

## RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

### Chapter 1191

Lauren said, "Funny thing, Andrew-you probably don't know this, but my mom's been all about dressing up lately. For the longest time, I only ever saw her in simple outfits. She never really cared about appearances.

"But now, she's all glammed up and polished! If you didn't know better, you'd think she was dating someone!"

Andrew did not know how to respond, so he stayed quiet.

He had a pretty good idea why Tiana suddenly started caring about her looks. It was probably because his presence reminded her of her first love—his father.

Even though he was not the man himself, they were still father and son. Much like Aspen, Tiana clearly had something not quite right going on in her head. Only someone like her could project her feelings for a man onto his son.

Nonetheless, no matter how he looked at it, Andrew just could not shake the weirdness of it all. After all, this woman was supposed to be his future mother-in-law, and yet, she was just a little off.

Not that Tiana acted completely shameless or unhinged, but she definitely was not your average respectable elder either.

Lauren chuckled and said, "Andrew, I don't think I ever told you this, but before my mom married my dad, she had a first love. She was crazy about him—like, absolutely head over heels."

"The whole Lambert family was on edge back then because of how heartbroken she was," she went on.

"She was devastated when it ended—so much so that she nearly flipped the whole house upside down."

Andrew muttered to himself, 'Yeah, and that guy she was heartbroken over? Pretty sure that was my dad.'

Lauren continued, "But he really did a number on her. And around that time, our family and the Lamberts were trying to build stronger ties. My dad was pursuing her, and she was so hurt and furious that she married him out of spite."

Lauren paused for a moment, her expression softening with emotion. "She was dead set against the two of us for a long time, and honestly, a big part of it had to do with what she went through back then."

"She didn't want me to repeat her mistakes. She just wanted me to marry into the Driscolls, live worry-free, and have a privileged, secure life."

Andrew hesitated, then carefully asked, "Lauren... do you think your mom still has feelings for that first love?"

Lauren laughed. "Dr. Lloyd, you're such a dummy. First love always holds a special place in a woman's heart. It doesn't matter how it ended—most women never truly forget their first."

"So you're saying... your mom still has feelings for that guy?" Andrew asked. "Most likely," Lauren replied, her tone thoughtful. "She's never said it out loud, but I'm her daughter—I can tell what she's thinking, even if she tries to hide it."

"But honestly, I don't think she should be clinging to that memory anymore. Compared to my dad, that guy doesn't even come close!" she added with a scoff.

Andrew held back a sigh, thinking to himself, 'Lauren, I love you, but I have to say it—my dad might just be a tiny bit better than yours.'

Lauren then bared her teeth in a mock-angry grin and said, "If I ever get the chance to meet that guy from my mom's past, I'm totally slapping his son!"

Andrew blinked. "Wait, what? Slapping his son? Why? That's such a reach. Did his son do something to you?"

Lauren crossed her arms and huffed. "No, he didn't! But think about it, Andrew-my mom's old technically my elder, so I can't slap him. But I'm the younger generation, right? If I'm gonna help my mom get some closure, it's only fair I slap his kid instead for karma."

Andrew literally had no comeback for that.

#### Chapter 1192

The place Jameson picked for dinner was one of the most well-known upscale restaurants in Blumedale-The Palace.

"Andy, you might not know this, but around here, this spot is top-tier," Jameson said as he adjusted his tailored suit and smiled.

He added, "It's not like I'm trying to flaunt my wealth or anything. But sometimes, even if you don't care for appearances, you've still got to show up with style!"

Andrew chuckled and replied, "Mr. Rhodes, I get what you're saying."

Tiana spoke up coolly, "Jameson, no need to put on this kind of show in front of Andrew. Otherwise, you'll just end up looking ridiculous. This guy probably poops in places you haven't even dreamed of stepping into."

Jameson froze for a second, clearly shocked. "Well now, Tiana, you're really singing Andy's praises today. Could it be... the classic case of a mother-in-law who's starting to really like her son-in-law?"

Tiana gave a snort. "This has nothing to do with liking him. I'm just telling the truth."

Andrew was, after all, the Dragon Prince of the Lloyd family, descended from the royal Lloyd bloodline in Holtrien. Hence, he would likely have been born with a silver spoon, pampered from the start, with the world at his feet.

So, hearing Jameson talk about how 'top-tier' The Palace was just made Tiana feel a bit annoyed. Sure, The Palace was a big deal in Blumedale, but it was probably just another average night out to Andrew.

