

The Ashes 311

Chapter 311 Andrew chuckled and said, Mr.

Giordano, you truly exude an air of authority.

Your composure and dominance are impressive. Atlas scowled impatiently.

Cut the flattery, kid.

If you've got something to say, just say it.

He continued, I know well that Natasha and Dylan practically follow your lead now.

When it comes to scheming, you're the real mastermind here, Andrew quickly waved his hands and replied, Oh, you're thinking too highly of me

He lowered his voice and added, I just wanted to let you know, Mr.

Giordano, that back in the lounge at West End Manor, I noticed something interesting in Mr.

Moore and Ms.

Fuller's glasses.

He smirked slyly .

It's a rare substance called cantharides.

Rumor has it, once a man and woman ingest it, the only way to work it out is through an intense ... physical session to get rid of its effect- Atlas could not take it anymore and shut Andrew off.

Enough! Shut your damn mouth! Dont say another word! The fury and humiliation he had barely suppressed flared again, this time boiling over

He glared at Finley, his gaze sharp as a dagger.

Atlas growled, seething.

You fucking bastard, tell me the truth did you really do it? Seriously? Drugging people? How low can you go, Finley? Are you even human? Finley stammered, his face pale.

M Mr.

Giordano, I swear I wasnt thinking clearly.

It was at moment of weakness it wont happen again ! Atlas immediately slapped Finley, leaving no room for mercy.

Atlas roared, Next time? You think therell be a next time? Youve tarnished my reputation- everything Ive worked for ! Youre a fucking disgrace, you worthless piece of shit! The enraged Northern District crime lord unleashed a torrent of insults, spewing every curse he could think of.

The fury in his voice sent a chill through his men, who looked on in shock.

One of them pleaded, Mr.

Giordano, please! You dont have to resort to violence! Sir, think carefully! If you keep this up, youll sever ties with Mr.

Moore completely! However, Atlas was too consumed by rage to listen

His strength was undeniable, and his sudden outburst caught everyone off guard even Andrew had not expected it.

Finley could not react in time.

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 alone, 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, you've gone too far! I'm part of the Rhodes family, for crying out loud! Andrew glanced at him and smirked.

Mr.

Rhodes, looks like youve been properly humiliated! Michael glared at him with pure hatred, Andrew, if it werent for your stirring up trouble, I never wouldve been punished by Atlas ! Tonight, youre not walking out of this hotel alive! Andrew shrugged, unfazed.

Youre welcome to try.

Natasha spoke up calmly.

Mr.

Rhodes, Andrew is under my protection now

If you want to touch him, youll have to go through me first.

Michael hesitated, his expression dark and uncertain.

With Natasha backing Andrew, he could not afford to act recklessly.

Finley ground his teeth in frustration and growled, Mr.

Rhodes, why dont we join forces ? No matter what, were taking Andrew down tonight Michaels eyes lit up with delight.

Mr.

Moore, are you saying youre ready to switch sides and work with me? Finleys tone turned cold

Dont flatter yourself Do you really think someone like you is worthy of my loyalty? What Im offering is a partnership to eliminate Andrew.

Thats it, Finley clarified

Though disappointed, Michael still nodded.

Fine

Ill work with you on this.

Before they could act, Dylan stepped forward, his presence menacing.

He threatened, I dare of you to even lay a finger on Mr.

Lloyd

If you do, Ill bring every one of my men from South City here tonight and tear this hotel apart.

any The threat instantly silenced Michael and Finley.

A partnership between Natasha and Dylan meant combining nearly half of Jayrodales underground power

, leaving the two of them completely outmatched

Finleys chest heaved as he struggled to contain his frustration

In the end, he had no choice but to storm off, shouting over his shoulder, Andrew, you just wait!

Chapter 313 Andrew, Natashia, and Dylan returned to West End with their respective entourages. Andrew said, Dylan, I dont think I need to handle the rest of Madam Vostokoffs business

The chaos he had stirred up was more than enough, and he had no intention of meddling further in the underworld

Dylan nodded.

Mr.

Lloyd, youve already done far more than enough for us

Madam Vostokoff and I can handle the rest without troubling you further.

Natasha chuckled

Darling, you even managed to divide Atlas and Finley for us.

Why not see it through to the end? How about taking Atlas out entirely for us? Andrew shook his head without hesitation.

You know my rules, Natasha.

Ive already done

more than enough, far exceeding the value of that so called medicinal herb you offered me.

Isnt it a bit excessive to keep asking for more? Dylan quickly agreed.

Madam Vostokoff, Mr.

Lloyd has gone above and beyond for us.

Asking him for anything more wouldnt just break the rules it would make us look shameless. Natasha gave a soft, teasing hum, her tone playful but calculating.

Maybe my request is a bit much, but I didnt say I wouldnt compensate you further, darling. Andrew raised a brow

Youve got more medicinal herbs lying around? Natasha shook her head and shot him a sly look. Not herbs, but dont you think Im more valuable than some plant? Andrew frowned.

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 freeloader, 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.

Her anger and determination were clear, fueled by both frustration and a growing desire to 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.

