

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1441

Black Viper's sudden tongue attack did catch Andrew off guard for a split second. In that fleeting moment, a stray thought even crossed his mind.

'If I sold this guy to Teialan to work as a sex worker, with a tongue like that, he'd probably leave a trail of exotic clients moaning for more...'

Nonetheless, while Andrew's mind wandered for half a beat, his hands never missed a step. Just as he shattered Black Viper's ribs, he snatched the dagger clean from the man's grip.

With a smooth upward slash, the blade cut through Black Viper's extended tongue like slicing through licorice. A scream tore from his throat as mind-splitting pain surged into his skull, and blood gushed from his mouth as he stumbled, clutching his face in a frenzy.

Andrew approached without a hint of emotion and, with one clean twist, snapped Black Viper's neck. Thus ended the lives of Grand Viper's two prized killers: White Viper and Black Viper. One male, one female-both now rotting six feet under.

Aspen gazed at Andrew with flushed cheeks and burning admiration, her breath hot and uneven. "Master... you're so powerful... so amazing... I want to be ravished!"

Andrew winced. Even fighting Black Viper had not given him this big of a headache. He could not tell if Aspen was just high on the drug or if her true nature had finally broken loose, but this wild little minx was fully playing the part of his personal slave now.

And what did that mean?

It meant a slave ready for anything, anytime. No rules, no restraint-just obedience and craving, eager to be used, punished, or played with at his command.

Clearly, that was exactly what Aspen wanted from him.

With a sigh, Andrew scooped her up and pulled out his phone. Then, he dialed the Wrights, saying, "I found Grand Viper's people. Kevin, you'd better send a squad to clean up."

Kevin's voice came through, low and grim. "That old bastard dares to show his face again? Alright, Andy. Leave it to me. I'll send our elite squad to sweep the area."

Andrew hung up, smirking coldly as he walked out. The fire between the Wrights and Grand Viper was only getting hotter.

Meanwhile, Aspen was still writhing in his arms, peppering his face with kisses and moaning softly.

Andrew knew exactly how potent this drug was. Francesca had gone through this once, and it had nearly melted her brain. So, he knew it was best to get Aspen somewhere private, fast, before things got out of hand.

As that thought raced through his mind, he saw headlights cutting through the dusty road ahead.

Lauren's car pulled up, with Francesca in the passenger seat.

"Get in-now!" Lauren shouted as she flung open the door.

Andrew hopped in with Aspen still clinging to him and sighed in relief "Thank god you two showed up when you did Let's head back to Serenity Villa, now!"
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Francesca took one look at Aspen and gasped. "Oh my god-isn't this... the effect

of Enthralling Essence? How the hell did this happen to her?"

Andrew's eyes were cold. "That old bastard Mosby did this. But don't worry. He won't be walking free much longer."

Lauren nodded, focused on the road. "Andrew, my parents are already waiting for you at Serenity Villa. They said it's urgent."

Andrew's gaze narrowed slightly, knowing Tiana must have caught wind of something.

Both fragments he had were now gone-sacrificed in the rescue, and Mosby and

Rafael likely had the entire treasure map by now.

Even if they were still short by a

piece or two, Rafael-being from the Driscoll family and all Had more than enough power to hunt the rest down with ease.

Chapter 1442

Back at Serenity Villa, Andrew asked Tiana and Jameson to have a seat and enjoy some tea first. He needed to focus on resolving the effects of the Enthralling Essence burning through Aspen's body.

However, Tiana, already fuming, shot a cold glance at Aspen and scoffed, "That's a powerful aphrodisiac, and the only real cure is sex. Andrew, stop wasting time. If you can't handle it, call her boyfriend or husband."

That comment left Andrew momentarily speechless. Meanwhile, Lauren and Francesca both looked a little awkward.

The three women all shared one man, but that arrangement had never been officially acknowledged, especially not in front of their parents. If it got dragged out into the open now, it would be embarrassing for everyone.

Sensing the tension, Jameson gently tugged Tiana's sleeve and said, "Come on,

let's have some tea. Don't interrupt Andy while he's saving the girl."

Yet, Tiana was not letting it go. "If you want tea, have it yourself. I've got something to say to Andrew."

Andrew chuckled. "Mrs. Rhodes, why don't you and Mr. Rhodes enjoy some tea first? Don't worry. I'll join you soon."

Tiana sneered. "So what, she's yours now too? Are you planning to personally 'handle' her heat for her?"

