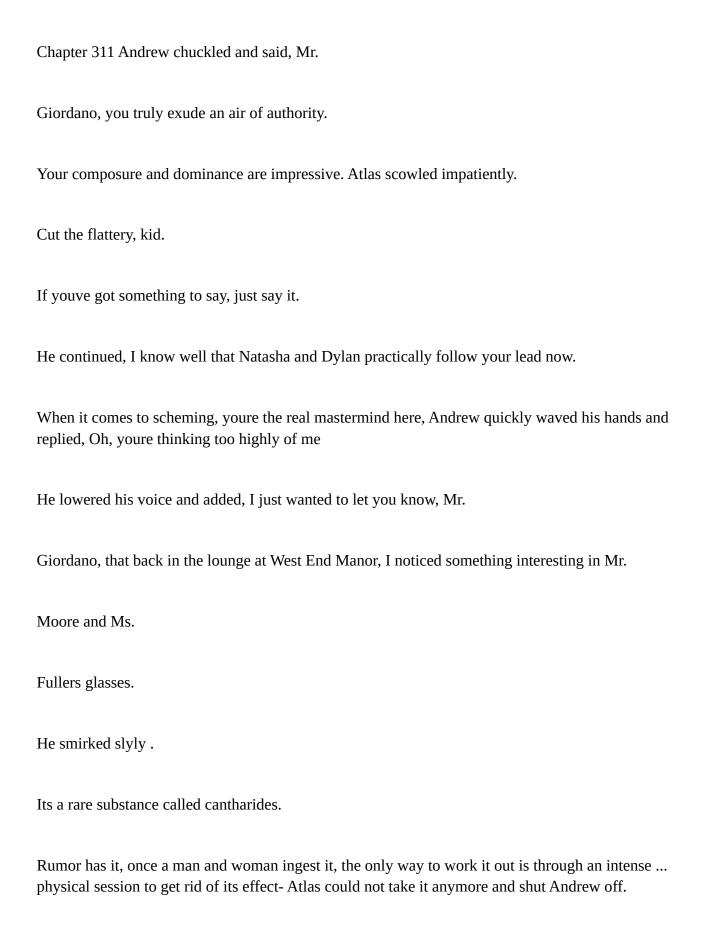
The Ashes 311





The slap landed squarely on his face, leaving his cheek swollen and red.

As he clutched his cheek in disbelief, he shouted, How dare you hit me, me, Atlas! Finleys eyes burned with rage as his expression twisted into something venomous. He snarled, Do boss of the Northern District.

you even know who I am ?! I dont care if youre the My granduncle is the leader of the Hidden Dragons! The Northern District crew felt their hearts sink, and panic spread among them as the weight of Finleys words hit them

Their minds raced, and they thought Atlas had gone too far and should not have lost control like this. To them, it was clear that Andrew was provoking Atlas, hoping he would make a mistake. Meanwhile, Atlas ignored Finleys threats.

His voice turned ice cold as he declared, From now on, you and I are no longer friends. Were done.

If you want to run crying to the Hidden Dragons, go ahead.

Ive got nothing to hide.

Without sparing Finley another glance, Atlas turned on his heel and marched away with his men

Finley took a couple of steps after him and yelled, Atlas, without me, your Northern District is doomed

Chapter 312 Atlas mocking laughter echoed from a distance.

Before you came to Jayrodale, Northern District was already a dominant force.

With or without you, it makes no difference

Also, Finley -Ive been putting up with your nonsense for way too long! Get lost, you pathetic son of a bitch! he added with a sneer.

Left standing alorie, Finley burned with murderous rage.

Atlas had slapped him, severed their partnership, and humiliated him publicly.

If that was the case, Finley decided there was no point feeling guilty anymore.

Atlas, the so-called crime lord of the Northern District, was nothing more than a shortsighted fool.

He thought someone as petty as Atlas never deserved his full support anyway, especially since everything was happening because of a woman.

Meanwhile, Natasha and Dylan exchanged glances, their mutual excitement impossible to hide. The Northern Districts two pillars, Atlas and Finley, had finally gone their separate ways. Now, it was their turn to take the stage.

Both of them turned their eyes toward Andrew.

Though they remained silent, the admiration in their gazes was unmistakable.

Natasha, in particular, felt her thoughts begin to race.

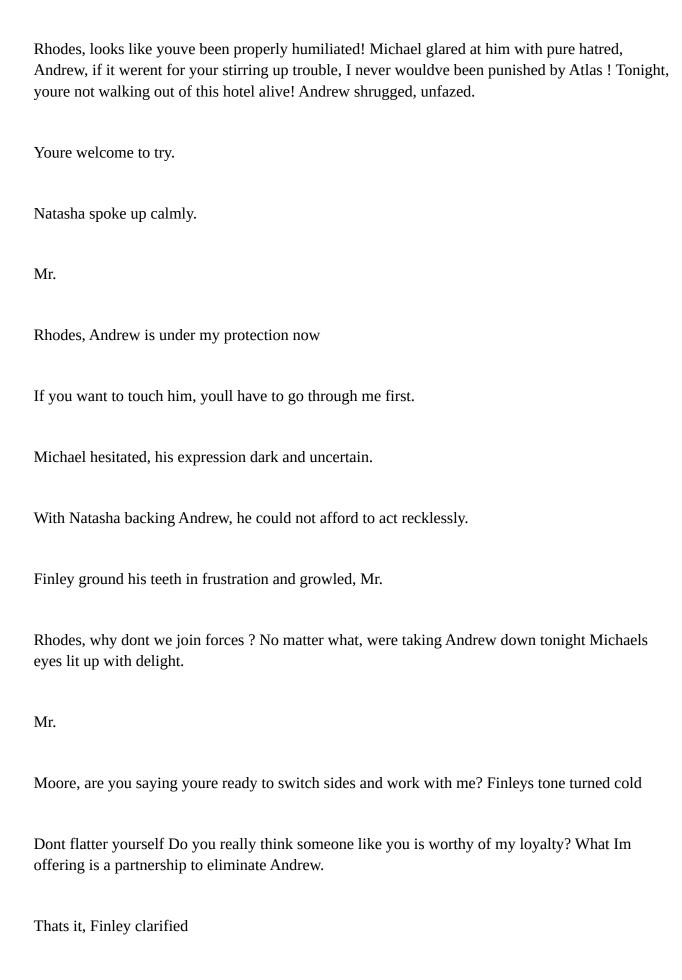
Andrew is far too talented to let slip away! There was no way she could allow Andrew to align himself fully with Dylan and South City.

