

The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1381

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They heard she was an orphan, all alone in the world, and given the Collins' family wealth, it wasn't like they could just turn her out on the streets.

The Collins family was well-off. Taking in one more wasn't a burden.

So, it wasn't a surprise that they decided to keep her around.

"You know, as her aunt and uncle, we can only offer advice. In the end, it's up to her guardians to make the decision, Eunice remarked, glancing toward the garden.

Snowflakes began to fall, and Arabella was walking alone amidst them when Romeo, who was standing by the front door, noticed her. He quickly handed his umbrella to the doorman to bring out to her.

"Is that Romeo?" A knowing smile played on Eunice's lips. "Seems he's quite taken with our Bella."

The doorman brought the umbrella to Arabella, and just as she stepped out, Romeo draped his coat over her shoulders, took the umbrella from her hand, and pulled her into a warm embrace.

"I've finally got you in my arms, Romeo couldn't help but say as he looked down at her.

His fiancée, it seemed, was probably the busiest woman in the world, and catching sight of her had become a rare treat.

Arabella chuckled, "Well, here I am, seeking you out as soon as I got a moment."

Romeo gazed into her eyes with a smile, "I thought you might not come. You mentioned on the phone that Grandpa had an accident. What happened? Is it serious?"

"You sure are getting the hang of calling him 'Grandpa'? Arabella teased.

"'Wife' rolls off the tongue even better. Want to hear it?"

"No thanks, Arabella shot back, "Grandpa's situation is a long story."

"Let's talk in the car then."

The car was warm, no way he was going to let his girl get cold.

Once Arabella was settled in the car, she explained the gist of it, leaving Romeo somewhat speechless, "I remember when she used to make soup for grandpa, making his illness worse. In the end, it was you who had to step in and save the day."

Arabella recalled the incident when Serena had eagerly bought leftovers from a medicine auction at an insane price to make soup for Grandpa Phillip. The well-intentioned gesture had ended up landing Phillip in the operating room.

"Time's passed, and she still hasn't learned'?"

Romeo said as he drove, "and once again, you're the one cleaning up the mess."

"She always feels like I'm going to take everything from her, Arabella said with a sense of resignation.

"But isn't everything she has because of you? Your family is her family, her lifestyle is thanks to you.

What does she really have that's hers?"

"Well, Martin is hers."

"Martin only knows her because she's 'the Collins' heiress'. If she were from an ordinary background, how could she ever know

Martin? So, in the end, it's still your doing."

Seeing how blatantly biased he was, Arabella couldn't help but laugh, "You're quite the defender."

"Because you're worth defending,' Romeo said, freeing one hand to hold hers.

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On the other side of town, Martin was driving Serena around, feeling as if he were living in a dream. It all seemed surreal.

Serena had texted him earlier: [Let's hang out. At first, Martin thought he'd read the message wrong. It wasn't until after he'd reread it dozens of times that he believed it was real.

This was the first time Serena had ever asked him out!

And it was the first time she had responded to his long-standing affection for her.

"Serena, where would you like to go?" Martin asked gently, glancing at the girl in the passenger seat.

Serena appeared indifferent. "I don't care."

She was just bored of hanging around her aunt's house and was looking for something to kill time.

"Feeling down?" Martin picked up on her mood. "Is something bothering you? Did someone upset you?"

Serena didn't want to answer, and Martin didn't press. Instead, he suggested, "How about we go to the lavender fields?"

Serena remembered how, a long time ago, Louisa suspected her of having improper thoughts about Romeo. To dispel any

doubts, Martha had lied, claiming Serena had a boyfriend.

To keep the lie from unraveling, Serena had even hinted to Martin that there was a new movie she wanted to see.

At that time, Martin was dealing with some business at Dawnstar's subsidiary and, upon hearing her suggestion, had immediately flown back.

He had asked her over the phone if she liked Dawnstar and mentioned that he wanted to take her to see the lavender fields there someday, but Serena had given him a non-committal answer.

Now, Martin was bringing up the lavender again, which surprised Serena. She looked at him. "You remembered?"

"I said I would take you; Martin affirmed, remembering his promise like it was written in crystal.

But Serena's eyes dimmed. How wonderful it would be if Romeo treated her the same way.

