

The White King's Favorite by Jenny Fox Chapter 10

#10 The Triplets

The two girls remained quiet for a little while, seriously shaken by that news. They had always seen their mothers trying to find more people from the Rain Tribe who had survived the slaughter three decades ago. Each time they had found one of the white-skinned women, or their mixed children, their mothers were seriously shaken, and thrilled. Both Tessa and Cessilia knew how much it meant to find people of that supposedly exterminated group.

“C-can you t-tell us more about th-those p-people? The Hashat T-tribe?” Asked Cessilia.

“Of course, my Lady,” nodded Yamino, a bit surprised by their reactions. “Although, there isn’t much. The Hashat was never a very powerful family, but they did get noticeable following the previous civil war. While a lot of our Kingdom was ravaged, their people became famous as miraculous healers...”

Cessilia felt her heart stop hearing this.

“Their medical knowledge was the most advanced in the lands,” nodded Yassim. “Their tribe went from village to village to help heal the people, and thus, that’s how they made a reputation for themselves. They never earned much for it, but their will to save even the poorest of our citizens got well-known throughout the land. It was known that the Hashat would heal even those who couldn’t pay, as long as no one was hostile to them.”

“Once the War ended, his Majesty rewarded them for their good actions. They were gifted a lot of money, and some lands that had been confiscated, although they decided to remain an itinerant tribe. I believe they have a couple houses in the Capital, but they never stay long. Only a handful stay to partake in the Nine Lords’ meetings, but the Leader’s heir and oldest son is usually travelling with the rest of their Tribe...”

“It is probably also for their safety,” nodded Yassim. “A lot of people were upset that a nameless tribe suddenly got so much money and land from the King...”

“Well, for once your King sounds like he did a good thing,” said Tessa, crossing her arms. “But that medical knowledge is something the Rain Tribe was known for. My guess is that the Hashat became so good because they took in some of our Rain Tribe’s people.”

“C-can we meet them?” Asked Cessilia.

“Of course, My Lady. Like I said, their Leader resides in the Capital. I can ask Counsellor Oroun to arrange a meeting with them; they are very kind people, only a bit secretive, for obvious reasons...”

Cessilia nodded with a little smile.

Yassim was always surprised at how polite, quiet and gentle the young Princess was. In fact, despite their very brief meeting he could see a lot of her mother in her. He could easily see why her cousin was so outspoken, in comparison, and always ready to jump to her defense. Despite her size, Cessilia seemed rather fragile on the inside...

"...Do you have other questions about the other families and tribes, my Ladies?" Asked Yassim, visibly a bit nervous.

"How will that competition go?" Asked Tessa. "I imagine it's not like there's going to be a sword fight or something?"

"Oh, no, my Lady. In fact, there won't be any open competition. It's only about inviting all the candidates, and his Majesty will choose one to be his wife."

"Nice, so we don't actually need to kill the others to win?" Asked Tessa, raising an eyebrow.

A bit shocked to hear a young woman say such a thing, Yamino glanced at Yassim, his mouth open. Did he just hear this? Yassim chuckled nervously. After all, Lady Tessa was also the War God's and the Empress' niece...

Thankfully, two of the triplets returned then, and they actually had already gathered everything Tessa had asked. They poured some tea for all four of them, and Tessa jumped on the meat buns. They hadn't eaten yet that morning, so the four of them gladly ate some breakfast, with the triplets happily serving them.

"...I want t-to visit the C-capital if p-possible," said Cessilia after a little while.

"Of course!" Said Yassim with a smile. "I'll personally walk you around this morning, my Lady. It's actually a market day, so it will be even more thriving than usual."

"Lady Cessilia," said Yamino, licking his fingers after his third meat bun. "I would like to introduce you to my niece, Neptuna, if you'd agree. That child grew up here in the Capital, she'll escort you as well if you'd like. I'm sure she will be able to show you the young people's favorite places."

"I'd love t-that," nodded Cessilia.

She had a little smile on her lips, that she couldn't hide. Cessilia was a bit impatient to explore more of this Kingdom. In fact, she had never been the adventurous type, and her family had always watched her a bit more closely. She lived her life half-way between the Imperial Palace and her father's Castle, sometimes visiting her grandmother too. But she had only accompanied her brothers to the North Camp once, and she rarely went anywhere without her family too. She wasn't like Kiera, who

couldn't stand being watched and would flee anytime she could. Perhaps because she was the oldest daughter, Cessilia was always very obedient. Only once had she broken the rules. She had betrayed her parents' trust once, and paid a heavy price for it...

