

# Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Chapter 1111 While Andrew and Aspen did not witness Christina's family's tragic ordeal, it did not matter.

They knew it could not have been pleasant.

The two of them had arrived at the Supreme Capital Group's corporate office building.

"Like I said, that family had it coming!" Aspen scoffed as she propped her long legs, clad in sheer black tights, right on the table.

She had been running around all day and was seriously worn out.

Andrew chuckled.

"I didn't expect you to be this good at holding a grudge." Aspen's expression turned frosty.

"I've always been petty.

You should know that better than anyone." Andrew nodded like he was reminiscing.

"Oh, I know.

Back then, the great Stevens girl from Bridgefields looked down on the world like royalty.

But look how things turned out.

Now, you're my personal servant, obedient to every whim.

If I tell you to strip, you wouldn't even dare cover up!" Aspen sneered.

"Of course, I'll follow your orders.

But you try telling me to strip? I'd rather die than give in!" Andrew rolled his eyes.

"Cut the act, will you? Don't pretend you're some untouchable saint.

It's not like I haven't already seen it all." Aspen's face flushed red in an instant. Humiliated, she snapped, "Andrew! Do you even have any shame?" ---- It was

bad enough that he'd seen everything, but to say it out loud? That, she couldn't tolerate.

Andrew waved her off.

"Don't blow up over every little thing.

I don't have time for your drama right now.

Clearly, staying at a hotel's not gonna cut it anymore.

We need a place where we can stay safely and not constantly look over our shoulders." Aspen rolled her eyes hard and could not help but jab back sarcastically.

"Weren't you all high and mighty back in Jayrodale? What happened, huh? You come to Blumedale and suddenly grow scared? If you're so tough, keep going head-to-head with the Haywoods, the Wrights, and the Goldings.

When you first came to Blumedale, you acted like you were invincible" A flicker of impatience crossed Andrew's face as he yanked her toward him and smacked her right on the butt.

"Watch your tone, you little brat.

Is that how a servant talks to her master? Do you think that's acceptable?" This woman was seriously testing him, clearly

forgetting her place If she wal net

already trying to walk all over him, that had to be shut down fast.

When Aspen heard the edge in his voice, she surprisingly did not cower this time. Instead, her face twisted in shock and fury.

She growled, "Did you just spank me? I've told you before I don't like men touching

me.

Teeth

And now you touched my ass? You bastard! I swear, I'll fight you!" clenched, fists balled, she lunged at him like she was ready to go to war.

Andrew's face darkened, a dangerous grin tugging at his lips.

"You just don't learn, do you? Fine.

It's been a while since I've put you in your place anyway, and I could use a little stress relief." As he spoke, he

pulled his leather belt off his waist in one swift motion. fo

Aspen's expression shifted in a heartbeat, her beautiful face blanching with dread.

Her feet froze in place, and she started backing away, her voice trembling with a mix of anger and shame.

She stammered, What the hell are you doing? Put that damn belt away! I agreed

to be your servant, Andrew, not your plaything.

If you think you can force yourself on me, you're wrong.

I won't allow it!"" Andrew said nothing, but his eyes were ice-cold as he slappednoveldrama

the belt against his palm and strode toward her.

Aspen's scalp tingled, wanting badly to crawl into a hole and hide.

Tf she had known this would happen, she never would have provoked this monster.

Look what she had done she was about to get completely devoured.

Her eyes darted toward the door, and in a split-second decision, she bit her lip and made a run for it.

Yet, just as she moved, Andrew's hand clamped around her neck and shoved her straight to the floor.

Her cheeks flushed crimson, humiliation flooding her like wildfire.

---- The position she was in hips raised, face down was the classic pose, practically begging for punishment.

How the hell could he do this to her? At the very least, Aspen thought Andrew could have given her a heads-up and let her mentally prepare.

Besides, this was the damn office, for crying out loud people still walked by here from time to time.

Chapter 1112 Aspen wondered how Andrew could be so cruel and heartless as to humiliate her like this in front of others.

