

YOUR GUISE 451

Chapter 451

“You think that everyone wants a sugar daddy?” Pearl couldn’t help but burst into laughter for a moment. “Do you really think I need to depend on men?” Jenny must have lost her mind, thinking everyone behaved like her.

“What do you mean?” Jenny’s tone turned icy.

Without a word, Pearl made a phone call. Soon, there was a loud voice coming from her phone that sounded familiar.

Ten minutes later, someone unlocked the door. As a result, Jenny’s expression changed instantly.

“Eric, what are you doing here?”

Eric Bloom was a foreigner with a charming appearance. He looked like a noble gentleman from medieval Aross. But Jenny wondered why he would show up out of the blue when Pearl was still around...

“What’s the matter? Can’t I come?” Eric’s spoken words were not very fluent as he frowned at Jenny.

Jenny shook her head and quickly held his arm, acting sweet and flirtatious. "Eric, did you come to see me because you missed me?"

Glancing at Jenny, Pearl pouted. "You guys are not alone. Can you please not be so lovey- dovey?"

Of course, Jenny noticed that Eric had been staring at Pearl when he walked in. His passionate gaze startled Jenny.

Helplessly, she clung to him closely. She wondered if Pearl had cast a spell on Eric. No, she wouldn't let that happen.

"Eric, she's the woman who's been bothering me. I can't even argue with her." Holding Eric's arm,

Jenny swung it, looking upset. "You're powerful and influential. Can you help me get back at her?"

However, Eric didn't obey Jenny like he used to. He looked at Pearl and said, "Hi."

Pearl rolled her eyes. "Eric, your Capleiner is still as bad as ever." Knowing that Eric wasn't fluent in Capleiner, she habitually spoke to him in Ealdasy.

Her comment made Eric lower his head in embarrassment. "That's normal since I haven't lived in Caplein for a long time."

"Why did you fall in love with her? I don't understand." Pearl was speechless.

Giving Pearl a passionate look, Eric smiled and explained, "It's because she looks a little like you, especially her mouth. I feel like k*ssing you when I k*ss her."

Pearl retched. "That's not necessary. Please don't say that."

Suddenly, she thought of her business and continued, "Eric, she's reckless because of your love. Can you do me a favor?"

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Eric smiled. "Of course."

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"Eric, do you know her?" Jenny was filled with disgust. She couldn't understand why Pearl wanted to show off her Ealdasy since Eric could understand Capleiner.

Besides, she wasn't very proficient in Ealdasy. It was somewhat difficult for her to understand their conversation, but she caught a key point from it. Pearl and Eric knew each other, and they had rather a good relationship.

Eric looked at Pearl affectionately. "Yes, she's my dream girl I told you about."

“Eric, when did you get to know her?” A deep chill filled Jenny’s heart. If her only supporter liked Pearl, she would have no one to rely on, and she would be in great danger.

Chapter 452

Pearl was thoroughly enjoying herself because of Jenny’s twisted expression. But she had turned Eric down many times, saying she had a boyfriend.

“Pearl was only fifteen back then, a young woman who had just gone abroad. I saw her fighting for justice for another young woman at the college’s entrance. Her swift and powerful moves amazed me, and I began to notice her.” Eric’s expression softened as he talked about that memory.

However, Jenny picked up on something from his words. “Eric, you’re the son of an oil tycoon. Why would you pay attention to such a rough woman?”

Dissatisfied, Eric stared at Jenny. “What are you talking about? I might even like you more if your personality wasn’t so different from Pearl’s.”

Blood drained out of Jenny’s face. She asked Eric, clinging to a glimmer of hope, “Eric, do you like Pearl?”

“Yes, I do. I want to marry her.” Eric’s answer was unexpected but straightforward.

“But you said you liked me!”

“Yes, I do like you, but it’s because you look like her, especially your l*ps. I like you very much, but I like her more.’

It was unbearable for Jenny. Both Richard and Eric, the two men she was proud of, liked Pearl. Yes, there was Richard too.

