

# The White King's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 1 -

## #1 The Dragons

“Do you like tea?” She softly asked.

“Ah... Yes, please.”

The man was still stunned.

The woman before him was a legend, in this Empire. She was adored like a living deity, perhaps more venerated than the Empress herself. Yet, from where he stood, just a couple steps away from her in this tiny kitchen, she seemed like any normal woman, simply pouring tea with a soft, serene smile on her lips. She wasn't even especially beautiful. Her chestnut hair was held in a high and large ponytail, but still so long it fell down to her lower back. She wore no makeup, except perhaps some for her rose-tinted lips, and was actually a bit skinny. Her green dress wasn't any better than any of the servants here, and she only wore a couple of gold jewelry items, too. Moreover, he just couldn't get used to how pale her skin was. He'd heard of tribes, in the south, with white-colored skin, but he had never witnessed it himself...

“You look tired,” she said as she presented him with a cup. “It must have been a long journey.”

“It was, Your Highness,” said the old man, taking it. “It took me over a month to come here, Your Highness.”

“You may call me Cassandra,” she chuckled. “Your Highness is a bit too ceremonial for me... What should I call you?”

He stood a bit more upright, trying to forget how dirty he ought to look right now. He had no money to buy clean clothes, and wore the same thing for days. Most people would have treated this old man, with his messy beard and tired eyes, like any beggar. Yet, that woman didn't even show any sign of discomfort.

“This old man's name is Yassim, my Lady. Yassim Hemelion, the Wise.”

“Well then, Yassim the Wise,” she repeated with a gentle smile. “Please tell me about the Eastern Kingdom.”

The man's hands froze on the cup.

He had followed Lady Cassandra, the Water Goddess, outside the Throne Room, a bit relieved to escape the arrogant Empress' gaze, but he was following her with no idea of

their real destination, or why she was even listening to his demands. She had first stopped by this small kitchen to make that tea. Seeing this living deity pouring tea in a kitchen didn't seem to surprise anyone, as all the servants coming in and out acted as if this was a regular thing that happened, quickly bowing before moving on with their tasks.

Now, his cup still in his hands, he kept following her a bit helplessly as Cassandra was walking out, back to one of the large corridors of the Palace. She was walking slowly, and clearly waiting to hear his answer... The man took a deep breath.

"...Our King is still young, Lady Cassandra. He is a brave young man, but he didn't become our King easily. After so many wars and battles, our people were famished, angry and lost."

"It must have been hard."

"Yes, my Lady," sighed the old man. "Very much so. Civil war left many cities in ruins, and our roads stained with blood. We are struggling to put all our systems back into a functioning, let alone flourishing, state. Commerce, finance, education, everything has been shattered, and we hope to build something better out of what was previously destroyed. But it is hard. Even five years after our young King rose to power, bandits are still roaming free, terrorizing our already traumatized citizens..."

"Isn't it a bit strange that a King would look for a Queen in a situation like this?"

Despite Cassandra's gentle voice, the old man frowned. He knew this woman was probably too smart not to have understood already.

"...We are hoping to confirm our young King's power with a strong lady by his side, my Lady."

"A strong Lady from the Dragon Empire... A lady with a dragon," she whispered.

The old man kept his head low.

Of course, any sovereign would have been delighted to have the power of a legendary beast to assert their authority. The young King of the Eastern Kingdom, among all, was in dire need of such power. He was a bit more nervous now that the Lady clearly knew some of the intentions behind his arrival here. He hadn't intended to hide it, but he did hope this wouldn't come to light so soon. Now he was probably looking like a desperate and shabby old man with too big demands...

He stopped, his hands tight on the little cup.

"Forgive me, Your Highness. You must think I'm a shameless man to have come here without even a decent present for your daughter, and to make such a demand."

Honestly speaking, everything he had heard previously about the Dragon Empire had made him think he was lucky to have kept his head on his shoulders this long... Yet, to his surprise, Lady Cassandra chuckled, and he dared look up. She was looking at him with that gentle gaze of hers. There was something invisible yet incredible about that woman. How young was she? Perhaps fifteen or twenty years younger, at least? Yet, she was looking at him as if she had seen the whole world with those emerald eyes. Yassim had always considered himself a scholar and very educated man, but he felt like a child in front of this young woman. She gently put her hand on his dirty shoulder.

“I think you’re a very brave man,” she said. “And someone who deeply loves his country.”

