



Chantelle said with a smirk. "The moment he found out something happened to you, the look on his face could've scared someone to death."

Aspen froze for a second, her heart thumping wildly as she glanced at Andrew walking just ahead. She could not help but wonder if Andrew actually cared whether she lived or died.

Chantelle gave a half-smile, half-sigh. "Mr. Lloyd sure seems emotionally invested in you, Ms. Stevens. But, if you don't mind me overstepping-there's something off in your head."

Aspen blinked. "Excuse me? Ms. Garcia, what do you mean by that?"

Chantelle chuckled softly. "I majored in psychology, both undergrad and grad school. Even with just a little observation, I'd say you're showing classic signs of Stockholm syndrome."

Aspen's lips parted slightly, but no words came out.

Chantelle studied her with a piercing gaze. "And I can tell you're an intelligent woman. You know you're getting deeper and deeper emotionally involved. But deep down... you don't actually want to get out, do you?"

Aspen's body gave a subtle shiver. "I'm sorry, Ms. Garcia, I don't know what you're talking about."

With a flustered tone, she threw out the line and quickly caught up to Andrew.

As the two of them walked off, Chantelle crossed her arms and murmured with a mocking snort, "Like a little bunny hopping straight into the wolf's mouth... Andrew, you surely are a womanizer.

"But too many women around a man? That's never a good sign. Let's see if you're strong enough to handle the storm they'll bring."noveldrama

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Back at Serenity Villa, Andrew treated the wounds on Aspen's face. Then, with his

usual commanding tone, he said, "Take off your clothes. All of them."

Aspen flared with anger. "What the hell are you trying to do? No way!"

Andrew sighed impatiently. "I need to check for any other injuries. If you've got more, I'll treat them all at once. Now, hurry up."

Aspen crossed her arms over her chest and shot him a frosty glare. "I'm fine, thank you very much. It's just my face-he slapped me a few times that's all. But if you'd shown up a minute later, you might've found a corpse instead."

Andrew chuckled. "So, what, you're blaming me for being late?"

Aspen turned her head away. "Don't flatter yourself. I'm just saying... my life's pathetic. I escaped one

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monster only to almost get violated by another."

Andrew's voice turned serious. "That was my oversight. As compensation, this entire villa is now yours."

Aspen stared at him, completely stunned. "Are you serious?"

This place was an ultra-exclusive villa in one of Blumedale's most expensive neighborhoods, and he was just giving it away.

Was he made of money?

However, what really caught her off guard was that the devil himself had actually admitted he was wrong. She did not know how to process that.

Andrew gave a firm nod. "I'm absolutely serious. And once things settle down here

in Blumedale, you'll be free to go."

That time, Aspen did not just look surprised-she was shaken. "You're not messing with me, are you?"

Her eyes narrowed with suspicion.

Andrew's face was stone-cold. "I don't joke. Once the company's up and running, your contract ends. You'll be free."

The she realized he actually
meant

strange emotion bubbled

in her best Instead of joy, what she
felt was a quiet kind of emptiness.

"Got it," she said softly before turning to head back to her room.

Chantelle's words echoed through Aspen's mind. She thought, 'Stockholm syndrome... Am I really... that pathetic?'

Chapter 1147



Andrew could not figure Aspen out, wondering what the hell was wrong with her now. He had just told her she could go, and she still looked upset.

Andrew shook his head and stopped thinking about it. Instead, He pulled out his phone and made a call back to Jayrodale.

"Gather your men and head to Blumedale immediately. And bring Reuben with you. Tell him—if he wants his freedom, I can offer him a way out."

Reuben Davis was that semi-martial king Elon had once brought to Jayrodale. Under Andrew's control, the man had been training Dylan and Natasha in martial arts.

Andrew did not know how the Haywoods would react to Seth's death, but he did not care. No matter what move they made, he would not back down.

It was time to bring his core team into Blumedale. If these powerful families wanted to raise the stakes, he would play right along.

Suddenly, his phone rang again. Andrew glanced at the caller ID and looked mildly surprised-it was Tiana.

"Mrs. Rhodes, what can I do for you?" he answered smoothly.

Tiana's tone was calm. "I heard you killed Seth Haywood."

Andrew did not deny it. "Yeah, didn't expect word to travel so fast. I'm surprised you already heard."

Tiana huffed. "The Haywoods are in chaos. It's not just me by now, probably half of Blumedale already knows. Anyway, that's not important. What I want to know is -what's your plan?"

Andrew said casually, "I'll go with the flow."

