

The Ashes 1021

Chapter 1021

Andrew stepped into the upscale private dining room, placed his order, and waited for the food to arrive. He had been running around all day, and the Phelan family had not even offered him a sip of water.

By the time he sat down, he was starving. So, he could not care less about his image and dug right in.

Aspen hesitated, then said shyly, "Hey, do you want to have a drink? You know, to celebrate?"

Andrew looked up at her. "Drinks? What are we celebrating?"

"Celebrating our company's launch," Aspen said with a slight nod.

Andrew chuckled. "Sure, let's open a bottle then. But I gotta say, you've changed since moving to Blumedale. Never thought you'd be into these fancy little celebrations."

Aspen blushed, which was rare for her. "I just feel like... you're this big-time CEO managing billions in assets. It'd be a shame not to mark the occasion."

So, they ordered a bottle of wine. Or at least tried to an '82 vintage wine, to be specific. However, those legendary vintages had gone extinct ages ago. Besides, Andrew had never really been into fancy imported wines anyway.

So, they had the server bring over a bottle of local brew instead—a strong Celestial Reserve liquor, the kind that hit like a truck.

Aspen frowned slightly. "That stuff is super strong. I probably can't keep up with you."

Andrew waved her off. "No worries. I can drink alone."

Aspen's eye twitched, thinking that he was hopeless.

"You're not really here for the company, are you?" Aspen said, her voice a little complicated. "It's Lauren. She's the reason you took the risk and came to Blumedale, right?"

Andrew laughed. "Come on, that's a bit harsh. Sure, Lauren's part of why I had to come... but I came to see the company and you, too. I'm not totally heartless."

Aspen sneered. "Sounds great and all, but I don't buy a single word of it." Andrew just smiled. "Then don't."

Right then, the private room door opened. The Celestial Reserve had arrived, but the person delivering it was not a server-it was Seth.

His hair was slicked back, his suit crisp and spotless. He said with a charming smile,

"Aspen, I hope you don't mind that I brought the bottle myself. Consider it on me. And since I haven't eaten yet, I thought I'd join you both."

His tone was polite, but his eyes kept darting toward Andrew, cold and calculating.

Aspen looked uncomfortable. "Mr. Haywood, I'm actually here with my superior. It's a business dinner, so it's not really the best time. How about this: I'll treat you to dinner another day. Just us."

She did not believe for a second that Seth had shown up by coincidence. Nonetheless, it did not matter-she just wanted to get rid of him quickly before things blew up. After all, she knew firsthand how ruthless Andrew could be if he lost his temper, regardless of who the other person was.

However, Sean was shameless. He simply smiled and sat down without waiting for permission. He said, "Since I'm already here, I might as well join you. Besides, Aspen, I've always been curious about your superior."

Then, he turned toward Andrew, extending a hand. "Nice to meet you, sir. I'm Seth Haywood, from the Haywoods-one of the founding families in the capital."

Andrew did not shake his hand. He just looked over at Aspen and asked, "Is he your boyfriend?"

Aspen's heart skipped. She shook her head quickly and denied it, "No! We barely know each other-"

Seth interrupted with a grin. "Aspen's just shy. Let me clear it up-I'm courting her, and I plan to marry her into the Haywoods."

He said it with the arrogance of someone who thought his last name was worth more than gold, and his eyes never left Andrew's, practically screaming challenge. "Interesting," Andrew said with a half-smile. He did not say anything more.

Aspen saw that smile and immediately panicked. She turned to Seth and snapped, "Seth, are you out of your mind? I told you I'd take you out another day. What the hell are you doing here stirring up trouble? Get out. Now!"

Seth let out a dark laugh. "Leave? No way. I'm here now, and I'm not going anywhere. Aspen, don't worry. Tonight, I'm gonna free you from this devil once and for all."

He slammed the bottle of Celestial Reserve down on the table and pointed straight at Andrew, his face completely cold.

He declared, "I won't waste time

talking. I'm just here to warn you: From this moment on, Aspen is her own person. She doesn't answer to you anymore. If you ever try to threaten, manipulate, or control her again...

"Well, sorry, but I, Seth Haywood, will make sure you end up as a corpse in the capital."

His tone was loud, dramatic, and over-the-top-like he thought he was the lead in some soap opera, swooping in to rescue the helpless heroine.

Chapter 1022

Andrew started clapping slowly. He mocked, "Bravo. That was truly something. A full-on knight-in-shining-armor performance!"

Aspen pleaded, "Andrew, please don't get mad. I'll make him leave right now!" Andrew raised an eyebrow. "Mad? I'm not mad at all. Actually, I'm happy for you." Aspen blinked in confusion. "Happy for me? Why?"