Those few words hit Yassim hard. For a second, the man felt his throat tighten a bit, as if he was about to cry. She had said in a few words everything that had made his trip worthwhile. Even more than that, he felt like he was somewhat acknowledged, all the hardships he had endured to come here felt like a faraway, painful but distant memory. He was an old man who had thought this trip might be his last, and now that he was at his destination, he could find a bit of relief in the words of a stranger...

“Thank you, my Lady...”

Cassandra smiled, and turned around, resuming walking. Wasn’t she going to tell him they would refuse, and send him home? Where were they going now? Yassim had the faint thought she might have simply indulged this exhausted visitor, but now, he was reminiscing about her discussion with the Empress. Would the Water Goddess really willingly give away one of her daughters? Yassim knew she had many children, but all those he had interrogated also said the Imperial Family was closer than ever in this generation...

“Did he mention which one?” She asked softly.

“W-Which one?”

“Which one of my daughters your King wanted to marry.”

Once again, he lost his confidence. What should he say? Should he lie, and try asking for any? Or should he simply pretend it was up for them to decide? If the Water Goddess knew the truth, she would probably not agree to this...

Still, seeing how he was taking his time to answer, Cassandra let out a little sigh.

“...I see.”

What did she see? Yassim was worried. Had he been exposed already? She was definitely a smart woman, how dare he lie to a living deity! Who was he to come all the way there and ask for a Princess to come back with him...

Cassandra didn't add anything, but she kept walking in the same direction. She didn't even look offended in any way, but as calm as she was before she had asked the question. Yassim kept following her, still stunned a bit more each second by this woman. All the servants were politely bowing and greeting her, and she'd reply with a smile or a polite answer, very differently from the arrogance he had been prepared for from the Dragon Empire's people.

They finally arrived in what seemed like a large garden. A very, very large garden within the Palace's walls. This Empire's Palace seemed as large as a small city from the outside, but Yassim had never imagined it would be so vast it could actually have such a grand garden, with even a lake! The place was lovely though, and the grass was very green despite the sun and heat. There were a few trees here and there, and under one of those, nearest to the lake, a group of young people were seated.

Cassandra was walking towards the group, and Yassim immediately noticed the striking resemblance between her and... some of those children. There were only two young women, circled by several younger children on the grass. From what Yassim could see, only one of the two young women had the same green eyes as the Water Goddess. She was young, but already a true beauty, and captivating the younger ones as she was reading them a book. She had long hair, just a shade darker than her mother's, and a darker, tanned skin, so pretty, a bronze color, almost golden under the sunlight. The contrast with her green eyes was absolutely striking, and beautiful.

Her back against the tree, she was reading the book she had in her hands to the rest of the group. She had a very pleasant voice, almost as if she was singing, and all of the other children were visibly deeply involved in her reading, sitting with their bodies leaning towards her, or on their stomachs.

"...and the young man ventured for days alone in that desert. He was thirsty, and the scorching heat was terrible to bear, burning his skin. Yet, he kept putting one foot in front of the other, bravely. He knew he had to go through this trial if he hoped to save his family. He spent many, many days in the desert, and could only rest a few hours, once the sun set and the gentle moon rose. Each night, the beautiful moon reminded him of his lover's beautiful white hair, and gave him courage again for the next day. So, each morning at sunrise, he rose like the sun, and resumed his long, long journey through the desert."

"...And on the fifteenth day," said Cassandra. "He found an oasis."

All the children looked back, only noticing them now.

"Mommy!" Shouted two of the boys in the group.

They suddenly stood up and ran to their mother. Neither of them looked older than ten years old... The older one of the two arrived first, hugging his mom's legs, while the younger one grabbed her hand.

“Mommy, Cessi was reading us a great story!”

“I know, I love that story.”

Yassim was baffled. There were a dozen children there, and from what he could see, half of them had light-colored skin! Not as white as the Water Goddess’ was, but definitely lighter than any other person’s skin in the Dragon Empire. He was dying to ask if all six were her children, including the two young women. Aside from the older boy who had run to his mother, only one of the boys and one of the girls on the grass also had green eyes, all the other children’s eyes were dark. But the fact that the one holding her hand had black eyes meant not all her children had inherited that feature...

“Children, this is Yassim the Wise. He came from the Eastern Kingdom.”

All the children suddenly turned their eyes to him, and for a second, the old man felt a bit panicked. However, things didn’t turn out at all like he had expected. Actually, the children with darker skin stood up and bowed politely before leaving the grounds. ...Were those children of servants? The ones with lighter skin that remained were obviously related to the Imperial Family, and they all wore purple or green clothing...