“But Pearl has a boyfriend. She doesn’t like you!”

Her words only made Pearl’s expression turn sarcastic instead of awkward. “Miss Jenny, do you think everyone hides things like you?”

Blushing, Jenny turned to Eric. “Don’t listen to her nonsense!”

“I know Pearl has a boyfriend, and I hope he treats her well. If not, I’ll make him pay.” Eric wasn’t upset by it, but he felt a little regretful.

As a result, Jenny collapsed, squatting on the floor, and began crying and wailing without caring about her image. “You said you’d marry me when you’re thirty. Did you lie to me?”

Eric frowned. “When did I say that? I might have joked about it when I was drunk.”

“Jenny, have you forgotten what you’ve done?” Pearl reminded Jenny, watching her pitiful sobs. “How

can you cry like this in front of everyone?"

She finally realized that Jenny loved no one but herself. Jenny loved Richard because he was young, handsome, and had a promising future. She loved Eric because he was rich, powerful, and good-looking. In short, all she loved was her own benefits.

Trembling, Jenny looked up at Eric with red eyes. "Don't listen to her crap, Eric!" She knew that she would lose everything if she lost Eric's favor now.

When Eric came to Caplein, he spotted Jenny right away and pursued her passionately, He even promised to give her everything she wanted if she dated him.

At that time, Richard had nothing to offer her. So, she naturally accepted Eric and broke up with Richard. Then, she started living with Eric abroad, while the latter kept his promise to support her financially.

Chapter 453

If Eric hated Jenny, she might not even become famous. She would've ended up like the other struggling unknown actresses, drinking and sleeping with others.

Eric gave Jenny a cold glance and then turned to smile at Pearl. "Let's ignore her. What can I do for

you?”

“Let’s go to the set. I’ll tell you when we get there.”

With that, she left with Eric.

Watching them leave together, Jenny disregarded any sense of decorum and hurried over. She

forcefully grabbed Eric’s arm. “Eric, you don’t want me anymore?”

Naturally, Eric didn’t want to miss a chance to spend time with Pearl. He pushed Jenny away firmly, a

cold look in his eyes. “I’ll break up with you if you keep making a scene.”

Jenny collapsed onto the floor, clenching her fists and glaring at Pearl with intense hatred.

Pearl followed Eric outside and got into the car, heading to the set.

In the car, Eric stared at Pearl’s face, his emotions a mix of different feelings. “If you didn’t have a

boyfriend, I might have done what Jenny did—pursuing you relentlessly.”

It was the first time Eric spoke Capleiner while addressing her. He probably felt it was more fitting to

speak it when confessing his love to a Caplein woman.

Pearl shook her head. “You don’t need to do that because I never liked you. You don’t have to try to win

me over.”

“Alright then. Maybe we’re not meant to be.” Eric shrugged and dropped the subject.

When they arrived at the set, they drew a lot of attention as a good-looking couple stepping out of a car together. People couldn’t help but speculate when they saw such an attractive pair together.

However, no one said much about it because they were aware of Pearl’s identity and the fact that her boyfriend was Richard.

Esther rushed out of the crowd. When she saw Pearl standing nearby with a handsome guy beside her, she beamed with delight. “Pearl, where did you find such a hottie?”

Eric gently held Esther’s hand, raised it, and k*ssed the back of her hand with a charming smile. “Hello, beautiful lady. I’m Eric Bloom. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Blushing, Esther smiled. “Hi, I’m-”

Suddenly, someone pulled her into an embrace and interrupted her. She looked up to see Mobius, his face looking fierce and gloomy. Startled, she pushed him away. “What are you doing here?”

Stunned, Mobius couldn’t understand why she had pushed him away. Finally, after holding back his anger for a while, he said, “What’s the matter? Did I interrupt your conversation with a handsome

foreign guy?”

“No, people generally appreciate beauty. You should respect my choices.”

“People generally appreciate beauty? Esther, you’re not loyal and fickle!” Mobius couldn’t contain his frustration.