Andrew gave her a chilling smile. "I mean, look at you—some heir to a powerful family wants to marry you, all head over heels, ready to rescue you from a so-called nightmare. That's gotta be something worth celebrating, right?"

Aspen fell silent. She could not explain it, but something about that smile of his sent shivers down her spine.

Seth tugged at his collar and looked down on Andrew with a smug grin. He said, "Kid, I know you've got a little something going on. Back in a small dump like Jayrodale, you might even pass for a big shot.

"But this is the capital. It's a battleground full of real players. This isn't some backwater town you can charm your way through. Here, if the Haywoods want you gone, you're gone—just like that. So, whether you let go of Aspen willingly or not, she will walk free."

Andrew nodded thoughtfully, his tone filled with mock fear. "Mr. Haywood, you're right. I'm just a nobody from a small place. Blumedale's filled with hidden powers scary stuff! But hey, if you're this into Aspen... sure. I'll step aside and let you have her."

'Huh?' Seth was caught off guard for a second. Then, he suddenly burst out laughing like he could not believe his luck.

He turned to Aspen, smirking. "Aspen, didn't you say this guy was terrifying? You even told me not to get involved, remember? Please. He folded the second he heard the Haywood name. Look at him! Don't worry. I said I'd rescue you, and I'm doing just that."

Before coming here, Seth had been a little anxious, unsure what kind of dangerous figure was 'enslaving' Aspen. But this? This was just some clueless punk pretending to be tough.

Seth was thrilled because this would be way easier than he thought. He could get Aspen and take control of the company assets worth billions. He could not believe his luck and felt like he had hit the jackpot.

Meanwhile, Aspen's expression was slowly growing colder by the second. She hissed, "Andrew, what the hell does that mean? You're treating me like a piece of property you can just hand over?"

Her eyes burned with fury and disbelief as she stared at him.

Andrew calmly replied, "So, you just take everything I say at face value? I was messing with that idiot. You really think someone like him could take you from me?"

Seth's smile vanished instantly. His heart dropped into a pit, and his face twisted in anger as he growled, "You got a death wish, kid? Let me remind you again that I'm a Haywood. My family-"

Before the idiot could finish his brag,

Andrew grabbed the bottle of

Celestial Reserve from the table and

smashed it over his head. Sure, it was an expensive top-shelf drink, but its bottle was just as famous for being thick and sturdy.

The glass cracked with force, and Seth's head started bleeding immediately, the scent of high-end liquor filling the air. Yet, Andrew was not done. He raised his hand and slapped Seth across the face so hard that the man flew out of the private room.

Andrew sneered, "Who do you think you are, calling me 'kid' over and over? So what if you're a Haywood? Tonight, I'll do your parents a favor and teach you some damn manners."

With that, he sat right back down like nothing happened, picked up his utensils, and casually continued eating.

Aspen's mind went completely

blank. This was the capital, and Seth was from the Haywoods, one of The Five Apex Families. That bloodline alone was enough to terrify people. Yet, Andrew had just hit him without a second thought.

She wondered if he even had limits.

"He really is a Haywood! Are you insane? Why'd you hit him that hard?!" Aspen finally snapped, her voice rising in panic.

She continued, "Stop eating! What are you even doing? We have to get out of here now.

Andrew sighed. "What's the rush? We haven't even toasted yet. My drink's still untouched."

Aspen screamed, "To hell with your drink! We're about to die, and all you care about is alcohol?"

She was losing it. What kind of man thinks about alcohol when a storm's about to hit? The Haywoods had muscle, and there would be no way out once their men showed up.

"Piece of trash!" came a furious roar from behind. "How dare you lay a hand on me? Today, I swear—if I don't skin you alive, I, Seth Haywood, am no longer a man!"

Seth was back, face twisted with rage as blood dripped down his cheek. Behind him, a group of men in black stormed forward.

Chapter 1023 "Starting trouble at Aroma Exchange? Do you have a death wish?" A sharp, commanding voice sliced through the room.

Striding in at the center of a group of men in fitted black suits was a tall woman in a crimson designer dress, a lit cigarette delicately balanced between her fingers. Her wavy hair and cold expression made her presence impossible to ignore.

Behind her, the men stood like trained operatives—buzz cuts, sharp eyes, and temple veins slightly bulging—the kind of guys you just knew were professionals. Seth pointed at Andrew and barked, "Ms.

Sinclair, I know the restaurant's rules! But I'm not the one who started anything—it was him, this crazy bastard! Just look at me! He beat me like an animal!" Ruth Sinclair's gaze darkened as she turned toward Andrew.

"So you're the one who smashed Mr.

Haywood's head open?" Before Andrew could respond, Aspen stepped in.

"Ms.

