

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

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Aspen's eyes never left Andrew as she asked nervously, "Andrew, do you need my help?"

Andrew calmly replied with just two words, "No need."

With a casual motion, he slapped a thug holding a machete so hard the man flew back. Without even looking, he threw his elbow backward, smashing into another guy swinging a steel pipe like he was volunteering to get wrecked. The blow crushed his nose flat, and he howled in pain.

Andrew's expression did not change—no anger, excitement, just pure calm. To him, these guys were not even worth warming up for.

Then, he raised his hand and collided directly with Rufus.

Rufus looked shocked. "You actually caught my Haywood Strike? Kid, I gotta admit, you've got some skill."

Andrew smirked coldly. "Only 'some'?"

"Fine, try this next strike and see what happens!" Rufus tossed aside his jacket, revealing a tight shirt stretched over rippling muscles and a solid chest.

Andrew scoffed. "Bring it on. You think I'm scared of you?"

Rufus sneered, "Kid, you clearly don't know who you're dealing with. I was a special forces soldier, and I come from the Haywood family. You're way out of your league—"

Before he could finish the word, Andrew's fist rocketed straight for his face.

Rufus grinned and lifted his arm to block, but in the next second, his entire arm snapped with a sickening crunch. It was like getting hit by a freight train.

His face twisted in horror, not even having time to scream before Andrew sent him flying through the cement wall in the hallway. He crashed to the ground, coughed up several mouthfuls of blood, and blacked out instantly.

The remaining thugs looked like their souls had just left their bodies. To them, Rufus was a legend of this club—untouchable, unbeatable. Yet, Andrew had dropped him with just one punch.

Andrew swung again, slapping down thugs like he was slicing through butter. More than a dozen of them cried out in agony, holding

heads and writhing on the floor. The

rest of them froze, then met

slowly backing away with wide, terrified eyes.

Andrew stood tall, face blank, as he growled, "If you don't want to die, get the hell out of here."

Instantly, the remaining men

scrambled and bolted out of the club. Sure, they worked under the Haywoods, but they were not about to die for them-not with a killing machine like Andrew standing in their path.

Aspen finally exhaled, her gaze filled with complicated emotion. He was terrifyingly strong, so strong that she did not even have the will to fight back.

At this rate, how was she ever going to escape his grasp?

Davon looked like he was about to

piss himself. He stammered, "D-Don't come any closer! I'm warning you! Phoenixdream

Enterprises has a serious influence in the capital. If you touch me, you're as good as dead!"

This was the first time in his life he had ever seen a man like Andrew.

Even with over 100 thugs, armed with all kinds of weapons, backed by someone like Rufus-none of it mattered.

Who the hell was this guy? Was he even human?

Andrew's face remained cold as he stepped forward and slapped Davon across the face. "I must've gone deaf. Say that again?"

Shaking with fear and rage, Davon clutched his face and shouted, "I said, I'm the Vice CEO of Phoenixdream Enterprises! If you lay another finger on me, I swea

Two more slaps landed clean, making Davon's vision blur. Blood streamed from his nose as he cried, "I-I'm sorry! I give up! Please, sir... stop hitting me! I was wrong, okay?"

Andrew sneered. "Go on, keep name-dropping. Keep acting like you're some big shot."

Davon's chubby body trembled all over. "I won't! I swear I won't! W-We were negotiating, right? I'll sign the contract! I'll sign it now! Just please don't hit me anymore!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew stood by and waited patiently as Davon obediently signed the contract.

Aspen said coldly, "Let's go. I never want to see this fat pig again."

Davon's bruised and swollen face twisted with hatred and bitterness. He silently cursed, 'You little bastard... and you too, Aspen, you damn tramp. Just wait. I'm the Vice CEO of Phoenixdream Enterprises-there's no way I'm swallowing this humiliation for nothing.'

Andrew let out a cold laugh. "Hold on, I'm not done with him yet."

He lightly patted Davon's chubby cheek and sneered, "I know exactly what you're thinking. You're probably hoping that as soon as we walk out that door, you can call in backup and try to take back control, right?"

Davon's face froze as panic flashed in his eyes. He quickly shook his head and stammered, "N-No, sir! I swear, I'd never do something like that! I wouldn't dare!"

Andrew scoffed. "Whether you dare or not, I honestly couldn't care less. I just want to ask you one thing-so you were planning to get your hands on my sexy assistant, huh?"

