

## **A Spoonful of Sugar: Don't Beg for Love Chapter 6 - 10**

### **Chapter 6**

However, Rickard did not understand why he felt that way. He shifted his gaze and said nonchalantly, "Since you've agreed, do what you're supposed to do and don't be an eyesore here."

Hesper glanced at the child, reluctant to part with him. She wanted to stay there for a while more, but the child was tired. His soft face was swaying from left and right drowsily.

Hesper could not bear to disturb the baby's sleep, so she returned to her room indifferently.

She did not manage to rest well during the first month post delivery and she was tormented by Madam Duval over and over again. Apart from the mental and emotional trauma, she was experiencing malnutrition as well.

She managed to wait until it was dinner time yet Madam Duval sent someone to tell her, "Madam said that you need more rest due to your recent delivery, so you don't need to join dinner downstairs!"

Hesper did not speak and instead covered her empty belly with a blanket in silence. She hardly had a normal meal since the delivery, so she starved so much that she looked emaciated.

However, she would be looking for trouble if she were to head to dinner when Madam Duval wanted to stir up trouble on purpose.

In the dining room, Rickard looked at the empty spot at the table and furrowed his eyebrows. "Where's Hesper? Why isn't she coming to dinner?"

The servant avoided his gaze while Madam Duval said unconcernedly next to him, "If she doesn't want to come, that's fine too. She's a grown woman. Could it be that she would rather starve herself?"

As she spoke, she passed him the ribs and said, "Set your mind and eat. You've been traveling everywhere during this period of time, so you've lost weight."

As Rickard looked at the ribs before him, the image of Hesper's emaciated figure came into his mind.

She was so weak and skinny that one squeeze could shatter her.

He pursed his lips and said in an indifferent tone, "She has just given birth, so she needs to replenish her nutrition. Otherwise, outsiders are going to claim that the Duvals are torturing their daughter-in-law."

"She isn't considered the Duvals' daughter-in-law." Noticing that Rickard was looking at her, she corrected herself unwillingly by saying, "I know, I know. I'll order someone to prepare some food for her. The food served on this table is all heavily-processed, high in oil and flavor, so it's not so suitable for her in her current condition, right?"

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Rickard did not know about that, but he knew that he would not allow Hesper to starve to death.

He still had some matters to attend to, so he left the Duvals' residence after dinner. Madam Duval threw her cutlery soon afterward and pulled a long face. "She's a pain in the \*ss. Why do we have to worry about her meal? Doesn't she know how to deal with it herself when she's able-bodied?"

"Precisely." Sophia did not have the courage to speak out of turn when Rickard was around, but she was furious. Now that Rickard was gone, she immediately revealed her sarcastic expression fearlessly.

"She wasn't that spoiled in the past, and it was very normal for her not to eat for days. Why can't she do it now? Does she really think that she's superior and can abuse her power just because she gave birth to the eldest grandchild of the Duvals?"

"Dream on, I won't give her the chance to do so."

Madam Duval let out a grunt and glanced at the leftover food on the table that was so messy that not even a dog would eat it.

"Come, put all the leftovers in a bowl and serve it to Hesper's room so she can enjoy the feast!"

Meanwhile, Hesper was already exhausted from starvation. She looked at the leftover stew in the bowl served before her in silence. If one were to describe it bluntly, even the Duvals' dog ate better than her.

Noticing Hesper's lack of action, Sophia swung a kick at the bed rampantly. "Eat it, quick! Aren't you starving? We made this especially for you."

She placed her hands on her waist, and her expression filled with pride and contempt.

"Hesper, this is the only meal that's served to you. Are you sure that you don't want to eat? If you don't, you're going to be malnourished. How are you going to feed your precious son then?"

Hesper shifted her gaze.

She could bear the hunger but how could she do this to her son.

The child came from her, so she would protect him with her life.

"I'll eat!"

She picked up a fork, but as soon as she got close, she furrowed her brows because she was choked by the pungent smell produced from the mixed food.

The sight of the food, with a thick layer of oil from the spices covering it, was nauseating.

Hesper tried her best to choose the less oily food, but she gagged as soon as she took a bite.

Sophia scolded in a stern voice, "Shut your mouth. Just try to throw up if you dare! You won't have anything else to eat if you throw up!"