Andrew replied, dead serious, "Mrs. Rhodes, that's not how it is. Aspen is my servant-my little slave. I have plenty of methods to relieve her symptoms. I don't need to cross the line."

Tiana scoffed. "Plenty of methods? Sure. But I bet your best method is unbuckling your belt and getting straight to it, right?"

It was clear that his mother-in-law was pissed. However, Andrew could not ignore Aspen either.

"Mrs. Rhodes, Rafael and Mosby have taken the fragments. I believe now's the time for us to stand united and strategize, not waste energy dragging each other through the mud."

Tiana's voice flared. "Andrew, you really are unbelievable! Have you ever thought about how unfair this is to Lauren and Fran?"

Andrew fell silent-that hit home. He did not know how to refute her.

Jameson frowned. "Tiana, that's enough. Let the young people figure it out on their own problems."

Francesca and Lauren jumped in quickly with sheepish smiles.

Francesca said, "It's really okay, Mrs. Rhodes. Aspen's like a sister to us."

"She's in pain—we want Andrew to help her," Lauren added.

Tiana shot them a warning glare. "Don't defend him! I'm laying it out now—Andrew better treat the three of you fairly. If you keep that little minx from the Stevens family around, then you'd better make it even.

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"All three of you serve him, and he better serve all three of you in return! If he dares to favor one over the others, he'll answer to me! I can't stand men who play favorites. It makes my skin crawl!"

Andrew blinked, stunned. "Mrs. Rhodes, is that what you meant by fairness?"

Tiana's eyes gleamed with wicked amusement. "What else did you think I meant? Do you think I didn't notice your little harem arrangement with these girls? If you've got the stamina and the skills, fine. Enjoy your little paradise.

"But don't you dare neglect Lauren or Fran! Now go. Handle it. You've got three hours—I'm being generous."

Andrew's face twitched.

Three hours?

This woman really wanted to kill him. Even with his stamina, three hours straight was brutal, and Aspen's condition was not something that could be solved in under an hour.

Francesca and Lauren were both blushing furiously, caught somewhere between embarrassment and amusement.

Lauren, ever the thoughtful one, said quickly, "Mom, I'll sit this one out. Let Andrew help Aspen first; then he can handle Fran. I'll rest today."

Francesca jumped in, waving her hands. "No, no! I don't need anything either. Andrew's been exhausted lately. And let's be real who wants to do that every single day? Mrs. Rhodes, please don't make things harder for him!"

Chapter 1443

Andrew carried Aspen to the second-floor bedroom, moving quickly but gently. He planned to try every alternative method he knew to help her sweat out the drug. Only if all else failed would he consider the final option—one that involved getting directly involved himself.

Downstairs, Tiana glanced at Jameson and let out a cold, pointed laugh. "At least that boy isn't greedy. If it were certain other men, I bet they'd jump at the chance, turn it into an all-out orgy, and call it charity."

Jameson's face turned bright red with irritation. He wanted to snap back and ask her why she was so blunt. However, with the two girls present, he forced a strained smile instead.

He cleared his throat and said, "Lauren, Fran, this place really is lovely. Why don't you show me around?"

Grateful for the change of subject, Lauren and Francesca eagerly led him off on a tour of the villa.

Tiana, hands folded neatly into the sleeves of her dress, tilted her head and stared up toward the second floor. After a moment, she looked away with a scowl, lips twitching with something between shame and irritation.

She muttered, "That damn brat... how hard is he going at it? She's crying already! Young people these days have no shame at all!"

Grumbling to herself, she stormed into the dining area and yanked the glass door shut.

At her level of martial arts, her hearing was absurdly sharp. Even the tiniest sound would not escape her ears, let alone the very non-tiny sounds currently echoing from upstairs.

Andrew had always been proper and serious. She could not help but wonder if he was a complete beast in bed.

An hour later, Andrew finally came down to the main hall, having stabilized Aspen and left her asleep.

Tiana was already waiting, tapping her fingers on the table with an impatient scowl. "Showered yet?"

Andrew blinked. "Showered? In the middle of the day? Why would I—"

"You young people really don't care about hygiene, do you? You finish that kind of

thing, and you don't even rinse off?" Tiana snapped.

Realizing what she was implying, Andrew gave a dry chuckle. "Mrs. Rhodes, it's not what you think. Enthralling Essence is intense, and yes, usually requires a sexual release. But my medical techniques allow for alternative methods."

