

Too Lazy to be a Villainess

Chapter 18

The room was really, really quiet. Like the kind of quiet before something very, very bad happens. Thick, suffocating, and edged with fear.

I clung to Papa's chest, still hiccuping from my very justified meltdown earlier. My tiny fingers curled into his clothes, and I pressed my face against him. His heart was beating fast. Or maybe that was mine. I didn't know. All I knew was that everyone in the room looked like they were about to cry or throw up.

And, honestly? Same.

Papa was scary.

Like, I knew he was always kinda scary, but this was different. His crimson eyes weren't just cold. They burned. Like, if he looked at someone long enough, they'd just drop dead on the spot.

And these people? The maids, the guards, even Nanny and Mareilla? All of them were kneeling, heads down, shoulders stiff, like they knew death was already breathing down their necks.

Papa still had his sword out. Oh. Right. There was blood on it.

My stomach twisted. That was... that was from earlier. From when he saved me. When he—when that lady—when she—

I squeezed my eyes shut.

Nope. Nope, I was not thinking about that right now.

I focused on Papa instead. His grip on me was tight, like he was scared I'd vanish if he let go. Which was ridiculous because I wasn't going anywhere. My legs were wobbly, and my eyes were still all puffy from crying. Theon stood beside Papa, not saying anything because he knew everything was messed up. But one thing I didn't like was Nanny and Mareilla kneeling too.

Papa took a slow breath, his eyes still burning with anger.

"Raise your heads," he said, his voice cold and ruthless.

No one moved. Or should I say, no one dared.

"I won't repeat myself."

Everyone obeyed. Heads lifted, but no one dared to look into Papa's eyes. Except for Nanny. She didn't move.

She was trembling.

Not like the others. Not like the maids who were scared for their jobs or the guards who were scared for their heads. This was different.

She wasn't even raising her head.

And I knew why, because today I almost died. And it must have made her remember her dead child—the one she lost in a fire.

I knew she must be feeling useless. She couldn't even protect me. She must be thinking she failed again. But she doesn't know that I understand everything. I know my nanny more than anyone in this room.

I saw her hands tremble whenever she held me close. I saw her standing outside Papa's office even though her foot hurt. I saw the sadness in her eyes when she fed me. Sometimes, I even heard her crying when she thought I was asleep.

Her baby died. And today, I almost did too. That must have brought back all the pain she tried to bury inside her.

And then Papa took a step forward. The sound of his boots hitting the marble was loud in the silence.

Another step.

Then another.

I tightened my grip on his cloak. He stopped right in front of her. The tip of his sword glinted near her bent head.

"Nerina," his voice was cold. "Do you not hear me?"

Nanny flinched but didn't move. Everyone held their breath.

And, I didn't like this.

I squirmed in Papa's arms, but he didn't notice. His crimson eyes were still burning, still filled with rage. He won't spare anyone today.

Nanny, please... Just lift your head. Please.

But she didn't, and I was scared. I felt something tight in my chest. I didn't like this. I didn't like this at all.

I have to do something; I have to save my nanny. I wiggled in his arms, harder this time.

"Aaawooo... gaga..."

You cannot kill my nanny, Papa. You cannot.

I kicked my legs. But nothing was happening; Papa wasn't even looking at me, and now I am scared too much. I cannot lose my nanny. Never.

And then—

"Wahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"

I cried.

Loud.

The room froze.

Papa froze.

The anger, the sharpness—it scared me. It made my sobs come harder.

His sword didn't move, but something flickered in his eyes. He came back to senses.

Then Theon hesitated before stepping forward. "Your Majesty," he said carefully, "the princess has already seen something horrible. You should drop the sword."

Papa clenched his jaw.

Then, slowly—reluctantly—he lowered the sword to the ground.

His arms tightened around me, and he held me with both hands, trying to calm me. "Okay, okay. I won't do anything."

I hiccuped.

He wiped my tears. "It's alright now."

The room was silent except for my sniffles. Then Papa turned to Nanny. His voice was still cold but quieter now.

