

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1461

Lauren let out a bitter laugh and nodded. "Alright, I'll drive you both to the hospital! If we wait any longer, Leroy might not make it!"

Christina was overwhelmed with gratitude. "Thank you, Ms. Rhodes, thank you so much!"

After hesitating for a moment, she approached Andrew and bowed her head low. "Mr. Lloyd, thank you as well for saving us siblings! If it weren't for you, Leroy might have been beaten to death by that monster Quinton!"

Andrew sneered coldly. "Funny, I remember the Stevens family being all cozy with Quinton not too long ago! Mrs. Stevens regarded him as her son-in-law, and Leroy kept calling him 'brother-in-law'! What happened? Those titles suddenly lose their magic?"

Christina dug her nails into her palms, feeling the sharp pain pierce through her. "Our family was blind and foolish-We deserve everything that's happening to us."

She continued, "Oh, and Mr. Lloyd... Quinton came after me because of you. Looks like he's trying to force your hand. He apparently needs your help with something, but he knows approaching you directly won't work.

"That's why he tried to use me as leverage. He wanted me to help him lure out Ms. Rhodes, Ms. Aicker, or Aspen. He figured if he could grab any one of those three, he could make you comply!"

A cold gleam flashed in Andrew's eyes as he sneered. "So why didn't you do what he asked? Betraying me isn't exactly new territory for you!"

Christina's face turned another shade paler as she smiled bitterly. "Mr. Lloyd, I know you look down on me and think I'm just some stupid woman who's already exhausted your patience!"

"But I still remember who helped me when I needed it most! Ms. Rhodes has been good to my family and gave us a chance to rebuild our lives. I'd rather die than harm her!"

Andrew scoffed. "If you'd had this kind of conscience earlier, you wouldn't be in this mess today!"

Lauren walked over and playfully tugged at his arm. "Andrew, enough already, okay? They've suffered enough! How about this-you head back, and I'll take them to the hospital."

Andrew nodded and turned to

Rachel with an icy tone. "From now on, if there are any more brutal incidents like this in Chamber of Commerce territory, don't bother asking me first, just handle it directly! No matter who's behind it, even if it's people from the Five Apex Families or the Three Titans, don't give them any special treatment!"

Rachel quickly nodded. "Understood, Mr. Lloyd!"

She knew that this Andrew would be

another George. The former

chairman had clawed his way to power with blood on his hands, and from Andrew's attitude, he was every bit as ruthless as George had been. After all, he could not even give a damn about the Three Titans.

Rachel had no idea where Andrew got such confidence.

Lauren called for a car to take Christina and Leroy to the hospital. In the vehicle, Christina remained silent for a while before asking, "Ms. Rhodes, I hope you don't mind me prying! I wanted to ask-now that Andrew is chairman of the Gabo Creek Chamber of Commerce, just how much power does he actually have?"

Lauren smiled gently. "Honestly, I'm not entirely sure myself! But let me put it this way, Ms. Stevens-Andrew is now at least on the level of the heads of the Five Apex Families.

"When you add Governor McCormick and Mr. Keller Senior backing him, plus his growing influence and business empire, I'd say Andrew is now powerful enough to negotiate directly with the Three Titans families!"

Christina fell silent and slowly lowered her head.

Powerful enough to negotiate with the Three Titans families? She could not even comprehend what kind of status that represented, what kind of overwhelming influence and power that required.

All she knew was that she and Andrew now lived in completely different worlds- her on the ground, and him far above the clouds.

Quinton, the heir of the Wright family, who once had complete control over her and Leroy, had been slapped into tears by Andrew right in front of her.

It was the kind of scene Christina never even dared to dream of.

Chapter 1462

Lauren seemed to sense something and smiled comfortingly. "Ms. Stevens, let the past stay in the past! You can completely start over now. You're very capable, and with your family by your side, I believe that with effort, you can still build a good life!"

Christina forced a smile. "I'll do my best to live up to your kind words, Ms. Rhodes, and I'll definitely work hard!"

Meanwhile, Andrew left the fast-food restaurant and got into his Ferrari, heading toward a coffee shop.

Yara, dressed in a stunning red dress, was already waiting for him with graceful elegance.

"Andrew, I ordered you a cappuccino," she said sweetly as he approached, her smile soft and flirty. "Do you know the meaning behind that drink? It's said to symbolize two people in love going on a date."

