a little bit faster; The room was in the shape of a comma, with a large round area, and a little corner on the left, with a large canopy bed with cerulean blue sheets and light wood. There was another door a bit further on the wall, blue too, but for now, she was too busy processing everything else she could see. The tall columns were supporting a stunning vaulted ceiling, with an incredible mosaic of iridescent, dark little pieces that Cessilia couldn't identify, just like the white one on the door earlier. Moreover, everything was shining incredibly, with all the colors her eyes could catch, reflecting the little movements of the water around her. Because like what they had seen in the corridors, there were little streams of water crossing the room, all going to the side opposite to the door. And in fact, there was no wall opposite to them. Instead there were more of those columns, in wide arches with, beyond them, the breath-taking view of the sea.

Cessilia lost her breath as she walked closer to see. There was a little half-wall, made of sculpted redwood, to keep her from falling, but as she stood there, it was clear this room was half a balcony, with an amazing view of the sea, in which the water streams were falling into, several feet below her. She could smell the gentle, salty breeze of the ocean, caressing her cheeks and freshening up the whole suite. She could hear the waves crashing against the foundations of the castle and going back gently into the large river steam. Her eyes could even spot a colored fish, at times, before it quickly

swam away. This room showed her the edge of the Eastern Kingdom with, beyond the island they were on, the vast sea with no known end.

"This is... amazing," she muttered, amazed.

"By Glahad's butt..." whispered Tessa, somewhere behind her. "You weren't kidding, this place is gorgeous."

Cessilia chuckled and turned around. Just like her, the two old counsellors looked a bit lost, and amazed, looking all around as well. All the furniture showed great taste, and was made in light wood, with pieces of cerulean fabric here and there. In the morning, she could just imagine the amazing sunrise they could witness, and that would light up the whole room...

The three servants, visibly triplets, advanced forward to bow to her again.

"I'm Nupia," said one of them. "I am the oldest of the triplets. The second is my brother Rupio, and the youngest of us is Lupia."

"Nice t-to meet you," smiled Cessilia.

"Nice to meet you guys," added Tessa, putting her hands on her hips. "We'll have tea, dried fruits and meat buns for breakfast, thanks!"

"T-Tessa!" Protested Cessilia.

"What? I'm starving! Isn't it their job...?"

"We will bring it right away!" Said Nupia with a smile.

Indeed, Rupio and Lupia quietly walked out. All three of the triplets looked exactly the same, had the same black eyes and hair, same dark skin shade, the same bob haircut and fringe, the same body build and blue outfit, and had no distinctive feature to distinguish one from another. They seemed to be young, just at the beginning of their teenagehood, and with their thin features, it looked impossible to even tell which of the three was a boy...

"This room had to be prepared within short notice, Princess," said Nupia. "If there is anything you dislike, it will be changed right away."

"Is t-that really alright?" Asked Cessilia.

"Of course! All of the candidates were given dedicated servants, and attributed rooms. This one was prepared in a rush, but we are happy to do anything you need to make it more agreeable!"

Nupia seemed very enthusiastic, but Cessilia was visibly still a bit taken aback. They had only just landed this morning, and seen the King not an hour ago. This room had truly been prepared in record time...

“Well, I guess we know where we’ll stay from now on,” said Tessa, sitting down in one of the large armchairs. “Now, will you two explain what the heck is that competition thing? Yassim?”

The two Counsellors exchanged a glance and sighed, coming to sit with the young woman. Unlike them, Cessilia was still standing, visibly absorbed by the white, iridescent material on the columns. She slowly caressed it with her hands, surprised by how smooth and cold it was.

Tessa didn’t seem surprised by her cousin’s attitude, so the Counsellors focused on her. In fact, Yamino let out a long sigh.

“I have to admit, I was shocked to see you after such a long time, Yassim. I really thought his Majesty had killed you, you old fool... but it turns out you ventured to the Dragon Empire, to bring back a Princess no less? What came to your tortured mind that made you return like this?”

“I have to apologize to the ladies,” sighed Yassim. “This is exactly as you heard earlier. I... I didn’t lie about being a Royal Counsellor, I have been by the King’s side for a very long time. However, I... fell into disgrace a few months ago. I believe the King spared me in the name of everything I taught him over the years, and the fact that... I did save him once. However, he banished me from our Capital, threatening that, if he ever saw me again, he’d cut my neck. When I begged him to reconsider, he said I could only return if...”

“You brought a new chick for his coop?” Scoffed Tessa. “Why Cessi, though? Why come to our Empire? You should have just remained hidden and saved your damn neck!”

“I... I am an old man, Lady Tessa, I do not fear the Goddess of Death. However, I did fear to leave our damaged Kingdom in the hands of an even more damaged man. I believed that... if I could bring the right Queen to his side, perhaps, then him saving my life would have had some sort of... fateful meaning.”

Tessa rolled her eyes, a bit upset.

“You made one dangerous bet, Yassim...” sighed Yamino. “However, I’m happy to see you. To be honest, I was worried about what was going to happen to all the candidates.”

“Aren’t you trying to have your niece become Queen?” Asked Tessa, frowning.

"Naptune is a very smart young woman," nodded Yamino. "I thought it would be better if there was another alternative, among the candidates... However, now that I have seen Princess Cessilia, I will suggest she supports you. Naptune has little ambition of her own, so I believe she will be happy to support Lady Cessilia if... she wants to."

