

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

1061-1070

Andrew said, "Perfect timing. I'm here to take Lauren with me, and while I'm at it, I'd like to ask her hand in marriage."

Tiana's face twisted in shock and fury the moment he said those words.

The rest of the Rhodes family instantly turned toward Andrew with blazing eyes, their expressions filled with outrage.

"Kid, who the hell do you think you are? You think you're worthy of asking Lauren for her hand in marriage?"

"Get lost already. Lauren would never end up with someone like you. Joe is the only one truly fit to marry our Lauren!"

Another chimed in, "I've heard about you for a while now-Andrew Lloyd from Jayrodale, right? Let me give you a piece of advice: if you value your life, turn around and leave. But if you're set on dying, then by all means, keep acting like a fool!"

Voices filled with scorn and rage came crashing down on Andrew from all directions, relentless and merciless.

Jameson walked over with a helpless look and stood in front of Andrew, trying to calm things down. "Andy, don't take it personally. The Rhodes family is dealing with a serious crisis right now, and everyone's on edge."

Andrew nodded and said, "Mr. Rhodes, I can tell. It does look like something big's about to go down. If there's any way I can help, just say the word."

But Jameson quickly shook his head and replied, "Thanks for the offer, but there's no need. Our family matters are not something you should get involved in."

Tiana sneered and said, "You should just worry about yourself. Leave the Rhodes residence while you still can. Otherwise, don't blame me if I can't protect you when things go down."

Andrew frowned slightly. The way Tiana said that felt like someone dangerous was about to storm through their gates. Moreover, from the look on the rest of the Rhodes family's faces, it was like they were all sitting on a ticking time bomb, their panic barely contained.

Suddenly, a loud bang echoed from the front doors. Someone had just kicked them wide open.

Right after that came the sharp cries of security guards being taken down.

"It's bad. They're here!" Tiana's face darkened instantly, her tone grim and heavy.

The rest of the Rhodes family looked like they had seen death itself, their bodies stiff with fear.

Andrew, however, remained calm as he turned to look toward the door. Footsteps echoed steadily from outside, growing louder as several figures walked in without a hint of rush.

Leading them was a burly old man with a face covered in a full beard, who emitted a terrifying presence that filled the room like a storm. He carried the kind of savage, brutal aura that made it hard to even breathe in his presence.

Behind him followed two disciples—one man, one woman—and lastly, two more people.

Kenny and his daughter, Sherilyn.

"Jameson, get down from that seat. Starting now, Kenny is the new head of the Rhodes family," the old man ordered without hesitation.

His voice was full of arrogance like he was merely giving out a casual command. At the head of the room, Jameson sat in the main chair, his face frozen cold.

"Mr. Haywood Senior. As a master of the southern martial world, aren't you stepping way out of line by interfering in the Rhodes family's private affairs?" This was Aidan Haywood. A legendary figure from Holtrien's southern martial circles—said to have already reached the rank of martial king.

He was ranked fifth on the Underworld Index, even higher than Zachary, whom Andrew had recently encountered.

"Out of line? The Rhodes are just ants beneath my feet. I'm giving you a chance to back down gracefully, to hand over power without bloodshed. But if I lose my patience and decide to wipe out you and your wife... well, that won't be fun for anyone."

The bearded Aidan chuckled. At a glance, one could tell he was a ruthless man,

and the moment he spoke, the entire Rhodes family turned pale.

Disaster had truly come knowing, and even Tiana's face went slightly white, filled with barely contained rage and humiliation.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew stood quietly, his gaze cold as he observed everything unfold.

Kenny and Sherilyn's attention was locked on Jameson and Tiana, and they did not even notice Andrew standing at the back of the crowd.

Tiana's voice was like ice as she snapped, "Kenny, what's the meaning of this? If you've got something to say, we could've handled it behind closed doors as a family. Was it really necessary to bring outsiders?"

Kenny looked pale, clearly still exhausted from handling Michael's funeral, and his energy was visibly drained.

Even so, his words were sharp and venomous. "Tiana, you f*cking bitch. You're still trying to sway me through familial ties?"

He scoffed and added, "Where were you when Michael died? You said nothing then. Today, I'm taking the position of the head of the family. As for you and Jameson..... You'll spend the rest of your lives on your knees at Michael's grave!"

Jameson's face was red with rage as he shouted, "Kenny, can't you think straight for once? I've told you before-if you had just asked, I would've gladly stepped down as the family head. As your brother, it wouldn't have bothered me one bit."

He continued, "But have you heard yourself just now? You sounded ridiculous! We were heartbroken when Michael died, truly. But let's not pretend he was innocent-he repeatedly tried to harm Lauren. And I never once held that against you, even though I had every right to!"

