

## A Spoonful of Sugar Don't Beg for Love Chapter 441

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#### Chapter 441

"I don't think I'll be giving a speech or anything like that just yet. It's very rare for our place to be this boisterous, so let's not spoil the fun."

Pennleigh turned his head to the side and picked up a piece of celery and shrimp cocktail for Hesper. "This is our home chef's signature dish, try it."

'She doesn't like celery.'

Rickard watched this scene coldly, but in the next second, Hesper actually picked the piece of celery up and smiled at Pennleigh. "Wow, it tastes much better than expected."

Pennleigh realized it and said apologetically, "Do you not like celery?"

Rickard's gaze was still fixed on them, and although Hesper did not turn her head, she could still feel his scorching gaze, so she shook her head indifferently. "I might not have liked it very much in the past, but it doesn't mean that I won't like things that I didn't like before, right...? Actually, it turns out that celery is more delicious than I imagined. It's really good."

"Glad to hear that."

Even though she said so, Pennleigh did not see Hesper grab another piece of celery again, so he instantly knew that Hesper only said that because of Rickard.

Aelinor did not look too happy about the reaction between the two either. After taking a few mouthfuls, she claimed with a straight face that she was not feeling well, so she would stop eating for now.

Hesper could not care less about what had happened to Aelinor. And Rickard's gaze continued to be fixed on her from time to time. She could feel it, but Pennleigh was very

good at acting like a perfect boyfriend. He was so good at it that even Isobella patted him on the shoulder and told him helplessly that he was being way too attentive.

“Just let us be, mother. We’ve gone through a lot just to get together. Don’t you think so, Hes?”

Hesper was older than Pennleigh by less than one year. When she was in the company, she would usually address Pennleigh as Mr. Pisano, and although she thought of him as a younger brother deep down, she had never heard him call her Hes.

Seeing Isobella’s gossiping gaze, Hesper rubbed her temples with her hands in embarrassment.

“Alright, that’s enough, Penn. Can’t you see just how bashful Hesper is?” Isobella patted Pennleigh’s back. “You used to be such a boring and introverted person, I really didn’t expect you to turn into such an attentive and doting man after falling in love. You look just like your father from back when we were still young.”

The food at the Pisanos tasted really good. Hesper was acting while eating and thinking about something else deep down too, so before she realized it, she had already eaten almost everything that Pennleigh had been fetching onto her plate, to the point where she felt a little unwell in her stomach. Only then did she realize that she seemed to have been very open to all sorts of food all night, and she did not even know how much she had eaten so far.

2/2

“I’ll stop eating now.” Hesper whispered in Pennleigh’s ear. “I want to go out for a stroll.”

“Okay, do you want me to go with you?”

“...There’s no need for that.” Hesper shook her head. “Perhaps I’ve eaten too much. I’ll be back in a while. Mrs. Pisano will surely follow us out if you were to go out with me.”

It could be seen that Isobella was more satisfied with Hesper now than before, so what Hesper said was not unreasonable. Pennleigh could only nod. "Okay, go then. If you can't find the way, you can ask the servant to lead you outside."

"Okay, got it."

Walking outside, Hesper finally breathed a sigh of relief.

...Although it was said to be a luncheon, it was almost evening now.

After all, it seemed that everyone gathered there that day not just for a meal but to catch up with each other, so they talked about all kinds of topics. In addition to that, Hesper did not know anyone apart from Isobella, Pennleigh, and Rickard, so it was really difficult for her to go around and initiate conversations.

Chapter 442

Seeing that Hesper had just said something in Pennleigh's ear before walking out, Rickard looked away too.

Hesper and Pennleigh were indeed very close. Rickard could tell that what Hesper had said just now was targeted at him.

In the past, she might not fall for someone like Pennleigh, but things are different now."

However, Rickard still did not believe it.

Til head out for a short while."

Petruchio did not think much about it. After all, he knew exactly how busy Rickard could be. If it was not for their good relationship, Rickard might not have stayed for lunch. He nodded. "Go then. If you have something to do, you don't have to stay back and entertain us."

I'm not busy at all."

"Huh?"

Rickard retracted his gaze and frowned. "I mean, I'm not very busy nowadays, and there are quite a few things that I have to attend to in Fredonia, so... Can I continue to bother you for a while longer?"

