

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)1091-1100

Irene shouted, "You actually brought her to a hotel room? Ugh, have you no shame?"

Andrew replied coolly, "It's none of your damn business."

Then, he casually walked over to the front desk and booked a deluxe suite.

Leroy called out, "Hold up, Andrew!"

Andrew stopped and turned, shooting him a glance.

Leroy looked at the unconscious Aspen and asked, "So, are you two officially sleeping together now?"

Andrew snapped impatiently, "If you've got something to say, say it. If not, get lost."

Leroy snorted. "Relax, man. I'm just saying that you're impressive. You're actually sleeping with Aspen? Honestly, if it weren't for us being related, I'd be tempted too. She's seriously top-tier-any man would want a shot."

Andrew sneered. "Is that so? Well, you're even more of a shameless animal than I thought."

Leroy's temper flared. "And who are you to insult me, Andrew? Don't forget, the woman you're sleeping with is still a Stevens. She's still one of ours. So, you better be ready to pay the price for that."

"That G-Wagon of yours-still driving it? If not, hand it over. Consider it payment for sleeping with Aspen."

Andrew was honestly impressed. Leroy had been eyeing his ride since their time back in Jayrodale. That idiot had the thickest skin he had ever seen-persistent to a ridiculous degree.

Just then, Christina spoke coldly. "Andrew, I never thought you'd end up accepting a woman you once hated, someone who hurt you. Shows what kind of man you really are-you'd throw away your principles just to get laid."

Andrew said with complete indifference, "You can say and think whatever you want. That's your business. But yes, you're right. I've accepted Aspen because she's miles better than you in every way."

Christina's frosty expression darkened. "Do you really think Aspen is better than me? Andrew, you think I'd believe you're not just saying that to piss me off? Tell me-what exactly makes Aspen better than me?"

They were both from the Stevens family, but now Aspen had clearly grown close to Andrew. By the looks of it, Aspen was already one of Andrew's women, and that stung Christina with jealousy and rage.

After all, she had once begged, groveled, and still failed to win Andrew back. Yet, Aspen was the one lying in his arms.

Andrew said calmly, "Aspen's better than you in every single way. So Christina, do me a favor and stay far away from me. This little obsession you have is pathetic. You're just making yourself look worse."

Christina let out a bitter laugh, her voice tinged with fury. "Andrew, Aspen's badly hurt, isn't she? Most likely because of you, right? From the looks of it, you're surrounded by enemies in this city. You're barely holding on."

Andrew repeated coldly, "Still none of your damn business. In fact, it's none of your whole family's damn business."

Then, he carried Aspen into the elevator, heading straight for their room.

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Down in the lobby, Christina's whole family stood there fuming.

Irene snapped, "Christie, thank God you didn't get back together with that little bastard. Look at him-he's even sleeping with Aspen. I'm so furious I could scream!"

Leroy rolled his eyes. "Mom, why are you even mad? You're just pissed that Andrew chose Aspen instead of Christie, right? Admit it—you're jealous and bitter!"

Irene's face flushed with embarrassment. "Shut your mouth! Grown-ups are talking—who asked you to chime in?"

Leroy was about to fire back when he noticed how strange Christina looked and asked, "Christie, what are you thinking right now? You've got that look... like some villainess from a movie."

Christina answered calmly, "Right now, I'm relying on Quinton, and Andrew is basically his sworn enemy. So if I tell him where Andrew and Aspen are staying... don't you think that's the right thing to do?"

Irene jumped in without hesitation. "Of course it is. That's exactly what you should do. Quinton has done so much for our family. He sends me gift cards for spa days, bracelets, and gold rings-he's always thinking of us! Naturally, we should return the favor and help him out."

Leroy added viciously, "Exactly. Andrew and Aspen are clearly on the run. If we

tell Quinton, he'll make sure the Goldings get word. Those two lovebirds won't know what hit them."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew's room was Room 9527. He unlocked the door and laid Aspen gently on the bed. As usual, he checked the space thoroughly to make sure everything was secure before preparing to lie down and get some rest.

However, just as he was about to close his eyes, he noticed Aspen's body burning up with fever.

Andrew cursed under his breath, 'Great... Now she has a high fever.'

Nonetheless, he knew that for someone with a weaker constitution, this kind of fever after sustaining injuries was normal since the immune system would be completely worn down. He fetched some ice and started cold compresses to bring her temperature down.

Yet, even after trying for a while, Andrew realized it was not helping much at all. Left with no better option, he had to resort to the last resort of stripping Aspen down completely.