“No, I like you, but you

don’t like me. Besides, you’re not my boyfriend. Stop meddling in my affairs!” How could he accuse her of being inconsistent when he had rejected her when she had expressed interest in him?

Chapter 454

“See! You can’t even say a word, can you?” Esther found his indignation amusing. Finally, after a long time, she had the upper hand, and she was thoroughly enjoying herself.

“You’re being unreasonable!” Mobius couldn’t control his anger, making it hard for him to catch his breath. He had never imagined that the usually obedient Esther would become so rebellious one day.

Suddenly, gloominess shone in his eyes. He grabbed the back of Esther’s collar. “I’ll teach you a lesson on behalf of your brother. I’ll report this to him if you act like this again.”

“Tsk, I’m not scared of Tyler,” Esther said disdainfully. She felt that he always made excuses and lied

about his feelings.

“He said he’s going to tell your mother.”

In the next second, Esther’s smug smile stiffened. “Okay, forget what I said.” She then hid behind

Mobius, looking dejected.

Seeing this, Pearl felt helpless. It was a rare opportunity to force Mobius to admit his feelings for

Esther, but Esther gave in too easily.

Eric didn’t dwell on the situation either. He extended his hand to shake hands with Mobius. “Hello, nice

to meet you.”

Mobius, with a cold expression, shook Eric’s hand firmly. “I can’t say the same.”

“Ah!” Eric winced from the firm handshake and turned to look at Pearl in bewilderment. “Is your friend

really that strong?”

“Haha...” Pearl forced a laugh. “That’s just how he is. Don’t take it personally.”

“Alright,” Eric nodded. “Let’s go in.”

Pearl led Eric to the set of “The Melody of the West.” Esther wanted to join them but stayed back due

to Mobius' threat.

When the director saw Pearl again, he had a headache. "Miss Pearl, I can't make a decision about this.

I told you I can't upset Miss Jenny's backer..."

"Look, Eric. Jenny has threatened all of them." Pearl turned to Eric, shrugging helplessly.

Eric wore a serious expression as he stared at the director. "What did Jenny say to you?"

"She said she would have her boss shut down our production if we let others use the set," the director

stammered but continued, "I thought it was just Mister Richard. Since he's close to Miss Pearl, I

thought he would agree. But Miss Jenny mentioned that her boss is the son of an oil tycoon and even

showed me evidence. I...I had to agree."

After explaining, the director let out a deep and helpless sigh.

"What if I tell you that the oil tycoon's son is my friend?" Pearl asked.

The director's eyes lit up with hope. "Really?"

"Here he is." Pearl pushed Eric forward since the director didn't believe her. "Why don't you tell them

about your identity, Eric?"

Eric showed his passport. "I'm sure this can prove who I am."

After a glance at the passport and the familiar name on it, the director turned pale. It was really him!

In an instant, the director's legs felt weak, and his voice trembled. "Oh, sir. You're here because—"

"I came to Caplein because of what Jenny did. She used my identity to threaten you all and harm

Pearl's interests. I'm very upset about it. So, I want to make it clear that you must prioritize Pearl

above all else."

Chapter 455

The director finally realized that Eric, a wealthy heir, had a soft spot for Pearl, not Jenny. Jenny had

only used her influential connections to intimidate them.

"You could have just given me a call for such a trivial matter. Why did you come here in person..."

Being a sensible person, the director immediately agreed to Eric's request to gain favor. "Alright, I

understand. Don't worry. I'll let Miss Pearl use the set for as long as she wants!"

Pearl chuckled. "Would you believe it if he had called you?"

The director felt a bit awkward, realizing that Pearl's point made sense. However, he was too timid to

argue with her, given that she had brought such an important person with her. He simply nodded and

said, "Yes, you're absolutely right."

“Alright, we’ll come and use your set tomorrow. You can carry on with your work for today.”

Pearl’s reminder prompted the director to realize that they needed to clean up the set promptly for her use tomorrow. He humbly bid them farewell, not wanting to offend them.