Davon's eyes instinctively darted to Aspen's body, especially those long legs wrapped in black tights. He swallowed hard and quickly shook his head. "No, no, never! She's your woman—I wouldn't even dream of it!"

Andrew chuckled. "At least you know your place. Then, let me ask again—do you think she's pretty? Be honest."

Davon gave a pitiful smile and nodded cautiously. "She's gorgeous. Totally stunning. If I could have a woman like that, I'd give her everything I own—no hesitation. Hell, I'd even let her break my ribs and boil them into soup if that's what she wanted."

Andrew raised a brow, clearly amused. "For real? Personally, I think she's just average. Why do you look so desperate?"

Davon muttered indignantly, "Mr. Lloyd, that's because you've never gone hungry. Guys like me, sure, I've had my fair share of women, but someone at that level? Someone who makes your head spin the moment you see her? Never. But Aspen? She's pure fire."

"Those long legs in black tights, that perfect body-man, I could enjoy her for three whole years and still not get tired of her. So take my advice-don't take your blessings for granted."

Andrew rubbed his chin and pretended to think it over. "Honestly, I really don't see it. And to tell you the truth, I've never even had the urge to touch her."

Aspen rolled her eyes hard. 'This devil has zero interest in touching me? Please! He's saying as if I'm dying for him to!'

Davon stared at Andrew,

dumbfounded. "No way. You've never touched her? Mr. Lloyd, you're wasting a damn treasure! I just don't get it you see her strutting around with that tight little body every day, and you've never once wondered what it'd be like to push her down? If I were you, I'd be celebrating every night-living the dream!"

Andrew clicked his tongue. "Yeah, and that's the thing. You're not me, so you'll never get the chance. The woman I don't even bother with? You're practically drooling over her like a starving mutt outside a steakhouse.

"Mr. Parks, right? This is exactly the difference between the two of us. Your dream is something I can touch anytime I want... and still not care about."

Davon's face fumed beet red as shame and fury washed over him. "Y-You're doing this on purpose, huh? Just to humiliate me? Well, don't get cocky. That chick's clearly a handful. You're just a nobody with good fists, but one day, you won't be able to keep her under control."

Andrew chuckled and raised his eyebrows. "No, you're wrong."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"Anytime, anywhere-if I want to take her, I can," Andrew said coolly. "For example... right now."

As Davon stared with envy, practically drooling with jealousy, Andrew turned to Aspen and said, "Come here. Kiss me."

Aspen blinked like she misheard him and asked in disbelief, "What did you just say?"

"I said come here and kiss me," Andrew repeated, his expression unreadable.

Aspen's face flushed a deep red from her neck to her ears as she snapped, "Andrew, you bastard! How could you ask me to do something like that in front of others? Have you lost your mind?"

She honestly started to wonder if Andrew had lost it. Just moments ago, he said he had no interest in touching her, and now he wanted her to kiss him in front of a disgusting creep like Davon.

What kind of twisted taste did this demon have?

Andrew's face turned cold. "Aspen, you better think very carefully. Are you going to follow my command, or not? Because you already know what happens if you refuse."

Aspen's face looked awful. She could tell this demon was pissed. Swallowing her disgust and forcing herself through the bizarre tension, she clicked forward in her heels and stopped in front of him. She told herself it was just like being bitten by a dog-get it over with.

With resentment and humiliation in her eyes, she leaned in, her red lips trembling as she kissed him on the mouth.

Davon stared in a daze, his eyes wide with lust as drool slipped from the corner of his mouth. 'Damn, if only that gorgeous woman is kissing me instead... What a dream.'

Andrew slapped him across the head so hard that Davon dropped to the floor unconscious. He said, "Sexy scenes like that aren't for free viewing, and you didn't pay for the show."

He casually straightened his clothes and added, "Let's go."

Aspen froze mid-step, trembling with shame and fury. She snapped, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Andrew did not deny it. "Of course I

did. As for the reason? You should

know it well enough. Late of net

been getting a little too full of yourself. So I had to remind

you who's the master, and who's the servant."

Aspen stormed behind him, her long legs striding hard as she gritted out, "Don't worry. As long as I don't have the strength to fight back... I know exactly what I am. I'm the servant. You're the master. But Andrew, the moment I have the power to stand against you this game ends."

Andrew chuckled darkly. "Relax. That day won't come. Well, maybe in your next life."