At the Dawnstar lavender fields.

After parking the car, Martin gently tugged on Serena's sleeve, careful not to hold her hand in case she didn't like it.

Even though he was being a perfect gentleman, Serena couldn't help but feel a bit repulsed, though she didn't show it.

As they approached the entrance, a security guard informed them, "Sorry, the fields are privately booked today."

Serena was taken aback. How could such vast lavender fields be booked out just like that?

Glancing inside, she saw a dozen bodyguards standing by, and amidst the lavender, there was only one couple - Romeo and

Arabella, by their silhouettes and postures!
Especially Arabella, who was wearing the same
outfit as she had that morning!
Serena's expression changed instantly. What were
they doing here on a date?

A few photographers ran towards them, seemingly
discussing photo arrangements.

They booked such an expansive field of lavender
just for a photoshoot?

Martin conversed fluently in French with the security
guard, trying to negotiate. He offered to pay the
same private booking fee to
use just a small corner of the field, wanting only to
take a walk with his girlfriend.

The guard explained it was impossible because the
person who had booked the field had a prestigious
status, and they couldn't
afford to offend them.

Martin didn't want to give up and continued to
discuss with the guard.

Meanwhile, Serena overheard Romeo's voice
coming through the loudspeakers, "Bella, this piano
piece is composed just for
you. I've said it many times, but at this moment, I still
want to tell you, I love you."

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Serena stood frozen, disbelief etching her features as she overheard Romeo's declaration of love to Arabella, accompanied by a composition he had crafted just for her.

This was so unlike him!

"I love you so much I want to shout it from the rooftops, yet I'm scared too many eyes might covet your brilliance, fear you might become someone else's daydream. Bella, I love you, and I want you by my side every single day."

The gentle melody of the piano ebbed and flowed with the scent of lavender in the air.

It was a recording Romeo had made in advance.

A smile brimmed in Arabella's eyes. "Didn't you already write me a song? What made you think of crafting another?"

"When I'm with you, I'm filled with joy, and I just want to capture that feeling," Romeo murmured, leaning down to tenderly stroke

her face. "Can you hear what my heart is saying?"

Nodding, Arabella couldn't help but laugh, "I can hear it, though it's a bit showy, isn't it?"

"It's just us here, no tourists," Romeo chuckled along. "Maestro Melody, you haven't given your verdict on this Piece yet."

"It's not bad," she laughed.

"Maestro Melody, what do you decipher from it? A heart-skipping fondness? Or a longing that fills every thought?"

"It's your love, overflowing."

Martin, aware that a romantic scene was unfolding inside, tried unsuccessfully to persuade the security guard at the entrance.

Not wanting to force the issue, he turned to Serena, "Shall we find another spot?"

Serena, eyes locked on the distant sight of Romeo and Arabella kissing, remained silent, filled with a sense of defeat.

Determined not to let her down, Martin persisted in negotiating with the guard, suggesting they could pay double the price or

meet any other request the private party might have, as long as it was within his power.

The guard, moved by his sincerity, reluctantly went to consult the head of security.

The head of security, unable to make the decision, jogged to the center of the flower field and waited for the couple's tender

moment to end before asking, "Boss, there's a couple from Solterra who want to come in with his girlfriend. They're offering

double the price and promise not to disturb you."

"Let them in" Arabella said, looking up at her partner, her arms still wrapped around his waist. "Aren't we heading somewhere

else shortly anyway?"

"If my fiancée says so, then that's what we'll do," Romeo said, gazing adoringly at Arabella and planting a kiss on her forehead.

"I've also arranged for a hot air balloon."

"Did you get that idea from browsing online, or did you come up with it yourself?"

"A bit of both." Romeo admitted, watching for her reaction. "Is it not romantic enough?"

As long as it was his doing, Arabella adored it. "As long as it's from you, I love it"

The security chief relayed the message, and soon Martin and Serena were allowed entry.

Martin beamed, "Serena, we finally get to go in."

Serena watched as Romeo and Arabella ascended in the hot air balloon, her eyes darting to the photographers swarming the field, capturing the moment.

Martin sensed the envy and disappointment in her gaze and softly asked, "Would you like to ride in a hot air balloon, or take photos?"