Jameson gave Andrew a grin and said, "Andy, Tiana used be real critical of you. But look at her now-completely turned around. She's backing you at every turn. Not bad, not bad! In our family, once you win over Tiana, you've basically won it all. You're moving fast, kid!"

Andrew's face twitched a little. He really wanted to tell Jameson to please never use the phrase 'won over' again—it just sounded way too suggestive.

As he lifted his head, he caught Tiana looking at him with a sly, unreadable smirk. He quickly cleared his throat and looked away, pretending not to notice. In his mind, though, he was cursing this crazy woman. He had no idea what she was plotting.

If she ever dared entertain any sort of twisted idea, Andrew would crush it without hesitation, right from the start.

The restaurant's guest manager,

Justin McGrath, approached them with a broad smile. "Mr. Rhodes, welcome! The 'Moonlight Court' private dining room is ready and waiting."

Jameson frowned. "Mr. McGrath, I think there's a mistake. I booked the 'Celestial Suite'-the highest-tier room, not Moonlight Court."

Justin looked uncomfortable. "You're right, Mr. Rhodes. You did reserve the Celestial Suite, but unfortunately, it's already been taken by another party."

"So I'm sorry, but we've arranged for you to dine in Moonlight Court instead it's still an excellent space!"

Before Jameson could respond,

Tiana snapped coldly, "We booked it first, which means tonight, we're dining in the Celestial Suite, no question. Who took our spot? Go tell them to get out."

Justin forced a smile. "Please don't make things hard on me, Mrs. Rhodes. Yes, your family made the reservation first, but the guests who took it are from the Hopkins family. And the Hopkins... well, I'm really not in a position to offend them."

Tiana let out a sharp laugh. "So what, the Rhodes family is easy to step on?"

Justin did not say anything he just laughed awkwardly twice. However, the message was clear: The Palace would rather upset the Rhodes family than cross the Hopkins.

Everyone knew why. The Hopkins was far more powerful than the Rhodes, and it made sense to avoid offending the bigger player.

Jameson kept his tone calm. "Let's go, Tiana. Andy, we'll eat somewhere else. The Rhodes might be new in Blumedale and still growing, but we're not without our pride."

Andrew nodded. "I agree, Mr. Rhodes. Blumedale's a big city. No reason we have to eat here."

However, Tiana clearly did not share their take. She looked Justin dead in the eyes and said coldly, "What if I insist on dining in the Celestial Suite tonight?"

Her personality was the complete opposite of Jameson's. Where he was warm and composed, she was all fire and fury.

### Chapter 1193

Justin's face twisted in discomfort, but before he could say anything, a loud voice boomed across the entrance.

"Mr. McGrath, you can step back! If Mrs. Rhodes wants to dine in our Celestial Suite, then she's more than welcome!"

As the voice faded, a burly man with a thick beard strode over. The giant crystal ring on his hand and the heavy gold chain across his chest made it clear this man was rich, but absolutely tasteless.

Jameson snorted coldly. "The Hopkins family sure has some nerve, snatching up someone else's reservation like it's nothing."

Archie Hopkins cracked a wide grin, revealing a mouth full of blackened teeth, and laughed without a care. "Mr. Rhodes, you sound way too naive!"

Archie shrugged and said, "In this world, it's all about money and muscle. The Hopkins family's got both. So stealing a little dining room from the Rhodes family? It's nothing."

Tiana's voice turned icy. "Since you're admitting it's theft, then do us a favor and get the hell out."

Archie's droopy eyes roamed over Tiana's figure without a shred of shame, and he clicked his tongue lasciviously. "Mrs. Rhodes, maybe the Rhodes are nobodies here in Blumedale... but you, you're a prize."

"Good Lord, look at you in that dress! That bare back of yours... I could spend a whole year savoring you and never get tired," he leered.

Lauren and Cecelia's faces darkened with rage, and even Andrew's brows drew tight, a flash of cold light passing through his eyes. However, Tiana stayed perfectly calm.

She walked straight toward Archie with a sweet, syrupy smile. "Mr. Hopkins, do you really think I'm beautiful?"

Archie was practically drooling now and nodded like a fool. "Of course! You're drop-dead gorgeous!"

Archie bragged, "Tiana, all you have to do is ditch Jameson and fall into my arms. I'll sign over everything I own to you! I'll kick my current wife out tonight, no hesitation, and throw you the biggest, grandest wedding Blumedale's ever seen!"

As he rambled on, his eyes were glued to Tiana's chest, his breathing growing heavier and more disgusting by the second.