Aspen did not say a word, but the sound of her heels stomping against the hallway floor echoed with a vengeance.

Back at the hotel, as soon as they stepped through the door, Andrew barked, "Hold up. Don't move."

Aspen paused, confused for a moment, but then quickly caught on as her expression turned sharp.

Andrew did not say anything else as he swept through the room, checking every corner. His eyes darkened.

Aspen's heart tightened. "Did someone already find where we're staying?"

Andrew replied calmly, "The room looks untouched at first glance, but there are a few small

details definitely signs it's been net

tampered with. But it seems like whoever it was left once they realized we weren't here."

Aspen's voice grew tense. "Should we pack up and move again? With that bounty from the elite families on our heads, we don't even know what kind of assassins they'll send."

Andrew snorted. "Before we move, I'm paying Christina's family a little visit."

Aspen let out a cold laugh too. It was obvious now how their location had gotten out so fast-no doubt, Christina and her family were behind it.

After all, the night they checked in, they just so happened to run into that family of three-and now, the only suspects made perfect sense.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Without drawing attention, the two of them headed down to the hotel's ground- floor cafe for a bite.

"That guy's been tailing us since we got back earlier," Andrew said casually, his tone relaxed as he picked at his food.

"From the way it looks, he could be from the Haywoods' club, or maybe Davon's people. It could also be someone sent by the Goldings-it's hard to say right now."

Aspen sat across from him, lowering her voice as she asked, confused, "Which one are you talking about? It feels like everyone's got their eyes on us."

Andrew replied calmly, "At the moment, only one person's been watching us. He's behind you, slightly to your left. You idiot, it's enough to know-don't turn around and look."

Aspen huffed. "Ugh, fine! No need to snap at me!"

They sat for a while longer, chatting as if everything were normal.

Then, Andrew suddenly stood and said, "Alright, the Stevens family just came back. Let's follow them."

Aspen quickly rose with him as they trailed behind Irene and Leroy, who had just walked into the hotel.

"This city's nothing like Jayrodale," Irene said, her voice purposely loud.

She added, "Skyscrapers everywhere, designer boutiques lined up one after another! But the best part was the restaurant Mr. Wright took us to.

"Can you believe one meal cost over ten grand? My God, I've never had anything that fancy in my life! Mr. Wright clearly has a thing for Christie."

Irene was dressed in flashy designer brands and juggled multiple shopping bags as she strutted into the lobby, bragging at full volume.

Leroy grinned like a fool. "Mom, I noticed it too. Mr. Wright totally has the hots for Christie. She really

knows how to reel in a big fish

mean Mr. Wright's an heir to one of The Five Apex Families. If she lands him, the Stevens family's gonna skyrocket straight to the top."

He scoffed. "And Andrew? Back in Jayrodale, he acted all high and mighty-but

here in the capital? Compared to Mr. Wright, he's straight-up garbage."

Irene scoffed, Exactly! That backwoods thug doesn't even belong in the same conversation Mr. Wright, who's basically royalty. Leroy make sure to stick close to Mr. Wright and butter him up when needed.

"I'm not worried about Christie. She's destined to marry into power and live like a queen. You, on the other hand, need to work a little harder. But it's not impossible. So do your part, alright?"

Leroy laughed smugly. "Mom, do you even need to tell me that? Working hard is boring! But buttering up Mr. Wright and rising through the ranks here in the capital? That's child's play for me. Sucking up and riding someone else's coattails? I was born for it."

Irene beamed with pride. "That's my boy! Very soon, our whole family will be living the high life in this city."

They were so caught up in their delusions of grandeur that they did not notice Andrew and Aspen until they were standing right in front of them.

The smugness on Irene and Leroy's faces only intensified.

Leroy sneered. "Aspen, Christie's basically Mr. Wright's right hand now. And look at you, still following Andrew around. No future, no money, no nothing. What were you even thinking?"

He raised his wrist to show off his luxury watch, making sure it caught the light just right.

Aspen smirked. "Nice watch. Let me guess—Quinton bought it for you?"

Leroy lifted his nose like he had just won a prize. "Of course! No secret there. Truth is, Mr. Wright's already like a brother-in-law to me."

Aspen scoffed. "Idiot. One day, Christina's going to get herself destroyed-thanks to you and that loudmouth mother of yours."