Serena wanted to roll her eyes. She had no desire to share a hot air balloon or a photo shoot with him.

She just retorted, "Can't you think of something original? Why always copy someone else's ideas!"

Martin was puzzled by her sudden outburst. In a soothing tone, he asked, "What would you like, then?"

He was willing to fulfill any wish she had.

Serena shot him a cold glare in response, "What's the point if I have to come up with it myself? Look at her boyfriend — a private event, a special composition, a heartfelt confession, a hot air balloon ride, and even a horde of photographers to capture it all."

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Martin pondered with a hint of mischief in his eyes, "How about I surprise you with something like this next time?"

Serena remained silent, feeling an undeniable chasm between him and the charm she found in Romeo. There was just no comparison!

She was settling, and she knew it.

Martin suggested a stroll through the sunflower fields, but her gaze kept drifting towards the hot air balloon tethered nearby. It

wasn't flying far, and she could clearly see a couple locked in an embrace, sharing a kiss that was all too glaring for her.

It was such an eyesore!

Noticing her discontent, Martin tried to cheer her up with a soft proposal, "Hey Serena, want me to snap a pic of you with my phone? You could post it on Facebook."

"Forget it," Serena replied, uninterested. "Taking pictures on someone else's turf feels like mooching off their moment. Don't worry about me. I just want some time to myself."

Martin felt a pang of guilt, realizing he should have planned ahead to avoid disappointing her.

Up in the hot air balloon.

Romeo's lips lingered on the girl's, his hand gently caressing her slender waist.

Arabella responded to his fervent affection, and after a while, she felt his passionate kisses begin to wander downward.

"Romeo.

Her soft call made him pause, his eyes still filled with lingering adoration, "Hmm?"

"There are people watching below."

Arabella looked down at the stunning vista—the sprawling lavender fields were a breathtaking masterpiece.

"I never realized how beautiful lavender could look from this angle."

"You're even more beautiful." Romeo embraced her from behind, sharing the view. "If you like it, we can come here more often."

Arabella knew their time was limited; they both had busy lives and rarely had moments to enjoy the scenery in quiet like they were now.

"Some sights are worth seeing just once."

"No matter how many times you want to see it, I'll be there with you. If you get tired of it, we'll find a new place.

If not, I'll stay until you've had your fill"

Serena, watching the hot air balloon with its occupants still aloft, could only imagine the intimate whispers shared in that close embrace. It was maddening.

Martin glanced at the couple in the sky and then at Serena beside him. He cautiously reached for her hand, hoping to ease her irritation.

Serena felt a surge of aversion but was also aware that she needed to give Martin some encouragement. He had to be firmly attached to her, willing to give his all.

Martin was surprised when Serena didn't pull away. His smile grew sweet and content. He was careful not to hurt her, holding her hand with a tenderness that was almost fearful.

The couple in the balloon kissed again, with Romeo leaning in, seemingly insatiable, driving Serena to the brink of envy.

If only Romeo had been that assertive and gentle with her.

Why had he been so cold to her in the past, almost annoyed, yet so smitten with Arabella?

Martin, sensing she was still upset, followed her gaze. In the warm sunlight, the couple in the balloon seemed to melt into each other with their kiss.

Martin, too, longed to kiss her, to melt away her anger.

But as he leaned in, Serena turned away, her eyes flashing with irritation and reluctance.

Realizing he had crossed a line, Martin apologized, "Sorry, I got ahead of myself.

"Do you want me or my heart?" Serena suddenly looked up, her voice tinged with anger.

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"Of course I," Martin was visibly nervous, his gaze locked into hers, yet he couldn't bring himself to deceive her, "want it all."

He yearned for both.

The sincerity in his eyes appeared to Serena as nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing, "So, hanging out with me, you've always had ulterior thoughts, right?"

Martin was puzzled. To him, these 'ulterior thoughts' were simply an extension of his affection for her. Seeing her upset, Martin didn't dare to soothe her with his actions anymore. He could only try to explain verbally.

"I'll admit, I'm drawn to you, because I like you. I want to kiss you, hold you, take your hand. I want you, all of you, for myself. But more than that, I want your heart. I hope to have a place in there, even if it's just a tiny corner, that would be enough for me."