Sinclair, we were just having dinner when Seth barged into our private room and disrupted everything.

As per Aroma Exchange's policy, customer privacy is sacred above all else.

So, we weren't in the wrong here, and I hope you'll look into this fairly." Andrew frowned.

He could tell Aspen was really tense around Ruth.

Every word she said was measured and tight, like she was afraid of ---- stepping out of line.

He spoke up anyway.

"Yeah, I'm the one who cracked that wannabe's head open.

Not only that, I even gave him a little kick for good measure." He did not think he had done anything wrong and had no intention of letting Aspen take the fall for him.

However, the moment those words left his mouth, Aspen panicked and hissed under her breath, "Shut up! If you piss Ms.

Sinclair off, none of us are walking out of here!" Andrew scoffed.

"What's the big deal? We're just eating.

It's not like we're skipping the bill.

What is this place anyway a crime syndicate hangout?" Aspen looked like she was going to pass out from stress.

She begged, "For the love of God, please stop talking! You have no idea who owns this restaurant." She explained, ""The person behind Aroma Exchange is one of the most dangerous power players in the capital.

They made it clear that anyone who causes trouble here is either leaving in a body bag or in pieces." Andrew let out a dismissive grunt, clearly unimpressed.

Just then, Ruth's cold voice rang out again as she stepped forward, heels clicking on the floor.

With a smirk, she said, "You don't seem to get the rules, huh? When people dine here, we treat them like family great food, top service, all good vibes.

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---- "But someone who causes a scene in our space? Honestly, it's been a long time since I've seen anyone stupid enough to try.

Seth spat viciously, "Ms.

Sinclair, that's what I've been telling you! This guy's nothing but a rabid dog arrogant, disrespectful, absolutely suicidal! You probably don't know yet, but he's from Jayrodale, a

total backwater.

He has no idea how things work in the real world.

Just give the order, and he'll be on his knees begging for mercy." Ruth's eyes

narrowed, the disdain evident in her tone.

"So, he's from some little town? No wonder he doesn't know his place.

Fine.

Get down on your knees and apologize to Mr.

Haywood.

Then, cough up a million in damages.

We'll let it go for Ms.

Aspen's sake, since she's a valued regular." Aspen's voice turned firm.

"Ms.

Sinclair, I've already explained.

Seth was the one who started this he forced his way into our room, threw insults and left Andrew no choice but to defend us." According to your restaurant's own policies, guests are entitled to both privacy and security.

So, if anything, the ones who failed their duty were Seth and Aroma Exchange's own staff.

You can't just blame us because we fought back.

That wouldn't be fair." Ruth frowned slightly at that.

On one hand, she had a clueless guy from a small town.

On the other, she had a wealthy heir from one of the capital's most powerful

families.

It did not take a genius to know where her bias should lie.

Nonetheless, rules were rules, and she could not just trample over them without consequence.

Besides, if what Aspen said was true that Seth instigated the whole

thing then pinning this all on

would be a tough call to

Worse yet, they had already drawn attention, and other VIP guests were starting to watch from nearby rooms.

If she handled this poorly, it would not just be a bad night it could seriously hurt the restaurant's hard-earned reputation.

Chapter 1024, Ruth turned her head slightly, voice sharp and cool.

Haywood, is it true what Ms.

Aspen said? Did you barge in and stir things up first?" Seth growled, "I only said a few words.

I never crossed the line! But that lunatic just snapped and attacked me out of nowhere! Ms.

Sinclair, the Haywoods and your establishment have always had a good relationship.

You have to stand up for me!" Aspen quickly countered, "Ms.

Sinclair, that's not how it happened at all! He came into our private suite without permission

and kept throwing insults at Andrew, calling him names over and over again.

If you don't believe me, check the surveillance footage!" Seth sneered coldly. "Aspen, everything I didl did for you.

I was, trying to save you from this nightmare, and this is how you repay me?" Aspen scoffed.

"Mr.

Haywood, are you really going to pretend your intentions were noble? Let's be honestyou had your own motives.

I've told you before, I'm not one of those starry-eyed girls who fall for a flashy last name.

You were never going to fool me that easily." Seth's face twisted with rage, and a curse was already on his lips when Ruth cut him off with an impatient wave.

"No need to review the footage.

Mr.

Haywood, it's clear you were the one who crossed the line first." ---- She added, "Out of respect for your family, I'll let it go this time but there better not be a next time." Seth's face darkened instantly, nearly black with fury.

However, he knew better than to challenge Ruth because the woman had power he could not afford to mess with.

Aspen...

and you, you little punk Andrew this isn't over," he spat viciously, then stormed out. He was still bleeding, humiliated, and unable to retaliate.

If he stuck around, he would only become the butt of every rich snob in the place.