Tiana gave a mocking smile. "Alternative methods? You mean, you used your hands, right? You call that a professional solution?"

Andrew's expression twitched. "Mrs. Rhodes, you sure are well-informed. But actually, I didn't use my hands. I used—"

She waved a hand dismissively before he could finish. "Whatever you used, don't want to know, but at least you have some decency left. You didn't keep

us all downstars waiting while you and your little maid turned the upstairs into a slip 'n slide."

Andrew opened his mouth, wanting to say something—anything—to get her to stop being so graphic. He thought, 'You're my mother-in-law. Can we not talk like this?'

However, before he could even form a sentence, Tiana added, "I do have a question, though. Just curiosity, nothing more. What exactly did you do to her to make her scream like that?"

Her eyes narrowed, studying him intently.

Tiana's eyes were sharp and beautiful, unmistakably inherited by Lauren. The difference was that where Lauren's gaze was soft and kind, Tiana's was full of cunning and edge.

It was not hard to imagine-back in her prime, Tiana must have been the kind of seductress who gave men migraines and nightmares.

Andrew coughed. "Mrs. Rhodes, I really don't think you should ask that."

He meant it.

Of every woman he had ever met-young or old-Tiana was hands-down the most dangerous. She was not just sharp-tongued, but she could also be sweet as sugar one second and venomous the next.

Most elders kept a respectful distance, holding themselves with grace and restraint.

But Tiana? She was always pushing buttons, doing things no son-in-law should ever have to process.

And more than once, Andrew had caught himself wondering if this woman was mentally sound.

Not long after, Jameson returned with Lauren and Francesca from their quick tour around the villa.

Once everyone had taken their seats, Andrew looked at Tiana and spoke frankly. "Mrs. Rhodes, the two map fragments I had on me were taken. Right now, the question is-should we try to take them back, or is there another way to stop Mosby and Rafael?"

Tiana arched a brow. "Why stop them? Isn't this perfect? Ever since the fall of the Fallen Crimson Dynasty, no one's gotten this close to reassembling the full map. If the treasure map is finally complete, that means we're closer than ever to uncovering the legendary vault-it could be just around the corner."

Jameson nodded thoughtfully. "That's true. The Rhodes family has spent generations safeguarding our piece of the map. Even though our bloodline has endured, that fragment has always been a ticking time bomb. One mistake, and it could wipe out our entire clan.

"The Bates of Oak Apothecary were wiped out over this. They're the cautionary tale. I don't want the Rhodes family to follow that same tragic path. If we lost the map, then so be it. Perhaps we were never meant to control it in the first place."

Tiana snorted. "You're only half right. Yes, losing the fragment means we're no longer in possession of it. But that doesn't mean our family should wash our hands clean and walk away.

"If the full map is now complete, then what lies behind it-the treasure, the secrets —no one knows for sure. But one thing's certain: the Rhodes family deserves a share of whatever's found."

Jameson looked stunned. "Are you out of your mind? You actually want to join the hunt?"

Tiana chuckled coldly. "What else did you think I was planning? You think I'd just let our family's piece get stolen, and let Andrew's fragment get snatched away, without a second thought? The whole point of letting Mosby and Rafael run wild is to let them do the dirty work. Once the treasure shows itself, the Rhodes family makes its move."

Jameson slapped the table. "This is insane! Tiana, let me be clear. This so-called 'treasure' from the Fallen Crimson Dynasty? No one even knows where it is, or what's really inside.

"It could be gold and jewels. It could be an entire secret realm, or it could be hiding something terrifying. But there's one thing I do know. Along with the fragment passed down to us, there's always been a warning.

"Every direct descendant entrusted with the map has been told-never, ever desire the treasure. Never try to reassemble the full map. Because if you do the family will fall, and you'll be marching straight into death."

Tiana rolled her eyes. "That old speech again? That kind of superstition was just created to make the treasure more mysterious-and to keep it hidden longer. Let's be real. It's all away to protect the treasure from being found too easily."

Jameson shook his head. "It's not that simple. This warning has been passed down through the Rhodes family for generations.

"My father-Lauren's grandfather told me face-to-face: even if the Rhodes family is pushed to the edge of extinction, we must never chase the treasure. Because what comes next... would be even worse than extinction."

Tiana frowned and looked ready to argue again, but Lauren jumped in quickly. "Dad, Mom-can you both please stop fighting? Let's hear what Andrew has to say."