As they left the set, Pearl suddenly stopped and turned to Eric. “Eric, when are you planning to return?

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“No hurry. I intend to have some fun while I’m here.” Eric turned to Pearl with a warm smile and extended an invitation. “By the way, are you free? Could you be my personal tour guide?”

A chill ran down Pearl’s spine as she heard his invitation. As expected, the moment she turned around, she saw Richard, his expression cold.

1

“I was wondering why you left suddenly. So, you went to see another man without informing me?”

Richard’s tone was calm and measured, as if he were judging a person on death row.

Nervously, Pearl clung to Richard and explained, “Richard, let me explain. It’s not what you think...”

“Oh? Did I misunderstand? Are you planning to tell me later because you’re afraid I might get angry?”

So, you decided to go ahead and do it first?" Gradually, Richard's face became somber.

Pearl chuckled and nodded helplessly. "Well, yeah."

"Do you know that you're in the wrong?"

Pearl nodded repeatedly. "Yes, I know I was wrong."

"So, how do you plan to make it up to me?" Richard moved closer to her, his expression unfathomable.

"I...I'm going to..." Pearl, who was usually articulate, found herself stammering and hesitating. She

couldn't come up with an answer.

"How about this? Let him watch nearby when we go to Luisford to shoot the k*ssing scene tomorrow."

Richard emphasized the k*ssing scene and didn't allow her to refuse.

Helplessly, Pearl couldn't resist due to Richard's stern demeanor.

Hearing that, Eric was heartbroken. "Oh, my gosh. I'll go crazy if I watch you guys k*ss."

Richard cast an icy glance at him. "Yes, I want you to watch, so you'll stop coveting my girlfriend."

"No, I mean I'll be really jealous of Pearl if I watch you guys k*ss." Eric gazed at Richard with a different

kind of emotion in his eyes.

Pearl was left dumbfounded, and Richard had no words.

“What do you mean, Eric?” A sudden sense of unease washed over Pearl.

Chapter 456

“Richard really charmed me the moment I saw him just now,” Eric said, holding his chest dramatically as if he were deeply moved.

“Eric, Richard is a man!” Helpless, Pearl suddenly regretted bringing Eric here...

“Oh, Pearl, you’ve changed!” Eric widened his eyes in mock shock. “So what if he’s a man? It doesn’t stop me from admiring him. If I had known your boyfriend was this amazing, I wouldn’t have worried so much.”

Eric’s sudden change took Pearl by surprise. She pursed her lips and teased, “Are you sure you’re just admiring him? You’re practically drooling, Eric.”

“Okay, let’s not get hung up on these details,” Eric waved dismissively and hurried over to Richard, looking at him with admiration. “Mister Richard, can I call you Richard? I want to have some fun in Hazelton for the next few days. Can you show me around?”

“No.” Richard’s mood darkened; he had never encountered such enthusiastic pursuit from another man before.

Eric pouted, looking forlorn. "But I don't know where to go. Please, I'm begging you." His coquettish demeanor had a certain charm that could be hard to resist, especially since he had a somewhat feminine appearance.

However, Richard remained unmoved and rather irritated. Even though he was relieved that Eric had lost interest in Pearl, he still disliked the man, partly because of Eric's somewhat feminine appearance.

"Can't you ask someone else for help?" Pearl suggested with a touch of amusement. "What about Jenny? Why don't you ask her to show you around?"

Eric hesitated at the mention of Jenny. "I just ignored her for your sake earlier. You saw that, right? Maybe she hates me now. Plus, I've helped you. You should return the favor and be my tour guide if Richard doesn't want to."

Of course, Pearl would be with Richard, so it made no difference which one of them showed Eric around.

"Alright, I'll take you along." Richard's decision was motivated by his desire not to let Eric spend time

alone with Pearl. He shot Eric a cold look and sounded icy.

“Okay, see you tomorrow. I’ll go back to the hotel and pack up tonight.” Eric wanted to give Pearl a parting hug, but Richard stopped him with a cold stare.