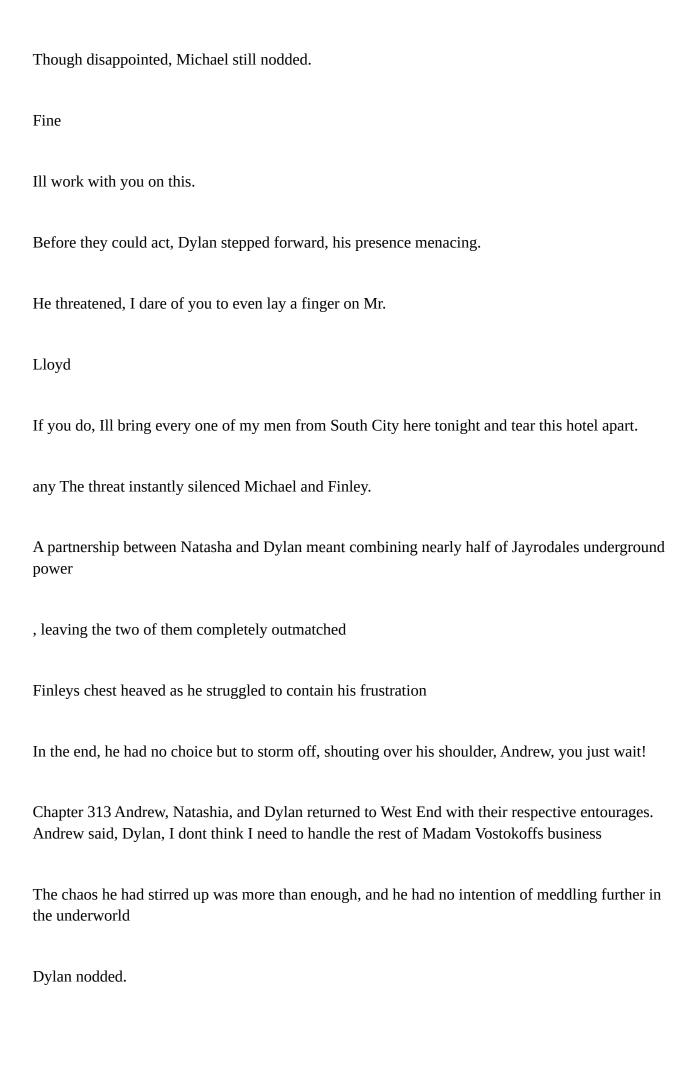
Natasha was the type who, once she set her mind to something, would stop at nothing to get what she wanted.

As Atlas and his men departed, Michael hobbled into the hotel with help from his entourage.

Overwhelmed with resentment, he grumbled, Atlas, youve gone too far! Im part of the Rhodes family, for crying out loud! Andrew glanced at him and smirked.

Mr.