Since they had left in a rush earlier, she'd only had on a thin top, which made it easy for Andrew to pull it off. Her chest was now completely exposed, and her perky little breasts bounced teasingly in front of him.

For a second, Andrew felt a wave of heat rush to his head from the view.

'Focus,' he reminded himself. 'A proper master doesn't just mess around with his servant whenever he pleases.'

After giving himself that internal pep talk, Andrew reached for her tight jeans and peeled those off too. He let out a quiet sigh of relief that she was not wearing a miniskirt with thigh-high stockings. He was unsure if he would survive that temptation.

Once Aspen was completely undressed, her body temperature finally started to come down.

Only then did Andrew notice how shapely her legs really were. They were long and lean-classic beauty essentials. She reminded him of Lauren, who also had those long, fair, runway-worthy legs. The only difference was that Lauren had a rounder, perkier backside.

On the other hand, Aspen was more like a delicate girl next door, stripped down and vulnerable. Nothing about her body screamed "extra", but everything was just right in every place. It was the kind of figure that came together in perfect harmony-not an inch too much or too little.

Shoving away the rising heat in his body, Andrew turned off the lights and collapsed on the couch.

Why was a billionaire CEO of an investment firm sleeping on a couch instead of booking a separate room?

Why did a handsome, wealthy man choose not to share a bed with the gorgeous woman lying there?

Well, Andrew did not want to look too desperate. Booking a separate room would have been boring since he would miss out on all the visual perks right in front of him. However, jumping into bed with her right away would have been predatory behavior.

Sure, Aspen could have been his with just a snap of his fingers, but forcing things was not his style. Letting things unfold naturally? That was the true art and a much better experience.

Just as Andrew drifted off into sleep, Christina sent Quinton a message.

Christina: [Andrew is staying at the same hotel as the three of us.]

It was short, straight to the point, and laced with spite. Quinton read it, then chuckled coldly. He did not rush to tip off the Goldings just yet. Instead, he stared at the message with amusement.

He mumbled, "Women... once they fall out of love, they can go from 'I'd die for you' to 'I wish you were dead and buried.' And clearly, that's exactly what Christina's doing with Andrew.

"Sometimes really don't get what goes on in that kid's head. If I were him, I'd have just fed Christina a few sweet lies and won her back. Once I had her eating out of my hand, I'd take what I wanted, use her up, and then swallow the Stevens Group whole. Everyone wins."

Quinton scoffed. Then, he picked up his phone and called Elon. Despite both being heirs of the Five Apex Families, he never thought much of Elon. He thought the guy was fat, had

terrible taste, and married someone who looked like she came straight out of a dumpster fire.

Not to mention, Elon had zero tricks up his sleeves.

In a world where all firstborns were trained in scheming and survival, Elon stood out for being hopelessly naive. Meanwhile, Quinton saw himself as a master of manipulation and dirty tricks.

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It was all part of Quinton's plan to make it easier to control his subordinates once he inherited the Wrights. Moreover, the fatter Elon was, the narrower his thinking

seemed to get.

Still, despite looking down on him, Quinton was not about to waste a perfect pawn. So, in the middle of the night, he made the call.

As he expected, Elon had not gone to bed either. After all, with Andrew still walking around free, how could they possibly sleep?

"Elon, I've got Andrew's location. He's staying at the Crown Hotel," Quinton said the moment the line connected.

Elon's voice on the other end sounded totally disinterested. "Got it."

Quinton frowned. "What's up with you, Elon? If you know where Andrew is, then get your people from the Goldings over there and take him out! Or what, is your family's kill order just for show? Move your damn men already!"

He could not stand how lifeless Elon sounded, so he kept pressing him.

However, Elon replied flatly, "Quinton, I'm not in the mood to deal with Andrew right now. If you're done, I'm hanging up."

Quinton froze in disbelief. He slowly started getting pissed, wondering what the hell was wrong with.

Why was Elon not in the mood to deal with Andrew? After all, the Goldings had issued an official manhunt. Logically, eliminating Andrew would be a top priority.

"You're not seriously scared of Andrew, are you?" Quinton taunted, hoping to light a fire under him.

Elon just snapped, clearly annoyed. "It's not about fear. The Goldings are dealing with something else right now. Anyway, that's it."

Just like that, he hung up before Quinton could ask another question.

Quinton stared at his phone, completely baffled. He wondered what was happening with the Goldings, especially since he had not heard anything yet.

Even Richard, the head of the Goldings, had already been played by Andrew, his reputation practically in ruins. Despite that, Elon did not give a damn about revenge.