Ruth turned her cold gaze back to Andrew and waved her hand dismissively.

"Ms.

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Aspen, take your guy and leave.

Our restaurant no longer welcomes you especially people who don't know their place.

So don't bother coming back." Aspen did not dare argue.

The fact that Ruth did not escalate things further was already a miracle.

"Thank you, Ms.

Sinclair.

We'll leave right now, and we promise not to return.

She grabbed Andrew's arm and tugged, trying to pull him out of the room.

To her horror, Andrew did not move.

"What are you doing? Come on!" she hissed, eyes wide with panic.

she could not understand why Andrew was still lingering around.

Was he really itching for a beating? ---- Andrew let out a dry chuckle and said flatly, "Leave? What for? We haven't even finished our meal."

Aspen's eyes widened in shock

he pointed directly at Ruth, saying, "Your restaurant might think it's hot shit but I'm not impressed.

I paid for my dinner, and someone else ruined it.

So, you better bring me a fresh set of dishes and the bottle of Celestial

Reserve I ordered now." Normally, Andrew was not the type to lose his temper.

Nonetheless, under certain conditions, especially when someone tried to throw their weight around, he did not hold back.

Ruth's condescending attitude had pushed all the wrong buttons.

If she wanted to act like royalty, then fine he would treat her like a challenge.

He was eager to see what she would do when someone did not grovel Ruth's face turned green with fury.

She growled, "You're giving me

orders? Do you have any idea what kind of reputation Aroma Exchange has in the capital?" The moment those words hit the air, the room around them exploded with murmurs.

"Holy crap, this guy's actually lost his mind!" someone whispered.

"Doesn't he know who he's talking to? The last guy who talked to Ms.

Sinclair like that was long dead!" ---- "He should've just taken the out when she offered it.

What's he even trying to prove?" "If Ruth's boss gets wind of this...

he won't be walking out of here upright.

Hell, he might not even walk out at all."

Chapter 1025

"Let's go! What the hell are you doing? Move!" Aspen was so pale she looked like she might pass out, and she shoved Andrew hard-twice.

She could not understand why he was being so reckless. Why could he not lower his ego and let this slide?

After all, this was not Jayrodale. This was the capital, a place crawling with power players and hidden sharks. Even Seth had the sense to shut up, and back down in front of Ruth, yet Andrew was still out here picking a fight.

Was he trying to get them killed?

Andrew suddenly pulled her into his arms, his gaze sharp and cold. He said flatly, "Don't worry. I've got you tonight. If anything happens to you, I'll make sure this trash excuse of a restaurant gets wiped off the map."

Aspen's mind went completely blank, and her body went numb. They were in trouble-deep, terrifying trouble.

Ruth let out a slow, furious laugh and snapped, "You've got a sharp mouth for someone so young! Do you really think you're untouchable? One word from me, and the people behind me will rip you to pieces!"

Andrew raised a brow and said calmly, "So that's how Aroma Exchange does business, huh? I came here, paid for my meal, and now your staff wants to throw fists because your little VIP acted out? Sounds like a classic case of a fancy place bullying its guests."

Ruth clenched her fists, livid but speechless. As much as she wanted to order a beatdown, Andrew's words had enough logic to make it tricky.

However, it was his arrogant attitude that made her see red. Every other guest treated her with respect-only this random nobody dared to bark orders at her.

Somebody in the crowd chuckled mockingly. "Kid, just apologize to Ms. Sinclair and get lost while you still can."

"It's just a meal. You should be grateful you're still breathing-stop pushing your luck!"

Another commented, "Coming to a place like this, you better have the name or the brains to match. But you? You've got neither."

"Only a clueless nobody would piss off the host like this and think he can still finish dinner."

Murmurs rippled through the crowd as everyone watched with disbelief as they realized Andrew was seriously refusing to leave just for a damn meal. They figured he was probably some broke loser from out of town, desperate to soak up every last drop of luxury.

Andrew ignored them all. He calmly took Aspen by the hand and returned to the private room. He did not glance at Ruth, nor did he hesitate he just walked straight in.

"Bring out our food again," his voice called from inside, steady as ever.

"Everything we ordered-exactly the same. And don't forget the Celestial Reserve

I asked for. If you don't, I'll be reporting Aroma Exchange for defrauding customers."

The room fell silent for a beat. Then, the tension snapped like a wire as people looked around, wide-eyed, some laughing in disbelief.

He was still pushing and even doubling down.

One of Ruth's bodyguards leaned in, voice cold and deadly. "Ms. Sinclair, want me to break his legs and toss him out back with the dogs?"

Ruth's face was tight with rage, but she shook her head. "No. We don't break rules-especially not in front of other guests. If we start doing that, our whole brand goes down the drain."