Irene's eyes bulged as she snapped, "Aspen, you little bitch-watch your damn mouth!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Irene sneered, "If you're jealous of Leroy and Christie, just say it. Look down on us all you want, but what has Andrew even bought you?"

Andrew replied calmly, "Nothing much. Just handed her a multi-billion-dollar company to play with."

Irene froze for a second, then burst into mocking laughter. "Andrew, would you cut the crap? You? Open a company like that in the capital? Billions? Please. Do you think you're some young heir from a legendary family or something? Even those rich boys don't talk this big!"

To Irene, a company worth billions was pure fantasy. That amount could buy her life a hundred times over. There was no way a backwoods punk like Andrew could ever afford something like that—not in this life or the next.

Andrew shrugged. "Whether you believe or not is none of my concern."

Just then, the elevator arrived. They all stepped inside and rode it up.

Leroy took out a room key card and grinned. "Hey Andrew, ever stayed in a presidential suite? Our room's going for about five grand a night. Want me to give you a little tour?"

Andrew smiled. "Sure. I've honestly never had the honor of seeing what a presidential suite looks like."

Leroy had only meant to show off like he always did. Yet, when Andrew actually agreed, the smug grin on his face grew even wider. He thought Andrew was nothing more but a country bumpkin, no matter where he went. Then again, it gave Leroy a chance to brag.

They followed Irene and Leroy to the 12th floor.

Irene turned around suspiciously and snapped, "Alright, enough following us. Andrew, Aspen, I know what you're trying to do. Planning to steal something, aren't you? Let me tell you something. Inside ou suite, every single item is worth

thousands. You're not setting one foot inside."

Andrew casually glanced at their suite-room 1288.

Aspen narrowed her eyes and said coldly, "You were the ones who leaked our location to the outside, weren't you?"

Irene stood planted at the doorway like a guard dog and barked, "Damn right we did. What now? Are you gonna start something? But let me remind you-right now, we're honored guests of Mr. Wright. If you even try anything, you'll be digging your own grave!"

Aspen clenched her teeth. "You rotten hag... just wait. Karma's gonna chew you up."

On the far side of the hallway, a man in a baseball cap appeared without a sound. From a distance, he could clearly see Andrew and Aspen standing near room 1288.

Since he did not dare get closer, he could not make out what they were saying. Then again, not that he cared. At he needed was the room number of the punk who had dared to hit Davon. Once he had it, he quickly turned around, slipped into the elevator, and left the hotel.

At the same time, he made a call and reported, "Mr. Parks, I got it. I've confirmed the hotel room where Aspen and the guy who hit you are staying."

At the Haywoods' private club, Davon sat with his swollen, bruised face, grinning viciously as he hung up the call.

He growled, "Mr. Haywood, I've

found that little bastard who started

the fight at the club. Both he and

Aspen are in this hotel right now. I want your men to handle it immediately. My only request is simple-kill that punk and bring Aspen to my suite, unconscious. If I don't wreck her so hard she bleeds, I'm not a man!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Seth shook his head and said, "Mr. Parks, this happened on my turf, so naturally, I'll take full responsibility. But Aspen is off-limits, as she's my woman. I can promise you this-I'll cripple Andrew and make him crawl to you on his knees to beg for mercy. You can do whatever you want to him then, how about that?"

Davon growled, "Not a chance! That punk Andrew beat me up mercilessly. As the Vice CEO of Phoenixdream Enterprises, there's no way I'm letting him off the hook. But more importantly, if I don't get Aspen in my bed soon, I'll lose my damn mind."

Seth's expression darkened. "Mr. Parks, you're pushing it. By rights, since the fight happened in my club, I'm offering to take care of Andrew for you. But as for Aspen, it's fair game. May the better man win. Whoever has the power to claim her, gets to keep her. Isn't that fair?"

Davon's face twisted. "Mr. Haywood... you too? You're into that woman?"

Seth replied without hesitation, "Of course. I'm not just interested-I'm dead set on having her. Even if you weren't involved, I'd still have Andrew eliminated. Aspen belongs to me."

His obsession was not just about Aspen's body. It was also about the 50 billion dollars tied to Supreme Capital Group.

Seth's fantasy was crystal clear-he wanted both the woman and the wealth.

Andrew? He was just a punk from Jayrodale.

So what if he had money? He was still nothing compared to the Haywoods, one of the Five Apex Families. Seth thought he was just a fat sheep, waiting to be carved.