Quinton could not wrap his head around it.

Had the Goldings turned into a bunch of cowards?

The more he thought about it, the more irritated he felt. After all, he had already passed on Andrew's location, but nobody lifted a finger to handle it.

Unable to sleep, Quinton opened a group chat with some government friends and asked, [Anyone know if something happened with the Goldings recently?]

Responses flooded in almost immediately.

As one of the Five Apex Families' golden boys, Quinton did not even have to try- there were always people lining up to butter up to him.

[Still awake, Mr. Wright? Wanna come out and join a threesome or something?]

[As far as I know, nothing's happened with the Goldings. Why do you ask?]

[I know! I know! Some major scandal broke about them today!]

Seeing someone with actual intel, Quinton perked up and quickly followed up.

The guy typed in the group chat, [This just leaked earlier today. You know Elon's wife is from the Rhodes

family, right? That woman's a legend. Word is, she went and cheated on him-big time,

[And I'm not talking about once or twice... she pulled an eleven-man

train! No joke. The guy must be impotent or something, because she literally ran off to have an

eleven-way orgy. Isn't that just

absolutely nuts? I was shocked to

hear it!]

After reading that, Quinton shut his phone and fell into a deep, awkward silence. Suddenly, he understood why Elon was too wrecked to care about Andrew right now.

Honestly, if something like that happened to anyone, it would crush

them. Your wife sneaking out for an eleven-man orgy? That was

next-level humiliation-the kind would make the sky feel like it was crashing down.

"Elon, man... I'll give you a moment of silence. Three full minutes... just for you," Quinton said with mock sympathy.

Then, he burst out laughing, shameless and entertained. At the same time, he urged everyone in the group to share the juicy scandal.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Late at night at the Golding family estate, the massive mansion blazed with lights from top to bottom. Strangely, though, the entire place was dead silent, not a single person in sight. Only the grand hall was occupied-several figures stood beneath the towering chandeliers.

At the center sat Richard, head of the Golding family, high on the main seat with an icy expression carved into his face.

The butler stepped forward and leaned in to whisper in his ear. "Sir, there's an update on the bounty."

Richard's eyes flickered. He growled, "Well? Where's Andrew's head?"

The butler's face twisted slightly. "We didn't recover Andrew's head, sir... but three members of the assassin group were found dead at the villa. We believe it was Andrew's residence here, but by the time our men arrived, the place had already been cleaned out."

The flicker of satisfaction in Richard's eyes disappeared, replaced with pure disgust. He hissed, "How useless."

Knowing his place, the butler backed away quickly without another word.

Richard's foul mood darkened further as his bloodshot eyes swept across the room. There was Elon, his eldest son slumped, broken, a hollow shell of himself.

Kenny and Sherilyn were on their knees in the center of the hall, begging for mercy over and over again.

Richard stood and stalked toward Elon, his voice cold and sharp. "You're acting like the world is ending. Over what? Some little scandal?"

Elon's lips trembled. "Dad, you're right to be angry. But I never imagined I'd marry someone so filthy and shameless. She's disgraced the entire Golding name."

Richard snorted. "You should reflect on why you brought that kind of woman into this family. But as a Golding, you need to understand that this sort of humiliation is nothing. You're expected to rise above it. Now, I'm giving you a chance to redeem yourself."

Elon looked up. "Huh?"

Richard grinned cruelly and tossed a dagger at Elon's feet. "Go kill the woman who disgraced our family."

Elon, already pale, went ghost white.

Richard's tone turned even colder. "Think hard. Either you do it yourself, or someone else will-because, at this point, your role as the heir means nothing. You freeze in crisis, you hesitate, you flinch. That's not a man fit to take over the Goldings.

"If you won't act, Archer will return from the military and take your place."

Elon's hands trembled as he reached for the blade, but the cold steel made him instantly recoil.

Richard shook his head. "Elon, you've never been half as brave or capable as your younger brother. His martial training advanced rapidly-he's the backbone of this family now.

"Since joining the military, Archer's become even more outstanding. He was just promoted to Colonel. He's the pride of the Goldings. And you? You came first, but that's about the only thing you've got going for you.

"Fat, weak, and now a coward too. I'm asking you to kill the woman who betrayed you and disgraced our name, and you can't even do that?

How Could I ever hand over the

family to someone like you?e?

could you possibly stand against Andrew?"

Tears streamed down Elon's face. He begged, "Dad, I'm not a coward. I'm not weak. But Sherilyn... she's still my wife. I-I can't bring myself to kill her."

