

# Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

## 1551-1555

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"Only the most magnificent royal tombs would have side doors or alternative entrances built into them," Andrew said.

Kevin nodded. "That's exactly right. Royal burial grounds often took decades to complete. Emperor's tombs especially, would begin construction the day they took the throne. Some took up to 50 years to finish.

"Because of this, they inevitably had to create multiple side doors and alternative entrances. This made it convenient for craftsmen to come and go and allowed the emperor or high-ranking officials to come down and inspect the progress themselves!"

Chantelle asked curiously, "Wouldn't the emperor use the main entrance when visiting his own tomb?"

Andrew shook his head. "The emperor would only go through the main entrance once on the day he was buried. Every other time, he couldn't use the main door and had to use the side entrances instead."

Kevin was getting impatient. "Come on, let's hurry up and climb to take a look."

The nearly vertical cliff face constantly dripped with water, making everything slippery and wet. Even though there were stone steps carved into the rock, they were covered in moss and algae, making it nearly impossible to get a good foothold without slipping.

Andrew positioned himself behind Chantelle, holding her hips to help her maintain balance as she climbed ahead. Though it was somewhat embarrassing, Chantelle did not resist his help.

Kevin brought up the rear, struggling with the climb, and offered, "Andy, why don't you take a break and let me help Ms. Garcia instead?"

Andrew laughed coldly. "Kevin, you're nearly in your 50s and still trying to cop a feel? That's pretty shameless, don't you think?"

Kevin's face flushed red with anger. "Nonsense! I just wanted to help Ms. Garcia out."

Chantelle called down firmly from above, "Mr. Wright Senior, don't trouble yourself. With Mr. Lloyd's help, I can make it up just fine!"

Looking up at Chantelle's shapely figure ahead of him, Kevin felt quite envious. That lucky bastard Andrew was certainly blessed to be in such a position with Derek's usually cold and distant secretary.

After considerable effort, the three finally made it up the hundreds of stone steps to reach the protruding platform. Two stone sculptures, each about chest-high, stood lifelike with wings spread as if ready to take flight.

"These are totems from the Crimson Dynasty—the Sky Emperor's Falcon!" Andrew explained.

Chantelle ran her hands over the stone carvings admiringly. "Such exquisite craftsmanship! You rarely see work of this quality anymore!"

Kevin's eyes lit up greedily. "Too bad this place is so deep underground and hard to access for removal work. Otherwise, these two sculptures alone would fetch a fortune."

He shifted his tone and chuckled. "But guardian pieces are ultimately just decoration. Once we push open this door, the real treasures inside the tomb are where the serious money is!"

Andrew cautioned, "Don't push the door yet. Let's check around first to see if there are any traps!"

Kevin waved dismissively and

laughed. "Andy, you're being way too cautious. This was a side entrance used by construction workers—it's not a dungeon or prison. There wouldn't be any deadly traps in a place like this."

Andrew frowned as he watched

Kevin place both hands on the

bronze doors and bellow as he began pushing with all his strength. With two creaking sounds, the relatively modest bronze doors began opening inward.

"It's actually opening!" Chantelle exclaimed in surprise.

Andrew looked down at the ground, then at the easily opened bronze doors, feeling like something was not right. Suddenly, his eyes sharpened, and he noticed that behind the doors, the ground was covered with a mess of footprints.

The brick floor behind the door was thick with dust from years of abandonment, which was normal. However, the current state of the ground, covered in various footprints, definitely was not normal.

Without hesitation, Andrew shouted, "Chantelle, get back!"

Over a dozen gun barrels suddenly emerged from behind the door, aimed directly at Andrew, Chantelle, and Kevin.

Kevin was still frozen in his door-pushing position, his blood running cold. "Show yourself! I'm Kevin, head of the Wright family!"

A sinister chuckle echoed as the gun barrels shifted slightly. Then, a hateful, sneering face appeared from behind them.

"Mr. Wright Senior, what a pleasure! But what surprises me most is running into you here, Andrew."

Another man laughed. "Andrew, your time is up!"

Chantelle gritted her teeth in recognition. "Rafael, Mosby—it's you!"

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Behind the bronze doors stood Rafael and his crew—the same people who had vanished without a trace since the treasure hunt began as if they had disappeared off the face of the earth.

All dozen or so guns were foreign-made weapons, and at least half the faces belonged to foreigners with prominent noses, deep-set eyes, and night vision goggles.