Kenny's face twisted into a grimace as he growled, "Shut up, Jameson! Just shut your damn mouth, you hear me? I don't have a brother like you. Do you think I care if you were willing to step down? Please.

"I don't want your handouts. I want to rip away everything you've ever owned and turn you into a broken nobody-just like how you snatched the position from me all those years ago."

Jameson's face grew darker, and he shook his head slowly. "That was decades ago, Kenny. And you're still not over it? The head of the Rhodes family was passed to me after a unanimous vote from the elders and the former patriarch himself.

"For all these years, I've led the family while bearing the burden of my guilty feelings, and I've done everything I could to make up for it. I gave where I could, and I stepped aside

whenever possible, but you've gone too far. First, you want my title, and now you want to kill me and my wife? So tell me, have I really done you that wrong?"

Kenny's eyes were full of rage as he bit out, "Yes. I admit-you've done well leading the Rhodes family, bringing the family all the way to the capital. So what? I'll be taking the seat for myself. Originally, I had considered sparing you two. But now that Michael's dead you both can both join him!"

Sherilyn let out a harsh snort. "Dad, stop wasting time talking to these losers. Let Mr. Haywood Senior deal with them already. Once they're gone, you'll officially be the head of the Rhodes family, and you'll finally get justice for Michael!

"With the Golding family backing us, you'll lead the Rhodes to a way better future -so much better than Uncle Jameson ever could."

Tiana suddenly barked, "Enough! Kenny, Sherilyn, there's something you need to understand. Michael's death had nothing to do with us. Don't you dare try to pin your hatred on us! He was killed by Andrew."

Sherilyn's voice was filled with venom as she snapped, "Of course, we know that little bastard killed him. That's why after we deal with you and your husband... Andrew will be the next to go down."

Kenny sneered. "Tiana, you've

always been ruthless and manipulative. But it won't matter how much you talk today. You can push all the blame onto Andrew if you want, but it won't save you two. I'll crush that little punk with my own hands. And the two of you-hand over your power and prepare to die with him.

"The way I see it, Andrew only went after Michael and forced me to crawl back from Jayrodale in humiliation because of one reason that lovely daughter you raised, that little whore, Lauren."

Sherilyn's face twisted with hate, and she let out a manic, creepy laugh. "Don't worry. Once you two are dead and my dad's in charge of the Rhodes family, we won't kill Lauren right away.

"I'll turn her into a tramp-passed around by every rich boy in this city. That's the only way we can properly honor Michael's spirit. That's how we punish you two for your arrogance, and that's how we'll erase the shame Andrew brought to my dad and Michael!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Tiana felt a chill run down her spine, but she still sneered, "Sherilyn, you married into the Goldings and made a name for yourself. I just didn't expect that all this time, you've still been eaten up with jealousy and hatred for your own family.

"But you've clearly overestimated yourselves. Even if Jameson and I fall today, Lauren will be just fine. She's set to marry into the Driscolls, and one day, she'll use their power to make you and Kenny pay for everything you've done-blood for blood."

Kenny scoffed. "You're the one dreaming, Tiana. That little tramp you raised will never marry into the Driscolls. She's already lost her purity, messing around with that street rat Andrew. Do you seriously think the Driscolls would ever accept her?

"No! The second they learn the truth, they won't just reject Lauren-they'll join me in wiping out you two and your shameless daughter."

Tiana's expression changed again and again. It was clear-there was no peaceful way out of this. Her anger toward Andrew flared to new heights.

If that little bastard had not clung to Lauren like a leech, the Rhodes family would not be facing this nightmare right now. She and Jameson, especially their beloved daughter, would not be standing on the edge of ruin.

Jameson's voice turned cold. "Tiana, there's no point in saying more. If Kenny and Sherilyn are this far gone, acting insane and dead set on destruction, then we'll let our hands do the talking. If Kenny wants to take my place as the family head so easily, he better be prepared to pay the price."

Tiana's voice cracked as she snapped, "You make it sound so simple! Sure, we might be ready to die. But what about Lauren? She's our precious daughter! If we're gone, who'll protect her? Who will she rely on in this world?"

Her eyes brimmed with tears as they spilled over, trembling with sorrow.

Jameson sighed and replied solemnly, "I know how deep your love for her runs. And I know how hard you've worked all these years. You poured everything into planning her future, hoping she could live the rest of her life in peace. But some things are just fate, Tiana. We can't control everything."

He added, "And even if we're gone, Andrew will still be here. I believe that he can give Lauren the life she deserves."

Tiana let out a bitter laugh. "You still believe in him? Even now, at a time like this? Jameson, I really don't understand you. When it comes to Lauren, how did you become so blind-so damn foolish?"