Richard responded indifferently. "A man without ruthlessness is no man at all. If you can't be merciless when it counts, you'll be walked on, chewed up, and spit out.

"That softness in you? That's exactly why Sherilyn felt emboldened to go out and sleep around. So yes, she's to blame-but so are you. You let it happen. You enabled it."

Elon clenched the dagger and began walking toward Sherilyn. She had her mouth stuffed with cotton, but she cried and screamed as best she could, her face twisted in terror.

Kenny roared, "Richard, you cold-blooded bastard! You're seriously forcing your own son to murder his wife? Are you even human?"

Richard chuckled and stepped in front of Kenny. "Oh, Kenny, what are you barking about? Let's not forget-you raised this filthy little slut. That's on you too."

With that, he backhanded Kenny across the face, splitting his lips and spilling blood. "Now crawl over here and lick my toes."

Returning to his seat, Richard gave the order casually, as if asking someone to pass the salt.

Kenny was humiliated beyond words. "Richard, what the hell did you say? You've lost your damn mind! I'm Elon's father-in-law-not your goddamn dog!"

Richard snorted. "Does it really matter? Sherilyn married into the Goldings, and your whole family rose up riding on our coattails. But at the end of the day, in my eyes, you're still nothing more than a crawling worm."

He waved his hand, and two burly enforcers stepped forward. Then, they grabbed Kenny by the hair and dragged him across the floor, slamming him down and shoving his face toward Richard's feet.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

At that moment, Kenny would much rather die than suffer the humiliation. He had fought tooth and nail to get Sherilyn married into the Goldings, thinking it was their one-way ticket to the top-a guaranteed leap from rags to royalty.

However, he never imagined that in a family like the Goldings, they would stop treating someone like a human altogether once they lost their worth. They were tossed aside the moment they were no longer useful.

Richard looked over at Elon, who still had not made a move, and let out a cold laugh. "If you can't do it, get out of my sight."

Elon numbly stepped aside, staring at the weeping Sherilyn as if she were a stranger. His eyes were hollow, and his body did not move.

Suddenly, three men and eight women were dragged into the hall and forced to their knees before Richard. Each one wore a look of absolute horror.

"So, you're the ones who were fooling around with Sherilyn, right?" Richard asked calmly.

None of the group who had participated in the infamous eleven-person orgy dared utter a word.

Richard's voice remained flat. "I'll only ask once. Who slept with my daughter-in-law?"

Just as he expected, two of the men cracked immediately. They crawled forward, sobbing and begging for mercy. "Please, Mr. Golding Senior! We were wrong! We were so wrong!"

Richard's face held no emotion. "Kill them."

The enforcers stepped forward with gleaming blades, ready to slit their throats. But then, from the remaining eight women, three suddenly broke down in terror.

They trembled violently, wet themselves, and crawled forward alongside the two men.

This time, even Richard looked stunned.

Elon, the guards, and even the Golding elite standing nearby were completely speechless.

After all, the men coming clean was terrible enough. But now the women were confessing too?

What the hell did that mean?

Richard narrowed his eyes. "You three were involved too?"

The three knelt figures slowly raised their heads, revealing strikingly beautiful faces. However, when they spoke, their voices were coarse and unmistakably male.

"Sir... the truth is... we're not actually women."

"We're men-crossdressers. Please, forgive us. We had to do it... it's part of our work."

"Ms. Sherilyn has a very particular taste."

Richard sat frozen. Sherilyn had not just hooked up with random guys, but she had also gotten involved with three crossdressers.

Elon was not just a cheated husband-it was a next-level embarrassment.

He refused to accept it and shouted, "No... I don't believe it! They're lying! These three are definitely women! They didn't touch Sherilyn! No way!"

Shouting in denial, Elon stormed up to the trio and yanked at their hair and faces.

The hair did not come off-it was real.

The skin? Smoother than most women.

After a full inspection, Elon let out a breath of relief. "They're women. They're definitely women. Thank God. It's bad enough with two guys-I can't take five."

However, one of the Golding

enforcers, who was known to

frequent underground clubs and had

seen it all, cleared his throat and whispered, "Uh... Sir... today's plastic

surgery, gender reassignment, and makeup skills are scarily good.

"Just feeling around won't tell you anything. If you really want to be sure... you'll have to check what's down there."

Elon froze. Then, he barked, "You three-drop your pants. Now!"

The three exchanged awkward glances but did not dare disobey. One by one, they unzipped and pulled down.

Elon stared.

Then gasped.

He was instantly reminded of a trip to Teialan when he once visited a street known for ladyboys-figures with flawless skin, long legs, and beautiful faces... until they pulled something out that made his jaw drop.