Hesper raised her head and glanced at her in rage. She knew that Sophia was right.

She didn't understand why they would treat her like this. She had not committed any serious crime apart from marrying Rickard. Why would they hurt her and humiliate her?

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Just bear with it and you can extricate yourself when grandfather is cured. Hesper told herself in her heart and swallowed the food with tears streaming down her face.

“Tsk tsk. You’re really eating, huh.” Sophia began to ridicule her again.

“You don’t even care about your most basic self-respect and integrity anymore just so you can continue to stay in the Duvals’ residence? I’ve never encountered someone as shameless as you.”

Hesper said coldly, “It’s your brother who wouldn’t agree on getting a divorce.”

“Bah!”

Sophia refused to believe Hesper’s remark. She was infuriated by the sight of Hesper’s calmness.

“My brother wouldn’t agree on getting a divorce? Don’t forget that his lover is back.

Frankly, my brother headed out in a rush after dinner for an appointment. Who do you think he is meeting?”

Hesper felt her heart wrench in pain. She told herself that she would not mind, yet she could not refrain herself from feeling envy upon hearing Sophia’s remark.

Sophia could see the agony in Hesper’s eyes. She said with a sneer, “How dare you claim that my brother wouldn’t agree on getting a divorce in your current state?”

She took two steps forward and clutched Hesper’s fair, clean lower jaw with her hand, her eyes bursting with malicious hatred.

“But don’t worry. I’m here, and I will make sure to facilitate their relationship so you can be demoted from your position of Mrs. Duval!”

Upon saying that, she swung her hand with great force, which pushed Hesper to the side, before she left, feeling pleased with herself.

Hesper maintained her body position for a long time without moving. She looked at the ceiling absentmindedly and thought about the past.

She thought about how deeply in love Rickard and Juniper were in the past.

She remembered how Rickard was constantly distracted and his temperament changed after Juniper left the country.

She felt as if she could see Juniper smiling bleakly with her hands outstretched.

“Did you really go and see her, Rickard?”

Rickard and Juniper sat across from each other in a luxury condo located in Leneriv.

After a long time, he said, “You called me here in a rush. What happened?”

Tears welled up in Juniper’s eyes when she heard the estrangement in his voice.

“Rickard, are you still angry at me? I knew that you resent me when I met you in the company the other day. However, I have my difficulties too!”

“It’s passed, and I’m not angry at you.”

“I don’t believe that!” Juniper bit her lower lip tightly. She was so beautiful, the sight of her crying made one feel pity for her.

“If you’re not angry at me, why won’t you come and see me when you know that I’m back? Don’t you know that I’ve been waiting for you all this time?”

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## **Chapter 7**

Her remark would cause a misunderstanding easily. Rickard frowned and said, "I'm married."

"You were supposed to be mine! Mine!"

Juniper's tears streamed down more profusely as if she was triggered by him.

He used to care for her sincerely in the past after all. The vigilance in Rickard's eyes diminished a little, and he pulled out a tissue that he passed to her. "Don't cry. Don't you like to look pretty? Your eyes will swell from crying."

"I've already lost you, so I don't care about beauty anymore." Juniper suddenly hugged him and leaned her face into his chest.

Rickard's entire body shook. He was about to push her away when she said, "I didn't leave willingly all those years ago. I was diagnosed with a tumor, and the doctor told me that I could possibly be infertile. I don't know how Hesper found out about my condition, but she told Mr. Duval Sr., who came to see me with her and forced me to leave you."

"What?" Rickard's expression was filled with shock.

He had always taken her act of leaving him to heart because he thought that she had fallen for someone else. Doesn't that mean that I've misunderstood her all this time, and the problem came from my side?

Juniper was extremely sad, her eyes reddening with tears like an innocent child. "I was afraid that my infertility would slow you down. Also, Hesper pressured me and claimed that she could bear children for you, so I decided to leave because I refused to be humiliated further."

"Are you telling the truth?" A storm began brewing in Rickard's eyes as if it would destroy everything.

Juniper was rather terrified by him in his current state.

But she could not allow herself to cower, so she immediately raised her hand and pledged, "I swear that every word I said is true. If I'm lying, I won't be able to have a child for the rest of my life!"