"Shall we start with a tour of the Castle?" Offered Yamino, patting his round belly. "This way we can go see my niece, and then you younglings should be off to the Capital!"

"...What about the rest of your, uh... Luggage, ladies?" Asked Yassim, suddenly remembering the black dragon.

"Oh, he'll be back when he's full," shrugged Tessa.

"K-Krai likes to g-go hunt first th-thing in the morning," smiled Cessilia. "He will nap somewhere and c-come b-back later..."

Yassim tried to smile a bit awkwardly. He was a little bit worried as to where the large black dragon would set his new hunting ground...

"Oh, let's go now," announced Tessa, standing up and stretching. "I need to walk to digest all this. I'm curious about this Castle too. It's so tiny!"

Yamino and Yassim felt a bit defeated by the young woman's honesty, but she probably had very different standards, considering where she came from. Yassim had witnessed himself that the War God's residence was about as big as their King's...

"We can take care of your luggage if you want!" Quickly offered one of the triplets, running to the bags they had put down at the entrance.

Before she could put her hands on it, a knife flew right by her fingers, missing them only by an inch. The piece of cutlery stabbed the wall next to her. Nupia froze and fell back in fear, her eyes wide. Her younger siblings, who were respectively holding the teapot and a full fruit plate, glanced at Tessa, both just as shocked.

"If you touch our things, I'll cut your fingers off," said the young woman.

"I-I'm sorry!" Quickly said Nupia, backing away from their bags.

The two counsellors were in awe. Not only because they had barely seen the action, or that this kitchen knife had been thrown with such speed, strength and precision that it literally got stuck inside a wall, but also because Cessilia had barely reacted to this. In fact, her eyes had quickly gone to each of the triplets before she had taken her teacup to sip quietly, as if her cousin's action was completely normal.

"M-my Lady," said Yamino, a bit confused. "There's nothing to worry about, all the Castle's servants are trained since childhood to serve well..."

"T-they are not just servants," suddenly said Cessilia.

Once again, the two old men were utterly confused, but the young Princess' green eyes were on the two younger triplets. It was as if her previously gentle gaze had turned into an emerald-colored stare. This time, Yassim could clearly see something of her father in Cessilia's eyes. She didn't look so fragile anymore, all of a sudden, but she had the piercing gaze of someone who knew how to watch out for threats.

"I-I am sorry," mumbled Nupia, bowing again and again; "We are really just servants, my Lady..."

"D-do you t-train servants to f-fight?" Asked Cessilia, her eyes going to Yamino.

"Of course not!"

"Then they are not j-just servants," she quietly said.

The triplets kept exchanging glances, visibly confused. Yassim was also trying to understand. Cessilia seemed so sure, but the triplets also seemed genuinely shocked, and the look of fear on their faces too... Still, the young woman was the War God's daughter.

"How do you know, my Lady?"

"The b-boy didn't flinch when T-Tessa sent that knife, neither d-did Lupia," she simply said.

Yassim was astonished. He glanced aside, but... indeed, it made complete sense. If the triplets had really been shocked, they would have very briefly lost the grip on the dishes they were holding. The knife had flown close to them and almost injured their older sister, so they should have been at least shocked. Some of that teacup held on the plate would have been spilled, and those grapes on top of the fruit bowl looked like they were just about to fall, yet still there. If she hadn't said anything, Yassim wouldn't even have noticed their lack of physical reaction, and been floored by their acting. They were both faking their surprise so perfectly, but Cessilia had been able to notice it. Not only that, but... she even could tell those two apart? Since they had left the room and returned together, Yassim just couldn't tell which one was the boy or the girl, but Cessilia obviously had no doubt.

A shiver went down the old man's spine. There was definitely more to that young woman than meets the eye.

Realizing they were discovered, the triplets exchanged glances, and immediately got down on their knees, apologizing together.

“Our apologies for duping this Princess! We were told to quietly and secretly watch over the Princess, we would never try to harm the Princess!”

“...Who sent you?” Asked Tessa, who was playing with another knife already. “Don’t you lie, I’ll really cut your tongue if you do. I only need one of you to talk.”

“The King, my Lady! It’s the truth!” Quickly said Nupia.

As she was repeatedly bowing and hiding her face, Yassim had no idea how to tell if the triplets were telling the truth, but Tessa and Cessilia were visibly satisfied with that. Tessa glanced towards her cousin, and put the knife down.

“K-King Ashen t-told you to p-protect me...?” Repeated Cessilia.