Tears welled in her eyes, but her resolve hardened.

Even if she had to endure this monster's savagery, she would never surrender.

The moment she was free again, she would end it all.

Andrew, oblivious to the storm raging in her mind, brought the belt down hard across her backside.

The leather split the air with a vicious snap, blooming fire across her skin.

"This is for your defiance," he snarled, striking again.

"For your arrogance.

For still thinking you're above this!" Each lash seared like acid, pain radiating to her bones.

A scream clawed at her throat, but pride choked it back.

Instead, a stifled moan escaped, trembling and low.

Andrew froze, belt raised.

That soundsoft, almost pleased was not the cry of pain he had expected.

On the other hand, Aspen was horrified when she realized it too.

Her gasp had curled into something wanton.

Something that betrayed not agony, but dark, traitorous heat.

Inan instant, Aspen's flushed face shifted from fury to humiliation, then to seething self-loathing.

"You bastard!" She covered her face, too mortified to even look at him.

Andrew scoffed and brought the belt down again, though the ---- strikes were lighter this time.

Still, pain lanced through her, sharp enough to make her grit her teeth.

However, she refused to cry out, her breath coming in ragged gasps instead.

"Hit me all you want.

As long as I'm alive, I'll make sure you regret this one day," she spat, glaring at him.

Andrew casually tossed the belt aside, his voice icy.

"I warned you betrayal was never an option.

Consider this a light lesson.

Would be ashamed to ruin such...

perfectly shaped ass." Then, he leaned in and whispered, "Next time, I won't use a belt.

Imagine a thick and long shaft instead.

So behave." Aspen, straightening her skirt with trembling hands, nearly choked on her fury.

The threat and his vulgar implication left her dizzy with humiliation.

Andrew took sip of water, then immediately choked, spraying it everywhere. Aspen sneered.

"Serves A

right, you bully! A

man

can't

a woman, and

drink water propo

Karma's a bitch." Wiping his mouth, Andrew ignored her jab.

Instead, he hesitated, then grimaced awkwardly.

"Hey, Aspen...

sorry about that." "What?" Her face froze.noveldrama

Did the devil himself just apologize? This had to be a sign of the apocalypse.

Then he added, "Uh...

I kinda ripped your stockings.

Like...

all the way.

Skin's showing.

You might want to change..." The words hit Aspen like a

sledgehammer, and her mindel

buzzing.

later

A beat the few employees

vel

Supreme Capital Group heard shriek that could shatter glass.

andrew, I'll fucking kill you! I'm going to murder you, you bastard!"

Chapter 1113 Andrew had not expected things to get this awkward.

Nonetheless, he swore that despite the torn stockings, Aspen's pencil skirt had covered everything.

There were no scandalous views or nosebleed-inducing reveals.

However, Aspen clearly disagreed.

She changed into a fresh pair immediately, then fixed him with a glare sharp enough to flay skin.

"Quit staring.

We're leaving.

I booked a property viewing.

We need a place to live, after all," Andrew said, eager to escape.

As the capital city, prime real estate was not hard to find in Blumedale.

Yet, Andrew was not just looking for luxury; he needed somewhere even the Goldings' assassins and the Haywoods\* schemers would not dare touch.

That was how they ended up at The Sovereign Residences.

Aspen, who had been fuming in silence, finally spoke.

"We can't afford a broom closet here, let alone a house.

This isn't about money; it's about power and connections.

The kind we don't have.

which is why I called in a favor," Andrew said.

She scoffed.

"Favor? The Sovereign Residences sit on Blumedale's most powerful geomantic site.

The peak residences were blessed by the Grandmaster of Mistveil Peak himself.

Owning one ensures great luck for generations!" Andrew rolled his eyes, "That man is a fraud.

If he says the sky's blue, check for paint." Aspen gaped.

In Holtrien, Mistveil Peak stood above all even the nation's elite bowed to its wisdom.

Yet, Andrew dismissed it like a bad horoscope.

Aspen could not fathom how this devil-may-care lunatic dismissed Mistveil Peak so casually.