"Of course, I wouldn't say no to that."

Unexpectedly, not only did Rickard not want to leave, but he actually wanted to stay with the family for a while longer. Hearing that, Petruccio was flattered.

After all, Rickard had always been quite a mysterious man, so getting to meet him in person was never an easy task in Petruccio's opinion. Apart from that, he still wanted to do something in order to fight for the contract. If Rickard chose to stay with them for a few more days, there might be a chance for them to discuss the terms further.

"Thank you, Mr. Pisano." Rickard leaned over slightly and then strode out of the dining hall.

Seeing that Hesper and Rickard had left one after another, Isobella jerked Pennleigh's arm curiously. "Why did Hesper go out? Is it because this is her first time here and she feels a little embarrassed?"

Seeing Rickard leaving the hall, Pennleigh guessed that he was going after Hesper, so he shook his head hastily. "Don't think too much, Mom. Hesper just feels a little bored, so she's gone out for a walk. She's not very used to such lively occasions."

"I see, it's indeed our problem. We didn't expect Mr. Duval to visit us at this time."

"Alright, Mom, I'll go out to find Hesper first..."

As soon as Pennleigh stood up and was about to leave, Isobella pulled him back down with a hint of disapproval on her face. "What's the hurry? Your girlfriend just went out a few minutes ago, and you already can't wait to catch up to her. What kind of woman can stand such a clingy boyfriend?"

'But Rickard...'

For a while, Pennleigh did not know what he could say to reason with Isobella and prevaricate her. Isobella had also seen through his thoughts and pulled him back down into his seat. "It's alright, your girlfriend will be fine. She's at our place, so she's not going to go missing. You can go and find her in a while. Now sit down and eat."

The Pisano manor was gigantic, and Petruccio's personal hobbies were extremely extortionate, but Hesper liked everything very much.

It was already midsummer, and there were cicadas chirping occasionally in the evening, and the camphor trees looked lush. Hesper raised her head and saw the afterglow glimmering through the gaps between the leaves as if they were scattering gold dust all over the field.

"Hesper Rivera."

Hearing Rickard's voice, Hesper was not surprised, but she did not want to look back either.

Rickard looked at Hesper, who was sitting in the shimmers. Ever since she came to Fredonia, perhaps because of a change of her identity or a change in her mentality, Hesper had dyed her hair black again, and her naturally curly hair scattered over her shoulders gently.

She and everything surrounding her made the whole scene look like an oil painting.

“It’s been a long time. Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Hesper finally looked back. Rickard looked no different from half a year ago. He still seemed to love to maintain a straight expression. Not even such a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere could

melt his indifference.

“What can I say? You know what I want. All I want now is Renfrew.”

Rickard did not want to discuss this issue with her but said indifferently, “Renfrew can receive the best education as long as he stays with me at the moment. You should know best that you’re in no position to provide him with that now.”

Chapter 443

Hesper suddenly felt that the setting sun was too dazzling to her taste. She did not like it anymore.

Rickard was still standing upright, but his finely-defined face gave off a slight hint of helplessness. “I’m not belittling you...”

“I know, you’re just stating the facts.”

It had been so long, Hesper had certainly made peace with this fact, but she was not doing too bad herself now. “Mr. Duval, why come to see me personally? Since you can’t fulfill my wish, is there anything else that I should know?”

Rickard frowned. “Pennleigh Pasino.”

‘Sure enough.’

Rickard’s gaze had seldom left her and Pennleigh throughout the whole luncheon, so Hesper was not surprised that Rickard would ask her about him. After all, she had already experienced the possessiveness of men.

‘He was already extremely sensitive and suspicious when he had no feelings for me, let alone now when he’s slightly into me.’”

“Pennleigh is now my boyfriend. Haven’t you already seen it?”

“Impossible.” Hesper shrugged as soon as she heard what he had to say. “Why won’t you believe me? I have no relatives to rely on ever since I came to Fredonia. Apart from Mr. Sanchez, who’s been helping me, Pennleigh is the only person who’s been by my side all this time. He helped me a ton and gave me the opportunity to work at Eustoma in order to fulfill my dream. When I was going through one of the most difficult times of my life, he was always there by my side. So, why can’t I fall for him?”