This time, she wasn’t doubting the triplets, but there was surprise in her voice. Tessa, too, frowned subtly. What was going on there... The triplets nodded quietly again, visibly still afraid of the cousin’s dangerous knife-throwing ability.

“...I see.”

That was all Cessilia said, and no one dared to ask anything else. Instead, as she slowly stood up, they all did, and she put back on a gentle smile, as if all that hadn’t happened.

“Is it alright if we g-go now?” She asked Yamino.

“Of course, my Lady! Nothing better than a little digestive walk, right?”

“You three are coming with us,” immediately said Tessa, glaring at the triplets.

All three immediately complied, and cleared the table in record time while the girls took out their coats.

“Maybe we should wear something d-different?” Suggested Cessilia.

She had probably noticed the difference in clothing with the rest of the nobles.

“There will be plenty of clothes in the market if you ladies went to buy something,” nodded Yassim. “They may not be as luxurious as the Dragon Empire’s fabric, but we have some of the best clothing shops of the Kingdom in the Capital.”

“Oh, for sure! Neptuna will happily take you, Princess Cessilia,” nodded Yamino. “My niece loves going downtown.”

Their little group soon got ready to leave the room, and Cessilia did notice how Nupia carefully closed the room behind them, and walked back to her, handing her the key.

“From now on, Princess Cessilia, you are the only guest allowed in the Cerulean Room, and to decide who will be allowed in or not. The sentence for trespassing is death, my Lady.”

Tessa scoffed.

“I hope you’ll remember to let me in, Cessi.”

The two cousins chuckled, but did not mention anything about allowing the older counsellors in again. Instead, their little group walked out and back into the corridors. This time, Yamino was leading them, while the triplets followed behind. Cessilia was a bit excited to go out, and out of this Castle. She found this place a bit sad and stuffy; most of the corridors were bare and the atmosphere heavy anywhere they went. A few people they walked into quietly bowed to their group and disappeared, out of the way. Either the news of an Imperial Princess coming had quickly spread throughout the place, or those people knew they should stay away from the guests; no one talked to them.

“My niece should be in the library,” said Yamino as they got down to a lower floor. “She is a clever girl and loves reading, she is a bit of an indoor flower, you see.”

“I know someone like that,” smiled Tessa, smiling at her cousin.

Cessilia smiled back. Perhaps Neptuna could become a good friend indeed... plus, now that he had mentioned it, she was a bit curious to discover that library. Cessilia had read almost every book she could find in all three palaces she lived in, and her grandmother even gifted her several books for each of her birthdays, just so she could have something new to read. In fact, in the Dragon Empire, it was rumored that the Princess’ love for books had multiplied the circulation of books within the Empire, and inspired more of the youth to read, as she and her mother regularly donated books to the schools, orphanages and charities.

However, Cessilia found herself a bit disappointed when they entered said library.

The room wasn’t as big as she had hoped, nor filled with books. In fact, some of the shelves were half-empty, and seemed too large for their contents. The old oak wood seemed about to crumble, and the colored leather of some books was standing out too much among the decrepit ones. Seeing the disappointment in the Princess’ eyes, Yassim stepped forward, a bit apologetic.

“Because of the recent war, a lot of the books are now among the people’s private properties rather than in the Castle’s library... They became extremely rare and valuable due to many of them getting burned, too, so it has become harder to replenish those shelves. They were once filled with dozens of amazing books, my Lady. All of the Counsellors have been trying to bring more books back, but...”

"There are too many thieves," sighed Yamino. "Because the books are so valuable, some are getting stolen every week, despite his Majesty putting some guards here."

"That's sad..." muttered Cessilia.

Slowly, she stepped first into the libraries, her green eyes going on the shelves without touching any of those books. This place felt... abandoned. It was as if a few people had tried to take care of it, then abandoned it. There was dust on the shelves, and only the books with the prettiest covers seemed to be properly taken care of. The oldest, ugliest ones had their back cover falling apart, and were piling up dust. Cessilia's eyes were reading one title after another, most of them completely unknown to her. She was still very curious to read each of these books, but her heart was pained when she witnessed their poor state. She grabbed one of the very old books.

"Anyone c-can take a b-book here?"

"Anyone, Princess."

The voice had come from the other side of the shelf. Cessilia's green eyes looked in between the books, and sure enough, a pair of dark eyes appeared, with a smile on those red lips.

Jisel was staring at her from the other side, her eyes smiling.

"We meet again, Princess. What a coincidence..."