"Don't you dare move, Andrew, or these men will shoot!" Mosby stepped forward with a sinister grin, eyeing the Desert Eagle in Andrew's hand.

Andrew casually tossed his Desert Eagle to the ground and chuckled. "Dr. Lake, Mr. Driscoll—what a coincidence running into you here."

Mosby laughed coldly. "Coincidence? You're overthinking this, Andrew! Mr. Driscoll and I have been waiting here with our men for quite some time. The tomb treasure lies just below, but unfortunately, you'll never get to see it."

Andrew shrugged nonchalantly. "There's plenty of treasure to go around; I'll just take a small share. I'm not greedy, so you can have the rest. How about it?"

Mosby was so angry he burst out laughing. "Still trying to negotiate when death is staring you in the face? Andrew, don't you realize we're not giving you a single cent of the treasure, and we're taking your life too?"

Andrew's expression remained unchanged. "People shouldn't be too greedy, you know. I was the one who pieced together the treasure map in the first place. Kicking someone when they're down? That's not very fair, is it?"

Mosby exploded with rage. "Andrew, you've got some nerve lecturing me about fairness! If it weren't for you, would I have failed so miserably in Blumedale and lost all my reputation? And what about killing my apprentice? How do you plan to settle that blood debt?"

Andrew smiled calmly. "How else can we settle it? When we divvy up the tomb treasure later, I'll just give you a bigger share of my portion."

Mosby scoffed. "Are you deaf? I already told you—you won't get a single penny of the treasure in there."

Rafael frowned impatiently. "Dr. Lake, why waste time talking? Just shoot him and be done with it."

Kevin quickly called out, "Wait, Mr. Driscoll, and Dr. Lake—if you're going to kill someone, don't drag me into it."

Rafael looked displeased but still allowed Kevin to move closer to their group. After all, he was the head of the Wright family, and killing him outright might cause problems when they returned to Blumedale.

Chantelle spread her arms wide and said coldly, "I'd like to see which one of you dares to pull that trigger!"

Rafael shouted, "Ms. Garcia, step aside immediately!"

Mosby gritted his teeth. "Ms. Garcia, this is between us and Andrew. Please don't interfere."

Chantelle's face was ice-cold. "I said

I absolutely will not stand by and watch you commit murder. Mr. Driscoll and Dr. Lake, don't forget

that finding this place was Andrew's achievement alone. Don't you think

what you're doing is heart

and

ungrateful?"

Rafael burst into maniacal laughter. "Heartless and ungrateful? Ms. Garcia, you're really naive! Money moves people's hearts, especially when it's the tomb of a prince from the Fallen Crimson Dynasty. Forget about Andrew. When faced with treasure like this, I'd kill my own father without hesitation!"

Chantelle was furious but helpless against more than a dozen gun barrels pointed at them.

Andrew suddenly spoke up, "Mr. Driscoll, have you confirmed the tomb owner's identity? Which prince from the Fallen Crimson Dynasty is it?"

Rafael snorted coldly. "A dead man doesn't need to know such details. Ms. Garcia, I'm telling you one last time—step aside, or die alongside Andrew!"

Chantelle's face grew pale. "You bastards! Are you really going to kill us all?"

Mosby's face was full of hatred. "If I don't kill him, should I keep him around for Christmas?"

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Mosby said, "Honestly, we've been waiting here for quite a while! We wouldn't believe it if anyone else could find this place, but Andrew here is as cunning as a fox. I knew he'd show up eventually.

"Andrew, how do you like this little trap we've set for you? Luring you into the jar and then catching you inside?"

Andrew's smile gradually turned cold. "Honestly? Not impressed at all! Ms. Garcia, step aside—this is between me and them, it has nothing to do with you." Chantelle said anxiously, "But if I move away, you'll die!"

Behind them was the source of the underground river, and their current position was on a cliff face hundreds of feet high. Andrew was truly trapped with no way to escape.

Andrew said calmly, "My problems aren't your concern. Step aside. I want to see what these idiots can do to me!"

Mosby raged, "Ms. Garcia, move aside right now, or we'll kill you too!"

Rafael's face was ice-cold. "Ms. Garcia, this isn't Blumedale. We're hundreds of feet underground in a realm of the dead. After we kill you and eliminate Andrew, there'll be no witnesses left alive.