Jameson's face stayed firm, his voice unshaken. "Whatever you say, it's too late. And I don't believe I'm blind or foolish. Andrew just needs time to grow. One day, he'll rise up and protect Lauren from all the storms ahead. Of this, I have no doubt."

Standing in the back corner, Andrew felt a wave of emotion stir in his heart. He knew this exchange between Jameson and Tiana was partly for his ears—a final message, a parting wish.

They were leaving Lauren's future in his hands, and their attitudes couldn't be more different.

Jameson always believed in him, spoke to him kindly, and never doubted his potential. But Tiana? She had always shut him down, rejected him, tried to push him away.

Still, Andrew could not help but think they were making this whole thing sound way too dramatic.

So what if Kenny had brought in some big-name reinforcements? What was the big deal?

He smirked, taking a step forward, ready to walk out and crush Kenny right there. That so-called martial arts master ranked fifth on the Underworld Index?

So what?

Since they came knocking, then there was no need to talk—it was time to throw down. Sometimes, blood and violence were the only ways to settle things.

But right then, the unexpected happened.

Tiana suddenly stepped forward, moving quickly across the room toward Aidan. Before anyone could process what she was doing, she dropped to her knees in front of him and bowed deeply, her forehead hitting the floor.

"Mr. Haywood Senior, I, Tiana Lambert, am begging on my knees. Jameson and the rest of the Rhodes family are stubborn and doomed. If they want to die, that's their choice. But refuse to go down with them for nothing."

She pleaded, "Please, Mr. Haywood Senior—take me in. Spare my life. I'm willing to serve you from now on!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Tiana's sudden move left everyone stunned. Even Andrew's brows furrowed tightly as disbelief flickered across his face.

Jameson shot to his feet, his voice shaking. "Tiana, you-"

Tears streamed down Tiana's face as she shouted, "Don't even try, Jameson. You're nothing but a coward-weak and useless. What? You want to know why I did this? Fine, I'll tell you—I don't want to die! I'm not letting you drag me down, and I won't let Lauren die alongside you!"

From the crowd, one of the Rhodes family elders, Bruno Rhodes, roared with fury. "Shameless! Tiana, as the lady of the Rhodes family, how could you throw away all dignity like this? Stand up right now! I said, get up!"

He shouted, "Kneeling to a violent brute like that? You've disgraced our family!"

With rage boiling over, Bruno stormed toward her and reached out to yank her to her feet.

Aidan's expression darkened as he growled, "How dare you? Calling me a brute— what, you think I'm beneath you? Well, let me send you off, free of charge!"

With a single swing of his arm, Aidan unleashed a palm strike so powerful, it ripped through the air with a deafening snap. It landed squarely on Bruno's chest -no mercy, no hesitation.

A spray of blood, thick with shattered organs, burst from Bruno's mouth as his body flew back like a ragdoll. He slammed to the ground in a crumpled heap—

lifeless, silent, gone.

"Bruno!"

"Bruno-No! You animals! You kill him like it's nothing? I'm going to fight you with everything I have!"

...

In an instant, chaos erupted. The remaining members of the Rhodes family lost it. Eyes bloodshot, fists clenched, they charged forward.

Aidan grinned like a madman. "Butch. Spike. Kill every last one of these stubborn ants."

The man and woman behind him-his apprentices-stepped forward without a word, bloodlust flashing in their eyes.

Kenny quickly rushed in to beg, "Mr. Haywood Senior, please! You only need to kill Jameson and Tiana. The others-please, spare them!"

Yet, Aidan's voice was pure ice. "They're just a pack of mangy dogs. You think I'll let them live after they insulted me?"

Right then, Jameson's voice boomed across the hall. "Stand down!"

He shoved the other family members back and stepped to the front, locking eyes with Tiana. Their gazes clashed mid-air-love, betrayal, heartbreak, and fury all tangled together.

"Tiana," Jameson said, his voice heavy, "I always knew someone might betray me. But I never thought the one to do it... would be you."

He laughed, but it was a bitter, hollow sound. Tears crept into his eyes without him realizing it.

He added, "I know you've hated me for what happened with Lauren, for everything I failed to do. And now, you hate me even more because I can't protect you, and I've put your life in danger.

"I remember you didn't want to

marry me in the first place. All these years of frustration may have led you to this moment, where you chose to betray me and our

But hear me now-today, I, Jameson Rhodes, will be the first to die for our family. And I swear to the heavens, I will not hate you for it-not even a little."

Tiana's body trembled violently as his words pierced through her. She burst into tears, no longer held back.

