

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1731

Victoria's cheeks flushed crimson, and she looked utterly embarrassed and ashamed. She raised her hand as if to strike him, but then lowered it again.

She gritted her teeth as she said, "You little bastard, you've been keeping this pretty well hidden! Why didn't you tell me earlier that your father is Reginald, and let me make a fool of myself?"

Her heart pounded uncontrollably as she recalled all the things she had said and those exaggerated gestures she had made. Even at her mature age, she could not stop the wave of heat rising to her face or the strange, complicated feelings churning in her chest.

Andrew rolled his eyes and said bluntly, "I didn't want to bring up my dad at all. I didn't want to trigger your resentment or make things worse, but you seriously crossed the line, so I had no choice."

Victoria let out a frustrated laugh. "So you're Reggie's son. Even if I'm angry with you, I wouldn't have the heart to lay a hand on you. No wonder when I first saw you, I was so confused! How could there be someone in this world whose temperament and looks are so similar?"

She continued staring at Andrew intently. "Turns out you're his son!"

The adoring look in her eyes, along with her conflicted expressions, made Andrew extremely uncomfortable.

Noticing Andrew's embarrassment, Victoria's face flashed with shame. She quickly composed herself and laughed. "Don't mind me! It's just that I miss Reggie so much that I got a little carried away for a moment!"

Andrew nodded. "I understand. Mrs. Rhodes was the same way back then."

The moment the words left his mouth, Andrew regretted them, thinking that this would be trouble.

Sure enough, Victoria's expression turned cold, and she snorted. "Don't mention that bitch in front of me! Reggie only loved me, and Tiana was just delusional!"

Andrew quickly said, "Yes, of course. My dad only loved you."

However, he silently apologized to Tiana. He had no choice but to appease Victoria for now. Otherwise, who knew if she would start getting jealous again?

"Since we're on the same side, you can just call me Victoria from now on."

She gave an embarrassed smile as she stared at Andrew, clearly finding more and more to like the longer she looked at him.

She added, "You're every bit as impressive as he was back then! If you had come to find me earlier, I would have already helped you dominate the entire Gabo Creek province!"

Andrew shook his head and smiled. "Thanks for the kind offer, Victoria, but initially, I didn't know you and my dad had a history together! Besides, I didn't dare approach you carelessly. I figured you probably harbored a lot of resentment toward him."

Victoria's expression turned thoughtful as a hint of nostalgia crossed her face. Then, she let out a bitter laugh. "Saying I didn't hate him would be a lie. I was ready to give up everything for that man back then, but he still left me and walked away!"

She hissed, "The only thing that's ever comforted me since is knowing he left that bitch Tiana, too. That proves I was never beneath her!"

She really could not go a minute without comparing herself to Tiana. Always bitter, always jealous.

Andrew muttered something under his breath, then said aloud, "I came here to pay you a proper visit, Victoria. Now that I've done that, I should get going."

Victoria quickly said, "No rush. Stay a little longer with me!"

When she saw how guarded he looked, she blushed with anger and snapped, "You brat, don't get the & wrong idea! You seriously think I'd stoop so low and mess around with

you? Your dad is Reginald! I'm not about to become some old cougar chasing after his son!"

Andrew figured that if he did not sweet-talk her a little now, he would fail as a self-proclaimed charmer.

He grinned and replied, "Victoria, you're not old at all. You're in your prime. Your skin's so smooth it puts teenage girls to shame!"

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Andrew said it without even blinking.

Sure enough, Victoria burst out laughing. "Really? You really think I'm not old?"

Andrew nodded and replied, "Not at all. You're incredibly young and beautiful."

With a bashful smile, Victoria let out a playful hum. "You smooth talker... but I have to admit, I love hearing it! Andrew, how about I marry Liliana off to you? Don't worry, it's not to trap you into anything. It's a reward!"

Andrew quickly waved his hands. "I can't accept that. I really can't. First of all, your daughter and I already have some misunderstandings. And second, I'm taken."

