

From the Notebooks of a Middle School Princess

Royal Crown



Written & illustrated by

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Feiwei & Friends  New York



BY COMMAND OF THE
ROYAL PALACE OF GENOVIA

YOU ARE INVITED TO BE PRESENT

AT 1:00 P.M., THURSDAY, THE
31ST DAY OF DECEMBER

FOR THE CORONATION OF HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

PRINCESS AMELIA MIGNONETTE
GRIMALDI THERMOPOLIS RENALDO

THE THRONE ROOM

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

DRESS: FORMAL

Monday, December 28

11:30 A.M.

Royal Pool



It's three days before my sister's royal coronation . . . the first coronation of a female ruler in Genovia in *two centuries!*

I should be having fun—especially since it's winter break, my best friend, Nishi, is visiting from America, and I get to be *in* the coronation ceremony.

But instead, I'm being forced to entertain my snobby cousin Lady Luisa Ferrari because her grandmother, the baroness, is in Biarritz with her new gentleman friend.

“I’m bored,” Luisa keeps saying.

“*You’re* the one who said you wanted to work on your tan,” I remind her. We’re stretched out in the winter sun on chaise longues next to the pool, which is heated. But still.

“How can you be bored staying in a *royal palace*?” Nishi wants to know. She doesn’t mind hanging by the pool, because even though it’s only seventy degrees in Genovia right now, it’s thirty-five and snowing in New Jersey, where Nishi’s visiting from. “They have *everything* here: tennis courts, horseback riding, sailing, mani-pedis, a state-of-the-art home theater, all the food you can eat, prepared by a *five-star* chef—”

“Yes, but hello.” Luisa holds up her phone. “The cell service? Horrible.”

“What do you expect from a building that was constructed in medieval times?” I ask. “The walls had to be made three feet thick in order to keep out invading marauders.”

“Yes, but now they’re keeping out my cell phone service provider.” Lady Luisa adjusts her floppy hat.



She wants to tan on her body, not her face. “It’s no wonder the duke hasn’t been able to reach me.”

The duke. That’s all Luisa ever talks about, her boyfriend, the Duke of Marborough.

I have a boyfriend, too—well, a friend-who-is-a-boy—but I don’t talk about him all the time.

And I highly doubt that the reason Luisa hasn’t heard from her boyfriend is because of the palace’s thick walls. More likely it’s because they’re in another one of their fights. All Luisa and the duke ever do is fight, usually over the duke’s refusal to do anything except play video games. Which would be all right if Luisa played video games, too, but she doesn’t.

“You know, Luisa,” I can’t help pointing out, “you’re living through one of the most momentous occasions in Genovian history. My sister’s coronation on Thursday is going to be attended by over two hundred heads of state and televised worldwide—”

“Oh my God, I know,” Luisa says with a yawn. “You’ve only mentioned it a million times. Could you please pass me the sunscreen?”

It’s not really my cousin’s fault that she’s so rude. She actually has a pretty rough home life. Her parents are getting divorced and, according to my friend Princess Komiko, **the two of them** are fighting over who *isn’t* going to get custody of Lady Luisa.

That’s why Luisa lives with her grandmother in the first place, a grandmother who is always jetting off to places like Biarritz with new gentlemen friends.

“I don’t understand why your sister even has to have a coronation ceremony, Olivia,” Nishi says. “Isn’t she already a princess?”

It’s natural that Nishi would be confused about this, since she’s from the US, and hasn’t been getting the

endless lessons on the coronation that we have here in Genovia, both in school and on the nightly news.

“Of course she’s already a princess,” I say. “We both are, since our dad is a prince. But Dad is abdicating—which means giving up the crown—so that he can spend more time with me and Rocky. So on Thursday, at the coronation, Mia will formally take over the throne from my dad.”

“Oh.” Nishi adjusts her sunglasses. “But then why isn’t she becoming a queen?”

I sigh. Royal life is complicated.

“Because Genovia is a principality,” I explain, “which means it’s ruled by either a prince or a princess, not a king or a queen.”