"Nonsense!" Rickard immediately pulled down her hand.

He felt extremely guilty in his heart; his eyes were bloodshot. "You've been wronged because of me while I've only just found out about it today. Don't worry, I promise that if what you said is true, I won't let her off for doing this."

How dare you use grandfather to break up Juniper and me, how dare you, Hesper!

...

"Wake up, Mrs. Duval."

Hesper was awakened by a servant in the Duvals' residence.

She opened her eyes to find the kitchen helper, Wanda.

Wanda served a bowl of chicken soup and said cautiously, "You can't allow yourself to eat poorly when you're recovering from a childbirth, Mrs. Duval. I made this for you in secret. No one saw me. Drink this while it's still hot, quick."

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Wanda was afraid that Hesper would be worried, so she lowered her voice and said, "Madam and Ms. Duval are out, and there's no one else at home now. Eat something so you can gain some strength, quick!"

"Thank you, Wanda."

Tears welled up in Hesper's eyes; it had been a long time since she was treated with kindness. She took the chicken soup and began eating it in large gulps.

Wanda felt sorry for her. "Madam and miss have gone too far. You could still eat and dress well when Mr. Duval Sr. was still at home previously. They're so inhumane to you these days. It's a shame that I'm just a nobody here, and I can't do much to help you, Mrs. Duval."

"Don't say that. I'm already very grateful that you're willing to serve me a bowl of soup." While the people of this family were very cold to her, Wanda was the only person who would treat her kindly.

However, no one could know about Wanda's kindness. Otherwise, Wanda would be in trouble along with her.

"Thank you very much, Wanda. You should quickly go before anyone sees you."

"Noted, Mrs. Duval." Wanda took back the empty bowl and said piteously, "Do take care of yourself. Everything is going to be better when Mr. Duval Sr. is back."

"I know." Hesper forced a smile but her heart was filled with sorrow.

Everything is not going to be better when grandfather is back, but it will come to an end.

After she had the soup, she finally had the strength to move. She missed her child, so she washed up and went to the nursery.

Hesper picked up the baby cautiously. It was tiny, soft, sweet-smelling and chubby.

"I'm here to see you, my precious."

She could not refrain herself from rubbing her face against the baby. There was no telling if the baby could sense that she was his mother, but he moved his arms and legs in joy. He also babbled as if he was talking to her.

"My sweet baby." Hesper's eyes were moist with tears as she looked at her sweet baby, but there was nothing she could do to stay with him.

All of a sudden...

"Hesper!"

A raging roar was heard coming from behind her. Before she could respond, her arm was pulled strenuously by someone.

"My baby!" She hastily protected the child in her arms, but she was pulled backward by such immense force that her back slammed into the changing table.

"Ouch..."

Hesper let out a muffled grunt and looked at the person before her.

Rickard's expression was filled with anger. He looked like he was dissecting her with his cold, sharp eyes.

"Rickard, you should mind where you are if you want to throw a fit. Didn't you see me

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holding the baby in my arms? What if..."

"Who do you think you are to talk about the child with me?"

Rickard interrupted her in rage. He bore with it for a night, but he could bear it no more at that very moment.

"Tell me, what did you and grandfather do to Juniper?"

"What are you talking about?"

Hesper was baffled, but then she saw Juniper walking into the room soon afterward. She was incredulous that Rickard had actually brought Juniper to the house so openly. Rickard clutched her arm tightly and forced her to look at him. "Why are you still pretending? Did you meet Juniper before she left the country?"

He spoke so loudly that the baby began bawling loudly.

"Oh, my sweet baby, don't cry, don't cry." Hesper coaxed the baby in a flurry. She was infuriated by the sight of Rickard standing there like a guardian.

"Get some medicine if you're sick, Rickard. Don't act like a mad man in the morning!" How dare this woman scold me?

Rickard's expression turned unpleasant.

Meanwhile, Juniper glanced at Hesper and the baby ferociously and said in a pitiful tone, "Hesper, tell the truth. You came to see me on a few occasions before I left the country, didn't you?"

"I did come to see you, but that was because..."