"I'm sorry, but this is private property." novel drama

You may not proceed." Two robed elders barred their path at the gilded gates of The Sovereign Residences.

Aspen's pulse spiked, realizing these were not mere guards they were martial masters.

One radiated the aura of a senior grandmaster, while the other's power was so dense, she could not even gauge it.

Nonetheless, she could still easily deduce that this was a semi-martial king, or even stronger.

Stationing such elites as doormen only screamed of the Residences' unfathomable prestige.

Yet, Andrew just grinned.

"Not bad.

At least they hire real elites as gatekeepers.

I'm...

mildly impressed." Aspen stared at him like he had sprouted a second head.

She thought, 'Not bad? Mildly

impressed? Just how shameless can Andrew be? You're saying as you can really move in!' alright,

I see

we've seen enough, and you've said enough," she hissed, yanking his sleeve.

"Let's go before you embarrass us further." She simply did not understand why

Andrew dragged her here.

Andrew chuckled.

"What's the rush? Since I'm here, I'm obviously- - buying a place.

Otherwise, why would I be here?" Aspen rolled her eyes.

'Does this bastard ever stop lying through his teeth? Just as she about to mock him, a group ore lose!

people walked over.

Leading them were two figures in crisp military uniforms.

The man stood tall, his chiseled frame and lazy smirk radiating old -money arrogance.

However, it was the woman who stole Aspen's breath.

She had stunning facial features and radiated an icy, intimidating aura.

What stunned Aspen most was the single gold star on the woman's shouldershe was a major general.

Inan instant, Aspen recognized her:

Luna Phelan, the second daughter of

the Phelansone of Blumedale's

powerful Three Titan families and

the undisputed golden child of Gabo Creek, a once-in-a-generation prodigy.

----

Chapter 1114, Luna was a woman Aspen had once idolized, envied, and dreamed of becoming.

As the group approached, Aspen's usual pride evaporated.

She lowered her head instinctively and stepped aside.

However, Andrew remained rooted in place, still casually appraising the villas within The Sovereign Residences.

"T like those two on the west side," he mused, pointing.

"Good sunlight, and the layout shows at least some thought.

But those three eastern ones? Tacky.



Just wealth without taste." Aspen nearly choked, wondering if Andrew was idiot blind.

After all, Luna and her entourage were right there, their uniforms impossible to miss.

Yet, he kept running his mouth like he owned the place.

She reached to yank his sleeve, but the tall officer was already in front of them.

"Move," the officer ordered flatly.

Andrew glanced over.

"And you are?" The tall officer said nothing, simply adjusting his epaulets.

The insignia gleamed: Colonel.

There was no doubt that just like Luna, he was one of the military's rising stars not quite her equal, but close enough.

Several designer-clad heirs stepped forward, shooing Andrew away.

They all wondered where this backcountry fool crawled out ---- from, daring to stand in the way of Blumedale's two brightest stars.

In any other setting, he would have been beaten bloody already.

"scram! Who the hell do you think you are, talking to Colonel Haywood like that?" "Since when did we let trash loiter at The Sovereign Residences?" "Get lost.

This place isn't for your kind." The tall colonel waved them off.

"Just some civilian.

He's not worth our time." Turning to Luna, his gaze flickered with barely concealed admiration.

"Ms.

Phelan, I've contacted the owner of Serenity Villa.

They'll arrive shortly consider it yours." Luna ignored him.

Her eyes locked onto Andrew, a mocking smile playing on her lips.

Her tone carried quiet skepticism as she said, " Andrew.

We meet again.

House-hunting, are we?" Andrew matched her coolness.

"Indeed we do, Ms.

Phelan.

And yes, Jam." The colonel stiffened.

"You...

know this man, Ms.

Phelan?" Luna's voice turned glacial.

"An acquaintance.

His family once knew mine." Luna offered no further explanation about Andrew, as though even mentioning him was beneath her. noveldrama

The tall colonel chuckled.