Victoria gave a cold little laugh. "Oh, I know you're taken. I just don't care. You're the heir of the Lloyds, a future power player in one of the biggest dynasties! It'll be more unusual if you don't have a few women around you."

Andrew opened his mouth to protest again, but Victoria raised a hand to silence him.

"Don't be so uptight, acting like a shy little boy. Learn a thing or two from Reggie back in the day-he'd sleep with me in the morning, wear out Tiana by the afternoon, and still find time to seduce that tramp from the Phelan family at night. Three times a day, not missing a beat."

It was the first time Andrew had ever heard about Reginald's scandalous past, and it honestly made his scalp tingle. He mumbled, "My dad... was really that much of a player?"

Victoria scoffed. "A useless man fooling around? That's trash behavior. But Reggie? He was a genius, just like you. He carried the same Blood-Eyed Black Dragon mark and held the legacy of the Lloyds! So no, that wasn't being a player. That was charm and power."

She added, "That's why, even when he made us furious, even when we gritted our teeth, we still couldn't help but love him and never walk away."

Andrew had nothing to say to that. Clearly, both Victoria and Tiana had loved Reginald in a way that bordered on obsession.

But now, Reginald had disappeared without a trace, and no one knew what had become of him.

Victoria suddenly asked, "Also, I could sense something... deep inside your energy core. There's a strong force pushing back; something's suppressing your power. What is it?"

Andrew smiled. "Victoria, you really are sharp. You're right. There are three martial seals inside my body. Two of them still haven't been broken."

Victoria gave a thoughtful nod. "I won't even ask who placed them on you. The kind of person who can do that must be a supreme-level master someone even I can't have just yet. But Andrew, I want to help you break your second seal." Content

Andrew's eyes lit up. "Do you have a way?"

Victoria hesitated, biting down on her red lips. Well... It's not exactly difficult, but it's a bit awkward. I'd but it'

need to transfer my energy to you directly and forcefully strike the seal. It's the fastest and most effective method.

"But... it would require our bodies to be in contact, a full mind and body alignment. Would you be okay with that?"

Andrew's face went stiff. He asked, "Whether I'm okay with it or not, shouldn't I be asking you if you're okay with it?"

Victoria gave a bashful smile. "I'm fine with it. I'll just treat you like my own son. And honestly, don't laugh... but part of me really wants to see you as Reggie."

Andrew immediately shut it down. "Yeah, no. I'll figure out how to deal with the second seal on my own. Thanks, Victoria, but I should get going. I'll visit you another time!"

Then, he turned and bolted. He was scared that Victoria might end up doing the

same kind of things Tiana had once done.

When Andrew left the Peck residence, his retreating figure looked hurried and flustered.

Miles and Liliana stood by, watching his Porsche 911 disappear down the road, both looking suspicious.

"Miles, he actually walked out of there without a scratch. Did Mom really let him off that easily?"

Liliana could not accept it. No matter what, Andrew should have at least been beaten half to death.

Miles did not say anything, but his expression darkened.

Liliana glanced at him sideways. "Why the long face, Miles? Did Cathy demand the 'bedroom tax' from you again, and you couldn't perform?"

Miles snapped, annoyed, "Shut it, you brat! You think I'm that pathetic? Besides, I've been taking Mr. Lloyd's Vitality Pill and Titan Essence Pill. Cathy's been begging for mercy every night."

Liliana looked skeptical. "Then why are you looking so glum?"

Miles found it hard to speak, but finally said, "Liliana, didn't you notice that Andrew's shirt was torn at the chest? When he went to see Mom, his clothes were fine, and he was alone, so you tell me..."

He did not continue because he felt it was too embarrassing to say out loud.

After a moment of confusion, Liliana immediately understood, and her mouth dropped open wide. "You're saying Mom tore Andrew's shirt? Did they actually... That bastard! If he dared to do that to Mom, I'd kill him!"

In her burning rage, Liliana turned around and rushed toward Victoria's quarters.