Tiana actually laughed. "That does sound like you—always direct, never afraid of a fight. But still, be careful. Lauren, I, and even Jameson are all worried about you."

Andrew chuckled. "Mr. Rhodes and Lauren worrying about me? That makes sense. But Mrs. Rhodes... you? That's kind of new."

Tiana snorted. "Don't get cocky. You're the prodigious heir of the Lloyds. Even if I don't like how you operate sometimes... Let's just say, you're not someone I can criticize too openly."

Andrew said, "Then do me a favor-tell Lauren I'm fine. She doesn't need to worry."

"Got it. I'll pass it on," Tiana replied. "Oh, and listen-if things get out of control over there, call me or Jameson. The Rhodes family may be low on the power rankings in Blumedale, but we're not completely useless."

Andrew teased, "You sound... unusually kind today. Even your tone with me is softer than usual. Feels weird, honestly."

Tiana laughed. "Don't let it get to your head, you brat. By the way, when you have time, drop by our place. I want to touch you."

Andrew's face darkened immediately. "Touch me? Mrs. Rhodes, please don't joke like that. I could get canceled for less."

Tiana spat. "Get your mind out of the gutter! I'm not some pervert. I just want to look at that totem on your chest again."

The call ended, and Andrew's expression turned slightly complicated.

Was Tiana still hung up on his father?

Did she miss him so much that she was using the totem on his body to remember him?

Just then, Aspen walked out of her room in a fresh change of clothes.

"I'm heading to the company," she said flatly "We have to replace everything that got smashed. And the

few employees we managed to hire someone needs to calm them down."

She sounded like someone who had just been scammed out of millions.

Andrew shook his head. "Forget the company for now. Stay home and rest. Wait until the swelling on your face goes down. Then you can jump back into things."

Aspen hesitated, then asked quietly, "Andrew... did we stir up something huge?" Andrew replied, "It's not huge per se, but right now, half of Blumedale's power circles are buzzing about how Seth got himself killed."

Aspen's eyes widened in panic. Her voice trembled. "The Haywoods will definitely retaliate. I'll be fine, but you might really be in danger. Maybe you should head back to Jayrodale for a while."

Andrew smiled. "If I leave, what about you?"noveldrama

Aspen clenched her fists. "Don't worry about me. The Haywoods wouldn't dare do anything to me."

Chapter 1148



Aspen said, "You're the one who killed Seth. The Haywoods are going to target you first-so you'd better leave now while you still can!"

Andrew said nothing. Instead, he walked toward her slowly, one step at a time.

Aspen frowned and instinctively took a step back. The space between them was too close for comfort, and it made her uneasy.

However, Andrew did not stop—he kept moving in, ignoring her resistance entirely.

Aspen soon found herself backed up against the wall. Her expression turned cold as she snapped, "What are you doing?"

Andrew leaned in, towering over her. "Aspen, something's off with you."

"What are you talking about?"

"You are... worried about my safety, aren't you?"

Aspen shoved him hard, her face flushing as she barked, "I wasn't joking just now! If you're not taking this seriously, then just forget I said anything!"

Her heart was pounding. For a second, she thought Andrew was going to kiss her. If he had, she would have bitten his tongue off without hesitation.

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The skies over Blumedale were dark and heavy. From the mountaintop estate of The Sovereign Residences, it looked like a torrential storm was about to crash down.

The Haywoods' estate, located in the wealthy western district of Blumedale, was massive, grand, luxurious, and opulent, as one would expect from one of The Five Apex Families.

But inside, the mood was grim and suffocating.

"Effective immediately—issue the family kill order," roared the Haywood family's patriarch, Roy Haywood, his voice shaking the entire estate.

"We're putting a bounty of half a billion on that bastard Andrew! I want him hunted until there's nothing left to bury!"

The roar echoed through the halls like thunder, sending waves of terror through servants and Haywood heirs alike.

Xavier, clad in combat gear, stood silently, his face dark as stone. "Father I'm partially responsible for what happened to Seth. If I hadn't let him go after Andrew on my watch, it wouldn't have ended in death."

Roy's face twisted with fury. "It's already too late for ifs and buts! I have plenty of sons-losing one or two doesn't bother me. But the Haywoods' dignity? That's worth more than all our lives put together."

He hissed, "I'll have that punk ripped limb from limb for humiliating our name!"

Xavier clenched his jaw, fists cracking with pressure. "Don't worry, Father. I'll avenge Seth with my own hands. I'll personally bring Andrew's head back."

Roy's tone dropped to something colder, almost condescending. "You're our brightest star, Xavier. You don't need to get your hands dirty. you do, it'll make the other families laugh and think we've got

ng on

one left to send.