"Then this boy is luckier than he  
deserves! Not only does he have et  
the

Phelans, but he's even exchanged words with you, Ms.

Phelan.

That alone is an honor his family would boast about for generations!" The  
wealthy heirs behind him nodded fervently.

"Exactly! Even a shred of association with the Phelan family means his  
forefathers are smiling from their graves!" Another chimed in, "But the real  
envy is that he's actually spoken to Ms.

Phelan.

Hell, he could dine out on that story for years! Kid, out of respect for Ms.

Phelan, we'll overlook your earlier disrespect.

Now step aside before we lose our patience." Andrew snorted and did not  
move an inch.

The colonel's eyes narrowed, a cold glint flashing through them.

The heirs, sensing the shift, immediately rolled up their sleeves, ready to  
teach this insolent fool a lesson.

However, Luna cut in first, her voice icy.

"Enough.

We're here for the property, not to entertain distractions.

My time is too valuable to waste on nobodies." The colonel shot Andrew one last disdainful glare, his expression screaming, "You're nothing but a bug beneath my boot." Then, he hurried after Luna, their laughter resuming as if Andrew had already been forgotten.

Meanwhile, Andrew was left standing there, ignored completely.

Aspen covered her face, too mortified to even speak.

Chapter 1115 On the path to the summit of The Sovereign Residences, the tall colonel, Xavier Haywood, eldest son and rising star of the Haywoods, casually remarked, "Ms.

Phelan, that man back there...

Andrew, was it?" Luna replied, "Yes.

That's Andrew Lloyd." Xavier smirked.

"Turns out he's got quite the reputation.

Apparently, he's already butted heads with my little brother, Seth.

But the real joke? He's somehow pissed off the Goldings enough to earn a blood hunt.

It's quite impressive that he's gotten multiple major families going after him in Blumedale." Luna frowned.

"Oh? He's managed to provoke your family too?" Xavier chuckled.noveldrama

"Surprised me as well.

For a nobody from Jayrodale, he's...

oddly efficient at making enemies.

That's quite a talent!" Luna's delicate brows drew tighter, her voice laced with icy reproach.

"Talent? All I see is a dead man walking." Xavier's smile darkened.

"You sound almost...

concerned, Ms.

Phelan." Luna remained indifferent.

"Pity is all I feel.

Colonel Haywood, Andrew once treated my grandfather.

A minor service, but one my family acknowledges.

So while I don't care what becomes of him, excessive handling in Blumedale would reflect poorly on my family's honor." Xavier laughed, waving a dismissive hand.

"Ms.

Phelan, relax.

This ---- nobody is barely worth my family's noticeonly my useless little brother Seth bothers with him.

If the Haywoods truly wanted him gone? One word, and he'd vanish before sunset." Luna gave a curt nod.

"Then I'll consider this a favor." Xavier was overjoyed, though he kept his tone carefully measured, his posture flawlessly poised.

"Luna, such words aren't necessary between us.

Since our military days, my oath

stands: I'd do anything for youeven if

I have to pay with my life." Xavier's

voice dripped with honeyed

ve

devotion, each word polished to a moving sheen.

With a blank face, Luna said, "Colonel Haywood, you know I have no interest in sentimental nonsense.

Consider this your first and last warning." Xavier laughed smoothly, offering a practiced apology that maintained every inch of his aristocratic grace.

But beneath the charm, his gaze darkened.

He thought, 'Andrew, was it? You could spit at the Haywood name for all I care a cockroach's defiance means nothing.

But make Luna speak for you? That's a privilege no man gets to keep.

Luna's group strolled through the gates of The Sovereign Residences without a second glance, while Andrew and Aspen remained barred.

Aspen hissed, "Haven't you humiliated us enough? If you won't leave, I will!" ---  
- The earlier scene had been mortifying.

Luna, that untouchable prodigy, might ignore ants like her, but

Blumedale's golden boys, lie

colonel? He was clearly one of

scion of a powerhouse family.

Yet, Andrew had dared to block his path.

One wrong word, and they would be corpses in a ditch.