Andrew sat down and waved dismissively. "Cut the nonsense. You said you had important info about Quinton. What is it?"

Yara pouted. "Jumping straight to business-how boring!"

Andrew let out a short laugh. "Ms. Wright, I don't think we're close enough to be flirting like this."

This woman used to be bitter and deadly serious, especially with how Quinton mistreated her. She even went as far as using her own nudes as leverage—ruthless did not begin to cover it.

But lately, she had been acting like some playful, lovestruck girl—always finding excuses to tease him.

Andrew was starting to wonder if she was just going through a phase or had fallen for him.

Yara spoke matter-of-factly. "Andrew, you've already grabbed my chest. We might not have a title, but we've definitely crossed a few lines. So if I want to act a little sweet with you, what's the harm?"

Andrew snorted coldly. "Ms. Wright, don't forget your place! I'm sworn brothers with your father. Your big brother Quinton is my godson! So

technically, you should treat me as such too. You coming on to me like this? Completely inappropriate."

Yara's cheeks flu

flushed red as she bit her cherry lips. "Fine, then you'll also be my godfather. But don't you know that half of these 'godfather' titles are just sugar-daddy cover-ups? Andrew, do you have a kink for that too?"

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Andrew felt a chill run down his spine. "You've gotta be kidding me."

Yara giggled and looked smug. "Of course not. But how about this-I'll call you 'daddy' in private, okay? Just take me to a hotel, make me yours, and I'll be all yours from then on."

Her voice dripped with temptation, her eyes shimmering with heat-Andrew could tell she was not just playing around.

"Ms. Wright, we started off as business partners, and I thought we were slowly becoming friends," Andrew said, his tone sharp. "But if this is where your mind's going, then sorry-I'm not interested."

Yara sighed in defeat and slumped back. "Fine, I knew you wouldn't take the bait! But my feelings won't change. As long as you're willing, I'm ready to give myself to you!"

Her voice got quieter toward the end, her tone softening. Despite her boldness, she was still a well-bred lady at heart, not quite used to being so forward.

Andrew rubbed his temples. "I don't get it. Why ruin a perfectly good working relationship? Isn't our current way of getting along much better?"

Yara scoffed and clenched her teeth. "Women always want more. Haven't you figured that out? Andrew, if you want to blame someone, blame yourself for being too damn

attractive. Even if you helped me win the position of head of the Wright family, at the end of the day, I'm still

a woman, and women need

someone strong to lean on.

"And you, Andrew, are the most ideal man I've ever met. Plus, I wouldn't mind undressing and sharing a bed with you..."

Chapter 1463

Seeing the blush on Yara's face only gave Andrew a headache. He simply said, "Alright, enough. Let's talk business first. You asked me to come here, and whatever you've got might actually be useful."

Yara knew she could not push too far. After all, Andrew was not the type of man who let women manipulate him just because they batted their lashes—unless, of course, she could one day get him by the balls.

She began, "Remember when your little maid Aspen got kidnapped? That whole thing was orchestrated by my brother, Quinton—he was the one who joined Mosby and Rafael to make it happen."

Andrew's eyes narrowed. "So I was right. Quinton really is in bed with those two."

Yara recalled something and continued. "He came to me and asked me to beg you for help with something. He didn't specify what exactly, and I didn't ask."

That made something click in Andrew's mind—Christina had said the same thing earlier.

So, what exactly was Quinton after?

Then it hit him: the treasure map. The Rhodes family's piece could not be revealed.

Could it be that Mosby and Rafael, out of options, sent Quinton to get his help? The more he thought about it, the more likely it seemed.

He should have searched that little bastard when he had him on the ground earlier-maybe he had part of the map on him. Then again, it did not really matter.

The Rhodes family's map was the only one that could be revealed with a virgin's blood, and he had that in his possession. Eventually, Quinton, Mosby, or Rafael would have to come to him.

Without one fragment, they would never be able to piece together the complete treasure map.

Yara took a sip of coffee, then suddenly said, "Andrew, I think you shouldn't go too far with Mr. Driscoll or Dr. Lake. Making them full-on enemies might not be smart."

Andrew raised a brow. "Oh? You think I'm scared of them?"