"The kill order's price is higher than anything the Goldings ever offered. Half a billion—we'll drown him in assassins."

Xavier nodded, his voice like ice. "For

that price, hell die a thousand

deaths. He may be hiding in The

Sovereign Residences, and sure, the

killers won't dare enter. But the

moment he steps outside, the assassination attempts will be relentless."

In the corner, the old butler who had been silent until now cautiously lifted his eyes. "Mr. Roy, Mr. Xavier-should we begin making arrangements for Mr. Seth's funeral?"

Xavier's hands clenched tighter, his body brimming with rage. Bones cracked under the pressure.

He said coldly, "No rush. We start the funeral the day Andrew's head lands at Seth's altar. I want to offer that bastard's skull as a tribute for 49 days straight!"

The butler nodded. "Of course, sir. But... Mr. Seth's body won't keep for too long. We should begin preparations sooner rather than later."

Xavier raised three fingers, and his voice boomed with dominance. "Three days! If that bastard's head isn't laid at Seth's altar in three days, then I'll offer my own life as an apology to Seth!"

Roy's brows twitched. He did not like hearing those kinds of words from his eldest son. After all, Xavier was the most promising heir of the Haywoods, and talking about dying was never a good thing.

But then again, this fire, this pride, this absolute dominance was exactly what a true Haywood man was supposed to be.

So, Roy said nothing of it. He believed that three days would be enough.noveldrama

Chapter 1149



The Haywoods' bounty order exploded across Blumedale like a thunderclap.

Someone exclaimed, "Holy hell-two elite families teaming up to hunt down one man? Who the hell is this Andrew guy?"

Another chimed in, "The Goldings offered 300 million, and now the Haywoods are throwing in half a billion. That's 800 million in total. I mean, damn-if I were an assassin, I'd be tempted!"

"With both families issuing kill orders? No way Andrew makes it past today."

Elsewhere, Quinton wasted no time finding Christina and her family.

"Christie," he said, barely hiding his glee, "things are about to get interesting. Andrew just caused a major disaster!"

He looked positively thrilled at the news.

Christina's tone remained cold. "I heard. I really don't know where he got the nerve to kill Seth. That's just ridiculous of him."

Irene was playing with a new bracelet, her eyes gleaming as she casually said, "Who cares? Andrew's been arrogant long enough. Finally, someone's putting him in his place. Let's see how long he keeps acting untouchable."

Leroy clenched his jaw. "That bastard actually used Seth's men to try to crush our entire family last time. This is karma. He had it coming."

Quinton smirked. "So, Christie, how's business going in Blumedale lately?"

Christina smiled graciously. "Thanks to your help, everything's moving along smoothly. I've already launched several projects here in Blumedale. There's just one final investment I need to lock in, and once that's done, the Stevens Corporation will officially have its foot in the door."

Quinton nodded approvingly. "For someone from a small city like Jayrodale, you've got the kind of business acumen most people here could only dream of. I told you from the start, Christie, you were always destined for success."

Christina flashed a confident smile. "I believe in myself, but I definitely couldn't have come this far without your support."

Quinton waved it off. "Please, my help was minimal at best. In the end, it's your talent and vision that got you here. Andrew came to Noveldrama Blumedale and started a company?

too but what's he actually done with it? Nothing. Meanwhile, you've already made real progress. That's the difference."

Irene chimed in proudly, "Of course! You didn't know this, but back in Jayrodale, Christie was already a top-tier boss lady!"

Leroy interjected, "Actually, I heard Andrew's company scored a major contract from Mr. McCormick. If that's true, Andrew's pretty impressive!"

Quinton, Christina, and Irene all fell silent for a beat. No one wanted to remember that part of the story.

Irene glared. "Leroy, can you not? Why do you always bring up the one thing no one wants to hear?"

Leroy laughed awkwardly. "Right, right—slip of the tongue. Andrew's a nobody. Useless. Totally incompetent. That was just a mistake—my bad!"

Christina let out a cold huff. "I'm not one to delude myself. The truth is, Andrew did accomplish a lot after coming to Blumedale. Unfortunately, he made one fatal mistake by going up against the Haywoods. And now someone's dead.

"That means there's only one road left for him—death. When that happens, all those successes become meaningless."

Quinton nodded. "Well said. With the Haywoods' influence and Xavier's ruthless reputation, Andrew is as good as gone. By the way, Christie, you mentioned needing a key investor. Do you want me to step in?"

