

Chapter 217 Gone but not far

A few days passed of endless diapers and late night wakeup calls for both of the new parents. Doris had barely slept during the nights, but she was given a break during the day whenever Beth came by. There was no one else she trusted to watch her baby while she rested.

William didn't trust anyone. When Doris mentioned what Beth had done for her, William stiffened but said nothing. Doris knew he was fighting the side of him that wanted to control everything around him.

"Please don't go." Doris begged Beth when she came by her room. "I'll give you anything you want in the palace!"

Beth laughed and pulled Doris in for a tight hug. "You got this, Doris. You don't need me to stick around here anymore! I'd only be in the way!"


"I don't know if I can do this without you. How am I supposed to get any sleep?" Doris whined. She knew she was being selfish, but she was honestly terrified to be without her friend. Since she had

given birth, she had her constant support and help through everything. Even when William was gone all day doing whatever kings did, she was right there for her.

And now her best friend was about to go back to the north and leave her to figure out how to be a new mom on her own.

She was terrified.

"You're a natural, Doris." Beth pulled away and smiled at her friend. "I met your maid, Penelope. She seems helpful and nice. Don't be afraid to trust more people around you."

"It's hard." Doris muttered. She sighed and rubbed her eyes. "Okay. You're right. I'll never sleep again I don't accept their help." 

Beth rubbed her arms. "Write to me if you need me, I will be here as soon as possible."

Doris offered a small smile. "I'm happy for you, Beth. I really am. I'm happy that you've found happiness. That's all I ever wanted for you."

Beth squeezed her hand. "And I am happy for you, my dear. I will be back in a few weeks to help you with the wedding."

"You better! I might just give your spot away to

another maid if you don't return to me." Doris teased. Beth laughed and they said their goodbyes before Doris was left alone with her own traitorous thoughts.

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A knock startled Doris awake. Penelope entered with a kind smile and a pot of tea. Her eyes went right to Alec who slept in his crib next to her before they settled on Doris.

"How are you feeling, my lady?" She asked kindly as she set the tea in front of her,

Doris sat up and rubbed her eyes. "I'm doing fine, thank you."

"I'm sorry to have disturbed your nap. I thought it had been some time since you've eaten and I wanted to bring a tray by."

Doris eyed the the plate of sandwiches and tea and felt her stomach grumble. "It's quite alright, thank you. I hope it's not cruel to wish you might bring it by when you see I'm awake."

"Oh no! Not cruel at all. I do apologize, my lady. I know you must be so tired from all the late nights." The maid clasped her hands in front of her. "I used to help my mother when she gave birth to my little

brother. She would be up all night with him and barely had time to sleep."

Doris took a bite out of the sandwich as she listened to the girl. "How old were you when she had her baby?"

"Oh, I was about 10 or so. I used to watch him during the days just so she could sleep." Penelope gazed at Alec with a smile on her face. "It made me love children."

"What age did you come here? You don't look that old."

"I came here a few years ago, when I was about 16. I haven't heard from my mother since." She said sadly. Doris felt her heart turn in her chest. It felt similar with her own mother. It took a long time for Doris to get over that wound, some days it still felt wide open. 2

"If you ever need any help... I know it's hard for you to open your trust to others, but I wanted to offer any assistance you need." Penelope bowed her head. "A mother needs to rest and you have a palace of servants. It's a shame not to use them."

"I thank you very much, Penelope. I truly do—but William and I aren't ready to let others watch him

another maid if you don't return to me." Doris teased. Beth laughed and they said their goodbyes before Doris was left alone with her own traitorous thoughts.

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"I thank you very much, Penelope. I truly do—but William and I aren't ready to let others watch him

unless we know them well. Perhaps that will change in time." Doris smiled a little.

Penelope smiled again and bowed her head. "Then let me help while you are in the room, at least."

"I would love that, thank you."

—

Over the next few days, Penelope made good on her word. She came by as soon as Doris was up with Alec.

"Would you like some breakfast? I can have some brought." She offered as she started to fold Alec's clothes and put them away.

"Oh, that would be lovely, thank you."

Penelope stared at the two of them for a long moment before she left to call for breakfast. It wasn't until almost two hours later that she returned with the tray. Alec was fast asleep and Doris was lounging on the couch with a book next to him. 1

"Oh, I thought you'd gotten lost." Doris smiled as she brought the tray to her. Penelope poured a cup of tea while she eyed Alec in the crib next to her. Doris shifted a little.

"Sorry, my lady. The kitchen has been extra slow

today and I wanted to make sure you had the best food." ②

"I was thinking about going for a walk, perhaps we should box it up and have a picnic outside." Doris said lightly. She smoothed out the skirt of her dress and went to stand.

"Oh, no—no my lady. It's quite cold outside, we don't want the baby getting sick!" Penelope quickly went to help Doris sit again. Doris furrowed her brow as she watched the maid set her up a plate and cup of tea. ②

"Are you alright? You seem to be sweating." Doris said.

"I am, I just ran across the palace to get your food." She laughed a little. Doris watched the girl cross the room and act busy before she started to sip her tea.

"Well, I think we should go for a walk later then. We've been in this room for eternity." Doris sighed and ran her fingers through her hair. Again, she caught the maid staring at her baby. "You know, I think I'm all good here for now, Penelope. I—"

Doris stood to escort Penelope to the door, but felt her world shift from beneath her. Her head and

body suddenly felt heavy and the world spun until she fell back against the couch to grip it. ②

"What..." Doris whispered. What was happening to her?

Doris saw Penelope take a step towards Alec before the world went dark.