Andrew remained unfazed.

"Relax.

the

The person I'm waiting for is arriving now." He thought, 'A colonel? In another life, the man won't even be fit to polish my boots.'" Before long, a luxury car pulled up, and Zachary and Ruth stepped out of it.

"M-Mr.

Lloyd!"

Chapter 1116 The moment Zachary spotted Andrew, his face lit up, being all friendly.

However, he bit back the title "General" at the last second, settling for "Mr. Lloyd".

Beside him, Ruth bowed her head respectfully.

"Mr.

Lloyd, Ms.

Stevens." Andrew smirked.

"Zac, you'd better not be overselling this house of yours.

I've got high standards." Zachary hurriedly said, "Mr.

Lloyd, I swear on my life.

If my villa isn't the crown jewel of The Sovereign Residences, you can toss me off the balcony.

Many have been eyeing it, and even Xavier Haywood that 'Unbeatable Warlord of theirs' has been frothing to buy it for years." Aspen could not help but ask, "Mr.

Fischer...

We just saw a tall colonel enter with Ms.

Phelan.

Was that Xavier?" Zachary nodded.

"Most likely.

He must've found out I was coming today and decided to show up first." seeing Zachary's frown, Andrew raised an eyebrow.

"Is this a problem for you? If it's inconvenient, we can look elsewhere." Zachary snorted.

"That Haywood brute isn't worth worrying about! I just didn't expect Ms. Phelan to be here too.

Seems she's also after my Serenity Villa." Aspen quickly waved her hands.

"Then forget it, Mr.

Fischer.

You should just give the house to Ms.

Phelan." ---- Zachary replied coolly, "If Mr.

Lloyd weren't here, I might have yielded to the situation and let the Phelans have

it.

But since Mr.

Lloyd wants it, it doesn't matter who wants it.

Ms.

Phelan can find somewhere else!" Aspen was stunned speechless, wondering if Andrew truly held such weight in Zachary's eyes that was enough to make him dismiss even Luna without a second thought.

Soon, the four of them made their way to the summit of The Sovereign Residences.

It was Aspen's first time stepping inside such an opulent place, and she could not help but marvel at everything along the way.

Andrew, however, remained completely unfazed, casually chatting with Zachary.

At the mountaintop, Xavier, Luna, and their group were already waiting for Zachary's arrival.

The moment they spotted him approaching, they immediately came forward to greet him.

"Mr.noveldrama

Fischer, you simply must hand over Serenity Villa to me today.

Name your price won't even blink" Xavier chuckled as he spoke, his words light but edged with steel.

Zachary replied indifferently, "My apologies, Colonel Haywood, but Serenity Villa already has another buyer." Just as Xavier was about to demand who would dare challenge him, Luna, who had been watching Andrew step out of the car frowned in distaste and said coldly, "Andrew, do you really have nothing better to do than follow me around? You might not realize it, but I find men like you utterly lacking in class disgusting." ---- Xavier also turned his gaze toward Andrew and sneered, "Enough is enough, Andrew.

You've been scheming to follow Ms.



Phalen around don't you realize how shameless you're being? You should know

your place." Andrew frowned.

"What are you talking about? My being here has nothing to do with Luna.

I came to look at a house." The moment these words left his mouth, Luna visibly

froze.

Then, she let out a derisive laugh and shook her head, thinking it was a ridiculous excuse.

Xavier, meanwhile, wore an expression of amused contempt.

"Do you even understand what it means to own property at the peak of The Sovereign Residences? Let me put it bluntly you probably

couldn't afford a single tree hoolne

The other wealthy men in their entourage burst into mocking laughter, piling on the scorn.

Then, everyone heard Zachary speak.

"Mr.

Lloyd is the buyer of my property."

## **Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)**

When Zachary said Andrew was the buyer of his property, the group was dumbfounded. The wealthy heirs even stared at him in disbelief.

One asked, "Mr. Fischer, you can't be serious! Of all people, you'd sell Serenity Villa to some nobody?"