Her voice came out hoarse and

broken. "Whether you hate me or not doesn't matter anymore. This is the outcome of your choices, Jameson. You planted the seeds, and now all reap the sorrow. I'm sorry I just can't die with you. For Lauren and the Lamberts, I have to stay alive."

With that, she remained on her knees and crawled a few steps closer until she reached Aidan's feet. Her voice softened into a plea. "Sir, please spare me. I'll serve you however you wish. And the Lambert family, my family... They'll pledge their loyalty to you as well."

Aidan's rugged face lit up with clear interest.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aidan stared down at the beautiful woman kneeling at his feet, and something dark flickered in his eyes. His throat moved, and a twisted chuckle escaped his lips. "You really mean every word you just said?"

Tiana raised her hand and vowed, "Every word I just spoke was true. If I'm lying, then may you tear me limb from limb, right here and now."

Aidan burst into loud laughter, his eyes gleaming with greedy heat. His voice turned sleazy, laced with disgusting desire. "Wonderful-just perfect! Tiana, you were famous for your beauty in the martial world back in the day.

"But back then, I was obsessed with training and had no interest in... other pleasures. Now that I'm older and wiser-and looking at you still so ripe, still so stunning-I've got to say, it's hitting me all at once. Honestly, I'd feel bad wasting a woman like you."

Tiana's cheeks turned slightly red, but there was no sign of embarrassment or shame. Instead, her mature allure only intensified, like a perfectly ripened peach begging to be bitten into.

Her voice barely above a whisper, she murmured, "As long as you don't reject me, I'll serve you every night without fail."

Aidan roared with laughter, the vulgar gleam in his eyes practically glowing. He exclaimed, "Excellent-just excellent! Stand up, beautiful. From now on, you're my woman. Isn't there some trendy term online, 'Casanova Syndrome'? Seems like even an old dog like me can catch it."

Still laughing, he leaned forward and reached out his hand going straight for her backside.

Jameson turned away, unable to watch. When he opened his eyes again, grief and despair filled his face, and blood suddenly poured from his mouth. With a furious roar, he charged toward Aidan, ready to fight to the death.

Behind him, the remaining members of the Rhodes family exploded in rage. "Tiana, you filthy traitor! May you die a dog's death!"

"You sold your body to survive! You're not worthy of the Rhodes name!"

"Kill her! Jameson, please kill that woman!"

Kenny and Sherilyn wore matching sneers of contempt. To them, Tiana had always been the most difficult to deal with-even more so than Jameson.

But this? They could not believe that she was actually selling herself to that filthy old monster to stay alive. They could not even imagine what kind of woman would make such a disgusting choice. '

Amid the curses and chaos, Andrew remained calm, his face cold, unreadable. He kept his eyes locked on Tiana, and a faint smile played on his lips. He thought she was such a wicked woman.

His so-called mother-in-law? Yeah, she was something else.

Right at the moment Aidan's hand was about to grab Tiana, her eyes suddenly lit up with a deadly gleam. A dagger shimmered into her hand; no one even noticed where it came from.

With a fierce shout, she lunged and stabbed it straight toward Aidan's heart.

"You filthy dog-go to hell! You think I'd betray my husband and daughter just to serve you? Who the hell do you think you are? Get your hands off me!"

The entire room froze, stunned by the sudden turn of events. Everyone was still processing what was happening, but Andrew had already taken action. He quickly grabbed Jameson and pulled him back before he could get caught in the chaos.

Aidan's furious roar shook the entire Rhodes residence. "You wretched woman! You dare deceive me? I'll tear you apart!"

The dagger pierced Aidan's chest, right over his heart. However, it only sank in two inches before stopping cold.

Tiana's eyes widened in shock, wondering how powerful this monster was.

In the storm of Aidan's violent retaliation, Tiana ripped the dagger back out and leaped away just in time. Her carefully calculated ambush was now completely ruined.

It did not fail halfway—it had no effect at all!

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Butch and Spike immediately rushed to Aidan's side, their faces filled with panic.

"Mr. Haywood Senior, are you alright?"

"Please, hang in there, sir!"

Meanwhile, Kenny and Sherilyn both looked horrified—if Tiana's sneak attack had actually taken down Aidan, this whole day would have become the ultimate joke.

"That filthy bitch couldn't hurt me even if I handed her the opportunity," Aidan growled.

He did not even glance at the small patch of blood on his chest. However, his old face twisted into a storm of fury and darkness.

Jameson stared at Tiana in disbelief. "Tiana, so you weren't really—"

Tiana cut him off with a snap. "You idiot! Did you seriously think I'd stoop that low? Do you think I'd ignore a handsome man like you just to kiss up to that wrinkled sack of rot? You think I could stomach that?"