Rickard was speechless. He frowned and wanted to say something, but he was at a loss for words.

Hesper took a few steps closer, and the golden sunset disappeared within those few steps. “Mr. Duval, please don’t tell me you still think that I still have a thing for you.”

“Hesper, are you there?”

Pennleigh’s voice came from a distance just then. Hesper looked at Rickard’s irritable expression, turned around, and was about to respond to him, but in the next second, Rickard grabbed her arm and pressed her against a pillar in the corridor.

“Rickard Duval...”

“Shh.” Rickard grabbed her by the waist.

Pennleigh’s voice approached gradually. “Hesper, is that you?”

“What are you doing? Let me go!”

The position that Hesper was in at the moment looked a little awkward, so she subconsciously lowered her voice. Her eyes were bloodshot, and the tips of her ears were slightly red. “Let go of

## Chapter 444

Hesper did not go light with the stomp, so Rickard let go of her and frowned, while Hesper immediately ran to the side and started taking in gasps of fresh air.

Although Hesper and Rickard had had a child together, Hesper’s recollection of what happened that night was still rather vague, and nothing intimate had happened between the two of them after marriage. Theoretically speaking, this was the closest she had ever gotten to him as far as she could remember.

Hesper could hear that her heartbeat was chaotic and took a few deep breaths before glaring at Rickard, who looked as calm as a toad in the sun.

“Have you lost your mind? Are you even Rickard Duval?”

Her hair was a little messed up.

Rickard was in a daze thinking that the distance between the two of them was actually not that far away, but it was still a lot farther compared to the distance between them when they were about to kiss a while before.

Hesper saw that Rickard was staring at her without saying anything, almost to the extent that lasers were going to shoot out of his eyes.

“Rickard?”

Rickard came back to his senses and lowered his gaze. There was still no expression on his face, but Hesper could still see in the dim light that he seemed a little aggrieved.

“I don’t like it... When you get so close to him.”

Hesper was at a loss for words.

“I don’t like the way you say you like him, even if I know it’s a lie. Hesper, please don’t piss me off on purpose.” Rickard’s voice sounded very soft and deep.

He had always been very confident and stubborn. Hesper felt that she had made things very clear to him, apart from the fact that she did not really like Pennleigh. It was not because she still had a thing for Rickard but just that she did not feel the need to fall in love.

She had wasted her whole youth and her purity in an illusory love, so there was no need for her to repeat the same mistakes.

Hesper lowered her head. “There’s no need for you to say so many things to me, Rickard. If you really love me, just give Renfrew back to me. He’s all I want.”

Rickard was speechless for a moment, then said, “That’s a big no for me.”

The ambiguous atmosphere had dissipated long ago. Hesper already knew the response that Rickard would give her, so she took a step aside as calmness returned to

her gaze and flooded her eyes. “Mr. Duval, you’ve been out here for too long. You should go back now.”

“Hesper.” Rickard stretched out his hand to grab Hesper’s arm again. “I want to keep Renfrew by my side, hoping that he can hold you back so that you won’t stray too far.”

#### Chapter 444

Rickard had never uttered such gentle words. A hint of complexity flashed across Hesper’s eyes for a split second, but she still pulled her arm out of his grip.

“Mr. Duval, please show some self-respect. We have nothing to do with each other now, and I already have a boyfriend.”

On the other side, Pennleigh had searched around the manor but still could not find Hesper anywhere else. Thinking that he heard Hesper’s voice in the garden just now but no one responded to him, he guessed that Rickard might have found Hesper before he did.

Going back to where he started, he saw Hesper and Rickard standing next to each other.

Hesper’s expression was inconspicuous, and Rickard had never been someone who would let his emotions surface, so Pennleigh had no way to deduce what had happened before he arrived there.

“Mr. Pi... Penn, let’s go.”

Hesper walked up to Pennleigh, held his hand, and stopped looking at Rickard. While Pennleigh looked back at Rickard provocatively and then turned around. “My mother just asked if you have any favorite dessert. Do you like blueberries?”

“Ah, is it too sour? It seems to be...”

The two of them drifted away, and Rickard rubbed the tip of his index finger as if it still retained the warmth that he felt on Hesper.