After Andrew left, escorted by his men, Dylan shook his head with a wry smile.

Madam Vostokoff, youve spent enough time with Mr.

Lloyd to understand his personality by now.

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.

He continued, Madam Vostokoff, let me warn you you might want to give up on this idea of using him. Your West End is far too small to contain someone like Andrew.

Natasha looked uncertain for a moment

Are you saying Andrews background is bigger than he lets on ? Dylan shook his head.

I dont know much, and I wouldnt dare speculate.

But trust me messing with Mr.

Lloyd is a dangerous game, one you might not survive.

Natasha scoffed.

Please, who are you trying to scare ? Ive been in this business for years, Dylan.

Ive seen it all theres no big situation that could shake me.

Chapter 314 Dylan shrugged casually, clearly indifferent.

He had already tried to warn Natasha, but if she refused to listen, there was not much he could do.

It was obvious that Andrew was cutting her some slack if someone like Michael had dared to act up, they would have been slapped into submission long ago.

By the time Andrew returned to Moonlit Sanctuary, the sun was setting

He pushed open the door to the small house on the hill and found Marvin lounging under the tree at a stone table, sipping leisurely on some liquor.

The table held not just Andrews prized bottle of aged whiskey but also a few snacks that were perfect for drinking

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.

Its not that.

I just feel bad seeing someone like you such a pampered lady -go through so much trouble cooking all this.

Lauren let out a mock huff, sitting down to scoop soup into bowls.

Thats more like it

But honestly, it wasnt hard at all.

Ive always loved experimenting with food.

I dont cook often, but if its for someone I care about, Id happily do it every day.

Marvin laughed heartily.

Thats the kind of talk I love to hear.

Laurens eyes sparkled as she teased, Well, if it makes the richest man in town happy, III make sure to

say it more often! Marvin shook his head with a grin.

You two lovebirds should save the sweet talk for when youre alone.

I dont want to be the third wheel here.

After the meal, Marvin excused himself, claiming he had things to do, and left the two of them alone.

Lauren giggled.

Dr.

Lloyd, isnt Mr.

Yates such a thoughtful man? Hes giving us some quality time together.

Andrew put down his utensils and hesitated for a moment before speaking.

Ms.

Rhodes, I feel like I should clarify something about Marvin and me- Before he could finish, Lauren raised her hand to his lips, silencing him gently.

Dr.

Lloyd, theres no need to explain.

Ive known youre not just an ordinary person.

Andrew frowned slightly.

Its not as complicated as you think.

Marvin and I are simply- You dont need to say anything! Lauren interrupted, waving him off.

I already know, so dont worry about it.

Andrew watched her pop a piece of braised beef into her mouth, her eyes narrowing in delight as she savored the flavor

Wow, this beef is amazing! My cooking skills are out of this world! she shamelessly praised herself.

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 I 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.

Yates is nearly 60 now and has never married that's no secret in Jayrodale's elite circles! Everyone finds it strange that a man with such immense wealth hasn't taken a wife, or even had a mistress, second wife, or a random fling

She leaned in conspiratorially.

There's been plenty of speculation that Mr.

Yates must've had a secret family hidden away somewhere.

But because he's never said anything publicly, no one dares to gossip too much.

- Lauren paused dramatically and grinned.

I used to think Mr.

Yates was just really good at keeping his private life private.

But after getting to know you, and the more I've learned about

you ... She fixed her gaze at Andrew, absolutely certain of her conclusion.

I'm now 100% convinced -Dr.

Lloyd, you're Mr.

Yates son

Andrew's sharp features twitched slightly as his handsome face darkened.

For once, he found himself completely at a loss for words.

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.

Rhodes, since its your first time visiting, how about I show you around? Lauren hesitated, looking conflicted.

Maybe another time, Dr.

Lloyd.

I really need to head back.

Noticing how her fingers were fidgeting as if torn between staying and leaving, Andrew raised a brow in surprise

Its still early, Ms.

Rhodes.

Youre welcome to stay a little longer if youd like to.

Lauren shook her head

Its not about you.

Its... my situation

She sighed and added, Lately, I cant stay out too late.

Other than work or business, Im expected to go home right after my day ends

Andrew did not press further and simply nodded, Alright, let me walk you out then.

Lauren smiled brightly.

Sure.

The two strolled through the courtyard and out the iron gate, walking all the way to Moonlit Sanctuary's 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 family's elite fighter.

Jerry had never hidden his disdain for Andrew.

Frankly, Andrew did not care enough to act friendly either.

Inside the moving car, Lauren's demeanor turned icy.

Jerry, didnt I make it clear you didnt need to pick me up? Sitting stiffly in the passenger seat, Jerry responded without emotion.

This was all Mrs.

Rhodes instruction.

Lauren clenched her jaw

So what? My mother sent you to spy on me? Jerry did not deny it.

Miss, you know full well that youre engaged.

Mrs.

Rhodes was furious when she learned you were spending so much time with Andrew.

She specifically instructed us to ensure youre kept in check.

Laurens laugh was cold

So now I dont even have basic freedom or privacy anymore.