That was exactly what he was facing now.

Each one of the three had something bigger than his own.

Richard sat stiffly in his chair, so enraged his entire body trembled He was seconds from blowing a gasket. In all his years leading the Goldings, he had faced massive political drama and deadly rivalries.

However, never something this humiliating or revolting.

"Kill them. All of them. I don't care if they're men, women, or something in between. And that whore Sherilyn-make sure she dies tonight!"

As the head of the Goldings, Richard had faced betrayals, business collapses, and high-stakes threats from every direction.

But this? This was the most outrageous, degrading scandal he had ever witnessed.

Sherilyn's death meant nothing to the Goldings-it was a stain best erased. However, the humiliation she brought would linger like a curse.

Even Kenny did not dare plead for his daughter's life. Deep down, even he knew that Sherilyn had gone too far this time.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

In the faint light of dawn, Aspen slowly woke up back at the hotel. Her body ached, and a soft groan escaped her lips as she frowned from the soreness. The last thing she remembered before blacking out was Andrew finally arriving at the villa to find her.

Everything else after that was a blur. However, she vaguely recalled him treating her wounds and undressing her.

When Aspen realized Andrew had undressed her, she bolted upright and flung the covers aside in a panic.

Her bare, pale body was fully exposed beneath the sheets, with bandages wrapped around her chest and lower abdomen.

She wondered how Andrew helped with the bandage, and if he had touched her. If he did, where did he touch?

Did he touch her chest, her thighs, or even her private part?

A sharp scream echoed through Room 9527, and Andrew jolted awake on the sofa, looking more irritated than surprised.

"What the hell? You moaning from a dream or something?"

Aspen scrambled to sit up, her face flushed with fury. "You bastard! How could you take advantage of me while I was unconscious?"

Andrew frowned. "What advantage? All I did was bandage you up and save your life. And now you're accusing me of assault? Really? Aspen, don't you think you're acting a little like the girl who bites the hand that saves her?"

Aspen nearly exploded. She clenched her teeth and shouted, "If you didn't touch me, then where the hell are my clothes? Do you expect me to believe you didn't strip me down like this?"

Andrew stood, poured himself a glass of water, and spoke flatly. "Can you not be so dramatic? I had to undress you to treat your injuries. Besides, you had a raging fever last night—if I didn't help bring your temperature down, your brain might've cooked itself."

Aspen was mortified. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she ducked back under the sheets. She hesitated, then carefully shifted her legs, checking herself.

When she noticed no pain or discomfort, she let out a tiny breath of relief—at least that had not happened.

Lifting her head again, she fixed her cold stare on Andrew. "Fine. I believe you didn't cross the line. But Andrew, you definitely saw everything, didn't you?"

Andrew looked at her like she was an idiot and gave a soft snort. "Of course I did. I took off your clothes, didn't I? And for the record, I even touched a few places. Not bad, honestly. Feels good."

Aspen's face turned scarlet with rage and humiliation. "You're disgusting!"

Andrew leaned against the sofa, a smirk playing on his lips. "You're really something, Aspen. You're not a kid anymore. Is it really necessary to freak out over something so minor? Plenty of women your age are already planning their second kid."

Aspen gritted her teeth. "I may have a lot of flaws, Andrew. But one thing I've never been is promiscuous. Now, do you have any clothes I can change into? I want a shower and something clean to wear."

Andrew shook his head. "You can't shower—your wounds won't allow it. But I already asked the hotel to send a change of clothes."

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Soon enough, room service arrived with two neatly packaged outfits—one for a man, and one for a woman.

Andrew changed first but noticed Aspen still had not moved. He asked, "What's the holdup? Hurry up and change. We need to head downstairs."

Aspen grabbed the black stockings, high heels, and a tight blazer-skirt combo from the bed, then threw them all straight at his face.

Her chest heaved with fury. "You sick pervert! What the hell kind of outfit is this? How am I supposed to wear this?!"

Andrew picked up the stockings and inspected them with mild amusement. "Huh... didn't expect this hotel to have such excellent taste. Maybe just wear it. Make do."

Aspen sneered. "Oh, so now you're blaming the hotel? I know you—you ordered these!"

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Fine, sure. Let's say I did. But I never specified what to send—I just asked them to deliver a proper work outfit for my assistant. Apparently, they really nailed my preference."

Aspen had no other option—either she wore them or not. Swallowing her shame, she forced herself to put on the three-piece outfit from hell. When she finally stepped out of the dressing room, Andrew took one look and was genuinely caught off guard.