Davon scowled, clearly unhappy. Eventually, he forced out, "Fine. You can have Aspen. But can't I at least have one night with her? That's not asking much, is it? Honestly, that woman has me losing it-she's the hottest I've ever seen."

Seth's tone instantly turned icy. "Mr. Parks, you know she's a rare gem. So, do you think I wouldn't notice that too? Do you think I'd be willing to share someone like her? Let you have her for a night? What if you mess things up? Who do I hold accountable then?"

Davon snapped, "Mr. Haywood, if you're gonna be that greedy, then we're not gonna see eye to eye! How about this once you're done with her, you pass her along to me. Deal? I'm fine with used goods.

"No, wait-third-hand goods. Andrew

probably already got a taste of her.

That bastard claimed he never

vel

touched her, but who the hell believes that? A guy like that, resisting a woman like Aspen? No damn way."

He laughed bitterly, voice filled with jealousy and regret.

Seth snorted. "Mr. Parks, I think we should stop talking about Andrew. Just gather your men and head to the hotel. Wipe them out. And as for Aspen? Sorry, but I'm never going to get tired of her."

He added, "That woman is going to be mine-and mine alone. I'll keep her locked away at one of my private villas and dress her up in different outfits every day, and she'll be mine to devour every night..."

Davon realized he was never going to get what he wanted.

He sneered bitterly and said, "Fine, Mr. Haywood. Your family's powerful—I can't fight that."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"But your club better line up ten beautiful women to serve me around the clock for a full week-no interruptions!" Davon demanded.

Seth replied coolly, "Not just ten. I can give you 20 if you think you can handle it. Anytime you want."

Inwardly, Seth was disgusted by the bloated pig in front of him. If Davon had not been a longtime VIP client, Seth would have kicked him out a long time ago.

This loser wanted to compete with him for Aspen? Not a damn chance.

He would not even let anyone kiss the ground Aspen walked on, let alone touch her. From the moment he first laid eyes on her, he had already decided-Aspen would be his and his alone.

Davon sneered, "One more thing, Mr. Haywood-you better be careful. I saw Andrew fight with my own eyes. He took down Rufus without breaking a sweat. You better bring your A-team to that hotel."

Seth pointed at himself and scoffed. "Please. I am the A-team. Every single direct descendent of the Haywoods could end that little punk 100 different ways before breakfast."

Without wasting another moment, Davon's crew and Seth's enforcers-over 100 men-stormed toward the hotel like a small army.

Meanwhile, Andrew and Aspen had already packed up, ready to ghost the hotel.

"You think our little diversion's gonna work?" Aspen asked, her eyes flashing with a dark, vengeful gleam.

Andrew stayed calm as ever. "Don't worry. You'll get to watch the fireworks."

Aspen's expression turned frosty. "Christina and I... we were once great friends in a way. But now? I don't

or a thing. Honestly, the

brought all of this on themselves."

Moments later, the two pulled on their hats and headed to the hotel lobby.

They had just sat down when, right on cue, Davon with his swollen face-and Seth barged in, leading a swarm of men behind them.

"We're the Haywoods. We'll be fast and leave no mess," Seth announced like he owned the place.

The hotel front desk staff barely had time to ask questions before Seth flashed his identity and shut everyone down with sheer presence.

"Room 1288. That's where those two runaways are hiding. Davon, Seth-let's move," said one of the goons who had been tailing them, eager to prove himself.

Seth's eyes turned sharp and cruel. "The guy-take him down. Break him if you have to. But the girl? Don't lay a finger on her. She's mine to deal with personally."

The moment the order dropped, the crew roared in agreement and crammed into the elevator like a pack of wolves, heading straight for the 12th floor.

Back on the 12th floor, inside room 1288, Christina had just returned, exhaustion all over her face.

Irene fussed over her, massaging her shoulders and handing her water. "My poor Christie, you've worked so hard. Mr. Wright really went overboard, giving you so much responsibility! If he wears out the backbone of this household, I swear I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Christina said calmly, "The Wrights are a powerful stepping stone and a strategic platform. I don't mind the work or the stress. As long as I gain the skills and access to the right resources, I'll soon expand Stevens Corporation here."

Leroy clapped and cheered. "Christie, you're amazing! Seriously, you're perfect!"

Earlier, Andrew and Aspen actually came crawling back here..."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"I'm telling you, those two are in serious trouble," Leroy muttered.