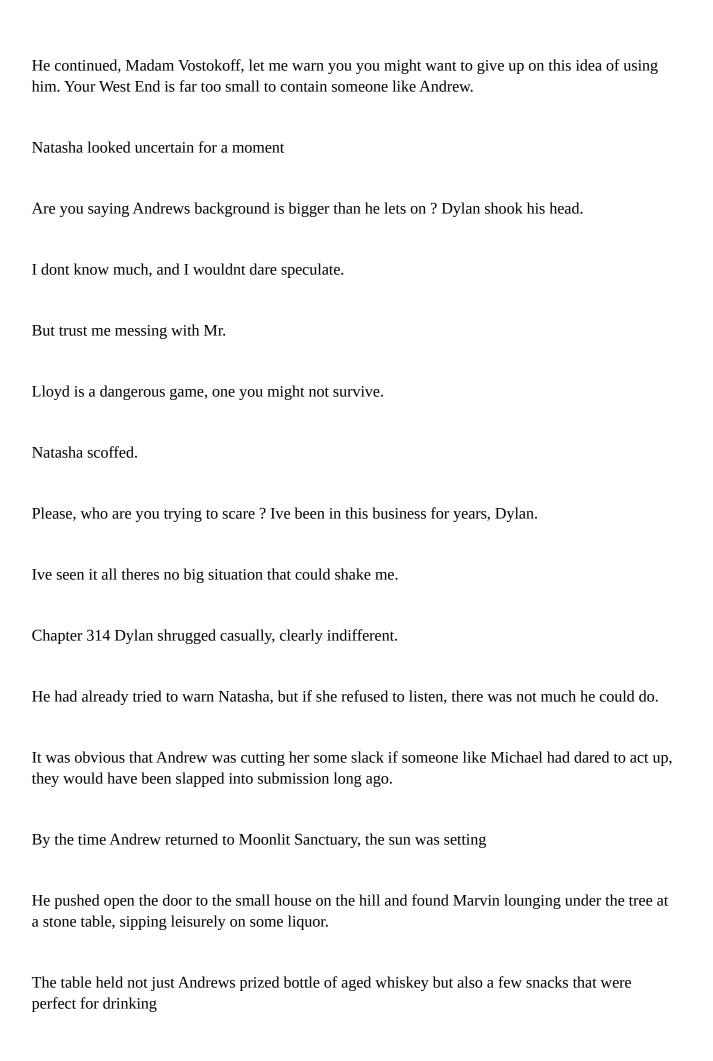




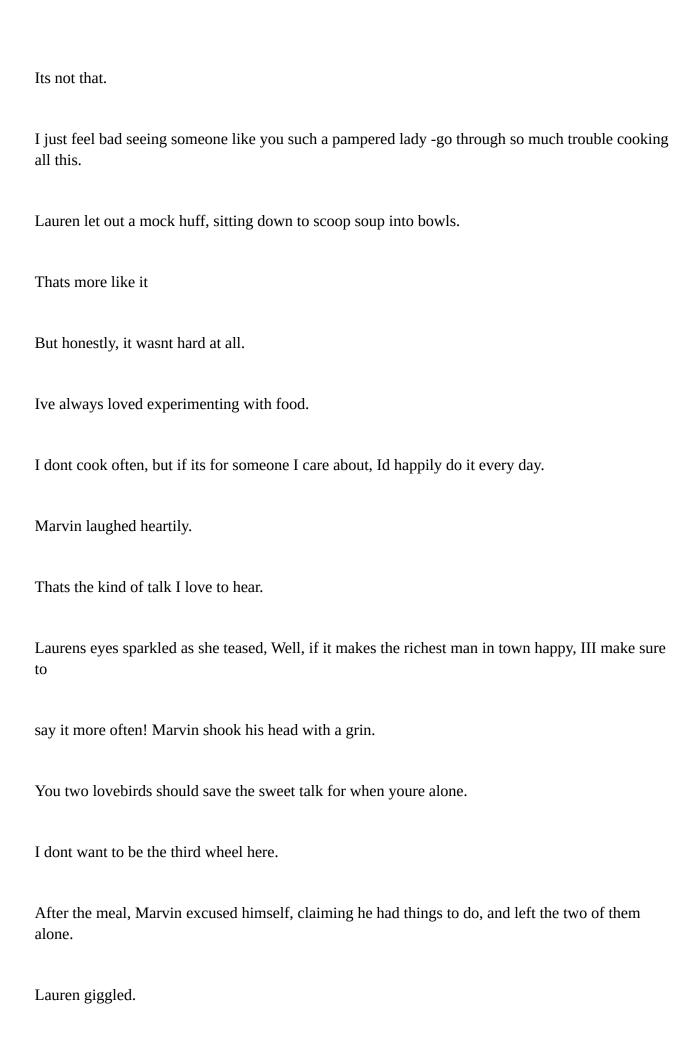
Madam Vostokoff, I have no interest in you as a person.
If Natasha could produce something genuinely tempting, Andrew wouldnt mind lending another hand.
But if she thought she could freeload, shed find him far less accommodating
Natasha clenched her teeth and said, Darling, are you seriously saying that my value doesnt even match
a single herb? Andrew replied honestly, At least for me, thats exactly the case.
Natasha took a deep breath, visibly restraining herself.
Fine.
Mark my words, Andrew III make sure you bow to me one day.
Mark my words, Andrew III make sure you bow to me one day. Her anger and determination were clear, fueled by both frustration and a growing desireto win him over. Andrew stood up and made his exit.
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Her anger and determination were clear, fueled by both frustration and a growing desireto win him over. Andrew stood up and made his exit. Madam Vostokoff, dont forget the medicinal herb you owe me. Ill be expecting it soon.

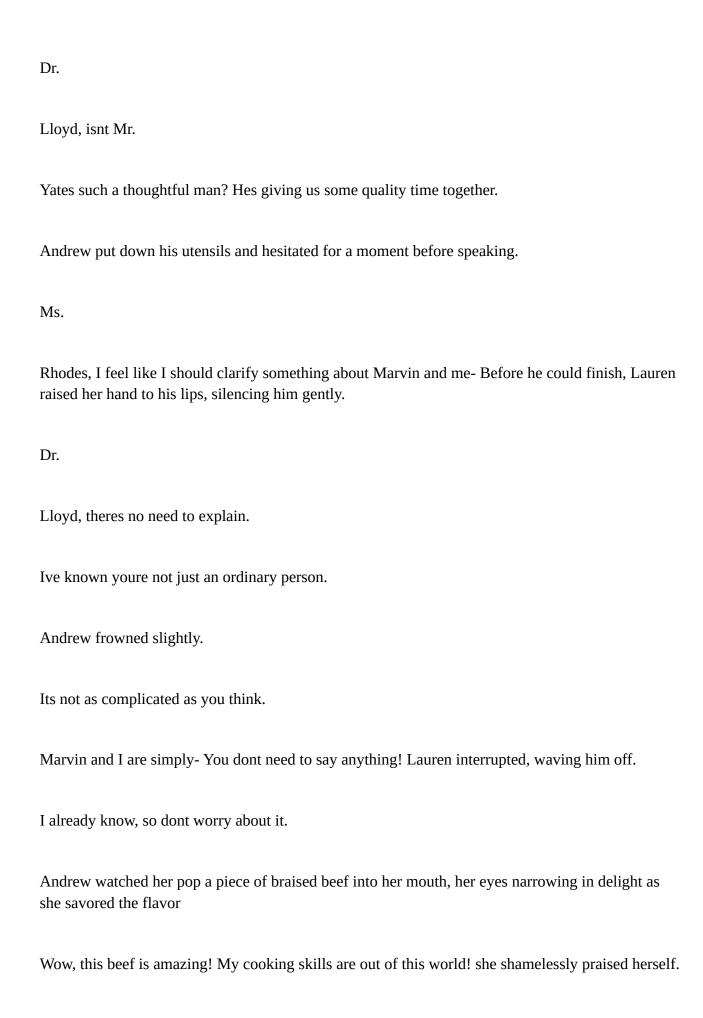
Capter 313 Trying to strong arm him wont work Its useless, and youll only end up losing Natasha imed her hand on the table, her flery temper flaring. Dylan, shut your damn mouth! Havent you noticed how patient and accommodating, Ive been with him? Any other man wouldve been castrated by now for disrespecting me! Dylan blinked, taken aback by her intensity, and sald cautiously, Madam Vostokoff ... youre not seriously falling for Mr. Lloyd, are you? Natasha let out a cold laugh. Falling for him? Not quite But someone like him I have to bring him under West Ends control. Dylan shrugged Youre stubborn and relentless, so I wont argue. But if you think you can win over Mr. Lloyd, you might want to rethink that plan. Natasha narrowed her eyes. Whats that supposed to mean? You think Im incapable of handling, Andrew? Dylan leaned back and spoke evenly. Even Ive never dared to dream of making Mr. Lloyd work for South City.