Long, slender legs wrapped in sheer black stockings, heels clicking with every step, and a form-fitting navy-blue skirt suit that hugged her curves so tightly, it drew out every

flawless line of her silhouette.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"Not bad. You look stunning," Andrew commented with a smirk.

Aspen silently cursed him for being a pervert. Though she was fully dressed now, her expression remained dark, and her mind kept flashing back to the thought that he might have touched every inch of her body—especially the most private parts.

Her skin crawled just thinking about it.

After a quiet breakfast downstairs, the two returned to the villa they had been staying in.

"Pack your things. We're leaving. It's not safe to stay here anymore," Andrew said casually.

Aspen frowned, feeling both annoyed and disappointed. "The house was perfect, and it was paid for, too. Such a waste, all thanks to you!"

Andrew let out a cold laugh. "Then why don't you stay behind?"

Aspen's face went pale in an instant, and she did not dare argue further. At this point, she and Andrew were practically bound together-if she did not stick with him, she was not sure she would live to see the next day.

They gathered a few essentials and headed back to the hotel.

"I think we should get separate rooms. I'd feel more comfortable that way," Aspen suggested.

Andrew shot that down immediately. "No. We're staying together."

Aspen grew irritated. "Andrew, what the hell do you want from me? I'm telling you now-I'll never give in to your pervy demands!"

Andrew looked at her with disgust. "You seriously think I'm that desperate for you? I want us in the same room so you don't end up getting assassinated in your sleep. Get it?"

Aspen fell silent, knowing he had a point. If she stayed alone, she might not even get the chance to scream before someone took her out.

"I've got a meeting today with one of our major project suppliers," Aspen said after answering a call. "The guy has serious backing. I need you to come with me."

Andrew nodded. "Good. Time we started making a name for our company. It'll also set me up nicely for when I go head-to-head with the Driscolls."

Aspen scoffed. "You're seriously throwing your future away for Lauren."

The Driscolls were one of the Three Titans, not the family one would casually provoke. To her, Andrew was just another moth throwing himself into the flame.

Andrew did not reply. He simply followed her to the car, and they drove together to an upscale private club.

"Hi, I'm Aspen Stevens from Supreme Capital Group," she said politely at the entrance. "I'm here by appointment with Mr. Davon Parks from Phoenixdream Enterprises."

Two large, intimidating bodyguards flanked the entrance, standing like statues. They gave her a brief look, then stepped aside. "Ms. Stevens, please go in."

When Andrew tried to follow, they stopped him. One of the guards said firmly, "Apologies, sir. Mr. Parks only invited the lady. You'll have to wait outside."

Andrew narrowed his eyes but said nothing.

Aspen said, "It's fine. Just find a spot to sit. I won't be long."

"Sure." Andrew nodded.

The moment Aspen walked inside, he turned and stepped right back up to the guards. He growled, "Move."

The two guards blinked, then burst out laughing in unison.

"Where the hell did this clown come from? If you don't want to die, get the hell out of here!"

"You got any idea where you are right now? Telling us to move? Who the hell do you think you are?"

Andrew's smile did not change. "Wow. Fancy little club you've got here. Threatening people at the door?"

One of the guards sneered.

"Threatening? Hell, I'll slap the teeth out of your mouth right now! I

why you're really here-you're

worried that girl's gonna get tak

advantage of, right? Well, letme put

your

mind at ease. Mr. Parks already gave the order. Tonight, she's getting ruined. We're talking used and broken."

The other guard chuckled darkly.

"You'd better leave while you stillet Pwoman walks out of this

can.

place untouched. Why else do you

think Mr. Parks does business here?"

Andrew still wore that same calm smile. "Mind if I ask who owns this classy establishment?"

The guards puffed their chests proudly. "No secret. It's owned by the Haywoods- one of the Five Apex Families. Scared yet? You should be!"

Then, they burst into laughter.

Suddenly, two brutal slaps landed hard across both of their faces. The guards collapsed instantly, unconscious before they even hit the ground.

"If this place belongs to the Haywoods, then I don't have to be polite anymore," Andrew muttered coldly.

He stepped over their bodies like

they were trash and marched straight into the club. He and Seth were already at each other's throats anyway-this would just be one more fire added to the blaze.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

In one of the rooms inside the private club.

"Mr. Parks, I'm still recovering from my injuries, so I truly can't drink. I hope you'll understand," Aspen said politely, her brow tightening.

She had come expecting a legitimate business conversation-a contract negotiation. However, judging by the atmosphere and Davon's sleazy expression, it was clear he had other intentions.