Serena turned her face away, silent.

"I'm sorry, Serena. I'll be more mindful from now on."
Martin gently tugged at her sleeve, not daring to take her hand, "Please, don't be mad, okay?"

Serena purposefully shrugged him off and marched ahead.

"Serena." Martin felt uneasy, fearing she might think of him as a creep and cut him off for good.

When Serena saw him anxiously catch up, the sense of control over him suddenly lifted her spirits.

"Are you smiling?"

Martin caught a fleeting smile on her lips, which eased his anxious heart, and a grin spread across his face, "Does this mean you've forgiven me?"

"From now on, you can't touch me without my permission!"

Martin found this a bit tough, but anxious not to upset her again, he simply nodded in agreement,

"Okay."

Serena glanced at his hand, and Martin quickly retracted it, not even daring to touch her sleeve again.

Her mood improved even further, reveling in the power she held over him.

"So, are you still mad?" Martin cautiously walked by her side, watching her every expression.

"Much better now."

"Then, can I hold your hand again?" Martin longed to reach out to her.

Unexpectedly, the next second, Serena extended her hand, "Here."

Overwhelmed with excitement and joy, Martin quickly took her hand, afraid she might change her mind.

The hot air balloon gently descended.

Those above didn't realize why there was such commotion below.

"So, you're ticklish" Arabella chuckled, giving Romec's waist another playful scratch.

Romeo retaliated, laughing, "You're even worse."

"Stop, please stop."

Arabella couldn't dodge in time and found herself captured in his arms.

"Say you love me."

Arabella remained silent.

Romeo, both domineering and doting, kept tickling her, "Say it, and I'll let you go."

Trapped in his embrace and laughing uncontrollably, Arabella pleaded, "Stop."

She had no strength left to resist.

It was the first time Romeo saw her laugh so radiantly, so beautifully. He was utterly mesmerized.

Arabella seized the moment to tickle him back. The usually aloof Romeo revealed a childlike side in front of her, conceding with a

laugh, "I surrender"

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Arabella chuckled, "Wow, even the great lover Romeo surrenders."

"In your presence, I'm always the vanquished, never the victor," Romeo's voice was a soft baritone, filled with adoration as he gazed into her eyes.

There was something about the way he looked at her that made Arabella realize that being the focus of such tender and loving

eyes was all she could ever ask for in this lifetime. The hot air balloon gently touched down on the earth.

Once again, Romec's lips found Arabella's in a kiss. She could feel the softness and the sweetness of his kiss, his breath near, right in front of her.

Serena, who had just managed to cheer herself up, felt her mood sour again.

The photographer, capturing the moment, thought to himself: "What a photogenic pair, every shot is a masterpiece. They barely need any retouching."

As Romeo led Arabella out of the basket, the photographer couldn't resist snapping several more pictures.

Holding Romec's hand, Arabella walked forward, her peripheral vision catching Serena nearby.

"Hey, what a coincidence." Serena offered a feigned greeting to Arabella.

But Arabella didn't respond, simply withdrawing her gaze indifferently.

"My girlfriend is saying hello to you,' Martin pointed out, causing Romeo to halt.

Romeo had been surrounded by photographers and bodyguards, so he hadn't immediately noticed others around them.

"Are you speaking to my fiancée?" There was an unmistakable sharpness in Romeo's voice, a warning to anyone who dared challenge him.

The head of security never imagined that the couple he let in to enjoy was Serena and her boyfriend!

This was a disaster.

It was his oversight, not realizing who he was admitting.

After all, he thought Arabella had a particular distaste for Serena.

"My fiancée's choice to respond or not is her own," Romeo said with a steely look in his eyes.

Yet Martin chuckled, "Mr. McMillian, have you considered the feelings of your ex-fiancée?"

Romeo scoffed at the mention of "ex-fiancée" "My fiancée has always been one and the same."

He pulled Arabella forward, formally introducing her, "This is she."

Arabella was speechless.

"I'm not sure who this ex-fiancée is."

Serena saw the argument unfolding and, realizing Martin's status wasn't going to help, feared making a spectacle of herself.