Jameson exhaled and nodded. "You're right. Andy, what do you think?"

Tiana spoke again before Andrew could answer. "We're talking about a treasure passed down from the last era of feudal rule-something that's tormented and destroyed multiple noble families across generations.

"If you seriously believe there's

nothing inside that vault, no hidden

power, no overwhelming

riches you're lying to yourself. And now that we're this close to

uncovering it? If we stand by and do nothing we'll just watch others get rich beyond imagination.

"But if we manage to seize it first, it'll change everything-overnight. It won't just be wealth. It'll be power. We could rise to the top and become a dominant force, untouchable and unstoppable."

Chapter 1445

Andrew looked at Jameson, then at Tiana. The two of them could not have had more opposite views,

Jameson wanted stability, believing that since the fragments were already lost, it was best to back away.

But Tiana? She was already burning with ambition, believing the loss of the fragments was a blessing in disguise-it meant Rafael and the others would

complete the map for them and reveal the treasure's location. Then, she could swoop in and seize the real prize.

Andrew had witnessed firsthand how far Tiana could go when she set her mind to something. Her ambition was unmatched; in many ways, she was more relentless than any man he knew.

Now, he had to make a decision. If the treasure truly surfaced, should he fight for it or not?

And if he did, he would have to be ready to face off with Rafael and whoever else dared to claim it.

However, Jameson's warning still lingered in his mind: that the treasure might not just be gold and silver. There might be hidden dangers beyond imagination.

That made things a whole lot more complicated.

Andrew said carefully, "Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes, how about this-let's observe for now. We wait and see if the full map really does come together. If it does, and the location is revealed, then we plan our move.

"Rafael and Mosby are both dangerous men with their own agendas. And the truth is, when Mr. Bates passed his family's fragment to me, he trusted me to guard it on their behalf. Which means I can't just sit back and watch Rafael walk away with everything."

He paused, letting the weight of his words settle.

Tiana smiled. "See? Even Andrew can't walk away from this. A treasure passed down from the Fallen Crimson Dynasty-aren't you the least bit curious about what's inside?"

Lauren chimed in, "Of course I'm curious. But I don't have any strong opinions on the matter. I'll follow whatever Andrew decides."

Francesca laughed lightly. "Same here. Treasure hunting sounds exciting, but you know it's bound to be dangerous too. I'll support whatever Andrew chooses."

Tiana shook her head. "You girls spoil him too much. A woman needs to keep her man in check-only then can she hold her ground in the relationship."

Jameson groaned under his breath.

How had this conversation suddenly turned back around on him again?

"Alright," he said, waving a hand, "we'll go with Andy's plan. We observe first. But

if it ever comes to making a move, I want one thing clear-nobody takes reckless risks."

He made sure to emphasize every word.

Andrew nodded. "Mrs. Rhodes, there's one more thing. What if Mosby and the others complete the map and quietly sneak off to find the treasure without us? That would make things a lot harder."

Tiana gave a sly smile. "Relax. The Rhodes family's fragment is blank. In order to activate it and see the final piece, Mosby and the rest will have to come to you."

Andrew raised a brow. "Come to me? Shouldn't they be coming to you?"

Tiana tossed him a small bottle, which he caught instinctively. "That contains Lauren's virgin blood. It's the key to unlocking the Rhodes fragment. Now that you're holding it,

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they have no choice but to me to

you." “

Lauren's face turned bright red. "Mom! Cece's blood works too, you know..."

Tiana gave a sly, satisfied smile.

"That's why I already had Cece sent to your grandfather's place. The

Lambert family is far from Gabo

Creek. Mosby and the others won't

be able to reach her."

Andrew gave a low chuckle and lifted a thumb. "Mrs. Rhodes, I've gotta hand it to you-that's impressively calculated."

Tiana smirked. "What, you think I'm a devious old woman? That I'm ruthless and manipulative?"

Andrew did not bother answering. Sure, Tiana was cunning-no doubt about it— but she was still one of his people. And when it came to allies, a little ruthlessness could be a good thing.

Besides, Andrew knew how to

handle her. He had never had trouble

keeping Tiana in check. If anything the fact that she handed over her

final bargaining chip Laurens blood-showed just how much she trusted him more than anyone else.

Deep down, Tiana was not confident in herself, knowing the blood was much safer in Andrew's hands.