Tiana stopped just in front of him and smiled sweetly. "Yeah... no thanks."

Archie's grin turned sleazy. "Tiana, quit playing hard to get! If you push me too far, I'll just have my guys grab you, and you'll still end up mine!"

Tiana gave a lighthearted laugh. "Mr. Hopkins, do you realize you're saying this in front of my husband and kids? Not exactly charming, is it?"

Archie flicked a glance at Jameson and sneered. "Everyone around here knows your husband's nothing but a spineless pushover. And you,

Tiana you're hotter than a basket of ghost peppers. Jameson's actotal waste of a man if you ask me!"

Tiana beckoned Archie closer with a teasing finger. "Come here, Mr. Hopkins. I've got a little secret to tell you."

Archie's eyes lit up, and he leaned in with a deep sniff, making a grotesque face. "Damn, Mrs. Rhodes, you smell amazing! You're triggering my Casanova Syndrome real bad!"

Tiana's hand whipped out so fast it was a blur, slapping Archie twice across the face so hard that a few of his rotten teeth flew out. He let out a screech and crashed backward, smashing into a giant decorative vase, which shattered into pieces.

"In my eyes, you're not even worthy of sniffing Jameson's fingernails," Tiana said icily.

"Disgusting filth. Crawl back to the trash can where you belong!!"

She stood there like an avenging queen, face cold and regal, as Lauren handed her a wet wipe.

Tiana wiped her palm slowly and casually, in the most humiliating way possible.

Meanwhile, Archie groaned and struggled to his feet, swaying like a drunk. His face twisted with rage as he roared, his voice cracking the air. "Tiana, you filthy bitch! You actually dared to lay hands on me!"

"Guys, get out here! Tonight, we're burning this whole family to the ground and teaching this dirty woman a lesson!"

At his shout, a swarm of Hopkins family members and bodyguards burst out of The Palace, charging straight at them like a pack of wolves.



Justin instantly sensed something was about to spiral. He rushed forward and tried to defuse the tension. "Mr. Hopkins, please calm down. We're all just here to have a nice dinner-no need for this."

Archie clutched his swollen cheek, his face twisted with rage. "Calm down? Get out of my face! If you say another word, I'll end you too!"

Justin flinched and quickly backed off, no longer daring to speak. However, as he glanced toward the Rhodes family, his eyes burned with resentment.

He cursed them for being foolish. Despite knowing they could not go up against the Hopkins, they still had to throw punches. He could not help but think they were just asking for it.

Lauren's voice rang out cold and firm. "Mr. Hopkins, what are you trying to do? Start a war?"

Archie bellowed with laughter. "Big mouth on you, you little bitch! With your trashy Rhodes family, you're not even qualified to go to war with the Hopkins!"

He sneered, eyes gleaming. "But don't worry-I'm not just gonna take your mom. I'll take you too. A mother-daughter combo? Now that's what I call fun, haha!"

The commotion drew a crowd. Guests who had been dining inside now poured out to spectate, curious about the chaos. As soon as they saw who was involved, the onlookers began shouting.

"Mr. Rhodes, are you insane? Who do you think you are picking a fight with Archie Hopkins?"

Another chimed in, "The Rhodes family just barely made a name for themselves in Blumedale. Now you're picking a fight with Archie? You must have a death wish!"

"Whoa, Mr. Hopkins actually got slapped? Twice? That's like stealing from a lion's den!"

What is the Rhodes family thinking? Are they trying to get wiped off the map?"

Hearing the crowd cheer him on, Archie grinned triumphantly. He turned back to Tiana and Jameson, smugness oozing from every pore. "Tiana, Jameson-you hear that? This city knows what's what. Now, I'm feeling generous, so I'll give you both a choice."

He continued, "Jameson, you get on your knees and beg me for forgiveness. And Tiana? Strip down and spend one wild night with me."

His crude demands sent the crowd into another fit of laughter. To them, the Rhodes family had officially become a joke.

A once respectable household was now completely humiliated by Archie.

It was a disgrace.

Lauren and Cecelia were trembling with rage.

Lauren's hand slipped into her purse-she was ready to draw a gun.

However, Tiana calmly raised her hand and said to her family, "There's no need to get riled up."

Then, she turned her eyes to Andrew. "Andy, step up and help your poor in-laws get some justice."

Andrew froze, thinking, 'Wait, what? Did she seriously just toss this flaming mess into my lap?'

Jameson frowned and stepped forward. "Tiana, don't drag Andy into this. This is our problem. I'll handle it."