“From the Eastern Kingdom?” Said the other young woman, sitting next to the one who was reading. “Really?”

She bore a close resemblance to the girl next to her, but she had dark eyes, freckles on her nose and her hair was cut at an unusual shoulder length. She exchanged a look with the young woman next to her.

“Yes, my Lady,” replied Yassim, bowing.

“This young woman is Tessa, my niece,” said Cassandra. “Next to her is my oldest daughter, Cessilia. Then, there’s my third-born daughter, Sadara...”

Sadara waved shyly at him, her big green eyes sparking with interest. Next to her was a boy about the same age as her and, unlike his younger brothers, he hadn’t moved and was frowning instead.

“Mother, what does he want!”

“This impolite child is my third son, Shenan. And those two are his little brothers, Kassein and Sepheus.”

Yassim kept nodding, wondering if it was important he remembered all those names. He was trying to do the math in his head, also, to understand how many children the Princess had. With five boys and three girls, it meant... at least eight children?

“Where are Kiera and Raissa?” She asked the two young women.

“Raissa is with mom”, answered Tessa. “Kiera... was with us until an hour ago, I think?”

Cassandra sighed.

“She probably ran off somewhere again... Did she leave Kiki here?”

The two girls exchanged a look.

“I’m not sure...” Finally muttered Tessa.

The Princess’ mother didn’t look too happy with that answer. To Yassim’s surprise, she turned her eyes towards the sky, and the walls of the garden, as if she was looking around for something.

“Krai!” She suddenly called loudly.

Yassim froze, hearing a sudden loud noise one second later. Like an earthquake, as well as a gust of wind. He could tell something big was moving on the other side of that wall, something very, very big. A fright chilled the old man’s body, as a shadow suddenly grew in front of them. Something dark, and incredibly huge...

“There you are,” sighed Cassandra.

The gigantic black dragon stood with all his might, grabbing the top of that wall with his claws as if to support his humongous weight with it. Yassim was struck both by the magnificence and scary size of that creature. His scales were shining like onyx under the sunlight, and his big red eyes were like ruby jewels, both shiny and frightening. He moved his body with surprising grace considering his size, and his movements were akin to a snake, or a feline. His front paws landed one after another in the grass, and Yassim couldn’t help but take a step back, as this creature was now in the garden, headed in their direction.

“Krai!” Exclaimed the two younger boys, running towards the beast.

It was terrifying to see such young children run fearlessly towards the black dragon, but no one else seemed shocked. Instead, Cassandra crossed her arms, and the black dragon kept coming forward, his gigantic tail whipping the air around him. He growled softly, a growl that echoed throughout the area and left Yassim wondering how big that mouth was... and those fangs.

“You... You let Kiera leave again, didn’t you?” Cassandra scolded him. “Did she feed you meat, Krai? You can’t let the children trick you with treats each time!”

The black Dragon laid down in front of the human woman, his head between his paws, and growled again, a short one this time. The two boys immediately began climbing him to play on his back. Yassim was astonished. A huge creature like that, with such sharp

claws, was lying like a house dog in front of the Princess? No wonder that woman was considered a living deity!

“You’re supposed to watch all the children, you know,” Cassandra added. “...Were you napping?”

Krai turned his head to the side, visibly ignoring her scolding. Yassim was truly unable to believe his eyes. Was it only an impression, or had the Dragon purposely turned his head to... pout?

Cassandra sighed, putting a hand on her hip.

“Fine, I guess I can use the good old method then... Call the little ones, Krai, please.”

The dragon rose his head, this time glancing towards the lake. He let out a long, more high-pitched growl. Yassim had a hard time keeping his eyes off the majestic yet terrifying creature, but a myriad of little sounds coming from the lake convinced him to glance in that direction next. The water was moving, making small swirls at the surface. ...Fish? However, the little waves seemed too large to be the work of mere fish...

“...You should step away from my aunt, old man.” Said Tessa.

Realizing she was talking to him, Yassim carefully distanced himself from the Water Goddess, who was walking towards the lake. All of a sudden, something jumped out of the water at full speed, splattering the grass around, and began running in the Water Goddess’ direction. For a second, Yassim mistook it for a gigantic snake, but it was way too fast. This thing obviously had limbs, four of them, and... a pair of wings. Another suddenly jumped out of the water, of a different color, and another one after that. In a few seconds’ time, no less than four little creatures with scales of various, shiny colors were running on the grass at a scary speed to get to the Princess.

Yassim couldn’t believe his own eyes... Those little ones were all tiny dragons! Baby dragons!