Fat-faced and beady-eyed, Davon swirled a glass of red wine as he leered at her. He said, "Ms. Stevens, you must be new around here. I guess you're not familiar with how things work in this city.

"When you sit down to talk business, drinks and fun go hand in hand. Loosen up. Don't be so uptight. Tell you what-down this bottle, and I'll sign that contract on the spot. Deal done."

Aspen replied calmly, "I'm sorry, Mr. Parks. I don't drink at all. But if you sign the deal today, once I've recovered, I'll gladly toast with you to celebrate."

Davon's smile faded, and his tone sharpened with irritation. "Aspen, my patience has limits. I squeezed you into my schedule out of courtesy. Don't go thinking your tiny little investment firm is worth my time.

"You want this deal? Be a good girl, drink the wine, and then... let me have some fun. Please me, and everything will move forward nicely."

His eyes began to openly roam over her body, lingering without shame. He thought Aspen was drop-dead gorgeous, especially today because she was dressed in those black

stockings and tight skirt. He imagined running his hands up those long legs inch by inch, and the pleasure that would follow.

Aspen caught the lust in his eyes, and fury instantly surged through her. She rose from her seat, voice cold and sharp. "Mr. Parks, I came here under invitation to discuss business. I'm not for sale. If this is what you meant by 'negotiation', then excuse me-I'm not staying for this garbage."

With that, she turned to leave.

Davon slammed his wine glass to the floor and let out a mocking laugh. "You.bitch. You came here acting all innocent, huh? You think you're too good for this? Then what the hell are you doing dressed like a slut? Don't pretend I don't know your game. You dressed like that in hopes to trade your body for this deal."

He stormed toward the door and blocked it, his face twisted with aggression. "You better rethink this. Get on your knees and suck me off. Then, throw your legs over my shoulders and let me really enjoy myself. Otherwise, you're not

walking out of this roomContent

Aspen had not expected Davon to be so bold, so vulgar, so disgusting. Her fury exploded, and she growled, "You disgusting pig-drop dead!"

With a swift motion, she lifted her leg and delivered a vicious kick straight to his groin-black stockings, stilettos and all.

Davon let out a blood-curdling screech, collapsing onto the floor and clutching himself, writhing in agony. He could feel that something down there had definitely snapped.

"You bitch! How dare you kick me?! If I don't pound you into the ground tonight, I don't deserve to be Phoenixdream Enterprises' vice CEO! Somebody! Get in here! Lock this whore down-I'm gonna break her!"

His screams rang out like a siren, and within seconds, about five enforcers stormed into the room.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aspen's expression fell immediately. If she had not been injured, this group of muscle heads would not have even made her blink. However, her chest wound had just been freshly bandaged by Andrew-if she fought now, the stitches would rip open for sure.

Still clutching in pain, Davon was helped to his feet by two of his men. He stared at Aspen with a twisted grin.

He taunted, "What, getting scared now, slut? Do you think you're walking out of here after that? Think again. Let me be real clear-the only reason I agreed to meet you today was to screw you. If I don't have you writhing and begging under me tonight, then this deal is far from over."

Aspen's face twisted in fury. "Why don't you go home and screw your mother instead, you fat freak?"

Davon roared, "Get her! Hold this bitch down for me!"

His goons lunged at Aspen like starving wolves.

Suddenly, a figure shot in from the side and landed in front of Aspen like a shadow. Then, three kicks flew out in the blink of an eye, each one brutal and precise. The bodyguards were sent crashing across the room, and they groaned in agony as they hit the floor, unable to get back up.

Davon's eyes went wide with shock as he stared at the intruder. "Who the hell... Who the hell are you? I'm the Vice CEO of Phoenixdream Enterprises! How dare you interrupt me!"

The man, of course, was Andrew. He did not even glance at Davon but instead looked straight at Aspen, his brow furrowed.

"This is what you call a business meeting? If I hadn't shown up when I did, you'd be bleeding out as someone's 'first blood' trophy."

The bluntness in his words made Aspen embarrassed her badly. She hissed, "You bastard! You really think I'm that helpless? Even with injuries, I could've taken those losers down in my sleep!"

Andrew chuckled coldly. "Sure. Those guys, maybe. But take a look outside- think you've got those covered too?"

As soon as he spoke, heavy footsteps echoed in the hall.

From every direction, black-suited enforcers poured in-dozens upon dozens of them, at least a hundred strong. Many carried weapons, their faces stone-cold, and their eyes murderous.

"T-This is insane..." Aspen breathed, the blood draining from her face.