"When we return to Blumedale, even if Governor McCormick wants to investigate, he'll have no evidence!"

Chantelle's expression finally changed as she realized that if she continued to interfere, she would definitely die alongside them. "Fine, I'll step aside and stay out of your business."

She raised her hands and slowly moved to the side, glancing at Andrew. "Mr. Lloyd, I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do to help!"

Andrew remained expressionless. "Just step aside. Women shouldn't get involved in men's grudges."

Suddenly, Chantelle bent down and grabbed the Desert Eagle from the ground. She raised it toward the bronze door and fired several shots.

Rafael and Mosby ducked for cover, screaming furiously, "Kill her! Kill that bitch! Open fire!"

Chantelle was an excellent shooter. After three rounds, she had taken down three of the foreigners. However, the remaining men did not wait for orders and opened fire reflexively under the stress.

More than a dozen gun barrels erupted in bursts of flame simultaneously.

Andrew cursed under his breath, rushed forward to grab Chantelle, then spun around and charged off the platform in two steps, jumping straight down.

The hundred-foot drop passed in an instant. Chantelle could only hear the wind howling in her ears before there was a tremendous splash. Massive waves erupted, and the endless underground river swept them away.

Above, over a dozen gunmen rushed out and kept firing down into the black cavern below.

Both Mosby and Rafael looked absolutely livid.

"That little bastard actually escaped!" Rafael snarled through gritted teeth.

Mosby waved dismissively. "Impossible. There's no way he could survive. The water in this cavern periodically erupts with hot springs, and the temperature is high enough to cook anything.

"Post guards here. If they dare show their heads, shoot them immediately. If they don't surface, then it's a death sentence either way-they'll either drown or get boiled alive by the hot springs."

Rafael ordered, "You, and you-Stay here on watch and kill anyone you see alive! The rest of you, follow me into the tomb to support Stanley! Let's go, Mosby. Now that we've dealt with Andrew, it's time to unlock the ultimate secrets of this great tomb!"

Mosby rubbed his hands together excitedly.

"Come on, let's head into the tomb.

The hidden burial chamber of the

Demon Queen's most beloved son-the prince who died young the treasures inside are beyond

nover

imagination... Truly beyond

imagination..."

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Fighting through the searing pain in his back, Andrew held Chantelle tight and dove toward the bottom of the river. The Desert Eagle was useless now, but fortunately, some unknown phosphorescent glow flickered faintly underwater, barely allowing him to see ahead.

Chantelle's eyes were wide with terror as she tried to cry out underwater. She swallowed two huge gulps of water before quickly shutting her mouth and frantically gesturing to Andrew with her hands.

Andrew knew what she was trying to ask, but now was not the time to worry about other problems.

Two spots on his back burned with intense pain-those were the bullet wounds. Luckily, Andrew had maintained good body positioning when he jumped, avoiding any vital areas, so while he was shot, it did not affect his mobility.

However, this could not continue for long. The blood loss alone could kill him, so they needed to reach dry land quickly to treat his wounds.

Surfacing where they had jumped from was impossible because they would just become sitting ducks for the shooters above.

After hitting the water, Andrew desperately swam toward the bottom, though this was incredibly risky since no one knew where the underwater passages led. One wrong move, and they could both drown in the depths.

Diving without any equipment was a life-threatening endeavor. After just 20 seconds, Chantelle's face was flushed red, and she could not keep up anymore.

Andrew cursed silently, grabbed her hand, and continued diving down. Yet, this underground river source seemed bottomless.

The darkness below revealed nothing about its depth, and Chantelle was already showing signs of passing out, struggling desperately.

Andrew turned around, wrapped his arms around her, and pressed his lips to hers. The usually cold woman's eyes widened with shock and indignation, but Andrew could not worry about decency. After transferring what little air he had left in his lungs to her, he continued swimming toward the bottom.

A surge of scalding underground spring water suddenly rushed up from below. The eruption came without warning, and the spring water was boiling, making them both feel like they were being boiled alive.

The intense heat turned their skin red instantly, and they felt like their flesh might cook through.

Even underwater, Andrew could hear Chantelle's cry of pain. At this rate, she would likely die.

The thought flashed through his mind as he spun around, pulled her close, and pressed her tightly against his chest while using his back to shield her from the scalding spring water rushing up from below.

The world record for breath-holding underwater was eight minutes and six seconds.