If anything, its South City shamelessly sticking close to him, hoping hed take us under his wing.

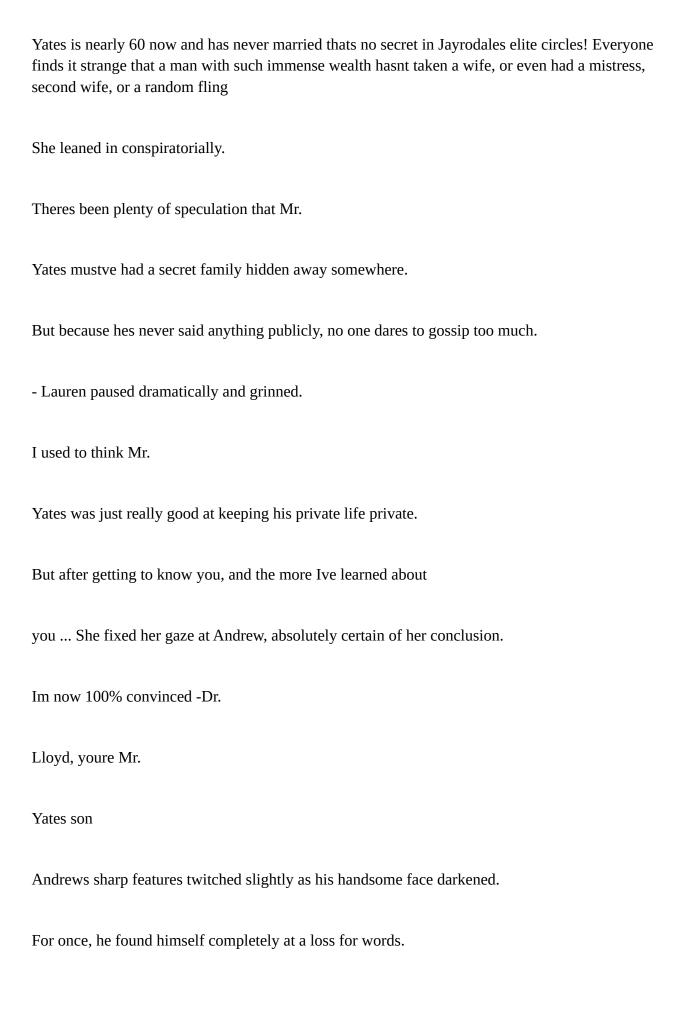


Andrew walked over and smirked.
When did you start getting into the finer things in life, old man? Marvin chuckled and raised his glass. Sir, youre giving me too much credit.
These fancy little snacks? Definitely not my handiwork.
He gestured toward the house with a knowing look.
Andrew frowned in confusion.
Who else would be here? Just as he spoke, the sound of footsteps came from inside.
A familiar figure appeared in the doorway, wearing an apron and carrying a steaming pot of beef stew.
Hey, youre back! Lauren beamed, her smile brighter than the evening sun.
Go wash your hands dinners ready.
Andrew froze for a second, surprised
What are you doing here? Lauren was bustling back and forth from the kitchen, carrying out a few more dishes before finally brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear.
Dont worry about how I got here
Just tell me am I not welcome? She tilted her head playfully.
If you dont want me here, Ill leave right now.
Andrew chuckled.





3 Andrew could not help but laugh at her antics.
Lauren clapped her hands together and smiled.
Alright, Im full
Dr.
Lloyd, I know you and Mr.
Yates have a complicated relationship that youd rather not discuss.
But dont worry 1 like you for who you are, not where you come from.
Before Andrew could respond, Lauren leaned in with a mischievous glint in her eyes.
Dr.
Lloyd, if I had to guess you and Mr.
Yates, youre father and son, right?
Chapter 315 Laurens words caught Andrew off guard, and he stammered, W What? No, you He had assumed Lauren had uncovered some hidden truth or had some brilliant insight.
Never in his wildest dreams did he expect her to come up with such an absurd and melodramatic theory. Meanwhile, Lauren looked utterly confident, her face glowing with satisfaction.
Mr.



Lauren only grew more convinced that she was right.
She continued enthusiastically, I dont know why he hasnt made your relationship public.
But Im sure theres a good reason some sort of difficult, private matter.
She leaned back with a satisfied smile.
Dr.
Lloyd, you might just be a humble doctor now, now, but one day, the Yates familys entire empire will be yours.
Youre already leagues ahead of people like Harvey, Finley, or Michael! Andrew let out a dry chuckle. Ms.
Rhodes, your heartfelt deduction is really spot on! He could not find anything to refute her ridiculously airtight logic, no matter how absurd it sounded to him.
Lauren raised her chin, looking incredibly smug
Of course! Ive seen my fair share of family dramas, betrayals, and inheritance wars in wealthy households
Its obvious Mr.
Yates is keeping your relationship hidden to protect you, allowing you to grow in safety without any threats lurking in the shadows.
Andrews face darkened even further.
And then what? Laurens eyes sparkled as she broke into a cheerful smile.

Then? Thats easy! The prince returns, claims his rightful throne, and settles all old scores! She clapped her hands together, her voice brimming with excitement.

All those who opposed you or couldnt stand your existence? Theyll meet their end, cut down by the sword of justice

And those who eagerly awaited your return will weep with joy, kneeling before you, swearing loyalty, and showering you with blessings.

Lauren tilted her head playfully.

And the star of the show, of course, will be me.

When you return, Ill play the role of the princess your partner through thick and thin

After overcoming all obstacles, well end up together, living a fairy tale life in a castle, happily ever after, and never apart.

Chapter 316 Lauren had talked so much that her mouth had gone dry.

She grabbed her glass of water and downed it in large gulps.