This was not a private club-it was a damn fortress run by criminals.

Moments later, the club manager appeared. He was a bald man with tattooed arms and a scarred face.

Davon hobbled toward him, his rage boiling over. "Mr. Haywood, thank God you're here! Take these two down! I want them ruined!"

Rufus Haywood scowled. "What happened to you down there, Mr. Parks?"

vel

Davon yelled, "What do you think? That bitch kicked me! I don't care how you handle it, but your club better give me a damn good explanation! I pay you people fortune every year, and now bget humiliated like this on your turf?!"

Davon had taken advantage of countless women inside these walls, and this was the first time he had ever tasted real shame or pain.

Rufus' face darkened. "Don't worry, Mr. Parks. We never mistreat our top clients."

He turned to Andrew and Aspen, his expression turning hostile. "You. Get on your knees and apologize to Mr.

Then, hand over a million as

Pmpensation."

"And you," he said, eyes shifting to Aspen, "Mr. Parks likes you. So be smart about this-strip, and keep him company."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aspen glared coldly. "Says who? What is this? Are the Haywoods running a den of thugs now? Does no one here know what decency even looks like?"

Rufus let out a sinister chuckle. "Sweetheart, did you really think this club was built for a legitimate business? You rookies must be first-timers here. This entire club belongs to Seth Haywood himself.

"And what we offer isn't just champagne and contract signings. We provide services that rich men like Mr. Parks truly value. You want logic and fairness? Girl, after you've been taken a few times, you'll realize reason doesn't matter. Power and money are all that do."

Aspen's face darkened instantly when she heard that it was Seth, the same man who had once pursued her and paraded around like a golden boy from a noble lineage. She never would have guessed he was secretly running this kind of hellhole.

She was glad she never placed any hopes on him. But right now? They were surrounded by over 100 armed guards. Injured or not, there was no way she could take them all down.

She looked at Andrew, a trace of urgency in her voice. "Come up with something. What do we do?"

Andrew shrugged nonchalantly. "What do we do? We fight our way out. What else?"

Aspen blinked, wondering if he was serious about fighting out. This demon was really that confident. After all, these were 100 trained muscles, fully armed.

Davon, still holding his stomach, sneered. "Fight your way out? Who do you think you are? You think you can take on 100 guys with bare hands? You messed with the wrong man today. You're both dead meat!"

Rufus scoffed. "Last chance, punk. Get down on your knees. Apologize to Mr. Parks and pay him a million in damages. If he's in a good mood, I might let you crawl out of here alive."

Andrew tilted his head slightly. "Thanks for reminding me. Let me lay my terms down too. I'm giving the Haywoods and this pig-faced Mr. Parks one chance. You get on your knees and apologize to us. Do it now, and I'll let it go. Otherwise... none of you are walking out of here in one piece."

Rufus was stunned for a second, and then his face twisted into a snarl. "You really are asking to die. You come into our territory, mouth off like that, and threaten us? Not crippling you here and now would be an insult to the Haywoods' name!"

Davon spat through clenched teeth. "Aspen, you're not actually betting your life on this clown, are you? Look at him he's gone delusional. You better get over here and give me what I want, or I swear, you'll be begging for death before this night is over."

Aspen sneered in disgust. "I told you-go home and screw your mother, you fat bastard."

Davon exploded. "Mr. Haywood! I want him dead! Kill him now—and if he dies, I'll take full responsibility!"

However, Andrew started throwing punches before Rufus could even give the command. Within seconds, the room erupted in chaos-body after body hit the floor, groaning in pain.

Not a single one of the Haywoods' enforcers could even last a full round.

Aspen stood frozen, stunned. She knew Andrew could fight and had seen him take out elites before.

But this? This was something else.

He was not just winning he was bulldozing through everyone like a human wrecking ball.

With a brutal stomp, Andrew kicked Davon square in the jaw. The fat man screamed as he flew back and crashed into a table, sending glasses and plates flying across the room.

Davon's wail was guttural. "Mr. Haywood! Kill him! Kill that bastard! If anything happens to me in this goddamn club, I swear—I'll make sure your family pays!"

Rufus's face turned a deep shade of rage. He could not believe that Andrew dared to cause a scene under his nose, and he wanted Andrew dead.

Rufus could not afford to let this slide. With a cold snort, he leaped into the fray himself.

As a Haywood, he was not just

some amateur—he was a full-fledged senior grandmaster.

Running the club for Seth meant in the end, whenever he

dealing with all kinds of

troublemakers and hard cases, but

in

was required, every situation would be resolved flawlessly.