Is that it ? Jerry was silent for a moment before sighing.

Miss, theres something Ive wanted to say a long time, though I feared youd think I was overstepping.

But today, Ill say it, even if it angers you you should cut ties with Andrew.

Laurens voice hardened

And if I dont ? Jerry glanced at her through the rearview mirror.

If you dont, the next person involved wont be me.

Itll be your mother, the matriarch of the Rhodes family herself.

He paused before continuing in a grave tone.

Mrs.

Rhodes personally came down from Blumedale, bringing members of the main familys security team to Jayrodale

I trust you understand the weight behind this move.

Lauren huffed, turning to look out the car window.

She refused to say another word, her expression stormy as the car sped through the evening streets.

Chapter 317 The next morning, Andrew arrived at Jayrodale General Hospital bright and early.

As the deputy chief, his workload was typically light, and he often joked that his role was more symbolic than hands on

Though the hospital was the largest in Jayrodale, it was privately owned, granting Andrew significant freedom

Unless there was a particularly complex case or a challenging surgery, he rarely had to step in, thanks to Francesca and Laurens help managing the load

Good morning, Dr.

Lloyd ! The vibrant and cheerful nurses greeted him warmly as he walked through the corridors.

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 .

Nonetheless, it was clear he adored his granddaughter deeply, so despite his irritation, he held back and simply let out a huff

Turning to Andrew, Cedric said, Dr.

Lloyd, I apologize if Ive embarrassed you.

But then he added with a sly grin, That being said, my earlier offer still stands.

If you agree to take me as your apprentice, Fran would make an excellent wife.

Chapter 318 Andrew stayed silent for a moment, then glanced over at Francesca

Her face was flushed red all the way to her neck, and the moment she noticed his quickly turned away and muttered, Andrew, dont listen to my grandpas nonsense.

Hes just gaze, she a hopeless old man.

Andrew chuckled lightly and said, Dr.

Aicker, as Ive mentioned before, the age gap between us is far too wide.

Accepting you as my apprentice wouldnt be appropriate, so theres no need to bring this up again.

Cedric looked visibly disappointed as he nodded and sighed.

Fair enough, I understand.

It was a bold request, after all

He then brightened up and added, But, Dr.

Lloyd, I didnt come here just to ask about becoming your apprentice.

Theres something else I wanted to discuss with you.

Andrew tilted his head curiously.

Oh ? Im all ears

Cedric stroked his beard and explained, Today is the Antiquities Showcase hosted by Radiant, Group. Experts and collectors from Jayrodale, Blumedale, and even Bridgefields will likely attend

He smiled and continued, I was hoping to invite you to come along and lend me your expertise.

Francesca was still flustered, but she quickly nodded in agreement.

Andrew, the Antiquities Showcase hosted by Radiant Group is one of the most prestigious events in the entire region

Lets go together itll be a great opportunity to see some fascinating pieces.

Andrew considered it for a moment before smiling.

Alright, lets go take a look.

Coincidentally, Id already promised Ms.

Santana that Id attend.

Francesca let out a small huff and said, Oh, thats right.

Ms.

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.

The showcase was held in a large outdoor plaza, which had been transformed into the centerpiece of the days festivities.

Radiant Group had invited several prominent antique experts to preside over the event.

These

Chapter 320 Andrew smiled and said, Ms.

Santana, it seems youre not just a skilled auctioneer but also an expert in antiques.

Thats quite impressive

Elsies face lit up at the compliment, though she remained modest.

Mr.

Lloyd, youre too kind

Its just that Ive grown to love what I do, and my family has been in the antiques business for generations

Ive picked up a few things along the way

As they strolled around the plaza, Andrew said casually, Well, lets take a look around.

If anything catches my eye, Ill leave it to you to help me evaluate it.

Elsie nodded with a smile.

Feel free to let me know if something interests you, Mr.

Lloyd

I'll be happy to assist.

Feeling a little competitive, Francesca kept her expression pleasant but couldn't 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 Elsie's 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.

I'd 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.

Aicker, thats

counterfeit

It has no collectible or artistic value.

Are you sure you want to buy it? Francescas face flushed with embarrassment, but she doubled down. Turning to the vendor, a man with a scraggly goatee, she asked, Sir, how much is this painting? Whos the artist, and what era is it from? The vendor immediately grinned and began his pitch.

Miss, youve got a sharp eye! This is an authentic masterpiece by the renowned Tom Hemmings. Since you appreciate its value, III let it go for just 200 thousand dollars.

Francesca turned back to Elsie with a smirk.

You heard him

He says its a genuine Tom Hemmings piece and is asking for two hundred thousand.

Do you still think its fake? Elsie shook her head and calmly addressed the vendor.

This painting has absolutely no connection to Tom Hemmings or any historic era.

But if Ms.

Aicker truly likes it, III buy it as a gift for her 100 dollars, take it or leave it.

The vendors face twisted in disbelief.

100 dollars? Are you joking? Forget it! If you dont recognize its worth, Im not selling it to you.

Francesca laughed lightly.

It seems Ms.

Santanans 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.