She added, "Just serve the food. Let's treat him like a stray dog we're throwing scraps to."

She issued the order and turned to leave-she was completely done with the mess. She did not want to spend one more second in this embarrassing circus.

Just as she moved, Andrew's voice echoed from the suite again. "Hey, lady in the red dress-Ms. Sinclair, right? Come in and have a drink with me. Whatever your tip rate is, name it. I'll make sure you smile til your jaw locks."

The room fell into dead silence.

Ruth froze in place, eyes burning with fury. If looks could kill, the walls would've crumbled.

Every single guest around them was stunned for half a second-then exploded in whispers.

"Did he just ask Ms. Sinclair to drink with him? Is this guy out of his damn mind?"

Someone mocked, "Who the hell does he think he is? One of the heads of The Five Apex Families? The leader of the Three Titans?"

"Shit, this guy is done. I'll bet 200 grand he's not surviving the night."

One said, "That idiot really picked the worst day to mouth off. Mr.

Fischer's in the restaurant tonight. Offending Ms. Sinclair is one

thing-but him? That's a straight ticket to hell."

At the mention of Zachary Fischer, even the boldest ones lowered their voices.

Chapter 1026

Some guests watched on with smug amusement.

Ruth bit down her rage and gave a chilling command to the man at her side. "Wait until they finish their meal and leave the restaurant. I want that punk's tongue."

With that, she turned and walked away, the contempt on her face thick enough to cut through glass.

What a joke—he actually thought he could touch her?

Ruth was beautiful, yes, but she was also powerful. In a place like this, people did not just treat her with courtesy—they treated her with reverence. No one had ever dared to say something so disrespectful to her, and the reason was simple.

Behind her stood a monster of a man, a silent force that kept Aroma Exchange untouchable. He was the one who made this restaurant sacred ground.

...

Back in the private suite, the food was served again, freshly plated. A new bottle of Celestial Reserve had also been opened.

Andrew ate happily, completely unbothered. Meanwhile, Aspen sat stiff as a board, her face pale and tense, and she couldn't bring herself to touch a single dish.

"Well, you might as well eat up... because after this, we probably won't live to see the next meal," she muttered with a bitter smile.

Andrew glanced at her. "Why aren't you eating? Come on. You're safe—I'm here."

Aspen shook her head, her voice low and hollow. "Go ahead and enjoy yourself. I can't. I'll do what I can to protect you once we leave, but I don't think it'll matter much. In the end, whether you live or die... it's out of my hands now."

Andrew just smiled and continued eating without another word. After all, he needed energy. Once he had it, he would not care if it was some snooty restaurant or one of the Three Titans' own estates- he would march in and flip the table. He never liked picking fights, but he hated being pushed around even more.

Upstairs from the dining floor was a private, luxury bar-reserved for Aroma Exchange's top-tier clients. After finishing their meals, the VIPs often came here for drinks.

Just beside the bar was a dimly lit lounge tucked behind frosted glass doors. Ruth, still in her red dress, stepped into the moody space.

Soft jazz played from a sleek sound system, and a long-haired man lounged lazily

in a woven chair, puffing slow rings of smoke while ambient lighting glowed above him.

Without a word, Ruth walked over

and dropped herself onto his lap, her expression filled with irritation. The man sat up and wrapped an arm around her, grinning as he slid his hand across her chest, giving it a firm squeeze.

"What's wrong this time?" he asked in a lazy drawl. "Someone made my baby upset? Or do you want something? Whatever it is, just say the word. I'll make it happen."

Ruth pouted and huffed. "Some little punk came into the restaurant and beat the crap out of the Haywoods' golden boy."

The man chuckled like it was no big deal. "So he got smacked around-big deal. What I care about is this-who pissed you off? Tell me, and I'll make him regret being born."

Ruth's eyes narrowed. "It was that same little punk. Not only did he act like Aroma Exchange was beneath him, he had the audacity to ask me to drink with him. Since we opened, no one has ever dared to insult me like that. He must have a death wish."

At that, the man's face finally darkened. "He asked you to drink with him? Does he not know that you-and this whole damn restaurant-are under my name?"

Ruth let out a cold snort. "He's just some idiot from nowhere and doesn't know a damn thing. I've already told the boys-I want his tongue cut out."

However, the man shook his head. "No need."

Ruth turned, glaring. "No need? What, don't you love me anymore? Or are you scared?"

He let out a low growl, then suddenly bit her lip hard and sucked until her mouth swollen. Only then did he pull back, smirking as he licked his lips.

"Scared? In Gabo Creek, there are only a few names worth worrying about. And I'm not scared of anyone, you got that, you little tease? This place? I built it for you to enjoy."