“Um, technically, it’s not ruled by either,” Luisa says in a waspish voice. “Genovians have a prime minister. The royal family doesn’t actually make any laws. Their role is only symbolic. So it’s not like Princess Mia will actually ever *do* anything once she’s crowned.”

I suck in my breath, shocked.

But before I can tell Lady Luisa how rude she’s

being, Rocky, my little stepbrother, comes bursting into the royal gardens, running at full speed, my miniature poodle, Snowball, barking at his heels.

“Olivia!” he shrieks. “They’re here! They’re finally here!”

“Good grief,” Luisa says, lowering her sunglasses to get a better look at him. “What’s *his* problem?”

What’s yours? I want to ask her, even though I already know.

“What’s here, Rocky?” I ask him instead, when he skids to a stop in front of us.

“The Robe of State,” he pants. “And the royal crown!”

No more hanging out at the pool with my rude cousin for me! I’ve got a crown to inspect.

Monday, December 28

1:30 P.M.

Royal Sitting Room



I knew something was going to go wrong—something besides my having to entertain my awful cousin Lady Luisa all day (and night), I mean. It seems like my family can never have an ordinary, universally televised state function without it turning into a disaster.

And now it looks as if the coronation will be no exception.

Normally the royal crown is in a bulletproof glass case in the palace museum with all the other crown jewels.

But because my sister, Mia, will be wearing it later this week for the coronation, it was sent out for cleaning.

Now it's back and has been brought upstairs to our living quarters so that Paolo, the royal beauty stylist, can figure out which of Mia's hairdos will best keep it in place.

We were all standing around admiring it . . . and trying it on, even though the royal crown isn't supposed to be worn by anyone except the reigning monarch.

But Mia said it was okay, because when will we ever have another chance to try on the *actual royal crown of Genovia*?

I have a tiara, of course (made of real diamonds!), but it's not a crown since it doesn't go all the way around my head . . . and it's certainly not *the* royal crown of Genovia. Only the ruling monarch wears that.

"It's so heavy!" Luisa cried, when it was her turn to try it on.

"It weighs seven pounds," Mia informed us from

the couch, where she was bouncing Baby Prince Frank, the fussiest of the twins, in her arms. “So you can imagine how much your neck would hurt after wearing it for a few hours.”

“And it’s worth over twenty million dollars,” my dad added. “So please be careful with it.”

“My neck doesn’t hurt a bit.” Lady Luisa stared at her reflection in the mirror. “I could wear it all day. I’ve never worn anything worth twenty million dollars before.”

“Believe me,” Mia said, “one of the first things I did when I found out I was a princess was try to get Dad to sell the crown and donate the money to the orphans of Genovia.”

“Pfuit!” said Grandmère scornfully. “The orphans of Genovia don’t need our money. They all have trust funds.”

“The sapphires really bring out the blue in my eyes,” Luisa said, admiring her reflection some more.

“Yes,” I said. “They do. Now, why don’t you give someone else a turn?” She’d been wearing the crown for almost five minutes.

“What’s that?” Luisa asked instead of surrendering the crown, pointing at a red velvet cape that was hanging on a dressmaker’s dummy in the corner.

“Oh,” I said. “That’s the Robe of State. It’s two hundred years old. It just got back from the cleaners, too.”

“And a good thing it did,” Rocky said, “because that skunk-fur trim smelled like farts.”

“That trim is most certainly not skunk fur,” Grandmère said tartly. “It is Alpine ermine, and extremely rare. And the robe did not smell of flatulence, it smelled of mildew from having had champagne spilled on it the last time it was worn.” She gave Dad the evil eye, which he pretended not to notice. “The Robe of State plays almost as important a role in the coronation as the crown. It is worn by the reigning monarch every time there’s an important state function, such as a coronation, the opening of Parliament, or the bachelor party of one’s brand-new son-in-law, apparently.”

“And traditionally,” Dad said quickly, “the youngest royal in the family always carries the robe’s train. And since Princess Elizabeth and Prince Frank aren’t old

enough yet even to crawl, Olivia is the one upon whom this formidable responsibility has fallen.”

I tried to look modest when Nishi smiled at me, impressed.