Worried that Romeo might reveal her background as the Collins family's adopted daughter, she tugged at Martin's sleeve, murmuring, "Let it go."

"In the face of new love, old flames can be denied. Mr. McMillian, you truly are heartless and faithless," Martin said with a hint of disdain.

As a man, to deny even those he's loved, seemed to Martin like a lack of honor.

Though he didn't know why the families' engagement had been abruptly called off, Serena had once loved Romeo deeply. Now, as Romeo walked hand in hand with his new love, treating Serena as if she didn't exist, oblivious to her feelings.

What was there to admire about such a man?

Romeo glanced coldly at Serena before indifferently averting his eyes, saying icily, "She and I were never even childhood

sweethearts. There was no love, so how can there be talk of new or old?"

"Martin!" Serena tugged at his sleeve, desperate to end the embarrassing scene.

If Martin saw how little regard Romeo had for her, he would surely think all the wonderful things she had boasted about before were lies.

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"Serena. Martin called after her as she stormed off, throwing him a warning glance before chasing after her.

"Forget it, Arabella said, taking Romec's hand.

"There's no need to be upset over such a trivial matter."

Romeo, who had been fuming just a moment ago, felt his anger subside significantly.

It was all because Arabella took his hand.

He glanced at the head of security who quickly bowed, saying, "Boss, it's my fault, I let someone in without proper clearance."

"Let's just go, Arabella said, pulling Romeo along, and he didn't bother to hold a grudge against the head of security.

"Serena!" Martin caught up and grabbed her hand. Angrily, Serena shook him off. "Isn't it embarrassing enough for you? Or do you need me to be completely humiliated before you're satisfied?"

"I didn't mean to embarrass you!" Martin said anxiously, trying to explain. "I just can't stand to see him treat you like that, to ignore you"

"What's it to you how he treats or ignores me?"

"You're my girlfriend." Martin was at a loss for what he had done wrong, adding, "I just want to protect you."

"Sometimes, Martin, you're really annoying," Serena said, turning to walk away.

Martin stood there, struck by lightning, watching her walk away with a wounded look in his eyes. But soon, he followed her again.

"Serena! Listen to me, I was just trying to stand up for you."

"You? Stand up for me? Romeo could ruin you with just one word!" Serena retorted as she walked away, frustrated with his embarrassment.

"So, are you worried about me? You're afraid he'll retaliate against me, is that it?"

Serena was at a loss for words, too angry to respond, and just stormed off.

Outside the floral field.

A woman was livid. "Is that girl insane?"

"She must be seriously sick."

Fitch's reply startled Diana.

"Fitch, what are you doing here?"

"Martin asked me to come and deliver a heart-shaped kite."

He had gone to great lengths to buy the kite, only to witness their argument upon arrival.

"That Serena is such a drama queen." Fitch decided not to give the kite anymore and whispered to the girl beside him, "Why are you here?"

"I came with my family to look at some property and noticed Martin's car parked there. I didn't tell my parents. I just made up an excuse to come check it out."

She never expected to see such an infuriating scene!

Serena was making a scene, never giving it a rest! Poor guy, her naive brother, completely be tricked by Serena and clueless!

"Martin is such a fool." Fitch watched as Martin followed Serena away, then said to the girl beside him, "They're gone. You can get up now."

They had been crouching there for quite some time. "My ankle's twisted?" the girl replied, which explained why she had been sitting on the grass.

"Ah? Should I help you back to your parents' place? Where were they looking at property?"

"They've already gone back." Diana had planned to check things out and then take a cab home, but she hadn't expected to injure her ankle.

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"Mind if I walk you home?' Fitch offered, extending his arm for her to lean on rather than his hand, ensuring that their fingers

wouldn't touch. It was a gentlemanly gesture.

After a moment's hesitation, Diana accepted, looping her arm through his. She tried to stand, but the pain in her ankle was

unbearable.

Seeing her wince, Fitch crouched down and

suggested, "How about I give you a piggyback ride?"

"Should I expect a little kid like you to carry me?"

"Out here in the middle of nowhere, you don't have much choice. Besides, I'm a grown man, not some little brat.

I bet I can carry you all the way to your place without even breaking a sweat!" Fitch maintained his crouched position, ready for

her.