“Hesper...”

## Chapter 445

Seeing Pennleigh and Hesper coming back together, Isobella smiled, walked over, and hold Hesper’s hand.

“Hesper, Penn is really a clingy kid, huh? As soon as you left, he immediately wanted to go find you. I stopped him, but he actually snuck out.”

Pennleigh cleared his throat. “Mom, can you not embarrass me?”

As he said so, Pennleigh winked at Hesper twice. She knew that it was probably because Rickard went after her, so Pennleigh chased out because he was worried, so she grinned knowingly.

From Isobella’s perspective, it could be regarded as affection.

“Okay, alright, you youngsters should know what’s best for you.” Isobella held Hesper’s arm. “Did Penn tell you about dessert making just now? What kind of dessert do you like? I’ll get the kitchen crew to make some for you. And let’s stay here for the night. We live quite far from the city, so it’s not safe for a young girl like you to go back at night.”

Living there was of course equivalent to living with Pennleigh. When Hesper decided to come here, she had already thought about this possibility, so she nodded happily. “I know how to make some snacks too, so why don’t I go and help in the kitchen? I don’t really have much to do here anyway.”

The main thing was that she was worried that Rickard would catch up to her and go crazy again later on.

“Oh, you even know how to cook? It seems that Penn has really found a bargain.” Isobella and Hesper walked into the kitchen as she complimented her. While Pennleigh stood in place and turned around, only to see Rickard pushing the door in.

“Mr. Pisano.”

The youthfulness that Pennleigh always had on while Hesper was around instantly faded away, and he nodded slightly. “Mr. Duval, I don’t think we’ve met before. It’s really nice to finally meet you, and I look forward to learning from you wherever I can.”

Rickard did not respond to his greeting. He could tell that Pennleigh was indeed interested in Hesper. It was just that Hesper could not feel it and thought that he was only acting with her.

In terms of social status, although Pennleigh ran Eustoma, it was still many levels inferior to the huge Duval Group, but Pennleigh did not show any sense of inferiority, perhaps because the less wit, the more courage.

“Why are you guys standing there?” Petruccio came over and patted Pennleigh on the shoulder. “I have to talk to Uncle Rickard first. you should come up later.”

‘Uncle Rickard...?’

Both Rickard and Pennleigh were stunned for a moment.

Chapter 446

All of a sudden, Pennleigh was inexplicably one generation younger than his love rival, so he frowned and retorted, “Mr. Duval and I are only a little more than one year apart, so how is he my uncle?”

Rickard was expressionless and turned his head away. “Mr. Pisano Sr., let’s talk in your study. Besides, am I staying in the guest room tonight?”

“Mr. Duval is actually going to stay here?”

Petruccio took a glance at Pennleigh, who was acting a little abnormally, and explained, “Mr. Duval and I are friends, so it’s only natural for him to be your uncle according to seniority... And Mr. Duval has some things to do in Fredonia recently, so he’ll be staying here with us for a while more.

“What are the things that are keeping him here?” Pennleigh asked instantly.

Feeling a little embarrassed, Petruccio turned his head and apologized to Rickard, “I’m sorry. My son can be an extremely curious man at times.”

Rickard nodded thoughtfully, then turned his head, gazed at Pennleigh, and said, “I’ll never pettily argue with someone of the younger generation, let alone my nephew Pennleigh.”

“Rickard Du...”

Before Pennleigh had time to say anything, Petruccio and Rickard had already walked away, leaving him alone, exasperated.

“Penn...”

Pennleigh did not know how long Aelinor had been standing beside him. She only came over after seeing Pennleigh exhale angrily and calm himself. “Penn, I’m staying here tonight. Can you bring me to the guest room?”

Chapter 446

Pennleigh was already a little annoyed, so Aelinor's appearance at this time was obviously only adding fuel to fire. He did not give off a friendly expression.

"Aren't there servants who can help you with that? Why would I know where you're staying tonight? There are a lot of guests today. Pennleigh took a deep breath. He did not lose his head after all, but his tone still sounded very cold. I'm going to look for Hesper."

Aelinor bit her lower lip, stared at Pennleigh with her devastated gaze, and exclaimed instantly, Do you know that Hesper was having an affair with our honored guest today? I saw everything at the garden just now. The two of them even..."