Another laughed. "I get it-this is one of Mr. Fischer's jokes! It has to be!"

There was simply no way the crown jewel of The Sovereign Residences could be sold to some bottom-feeder. The heirs burst into forced laughter, scrambling to smooth over the absurdity.

Even Xavier, after a stunned pause, joined in with a chuckle. "Zachary, you had me going there for a second! We're both military men-that's a bond thicker than blood. Come on, name your price. This villa... let's just say it's critical for me."

Zachary shook his head. "I'm not joking. The ownership of Serenity Villa is ready to be transferred."

Xavier's smile stayed polished, but his grip tightened on Zachary's shoulder. "Perfect. Then let it change hands to me. Unless... Our brotherhood isn't worth a damn to you?"

The young heirs turned their scornful gazes toward Andrew, their expressions dripping with disdain.

"Hick, get it through your skull-Mr. Fischer's buyer is obviously Colonel Haywood!"

"You? Looking at houses here? Hah! That's the funniest joke I've heard all year!" noveldrama

"Scram already. You're embarrassing yourself. This is the summit of The Sovereign Residences-only three villas exist here. Hell, you probably can't even afford to breathe the air up here..."

Aspen's brow furrowed, thinking, 'They're being too harsh. Looking down on someone is one thing, but this is just cruel.'

Luna, unable

to stomach the scene any longer, cut in coldly. "Andrew, if you need a place to stay, the Phelans can arrange something in Blumedale-consider it a favor to Marvin. But coming here to spout nonsense? Honestly, it's disgusting." Content belongs to

Andrew's face turned grim. "Ms. Phelan, are these idiots rubbing off on you? I've said it already-I'm here to look for a house."

Luna smirked. "Oh? Then enlighten

us-which villa, exactly, are you 'looking at? And just how much money or what influence do you have to buy any of them?"

Andrew pointed directly at Serenity Villa, his expression unshaken. "This one's passable. I'll take it."

The young elites erupted into another round of mocking laughter. "Take it"?

Had this fool's tongue slipped, or was he genuinely delusional?

Xavier shook his head, turning to Luna with a dismissive smirk. "Ms. Phelan, there's no need to waste breath on this clown. It's beneath you."

Luna scoffed but stayed silent, though the contempt on her face was unmistakable. Even she had to rely on Xavier's connections for a chance at Serenity Villa. Yet here was Andrew, a newcomer to Blumedale, already despised like a rat in the streets.

What possible leverage could he have to spout such nonsense?

Andrew's voice cut through the noise. "Zac, hand me the keys to Serenity Villa. The rest isn't your concern."

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"Oh, and name your price just send me the number later, and I'll wire you the money."

Andrew cut straight to the point, demanding the keys. He had had enough of these so-called elite brats—each one so full of themselves. He wondered why they were barking and acting so arrogantly.

Zachary did not waste time either. He swiftly pulled out a palm-sized velvet box and handed it to Andrew.

"Mr. Lloyd, this is Serenity Villa's jade key. It's not the most practical for daily use. Once you and Ms. Stevens move in, we'll register your fingerprints and retinal scans. After that, you won't even need a key."

Andrew casually tossed the box to Aspen and strode toward Serenity Villa's gates, muttering, "Got it."

Aspen fumbled to catch the box, her face a picture of stunned disbelief. The most exclusive villa in The Sovereign Residence had just been sold without a contract, negotiations, or even a grand handover ceremony. *noveldrama*

She stood there, utterly bewildered.

Xavier's face darkened instantly, his voice sharp with barely contained fury. "Zachary. What the hell is this? Even jokes have their limits. The Haywoods are willing to pay ten billion—and you'd still refuse my offer?"

In a desperate move, Xavier threw out an astronomical figure, but Zachary did not even flinch. He said calmly, "Colonel Haywood, this was never about money, and no, I'm not joking. Serenity Villa was always meant for Mr. Lloyd."

He smiled faintly. "As for everyone else? They were never in consideration. The only reason it's even on the market is because Mr. Lloyd expressed interest."