Diana couldn't help but laugh, climbing onto his back. "Just don't complain about my weight, okay?"

"As light as a kitten, why would I complain?" Fitch effortlessly lifted her up. "You ladies are always fussing about losing weight,

slim as you are, and then you go and ruin your health over it."

"Isn't it because you men say one thing but mean another? You prefer skinny over plump, right?"

"Hey, for the record, I don't care about size. If I'm into a woman, it doesn't matter if she's tall, short, heavy, or thin!"

"Yeah, right. As if! You guys are all about looks. Tell me honestly, would you give someone a second glance if she was on the heavier side?"

"If you were a bit chubby, I'd still find you cute."

"You're the chubby one!" Diana playfully smacked him.

After a while, Fitch managed to get Diana into the car, making sure she was comfortably seated in the passenger seat and buckled in.

The wind was picking up, and Fitch was still holding onto a kite. "Should I just let this kite go?"

It was no use keeping it.

Before Diana could object, the kite took to the sky with the wind, soaring effortlessly.

"Isn't that big red heart too cheesy? Was this your corny idea, or did my goofball brother come up with it?" Diana grimaced.

"It must be his drama queen girlfriend's idea" Fitch guessed as he watched the kite.

After all, Martin wouldn't come up with such a romantic gesture on his own. It had to be his girlfriend making demands, complaining, or even throwing a fit that pushed Martin to such lengths to send a kite as a peace offering.

"Did you talk to him or not?"

"I did, almost put my life on the line." Fitch stood by the car door, his tone laced with frustration. "You have no idea how annoyed I get with that drama queen. I can't fathom what your brother sees in her."

Diana knew it wouldn't be easy to get her brother to give up on Serena. "Let's just head back." She didn't want to see that heart-shaped kite anymore.

Meanwhile.

When Martin and Serena arrived at The Emerald Tower, they were informed that the top floor had been reserved by someone else.

"Who reserved it?' Serena dreaded another encounter like the one with Romeo and Arabella. The staff member replied politely, "I'm sorry, but we cannot disclose our guest's identity."

"How long have they reserved it for?" Serena couldn't help but inquire. "Is it off-limits all day?"

"Nobody can go up until they leave."

A nearby tourist expressed envy. "Must be nice to have money, just reserving that whole top floor on a whim."

"We're the unlucky ones, waiting for them to enjoy the view before we can go up."

"Not so unlucky, though. Even though they booked it last minute, they gave each of us a thousand-dollar voucher. We get to dine at the first and second-floor restaurants for free. It's pretty generous!"

The tower was divided into three levels. The first and second floors offered views of the city and had restaurants for dining, while the top floor provided a panoramic 360-degree view.

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Even though the penthouse suite was booked, the first and second floors were still open to everyone.

"That's pretty generous already."

"Yeah, I've never had a meal that pricey in my life

"Me neither."

Serena glanced back to see a throng of tourists, at least a few dozen, all halted in their tracks, barred from ascending to the

penthouse, hoping to linger and try their luck once the party upstairs had dispersed.

She noticed their simple and plain attire and couldn't help but approach the staff, "What kind of requirements does one need to meet to book the whole place?"

Her question drew the curious gaze of many bystanders.

"Is she here to book it? Judging by her clothes, her family must be loaded."

"Her boyfriend looks like he's made of money too. Booking the place should be a breeze for him."

"If she's asking that, money must be no object to her."

"Talk about loaded. Why are the rich and beautiful everywhere nowadays?"

Serena's vanity soared, and she looked confidently at the staff member.

The employee hesitated, then diplomatically responded, "It's about status.

Average rich folks just wouldn't cut it.

"What about Bard then?" Serena continued.

The staff member's face twitched, half-convinced Serena knew Bard and his tone became more respectful, "Mr.

Bard could, of course."

Serena understood that whoever had booked the penthouse was of considerable stature, at least of her uncle's caliber.

"Martin, let's book the place for ourselves." Serena said, taking Martin's hand.

Although Martin's business had been thriving back home, his clout in Dawnstar wasn't quite as formidable.

Booking the entire top floor of the Emerald Tower wasn't something money alone could achieve.