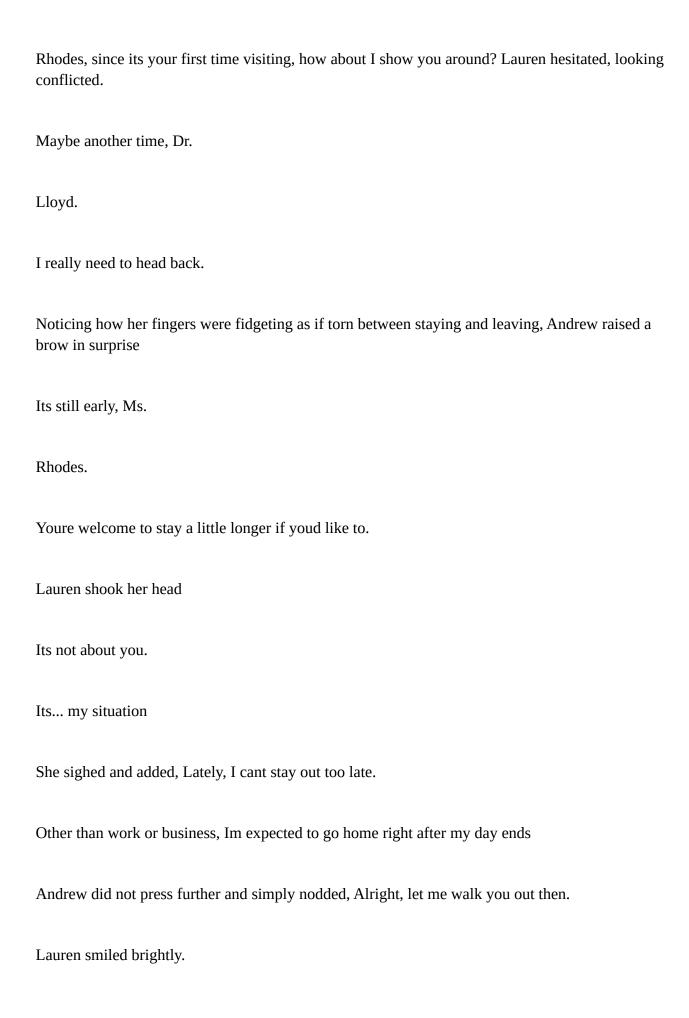
Andrew watched her, his lips twitching harder with every passing second.

He was almost certain now Laurens wild assumptions resulted from reading too marry trashy romance novels or binge watching overly dramatic soap operas.

Everyone knew how deeply these kinds of shows could corrupt their audiences, especially when it came to women with overactive imaginations.

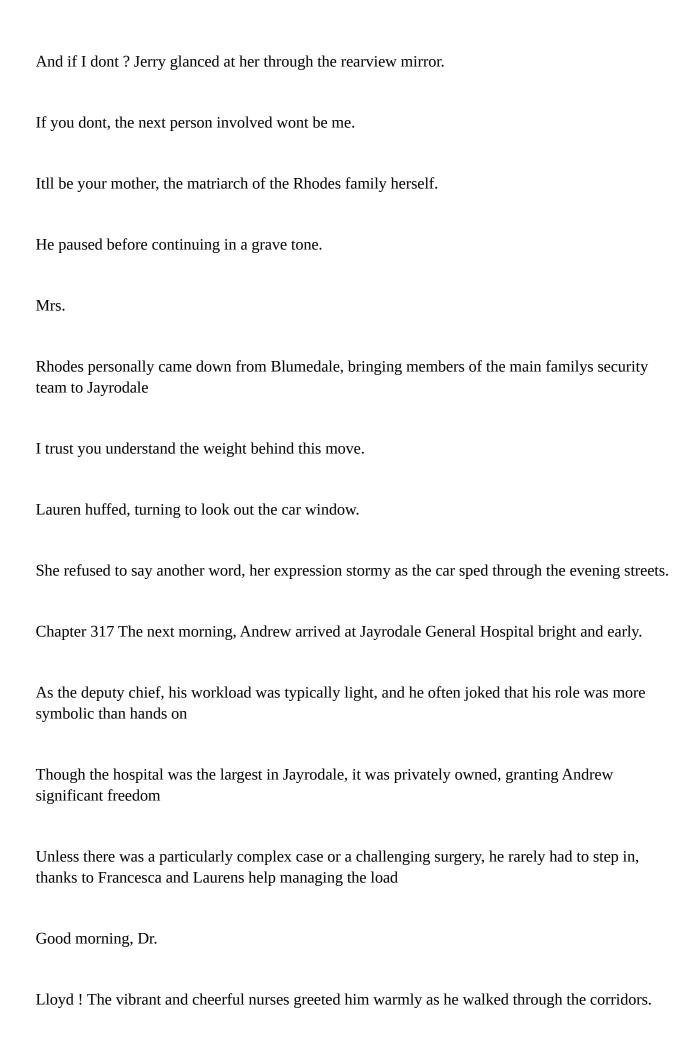
After finishing their meal, they cleaned the kitchen together, washing the dishes until everything sparkled

It was not even seven yet, so Andrew thought briefly before suggesting, Ms.



Sure.
The two strolled through the courtyard and out the iron gate, walking all the way to Moonlit Sanctuarys main entrance
There, a group of bodyguards from the Rhodes family were already waiting
As soon as Lauren approached, the door of the first car opened, and a middle aged man in tactical gear stepped out
Miss, the man greeted.
Lauren nodded.
Lets go
She climbed into the car but not before flashing Andrew with a warm smile and waving goodbye.
Andrew waved back, but his gaze caught the man lowering the car window and giving him a cold, mocking smirk.
Andrew remained expressionless.
He recognized the man it was Jerry, the Rhodes familys elite fighter.
Jerry had never hidden his disdain for Andrew.
Frankly, Andrew did not care enough to act friendly either.
Inside the moving car, Laurens demeanor turned icy.





Andrew smiled back and replied, Good morning, everyone! The most beautiful nurse in the hospital was Nyla, widely regarded as the belle of the department

When she saw Andrew, her face turned bright red, and she quickly lowered her gaze, clearly flustered.. Andrew gave her a polite smile before stepping into the elevator to head to his office.

Hospitals were known for being breeding grounds for gossip, and Jayrodale General was not exception. Andrew was not one to entertain rumors, but he could not avoid hearing whispers about Nylas apparent crush on him.

The Goth family, to which Nyla belonged, was considered somewhat notable in Jayrodale, making her a respectable match

However, Andrew had never thought of her as anything more than a younger sister.