“It’s no different than when we carried Mia’s train at her wedding,” I said with a shrug.

But it *is* different, since the beautiful lace train of my sister’s wedding dress was a lot lighter than the Genovian Robe of State’s twenty-foot train. I know, since I’ve already lifted the robe a few times for practice. I have no idea how Mia’s going to get down the entire length of the throne room in that heavy thing, even with my help.

We’d finally wrestled the crown from Luisa—who really didn’t want to give it up—and were trying it on Snowball just for laughs when a footman knocked on the door with a letter that had just been delivered by special courier.

I didn’t think anything of it at the time. My sister gets letters



delivered by special courier all the time. She's about to be the reigning princess of Genovia, after all, even if some people (Lady Luisa) don't think that's a big deal.

But this letter was different. I could tell by my sister's face after she opened it.

"Oh no," Mia said.

"What is it?" her husband, Michael, asked. He was trying to bounce both twins in his arms. All the twins do all day (when they're not sleeping or eating) is cry. Having a newborn twin niece and nephew is not as much fun as I thought it would be. "More yes RSVPs to the coronation?"

"Why does everyone wait until the last minute to respond to invitations?" Grandmère asked. "It's the height of rudeness."

"No," Mia said, reading the letter. "It's much worse than that. It's about our cousin, Prince René Alberto."

"Oh," I said. "Is he the one who keeps getting arrested for illegal offshore gambling?"

"No," Mia said. "He's the one who keeps contesting my right to the throne. And now he's doing it again."

Only this time he's filed a cease-and-desist order in an attempt to stop the coronation."

"What?" I almost dropped the royal crown, which could have been a disaster. It's very old, and the jewels aren't really screwed in that tightly. "How can he do that?"

"He's claiming that his eight-year-old son has more right to the throne of Genovia than I do."

"On what possible grounds?" Michael asked, looking outraged on his wife's behalf.

"And since when does René have a son, anyway?" Grandmère demanded. "I thought he and that horrid wife of his had a daughter. I distinctly remember the birth announcement. They named her Morgan. I sent her an add-a-pearl necklace, and every birthday since, I've been sending a pearl, not that they've ever thanked me."

"Morgan can be a girl's or a boy's name, Grandmère," Rocky pointed out. "And boys can like pearl necklaces."

"Well, evidently Morgan doesn't," Mia said. "Or at

least not enough, because his father is now demanding that I hand over the crown instead.”

My stepmother, Helen Thermopolis, shook her head. “What possible reason could Cousin René have to think that his son has more of a claim to the throne than you do, Mia? Is it because he’s a boy? How typically sexist!”

“And René is from the *Italian* side of the family,” Grandmère practically screamed. “He’s not even a Renaldo. He’s hardly even related to us!”

Luisa looked hurt. “I’m from the Italian side of the family,” she said. “And I’m not a Renaldo. Does that mean I’m not related to you?”

“Of course you are, dear,” Helen said, patting her on the shoulder, making me feel a bit guilty for thinking, *Sometimes I wish you weren’t*. “Princess Clarisse is exaggerating. The Renaldos and Albertos and Ferraris are all very closely related . . . and of course the Italian border is only a mile away from here.”

“Well,” Dad said, scanning the letter, which Mia had passed to him. “This might explain it. Apparently, Cousin René and his wife paid for one of those home

genetic ancestry kits that are so popular right now, and it turns out little Morgan's DNA is ninety-nine-point-nine percent Genovian."

"What difference does *that* make?" Grandmère demanded.

But I knew. Before the words were even out of Dad's mouth, I knew:

"Well," he began. "It means that little Morgan—"

"—doesn't have any *American* blood in him," I said, "like we do."

I tried not to sound as sad as I felt, but it was hard. I knew this whole princess thing was too good to be true.

Not that being a princess is so important. What's important is that, after spending most of my life living with people who never cared for me, I've finally found a family who does. The fact that they're royal—and so am I—has only been frosting on the cake.

Of course you can learn to get along with unfrosted cake . . . but life with it is so much sweeter.