Seeing the firm grip Serena had on his hand and the smile on her face, Martin finally said, "Okay, wait for me."

He reached out to his buddy Fitch who retorted, "Has that drama queen ever had enough? It's just a view, what's the big deal?"

"Mind your language."

"I really can't help you with this one, bro. Only my dad could pull it off, but why would he waste his connections on your drama queen?"

Before Fitch could finish, Diana snatched the phone, "Martin! She's being ridiculous and you're indulging her?"

Did you get kicked in the head by a mule?"

"Why are you with him?" Martin was surprised; his sister and Fitch, how did that happen?

"It's because of you! If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have sprained my ankle! Anyway, come home for dinner tonight, and don't say

I didn't remind you. It's Grandpa's birthday!" Diana said and hung up in a huff.

Martin saw the hopeful look in Serena's eyes and added, "Just a bit longer."

After much thought, he still messaged his father.

He had never sought his father's help with his business, even in the face of the biggest challenges, he had always toughed it out on his own.

This was the first time he wanted to use his father's influence to fulfill Serena's wish.

The Cooper family owned numerous department stores worldwide, with a workforce exceeding two million. If his father stepped in, booking the venue would be no issue.

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Seconds ticked by, and the surrounding tourists were all rubbernecking, eager for a spectacle.

"Looks like their connections aren't cutting it."

"Think about it, that kind of prime spot isn't just for anyone! After all, it's a famed landmark in the country!"

"I bet she's just some ordinary heiress, way out of her league!"

Serena could feel her anxiety mounting as she listened to their whispers. She turned to Martin, "Well. What's the word?"

Martin was still waiting for his dad's text. Today was his grandpa's birthday, and his Dad was probably busy keeping his grandpa company, not checking his phone.

He himself had almost forgotten his grandpa's birthday. Thankfully, he had the present ready. He'd drop it off later, along with an apology.

He wouldn't make dinner, though. Serena had agreed to eat with him, and that was a rare treat.

"Just a little longer," Martin said soothingly.

Serena was irked. If this was Romeo, his presence alone would've swung the doors wide open. In the end, it was Martin's lack of clout that was embarrassing.

He couldn't even book a venue without causing her to be the butt of jokes!

After what felt like an eternity, she decided it might be time to call in Uncle Bard to turn the tables—anything was better than being mocked by this crowd!

As she stewed over this, Serena couldn't help but silently rebuke Martin for making her resort to asking Uncle Bard for help.

Utterly useless!

Just as she was about to pull out her phone, Martin's buzzed with a message from his father, who had already squared things away.

Martin smiled at her, "Serena, we can go up soon"

"For real? You managed to book it?" Serena wrapped him in a hug, her mood instantly lifting.

"How much longer do we have to wait?"

"Just until the current guests clear out, and then it's all ours."

"I'm gonna want to stay up there for a while then!"

She raised her voice purposefully with that last remark, causing the tourists around them to groan inwardly.

How long would it be before they could ascend now?

Serena couldn't have felt prouder, and for once, she looked at Martin with genuine affection.

At the summit.

Romeo wrapped his arms around Arabella from behind, both of them gazing down at the sprawling Oakridge City below.

How he wished he could freeze this moment in time.

"Bella," Romeo's voice was tender and magnetic,

"do you like Dawnstar?"

"Are we talking a fleeting fondness, or the settle-down-and-stay kind of like?" Arabella played along, still captivated by the view.

"If it's the latter. I'd rather build our life back home."
"Then that's where we'll be," Romeo said indulgently.
"Wherever you want to live, I'll follow. If you wish to disappear, we'll retreat to the heart of the wilderness. If you want to make your mark, I'll be by your side, through thick and thin."

Arabella turned, her smile light, "And what if I'm just hungry?"

Romeo chuckled, his hand instinctively finding her stomach, "What about some gourmet food?"

"Perfect."

When the two of them hand in hand stepped out of the elevator back on the first floor, everyone was stunned.

"Doesn't that guy look just like Romeo?"

"Kinda does, is it really him? He's even more handsome than in the pictures online!"

"Who's that girl with him? She's gorgeous!"

"Was it them who booked the whole place? Did Romeo do that for her?"

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