Andrew's personal limit exceeded

the Guinness, record at ten minutes, though that was back when he was still in military service. His

underwater training had gotten

over the years, so ten minutes was definitely beyond his current capability.

The underground spring water temperature reached 150-160 degrees Fahrenheit.

However, due to density differences,

the hot spring water would float

above the cold water, so after Andrew endured about seven seconds of agony, the surrounding water temperature finally returned to normal as the scalding water rose to the surface.



With the last bit of strength left in his body, Andrew continued diving with Chantelle, then relaxed and let the underground current carry them toward an unknown destination.

After what felt like an eternity, Andrew felt like he was about to drown with not a breath of air left to squeeze out.

Meanwhile, Chantelle had long since lost consciousness underwater, kept alive only by the air Andrew transferred to her.

With a splash, both their heads

broke the surface. Andrew felt like every bone in his body was about to fall apart, but he did not care. He just greedily gulped down air with his mouth wide open, looking almost fierce in his desperation.

## **Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)**

Once his strength somewhat recovered, he dragged Chantelle to shore. After placing the heavy woman on a flat rock, Andrew had completely exhausted what little energy he had regained and collapsed beside the stone, falling into a deep sleep.

Sleep was the most efficient way to restore his strength. Of course, it would be even better if he could eat first and then sleep, but unfortunately, they had lost everything.

They had no food, flashlight, hunting knife, phone, or anything.

Fortunately, the small bottle of pills he kept close to his body was still there, though Andrew was too exhausted to even think about them.

During this deep sleep, Andrew felt like he was having an endless dream. In it, he seemed to return to his days in the military-gunfire and bullets, assassinations and more assassinations, blood, countless corpses, and such.

The memories flooded his mind one after another, making him gasp heavily until he suddenly woke up.

He looked beside him and cursed, "Damn it!"

He realized Chantelle was gone and wondered if she had fallen back into the underground river and been swept away, or had some wild beast dragged her off in this desolate wilderness.

Andrew was rarely this panicked as he forced himself up despite his exhaustion and walked around a large boulder.

There he discovered a completely naked woman by the water's edge, wringing out her clothes.

Her large breasts were in full view, her snow-white buttocks facing partially toward Andrew, as she worked diligently to squeeze every drop of water from her garments.

What made it even more torturous was that Chantelle had removed even her last line of defense.

Andrew smiled quietly, not making a sound to disturb her he swore this was the most beautiful scenery he had encountered since entering this underground tomb.

Chantelle usually wore work uniforms that made her chest look quite flat, and he was surprised how big her breasts were, without even a hint of sagging. She must be using some kind of binding undergarment-women in official positions were always careful about such things. Otherwise, it might test the willpower of certain older officials with questionable self-control.

Her leg muscles were firm and powerful with well-defined lines, indicating that this government princess took her martial arts training seriously.

Just as Andrew was getting absorbed in the view, Chantelle inexplicably glanced in his direction, and their eyes met.

The air was instantly filled with a bit of awkwardness.

"Mr. Lloyd, if you've seen enough, please turn around. I need to get dressed!"

Surprisingly, Chantelle did not scream or panic. Instead, she remained very calm, maintaining her usual cold demeanor.

Andrew immediately lost interest and obediently turned his head away. When a woman could remain unashamed in such a situation, where was the fun in that?

Was this Chantelle really frigid after all?

After getting dressed, Chantelle's heart was pounding hard. That damn bastard had actually peeked at her while she was washing clothes-how could he be so shameless?

Her heart was beating much more wildly than her cold exterior suggested.

Thinking about how she had just posed in such an embarrassing position for a grown man like Andrew to see, Chantelle wanted to dig a hole and hide inside forever.

"Ms. Garcia, I swear I didn't see anything!" Andrew said with complete seriousness as the ice queen approached, spouting utter nonsense.

Chantelle raised her hand and swung it toward Andrew's face with a sharp slap.

Unfortunately, Andrew dodged it

easily. "That's enough! It's not like forced you to put on a show for me. You're the one who wasn't careful about stripping naked out there."

He frowned, his tone turning colder. "I saved your life, and this is how you repay

me? By slapping my face? That's pretty unreasonable, Ms. Garcia."

Chantelle's hand was caught by Andrew. She struggled angrily to pull it back, but could not break free. "Let go!"

"I won't let go unless you promise not to hit me!"