Hesper furrowed her eyebrows. She was interrupted by the crying Juniper just as she was about to explain herself. "It was because you came to see me that I decided to leave so that you could be with Rickard. Now that I'm back, please return Rickard to me. I'm begging you..."

As she spoke, she pretended to initiate a bow.

"You're not the one who should be bowing!" Rickard shouted in anger and shifted his gaze to Hesper's face. He looked at her as if he was looking at an enemy.

"Bow down and explain yourself clearly, or else, don't even think about seeing the child ever again!"

"What? You're asking me to bow down?"

Hesper was incredulous and felt trapped by grief.

She never thought that after loving him for so many years, she would be humiliated in the end.

Rickard did not have the slightest ounce of respect for her.

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## Chapter 8

“If you want me to bow down, dream on.”

Hesper stood straight but her body trembled ever so slightly, not only out of anger but also fear.

Rickard sneered and said, “You’re still stubborn and refuse to admit your mistake?”

He snatched the child and passed him to Juniper before he pushed down Hesper’s back to force her to bow down.

The emaciated Hesper bowed down instantly.

The sight of her bowing over was painful to the eyes.

In fact, Rickard could even see the wisp of agony on her expression. Knowing that he did not exert much strength, he wondered why she could not even withstand that.

She’s only faking it again!

Hesper did not care about herself; when her baby was taken from her, she shouted hysterically and stretched out her arms. “My baby! Give me back my baby!”

Juniper wanted to see Hesper suffer so how could she possibly hand back the child to Hesper. She pretended to be startled by Hesper and hid behind Rickard in a haste.

The child bawled even louder, and his little face flushed scarlet.

Hesper could not stop herself from throwing herself onto Juniper in an attempt to take back her child.

Rickard shielded Juniper at once.

“Are you done? How can you be a mother when you’re acting like this? Tell the truth quickly, or I won’t let you off.”

“Yes, I met her. Will this do?” Hesper shouted in despair. She could not see any gleam of hope anymore after witnessing Rickard’s actions today.

She glared at them ferociously while bowing down. “I was reckless and unscrupulous in my efforts so I could marry you and destroy your wonderful relationship. Are you pleased?”

“Hesper!”

The veins on Rickard’s forehead pulsed constantly, and he was on the brink of losing his temper.

Hesper was fearless and she sniggered. “What? Wasn’t this the response you sought when you brought her home so openly? I’ll fulfill your wish then so that the both of you don’t have to sneak around in the future!”

“What do you mean by sneaking around? You’re talking nonsense.” Juniper looked as if she was about to cry.

Hesper sneered. “Would you dare tell me that both of you were not together yesterday night?”

“We...”

“Juniper, you don’t have to tell her,” Rickard said coldly. “Since you’re so impertinent, you’ll continue bowing here until you admit your mistake! Let’s go.”

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Rickard left with Juniper and the child without the slightest hesitation. He was so distant as if the the person bowing was completely unrelated to him.

Juniper smiled at Hesper in a provocative yet proud manner before she left.

Hesper did not care about Juniper's provocation, but she cared about the child in Juniper's arms. Her arms that hung at her sides turned into fists that became tighter and tighter.

She heard the sound of Madam Duval and Sophia arrive at home and heard their laughter from gloating in her misfortune after learning that she was punished to bow down.

"You should punish her like this so she won't think that she can disrespect all of us or think that her status has risen just because of her child."

Rickard was so agitated that he grunted at them impatiently.

Sophia said to Juniper, "Juni, it's been such a long time since we last met. Now that you're back, would you like to stay for lunch today?"

"Right, right, right. I remember you used to enjoy the fish prepared by our chef here. I'll get her to cook for you today."

Madam Duval immediately gave orders to the servants. Her enthusiasm toward Juniper was the complete opposite of how she treated her daughter-in-law, Hesper.

Juniper smiled shyly. "Thank you very much for your invitation, Madam Duval. It's a good opportunity for me to chat with Soph."

Everyone was having a good time chatting. They paid attention to Hesper or wondered if her back was aching from bowing down due to her recent delivery.

Hesper kept her head lowered and did not utter a word in the nursery, but she became even more determined to leave this place.

The only thing that she was glad for was that Madam Duval and Sophia, who did not seem to be bothered by the crying baby, ordered a servant to send the child back after a while, so she got to see the child for a while longer.