Miles followed her because he

needed to find out what exactly had happened. Calvin, his father, had always been weak and had no authority in the Peck family, and he could not even hold his head up in front of Victoria. If she had taken a liking to Andrew and wanted to kick Calvin to the curb, Miles absolutely could not accept it.

It was not that he could not accept his father being thrown out. After all, he treated Andrew as a peer, someone he somewhat knew. Hence, to have him become his stepfather later would be just too damn humiliating.

There was no way Miles could live with that.

The two siblings burst into the upper guest lounge, one after the other.

Victoria sat at her vanity, humming along with a vintage record spinning, clearly in an unusually good mood.

Liliana's eyes filled with tears as she shouted, "Why?"

Victoria turned around, her face growing cold. "Didn't I teach you any manners? You barge in here without knocking what happened to everything I taught you about class and respect? Get out!"

Liliana was in tears, filled with righteous indignation. She completely ignored her mother's words and questioned, "I'm asking you why! Why did you do such shameful things with that Andrew? You're both from different generations! You're also a mother of two... So, how could you even bring yourself to do that?"

Victoria froze, stunned by her daughter's words. Then, her cheeks flushed a deep

red as she became both embarrassed and furious.

"Who told you I did anything indecent with Andrew? You little fool! You're just

running your mouth like that. You want me to rip that tongue out of your head?"

Miles stepped forward, his jaw clenched. "Mom, what you're saying doesn't change the facts! Andrew looked guilty as hell when he left, and he took off like he was running for his life. So, how do you explain that?"

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Victoria let out a cold laugh. "Even if that's true, so what? Do I need your permission for anything I do? Maybe you've both forgotten who actually runs this family!"

Liliana's voice broke as she screamed, "You're so shameless! What, are you planning to give us a baby brother or sister next? You want to cheat on Dad, and then make me and Miles call Andrew our stepdad?"

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Victoria was furious and raised her hand to slap Liliana, but in the end, she held back. She said coldly, "Listen carefully. Nothing happened between me and Andrew. This situation isn't nearly as filthy or shameful as you're making it out to be."

She added, "That boy is the son of an old friend I once knew, and we were just catching up, nothing more."

Liliana still did not buy it. "Then where's the proof? Mom, you've never let a strange man into your room all these years, but Andrew gets special treatment—he even outranks Dad. He came in alone, and who knows what the two of you did behind closed doors!"

Victoria snapped, her voice icy. "That's enough. I don't owe anyone explanations, not in this house, not in this world. But since you're here, Liliana, I'll just get straight to the point—I've decided to marry you off to Andrew."

She continued, "From now on, I want you to spend time with him. Show some care and attention. If you can win his heart, you will be the next head of the Peck family."

Liliana stood there, completely stunned, forgetting to even wipe her tears.

"What did you say? You want me to marry Andrew? Mom, have you lost your mind? What are you trying to do? Have us both serve him together? You want to hand that bastard to achieve the ultimate fantasy and reach the peak of his life?"

Even Victoria, with her unshakeable composure, could not help but feel mortified and nearly fainted from shame. She slapped Liliana across the face and cursed, "You idiot, what kind of garbage is floating around in your head?"

"I'm only asking you to marry him, not for us to serve him together. Get that straight! Andrew is a junior to me—my favorite junior! That's the only reason I want to match you with him. And you should know exactly what kind of man he is. You marrying him would be more than a good deal for you."

Liliana held her cheek, wanting to argue back, but before she could, Miles stepped in.

"Liliana, enough. Don't cause a scene. I believe Mom and Andrew aren't like that."

Liliana looked confused. "Why? How are you so sure?"

Miles did not answer her. Instead, he turned toward Victoria and asked, "Mom, why such a sudden change of heart toward Andrew? Do you really want Liliana to marry him?"

Victoria let out a cold laugh. "Whether I want to or not is beside the point. But Miles, you're the sharpest one in this family. Let me ask you would you approve?"