Christina said blandly, "They've made too many enemies, and now they're targets of a bounty from the Goldings. As long as Andrew stays in the capital, it's only a matter of time before someone takes him out."

Irene let out a cold laugh. "Good! He had it coming. Didn't he strut around like a king back in Jayrodale? Now look at him—tail between his legs, hiding like a mutt in the capital!"

Right then, someone pounded violently on the suite door.

Irene shouted, "Who the hell is banging on the door like that? Leroy, see who it is. This hotel's got some nerve-I'm filing a complaint and charging them for my emotional trauma and stress damages!"

Leroy was just as annoyed. Cursing under his breath, he stomped toward the door.

However, before he could reach for the handle, the entire door flew inward with a deafening crash-kicked clean off its hinges. The heavy panel smashed straight into his face, knocking him down and cracking open his scalp.

"Motherfu—" he howled, clutching his bleeding head.

But before he could finish, a wave of men stormed the room like a tidal wave. They wasted no time and launched into a full-blown beatdown.

Within seconds, Leroy's legs were snapped, and he was curled up on the floor screaming, arms wrapped around his head in agony.

Meanwhile, Irene and Christina were both stunned, pale with terror.

Irene opened her mouth to scream, but a thug raised his hand and slapped her across the face so hard she flew backward. The impact was brutal, and blood gushed from her nose and mouth. Within seconds, she passed out cold without making a sound.

Only Christina remained untouched, but she looked absolutely shaken.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she yelled, her voice trembling.

The thugs ignored her completely and continued kicking the near-lifeless Leroy like they were working out frustration on a punching bag.

His face was covered in blood, his eyes bulging in despair. He thought in terror, 'Why me? What did I do to deserve this?'

Suddenly, a voice rang out. "Enough."

Seth and Davon strolled into the room like they owned the place.

Seth smirked as he glanced around. "So this is all Andrew amounts to? Weren't you talking big when you stood against me? Now look at you, crying like a pathetic loser. I thought you didn't know fear, punk

Davon stepped up beside him, grinning. "Listen here,

Andrew-getting beaten half to death doesn't even begin to cover what you owe. You slapped me a few times, right? I'll pay you back a hundredfold."

Both men looked smug, basking in their imagined revenge.

But then, confusion flickered in Seth's eyes. He finally realized that the guy bleeding on the floor was not Andrew, and the knocked-out woman on the ground was not Aspen either.

Not only that, the pretty girl who was still conscious was also not Aspen.

Seth's face turned storm-cloud dark. "Goddamn it. We beat up the wrong people!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The underling who had led the way rushed to explain, "I swear, Mr. Haywood, I personally saw Andrew and Aspen enter this exact room!"

Seth's face twisted with fury, his voice low and cold. "Damn it all... We've been played. Andrew lured us here on purpose. That bastard set us up."

Davon, meanwhile, had his eyes locked on Christina with a hungry grin. "Mr. Haywood, forget Andrew and Aspen. This might've been a screw-up, but I call it a lucky one. Look at this beauty-she's no less than Aspen, maybe even hotter. You wanted Aspen? Fine, I'll take this one for myself!"

Seth glanced at Christina and had to admit-she was stunning.

"My apologies, Miss," he said, adjusting his tailored suit with practiced charm.

"My men got a little overzealous just now. Please don't worry I'll take full responsibility for the injuries your family suffered."

Christina was not having any of it. Her fury erupted. "Take responsibility? You psychos broke my brother's legs! What the hell does an apology mean now?"

Seth, trying to show off his influence, kept his tone smooth and confident. "Miss, please relax. It's just broken legs.

"I'll call in one of the top doctors in the capital right now-Dr. Mosby Lake. He's a medical legend. His recovery is guaranteed."

Christina's expression turned icy. "Don't bother. I've already called someone. You people are nothing but gangsters-just thugs and lowlifes. You put my mom and Leroy in the hospital, and you're going to pay for that."

Davon chuckled lecherously. "Damn, I didn't expect the pretty one to have such a fiery temper. So what? It's just a few bruises. Nobody died, did they? Let me introduce myself. I'm Davon Park, Vice CEO of Phoenixdream Enterprises.

"And this gentleman beside me is none other than Seth Haywood, third son of the Haywoods—one of the Five Apex Families. So tell me, darling-do you still think you're in a position to hold us accountable?"