"Well, not *American* blood, necessarily," Mia said. "But they're claiming that Morgan's DNA is genetically a much closer match to the DNA of Princess

Rosagunde, the founder of Genovia, than either mine or yours, Olivia, because we have American mothers. Which, if you ask me, is simply—”

“*Ridiculous*,” Grandmère cried, rising from her seat. “Who has shown more of Princess Rosagunde’s devotion to the crown than either you or your sister? Why, it’s because of you, Amelia, that Genovia has one of the highest gross national products in the EU! And you, Olivia, helped keep your school from suffering a humiliating defeat last month in the Royal School Winter Games!”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” I said modestly. “All I did was take photographs for the school paper.”

“But that’s certainly more than your cousin René has ever done!” Grandmère insisted. “How dare he imagine he or his son is anything like our noble Rosagunde, whatever some DNA test says?”

“Wait,” Nishi whispered. “Who is Princess Rosagunde again?”

“Oh,” I said. “She’s the one who, in the year 569 AD, killed a Visigothic warlord, and saved the country from

being invaded. Genovia has been ruled by her descendants, the Renaldos, ever since.”

“Cool,” Nishi said, impressed. Nishi is always impressed by princesses who use weapons and also have extremely long hair, like Rapunzel.

“Besides which,” Grandmère went on, still on her anti-Cousin René rant, “René is an *Alberto*, so no matter what some DNA test says, neither he nor his child will ever sit upon the throne. There have always been Renaldos on the throne of Genovia!”

“Thank you for that, Mother,” Dad said. “It was very *Game of Thrones*. Now, please sit down.”

“How could René have even gotten hold of a sample of Rosagunde’s DNA to compare with his son’s?” Mia asked. “She’s buried in a crypt in the royal cemetery.”

“Who knows?” Grandmère asked. “Who cares? There’s more to ruling a kingdom than simple DNA. One must possess courage, compassion, integrity, intelligence—What qualities, other than his alleged genetic superiority, does this eight-year-old have that makes Cousin René think he’s fit to rule? *None!* How

dare he attempt to stop Amelia's coronation? How *dare* he?"

"Now, Mother," Dad said. "There's no need to shout."

"How else am I to make myself heard above these shrieking babies?" she demanded. "Where in heaven's name is their nanny?"

"Grandmère," Mia said. "You know we gave the nanny the week off for the holidays—"

Grandmère's face was turning almost as red as Baby Prince Frank's, and he has something called colic.

"The . . . week . . . off . . . for . . . the . . . holidays? Right before the royal coronation?" I thought there was a strong possibility that Grandmère might explode. "Why? Why *on earth* would you do that?"

"Because the poor woman has been working for weeks without a single day off," Mia said, taking Baby Prince Frank from Michael and trying to comfort him. "And it's Christmas. She'll be back by the coronation on New Year's. We can handle this. Or at least . . ." I

saw her hesitate a little. “I thought we could before that letter from Prince René.”

Grandmère sank into an armchair, clutching the fur collar of her vest. “No nanny,” she murmured. “No nanny, and there’s a coup afoot! May the good Lord help us all.”

“I don’t get it,” Nishi whispered to me. “How can these people say that you and Mia have no right to the throne just because you’re part American?”

“I don’t know,” I said with a shrug. “But I’m sure it will all turn out okay.”

Nishi didn’t look convinced, probably because of the scroll on the bottom of the television news station which Dad had just turned on. It said:

ROYAL WRECK!

Apparently, Cousin René had sent a copy of his letter to the press as well as to the palace this morning.

“Aren’t you *a little bit* worried?” Nishi whispered to me.

“No,” I said. “Not at all.”

But I was lying. Of course I'm worried! Especially since a little while ago I overheard Mia saying to Michael, when she didn't know I was listening, "Why does this kind of thing always have to happen right when everything seems to be going great? Why can't I just have a nice, normal family, like everybody else?"

Michael said, "Because no one has a nice, normal family. There's drama in everyone's family."

"Not like this," Mia said. "My family seems to have way more drama than anyone else's."

Which is so true! And I know why, too:

Because other people's families don't have thrones—not to mention crowns—over which to fight.

Monday, December 28

8:00 P.M.

