

14. Rhys

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

14

RHYS

3 WEEKS LATER

Some people have shitty days or shitty weeks. I'd had a shitty month.

Things between me and Bridget had been chilly since she told me she was moving back to Eldorra, and I hated that was how we were spending our last days together.

Our last days together.

My chest clenched at the thought, but I forced myself to ignore it and focus on the task at hand. I was still on the clock. We had a week left in New York. After that, I would accompany her back to Athenberg, where I would stay another week until her new guard fully transitioned into the role.

We didn't know who the new guy would be yet, but I already hated him...though not as much as I hated the guy Bridget was dancing with right now.

We were in the VIP room of Borgia, a fancy nightclub in downtown Manhattan, and Bridget had her arms wrapped around the pretty-boy douche who'd been ogling her all night. I recognized him—Vincent Hauz, an electronics heir and notorious womanizer who spent the majority of his days drinking, partying, and keeping the city's drug dealers flush with cash. He and Bridget had attended a few of the same events in the past.

I'd never wanted to rip his arms off until now.

A person only had to look at his face to know what kind of thoughts were running through his mind, and they had nothing to do with dancing. At least, not the vertical kind.

My blood burned as Bridget laughed at something Vincent said. I was positive he wasn't capable of saying anything witty even if someone threatened to take his inheritance away, but Bridget was also drunk. She'd already downed two cocktails and five shots—I'd counted—and I could spot the alcohol-induced flush on her cheeks from across the room.

She wore a sparkling silver dress that barely covered her bottom and a pair of lethal-looking heels that transformed her from tall to Amazonian. Tousled golden hair, long legs, skin gleaming with a faint sheen of sweat—she was magnificent. And not herself.

Normal Bridget would've never worn a dress like that—not because she couldn't, but because it wasn't her style—but she'd been acting strange since that night on the rooftop. Wilder, less inhibited,

and more prone to questionable decisions.

Case in point: Vincent Hauz. She didn't like the guy. She'd said so herself one time, and yet there she was, cozying up to him. He pulled her closer and slid his hand down her back to cup her ass.

Before I knew what I was doing, I'd shoved my way across the dance floor and clamped my hand on Vincent's shoulder tight enough he flinched and pulled back from Bridget to see who the interloper was.

"Can I help you?" His tone dripped with disdain as he looked me over, obviously unimpressed by my lack of designer clothes and fancy accessories.

Tough shit. Maybe he'd be more impressed by my fist in his face.

"Yes." I bared my teeth in a semblance of a smile. "Remove your hands from her before I remove them for you."

"And who the fuck are you to tell me what to do?" Vincent sneered.

The man who's about to pummel your face into a pulp.

Before I could respond, Bridget cut in. "No one." She glared at me. "I'm fine. Go back to your post."

The hell I will.

If Bridget were anyone but my client, I'd drag her into the bathroom, bend her over, and spank her ass raw for her insolent tone. Instead, I glared back at her, striving to keep my temper under control.

She wanted to party? Fine. She wanted to give me the cold shoulder? Fine. But over my dead body would she have anything to do with Vincent fucking Hauz. The man must be crawling with STDs. Vincent's eyes ping-ponged between us before realization dawned. "You're the bodyguard!" He snapped his fingers. "Dude, you should've said so. Don't worry." He wrapped an arm around Bridget's waist and pulled her closer with a leering smile. "I'll take good care of her."

Fuck pummeling his face. I wanted to knock all his teeth out.

Unfortunately, that would cause a scene, and rule number one of bodyguarding, as Bridget called it, was not to cause a scene. So, I did the next best thing. I tightened the grip I still had on his shoulder until I heard a small crack above the music.

Vincent yelped and released Bridget, his face awash with pain.

"What the fuck, man?"

"What did I say about removing your hands from her?" I asked calmly.

"You're insane," he sputtered. "Bridget, who is this guy? Fire him!"

I ignored him and turned to Bridget. "It's time to go, Your Highness." We were attracting attention, which was the last thing I wanted, but fuck if I was going to let this creep take advantage of her.

"You have an early morning tomorrow."

She didn't. I was giving her an out—one she didn't take.

"Good idea." Bridget brushed off my warning stare and placed a hand on Vincent's chest. My pulse beat an angry drumbeat beneath my collar. "I'll leave with Vincent. You can take the rest of the night off."

“You heard her.” Vincent wrenched himself from my grasp and took a step behind Bridget. Coward. “Get outta here. I’ll bring her home in the morning.” He ran his eyes over Bridget’s chest and bare legs, his gaze lecherous.

The man didn’t have a single brain cell in his over-inflated head. If he did, he would be running for his life right now.

“Wrong. This is what you’re going to do.” I kept my voice friendly. Conversational. But beneath the polite veneer ran a razor-sharp blade of steel. “You’re going to turn around, walk away, and never speak, touch, or so much as look in her direction again. Consider this your first and final warning, Mr. Hauz.”

I knew his name. He knew I knew his name. And if he was stupid enough to ignore my warning, I would hunt him down, rip off his balls, and feed them to him.

Vincent’s face flushed a mottled purple. “Are you threatening me?”