“How petty!” Eric pouted, withdrew his hands, and left.

Finally, Richard turned his attention to Pearl. “Don’t you think you should explain yourself? What happened?”

After spending a considerable amount of time with Pearl, Richard had a fairly good idea of her plans and had figured out who Eric was and his connection to Jenny. Yet, jealousy still consumed him, clouding his judgment. He pushed Pearl into a corner, saying, “It’s time for you to make it up to me, Park”

With no way to retreat, Pearl forced a smile. “I can explain

No need for explanations,” Richard interrupted. His anger flared up, even though Pearl appeared cautious and different from her usual self. “Kiss me, and I’ll forgive you.”

But we’re not alone,” Pearl protested, her face flushing. Richard’s request had caught her off guard.

They were in public, and even though they were tucked away in a corner, people could still see them.

“It’s fine. People can’t see us clearly because it’s nighttime,” Richard said seductively. “Hurry up.”

Blushing, Pearl leaned in and pecked his cheek, feeling somewhat helpless.

Chapter 457

“It doesn’t count.”

Naturally, Pearl knew what Richard meant. She stared at his l*ps and, with a sigh, leaned in to k*ss

him, hoping to end the awkwardness.

But in the next moment, Richard pulled her into his arms, wrapping his arms around her waist and

pressing her against his chest. “Don’t do this kind of thing again.”

“There’s nothing between Eric and me. I just asked him for help. Besides, he’s Jenny’s boyfriend, and

he’s the reason Jenny broke up with you.”

Richard’s eyes turned somber. “I’m not doubting you. I’m just upset that you didn’t tell me the truth.”

“Okay, I’ll be more open with you in the future, alright?” Pearl smiled sweetly, holding his neck and

blowing lightly on it.

Her willingness to cooperate seemed to convince him. “Okay, you’re forgiven.”

Pearl nodded and gently pulled away from his embrace. “Okay, let’s go back and rest. We’re going on a

trip tomorrow, right?" She then added, "With Eric."

At the mention of Eric, Richard's expression soured again. "Don't bring him up!"

"Okay, I know you're not too fond of him, but we promised to go together." Eric wasn't a bad person,

and he had been attentive to Richard in his own way. It was... interesting.

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Early the next morning, Pearl and Richard were still asleep in their hotel room when they heard a

frantic knocking on the door.

"Pearl! Come on, open up! The sun is up!" It was a familiar voice.

Battling sleepiness, Pearl stumbled to the door and found an excited and eager Eric waiting outside.

"Pearl, you look gorgeous even without makeup," Eric complimented her before glancing around. "

Where's Richard?"

"I didn't sleep in the same bed with him."

"What's the big deal? You guys are a couple, right?" Growing up in a more liberal culture, Eric

couldn't quite understand their conservative approach.

Pearl sighed and explained, "We're not married yet so let's not rush things."

"Oh..." Eric's eyes lit up. "Does that mean I have a chance?"

"Eric, this isn't the first time I've turned you down-

"Do you think Richard would ever consider me?"

Pearl realized she had misunderstood Eric's feelings. "If you keep pursuing Richard, I'll call your father to take you home."

Her threat made Eric panic. "No, please don't. You know he'll do something if you tell him."

Pearl snorted. "I'm glad you know."

Eric nodded flatteringly. "But my dad asked me when we're getting married the other day." "Pfft!" Pearl nearly choked on her saliva.

Chapter 458

Pearl wiped her lips clean and suggested, "I think you can be honest with your father and tell him that we're not suitable for each other at all."

Eric's father was an oil baron, and Pearl had once inadvertently helped him, which led to his desire to set her up with his son. Eric initially wanted to protest but was quickly captivated by Pearl's charm,

willingly becoming her boyfriend and even her prospective husband.

With a regretful sigh, Eric admitted, "Yeah, it seems like fate is against us. I've finally found a man I like, but he's your man. It's a tough situation for me."

Pearl gave him a stern look, silencing him instantly.

