

# Chapter 24: Bridget

Chapter 24: Bridget's experience at the royal ball highlights the stark contrast between the expectations placed on her as a princess and the personal desires that stir within her. The evening, which was meant to be a stepping stone in securing her future with an appropriate suitor, quickly turns into a series of awkward and unsatisfying encounters. She is introduced to suitor after suitor, from the self-important Count of Falser, who is more concerned with boasting about his gym and tailor than getting to know her, to the shy Alfred, whose love for his birds makes him more comfortable in conversation with them than with her. Each interaction underscores the disconnect Bridget feels in this orchestrated attempt to find love, and her yearning for simplicity and sincerity becomes more apparent.

In a rare moment of relief, Bridget connects with Alfred over a mishap involving his birds. This small and seemingly insignificant exchange offers Bridget a brief escape from the forced nature of her social interactions and highlights her deep desire for a more authentic connection. However, the pressure to fulfill her royal duties remains ever-present, and as the evening wears on, Bridget seeks solace away from the crowd. Stepping into the restroom, she becomes consumed by thoughts of Rhys, her bodyguard, whose presence at the ball only adds to her internal conflict. While he represents a connection she cannot openly pursue, his presence is comforting, yet it also amplifies the pain of her royal obligations that separate them.

Rhys's presence in her life is both a source of comfort and torment, as their budding relationship continues to remain a secret, fraught with obstacles neither can ignore. Their stolen moments—those brief encounters filled with quiet, charged emotions—reveal a deep bond that Bridget longs to nurture but cannot openly embrace due to her royal position. She recalls how Rhys had wished her a happy birthday earlier in the evening, an act of tenderness that starkly contrasts with the

rigid formality of her public life. The mixed emotions she feels are compounded by the growing realization that her connection with Rhys is more than just fleeting attraction; it has become something much deeper and more meaningful.

Amidst the turmoil of her private feelings, Bridget faces a confrontation with Lord Erhall, the Speaker of Parliament, whose criticisms challenge her already fragile sense of self and her ability to rule. Erhall's remarks, questioning her competency and casting doubt on her capability to fulfill her royal duties, highlight the intense pressure Bridget faces as a woman in line for the throne. His skepticism, and the political ramifications of her gender, serve to reinforce the barriers she faces in her quest to break free from traditional expectations. Erhall's dismissiveness of her ideas only deepens Bridget's internal struggle as she realizes the immense weight of the responsibilities she must bear, all while trying to navigate a world that refuses to see her as more than a symbol.

The encounter with Erhall also underscores the societal and political forces working against Bridget's personal happiness and growth. She is reminded time and time again that her role as a princess is to serve the kingdom, not to indulge in personal desires or to challenge the patriarchal structures that define her world. This struggle between personal fulfillment and royal duty defines the emotional core of this chapter, as Bridget's desire for a life outside of the palace's constraints grows stronger. The gift Rhys gave her—an intimate sketch that speaks volumes of their unspoken connection—becomes a symbol of her desire for a different life, one where she can choose love over duty and authenticity over pretense.

As the night progresses, Bridget's interactions at the ball contrast with her deepening emotions for Rhys. Her experience with the men at the event, combined with the pressure from the royal family and political figures like Erhall, forces her to grapple with the limitations placed on her as both a woman and a royal. The internal conflict she faces, between her duty to her people and her desire for a genuine connection, reveals the complexity of her situation. The chapter captures Bridget's emotional turmoil, highlighting the intense desire for something real and meaningful that seems

increasingly out of reach in her world of expectations and appearances. The juxtaposition of her public role and private feelings sets the stage for further exploration of Bridget's character as she navigates the many challenges before her, both politically and emotionally.

This chapter not only showcases Bridget's struggle between her royal responsibilities and her personal desires, but it also paints a picture of her growth as a leader. She begins to question the limitations placed on her by her position, all while trying to maintain the image of perfection expected from her. Rhys, as her bodyguard and confidant, represents a personal escape from this reality, though their relationship remains constrained by the world around them. As Bridget contemplates her future, she is faced with the difficult decision of whether to continue down the path set out for her or to take a leap of faith toward a life filled with love and authenticity. The stakes are high, and Bridget's internal battle will only intensify as she moves forward in her journey.