Pennleigh's gaze turned even colder. "Don't talk nonsense."

"But I saw it all-!" Aelinor's voice became louder, so Pennleigh covered her mouth. Fortunately, there was no one around, and no one was paying attention to her from the distance.

Pennleigh breathed a sigh of relief. "Alie, shut up."

Although Pennleigh's voice had softened, Aelinor knew that Pennleigh was just trying to calm her down and not let her say anything unfavorable about Hesper, so she looked at Pennleigh with her teary eyes.

"But I really saw it..."

Pennleigh had a lot on his mind. In fact, he already guessed it. When he passed by for the first time, something wrong was obviously going on between Hesper and Rickard. Although he was not very happy about that, at the end of the day, he and Hesper only had a superior-subordinate relationship.

Aelinor had always been a person who could not keep things to herself, not to mention that Pennleigh did not know that this young girl actually had feelings for him. It was just that he was several years older than Aelinor, and because the relationship between their families had always been good, he had always regarded Aelinor as a younger sister.

If Aelinor continued to go on like this, the matter would be revealed sooner or later. Pennleigh rubbed his temples and then pulled Aelinor into a corner of the hall. "Forget it, I'll be honest with you. Hesper and I aren't in a relationship, and things are indeed complicated between her and Rickard, but it's not what you think."

Aelinor's eyes widened.

"You... You two are only putting on a show?"

When saying this, Aelinor finally remembered to lower her voice. Seeing Pennleigh nodding, a smile reappeared on her face, while the tears of grievances disappeared instantly.

“So, you and Ms. Rivera are only putting on a show so that you can prevaricate Auntie Isobella. She’s only your subordinate, right?”

Pennleigh responded with a hum, “Don’t tell anyone about this, or I’ll have to go on blind dates because of my mother’s orders. If that’s the case, who I marry will no longer be up to me to

Chapter 41

decide.

“I know, I know. I promise you that this secret will only rot in my stomach!”

When Hesper walked out of the kitchen, she saw Aelinor leaning against the corner of the wall, glancing at her like a puppy.

Hesper was a little confused.

I haven’t seen her for only about half an hour. How can her attitude change so drastically?

“Uh... Rivera, I was at fault before this, so I’ve come to apologize to you!” Aelinor’s eyes were shimmering, and they looked full of vigor probably because she was still relatively young. “I already know about the deal between you and Penn... But don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone about you two!”

‘Oh, I see.’

Everything made sense to Hesper now. Aelinor disliked her before this only because she was Pennleigh’s girlfriend, so now that she knew that she was only a fake girlfriend, it was only natural for her attitude to change for the better.

“It’s okay, you’re younger than me, so what you do won’t bother me too much.”

“Good to hear that!” Aelinor came over and wrapped her arms around Hesper’s. “Actually, I like you quite a bit, you’re really good-looking, and the perfume that you use smells good too. Can you tell me what skin care products you usually use? I want to buy one set too...”

Chapter 447

Hesper cleared her throat as it seemed a little hard to resist Aelinor’s enthusiasm.

'It's not difficult to see that she's an arrogant princess that's been doted on and spoiled all her life. She's different from Dianthe; although Dianthe is rather arrogant too, at least it's easier for someone to reason with her when compared to Aelinor. After all, Aelinor may still be a little too young. Every single emotion that she feels could be seen through her expression.

So...

With the sudden change in Aelinor's attitude towards me, Pennleigh's mother should also be able

to sense it."

Hesper could not help but feel slightly stressed. "You can add me as a friend on social media when you get back. I'll give you a list through the platform, but it's better for us to keep our distance now. Otherwise, Aunt Isobella will notice."

Hearing this, Aelinor nodded and looked a little confused. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have gotten so close to you. I promise I'll continue to tease you like I did just now... Oh, but that doesn't seem right either."

Hesper remained silent for a moment, remembering that Isobella mentioned that Aelinor was studying at Genecity University. She could not help but wonder if the university had once again bowed to capitalism.

Seeing that Aelinor came back with Hesper, Pennleigh already guessed that Aelinor had gone over to show her affection, so he could not help but lift his hand, rub his temples, look at Hesper, and see the helplessness in her gaze.