Just then, there was a knock on the door. Richard entered with breakfast.

Before Pearl could explain anything, Eric began denying his presence. "Mister Richard, I actually intended to visit you but ended up in the wrong room."

"I heard that." Richard pointed to the unlocked door. "You guys didn't even lock the room." Pearl breathed a sigh of relief. However, Richard continued, "Mister Eric, let's be clear. I hope you don't have any misconceptions. We're both men, and I know what you're thinking." Eric looked uncomfortable. "I don't know what you mean, Mister Richard."

Richard gave Eric a penetrating gaze, which left Eric speechless.

Pearl stepped in to defuse the brewing tension. "Alright, enough of this. Aren't we going out today?"

She smiled brightly to change the subject.

Richard had already dressed in casual sportswear, appearing tall and confident, while Eric maintained

his typically flashy attire.

Eric looked Pearl up and down and playfully remarked, "Did you notice that you're the only one not ready yet?"

Pearl glanced down at her pajamas, taken aback by the oversight. "Quit stating the obvious. Both of you, get out. I need to change."

"But I'm your bestie. There's no need for privacy between friends," Eric said stubbornly.

But Pearl pointed at Eric's face and threatened, "Are you leaving the room or not?"

"Alright, I'm going." Dejected, Eric left the room.

Pearl then turned her attention to Richard. "You won't tell me there's no need for privacy between us because we're dating, right?"

Richard gave her a chilly look. "No, I'm picky." After that, he left too.

Pearl was satisfied with Richard's response, feeling she had made the right choice in him. 'Yeah,

Richard would never... Picky?!'

"Richard Waldorf!"

Both Eric and Richard heard her yelling from inside the room.

Eric hunched his shoulders. "What did you do to upset her, Mister Richard?" In his experience,

Pearl was always composed and rarely lost her temper. This outburst was a novelty.

Richard reassured Eric, "It's nothing serious." He found Pearl's outburst adorable.

Soon, Pearl emerged from the room, ignoring Richard completely. She smiled at Eric and said, "Let's go, Eric."

Richard looked bad as he felt that he had shot himself in the foot.

"Pearl," he whispered, expecting her to mock him. However, she simply ignored him and walked away.

Chapter 459

Richard decided not to push the conversation with Pearl, assuming that she would no longer be mad at him after a while. Silently, he followed her.

However, he could no longer stay calm when Pearl bought just two bottles of water at a street stall,

leaving him with nothing.

"Pearl."

Pearl turned to him. "Mister Richard, you're filthy rich. Don't tell me you can't even afford a bottle of

water.”

Richard quickly caught up to her and walked beside her. He then grabbed one of her bottles and unscrewed the cap, taking a sip.

Pearl couldn't retrieve the bottle, so she quipped, “Mister Richard, it's rather audacious to snatch something from a lady! How shameful!”

“Yours tastes better.”

His audacious move caught Pearl by surprise. She turned away with a snort.

“Alright, don't be angry,” Richard said, turning her face towards him with a gentle look. “Won't I become a pervert if I said I wanted to look when you were changing clothes?”

But Richard did want to look at her.

“You're a pervert if you wanted to peek at my b*dy,” Pearl rolled her eyes, but her heart softened.

“Okay, lighten up. I'll pay for everything today to make up for it.”

Hearing that, Pearl burst into laughter.

Eric inched closer, his eyes shining. “Can you pay for me too?”

“You can pay for yourself, or all three of us.’

Consequently, Eric hung his head, feeling dispirited.

II

As they continued walking and chatting, they arrived at the Sanctuary of Passion, located near their hotel. This famous church in the mountains was believed to bless romantic relationships.

The hike had been tiring, and Eric, being delicate, started to complain after a short distance. Eventually, he decided to ride the cable car up the mountain.

“Do you really need the cable car for such a short distance?” Pearl expressed her disdain for Eric’s choice.

Eric looked at Pearl with a hint of shyness. “Would you like to join me? It gets lonely riding alone.”