Even if it was while she was bowing.

Lunch was ready. The Duvals had always enjoyed lavish feasts and more food was prepared on purpose to welcome Juniper that day.

Madam Duval, Sophia, and Juniper occasionally talked about something interesting before bursting out into laughter.

Yet, Rickard's mind gradually drifted to the nursery for some unknown reason.

It's been so long. This should be about enough time for the woman to bow, right?

At that thought, he ordered the servant to prepare a meal portion and got up.

"Where are you going, Rickard?" Juniper spoke at once, having been monitoring him secretly all this time. Coming from her, who had a bright smile on her face, it sounded more like a casual inquiry.

Rickard stopped for a moment and said, "I'm going to check on the baby."

Juniper was having a hard time forcing a smile. If he's going to check on the baby, why is he bringing a meal tray with him? It's obvious that he's bringing food to Hesper.

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However, she could not express her unwillingness because she had just gained back Rickard's trust. She would need time to repair their relationship slowly.

Hence, she gently reminded him, "Go, quick. Check up on Hesper while you're at it. Don't keep her bowing."

"Sure."

Rickard left, thinking that only Juniper would be kind enough to think about others.

Madam Duval and Sophia complimented Juniper for being a beauty with a good heart because of how caring she was toward even someone like Hesper.

Juniper smiled but did not speak. She clenched her fists so tightly that her nails dug into her flesh.

How is that caring? I'm going to take back what's mine bit by bit!

Upstairs, Hesper was still bowing when the baby suddenly cried. A servant told her that the baby was probably hungry, so Hesper picked up the child and breastfed him.

Meanwhile, Rickard came into the room just as she put down the baby after feeding him. Hence, in his perception, it appeared as if Hesper had not followed his order at all. However...

Glancing at her swollen ankles from prolonged bowing, he decided that he would not lower himself to her level. With an indifferent expression, he ordered the servant to serve the meal to her.

"Do you know your mistake? If you know, you may eat."

"That's none of your business." How would Hesper still have the appetite to eat after being humiliated like that. She swung her hand and pushed away the meal, scattering it on the floor.

In fact, some of the food had even splashed onto Rickard's pants. The anger in his chest was ignited once again. "Hesper! Don't push your luck!"

Hesper was fearless when she met his aggressive gaze. "You just want to stand up for your beloved woman, right? Why are you still acting like a hypocrite? Who are you trying to show off to?"

"You're impossible!"

Rickard felt as if his kindness was in vain. He had already ignored the fact that she got up without his permission, yet she still had the audacity to fool around?

"I must be punishing you too lightly. Continue to bow down until the next morning!"

The people in the dining room heard the quarrel and assumed expressions that showed that they were intrigued.

"What a fool. He gave her a way out, yet she didn't appreciate it."

Sophia expressed her contempt.

Juniper was delighted in her heart. She wanted them to quarrel; it would be wonderful if they could quarrel more.

That way, she would have a chance at regaining Rickard's love.

"Madam Duval, Soph," Juniper suddenly said, "I have something that I'd like your help with..."

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Upon hearing her remark, both of them smiled to express their approval.  
“Don’t worry, we’ll make sure to help rekindle your relationship.”

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## **Chapter 9**

The door of the nursery shut with a loud bang, and the deafening noise startled the baby.

Hesper pursed her lips tightly and held the baby in her arms tighter.

It did not take long before Madam Duval's caring voice was heard coming from downstairs. "Rickard, it's getting late. I'm concerned about Juniper going home by herself; it's not safe. You should send her home."

Rickard glanced outside and figured that it really was unsafe now that it was dark. "Let's go then."

After both of them got into the car, Juniper asked casually, "Rickard, is Hesper...still bowing down?"

Rickard remembered that Hesper was not bowing down when he went upstairs earlier, so he figured that she would not follow his order to bow down for the rest of the night. He said with a tinge of anger in his voice, "I can't be bothered to know. If she wants to bring trouble upon herself, no one can save her."

"Don't be angry anymore..." Juniper heaved a sigh of pity, but in her heart, she was overjoyed.

Meanwhile, Hesper was planning to return to her room when Madam Duval and Sophia suddenly barged into the room.