It was really difficult for them to worry about being exposed.

Isobella was praising Hesper's dessert-making skills in front of everyone, while Hesper walked to Pennleigh's side and asked in a low voice, "Why did you tell Aelinor about our fake relationship? I don't think she's very good at keeping secrets."

Hearing this, Pennleigh looked a little aggrieved. "Isn't it because of you?"

"Because of me?"

Hesper never expected that. Pennleigh crossed his arms. "What you and Rickard did in the garden just now... Aelinor saw everything. If I didn't tell her the real relationship between the two of us, I'm afraid that we'd become the center of attention by now."

Hesper was at a loss for words.

'I didn't expect that I'd be the one who'd ruined everything tonight. To be precise, it's Rickard's fault. Who knows why he lost his mind all of a sudden?!

Speaking of Rickard, Hesper realized something instantly. “Has Rickard returned? Why didn’t I see him?”

“You seem to care a lot about him...” Pennleigh lowered his head while covering his chest. He sighed and shook his head. “I’ll be very sad if this is the case. After all, I’m still your boyfriend in

Ch

name.

Rickard happened to witness this scene when he came downstairs; he stopped halfway on the

staircase.

‘How much more unlucky can I get? I’m going back up and then coming down again.’

Dinner was a lot simpler than lunch. Hesper had eaten a lot at noon, so she seemed a lot less interested in the dishes that got served. However, the almond dessert that she made received a lot of compliments.

“I didn’t expect you to be so good at cooking. I couldn’t believe it when I went into the kitchen with you.” Isobella patted Hesper’s hand and looked at Rickard, who had not eaten anything all this time. She thought that it was not to his liking.

“Mr. Duval, do you not eat almonds?”

Rickard came back to his senses and shook his head. “My wife used to be the best at baking almond cakes, and I haven’t tasted this flavor in a long time.”

Hearing this, Hesper’s hand stiffened for a split second, but Isobella did not notice and continued saying, “Oh, you’re already married. Then why didn’t you bring your wife along this time around? Does she not like to travel with you?”

Petruchio only vaguely remembered that Rickard had a son, but he had never heard much of his wife, and he only knew that he had one romantic relationship throughout his whole life, so he looked over curiously.

Hesper lowered her head and heard Rickard chuckle.

“She’s also in Fredonia now.”

Chapter 448

Hesper lowered her head and avoided exchanging gazes with Rickard, but fortunately, Petruchio and Isobella did not dig deeper regarding this matter. They only exchanged a few words, and dinner was almost over.

When Hesper agreed to stay, she never thought that Rickard would be staying here too, so she frowned and went to see Pennleigh. “Why is Rickard staying in your house? Why have I never heard that your families know each other very well?”

Pennleigh felt a little miserable too; he did not want Rickard to stay, but this whole thing was decided between Petruccio and Rickard, and he only knew about this not long before Hesper got informed.

“Okay... Anyway, it’s only one night. I’ll head back first thing in the morning tomorrow.”

“Yeah, that’s the only way to go now.”

Pennleigh led Hesper to the guest room. It could be seen that someone had specially rearranged this room a few days in advance. It seemed very suitable for ladies to stay in, and a work area had been set aside for Hesper, although she would not be rushing any work tonight.

“Good night, Hesper.”

Hesper waved at Pennleigh, suddenly saw Rickard coming around the corner, and immediately put on a smile. “Let’s go to the studio together tomorrow morning. I want to drink the coffee that they offer downstairs.”

Pennleigh was flattered. “Okay, then I’ll tell my mother that the two of us won’t be having breakfast at home.”

“Okay.”

Seeing Pennleigh’s sweet smile, Hesper sneered inwardly.

‘I didn’t expect this kid to know that Rickard was coming just by looking at me, even though he had his back facing Rickard. It’s indeed a waste for him to stay in the design industry instead of the filming industry.’

Rickard did not say anything, turned around, and went into the room across from that of Hesper. That was when she realized that she was actually living opposite to Rickard, and she did not know if it was a deliberate arrangement or just a coincidence.

Hearing the door close behind him, Pennleigh turned his head, just in time to see Rickard’s calm gaze as it disappeared into the darkness behind the door, which looked so cold that it was emotionless.