Royal Dining Room



Dinner started out super depressing . . . and then it got AMAZING.

Depressing because Mia, my dad, and Michael weren't there—they were busy doing stuff with Cousin René's court case, and Helen was busy looking after the babies—which just left me, Nishi, Luisa, Rocky, and Grandmère to eat Chef Bernard's award-winning roasted prawns.

Amazing because of the phone call I got in the middle of one of Grandmère's speeches on the importance of knowing one's royal duty.

“The future princess—or prince—of Genovia has a great many challenges ahead of her,” Grandmère was going on, over her prawns. “One of them is to make sure that every citizen of this country feels as if they are part of this community, and that none of the rich culture and heritage of this country is lost or forgotten in an era when most people won’t even look up from their screens.”

It took me a minute to realize she was saying all this because she’d caught Luisa checking her cell phone under the dinner table—a major etiquette *don’t* at the palace dining table!

“Oh,” Luisa said, when she noticed Grandmère’s death stare. “I do beg your pardon, Your Highness. But I’m expecting an important call.”

“Are you, my dear?” Grandmère asked acidly. “From the prime minister?”

“Uh, no,” Luisa said, slipping her phone back into her bag. It was a Claudio, of course. Lady Luisa only ever carries Claudios. “My boyfriend, the Duke of Marborough.”

“Your boyfriend,” Grandmère said. “The duke. How nice. You do realize, don’t you, that unless it’s an urgent matter of state, phone calls at the table are an abomination?”

“Well,” Luisa said snootily, “I doubt Princess Mia actually gets *that* many calls that are urgent matters of state.”

This was *not* the right thing to say. Grandmère nearly upset the silver tureen of vegetables (lightly coated with Genovian olive oil) that one of the footmen had been about to pass to her.

“I will have you know, young lady, that there isn’t a charity in this country that a member of our family hasn’t helped raise awareness of or funds for. The prime minister is *most* indebted to us. The money we generate in tourism alone has kept Genovia’s economy afloat for decades. And for centuries the princes and princesses of Genovia have also acted as ambassadors, diplomats, and even warriors for this country, saving it from invasion and ruin time and time again.”

Luisa’s big blue eyes widened even further than

they had when she'd seen her reflection while wearing the royal crown. "I . . . I'm sorry, Your Highness. Of course I knew that."

"Then why is it," Grandmère asked, "that you told my granddaughter Olivia that it wasn't like Princess Mia would ever actually ever *do* anything once she's crowned?"

Luisa swung her wide blue stare accusingly at me . . . but all I could do was swallow the mouthful of prawns I'd just taken and shrug.

"What?" I whispered. "I didn't tell her! I swear!"

I hadn't, either.

But I'd always known that Grandmère had hearing like a bat . . . which, by the way, use echolocation to find their prey.

I would have stuck around to hear Grandmère yell at Lady Luisa some more, except that at that very moment my phone vibrated in my pocket.

When I snuck it out and looked down at the screen (even though of course I knew doing this was *very wrong*), I saw that it was Prince Khalil calling!

“Um,” I said, feeling myself blush. “Pardon me, but may I be excused?”

“Retiring for the evening so early, Olivia?” Grandmère looked bemused. “It’s not like you to miss dessert.”

“Oh no, I’ll be right back,” I said, already out of my chair. “I have to go to the bathroom. I mean, the toilette.”

I felt terrible for lying, but it was for a very good reason. I hadn’t spoken to Prince Khalil in seven days (except for a few texts). He’d been in Paris for the holidays, visiting his grandmother. I *had* to take this call!

Grandmère frowned. “Well then, by all means, go,” she said, waving her hand. “There’s no need to announce your *exact* destination to everyone when leaving the table, you know, my dear.”

“Right,” I said. “I know. Sorry. Thanks. Bye. I’ll be right back—”

I didn’t wait to hear what anyone said next . . . although I was fairly certain Rocky giggled, as he always does when anything to do with a biological function is

mentioned. I wasn't going to blow this opportunity to speak to Khalil!

That's why I ran down the hall toward the nearest lavatory, then out the French doors and into the Royal Genovian Gardens to press Accept and also to write this, because if answering the phone in front of your relatives and best friend is rude, so is writing in your diary!