Jameson was hit with a rush of surprise and relief, but it quickly turned into frustration. "If you were going to strike, why didn't you tell me first?"

"No time for that crap," Tiana replied, her voice sharp. "We need to get ready now. That old dog's gonna lose his damn mind!"

Sure enough, Aidan was already exploding with rage, his roar shaking the hall.

"Butch! Spike! Kill every last member of the Rhodes! And as for Tiana—that bitch lives, but she'll beg for death when I'm done with her!"

Kenny and Sherilyn practically jumped forward with excitement. "Mr. Haywood Senior, please! Do it! As long as you give me the family head seat, you can have whatever you want. Anything at all!"

Tiana's ambush had scared the hell out of them, and they were not taking any more chances.

They no longer cared about preserving the family—they just wanted to crush Jameson and Tiana as fast as possible.

Especially Tiana, who now terrified them more than anyone.

On the other side of the hall, Rhodes family elites like Jerry charged straight at Butch and Spike. But one by one, they fell. Most did not even last a single exchange—arms broken, legs shattered, howling in pain on the floor.

Jerry's eyes were wide with shock. Both of Aidan's disciples were at the peak of the grandmaster level.

How was the Rhodes family supposed to survive this disaster?

Oddly enough, Andrew did not move. That earlier strike from Tiana had been flawless, and there was nothing to critique at all. Yet, the problem was never the tactic, but simply because the gap between her and Aidan was just too massive.

Aidan was not quite a full-fledged martial king, but he was clearly standing at the threshold.

Tiana, while a semi-martial king and the strongest warrior in the Rhodes family, was still a step below. She was not strong enough to turn the tide.

The Rhodes fighters were getting knocked back one by one as Butch and Spike tore through them like a hurricane.

Even Jerry took a crushing kick to the chest from Butch. Blood spewed from his mouth as he crumpled in defeat.

Jameson clenched his fists and prepared to jump into the fight. However, Tiana caught him by the arm, sighing. "With your level of strength, just stay back. You'll only be throwing your life away. Let me handle this."

Jameson's face flushed red with shame. He silently cursed, 'Damn it, Tiana is protecting me instead of the other way around-it really hurts my pride.'

All he could do now was pray the Rhodes family survived this. And if they made it through? He swore he would find Andrew later and demand a few more of those powerful pills.

Then maybe, just maybe, he would finally be able to give Tiana the night she deserved.

As chaos unfolded around them, Andrew pulled Jameson back from the front lines.

"Andy, why are you still here?" Jameson gasped. "We're holding them off-go now, while you still can!"

Andrew simply smiled. "Mr. Rhodes, I'm not in a rush."

Jameson's face darkened. "Not in a rush? Didn't you hear what I said earlier? If something happens to me and Tiana, I'm counting on you to take care of Lauren!"

Andrew replied calmly, "Don't worry, Mr. Rhodes. As long as I'm here, nothing will happen to the Rhodes family."

Jameson did not believe that for a second. What could Andrew do alone, in a place like this?

Maybe one day when he would mature-but now?

Still, Jameson had no time to argue. He turned back to the battlefield, fully focused on the fight.

Tiana was facing both of Aidan's disciples by herself. After several rounds, she found herself deadlocked-unable to gain the upper hand.

Her heart sank.

She was a semi-martial king, and she still could not take down these two.

Aidan sneered from the sidelines. "My apprentices are twin siblings, born of the same womb. Their minds are perfectly synced. Together, even someone like you is no match for them, Tiana."

With a roar, Butch and Spike launched a fierce counterattack.

Tiana was forced to retreat, fighting defensively as the pressure mounted. With each passing second, her heart grew heavier.

If she could not even defeat Aidan's apprentices, she wondered what would happen if Aidan himself entered the fight.

Would there be anyone left in the Rhodes family who could still resist?

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Sherilyn grinned and said, "Mr. Haywood, your two apprentices really are extraordinary."

Aidan let out a proud snort and replied with disdain, "I don't even need to step in. Keep watching-Tiana's defeat is only a matter of time. I told you already, that the Rhodes family is nothing more than a joke."

Suddenly, a voice rang out from the crowd. "Attack low!"

Tiana's heart jolted the second she heard it. Instead of retreating, she lunged forward, striking with both palms in a fierce assault. Following the mysterious tip, she immediately shifted her focus to Butch and Spike's lower stances.

In just seconds, their formation wobbled-only slightly, but enough. The crushing pressure on Tiana lifted, and she felt the change instantly.

Seizing the moment, she let out a sharp cry and shaped her fingers into claws, brutally gouging at their eyes.

Two blood-curdling screams rang out in perfect sync.

