

32. Bridget

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.

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BRIDGET

PROBLEM: I COULDN'T REPEAL THE LAW ON MY OWN. I NEEDED BACKUP, and I had limited options. I didn't want to tell Rhys until I had a more concrete plan, and I certainly couldn't tell my family or any of the palace handlers. My friends in D.C. were too far away and removed from Eldorran politics to help.

There was only one person left I could trust.

"You want to what?" Mikaela's mouth hung open as she stared at me like I'd sprouted a second head. "Bridget, the Royal Marriages Law is almost as old as the country itself. It's impossible to overturn, especially with those fuddy-duddies in Parliament."

"It's not impossible, it's improbable," I corrected. "There's a difference. And improbable things can become probable with the right strategy."

"Okay. What's the strategy?"

"I don't know yet."

She groaned. "Bridge, this is crazy. Why are you going to all the trouble to overturn the law? I thought everything was going well with Steffan. I mean, he was gone for a while, but he's back and as delicious as ever. And he's your date to Nikolai's wedding." She sipped her tea and set it on the table. "Am I missing something?" I bit my lip. Should I spill the beans about Rhys? I trusted Mikaela, but I didn't quite trust her reaction to the news, given what she'd said in my office about dating the staff.

"The law is archaic," I said. "It's not just for me. It's for all the kings and queens after me. If it wasn't for the law, Nikolai would still be crown prince and happily engaged to Sabrina."

"Okay, but laws can't be repealed unless the Speaker brings the motion to the floor and a three-fourths majority of Parliament votes in favor," Mikaela pointed out. "When was the last time they repealed a law?"

Fifteen years ago, when they repealed a law prohibiting speed limits of higher than fifty-five miles per hour throughout the country.

The odds weren't in my favor.

"I'll figure it out." Erhall would be difficult, but I would think of a way to persuade him. "Will you help?"

"You're crazy. This is crazy."

But for all her grumbling, Mikaela reluctantly agreed, and for the next week, I threw all my energy into creating a workable plan. I an-

alyzed every repealed law in Eldorran history—there weren't many—and studied the different ministers in Parliament, dividing them up based on how likely they were to pass the motion. I hadn't figured out a strategy for Erhall yet, so I left him for last.

However, it wasn't until my next check-in with Elin that something clicked. Something so simple I felt like an idiot for not thinking of it before.

"His Majesty is delighted you're attending Prince Nikolai's wedding with Steffan," Elin said with an approving nod. "Coverage has been positive with the goodwill tour and wedding, but we want to keep the momentum going. Plus, we want to make sure everything is in place for when you eventually take the crown. Nothing says stability like a good marriage with a good, solid consort, and Lord knows we need some stability after the abdication."

"I don't see how marriage affects the ability to rule," I said, stifling a yawn. I stayed up late last night doing research, and I was paying the price today.

"It affects public opinion, Your Highness," Elin said in a tone that suggested I should know this already. "No one is immune to public opinion. Not even the royal family."

I froze. "What did you just say?"

She raised a questioning brow. "No one is immune to public opinion, not even the royal family."

A lightbulb went off in my head, and I almost jumped out of my chair in excitement. "Elin, you're a genius," I breathed. "An absolute genius. You deserve a raise immediately."

"Excellent. Please tell His Majesty the next time you speak with him." She checked her watch. "That's all I have for today unless—"

"No." I was already up and halfway to the door. "This was a lovely meeting. I'll see you next week."

I practically ran into the hall.

"Your Highness, please remember, princesses don't run!" Elin called after me.

I ignored her. The ideas rushed in so fast I couldn't keep up.

Some were more devious than others, but at least one had to work. It had to.

Parliamentary elections were coming up in the fall, and I was still riding high from the goodwill tour. If I could get the public to back a repeal—

I slammed into a brick wall.

"Whoa. Where are you off to in such a hurry?" Rhys's amused voice cut through the chatter in my brain as he gripped my arms and steadied me.

I smiled, my heart skipping at the sight of him. "What are you doing here?"

We didn't have a meetup scheduled, but schedules were overrated, anyway.

"Thought I'd explore. See if anything interesting is happening, or if any princesses need protecting." His mouth formed a small, teasing grin.

"Hmm." I adopted a thoughtful expression. "I don't know about protecting, but I can think of a few things that might interest you."

There was no one else in the hall, even so, we kept our voices

low. Intimate.

Heat turned Rhys's eyes into molten silver. "Yeah? Like what?"

"Like a tour of the throne room." I slowly walked backward until I reached the door leading into the ceremonial space, and we cast a quick look around before slipping inside.

I'd planned to brainstorm ways I could get the public to support a repeal, but that could wait. I hadn't seen Rhys all day.

"So, this is a throne room." Rhys looked around the lavish space.

With its massive crystal chandeliers, thick crimson carpet and wall coverings, and gold trim, it was the most over-the-top room in the palace, but we only used it for the occasional knighting ceremony or official function. No one came in here unless they had to. "Looks exactly the way I pictured a throne room would look."

"Don't act like you haven't studied every inch of every room in the palace already."

Rhys gave me a slow smile, and my stomach flipped. "You think you know me so well."

"I do."

"Hmm." He walked closer to me until we were mere inches apart. "Then do you know what I'm going to do right now?"

I held my breath. "What?"

He leaned down and whispered, "I'm going to sit you on that nice little throne over there and eat your pretty cunt out until you beg me to stop."

I gasped out a laugh as he picked me up and tossed me over his shoulder with the ease of someone picking up a rag doll. "You can't! No one sits on the throne except the monarch."

Rhys set me down on the gold and velvet chair.

"It's going to be yours one day. Might as well get used to it," he said. "How does it feel?"

"I..." I looked around. The room seemed different from this vantage point. Bigger, more intimidating. "Strange. And scary. But...not as scary as I thought."

In my mind, the throne was so large I'd never grow into it, but now that I was actually sitting in it? It seemed manageable.

"Because you're ready for it." Rhys said it like it wasn't even a question. "You're a fucking queen, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Including yourself."

My mouth tipped up while my heart melted into a puddle. "If you ever give up on the bodyguard gig, you could make a killing as a motivational speaker."

He chuckled. "Not motivation, just the truth. The throne suits you. Now..." He knelt before me and spread my thighs. "How can I serve you, Your Highness?"

Heat consumed my body as he pulled my underwear down.

"Rhys," I hissed, my pulse racing with a mix of lust and anxiety.

"Someone will catch us."

The odds were slim, but they weren't zero.

His wolfish smile caused my toes to curl. "Then we better make it worth it. Hmm, princess?"