“No, Richard and I aren’t as weak as you.” Naturally, Pearl turned him down, not wanting to take the easy way up the mountain.

With a deep sigh, Eric chose to ride the cable car alone.

Pearl and Richard continued their hike, but they noticed that there weren’t many people on

the trail due to the unfavorable weather. Most visitors had opted for the cable car.

Halfway up the mountain, a strong wind began blowing, and rain seemed imminent.

Observing Pearl's sweaty face, Richard asked, "Feeling tired? We can take a short break if you need."

"Richard, we should hurry. It looks like rain is coming. If the path gets slippery, we'll be stuck here,"

Pearl urged, her concern for the weather overtaking her fatigue.

Richard stopped trying to persuade her and quickened his pace.

Thunder rumbled, and it seemed like it was going to rain soon. With the mountaintop nearly within reach, Pearl spotted something in the distance that alarmed her.

"Richard!"

Startled by her distressed expression, Richard became vigilant. "What's wrong?"

"Look! Over there!"

Richard followed her gaze and noticed that some upright stones had suddenly begun rolling down the mountainside at a rapid pace.

Chapter 460

Worried for Pearl's safety, Richard quickly shielded her and pulled her to the bushes nearby.

The boulders continued to roll down the mountains, making loud noises as they collided with the bluestone slab stairs.

Still shaken from the near miss, Pearl looked at Richard. "I'm so glad you pulled me to the side, or else I might have been crushed by those boulders."

"Stop that nonsense." Richard looked up toward the mountaintop and noticed a few shadowy figures moving about. As expected, it was someone's scheme.

Pearl narrowed her eyes. "Did someone grab a chance to harm us knowing that we would be here today?"

"You're smart." After all the boulders had passed, Richard helped Pearl to her feet. "I think it's too risky to take the cable car now, in case we're targeted again," he suggested, taking a deep breath and eyeing the nearby bushes. "How about we ascend the mountain from here?"

An amusing thought crossed Pearl's mind. "Are you suggesting a secret rendezvous?"

Richard gave her a bewildered look, wondering if she was alright.

"Alright, I'll stop teasing. Let's start climbing." Pearl checked her phone and noticed over twenty missed

calls. She touched her nose, saying, "I bet Eric is getting anxious waiting up there."

Richard was unmoved. "Let him wait." Nevertheless, he guided her into the bushes.

When they reached the mountaintop, Eric broke out in a cold sweat, seeing them come out of the bushes instead of the trail.

"Were you two hiking or on some bush adventure?"

Pearl rolled her eyes in exasperation. "It was a survival game."

Eric scratched his head. "I don't understand."

Pearl recalled something and asked, "Did you see anyone suspicious here near the church entrance?"

Eric averted his gaze. "No, I didn't..."

"Oh, great. Eric, were you the one who tried to harm us?"

Pearl, however, quickly realized that he wasn't avoiding her because of the question but because...

"Hey, handsome. I was looking for you. Why did you avoid me? Can I add you on WhatsApp? I like delicate and soft boys like you..."

Eric pretended not to understand Capleiner. "What are you saying? I don't speak Capleiner."

The well-dressed lady, appearing to be in her forties, smiled and spoke in fluent Ealdasy. "I have some money. Would you like to be my friend?"

This elicited laughter from Pearl and a smile from Richard.

"I'm sorry, I don't need any friends. Everyone I befriend ends up having unfortunate accidents because I bring them bad luck."

The woman looked puzzled and turned to Pearl. "Miss, is he your friend?"

Pearl suppressed her smile and nodded. "Yeah, he's my friend."

"In that case, do you have his contact information? I'm willing to pay. Name your price." The lady's eyes gleamed with anticipation.

Pearl glanced at Eric and raised her brows in surprise. "Oh, Eric. You're worth a lot. I think it's good to exchange your number for money."

Eric almost teared up.

Seeing his distress, Pearl decided to stop teasing him and turned to the lady. "I apologize. My friend is suffering from AIDS. He's gay and contracted it accidentally. If you're with him, you might..."