Miles fell into thought. "Andrew really is extraordinary. Just looking at what he's accomplished so far, he's already surpassed most of us who came from elite families. I do feel a little jealous, but I can't deny he's simply better than me. If Liliana really could marry him, then as her older brother, I'd honestly be happy for her."

Liliana's face turned pale. She shouted in protest, "Miles, I'm not doing it! What has he done to deserve me?"

Miles frowned. "Oh, please! He probably doesn't want you either it's still too early to talk about this, so don't act like it's a done deal. And to be blunt, you're not on his level.

That's just the truth."

Liliana looked like she had been slapped again. She opened her mouth in rage,

but no words came.

Miles turned back to Victoria, his face conflicted. "Mom, all these years, you've never shown even the slightest affection for Dad. But with Andrew... it was different. The way you looked at him... we all thought you'd fallen for him."

Victoria flushed with embarrassment. "Nonsense! I don't ever want to hear that kind of talk again!"

Miles nodded. "Understood. We won't bring it up again, and we wouldn't dare to."

Chapter 1735

Miles said, "But I know there must be a reason why you favor Andrew so much. Perhaps it has something to do with that person you've never been able to forget from years ago. Am I right?"

Victoria replied coldly, "What are you trying to say?"

Miles sighed deeply. "I'm not trying to say anything. I just think you've lived your whole life being too strong-willed and exhausted! In the Peck family, you don't respect anyone, and in Blumedale, you don't even give Governor McCormick or the Three Titans any time of the day.

"In Gabo Creek province's martial arts world, you're notorious for being ruthless and feared by everyone! Yet, you think about that one person day and night, your heart and soul consumed by him.

"As your son, I just want to ask if he was really that extraordinary? Is he really worth all that longing?"

By the time he finished, Miles' voice was filled with resentment. He was clearly angry.

Victoria was silent for a moment before letting out a sharp, bitter laugh. "Miles, it sounds like you've got a lot of resentment toward your own mother. Fine. Since we're being honest today, I'll just lay it all out and spare you any more false hope."

She explained, "Andrew... is the son of that man I've never stopped thinking about. That's exactly why I treated him the way I did today. You asked how special that man was... Well, just look at Andrew now. Everything he is today is a reflection of who his father once was. Does that answer satisfy you?"

Miles stood there, stunned for a long while before he let out a bitter laugh. "Oh, I'm satisfied-more than satisfied. Liliana and I don't measure up to Andrew, and Dad? He sure as hell doesn't measure up to his dad. Funny how fate works, isn't it?"

He continued, always thought

maybe God shut the window on Dad, but would at least open a door for our generation to make up for it. But no. God slammed the door on us, too And Andrew? That guy had the window, the door... hell, maybe even the damn roof opened for him. God really does play favorites."

Liliana growled, "It doesn't matter. I'm still never marrying that Andrew. Any man who wants me has to earn it, and he doesn't."

Victoria did not push her. She smiled faintly and said, "My sweet Liliana, you're just like I was when I was young. As long as you don't regret it in the end, I won't stop you."

Liliana answered firmly, "I won't regret it. Even if every man on Earth dropped dead, I'd still never fall for Andrew. I can only despise him."

Miles chuckled sarcastically. "Honestly, I wish I could marry the guy. Too bad I've got a set of the wrong parts. And at this age, it's a little late for a gender switch."

Liliana stared at him, baffled. "Miles, have you lost your mind too? Are you really falling for Andrew like Mom did?"

Miles shook his head. "No. I'm like Mom because I've always been clear-headed. But you? You're still just a silly girl who doesn't even realize greatness when it's right in front of her."

The mother, son, and daughter argued back and forth in the room. None of them realized that just outside the door, crouched in the shadows near the wall, Calvin had heard every word.

He quietly slipped away, his

expression twisting as he left. He muttered, "You bitch... so you still haven't let go of that bastard from the past. I couldn't beat him back then. But now?

Killing his son won't be difficult at all. Just wait! I'll make sure all of you drown in pain and regret."