He still remembered the time Bernards son, Phillip, had bullied Nyla, and Andrew had taught him a painful lesson with a well placed kick.

After that, Nyla had been endlessly grateful, going out of her way to assist Andrew whenever she could. If Andrew were to ask her out, Nyla would undoubtedly say yes Francesca herself had once teased him about it

She had even joked that half the nurses in the hospital had their eyes on him and urged him to settle down with Lauren before someone else swooped in.

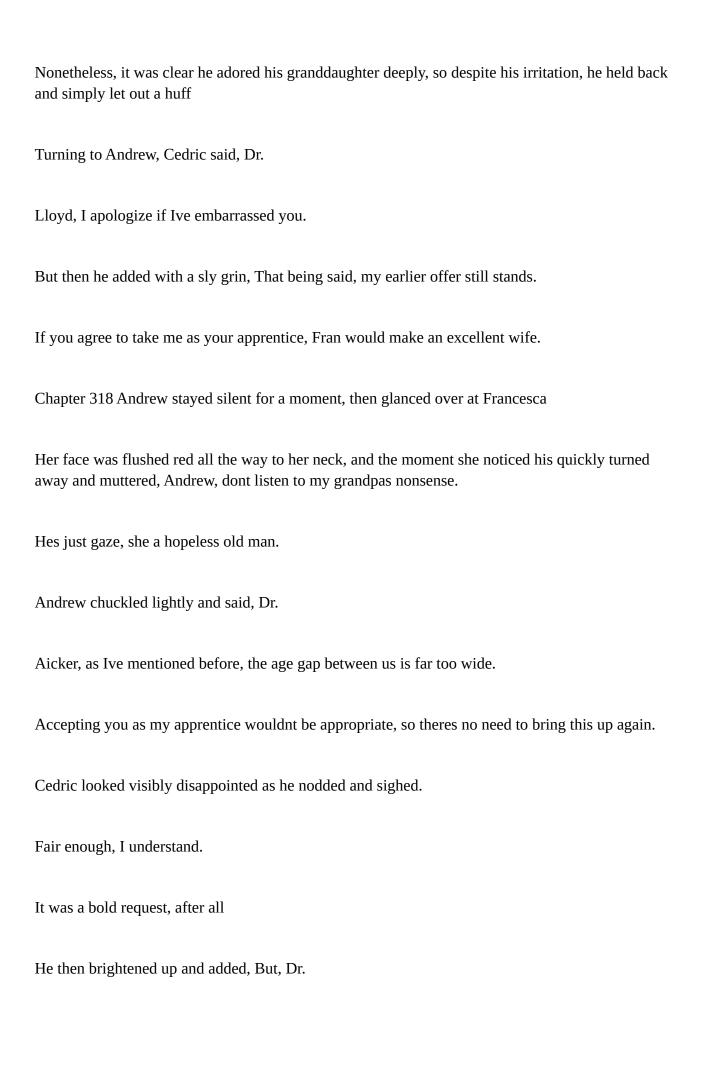
When Andrew opened his office door, he was surprised to find Francesca already inside, along with an elderly man .

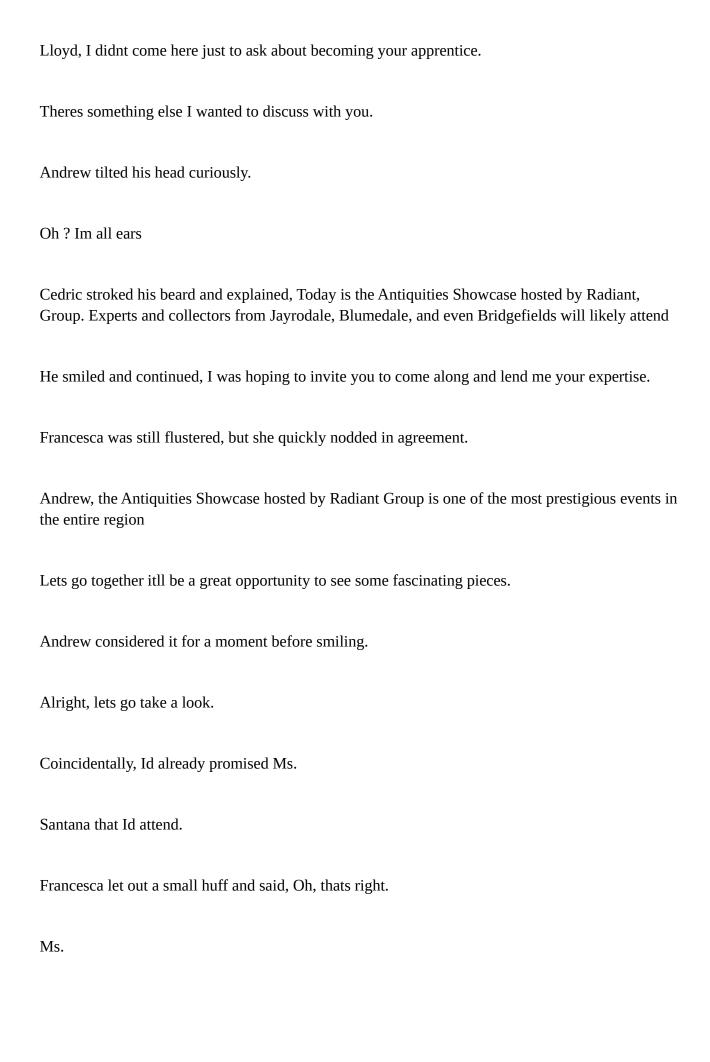
Dr.

Aicker, what brings you here today? Andrew greeted with a smile.

The older man was none other than Cedric Aicker a renowned physician from the Aicker family.