Blood gushed from their eye sockets as both Butch and Spike went down, instantly blinded and completely incapacitated. Then, Tiana grabbed both by the legs and kicked them across the hall like trash.

"What the..." Kenny and Sherilyn stared in disbelief, then immediately turned to Aidan.

Aidan's gaze darkened, his eyes sweeping the crowd like a hawk. Just now, someone seemed to have guided Tiana.

Who was it?

Yet, even after scanning every face, he could not pinpoint the voice. A flicker of doubt crept in, and he wondered if he had imagined it.

Tiana, still catching her breath, backed up to Jameson's side.

"Are you alright, my love?" Jameson asked, scanning her up and down with concern.

Tiana gave a faint smile and shook her head. "I'm fine don't worry."

She could not help but glance toward Andrew with a suspicious, almost impressed look.

That little punk's advice actually worked. How had he known the twin disciples' weak point was their lower stance?

Though stunned, she did not dwell on it. In the end, she was still the one who stabilized the situation for the Rhodes family.

Butch and Spike crawled toward Aidan, trembling as they collapsed at his feet. "Sir, we've failed you..."

Aidan's expression did not waver—not a shred of emotion on his face. He spat, "If you already know you're useless, then there's only one thing left to do—die."

With that, he brought both hands down hard, smashing his palms onto the tops of their heads.

Aidan had mercilessly executed his own apprentices without hesitation, and the brutal display left the entire Rhodes family stunned and horrified.

Jameson shouted, voice burning with rage, "Mr. Haywood Senior, you're a monster! You just killed your own apprentices! You're not a man-you're a goddamn beast!"

Aidan's face remained cold as he stated, "To a martial artist, the eyes are everything lose them, and your future is finished."

Kenny quickly chimed in with flattery. "Mr. Haywood Senior, your ruthlessness is unmatched. No one else in the martial world could compare!"

Aidan rolled his wrists, clearly warming up to make his own move. "Kenny, don't bother buttering me up. My apprentices' death won't be in vain do you really think I'm footing the bill for this? I came here for your benefit, but all the damage I took? You and your daughter will pay for it."

He did not attack just yet, though. Instead, he shot a meaningful glance at Kenny and Sherilyn, his expression dripping with amusement.

Kenny hurried to reply, "Mr. Haywood Senior, once I become head of the Rhodes family, I'll make sure every loss you suffered is repaid in full."

Sherilyn chimed in, "And the Goldings will back you too. We won't short you a single cent, Mr. Haywood."

Aidan's gaze Snapped back to Tiana, his voice low and venomous. "Tiana, you worthless bitch. Now it's timed taught you a lesson. Don't worry won't kill you right away. I'll cripple you first. Then, in front of your entire family, I'll rape you before Lend your life!"

Tiana's face twisted with shame and fury. "You filthy mutt! Keep dreaming! You call yourself a martial arts master? You're nothing but scum!"

Jameson growled, voice like ice. "If you want to touch my wife, you'll have to go through me first!"

With a roar that shook the hall, Aidan launched himself forward, fists like iron boulders, crashing down on Tiana's chest.

Tiana clenched her teeth, already feeling breathless before the attack even landed.

The pressure was overwhelming the gap between them was a chasm. However, the Rhodes family was behind her.

There was no retreat.

She could only brace for impact and push forward.

At the same time, she shouted with all her strength, "Andrew! If you've got even a shred of decency, if you still care about the Rhodes family, then get my daughter and my husband out of here-now!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The moment Kenny and Sherilyn heard Andrew's name, they both exploded with fury.

"You little bastard! Where are you? Show yourself!" Kenny shouted, veins bulging in his neck.

His face twisted into a mask of rage as Andrew calmly stepped out from the crowd, his expression blank.

The moment Kenny saw him, his eyes went blood-red. "Andrew, you killed Michael. Today is the day you die!"

Andrew replied coolly, "Kenny, you old mutt-you know damn well how he died. If I remember right, you signed a written agreement promising not to challenge the Rhodes family leadership."

Kenny's face twisted in a snarl. "Whether I stick to it or not is none of your damn business, you little punk! You think you're in a position to tell me what to do?"

However, Andrew did not take the bait. Instead, he smirked. "Of course it's my business. That's why I sent Michael six feet under before you broke your word. Now we're even; nothing owed between us."

Kenny trembled with fury, nearly passing out from rage right there. Meanwhile, Sherilyn's gaze turned icy as she stepped forward.

"So, you're the one who killed Michael. Andrew Lloyd, right? Perfect. Then today, I'll personally send you to hell. My dad couldn't stop you; neither could Michael. But me? I married into the Goldings. Killing you will be effortless."