I loomed over him, relishing the fear that skittered through his eyes. “Yes.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Bridget said through gritted teeth. “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

Vincent took another step back, oozing hatred, but the fear in his eyes remained. “Whatever. I’m over this shit.” He stormed away and disappeared into the crowd of drunken partygoers.

Bridget spun toward me. “What is your problem?”

“My problem is you’re acting like a drunk, spoiled brat,” I snapped. “You’re so shit-faced you have no idea what you’re doing.” “I know exactly what I’m doing.” She stared up at me, all fire and defiance, and heat curled inside me. I didn’t know what it was about her anger that turned me on so much. Maybe it was because it was one of the few times I could see her and not the mask she showed the world. “I’m having fun, and I’m leaving with a guy at the end of the night. You can’t stop me.”

I smiled coldly. “You’re right. You are leaving with a guy. Me.”

“No, I’m not.” Bridget crossed her arms over her chest.

“You have two options.” I leaned in close enough to smell her perfume. “You can either walk out of here with me like an adult, or I can throw you over my shoulder and carry you out of here like a child. Which one will it be, princess?”

She wasn’t the only one pissed tonight.

I was pissed she’d spent the last half hour letting a weaselly fucker put his hands all over her. I was pissed we were fighting when we had two weeks left together. Most of all, I was pissed at how much I wanted her when I couldn’t have her.

If there was one thing her move back to Eldorra made clear, it was that our relationship was a temporary one. It always had been, but it hadn’t hit close to home until now.

At the end of the day, she was a princess, and I was the guy they’d hired until they didn’t need me anymore.

Crimson stained Bridget’s high cheekbones. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me.”

“You forget you’re not the boss here, Mr. Larsen.”

The temperature of my smile dropped another ten degrees. “You

want to test that theory?"

Her lips thinned. For a second, I thought she might stay just to spite me. Then, without saying a word or so much as looking at me, she pushed past me and walked toward the exit, her shoulders stiff. I followed her, my scowl dark enough to make the other clubbers scatter like marbles before me.

We took the first cab we found back to Bridget's townhouse, and it barely stopped before Bridget jumped out and sped walk to the front door. I paid the driver and caught up with her in four strides. We entered the house, our footsteps echoing on the wood floors. When we reached the second floor, Bridget opened her bedroom door and tried to slam it in my face, but I wedged my arm in the gap before she could do so.

"We need to talk," I said.

"I don't want to talk. You've already ruined my night. Now leave me alone."

"Not until you tell me what the hell's going on." My gaze burned into hers, searching for a hint as to what was going on in that beautiful head of hers. "You've been acting strange for weeks. Something's wrong."

"Nothing's wrong." Bridget gave up trying to bar me from her room and released the door. I pushed it all the way open but remained in the doorway, watching. Waiting. "I'm twenty-three, Mr. Larsen. Twenty-three-year-olds go out and drink and sleep with guys."

A muscle ticked in my jaw. "Not the way you've been doing since we got back to New York."

Not the sleeping with guys part, thank God, but the going out and drinking.

"Maybe I'm tired of living life the way I should and want to live life the way I could." Bridget removed her jewelry and placed it on her dresser. "My grandfather almost died. One minute he was standing, the next he collapsed. What's to say the same thing won't happen to me?"

Her words held a ring of truth, but not the full truth. I knew every inflection of her voice, every meaning behind every movement. There was something she wasn't telling me.

"So, you decided you want to spend your potential last moment with Vincent fucking Hauz?" I scoffed.

"You don't even know him."

"I know enough."

"Please." Bridget spun toward me, fury and something infinitely sadder glittering in her eyes. "Every time I so much as smile at a man, you bulldoze your way between us like a territorial bear. Why is that, Mr. Larsen? Especially when you told me in no uncertain terms when we first met that you don't get involved in your clients' personal lives."

I didn't answer, but my jaw continued to tick in rhythm with my pulse. Tick. Tick. Tick. A bomb waiting to go off and blow up our lives as knew it.

"Maybe..." Bridget's expression turned contemplative as she took a step toward me. Mistake number one. "You want to be in their place." She smiled, but the haunted look remained in her eyes. "Do

you want me, Mr. Larsen? The princess and the bodyguard. It would make a nice story for your buddies.”

Mistake number two.

“You want to stop talking now, Your Highness,” I said softly.

“And be very, very careful what you do next.”

“Why?” Bridget took another step toward me, then another, until she was less than a foot away. “I’m not afraid of you. Everyone else is, but I’m not.” She placed her hand on my chest.

Mistake number three.

Her gasp hadn’t fully left her throat before I spun her around and bent her over the nearby dresser, one hand gripping her chin and forcing her head back while the other closed around her throat. My cock pressed into her ass, hard and angry.

I’d been on edge all night. Hell, I’d been on edge for two years.

The moment Bridget von Ascheberg entered my life, I’d been on a countdown to destruction, and tonight might just be the night everything went to hell.

“You should be, princess. You wanna know why?” I growled.

“Because you’re right. I do want you. But I don’t want to kiss or make love to you. I want to fuck you. I want to punish you for mouthing off and letting another man put his hands on you. I want to yank up that tiny fucking dress of yours and pound into you so