He added, "You're mine-and

everyone in the capital knows it.

Let's go. I don't come out often, but think it's time I showed my face, And while I'm at it, I'll take care of this little nobody who dared to

disrespect my woman."

Chapter 1027

Ruth was breathless, her chest rising and falling rapidly from the long-haired man's teasing touch. Still, she looked thrilled.

After punching his chest a few times in mock protest, she giggled and purred, "You're the one who made the restaurant rules, remember? No violence on the premises. If we go after that punk now, aren't we just ruining our own reputation?"

The long-haired man scoffed. "Those rules were made for others to follow, not me."

Ruth laughed seductively, pressing her chest against him with a flirtatious smirk as they linked arms and headed downstairs.

The moment they appeared, every guest in the restaurant stood up, rushing to greet them respectfully. The long-haired man returned each nod with a warm smile, walking with effortless dominance, radiating presence.

Ruth, however, wore a wicked smile. Now that her man was involved, that little punk Andrew? He was dead meat.

Someone exclaimed, "Look, look! Mr. Fischer's heading toward the private room! That kid's screwed!"

"For Mr. Fischer to make a personal move-damn, that punk must've really crossed a line!"

Another whispered, "Mr. Fischer isn't just anyone. He's one of the top figures in the southern martial arts world, a direct disciple of the martial arts alliance, and ranked ninth on the Underworld Index. He could end that kid with a glance!"

"He doesn't even need to lift a finger. One breath from Mr. Fischer would send that punk into cardiac arrest!"

The entire restaurant had stopped eating. One by one, guests either stepped out of their private rooms or leaned over balconies, all eager to watch the drama unfold.

Ruth arrived at the suite door and barked, "Open up! Get the hell out here!"

However, the door remained closed, and Andrew's calm voice drifted through. "Who's out there barking like a dog?"

Ruth trembled with fury, nearly choking on her rage. She turned to Zachary with wide, wounded eyes. "You see this? Do you see how arrogant that punk is?"

Zachary narrowed his eyes, lips curling into a dangerous smile. He had not expected anyone to talk like that in front of him.

"Open the door. I'll give you one chance. Come out on your knees and apologize to Ruth," he said, his tone low, heavy with threat.

Still, the door stayed shut. Andrew replied, calm as ever, "And who the hell are you, mutt number two?"

Zachary's face instantly darkened. His laid-back demeanor vanished, replaced by a storm brewing behind his eyes.

Around them, jaws dropped. Some guests were so stunned, they wondered if they had just hallucinated.

"Did he just call Mr. Fischer a dog? Does this guy have a death wish for his entire bloodline?"

"Nobody, and I mean nobody, disrespects Mr. Fischer. This is insane!"

"Just wait. He's not walking out of here alive!"

As the whispers and gasps spread like wildfire, Zachary took a step forward, ready to kick the door open.

Yet, before he could move, the door swung open smoothly with a swish. Andrew walked out with a blank

expression and asked, "Planning to

hands?"

Ruth sneered. "Time's up, you little freak. Now get on your knees so I can slice out that filthy tongue of yours!"

Andrew glanced at her, his smile sharp and lifeless. "Get on my knees? For you? Please... you're just an over-glorified whore."

Ruth's body stiffened as if struck by lightning, and her face went crimson with fury.

The guests around them looked like

their souls had left their bodies.

They could not believe what they had just heard. Even if Ruth was not exactly innocent, calling her that out loud, in public-was insane.

Aspen stood in the background, completely pale, lips trembling.

Even Zachary, the man behind Ruth, had shown up. It was the exact r

everyone whispered about in fan yet Andrew still dared to a Q V

like this.

Did he really not understand the consequences?

Ruth grabbed Zachary's sleeve, shrieking, "Zac! Kill him! Kill him now!"

However, Zachary did not move. He stood frozen in place as if someone had flipped a switch and turned him into a statue.

Chapter 1028

"Zac! Do it! What are you waiting for?!" Ruth shrieked, stamping her heel in a fury. Without a word, Zachary raised his hand and slapped her across the face hard.

The force sent Ruth flying, blood trickling from the corner of her lips. Stunned, she clutched her cheek and stared at him in disbelief like she had just seen a ghost.

"Why... Why the hell did you hit me?" she stammered.

Around them, everyone froze in place. They all could not believe what had just happened, and they could not help but wonder if it was a mistake. After all, they all thought Andrew was the one who should have been hit.

Andrew stared at Zachary, shocked. Then, he let out a low, amused laugh. He certainly had not expected to see a familiar face, of all things.

Meanwhile, Zachary shuddered. From the moment Andrew had stepped into the light, he had been frozen, like some spell had locked his limbs in place.

His legs were shaking as he stammered, "C-Captain, is it really you?"