Yara shook her head. "Of course not. You're not the type to be scared of anyone. But I think you've already hit a peak for where you are now. If you keep moving steadily, you'll reach the top.

"But if things get too ugly with Rafael-he's from the Driscoll family-and if they step in, that could bring real trouble."

Andrew scoffed. "I don't need the Driscolls to step in. I'm already planning to go find them myself."

Yara blinked, stunned. "Why would you do that?"

Everyone knew the Driscolls were part of the Three Titans. Picking a fight with them was practically suicide.

Andrew's voice was calm and cold. "No reason. My principle's always been the same-don't start fights, but don't back down if someone gets in my way."

Of course, there was Lauren too. But he had no intention of sharing that part with Yara.

Yara understood that some things were beyond her reach. She smiled faintly and leaned in again. "Okay, serious talk's done. How about you go watch a movie with me?"

Andrew shook his head. "It's too late. By the time we're out, it'll be almost midnight."

Yara pouted. "Isn't that perfect? My period just ended."

The implication was loud and clear-any guy with half a brain would get it.

"Ms. Wright, goodbye. I need to head back," Andrew said flatly. "Otherwise, the

three little monsters at home will tear the place down."

With a smirk, Andrew ignored Yara's irritation and got up to leave!

Left alone in the cafe, Yara's smile slowly faded. She mumbled, "Andrew, you really are a man who doesn't take the bait. That makes you a challenge. But I believe in my charm. Let's see how you keep up this saintly act when I straddle you completely naked one day."

She had made up her mind-she would latch onto Andrew's coattails.

Yara was smart enough to know

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that if she wanted to hold onto this man, sex was non-negotiable. Otherwise, she would never have a real grip on the powerful ally.

Chapter 1464

Returning to Serenity Villa, Andrew called Dylan over. "Follow Quinton and keep an eye on him! Pay special attention to the places he frequents and with whom he's been meeting."

Dylan nodded. "Got it. I'll handle the surveillance myself."

This so-called godson had the nerve to target someone from his inner circle. That crossed a hard line-and Andrew had no intention of letting it slide. Of course, he was not planning to make a move directly. He preferred using others to do the dirty work.

Quinton had teamed up with Rafael and Mosby. If the Wright family found out about it, Kevin would explode. After all, the Wrights were currently in a blood feud with Grand Viper, and Grand Viper was working together with Rafael and Mosby.

That meant Quinton was essentially colluding with the family's sworn enemies. If the Wrights did not deal with that kind of betrayal seriously, they would not deserve to be called one of the Five Apex Families.

Later that evening, Francesca and Aspen returned home from work. The three girls at Serenity Villa had a rotation system for cooking dinner-each taking

turns daily unless work got in the way. That meant Andrew did not need to lift a finger and got to enjoy a home-cooked meal every night.

"How are you feeling today? Has your body fully recovered?" Andrew looked at Aspen and asked.

Her cheeks flushed as she gave a sheepish smile. "I'm fine now. And... thanks again for helping me yesterday."

Andrew chuckled. "Don't mention it. It was my pleasure."

Aspen's face turned redder as she playfully glared at him. "Don't say stuff like that so casually. What if someone else heard you? Don't you have any shame?"

Andrew shrugged. "I'm just being honest. Aspen, I didn't expect you to be so cunning. You got drugged with Enthralling Essence and still managed to lure me into an unforgettable night. That was your real plan, wasn't it?"

Seeing the man's smirk, Aspen's face went bright red, and she bared her teeth at him in mock outrage. hat "Ugh, you're so annoying! I told you not to bring that up again! I wasn't in my right mind-I was drugged, okay? It wasn't intentional!"

She could not believe the nerve. What did he mean by 'cunning'? He was the one who made her body go limp and trembling by the end of it. If anything, he was the one who enjoyed himself.

A little while later, Lauren walked in the door.

Aspen looked up and teased, "You're late today, Lauren. You look exhausted."

Lauren kicked off her heels and plopped down beside Andrew. "Yeah, I'm beat. Just came back from the hospital. Christina and Leroy are finally out of danger."

Aspen made a noncommittal sound.

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"What now? Something else happened to the ever-dramatic Stevens family? Honestly, nine out of ten things I hear about them, I don't even believe anymore."

