

30. 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.

30

RHYS

I WAS ADDICTED.

Me, the man who'd avoided most addictive substances all his life—drugs, smoking, alcohol, even sugar, to an extent—had found the one thing I couldn't resist.

Strength, resilience, and light, wrapped up in five feet nine inches of creamy skin and cool composure that hid a heart of fire underneath.

But fuck, if she was an addiction, I never wanted to be cured.

"Are you going to paint me like one of your French girls?" Bridget teased, stretching her arms over her head.

My cock jumped with interest at the sight of her draped over the couch, naked, though let's be honest, there were very few things Bridget did that didn't interest my cock.

She had a rare day off after her morning meetings, and we'd spent the entire afternoon in a hotel room on the outskirts of Athenerberg. If anyone asked, Bridget was taking a spa day, but in reality, all we'd done was fuck, eat, and fuck some more. It was the closest we'd ever gotten, and that we could get, to a real date.

"Careful with teasing me, princess, unless you want a wart on your portrait," I threatened.

She grinned, and the sight hit me like a punch in the gut.

I would never tire of her smiles. Her real smiles, not the ones she showed the public. I'd seen Bridget naked, in fancy gowns, and in lingerie, but she was never more beautiful than when she was herself, stripped of all the pretenses her title forced her to wear.

"You wouldn't." She rolled over and propped her chin on her hands, which rested on the arm of the couch. "You're way too much of a perfectionist about your art."

"We'll see about that." But she was right. I was a perfectionist about my art, and the piece I was working on might be my favorite so far aside from the one of her in Costa Rica, which had finally broken my artist's block. "Hmm, let's see. I'll add a third nipple here...a hairy wart there..."

"Stop!" Bridget laughed. "If you're going to give me warts, at least put them somewhere inconspicuous."

"All right. On your belly button it is."

This time, I was the one who laughed when she tossed a throw pillow at me. "Years of grumpiness, and you suddenly have jokes."

"I've always had jokes. I just never told them." I shaded in her

hair. It spilled down her back, following the graceful curve of her neck and shoulder. Her lips parted in a small smile, and her eyes sparkled with mischief. I did my best to make the charcoal sketch realistic, though nothing compared to the real thing.

We fell into a comfortable silence—me sketching, Bridget watching me with a soft, slumberous expression.

I was more relaxed than I'd been in a long time, despite still being on high alert about someone possibly snooping through my guesthouse. I'd upgraded the security system and added hidden cameras that fed directly to a feed I could access on my phone. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened yet, so it was a wait-and-see game.

For now, I'd enjoy one of the rare moments Bridget and I could spend together without worrying about someone catching us.

"Do you ever show your art to anyone?" she asked after a while.

Sunset crept closer, and the golden late afternoon light bathed her in an otherworldly glow.

"I show it to you."

"Besides me."

"Nope." Not even Christian had seen my sketches, though he knew they existed. Ditto with my old therapist.

Bridget lifted her head, her lips parting in surprise. "So I'm..."

"The first person I showed? Yeah." I focused on finishing my sketch, but I felt the weight of her stare on my face.

"Mr. Larsen."

"Yes?" I drawled, picking up on the sensual note in her voice.

"Come here."

"You ordering me around?"

Bridget flashed another grin. "Maybe. I'm in trouble and I need your help."

I set down my pencil with a sigh. "You're not in trouble. You are trouble."

I strode over to the couch, and she squealed when I picked her up and set her in my lap. My cock nestled against her pussy, with only the material of my briefs separating us. "I'm here. Now what?"

"Now..." She pushed herself up on her knees so she could pull down my briefs. "You help me out. I'm a little tense."

I hissed out a breath when she sank onto my cock. "You're insatiable." For someone so regal in public, Bridget was a firecracker in the bedroom. Or living room, or shower, or kitchen counter.

Her grin widened. "You love it."

My chuckle morphed into a groan as she settled into an exquisite rhythm. "Yeah, princess. I do." I watched her, taking almost as much pleasure in the flushed arousal on her face as I did in the sensation of her pussy gripping me.

Half an hour later, after we were both breathless and sated, I curled an arm around her as we lay on the couch. That was my favorite type of moment with Bridget—the peaceful ones where we could just be together. We got so few of those.

"How did you get this?" She brushed her fingers over the scar on my eyebrow. "You never told me about this one."

"Hit it on a table." I stroked Bridget's arm absentmindedly. "My mother flew into one of her rages and backhanded me. I fell. I was

lucky I didn't hit my eye, or you'd be fucking a pirate impersonator."

Bridget didn't smile at my failed attempt at a joke. Instead, she brushed her fingers over the scar again before pressing her lips to it in a soft kiss, the way she had for the scars on my back in Costa Rica. I closed my eyes, my chest heavy and tight.

I'd talked about my mother more with Bridget than I had anyone else, including my old therapist. It wasn't so hard anymore, but Bridget had a way of making even the hardest things for me easy.

Relax. Talk. Laugh. Simple things that made me feel almost human again.

"Do you ever think about finding your father?" she asked. "For closure."

"Thought about it? Yeah. Acted on it? No." If I wanted, I could track my father down tomorrow. Christian had told me more than once it would take little more than a few presses of a button for him to dig up that information for me, but I wasn't interested. "I have no interest in meeting him. If I did, I'd probably get arrested for murder."

My father was a piece of shit, and as far as I was concerned, he didn't exist. Any man who could leave a woman high and dry like that didn't deserve recognition.

Even if all I wanted was a family, I would rather eat nails than waste energy seeking him out.

"It's crazy how much our parents shape our lives," Bridget said.

"With their choices, their memories, their legacies."

A shadow of sadness passed through her eyes, and I knew she was thinking about her own parents. One gone at childbirth, the other passing just a few years later, and she'd had to grieve, as a child, with millions of eyes watching her.

I remembered seeing a photo of her walking behind her father's casket as a kid, her face scrunched in an obvious attempt to hold back tears, and thinking that even though I had a shitty home situation, at least I could cry at my parent's funeral.

"I think part of the reason I'm so scared about being queen is I'm afraid of not living up to my mother's legacy. Of disappointing her somehow." Bridget stared at the ceiling, her expression pensive. "I never met her, but I read and watched every interview I could get my hands on. The home videos, the stories from the staff and my family...she was the perfect princess and daughter and mother. She would've made a great queen. Better than me. But I killed her." Her voice caught, and somehow, I knew that was the first time she'd ever voiced those words.

A deep ache pierced my heart, and it only grew when I saw the unshed tears in her eyes.

I straightened and cupped her face in my hands. "Bridget, you did not kill your mother," I said fiercely. "Do you understand? You were a baby. You are not guilty just because you were born."

"They didn't plan for me." A tear slipped down her cheek. "I was an accidental pregnancy. If it weren't for me, she'd still be alive, and