Christina shook her head. "No need, Quinton. I've already made contact with a potential backer. They're a new company but very well-funded. I've been trying to meet their CEO but have had no luck. "Fortunately, one of their senior reps agreed to meet me soon."

Quinton nodded. "Alright, just remember if anything gets in your way, you come to me first. Here in I

Blumede, I'm not saying I can solve every problem, but 99% of them? I-and the Wright family behind me-can handle it without breaking a sweat."

That line earned him another round of shameless flattery from Irene and Leroy.

Christina, however, said nothing. She already knew why Quinton was going out of his way to help her-and it was not out of generosity.

Chapter 1150



For Quinton, it had never been just about sleeping with Christina. What excited him more was the thrill-the thrill of a top-tier predator closing in on an ice-cold beauty.

To him, conquering a woman like Christina would stroke his ego and validate his inflated sense of self-worth.

Unfortunately for him, Christina never felt even a flicker of attraction toward him. At best, they could be called business allies—or to put it bluntly, she only saw him as a temporary tool.noveldrama

Quinton wanted power, possession, dominance.

Meanwhile, Christina only wanted leverage-specifically, to use him and his connections to push the Stevens Corporation into Blumedale.

Over at the Goldings family estate, word of the Haywoods' bounty hit hard. Both Richard and Elon were momentarily stunned when they heard.

"This kid really doesn't know when to stop," Richard growled. "Now he's provoked the Haywoods and even left a body behind. He's practically asking for death! He's so arrogant that it's disgusting!"

Elon sneered. "Actually, isn't this a good thing? We issued a kill order through our family, and he's still alive. But with the Haywoods joining in? There's no way Andrew survives this. Even the universe won't allow it."

Richard snapped, "Good? You call this good? We issued our bounty first. If that little bastard dies by their hand, where does that leave our reputation?"

"Everyone will start whispering that the Goldings couldn't get it done. That we're all bark and no bite-while the Haywoods strike fast and hard."

Elon's expression turned cold. "Don't worry, Dad. Andrew thinks hiding in The Sovereign Residences means he's safe. I'll prove to him just how wrong he is. With the kind of money on the table, there's no shortage of mercenaries willing to breach even the most secure estates just to collect."

Richard nodded approvingly. "Remember-you're the heir of the Goldings. You can't afford to be outshone by Xavier Haywood. If anyone's going to kill Andrew, it should be us. Get to him before the Haywoods do."

Elon grinned darkly. "Trust me, I've already made the arrangements."

Richard waved a hand. "Where's Kenny? Bring him in."

A servant quickly relayed the command, and Kenny entered the grand hall moments later. His clothes were ragged, his hands still caked in mud as he wiped them nervously.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he asked with forced politeness.

Richard chuckled darkly. "Kenny, I've got great news for you. Andrew-your precious enemy-is finally going to die!"

Kenny's eyes lit up with cold joy. "Good. That's... that's fantastic. He deserves it."

Richard smirked. "See? The Goldings keep our promises. Sure, Sherilyn was a disgrace—slept around and tainted our name. But even so, we're taking out Andrew for you. That's us doing you a favor."

Tears welled in Kenny's eyes as he bowed low. "Thank you, sir. Thank you for everything."

Richard raised a brow and chuckled. "Words are cheap. If you really mean it, then get down and lick my toes."

Kenny's expression instantly soured.

His smile disappeared as he said stiffly, "Sir, I've served your family like a slave since the day Sherilyn was exiled. I've cleaned your floors, served your meals, and take your beatings. And now you want this? Isn't that going too far?"

Richard scoffed. "You should be grateful Keven let a dog like you live. Too far? Don't be ridiculous. You're not even worthy of being wronged. Someone, get him on the ground. Let's see that tongue on my toes."

With a wave of his hand, several Golding enforcers rushed in, grabbing Kenny and slamming him to the floor. Despite his screaming and thrashing, they forced his mouth down onto Richard's bare foot.

Humiliation flooded every inch of Kenny's soul.

He hated Andrew, but the hatred in his chest for Richard-the man he once called in-law was even more consuming.

Ever since Sherilyn was cast out of the Goldings, Kenny had stayed behind and suffered abuse no human should endure.

Richard sometimes fed him

leftovers like a dog. Other times, he would humiliate him publicly, forcing him to lick his toes. On more than one occasion, Richard had dragged him out in the dead of night to eat actual garbage.

It was beyond inhumane.

Kenny wanted the Goldings to burn. He wanted Andrew destroyed too-the one who started this hellish downfall.

If it were not for that devil, he and Sherilyn would not be crawling in filth today.