

24. Bridget

At the glamorous ball arranged with the hope of finding a suitable husband, Princess Bridget navigates one lackluster encounter after another with potential suitors. Her exchanges range from the self-absorbed Count of Falser, boasting of his gym and tailor, to the timid Alfred, more fond of his birds than conversation. Amid superficial conversations and dancing, Bridget yearns for simplicity and genuine connection, which she briefly finds in a conversation about bird-loving Alfred's aviary mishap.

Despite her royal duties and the forced smiles, Bridget seeks respite in the restroom, pondering over the futility of the night and her growing, forbidden feelings towards Rhys, her bodyguard, whose presence at the ball both torments and comforts her. Their charged yet fleeting encounters reveal a depth of connection and understanding between them that transcends their societal roles, highlighted by Rhys's gruff demeanor yet tender birthday wishes.

As the night progresses, Bridget encounters the rude and power-hungry Speaker of Parliament, Lord Erhall, who questions her capability to rule. This confrontation brings to light the gendered expectations and political pressures Bridget faces, overshadowing even her own desires for love and companionship. This societal critique is juxtaposed with Bridget's internal struggle and her clandestine yearning for Rhys, whose gift—a thoughtful, personal sketch—becomes a symbol of their unspoken bond and the life Bridget aspires to beyond the confines of royalty.

The chapter paints a vivid picture of Bridget's public facade versus her private desires, illustrating the dichotomy between the obligations of royalty and the genuine human connections that elude her in the orchestrated search for a husband. It raises poignant questions about love, duty, and personal happiness within the restrictive frames of societal expectations and royal responsibilities.