“...Rickard lives just across the corridor?”

Pennleigh unconsciously licked his upper molars, and he immediately thought about the intimate moment that he just had with Hesper.

'It turns out that she only wanted to provoke Rickard. It's no wonder she became so gentle with me all of a sudden.'

Hesper responded with a light hum and took a deep breath. "It's only going to be one night. I'm leaving your place tomorrow. Just let him stay here by himself."

The moonlight seeped into the corridor and shined on Hesper's side profile. Pennleigh wanted to say something, but Hesper had already waved at him before he could do so. "I'll grab some rest first, and I'll get up early tomorrow and claim that something urgent has happened. Otherwise, Mrs. Pisano might keep me here for another day."

"... Okay."

Before Pennleigh could say good night to her, Hesper had already closed the door.

On the other side, Rickard gave Renfrew a call.

Renfrew was usually asleep at this time, but he heard that his parents had met each other today, and the news had managed to keep him awake.

"How is Mommy doing over there? Did anyone bully her?!" Renfrew asked while rubbing his drowsy eyes.

Rickard's gaze softened a little, and he shook his head. "Don't worry, no matter where Mommy is, she'll be the one who bullies others. It's impossible for her to get bullied."

...But

But you managed to bully her back then, didn't you?" Renfrew muttered.

Rickard paused for a split second, then sighed softly, thinking of the slender wrist in his palm today.

"She seems to have become thinner."

Renfrew shook his head with some dissatisfaction. "I knew that Mommy wouldn't take good care of herself when she's living alone out there. I hate Uncle Matt now. Mommy's life experience isn't something she can decide, so why should she suffer so many grievances?"

Chapter 449

Rickard knew that things were not as simple as Renfrew thought, but from a certain point of view, Hesper had done nothing wrong, she was just very unlucky.

"Now that Mommy has been found, can we bring her home?"

Rickard shook his head.

Seeing that, Renfrew frowned and then heard Rickard say, "But I won't leave easily this time around. Don't worry, the investigation about Daybreak has finally made some progress. With that, I can probably obtain some information about the doctor who can heal Mommy's legs too."

"I'll definitely heal Mommy's leg first."

"You're the one who says so!" Renfrew's brows relaxed a little, but he still looked rather serious. Mommy doesn't like you very much in the first place. If you were to do something wrong again, Mommy will surely abandon you for real this time around!"

Rickard felt a little helpless. Usually, the father should be the one educating the son, but he had never seen a son teach his father a lesson.

Just as he was about to say something, there was a sudden knock on the door of his room.

All the rooms located in this wing of the manor were guest rooms and the room closest to him was Hesper's room.

"What's wrong?" Renfrew did not hear the sound, but he keenly saw that something was wrong with Rickard's expression.

Rickard shook his head, then stood up. "It's no big deal, I'll go out and have a look... You should go to bed early. If Mommy were to know that I kept you up late at night, she would definitely get angry at me."

"...Alright."

Rickard opened the door and saw Hesper squatting at the door of her room with a broken glass

next to her.

Hesper closed her eyes tightly and bit her lower lip irritably as she knew that Rickard would surely hear her at such a close distance.

"Can you stand up?"

It'd been quite some time since he heard the sound of the collision. If Hesper had simply tripped and fallen to the floor, she should have gotten up by now.

Rickard walked up to her, squatted down, and held her leg with his right hand, trying to see if her leg was swollen or if there were any other wounds, but Hesper smacked his hand.

Hesper's slap was heavy, so Rickard frowned out of pain, but he did not back down.

“Let me take a look. Don’t move.”

Hesper was speechless for a second and then scoffed angrily. “Haven’t you heard that it’s

improper for men and women to touch each other? Especially when they’re in no way related to each other. Mr. Duval, it’s already very late at night, and I currently have a boyfriend. Don’t you think this is very inappropriate?”

Rickard did not say anything. Seeing that Hesper’s leg did not seem to have been injured, he turned his head toward her.

“We shouldn’t touch each other? It’s not like we haven’t done more intimate things before this.” Rickard was very calm when he said this, but his hand slid lower down Hesper’s leg and held her more sensitive ankle. “Does it hurt here?”