Xavier's control snapped. "Then answer me this, Zachary-you'd sell to some nobody over me? Is this the Haywoods being slighted? Or is it me you're disrespecting?"

Zachary remained unfazed, his tone indifferent. The Haywoods-and you, Colonel Haywood-have never been part of my social orbit. So 'disrespect' doesn't even enter the equation. But more importantly, you're mistaken about one thing."

Xavier gritted his teeth. "Oh?"

Zachary met his gaze with an amused smile. "I'm not selling Serenity Villa to Mr. Lloyd. I'm gifting it."

The moment these words landed, the young heirs collectively sucked in sharp breaths, their minds reeling. After all, Serenity Villa was the most luxurious estate in The Sovereign Residences. Yet Zachary had just given it to Andrew for free

The crowd could not help but wonder just who Andrew was to receive such treatment. Moreover, Xavier had just offered ten billion dollars.

Meanwhile, Xavier's face twitched, his composure cracking under sheer disbelief. "You're gifting it to him? Zachary... just how important is this Andrew to you? What kind of leverage does he hold?"

Zachary chuckled, replying. "For Mr. Lloyd? It's not just a villa. If he asked for my life, I'd hand it over without hesitation."

Xavier fell silent. Wave after wave of shock slammed into him, his gut churning.

Were it not for Zachary's undisputed status as a Blumedale elite—a man of formidable influence he would have wondered if the man had lost his damn mind.

As for Luna? Outwardly, she remained impassive. However, the storm in her eyes betrayed the truth: her shock ran just as deep as Xavier's.

## **Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)**

Zachary turned to Luna with genuine regret in his tone. "Ms. Phelan, my sincerest apologies. Had it not been for Mr. Lloyd, I would've been happy to accommodate you with Serenity Villa as a gesture of goodwill."

Luna's expression remained unreadable, her voice frosty. "The villa is yours to sell, Mr. Fischer. I've no interest in petty squabbles over property." noveldrama

Zachary gave a polite nod and, with Ruth in tow, took his leave. His business here was done—the villa now belonged to Andrew.

The moment he was gone, Luna's mask of indifference shattered into glacial fury.

Xavier, scrambling to salvage the situation, muttered, "Luna, I swear I'll get that villa for you—"

Luna said calmly, "There's no need. Zachary already gave it to Andrew, so naturally, we no longer stand a chance. That's that—I'll be leaving now. Oh, and Colonel Haywood, you and I are in a superior-subordinate relationship. Whether it's on base or out in the field, I expect you to remember that.

"So from now on, I want to hear you call me 'Ma'am' or 'General'—not by my name. My name isn't something you're qualified to say out loud."

With that, the Phelans' stunning prodigy strode off, her tall combat boots hitting the ground with poise.

Xavier stood frozen, his fists gradually tightening. All his efforts to please her were utterly worthless in Luna's eyes, just as he feared.

He knew Luna had her eye on Serenity Villa. Since he finally found a chance this time, he acted swiftly, spending a fortune and pulling strings to secure it. Yet, in the end, some random nobody from a backwater town beat him to it.

"Mr. Haywood, are we really just going to let Serenity Villa fall into someone else's hands?" one of the wealthy heirs asked with an ugly scowl.

The others were just as frustrated, their faces darkening with resentment.

If Serenity Villa had gone to someone powerful, like Derek the Governor, or one of the heads of the Apex Families, they might have stomached it.

It was downright insulting that the most luxurious, prestigious, and coveted estate in the entire capital had fallen into the hands of some no-name nobody.

Of course, owning what others wanted would only make Andrew a target.

Xavier's eyes narrowed, a storm

brewing behind them, and his voice

dropped into a chilling whisper. "There's no rush. After all, there's never been anything I wanted that I couldn't take. That applies to Serenity Villa... and Luna as well."

The heirs around him shivered instinctively. Among all the descendants of the Five Apex-Families, Xavier-the eldest son of the Haywoods-was by far the most terrifying and physically dangerous.

