

48. 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.

48

BRIDGET

FOR THE NEXT MONTH, I LAUNCHED INTO CAMPAIGN MODE TO WOO, OR threaten, enough ministers into voting yes on a repeal. Some were an easy sell, others not so much. But one hundred phone calls, eleven in-person visits, twenty-three media interviews, and countless public appearances—both scheduled and “candid”—of me and Rhys later, the big day finally arrived.

Rhys and I sat in my suite, watching the vote play out on TV. I'd stress-eat my way through two packs of Oreos while he sat next to me, his face impassive but his body vibrating with the same restless energy tunneling through my veins.

The current vote count: ninety yays, thirty nays, and two abstentions, with fifty-eight more votes to go. We needed one hundred thirty-five yays for a repeal. It looked good, but I wasn't counting my chickens until they hatched.

“Lady Jensen.” Erhall's sour voice rang through the mahogany-paneled chamber on-screen.

“Yay.”

“Lord Orskov.”

“Yay.”

I squeezed Rhys's hand, my heart thumping. I'd slotted Orskov into the maybe column, so his vote was a big win.

“They'll pass it.” Rhys's quiet confidence soothed the frayed edges of my nerves. “If they don't, we have our backup plan.”

“Which is?”

“Burn down Parliament.”

I huffed out a laugh. “How's that supposed to help?”

“I don't know, but it'd be damn satisfying.”

Another laugh, another easing of nerves.

Fifty-seven down. Fifty-six. Fifty-five.

The vote continued until only two ministers were left and we were one yay short of a repeal. If either of them voted yes, we were home free.

I squeezed Rhys's hand again as Erhall called on the next minister.

“Lord Koppel.”

“Nay.”

I deflated while Rhys let out a stream of curses. I hadn't expected Koppel to vote yes, but it was disappointing nonetheless.

Regret rose in my throat. I should've dug out the blackmail file

on Koppel. I'd tried to keep my campaign aboveboard, never outright threatening any of the ministers except Erhall, but perhaps I'd miscalculated. I wouldn't be the first person in history who'd gotten screwed over by their conscience.

You did what was right.

The hairs on the back of my neck prickled. I straightened and looked around my suite, but it was empty save for Rhys and me. Still, I could've sworn I heard a soft female voice whisper to me...a voice that sounded suspiciously like my mother's, based on the old tapes I'd watched of her.

This is what I get for staying up late. I'd been too wired to sleep much last night, and I was clearly delirious from exhaustion.

On-screen, a smug smile slashed across Erhall's face, and I could tell he was praying for the repeal to fail. He'd opened the motion as promised, but his glee had been visible every time someone voted nay.

"Lady Dahl."

I gnawed on my bottom lip.

Dahl was the last minister left. She had one of the most unpredictable voting records in Parliament, and she could go either way. None of my calls to her had yielded anything more than a polite Thank you, Your Highness. I'll think about it.

The restless energy emanating from Rhys tripled until it was near audible in the thick silence of my suite. The Oreos sloshed in my stomach, and I wished I hadn't binged on so much sugar in such a short time.

Dahl opened her mouth, and I squeezed my eyes shut, unable to watch the moment that would change my life—for better or for worse.

Please, please, please...

"Yay."

Yay. It took a minute for my brain to process that one word.

When it did, my eyes flew open in time to see an irritated-looking Erhall say, "With a final vote count of one hundred thirty-five yay, forty nays, and five abstentions, Parliament officially declares the Royal Marriages Law of 1723 repealed. The chamber..."

I tuned out the rest of what he said. I was too buzzed, my skin racing with tingles of electricity and my head dizzy with disbelief.

My stunned gaze met Rhys. "Did that really happen?"

His eyes crinkled into a small smile. "Yeah, princess, it did."

Fierce pride and relief lined his face.

"We did it." I couldn't wrap my head around it. The law had been the bane of my existence since I became crown princess, and now, it was gone. I could marry whomever I wanted without giving up the throne. I could marry Rhys.

The import of what happened fully sank in.

"We did it!" I squealed and flung myself into a laughing Rhys's arms. Everything went blurry, and I realized I was crying, but I didn't care.

So many months of agonizing over the law, so many early mornings and late nights and conversations that made me want to tear my hair out...all worth it, because we did it.

I'm proud of you, honey. The soft female voice returned, and emo-

tion welled in my throat.

It didn't matter whether the voice was real or a figment of my imagination. All that mattered was it was there, closer than it'd ever been.

Thanks, Mom. I'm proud of me, too.

Rhys, my grandfather, and Nikolai had all reassured me I could do my job as queen, but I hadn't quite believed them until now. My first real victory in Parliament. I hoped my relationship with the ministers would be more cooperative than combative, but I wasn't naïve enough to think it'd be smooth sailing from here on out. There'd be plenty of uphill battles to come, but if I won once, I could win again.

Rhys captured my mouth in a deep, tender kiss. "You did it. I'm just along for the ride."

"Not true." I snuggled closer to him, so euphoric I would've floated right off the ground had he not secured his arms around my waist. "You were there for everything, too."

The interviews, the meetings, the public appearances. All of it.

A deep sound rumbled in Rhys's chest. "Looks like you're stuck with me, princess." He grazed his knuckles over my spine.

"Should've thought this through."

"Am I?" I adopted a thoughtful expression. "I could always break up with you and date someone else. There's a movie star I've always—" I squealed again when he stood and tossed me over his shoulder.

"Rhys, put me down." I was smiling so big my cheeks hurt. "I have calls to answer." I waved my hand in the general direction of my phone, which had been vibrating with new messages and calls since the vote concluded.

"Later." Rhys's palm landed with a hard smack on my ass, and I yelped even as heat seared through me at the impact. "I need to teach you a lesson about joking with me. Especially about other men."

Was it wrong my panties dampened at the way his voice lowered into a possessive growl? Perhaps. But I couldn't bring myself to care as he kicked the door to my bedroom fully open and tossed me on the bed.

"What kind of lesson?" I was already so wet my thighs were sticky with my arousal, and Rhys's dark smile only made me wetter.

"Get on your hands and knees," he said, ignoring my question.

"And face the headboard."

I complied, and my heart crashed against my ribcage when the bed dipped beneath Rhys's weight. He yanked my skirt up with one hand and my panties down with the other, the movement so forceful I heard the unmistakable rip of silk tearing.

I needed to set aside a monthly budget to replace all the underwear he'd ruined, but I wasn't complaining.

"We'll celebrate the vote later." Rhys dragged his finger through my slickness and over my sensitized clit, and a tiny whimper escaped my mouth. "But for now, let's see if you still think you're funny after I'm done with you."