Dr.
Lloyd, Cedric said with a grin, Im here for you specifically.
Andrew raised an eyebrow
Oh? Do you have good news for me? Cedric chuckled mischievously
Of course! I came to ask when youll accept me as your apprentice.
He continued, To show our sincerity, the Aicker family is prepared to offer a grand
apprentice ceremony, complete with gifts including my precious granddaughter.
Wed even throw a three day banquet and invite the entire medical community of Jayrodale to witness it! Andrew was rendered speechless
However, Francesca turned bright red and snapped, Grandpal What nonsense are you spouting? Youre getting more ridiculous with age! Cedric laughed heartily.
Fran, Im your grandfather
Do you really think I dont know whats on your mind? He smirked and added, Tell me, if Dr.
Lloyd agrees to take me as his apprentice, would you be willing to be with him? Francescas chubby cheeks flushed red
Her wide teary eyes were filled with both embarrassment and anger.
Cedric Aicker, Im warning you if you keep talking nonsense, Ill stop acknowledging you as my
grandfather! In her fury, she even called him by his full name, which annoyed Cedric .





Santana personally invited you.
back at the Weller residence
Her tone carried a faint trace of annoyance, clearly unhappy about Andrews association with Elsie. Cedric, on the other hand, was delighted.
Dr.
Lloyd, I didnt realize you had such a close connection with Ms.
Santana! Thats fantastic
He grinned mischievously and added, When we get to the showcase, III have to use your connection to secure a few treasures.
Andrew laughed.
Dr.
Aicker, you seem quite passionate about antiques and collectibles.
•
Cedric straightened up with pride.
Not to brag, Dr.
Lloyd, but apart from my reputation as a healer, Ive made quite a name for myself in the world of antiques
Francesca could not help but tease, Grandpa, stop showing off.

You may enjoy collecting, but your skills are hardly impressive when it comes to identifying and appraising antiques.
Cedrics face fell, and he glared at her.
You silly girl! What do you know? The art of collecting and appraising antiques is just as intricate as medicine
Most people would be lucky to have even a fraction of my expertise! Francesca stuck out her tongue playfully but refrained from arguing further.
Still, her defiant expression made her disbelief quite clear.
Andrew turned to her and asked, Fran, if youre coming with us, are you sure the hospital will be fine without you? Francesca smiled brightly.
Andrew, Ive been working so hard I deserve a little break to relax.
Dont worry, Ive made arrangements with the hospital, and besides, Dr.
Hackett is there.
Andrew looked surprised
Bernard is back? Francesca rolled her eyes.
Yeah, hes back, and now that hes got Mr.
Bozzellis support, hes acting like he owns the place.
She sighed and waved dismissively.
But lets not talk about that annoying guy

Lets get going! The three of them piled into Andrews sleek black Mercedes G Wagon and headed toward the antique district, where Radiant Groups showcase was being held. influential figures were already seated, casually chatting about million dollar artifacts and rare collectibles with an air of effortless confidence. Dr. Aicker! So glad you could make it please, come in! Elsie approached them with a warm smile. Though her words were directed at Cedric, her could not help but linger on Andrew. gaze Cedric chuckled as he greeted her. Ms. Santana, see many familiar faces here today. Once the event begins, Im counting on you to help me find a few treasures. Elsie responded with a sweet smile. Dr. Aicker, you can leave it to me. If you see something you like, just let me know III make sure you get it. Cedric laughed heartily. With you here, Ms. Santana, I have no doubts

Your expertise in antiques is truly impressive. A staff member arrived to escort Cedric to his seat, but Elsie turned her attention to Francesca. Ms. Fran, why dont you sit with Dr. Aicker? Francesca frowned slightly and replied, Thanks, but III sit with Andrew instead. Elsies smile did not waver as she turned to Andrew. Mr. Lloyd, is there anything that catches your eye? Id be more than happy to assist you for free, of course. Chapter 319 In the car, Francesca called Lauren and spent several minutes chatting in hushed tones. When she hung up, her face showed clear disappointment. She said with a sigh, Its a shame Lauren cant join us. We had planned to attend the showcase together with you, Andrew, but the Rhodes family has been keeping a close eye on her lately. Shell have to skip it this time. Andrew could not help but think back to Jerry and the others from the day before. While they claimed to be there to pick Lauren up, their behavior seemed more like they were monitoring her. Cedric chimed in, The Rhodes family recently had an important guest arrive from the Blumedale. Lauren is probably tied up entertaining them, which is why she couldnt come along.

The three of them chatted casually as they drove, eventually arriving at Jayrodales most famous antique district.

The streets were already packed with people, forcing Andrew to park the car several blocks away.

Cedric glanced around at the bustling crowd and remarked, This years showcase is even livelier than last years! Luckily for us, Im a member of the Jayrodale Antique Society.

Lets take the VIP entrance! Andrew observed the scene as they walked, noting the overflowing shops and makeshift stalls lining the streets.

The area was full of curious trinkets and unusual items, with many people simply browsing for fun rather than making any purchases.

The world of antiques, as Andrew knew, was notoriously tricky to navigate.

Big spenders were either seasoned collectors or wealthy individuals who did not mind paying a premium. Cedric fell into the latter category his ability to identify valuable pieces was questionable at best, but his deep pockets often made up for his lack of expertise.