All three pairs of eyes turned to Cessilia, who was still absorbed by the ceiling. She had to be listening to them, because she was close by, her hands were joined and fidgeting a bit. Still, she took a little breath in, her green eyes still stuck above.

"S-Sir Yassim, what are t-those?" She finally asked.

"The ceiling and the columns are made of Nacre, my Lady. It's a material made of polished seashell. The one used on the ceiling is dark Nacre, while on the columns and doors are white Nacre. It's considered a precious material here, and used mainly for decorations, dishes or jewelry, a bit like silver in your country."

"...It's b-beautiful," she smiled.

"Cessi," pouted Tessa. "You do know this is all about you? What do you think of this competition thing?"

Her cousin finally turned their eyes to them.

"C-Counsellor, who are the other candidates?"

"Most were introduced by the n- seven lord families," said Yamino. "Because of the current situation in the Kingdom, they are all desperate to be the family of the next Queen... and perhaps, get along better with the King."

"Old Yassim here did mention he wasn't exactly playing nice," said Tessa.

The old Yamino sighed, patting his huge belly. It was so round under his white toga, it looked like he was about to pop out of his chair at any moment.

"Did you notice the empty chairs?" He said with a sorry voice to Yassim.

"Lord Cheshi and Lord Kunu... What happened?"

"His Majesty got extremely mad, just three weeks ago, over an argument with the Kunu tribe. They were arguing about the battle of the border, as you know this is still a sensitive matter. The Kunu always refused that the King place the Royal Army instead of Kunu warriors there... You know how proud and violent the Kunu Tribe was. They said the wrong... thing, and the next thing I saw was a bloodbath. He... killed the head and all of the Chieftain's family. After that, the Cheshi Clan stopped attending as a protest. They were never fond of the Kunu Tribe, but they said the King's ways couldn't

go on anymore. I can't blame them... They haven't attended a single meeting since then, but the King has yet to say anything about it."

Yassim's expression had fallen a bit lower at each word his friend had said. The Old Man did look very shaken about the empty seats before. Cessilia came to sit beside her cousin.

"The other families?" She asked.

"There are nine Lords, each at the head of a tribe, powerful family or clan," explained Yamino. "I myself was born among the Dorosef Tribe, but I renounced my privilege when I became a Royal Counsellor."

"The Yekara Clan is the most powerful," nodded Yassim. "I'm not surprised they are presenting two candidates. They have many lands and a lot of warriors. They took part in all the previous wars of the Kingdom, and turned on the previous King to pledge allegiance to King Ashen."

"Sounds like people our grandma would love on her bad days..." scoffed Tessa.

"The Dorosef Tribe is very peaceful," said Yamino. "They specialise in science and knowledge, they won't participate in this, neither does the Hashat family, they are too recent among the Nine Lords."

"The Sehsan and Yonchaa tribes are among the oldest of our Kingdom. They are probably participating to try and make themselves more valuable to the King. They are not aggressive, though, so I don't think their candidates will fight too hard for this..."

"I'm more worried about the Pangoja," nodded Yamino. "That Clan is the richest, and very secretive. They have many businesses all across the Kingdom, a lot of informants, and an eye on all the trades..."

"Now that sounds like my kind of people," smiled Tessa. "So, if I can remember all those names correctly, we have the Yekara Warrior Tribe, the Dorosef, Sehsan and Yonchaa tribes, that shady Pangoja Clan, the somewhat sulking Cheshi Clan, and the already dead Kunu people... who am I missing again?"

"The Hashat family, but they aren't participating. Although Counsellor Oroun is from that family, and presents his own daughter. The ninth family is the Nahaf, and they also have a candidate. I don't know them too well, they rose at about the same time as our King..."

"Great, now I'm going to have to take notes," grumbled Tessa. "What about that red-haired woman? She had... light skin, like Cessi and I. Where the heck does she come from to look like that, and act like that? I already can't stand her attitude."

Yassim was intrigued too. He hadn't thought he'd return to see his King had really taken a mistress... He felt horrible about it, after he had brought Princess Cessilia all the way here. That woman was the worst outcome he had imagined in his plan, and he also didn't like her already... He turned to Yamino, who rubbed his round cheeks with a sullen expression.

"Ah... That Jisel woman, I am not too sure, to be honest with you. I heard rumors about her here and there from the servants, and then I began seeing her in the Castle. She's... just acting as if she had always been here. She greets us, but I've never seen her talk with anyone but his Majesty. She's most often by his side, to be honest. I quickly found out she's been with him for a while now, but no one seems to know where that woman came from."

The two cousins exchanged a look.

"M-mother said there were other p-people from the Rain T-tribe..." muttered Cessilia.

"Yeah, she and my mom searched for some of them, but she only found a handful of slaves scattered in the Dragon Empire..."

"Rain people?" Repeated Yamino.

"White-skinned people," said Tessa. "Like our moms."

"Oh... I have never seen white-skinned people, but... people like you, I do."

"Seriously?" Exclaimed Tessa, slamming her armchair and making the old men jump.

"Y-yes," mumbled Yamino. "W-well... I mean, their skin isn't as fair as yours, but Hashat family's heirs are... definitely closer to your skin color than mine. They haven't met the King yet, but I met Lord Hashat's heirs at a party not long ago. I almost thought you were his people until Yassim spoke earlier..."

"Hashat," repeated Tessa, turning to her cousin again. "Hashat, Hashat... Cessi, didn't auntie use to sing that old song, when we were kids, remember? She taught us those lyrics from her native language, and Hashe was definitely the word for..."

"...It meant Rain."