Andrew clicked his tongue and smirked. "The Goldings, huh? Big-name family. It's crazy how someone as ugly as you managed to marry into their family. Fatty must have some wild tastes."

Sherilyn's jaw dropped, shaking with fury. "D-Did you say I'm ugly? You little bastard, say it again-I dare you!"

Andrew beamed. "Alright then, I'll say it again, loud and clear. You're ugly. Not just you-your whole family is ugly."

Sherilyn nearly lost it right then and there.

Kenny quickly pulled her back. "Sherilyn, stay calm! Let Mr. Haywood Senior

finish off Tiana first. Once he's done, it'll be Andrew's turn!"

Sherilyn took a breath and nodded, agreeing there was no need to rush. That little punk would not be running his mouth much longer.

Meanwhile, Tiana was already struggling under Aidan's relentless assault. His fists were like cannons each strike roaring through the air with a deafening boom. It was clear now that his power had far surpassed human limitations.

Tiana's arms and legs trembled with exhaustion. Her muscles burned, and her

cheeks flushed with tension and pain. Suddenly, her eyes hardened.

Gripping a dagger, she lunged

straight for Aidan's face, aiming for a deadly blow. If it landed, even someone like Aidan would die on the spot. Yet, at that same moment, Aidan's iron palm struck toward her shoulder.

Andrew saw it from a distance and could not help but curse under his breath that it was a suicidal move.

Tiana was betting it all, risking her life to take Aidan down with her. The idea was bold-but the execution was exactly what Aidan had been waiting for.

"Hmph. Sweetheart, you were always one move short. You really thought you could drag me into death with you? What a joke."

With a sick grin, Aidan's sweeping

palm suddenly accelerated, and the blow landed squarely on Tiana's shoulder. She staggered before hurling blood in a harsh burst. Half of her shoulder collapsed under the impact, bones snapping with a sickening crunch.

Her dagger was just inches from Aidan's eye, but she had no more strength to push it through.

Aidan caught her wrist with ease, his eyes flaring with vicious delight. Then, he backhanded her across the face with a loud smack.

Tiana let out a sharp cry, more blood spraying from her lips as her body flew backward.

"I told you before—stand against me, and you're begging for death! If you had surrendered earlier, served me like a good little thing, you wouldn't be suffering like this now, would you?"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aidan cast a quick glance down at Tiana, who was struggling to get up from the ground, her body drenched in blood. He sneered with contempt. Even now, he had not used half of his true strength.

Jameson suddenly roared, "Everyone from the Rhodes family, follow me protect our home and save Tiana!"

The few remaining guards and fighters from the Rhodes side rushed in without hesitation. However, they were nothing against Aidan, who had already entered a killing mindset. With every punch he threw, someone coughed up blood and collapsed to the ground in agony.

Tiana barely managed to stand, the world spinning around her. She forced out a shaky cry, "No... Don't... Don't throw your lives away! Jameson, take Lauren! Get her and Andrew out of here-run, now!"

However, Jameson's voice was firm. "We live together, or we die together. Running is not an option."

He turned to Andrew, his expression urgent. "Andy, take Lauren and go. Get back to Jayrodale. Don't come near the capital again!"

Andrew shook his head. "Mr. Rhodes, you and your family should stand down. I don't think leaving is necessary. Who wins or loses here... isn't decided yet."

Jameson froze, stunned by his calm. "You don't understand! Tiana's already fallen. The Rhodes family has no one left who can fight. Andrew, please. Take care of Lauren. Go!"

Tiana also screamed, shoving Andrew hard in the chest. "What are you doing, standing around?! Take Lauren and run, dammit! You little punk-I'd rather die than let Lauren get dragged into your mess. But now that death is right in front of us, I've made peace with it."

She added, "She's yours now. Go away with her-live your lives! But if you ever hurt her, I swear-even in death-I'll make you pay!"

Her desperate, angry words hit everyone like a gut punch. Even the Rhodes survivors, watching hopelessly, felt a sting behind their eyes.

If Tiana could not win, then who else could stand a chance?

Kenny shouted, voice filled with fury. "Mr. Haywood Senior, you can't let them escape! Especially Andrew-whatever happens, that bastard dies!"

Aidan let out a cold laugh. "I only agreed to help you take the family seat. Your personal grudges? Settle them yourself. Right now, I'm a little more interested in playing with Tiana. I'd like to enjoy the charms of a married woman!"

As he advanced, he laughed like a demon, and no one from the Rhodes family could stop him.

Jameson threw himself forward and blocked Aidan's path.

Aidan kicked him in the stomach, sending him flying as blood gushed out of his mouth. Yet, even as he flew back, Jameson latched onto Aidan's leg and refused to let go.