"What do we have here? I knew that you'd act one way to Rickard's face and another behind his back! My brother ordered you to bow down until tomorrow morning, so said you can stand up?"

"I'm not a criminal, so who are you to treat me this way?"

Hesper was about to stand upright when someone kicked at her back ferociously.

A thud was heard, and she bent over from the pain once again.

Sophia sneered with her arms crossed. "You're asking us when you're the one living in our house and spending our money? If you have the courage to get up, I'm going to make my brother hand the child to Juni so that she can raise him. They're going to be mother and son sooner or later anyway, so just think of it as letting them bond with each other."

"Don't you dare!"

Hesper was furious, her face flushing scarlet.

I'm not dead, yet the Duvals are already so keen to look for a stepmother for my child!

How can such nonsense exist in this world!

"Try and see if I dare!" Sophia was completely unbothered by her remark. She said with a mocking smile, "Who do you think you are? Do you think that I'm scared of you?"

Madam Duval ridiculed Hesper from the side as well. "Hesper, it was your husband who ordered you to bow down. We're only asking you to do as he said. If you insist on defying his order, I can only tell this incident to Mr. Duval Sr. so he can decide which side is right."

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Hesper's entire body shivered.

Madam Duval would not do it so kindly. She was only using this tactic to trigger Mr. Duval Sr. so he would be so infuriated that his health would deteriorate. If anything bad were to happen to Mr. Duval Sr., Hesper would not be able to make peace with herself. "Don't startle grandfather, I'll bow!"

Hesper shut her eyes in pain and did nothing as Madam Duval and her daughter taunted her as they liked from next to her.

Every word they said was akin to a knife that stabbed into her severely hurt heart and lashed onto her unhealed wounds over and over again. She felt so sad and furious that she wanted to die. This was all brought on to her by none other than her husband, whom she loved for so many years. It was Rickard!

If she could do it again, if only she could do it again...

But there was no redo in this world!

Rickard returned by midnight. He glanced in the direction of the nursery and found that it was pitch black. He figured that the woman had already returned to her room to rest. He headed to the study room as he thought to himself, but he halted to a stop when he walked past Hesper's bedroom.

The door was not shut tightly.

Hesper had never been so careless to leave her door that way. He furrowed his eyebrows and felt an ominous presentiment in his heart.

"Hesper?" he called out coldly, but no one answered him. He opened the door to find that the bedroom was pitch black and empty.

Is it possible that she's still bowing down?

Rickard glanced at the time and realized that it had already been six hours since their quarrel earlier. Could it be that she's still so stubborn that she won't yield?

As he was thinking, his attention was drawn to a glow coming from the side of the bed. Rickard picked up Hesper's phone and took a glance to discover that there were more than 10 missed calls on it, all from Julian.

"Hesper, are you all right? Did something bad happen to you?"

Rickard glared at the unread text message ferociously, and his presence turned frantic instantly.

A loud bang was heard, and the phone was thrown so hard that it cracked. The highly agitated Rickard left slamming the door in rage.

Hesper was jolted awake by loud noise in the midst of a quiet night. She tried to open her eyes with great effort but could not. It felt as if her eyelids weighed a few thousand tonnes, and her body was freezing.

"It's freezing, it hurts..."

She muttered subconsciously like a distressed avalanche victim that no one could save and left to perish in the snow.

At last, she lost count of the time before the door of the nursery opened up slowly.

It was a concerned Wanda, who seized the opportunity while it was early in the morning

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to check on Hesper, only to find her collapsed on the floor, her body curled into a ball.

“Mrs. Duval, what’s going on with you?” Wanda ran to Hesper in a haste.

“It... It hurts.” Hesper’s face was ghastly pale and her entire body was drenched in cold sweat.

Wanda stretched out her hand to feel Hesper’s forehead and pulled back her arm immediately from the burning heat. “Someone, come! Mrs. Duval has a fever. Send her to the hospital, quick!”

The servants in the villa were alarmed. They came to stand around her in succession. Rickard heard Wanda’s calling as soon as he returned from his morning run downstairs. He furrowed his eyebrows, pushed away the crowd, and walked into the nursery.

Madam Duval and Sophia were awakened by the noise as well. They scolded with stern expressions. “What’s with the clamor? Why were we awakened so early?”