He pulled out his phone, clearly ready to rally the Rhodes family for a proper showdown, but Tiana waved him off.

"No need to bother. He can handle this," she said breezily. "For him, this kind of thing is child's play."

Lauren gave Andrew a baffled look, as if silently asking, "Andrew, when did my mom start thinking you were some sort of superhero?"

Tiana smiled styly, eyes locked on Andrew. "Come on, Andy. Some scumbag is out here harassing your mother-in-law and even threatening to sleep with her. Are you really just going to stand there and do nothing?"

Andrew let out a long sigh. He finally realized why she was acting so brazenly- because she knew

, and she felt untouchable.

"Alright, Mrs. Rhodes. You win," he muttered.

Grinding his jaw, Andrew finally stepped forward and positioned himself between

the Rhodes and the incoming threat.

Archie squinted at him, voice

dripping with venom. "You little

bastard.

Stay the hell outta th1

less you want to die, back the k off."

The others around them sneered and snickered. "Kid, you're all skin and bones. Do yourself a favor and get lost."

Another chimed in, "Mr. Hopkins doesn't even take the entire Rhodes family seriously. What makes you think you stand a chance, you low-level nobody?"

"Heh, did you all hear it earlier? Tiana said they are his in-laws. Damn, this kid hit the jackpot. Tiana and her daughter? Both absolute knockouts."

One remarked, "No kidding. That lucky punk, I envy him like hell. If it were me, I'd be laughing in my sleep. Bagging a mother-daughter pair? That's the dream, man... pure heaven."

A few filthy-mouthed degenerates let loose with their vulgar fantasies, and the air instantly grew more volatile. The tension between both sides was now on the brink of exploding.

Tiana let out a cold, mocking laugh. "Looks like Mr. Hopkins isn't the only one talking shit tonight. Some of you have even more sewage coming out of your mouths."

She turned to Andrew, her smile sharp as ice. "Come on, dearest son-in-law, I don't want to see anyone who just spewed filth still standing. You know what to do."

Andrew's face turned cold, and without a word, he stepped forward and started slapping people left and right. He did not bother sorting who said what-if they had been vulgar, they were getting hit.

Anyone who had made nasty comments a moment ago was knocked straight to the ground. Andrew had already been fed up with Tiana's earlier antics, but these dirtbags had crossed a line in front of Jameson, and that was something he could not let slide.

Archie froze for a second before letting out an enraged, barking laugh, "You little bastard, you really got guts, huh? Tiana tells you to hit people, and you just start swinging? You must have no idea just how close you are to dying right now!"

Andrew shot him a look. "You talk too damn much, you trash."

Before Archie could even react, Andrew lifted his leg and kicked him square in the chest. Archie went flying, crashing into another giant vase near The Palace entrance, and smashing it to pieces.

"Kill him! Now! All of you, get him!" Archie's voice cracked with fury as he screamed, completely out of his mind.

He could not even focus on the pain in his chest anymore. He was too blinded by rage.

Getting slapped by Tiana was one thing, but now some punk just kicked the crap out of him in public.

Did they think he was a paper tiger?

Andrew moved like lightning, fists,  
cutting through the air like blamet

He charged straight into the Hopkins family's muscle and unleashed a brutal onslaught.

The Hopkins might not have been one of the Five Apex Families, but they were not far behind either. They had real power in Blumedale, a top-tier legacy filled with trained fighters and influence.

Yet, in the stunned silence of the crowd, under the pale restaurant lights, Andrew took down over 30 of them in less than a minute.

Tiana clapped with glee. "Now that's what I call a powerful son-in-law!"

Lauren and Cecelia beamed with admiration, their eyes sparkling like stars. They were practically swooning.

Only Jameson looked uneasy. He muttered, "Tiana, you've gone too far this time. You're dragging Andy into your mess. Now he's made enemies for no reason!"

Tiana snorted. "You worry too much. This kid's not even afraid of the Apex Families—what are these small fries compared to that?"

Andrew, meanwhile, kept walking forward, eyes locked on Archie. The man was scooting back on his butt, scrambling to get away.

He stammered, "Y-You stay back! I'm from the great Hopkins family. If you lay a finger on me, you're dead by morning!"

Andrew said nothing. He simply raised his hand and slapped him across the face. Archie's head- snapped to the side, his vision spinning as his skull buzzed from the blow.

Justin stood frozen in shock, his eyeballs nearly popping out. He wondered who the hell this lunatic was.

Even the bystanders who had just mocked Andrew for being weak now looked at him with stunned disbelief.