"Nerina. Look at me."

Nanny flinched but finally, slowly, lifted her head. Her eyes were filled with pain, like she was holding all the tears.

Papa exhaled, his gaze still unreadable. "You have responsibilities, Nerina. My daughter has cried too much. She needs something. Get it."

Nanny's breath hitched. Then she scrambled to her feet, almost tripping in her haste. She disappeared for a moment before returning with the milk she had gone to get before all of this happened.

But then she hesitated. she just stared at me. She didn't reach for me. Her hands trembled as she held the milk bottle, unsure, unwilling to hold me.

I didn't like that.

I stretched out my arms toward her.

She still didn't move.

I reached further, my tiny fingers grabbing the fabric of her dress, pulling her closer. Her lips parted, and for a moment, I thought she wouldn't take me. But then she reached out—carefully, hesitantly.

Her hands shook as she took me from Papa's arms. I curled into her warmth. She held me close, pressing soft kisses against my hair, her body trembling with quiet sobs.

Tears slipped down her face.

She wiped them away quickly.

Then, swallowing back her emotions, she gently brought the bottle to my lips and fed me.

I drank.

Because this was warmth.

After almost dying, a baby always needs something warm—like a mother's embrace. And Nanny was a mother to me. I never knew what a mother's love felt like.

Not in my last life.

Not in this one.

But after Nanny came into my life, I finally understood.

Mother's love wasn't just about giving birth. It was the way Nanny always held me close, how she wiped my tears before her own, how she never let go—even when her own heart was breaking.

Slowly, the weight in the room lifted.

Papa said nothing.

No one said anything.

But that didn't mean it was over. I saved Nanny.

But I couldn't save everyone. I cannot save everyone because today I almost died in my own home—at my own palace—at my own nursing room. And this is not something that we can just let go of.

This is serious.

The Imperial Palace—my home—was supposed to be the safest place in the empire. Its security was too tight, too impenetrable. No one could just walk in, wield a knife, and attack the Imperial Princess for fun.

Which meant—

Someone had helped that maid get inside.

Someone wanted me dead.

Papa turned back to the gathered servants and guards, his crimson eyes gleaming with cold fury. He didn't need his sword to show how powerful he was. His presence alone was enough.

The air felt heavy, suffocating. Like the walls themselves were pressing down, trapping everyone in his wrath.

The guards stiffened, their hands trembling at their sides. The maids, the footmen, the attendants—none of them dared to breathe too loudly. Some had their heads bowed so low that their foreheads nearly touched the floor.

But Papa was not moved by their fear.

"Who," his voice was quiet, deadly, "let a traitor into my palace?"

No one answered.

Papa took a step forward.

Silence.

Another step.

A maid whimpered. A guard clenched his jaw so hard it looked like his teeth would crack.

Papa scoffed. "No one knows?" His voice was soft. Almost amused.

It was terrifying.

"Then tell me—" he continued, slowly lifting a hand. Not to draw a weapon. He didn't need one. "—should I have you all executed? Since none of you seem to be aware of your own duties?"

A few gasps slipped through the crowd. I could feel the tension thickening, pressing against my skin.

I was busy drinking my milk, not caring. Because why should I? I almost died. Someone had helped that maid—the traitor. They weren't nice to me, so why should I care about them?

Am I turning like Papa?

But Papa's focus remained on the trembling bodies before him.

"Someone in this palace betrayed me." His voice turned sharp, slicing through the silence like a blade. "Betrayed the Empire. So tell me who did it before I execute every single one of you with my own two hands."

No one spoke.

I think they really had no wish to live. I mean, if you want to live, spit those words.

Then—

Theon stepped forward and bowed in front of Papa. "Your Majesty, with your permission, allow me to question them. We need to know what really happened. Why was the princess left alone in her room?"

Oh. That was smart.

Theon was really smart.

That was the biggest question. No one dared to leave the Imperial Princess alone. And if they did... then there had to be a reason.

What could've happened?