Before Christina could reply, a voice full of scorn echoed from the hallway.

"Really, Dayon? Phoenixdream is just a mid-tier firm here in the capital You think you can throw your weight around? And Seth... since when did you have the balls to raise hell on my turf?"

The moment the words dropped, Quinton stepped into the room, his expression like a brewing storm.

Davon's legs nearly gave out. "Mr. Wright? W-what are you doing here?"

Seth also straightened up immediately and forced a tight, awkward smile. "Quinton, hey... This is just a misunderstanding. My guys got carried away. I didn't know this was your territory-total mistake. I apologize."

Inside, his stomach twisted. He never expected the people in this suite to have ties to Quinton. He cursed silently, 'Damn you, Andrew! You just threw us into a fire pit!'

Quinton's tone was frosty. "Start talking. What the hell happened here? And if I don't get an explanation that satisfies me, Seth, don't blame me for going cold on you."

Seth clenched his jaw and spat

bitterly, "Quinton, I came here to deal

with Andrew. I planned to cripple

him. But he wasn't here, and my guys accidentally hurt the wrong people."

Quinton narrowed his eyes. "So you're telling me Andrew misled you into coming here?"

Seth scowled. "Exactly. My guy tracked him straight to this room. That bastard tricked us!"

Quinton's face darkened like thunderclouds as he snapped, "Idiot!"

He stormed toward Christina, his tone softening slightly. "Christie, this is my fault. I should've been more careful."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Quinton said firmly. "Don't worry. Dr. Lake is already on the way. Your mom and Leroy will be okay."

Christina looked at her family, broken and bleeding on the floor, and fury surged through her chest. She said coldly, "I don't blame you for this, but the fact remains —these people attacked us out of nowhere. There has to be consequences."

Quinton spun around and slapped Davon hard across the face twice.

Davon hit the floor, blood pouring from his nose and lips as he screamed in pain. Even so, he did not dare fight back, not against Quinton.

However, with venom in his voice, he growled, "Andrew, you bastard! This isn't over!"

Seth's eye twitched.

Quinton was the most respected heir in the capital among the Five Apex Families. Seth was not even close to his level, so all he could do was force a smile and mutter, "Quinton, I take full responsibility for this mess. I'll personally make it right with this young lady."

Quinton snorted. "There's only one way you make it right. Go take care of Andrew -now. I saw him downstairs in the lobby earlier, yet here you are, ganging up on a woman and her family. Seth, do you even realize how stupid you look right now?"

The scolding hit like a slap to the face.

Seth's expression turned red with shame and humiliation, but he forced out a vicious promise. "Don't worry, Quinton. I'll go after him immediately. This city's only so big—there's no way he escapes the Haywoods' grasp."

Quinton nodded. "Good. Then move fast, and don't forget to cripple him. Leave nothing behind."

Seth gritted his teeth and said, "Just for the chance to make this up to you, I swear I'll ruin that bastard and bring you his head if I have to."

He stormed out of the hotel with his men, fanning out in every direction to hunt Andrew down. The way they had marched in like kings was nothing compared to the pathetic retreat they now made.

Christina frowned. "Quinton, do you really think Seth can take Andrew down?"

Quinton chuckled with disdain. "Not a chance in hell. That punk's no match for Andrew—even if he does find him, he'll just be walking into his own funeral."

Even he had been burned by Andrew before.

If Quinton could not deal with him cleanly, Seth sure as hell could not.

Christina's brow tightened even more. "Then why did you push him to go?"

Quinton stood at the window,

looking out over the city with a cold,

calculating gaze. "First of

all-Andrew deserves to die. Second-this entire thing was clearly a trap. He lured Seth here on purpose to send a brutal message to your family. And lastly-if Seth's dumb enough to volunteer as bait, why not let him? If he dies, that's his problem. All I need is for him to find Andrew."

Christina's expression darkened as well. Her voice dropped low. "I didn't think Andrew would go this far, dragging my mom and Leroy into this? He's not even human!"

Quinton tilted his head, half amused, half intrigued. "So tell me, Christie... are you really over him now?"

Christina's tone was icy. "There's no pain greater than being completely disillusioned. He rejected me, and now he wants to destroy me, but he can't. He'll only make me stronger. I can feel it-the day I crush him under my heel is coming soon."

Quinton burst into laughter. "Not often you meet a woman with that kind of fire!

Christie you've got this."