Lauren replied, "Not this time, Aspen. You're overthinking it. They were both seriously hurt-Quinton nearly killed them. Leroy especially. He barely made it."

Aspen's expression shifted for a split second before she pressed her lips together and said nothing.

Andrew glanced at Lauren and asked calmly, "You paid their medical bills, didn't you?"

Lauren nodded, looking innocent. "Andrew, you're not mad at me for stepping in, are you?"

Andrew waved her off. "Of course not. You did out of

kindness that's a good thing. But you didn't need to spend your own money Quinton paid 20 million today, remember? Since Christina was injured on the job, the fast-food restaurant will cover her medical expenses. So you really didn't need to pay out of pocket!"

Lauren smiled. "It's fine! It wasn't that much money anyway."

After dinner, Lauren, Francesca, and Aspen sat in the living room binge-watching their shows.

Chapter 1465

Andrew took one glance at the screen and immediately lost interest-it was one of those over-the-top drama series full of catfights and betrayals set in an ancient royal palace.

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Serenity Villa was huge, with over 20 rooms. Andrew picked one to use as his alchemy room. Then, he locked himself inside all night, crafting several types of elixirs he might need later.

The treasure map pieces were all collected, just waiting for the Rhodes family fragment to reveal its true form—then the real hunt would begin.

Outwardly, Andrew had been playing it cool, watching from the sidelines. But in truth, much like Tiana, he never planned to let Rafael and Mosby dominate the game unchecked.

However, Andrew differed from Tiana in one key aspect. Tiana simply coveted the treasure, while Andrew did not want to see Rafael and Mosby succeed. Plus, he also owed it to Ronan and Janice to bring justice.

By the second half of the night, Andrew had nearly finished preparing all the elixirs he would need. He was about to call it a night when a soft, warm body suddenly wrapped around him from behind.

"Shhh... Andrew, don't speak. It's me!"

He instantly recognized the familiar scent and the curves pressing against his back—there was no mistaking who it was.

Lauren.

Grinning, Andrew reached up, grabbed the delicate arms around his chest, and pulled hard. With a soft squeal, Lauren tumbled right into his lap.

"Alright, what's this? Why are you sneaking into my room in the middle of the night? Are you hoping to get a shot?" he teased, eyes gleaming with wicked heat.

Lauren covered her chest as her loose nightgown slipped slightly, pouting. "Andrew, you're getting so shameless lately! I just came to check if you were resting. I saw your light was still on, so I popped in to see."

Andrew raised an eyebrow, his smile playful. "Really? Because it feels like you came here for more than just a little check-in."

Under his burning gaze, Lauren's heart raced like a drum, and she stammered, "Okay, fine... I missed you. This is the first time since moving into Serenity Villa that I've gotten to be alone with you like this."

"Don't get me wrong, I like being around Fran and Aspen too, but... it feels kind of

special, just the two of us, alone at night like this."

Andrew chuckled low in his throat. "Special? Then let me show you something even more special."

Lauren parted her lips instinctively. "What do you "

Before she could

finish, Andrew

lowered his head and kissed her

hard. Her eyes widened in

shock-she had not expected

him to

be so sudden. She was about to to

gently push back, maybe show a little ladylike restraint, but Andrew's heated hand had already slipped under her nightgown without hesitation.

"Andrew-no, wait-stop! If you keep doing that, I-I might scream!"

Panicked by the thought of Francesca and Aspen overhearing, Lauren gasped and tried to hold her breath, frantically whispering her protests.

However, Andrew was already breathing heavily, his eyes blazing. He murmured, "Let them—it doesn't matter anyway. Come on, let's take this to the bed."

Scooping her up with ease, Andrew carried her over and tossed her onto the mattress. Moments later, creaking and squeaking could be heard.

The bed in Andrew's makeshift alchemy room had not been used before, so every movement sent loud groans through the old frame. For the rest of the night, the creaking did not stop.

Lauren spent those hours completely undone, tossed around like she weighed nothing, finally understanding what Aspen had endured before.

She used to think Francesca was exaggerating whenever she complained. Surely Andrew could not be that intense. How bad could it possibly be?

Especially since Lauren had never liked to admit defeat. But that night-no, those few hours-she experienced firsthand what it truly meant to be taken to the edge of heaven and dragged back again.

By the next morning, the sun was high in the sky by the time Lauren finally stirred awake.