Andrew's lips curled into a cold, mocking grin. "Zac, huh? You're doing pretty well for yourself. All this trouble... just for a woman? This place is yours, and I ate your food. So tell you what—I'll stand here. Do whatever you want with me."

Zachary nearly collapsed, his face drained of all color as he shook his head violently. "N-No way, Captain! Please, stop pulling my legs. It's all just a misunderstanding, a big one..."

The sight of him trying to laugh it off-nervous and sweating-left the onlookers in stunned silence. They were stunned to watch that Zachary was actually apologizing to Andrew.

On the side, Ruth forgot about the pain on her lips. She had never seen her man like this-pale, shaking, terrified. It was like he had just come face to face with his worst nightmare.

To her, Zachary had always been untouchable in both the underground and the elite circles of the capital. He could crush empires with a phone call. Yet now, he stood there like a scolded child.

Aspen's mind was buzzing, and she thought nothing made sense anymore.

Why was Ruth's backer, the formidable Zachary Fischer, suddenly acting like Andrew was the one in charge? He looked like he would kneel and kiss Andrew's shoes if asked.

In the middle of this surreal tension, Andrew casually said, "Well, since fate brought us back together, we might as well catch up. Let's go find somewhere quiet to talk."

Zachary did not dare hesitate. He immediately gestured respectfully and replied, "Please, this way."

Then, he turned to lead them out, spine stiff and eyes lowered. He did not even dare straighten his back.

Ruth scrambled after him, still trying to understand. "Zac, why did you—"

However, Zachary snapped without turning his head. "If you cherish your life, shut your damn mouth!"

Ruth went ghost-white and did not

say

her ser at Andrew, eyes filled r word. She looked overet

With

pure terror.

Who the hell was this man? What kind of monster could make her invincible man

look like a servant?

Aspen stayed close to Andrew, stunned and silent.

"Y-You know Mr. Fischer?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Andrew nodded with a faint smile. "Yeah, I know him."

Aspen stared. "And... what exactly is your relationship?"

Andrew paused thoughtfully and then said, "Let's just say if I told h to

Wimp off a building, he'd

without asking why."

bet

Aspen's perfectly made-up face twitched hard, her heart racing so fast it almost hurt.

Half a minute later, Andrew was seated at a private booth on the upper floor of the lounge bar.

Zachary did not hesitate to kick

everyone else out of the space, and none dared to complain. In fact, the

guests filed out with wide eyes and craned necks.

They all wondered who was this man that even Zachary rolled out the red carpet

for.

Chapter 1029 "Ms.

Stevens, please have a seat," Zachary said warmly.

Aspen was caught off guard but quickly sat beside Andrew, feeling, like she had entered a surreal dream.

Never in her life had she imagined someone like Zachary Fischera living legend in the southern martial arts world would personally invite her to sit.

"Ruth, go grab the two vintage bottles I've been saving," Zachary added, turning to her with a tone that left no room for negotiation.

"Tonight, I'm going all out for Mr.

Lloyd." Ruth's face tightened with resentment.

Why was her man, always so powerful and untouchable, suddenly acting like a bootlicker? However, when Zachary's icy gaze locked onto her, she shuddered and hurried off to obey without another word.

Andrew chuckled, clearly amused.

"Zac, you're living large these days.

And your woman? Man, she carries herself like she the damn queen." Zachary forced a bitter smile.

"I'm sorry, Mr.

Lloyd.

Ruth's gotten spoiled by me.

I'll discipline her better going forward." The two prized bottles were soon brought in, and Zachary poured the drinks himself first for Andrew, then Aspen, and finally for himself.

---- When the bottle reached Ruth's hands, Zachary's expression turned cold.

"Ruth, you disrespected Mr.

Lloyd today.

Three shots, right now.

Apologize properly." Ruth's face flushed red with indignation.

"Zac, can I just ask why? Zachary's tone dropped a notch.

"You don't need to ask why.

I told you to apologize, so you do it." Ruth glared at Andrew, slamming the bottle on the table.

"Sorry, but I'm not doing it." She still had not forgotten the humiliation earlier, and now she was expected to grovel? Not a chance.

Zachary's face darkened instantly.

"Pour the drinks.

Now." Ruth scoffed.

"Unless you give me a damn good explanation, I'm not doing it!" Andrew raised his hand

with a faint smile.

"Forget it.

No real harm was done.

An apology's not that important." Aspen quickly chimed in, smiling politely.

"Mr.

Fischer, you don't have to force Ms.

Sinclair.

It's fine, really just a misunderstanding." Both Ruth and Zachary were clearly not ordinary people.

Even if ---- Andrew did not seem the least bit afraid of Zachary, Aspen still felt it was better to keep things peaceful.