Now that he had risen to the rank of Colonel in the Holtrien military, his influence had skyrocketed. Combined with his elite family background, messing with him was a one-way ticket to ruin.

And right now, there was no doubt that Andrew was walking a very fine line.

The group of heirs stayed by Xavier's side, refusing to leave. They lingered just outside Serenity Villa, waiting for their next move.

Zachary had made his play, and they had lost. Yet, that did not mean Xavier, the apex predator of the elites, could not just take Serenity Villa from Andrew instead.

Compared to wrestling it from Zachary, snatching it from Andrew would be child's play.

...

Despite being called a villa, Serenity Villa was more like a private compound. It had an expansive estate that sprawled across nearly ten thousand square feet.

Though it sat atop Blumedale's highest hill and lacked a full, scenic lake, it still had its own man-made one that shimmered under the sky.

Beneath the blue skies and clear waters, the view was dazzling, and Andrew could not have been more satisfied.

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aspen ran through every room and checked out the front and back of the house. By the end of it, her legs were sore. Even so, instead of feeling tired, her delicate face was lit up with excitement and wonder.

"Hey, this place is hands-down the best, fanciest, and most expensive location I've ever seen in my life!" she said, rubbing her aching calves while smiling up at Andrew.

Andrew replied casually, "Judging by that smile you can't wipe off your face, I'm guessing you're falling in love with it?"

Aspen pouted. "Saying I'm not would just be lying to myself. Serenity Villa is clearly the kind of estate that money alone can't buy. A place like this... I'd say only the top families in Blumedale are worthy of it."

Andrew let out a dismissive snort. "Don't put those so-called Blumedale elites on a pedestal. Serenity Villa isn't some heavenly paradise. Just remember-the view from the top is always the most breathtaking. And Blumedale in Gabo Creek Province? That place barely makes it to mid-mountain status."

Switching to rub her other leg, Aspen looked dreamy as she said, "Of course, I know the view is best from the top! And there's no way Blumedale could ever compare to the grandeur of Chetvine in Holtrien. I just don't know when I'll ever get the chance to step into a place like Chetvine, where the real elites gather, and show them what I've got."

Andrew shook his head. "You? Not very likely."

Aspen's face immediately darkened. "Don't look down on me like that! I may not be there yet, but that doesn't mean I'll never make it!"

She was starting to realize-talking to this devil of a man meant constantly being ready to get pissed off at any moment.

Andrew suddenly flashed a strange smile. "Heh... actually, I can think of one possible way for you."

Aspen looked at him, half skeptical and half intrigued. "What way?"

Andrew glanced at her newly changed black tights and those long, thirst-inducing legs, then smirked. "It's simple. All you need to do is land apich guy from Chetvine. Like, sleep with him, make him happy, and there you go-your golden opportunity!"

Aspen's face instantly turned red with embarrassment. She had honestly thought he was about to give her some constructive advice, but he unexpectedly came up with something sleazy.

She bit her lip and snapped, "You're disgusting! Selling my body to gain power and wealth? I won't stoop to that, and I don't need to!"

Andrew clicked his tongue, clearly amused. Is that so? Well, gotta say... you've got backbone. Alright then, tet's split up and pick our rooms. Once we're settled in it's time to get down to business."

Only one word could describe Serenity Villa on the inside-huge.

Aspen took her time and carefully picked her room. It was on the third floor, facing east, so every morning, she could catch the sunrise and do yoga out on the balcony.

Just thinking about it made her giddy.

She cheerfully unpacked her bags and finished setting up her space, then stepped out into the hallway. Right then, she noticed that the room next door was wide open.

Andrew walked out with a bright grin, showing off his perfect white teeth as he said, "Haha, what a coincidence! My room's right next to yours!"

Aspen's expression turned thunderous in an instant. "Andrew, you did this on purpose, didn't you?"noveldrama

Serenity Villa had at least 30 rooms, spread across five floors. If she truly believed this was a coincidence, she might as well be a kindergartener.

That jerk had definitely planned it.