Hesper felt a little ticklish, but she still put on a stubborn look. “Mr. Duval, if you don’t let go, I’ll

scream.”

“You’re welcome to do so. Summon everyone here to see what we’re doing.”

“Rickard Duval!”

There was a faint hint of hilarity in Rickard’s eyes, and when he made sure that there was nothing wrong with Hesper’s ankle, he was certain that she had not broken any bone. However, he did not let go but lifted his head and gazed at Hesper with a half-smile.

“Rickard... Ms. Rivera, you should continue to call me by my name so that we won’t look too distant.”

Char 1440

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Chapter 450

Hesper was a little speechless, but she was directly picked up by Rickard in the next second.

Hesper was so astonished that she almost exclaimed, but if she and Rickard were to be seen in this posture, nothing she said would be able to clear her name, so she could only glare at Rickard with wide eyes.

“The injury on your legs has recurred. I forecast that it’ll rain tomorrow.”

Rickard hugged Hesper in his arms as if she was a child, strode into her room, and gently placed her on the bed. “Did you bring your painkiller with you? And be honest with me, did you ram into something just now?”

Hesper blinked a few times in a row.

Has this man been possessed by some spirits? Why does he sound so absurd? No matter what, such words shouldn’t come out of his mouth.’

“Why are you looking at me?”

“How can you be so shameless?” Hesper turned her head away, and said awkwardly, “The injuries on my leg are thanks to you, so why put on a show in front of me and try to sympathize with me now?”

Hearing this, Rickard lowered his gaze. “Yes, it’s all my fault.”

Hesper did not expect Rickard to admit his mistake so directly. In fact, something had been clearly wrong with Rickard ever since she met him in Fredonia. It was as if he was a different person.

“Will apologies cover everything that you did to me in the past? Will my legs get better only because you apologized to me? Or do you think this will undo everything you did to lie to me before this?” Hesper closed her eyes. “Rickard, you’re so despicable from time to time.”

I got scolded again.’

Rickard sighed lightly.

“Hesper, although this isn’t the first time you’ve wronged me, I still feel that I must explain the matter to you.”

Turning Hesper’s face over, Rickard continued to explain seriously, “The last time I left Zoya with you, I traveled here to Fredonia by myself. I didn’t come here because of the organization Daybreak, but because there’s a doctor here who claimed that he can treat your leg injury. I followed his tracks here and just so happened to find out that he might have something to do with Daybreak.”

With Rickard clamping her chin with his fingers and forcing her to look at him, Hesper had to stare straight into his eyes, so she could only curl her lips. “What does this have to do with you deliberately sending Zoya to me? Even if your original intention was to find a doctor for me, Zoya still managed to hurt Renfrew and me, didn’t she?”

Rickard frowned, then slowly shook his head.

“Zoya is Renfrew’s mysterious friend. You should know that, right? Renfrew once told me that his friends would never hurt him no matter what. I’d never seen that kind of certainty beaming from Renfrew’s eyes before, so I also chose to trust him.

“During that period, I asked Benji to keep an eye on Zoya. If she wanted to harm you, we would’ve taken her away before you knew it... Apart from that, you have to admit that Zoya didn’t do what she did because she wanted to harm you, but because she lost her cool as soon as she saw Roberto, right?”

Hesper remained silent for a moment.

In fact, what Rickard said was right, and Hesper knew that deep down, but Rickard did use her, whether it was with good intentions or bad ones.

“Then what about you deleting my messages?” Hesper lifted her gaze, and the coldness in her eyes remained undiminished.

‘What I can’t accept the most was this matter. During that time, I actually changed my mind about him, but because of jealousy, this man actually deleted the last few messages that Julian had sent me. If it wasn’t for Nathaniel’s timely discovery, I would’ve been an accomplice in killing Julian.”

However, Rickard frowned. "What messages are you talking about? Since when did I delete your messages?"

The heavy doubt flashing in Rickard's eyes did not seem fake. Hesper thought of something deep down, but she still said with an indifferent expression, "Back then, when I went to visit Grandpa and left with Aunt Curie for a short while, you went into my phone, didn't you?"

Instead of losing his head, Rickard scoffed.

"Hesper Rivera, in your eyes, am I the kind of person who would check someone else's cell phones when they're not around?"