

Chapter 15: Rhys

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HEARING THE WORD *FUCK* LEAVE BRIDGET'S MOUTH IN THAT POSH, PROPER voice of hers...

It took every ounce of self-control I had not to do what I'd said I would do. What she'd asked me to do.

But even though I wanted nothing more than to throw caution to the wind and say *fuck it*, I'd give her exactly what we both craved, I didn't. Bridget was still drunk. Maybe not as drunk as she'd been half an hour ago, but intoxicated enough to have compromised judgment.

I had no clue if this was her or the alcohol talking. Hell, she'd been ready to go home with Vincent Hauz, and she hated him.

"That wasn't a promise, princess." My fingers dug into her skin.

"It sounded like one to me."

Jesus. Temptation was so close I could almost taste it. All I had to do was reach out and...

What the hell are you thinking, Larsen? my inner conscience snarled. *She's your client, not to mention a goddamned princess. Get the hell away from her before you do something you regret even more than what you're doing now.*

It didn't matter she was only my client for two more weeks. She was still my client, and we'd already shattered almost every professional boundary tonight.

"This is what I meant," I bit out, unsure who I was more pissed at, her or me. "You're acting like a different person. The Bridget I know wouldn't be asking her bodyguard to fuck her. What the hell is going on with you?"

Her face hardened. "I didn't sign up for a heart-to-heart, Mr. Larsen. Either fuck me, or I'll find someone else who will."

She let out a small yelp when I bent her fully over the dresser so her body was at a ninety-degree angle and her cheek pressed against the wood.

I leaned down until I was so close, I heard her every shallow, panting breath. "Do that," I said. "And you'll be responsible for a man's slow, bloody death. Is that what you want, princess?"

Bridget's hands clenched into fists. "You won't touch me, and you won't let anyone else touch me, either. So tell me, what the hell do you want, Mr. Larsen?"

You.

My frustration with everything, my whole damn life, reached a boiling point. "I want to know why you've been acting like an impulsive teenager instead of a grown-ass woman!"

Bridget was the most levelheaded person I knew. At least, she had been before her personality transplant.

"Because this is the last chance I have!" she yelled. I had never, not once in the two years I'd worked with her, heard her raise her voice, and it shocked me enough I loosened my hold on her and stepped back. Bridget twisted out of my grasp and straightened to face me, her chest heaving with emotion. "I have one week left. One week until..."

Sudden, icy terror gripped me. "Until what?" I demanded, bile rising in my throat. "Are you sick?"

"No." Bridget looked away. "I'm not sick. I'm just getting the one thing most people dream of."

Confusion chased away my brief flash of relief.

"The title of Crown Princess," she clarified. She slumped against the dresser, her face weary. "Before you say it, I know. First-world problems and all that. There are people starving, and I'm complaining about inheriting a throne."

My confusion doubled. "But Prince Nikolai..."

"...Is abdicating. For love." Bridget flashed a humorless smile. "He had the gall to fall in love with a commoner, and for that, he has to give up his birthright. Because the law forbids the monarch of Eldorra to marry anyone not of noble blood."

Of, for fuck's sake. What was this, the seventeenth century?

"That's bullshit."

"Yes, but it's bullshit we have to follow. Including me, now that I'm next in line to the throne."

My mouth curled into a small snarl at the thought of her marrying another man. It was irrational, but nothing about my reactions was rational when it came to her. Bridget could wipe away every sense of logic and propriety I had.

She continued, oblivious to my turmoil. "The palace is making the official announcement next week. I'm not supposed to tell anyone until then, which is why I haven't said anything." She swallowed hard. "After the announcement, I'll officially be the heir to the throne, and my life won't be mine anymore. Everything I do and say will reflect the crown, and I can't let my family or country down."

She took a deep breath. "That's why I've been going a little...crazy lately. I want to savor being normal for the last time. Relatively speaking."

I was silent as I digested her bombshell.

Bridget, the future Queen of Eldorra. Holy shit.

She was right in that most women would kill to trade places with her. But Bridget was the girl who once ran out in the middle of a thunderstorm and danced in the rain. Who spent her free time volunteering at an animal shelter and would rather stay home watching TV and eating ice cream than attend a fancy party.

To her, becoming queen wasn't a dream; it was her worst nightmare.

"It was never supposed to be me. I was the spare." Bridget blinked, her eyes bright with unshed tears. My chest squeezed at the sight. "It was never supposed to be me," she repeated.

I grasped her chin and tilted it until she was looking at me. "You're a lot of things, princess. Stubborn, infuriating, a pain in my ass half the time. But I promise you, you're not a spare anything."

She let out a weak laugh. "That might be the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

"Don't get used to it."

Another small laugh, one that faded as quickly as it had come. "What am I going to do?" Bridget whispered. "I'm not ready. I don't think I'll ever be ready."

"You're Bridget von Ascheberg," I said. "You'll be ready."

Bridget excelled at everything she did, and being queen would be no exception.

"In the meantime..." I hoped I didn't regret what I was about to say. "You're going to live your life the way you want. As long as it doesn't involve Vincent fucking Hauz."

If I ever saw that fucker again, I would break every bone in his body just for touching her and occupying space in her thoughts. He didn't deserve any inch of her.

Bridget brightened a bit. "Does that mean you'll fuck me?"

Definitely still drunk.

I groaned, well aware of the erection that hadn't waned at all this entire time. "No, princess. That's not a good idea."

She frowned. "But it's on my bucket list."

Oh, Jesus. I was almost afraid to ask, but... "You have a bucket list?"

Bridget nodded. "For before I return to Eldorra." She ticked off the items on her fingers. "One, go someplace where no one knows or cares who I am. Two, eat and read and sunbathe all day without having to worry about an event later or waking up early the next day. Three, do an adrenaline rush activity my grandfather will yell at me for, like bungee jumping. And four, have an orgasm I didn't give myself." Her shoulders slumped. "It's been a while."

Fuck. Now the mental image of Bridget giving herself an orgasm would forever be etched in my mind.

I scrubbed a hand over my face. How the hell did I get myself into this situation? The night had gone so far off the rails I couldn't see the tracks anymore.

"One is probably off the table," Bridget said. "But you can help me with four."

She was going to achieve something neither my mother nor the military had. She was going to kill me.

"Go to bed," I said in a strained voice. "Alone. You're drunk, and it's late."

Bridget stared at my groin, where my obvious arousal tented my pants. "But—"

"No." I needed to get out of there. Stat. "No buts. You'll thank me in the morning."

Before she could protest further, I left and headed straight to my bathroom, where I took the world's longest, coldest shower. It did nothing to slake the heat of my arousal. Neither did fisting my cock until I reached a wholly unsatisfying orgasm.