But what was I supposed to do? Prince Khalil is my boyfriend . . . sort of.

I'm not actually allowed to have a boyfriend because my dad doesn't approve of girls my age dating. I only turned thirteen last month, which is also when Prince Khalil wrote me a letter telling me that he likes me more than any other girl he's ever met.

He didn't say he *loves* me, or anything, and I haven't told him that I love him.

But he is a boy, and he is my friend, and we hang out together a lot, and there is no other boy who I like better, or who makes me feel more tingly when he smiles.

So I guess, technically, he's my boyfriend . . . even

though I'd never call him that, especially in front of him (or my dad, either)!

I don't know what else to call him, though. "Boy-friend" sounds so . . . I don't know. Like something Lady Luisa would say!

And that's fine for her. I just don't know if it's right for me.

Anyway, I should be allowed to answer a call from my friend-who-is-a-boy if I want to (although not at the dinner table, of course. I know that's rude). I've never had a friend-who-is-a-boy before. I seriously have no idea how I, of all people, got one, especially one as nice and funny and intelligent as Prince Khalil.

I still sort of can't believe it. . . .

"Hello?" I said, once I'd gotten to the privacy of the Royal Genovian Gardens.

"Hi, Olivia!" Khalil said. "Sorry if this is a bad time to call. Were you eating?"

"Oh, no," I lied. "No, no, it's cool."

"Great. I just wanted to let you know we're back in Genovia. My parents and I arrived on the seven-thirty train."

“Oh,” I said, grinning like an idiot at the sound of his voice. “That’s a good train.”

That’s a good train? What’s wrong with me?

“It is. So when can I see you? I missed you!”

I laughed. It was so good to hear his voice. Also good to hear that he’d missed me, because I’d missed him, too . . . more than I liked to think about.

“I can’t wait to see you, too,” I said.

The thing I like best about Prince Khalil, besides how kind and thoughtful he is, is that he can always make me laugh, even when I’m sad or upset about something, which isn’t very often, but does happen sometimes, such as now.

Also, we have a lot in common, since we both want to be scientists when we grow up—Khalil loves herpetology, and I love wildlife illustration—although sadly for both of us, the royal thing might get in the way of our future careers.

Thankfully I’m third in



line to the throne, though, and Prince Khalil's country has erupted in a civil war, so there's a strong chance we'll both get to do what we love for a living instead of having to rule.

"I can't do anything right now, though," I said, "because it's kind of late and I've got my friend Nishi and my cousin Lady Luisa staying with me, and, well, uh, I don't know if you've seen the news . . ."

"Yeah," Khalil said. "I did. That thing about your cousin?"

"Yeah, *that*." I tried to laugh airily the way Grand-mère always does when someone expresses concern about something she doesn't want them to think matters, even though it does, like her tattooed eyeliner. "No need to worry about that, though. The palace legal team is handling it."

This wasn't a lie. Michael's sister, Lilly, and all the other lawyers who work for my dad are scrambling to deal with Cousin René's legal filing. I have no idea how, since it sounds to me like he has a pretty good claim.

"Well, that's good," Prince Khalil said. "Still, it's kind of a bummer."

“Yeah,” I said. “It is. But maybe we could hang out tomorrow?”

His voice brightened. “That would be great . . . especially because I have a surprise for you from Paris.”

“A surprise?” I was shocked. “From Paris? What is it?”

“If I tell you, then it won’t be a surprise, will it?”

“No . . . I guess not.” A surprise? What could it be? “But—”

He laughed in a mock-evil way. “You’ll find out what it is soon enough. See you later, Alligatoridae.”

I smiled. “Okay. After a while, Crocodylidae.”

Prince Khalil and I always use the correct names for the subfamilies of animal species. It’s our thing. Some people (such as my cousin Lady Luisa) might not find that romantic, but I do. Science can be very romantic, though not in a mushy way. It is romantic in a hands-on, evidence-based way.

And nothing is as hands-on as a surprise from your boyfriend—or your friend-who-is-a-boy—whatever it might be!