However, Zachary did not share that view.

He snapped, "You stupid bitch, are you deaf? I said apologize!" I With no warning, he backhanded Ruth

across the face again bel

Then, he grabbed her hair and slammed her face down against the table.

He growled, "Listen closely.

Mr.

Lloyd is someone I respect.

You get that? You screwed up today, and instead of showing remorse, you've got the nerve to act like this? "Mr.

Lloyd might be generous enough to overlook your trash behavior, but I'm not.

Either pour the drinks and apologize,

or I'll send you back to that club and

let you return to what you used to be." Blood at the corner of her mouth, Ruth had now been slapped twice in

one night.

She sobbed, "Fine, fine! Zac, please don't be mad.

I'll apologize! I'll do it!" Tears welled in her eyes as she finally caved, overwhelmed

by fear.

Everyone knew that Zachary had bought Ruth out of a luxury club.

She existed at his whim a trophy, a possession, his to command or discard.

Even so, it did not stop her from strutting around like a queen, basking in his affection, flaunting power she never truly owned, Nonetheless, when Zachary got

angry, all that vanished instantly.

What terrified her even more was realizing that Andrew was someone her god-like

man

bowed to.

It was unfathomable.

With trembling hands, she poured three shots and offered them to Andrew one by one while apologizing.

When the last glass hit the table, she turned to Zachary, her voice weak and full of shame.

"I'm sorry, Zac.

I was wrong.

I won't ever do it again."

Chapter 1030 Zachary let out a cold snort.

"You better make sure there isn't a next time.

Everyone seated here has earned their place except you.

You're just a cheap nobody who doesn't belong at this table." He added, "Get on your knees and pour drinks for Mr.

Lloyd and Ms.

Stevens." Ruth stared at him in disbelief.

Was he seriously asking her to kneel now, all for Andrew? Was he really worth this level of humiliation? Ultimately, she gritted her teeth and dropped to her knees like a servant silently pouring drinks as ordered.

Aspen watched, wanting to say something but stopped herself.

she could not help but shoot Andrew a look, annoyed he had not said a word to stop it.

Letting someone kneel like that was seriously inhumane.

However, Andrew just sipped his drink quietly, as if he had not seen anything.

He had no intention of stepping in not after how Ruth had acted earlier.

If anything, this was just karma being served cold.

Zachary downed half his glass and looked across the table.

"All these years...

we thought you were"

Andrew smirked.

"Dead, right?" Zachary paused, then laughed awkwardly.

"At first, yeah.

That's what everyone believed.

But later...

no one dared say it anymore.

Anyone else could've died but you? No one ever truly believed you would." Andrew waved his hand.

"That's all in the past.

Come on drink." Zachary immediately raised his glass respectfully.

Back in the day, he would not have even dreamed of drinking at the same table as this man.

Not because of fear but because he simply was not qualified.

Andrew set his glass down and asked, "And you? How'd you end up here? Opening a restaurant and living on scraps? With the record you had, and the people above who favored you, shouldn't you be a colonel by now?" Zachary shook his head.

"After you left, everything fell apart.

If this were back then, yeah my goal was the battlefield, to earn my stars.

I wanted to be a general and lead real campaigns.

"But now? You're gone, the fire's gone, and the rest of us just scattered.

This restaurant is just a way to pass the time.

I ended up joining the southern martial arts world, made it to ninth on the Underworld

Index...

been drifting ever since." Andrew sneered.

"Ninth place? And you're proud of that? Please.

That's worthless.

Don't you

unless are say you know me i crack the top threet

Zachary's face flushed w

with shame.

"You're right.

You're absolutely right.

I haven't been slacking, I swear.

I've been trying.

But not everyone's like youcrushing names on the Titan List like it's child's play." Their conversation was not hushed or hidden, and every word rang loud and clear in the bar's

stillness.

Ruth and Aspen heard every single word.

Ruth could barely process what she was hearing.

Her manZachary Fischerranked ninth on the Underworld Index, a figure that made

most

men in the capital shiver.

Yet, Andrew scoffed at that ranking.

Who the hell was this man? On the other hand, Aspen felt like her world was flipping upside down.

She was being crushed under wave after wave of revelation.

Andrew was not some nobody from Jayrodale, He knew Zachary, and the
did not even blink at someone

ked ninth in the Underworld

Index. .

UM

Moreover, they were casually talking about ranks like colonel and generalmilitary- level
honors.

This could only mean one thing Andrew must have come from the military. However, what shook her even more was Zachary's last sentence, which said Andrew had --

-- already been tearing through names on the Titan List.

The Titan List was Holtrien's most exclusive martial authority ranking, known to represent

the strongest of the strong.

Her mind could not even fathom it.