

Chapter 30: Rhys

Chapter 30: Rhys feels the full weight of his addiction, but it isn't to anything he can easily avoid—it's Bridget herself. Throughout his life, Rhys had prided himself on steering clear of substances that could trap him, whether it be drugs, alcohol, or even an overindulgence in sugar. Yet here he was, completely consumed by a woman whose resilience, elegance, and hidden fire drew him in deeper with each passing day. For once, he didn't want to resist the pull. Spending the afternoon together in a quiet hotel on the outskirts of Athenberg, away from the prying eyes of the public, gave them the rare chance to experience something that almost resembled a normal date. Between the shared meals, tender moments, and hours tangled together in bed, they created a bubble where nothing else mattered. In those fleeting hours, Rhys allowed himself to forget the reality they would soon have to face.

As Rhys sketched Bridget, he reveled in the sheer simplicity of the moment. She teased him playfully, and he responded with mock threats of adding silly imperfections to his drawing. Bridget's real smile—so different from the polished ones she wore in public—struck him harder than any physical blow could. To Rhys, her beauty wasn't just in her appearance but in the way she let her guard down with him. Their banter came easily, a testament to the intimacy they had built outside the public eye. Despite knowing that danger loomed, with increasing security concerns around his guesthouse, Rhys chose to hold on to this afternoon. These peaceful moments were rare jewels in their turbulent world, and he cherished them with an intensity that surprised even him. In those quiet hours, he could almost believe they had a future untouched by royal expectations or societal scrutiny.

Their conversation turned deeper as Bridget asked whether Rhys ever shared his art with anyone else. When he admitted she was the only one, the magnitude of that confession hung heavily between them. Bridget's reaction was tender, teasing at first,

but full of an understanding that few others could offer him. Rhys knew he didn't trust easily, but with Bridget, opening up was less a conscious choice and more a natural response. When she called him over with a mischievous glint in her eye, the playful mood returned. The connection between them wasn't just physical—it was emotional, intricate, and rooted in a level of trust that neither of them had shared with many others before. Their intimacy deepened in ways that went beyond lust, revealing a vulnerability Rhys rarely allowed anyone to see.

Later, as they lay together, Bridget gently touched the scar on Rhys's eyebrow, leading him to share a piece of his painful past. Her simple gesture of affection—pressing a kiss to the scar—spoke louder than any words. For Rhys, these small acts chipped away at the armor he had built over years of hardship. Bridget had a way of making him feel human again, someone worthy of love, rather than a shadow weighed down by his childhood. Their talk shifted to the topic of his absent father, a man Rhys had no interest in finding. Despite the ease with which Christian could uncover the truth, Rhys knew there was nothing he wanted from the man who had abandoned him. He carried enough wounds without reopening that chapter. Yet, having Bridget there, listening without judgment, made the pain of those memories easier to bear.

Bridget's own fears and insecurities surfaced, shedding light on the heavy expectations she carried. Haunted by the legacy of a mother she had never known, Bridget confessed her deepest fear: that she would somehow fail the memory of the perfect queen her mother was supposed to be. Worse, she blamed herself for her mother's death—a burden no child should have to carry. Rhys listened, his heart breaking for her, and responded with fierce, unwavering love. He made sure Bridget knew that her life was not a mistake, and her mother's death was not her fault. His words were an anchor in the storm of her grief, pulling her back from the self-imposed guilt she had carried for so long.

Their exchange underscored a powerful truth about their relationship: beyond the physical attraction, beyond the public personas they were forced to maintain, they saw

each other in a way no one else did. In a world that demanded perfection from them both, Bridget and Rhys found solace in each other's imperfections. They were each other's safe harbor, a place to rest and heal, even as the world around them grew increasingly chaotic. With every shared secret, every moment of vulnerability, their bond deepened, becoming something too strong to be easily severed. As night crept in and they lay in the quiet aftermath of love and confessions, one thing became certain—no matter what battles awaited them beyond the hotel walls, they would fight for each other with everything they had.



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