Wanda held Hesper and spoke with a shaky voice, “Madam and Ms. Duval, Mrs. Duval is burning with fever.”

“Is that really serious?” Madam Duval rolled her eyes. “There are so many women in the world, yet Hesper is the only spoiled one. She’s always sick and in pain every other day. Who knows if she’s faking it!”

Hesper was barely conscious from the fever; she could not utter a word.

The more Wanda looked at Hesper, the more anxious she became. Meanwhile, Rickard arrived and took a glance at the crowd around him before he queried with a cold voice, “What happened?”

“Mr. Duval, it’s Mrs. Duval. She’s come down with a high fever after bowing here all night while in her weakened state.”

Wanda hastily narrated the situation, which triggered Mrs. Duval and Sophie’s anger at once.

“Don’t listen to her, Rickard. I think she’s faking her illness to go against you because she was displeased with your punishment yesterday!”

Rickard kept quiet and did not speak. He had yet to forgo yesterday’s incident.

However, he could tell that Hesper did not look so good.

“How do you feel? Can you speak?”

Rickard approached her and attempted to feel her forehead, but Hesper shoved him away. “I’m not dying. You don’t need to bother yourself with me.”

The man pulled a long face. This woman is nothing but cruel to me, and there’s no telling whether she’s actually flirting with another man behind my back to earn his sympathy.

“Since you’re fine, get up. Why are you lying on the floor?”

Hesper propped herself up without uttering a word, but before she could stand steadily, her knees buckled and she began to fall again.

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## **Chapter 10**

“Mrs. Duval!” Wanda screamed out in surprise.

In the next moment, Hesper was caught by a pair of huge, male hands.

Everyone was stunned; not even Rickard realized what had happened.

How could he possibly initiate such an intimate interaction with her?

He was convinced that he did it instinctively. He caught her out of instinct, and that was all.

Sophia could not bear to watch anymore. “Dick, don’t mind her. The more you mind, the more she’ll feign her agony. She did it so she could get your attention.”

“Shut up!” Rickard shouted coldly. Having gotten close to Hesper, he had only just discovered the abnormality of her body temperature.

“She’s having a fever. Call the family doctor.”

Sophia did not have the courage to continue to speak out of turn. However, this time, Hesper was the one to reject Rickard. “No, I don’t want the family doctor. Send me to the hospital.”

Rickard’s eyebrows furrowed tighter, and he said impatiently, “You need treatment to lower your fever immediately. It’s faster with the family doctor.”

“No, I want to go to the hospital,” Hesper insisted.

She did not have the courage to stay with the Duvals when she was sick because Madam Duval and Sophia might be seized with crazy ideas to put her in harm’s way.

In the hospital, at least she could ensure her own safety.

Rickard misunderstood her.

Remembering Julian’s numerous missed calls, his eyes filled with murderous intent. He nodded coldly and said, “Fine, I’ll fulfill your wish.”

Hesper could sense the strangeness in his tone, but she could not ponder further on it due to the discomfort in her body. She was sent to the hospital by the bodyguards.

Before they departed, Rickard gave the assistant an order coldly. “Monitor her closely. If Hesper meets up with some brute, inform me at once.”

“Uh...” The assistant was incredulous. Does Mr. Duval suspect Mrs. Duval of having an affair?

How could that be?

The assistant trembled deep inside after meeting the man’s stern gaze. He behaved himself and shut his mouth at once.

“Come, let’s go to the company first.”

The assistant hesitated for a moment before he asked cautiously, “Mr. Duval, Mrs. Duval is sick. Are we not going to visit her in the hospital?”

Rickard glanced at the assistant nonchalantly. “She’s just a woman. Compared to our collaboration with Haven Group, which one do you think is more important?”

The assistant came to understand the situation but still heaved a sigh in his heart.

It was precisely this kind of reasoning that had led the relationship between Mr. Duval

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and Mrs. Duval to grow so distant.

In the Duvals' residence, the rest of the people returned to their posts after Hesper was sent to the hospital.

Wanda was about to leave when Madam Duval called out to her. "Stand there. Have I given you permission to leave?"

Wanda's body trembled, and she turned around to look at Mrs. Duval in fear.

