

Chapter 5: Rhys

Chapter 5: Rhys was a phrase that looped in my mind as rage simmered through my veins. Bridget had once assured me she would be fine, but that misplaced confidence had nearly gotten her killed, dragging me into a night I wouldn't forget anytime soon. I'd warned her about the shady concert venue, a collapsing warehouse that screamed danger, yet she defied every word of caution and snuck out without backup. That decision led to her kidnapping, along with Ava, by a mercenary whose loyalty was bought by blood money. Even now, glancing in the rearview mirror and seeing her bruised but breathing wasn't enough to erase the sickening terror I had felt hours earlier. I hated disobedience, but even more than that, I hated how close we had come to disaster. No matter how composed I appeared, the fear had dug itself deep into my bones, refusing to let go.

The situation escalated quickly, dragging Ava and Bridget into a web of revenge centered around Alex Volkov and his criminal family drama. Honestly, I didn't give a damn about Volkov's vendettas; all that mattered was getting Bridget back in one piece. I had foreseen the possibility of trouble and installed a hidden tracker in her phone weeks ago—a decision that might have saved her life. Following the signal to Philadelphia was like chasing a ghost through the shadows, but eventually, I found them tied up and terrified. Despite the successful rescue, fury brewed inside me with every mile back to her townhouse, each minute sharpening my anger. A part of me wanted to scream at her the moment we crossed the threshold, but I clenched my fists and focused on Ava first. She needed Bridget's comfort more than she needed to hear my rage unleashed.

When Ava disappeared into the guest room, I wasted no time pulling Bridget aside, my voice low but lethal. She tried to soften the blow with a whispered apology, saying it all worked out because she was safe now, but that only made my blood boil hotter. I

demanded she meet me in the kitchen, away from Ava's fragile ears, and she obeyed, hugging herself tightly. It wasn't just the bruises on her wrists that angered me; it was the sheer recklessness, the betrayal of my trust, and the cold fear that gripped my chest thinking about what could have happened. She claimed it had been a mistake, but mistakes didn't land you at gunpoint. As I cornered her against the wall, forcing her to acknowledge the gravity of her actions, I glimpsed something raw and broken in her eyes that tempered my fury just enough not to explode completely.

There was no way to sugarcoat the truth: Bridget's choices had put herself and Ava in mortal danger, and next time we might not be so lucky. Her protest that the attack wasn't about her, but Ava, didn't excuse the recklessness that night. If I had been there, I would have neutralized the threat before a hand even touched her, and she knew it. It wasn't ego speaking; it was fact, honed from years of military training and a career built on saving lives in the worst circumstances imaginable. When I reminded her what I had told her from day one—to do what I say without question—she visibly flinched but didn't argue. That tiny moment of surrender lit a stubborn pride in me that even her glare couldn't extinguish. She could hate me all she wanted; I'd rather her alive and furious than dead and silent.

In an unexpected twist, Bridget offered a compromise that I didn't see coming: remove the tracker from her phone, and she would follow my security orders without question. The logic appealed to me—having her cooperation would be a tactical advantage—but every instinct in me screamed not to loosen control. Watching her stare me down with fire flashing in her sea-blue eyes made it hard to think clearly. Against better judgment, I agreed to a four-month trial. If she failed once, all bets were off, and I'd revert to treating her like a full-time hostage until I could guarantee her safety. Bridget's acceptance of the terms came with a condition of her own: to omit the incident from my security reports. While I should have refused immediately, a tiny crack inside me widened, the thought of walking away from her settling in my chest like a heavy stone.

The reality was simple—if the king found out, not only would my contract be shredded, but Bridget would suffer even harsher consequences. The media would devour the story, the palace would tighten its leash, and she would lose even the fragile freedom she clung to now. I hated the idea of being forced into a lie, but seeing the pleading in her eyes crushed my resolve more effectively than any royal decree ever could. I told myself it was a strategic decision: keep her close, keep her safe. But deep down, I knew the truth was far more complicated and dangerous. Because somewhere between the threats, the arguments, and the endless stubbornness, Bridget had become more than just a client. She had somehow become someone I couldn't stand to lose.



The moment ended with a reluctant truce, both of us tense, wary, and battered from the night's ordeal. Yet beneath the anger and exhaustion, a new current had formed between us, something fragile and raw that neither of us dared acknowledge out loud. Bridget had survived the night, but the battle for her safety—and maybe something far more complicated between us—was just beginning. The simple truth remained: as much as I hated the risks, the arguing, and the temptation she presented, there wasn't a force on earth strong enough to keep me from protecting her. Even if it meant breaking every rule I'd ever lived by.