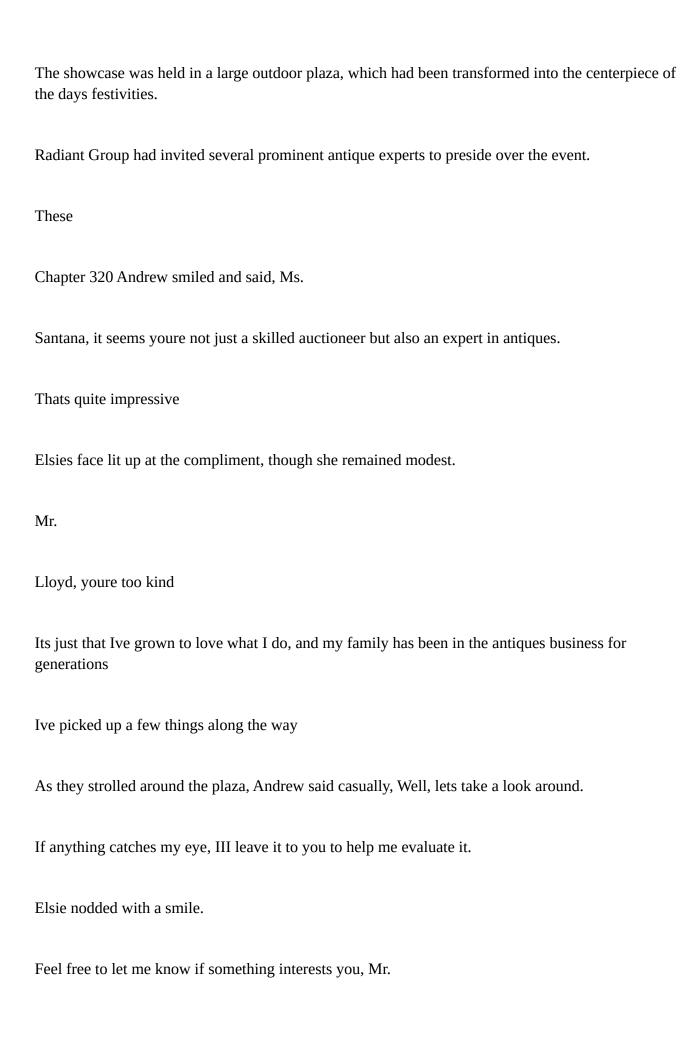
Every year, Cedric would spend hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, at these showcases without hesitation.

Yet among the crowd, there were also those rare individuals who could spot hidden treasures for a fraction of their true value.

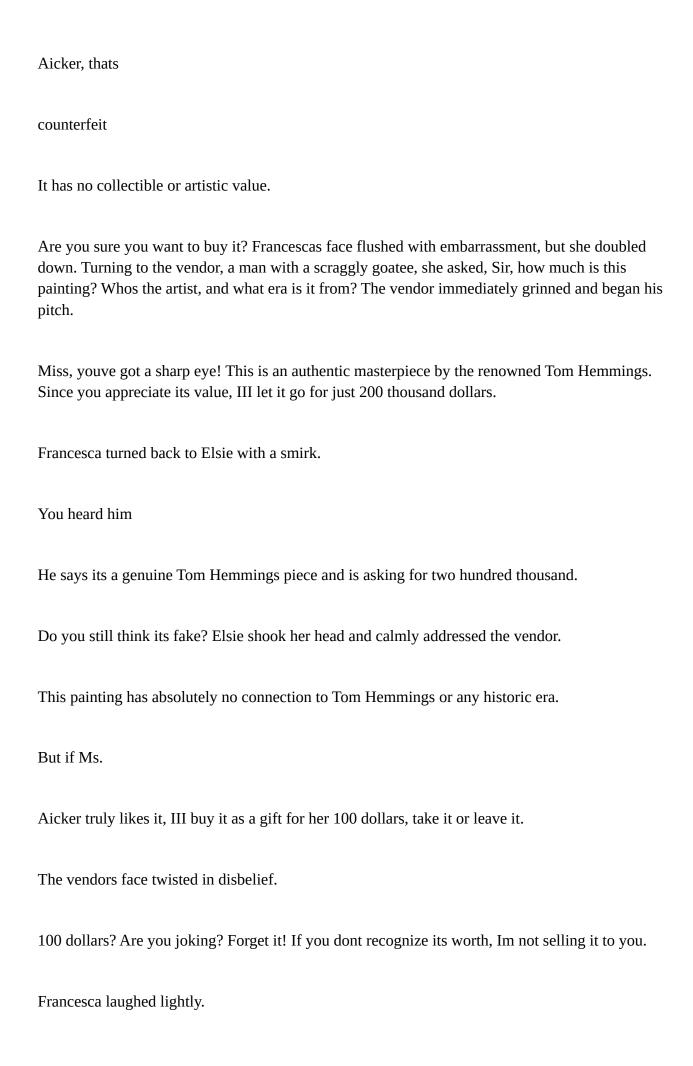
These were the true masters of the antique world, often professional collectors or appraisers. Such experts were few and far between, though.

In the antique community, anyone daring to call themselves a master was either a fraud or a genuine heavyweight and the latter were elusive and notoriously difficult to meet.

After Cedric flashed his membership credentials, the three of them were escorted through the VIP entrance and into the main event area.



Lloyd
Ill be happy to assist.
Feeling a little competitive, Francesca kept her expression pleasant but couldnt resist commenting. There are so many antiques here paintings, artifacts, and all sorts of treasures.
Can Ms.
Santana really guarantee she knows everything about all of them? Elsie remained calm and replied confidently, The world of antiques is vast and intricate, covering countless styles and eras.
It would be arrogant to claim mastery over everything, but I can assure you that I have a solid understanding of the market and a decent level of authority.
Andrew nodded thoughtfully, impressed by Elsies humility mixed with quiet confidence.
He could tell she was a woman of genuine expertise, not just empty boasts.
However, Francesca was not convinced
With a sly smile, she pointed at a yellowed painting lying on the ground.
Id like to buy this painting.
Ms.
Santana, can you give me her professional opinion on it? Elsie glanced at the painting and looked a bit surprised.
Ms.



It seems Ms.
Santanas influence doesnt carry much weight here.
Unfazed, Elsie pulled out an identification badge hanging from her neck and held it up for the vendor to
see.
Are you sure I dont know what Im talking about? widened, The moment the vendor saw her credentials, his demeanor shifted entirely.
His eyes and he quickly started nodding and bowing.
Oh, my! Ms.
Santana, I didnt realize it was you! Please forgive my ignorance.
He chuckled nervously and added, Ms.
Santana, your sharp eyes are unmatched
You know what? Forget a hundred dollars how about 50? Take it for cost price! In no time, the painting was neatly wrapped and handed over to Francesca.
Elsie paid the 50 dollars with a smile.
Ms.
Aicker, still think I dont know what Im talking about? Francescas expression was a mixture of confusion and disbelief as she stammered, Wait a second That guy just claimed this painting was worth 200 thousand, and now hes selling it for 50 bucks? She stared at the wrapped painting in her

hands, completely bewildered

If its worth so little, how on earth did he have the audacity to ask for 200 thousand in the first place? At that moment, Francesca was so stunned that she forgot all about competing with Elsie.