Tiana screamed, "Jameson, let go! Don't do this! Do you want to die?!"

Jameson gave a broken, bloody smile. "Tiana, do you remember what I said on our wedding day? You always thought I was weak. Maybe you even looked down on me. But you're my wife, and I'll protect you."

"If nothing else, I'll die trying."

Tears poured down Tiana's cheeks, full of love and sorrow. She choked out, "You fool... I... I love "

Andrew's voice cut through the

chaos just then, dry and irritated. "Okay, can the two stop with the cringe declaration right now? I already said this-Mr. Rhodes, fake your people and stand down! I'll handle this.

"And Mrs. Rhodes, come on. At your age? You really think this is the time for a romcom monologue?"

Jameson and Tiana both froze, speechless.

Instead of running, he was lecturing them. Had he completely lost his mind?

Aidan glanced at the approaching Andrew, barely hiding his disdain.

He scoffed, "Little brat, if you don't want to die, then listen to them and get the hell out of here. The farther, the better. But if you dare ruin my good mood... I'll grind your bones to dust!"

Andrew smiled casually. Then, without another word, his pace suddenly exploded into motion.

With a crack like a whip, he launched into a sweeping roundhouse kick that tore through the air—aimed straight at the top of Aidan's skull.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aidan was stunned, realizing that something was very off. In that split second, Aidan, who had brushed off Andrew like an insect, suddenly realized that this so-called "nobody" was not just tough. In fact, he was dangerous.

The instant their moves collided, Aidan's instincts—honed on the edge of martial king mastery—screamed in alarm.

With a low growl, he made his move. Instead of dodging Andrew's whip-like kick, he charged forward, trying to smash his forehead into Andrew's knee. At the same time, his fingers hooked like claws, launching a brutal move right for Andrew's heart.

"You little punk, since you have a dead wish, I'll rip your heart out and show it to you while it's still beating!"

Tiana gasped in horror. "Andrew, you're not his match—get out of there, now! If you die here for nothing, everything we've fought for will be wasted!"

Andrew's voice was calm but sharp. "Mrs. Rhodes, let me give you a lesson. Watch closely. Taking out trash like this? It really isn't that hard."

"And while you're at it, take another look—at the so-called pawn you thought was beneath Lauren... Well, it turns out that I might just be a tiny bit more impressive than you imagined."

Andrew's legs shot through the air, raining down kicks aimed at Aidan's head, ears, and chest. Every strike was a kill shot—fast, ruthless, and perfectly timed.

Aidan roared like a beast, caught off-guard by the unrelenting power. With every hit, he felt the pressure in his chest rise. He tried to shout, to retaliate, but the air in his lungs would not come out.

He could only block, and in the face of Andrew's relentless barrage, he stumbled backward, spinning like a top across the marble floor.

'H-How the hell is this possible? Why am I hesitating? Why do I feel fear? No one but a martial king should be able to suppress me like this! This brat is just riding a burst of momentum. Once it fades, he's done. Then, he dies!'

Gritting his teeth, Aidan took a deep breath and puffed out his chest to absorb a direct hit from Andrew's foot. His iron fists swung out like twin hammers, aiming to crush Andrew's skull from both sides.

He refused to believe he would be humbled by a street rat lurking in the shadows.

Andrew said nothing. Instead, he

smiled coldly. Then, his foot tapped lightly against the ground. It seemed soft, almost playful. However, the marble beneath his toes shattered in a web of cracks-proof of the terrifying force he had just

summoned.

In the next instant, he exploded forward like a runaway train. Andrew's body slammed directly into Aidan's chest.

Aidan's twin palm strike froze mid-air. He looked like he was trying to give Andrew a hug, but his arms never reached him-they could not.

The sound was horrifying, like a log snapping underfoot. His ribs and his chest had shattered.

"You..." Aidan gasped, eyes bloodshot and bulging, staring at Andrew in disbelief.

Andrew's face remained unreadable. Then, he raised an elbow. With a single thrust, the blow detonated like a bomb, sending Aidan's giant frame flying across the hall like a broken wreck.

Andrew did not even follow up. Instead, he slid sideways-gliding over the smooth floor like he was skating on ice-until he appeared right in front of Kenny and Sherilyn.

"Get on your knees." His voice was like a gunshot in a quiet forest-cold, sharp, and inescapable.

Before Sherilyn could even curse him out, Andrew lifted his leg and snapped it forward.

Kenny and Sherilyn both screamed, clutching their knees, which now felt

like they had been shattered from the inside out. They dropped to the

floor, howling in pain, both of them

floor

kneeling hard before him.