Mrs. Duval grabbed a vase next to her and hit Wanda's body with it ferociously.

"Wanda, you're very capable. Do you know who you're working for? Do you know who pays your wages? How dare you live off us but secretly help an outsider!"

"Madam, I didn't..." Wanda was almost in tears from fear. She bowed down at once.

"You didn't? What were you doing at the nursery then? Had you not made a fuss, perhaps she would have died and no one would know! How dare you say you didn't do it!"

Wanda was aware of Madam Duval's cruelty, but she did not expect it to be to this extent. She was scared out of her wits. "I'm sure that you'd understand the situation, madam. I prepared some supplemental food and came to check on the young sir to see if he was awake. I didn't expect to find Mrs. Duval unconscious, so I called out in panick."

"Hmph. Knock it off," Madam Duval said with a bitterly sarcastic tone. "I don't care if you really are a fool, or if you're just feigning your foolishness. I'm going to put it out there today that the Duvals' residence is no place for the kind hearted! If you dare to protect her again, don't blame me for being hard on you!"

Wanda's body froze, but then she nodded obsequiously and said, "Yes, mam... I understand."

In the hospital, Julian was extremely worried about Hesper's condition after failing to get in touch with her. He was slightly distracted on his shift until he heard a conversation between two nurses.

"Yikes, this Rivera woman is quite pitiful for having such a high fever after her recent delivery. There's no telling if her mother-in-law is helping to care for her."

"I heard that she's the young Mrs. Duval of the Duval family and her mother-in-law is not fond of her, so Madam Duval makes life difficult for her. My colleague told me about her burn injury. Her mouth and lips were badly burned the day she had her baby. Isn't this an obvious sign of abuse within an influential family?"

"Oh god, that's really terrifying. I don't want to think about marrying a man from an influential family anymore..."

The two young nurses' discussion faded as they walked away. Julian's expression changed drastically.

He knew that something bad must have happened to her when he failed to get in touch with her yesterday. Damn you, Duvals! There is no telling what they did to her!

"Hesper!"

At last, Julian found Hesper and saw the infusion tube on her hand, her ghastly pale

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face completely drained of blood. She did not look like a woman who had just given birth recently but a terminal illness patient who would die soon.

Julian's eyes reddened with tears. He stood by the bed at a loss of what to do.

"What brings you here, Ian?" Hesper hastily tried to sit upright when seeing Julian, but she did not have the strength to do so because of malnourishment.

Julian hastily stretched out his hands to help her get up and propped a pillow behind her caringly.

Witnessing the scene, the bodyguard posted at the door immediately called up Rickard's assistant.

In the room, Julian said softly, "I came to check on you after I found out that you're sick. How do you feel? How did you get yourself sick again?"

Hesper cracked a faint, bitter smile. However, she could not bring herself to speak ill of the family, so she said nonchalantly, "I'm fine. It will pass soon."

"You're always trying to be brave." Julian looked at her with pity. "I called you many times yesterday night because I wanted to check with you on the lawyer's matter. You didn't pick up even once, so I should have known that something bad had happened to you. It's all my fault for being useless. I'm not capable of getting you away from the Duvals."

"You called me, Ian?" Hesper had not heard her phone ring at all the night before since she left it in her room. She did not wish to get Julian in trouble either, so she could only force a smile and say, "It's fine. You're already being so kind to me, Ian. Perhaps this is just a difficult period for me in my life."

"No, you shouldn't be treated like this." Julian could not refrain himself from advising her, "Leave him, Hesper. The Duvals are akin to hell for you. Only by leaving them can you restart your life."

Hesper wanted to restart her life too, but...

Meanwhile, a loud bang was heard when the door was kicked open by someone.

Rickard walked into the room, his face green with rage. His entire person exuded an evil, foreboding presence. He looked coldly at the two people chatting harmoniously by the bed. "Where did you say you were taking my wife earlier?"

Julian and Hesper's expressions changed drastically when they heard the word 'wife'.

Julian expressed his anger. "Mr. Duval, if you really regarded Hesper as your wife, why would you let her get injured and hospitalized again and again!"

"Heh..." Rickard chuckled in a dangerous manner and pushed his tongue against his cheek. It was a sign that he was about to lose his temper.

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