

The Ashes 531

Chapter 531 Lauren let out a giggle.

Dr.

Lloyd, you practically scared Troy half to death.

Andrew shook his head

I wasn't just trying to scare him

There's genuinely a faint odor of decay on him.

It's not as strong as Rubys, but it's there, which means he's already infected with something. Lauren looked stunned

You think that horny fool might actually have HIV? Andrew chuckled lightly.

HIV is terrifying, but its spread is relatively well controlled these days.

As for Troy, we'll need a hospital checkup to confirm.

Whether it's HIV or something else, his situation doesn't look good.

With that, the two did not linger and returned to Rhodes Corporation.

Over at the Pharmaceutical Division, preparations for the Amberpeak Corporation collaboration were in full swing

1 Michael was beaming with energy, treating the project as his crowning achievement since becoming CEO

In his mind, the successful conclusion of this deal would solidify his position in the family, earning him applause from the upper echelons.

He could not help but see it as a crucial stepping stone to eventually claim the title of Rhodes family patriarch

In contrast, Michael scoffed at the thought of Lauren, believing that his dear cousin had become irrelevant, and she was not even a challenge anymore.

With the company completely under my control, she was just a placeholder vice CEO nothing more than a soon to be married off pawn of the family.

Like Marcus, most of Laurens allies had already been pushed out of key positions.

Michael felt secure, confident that his grip on the company was stronger than ever.

Reclining in his office chair with his legs crossed, he enjoyed a massage from Cindy, his secretary.

For the first time in a while, he felt utterly relaxed

Michael laughed.

Troy is such a gem.

Through sheer determination in bed, he managed to secure Ruby

Honestly, I'm a little jealous of him! Always attuned to Michael's moods, Cindy smiled sweetly and teased

, Mr.

Rhodes, it sounds like you might have a little interest in Ms.

Dickinson yourself.

Michael did not bother hiding it.

Of course, I do.

Rubys stunning sharp, gorgeous, and sexy as hell.

Who wouldnt be interested? He sighed dramatically.

But heres the thing

AS CEO, I cant afford for people to think Im sharing a woman with Troy, of all people.

Imagine the rumors itd look like Im scraping the bottom of the barrel.

My reputation would take a hit.

Cindy nodded, offering advice.

Youre right.

For the sake of your image, its best to keep your distance from Ruby

Michael smirked and squeezed Cindys stocking clad rear firmly, making her wince.

He laughed as he released her.

I may not be able to bed Ruby myself, but Ive already told Troy to give me all the juicy details about

their time together.

Sometimes, hearing the play by play can be just as thrilling.

Cindy forced a laugh, though inwardly, she was disturbed

She thought these rich boys were on another level of depravity.

While she had sold her body for status, even she could not sink to their level.

Suddenly, the office door burst open, and a subordinate rushed in, looking frantic.

Michaels relaxed mood evaporated, and he scowled.

Didn't I say not to disturb me unless it's something important? Cindy and I are in the middle of ... discussing serious business

11 Ignoring the scene entirely, the subordinate blurted out, Mr.

Rhodes, we've got a problem! Michael frowned

What now? The subordinate hesitated, then delivered the shocking news.

It's Mr.

MacAfee

He's gone mad! He ran to Ms.

Rhodes's office, got down on his knees, and started begging Andrew to save him.

He's screaming that he doesn't want to... rot away!

Chapter 532 Just as the subordinate finished reporting, he added anxiously, Mr.

MacAfee is saying that as long as Andrew is willing to save him, hes ready to do anything even be Andrews lapdog! Michaels face turned crimson with rage, and he roared, What did you just say? This useless idiot! Im his boss, and Im the one he should be loyal to not that Andrew! Seething, Michael barked, Lets go

I want to see what kind of madness this fool is up to! With a stormy expression, Michael marched toward Laurens office, flanked by his entourage

Troy was supposed to be his trusted subordinate, the handpicked Pharmaceutical Division head, to replace Marcus.

Yet, here he was, groveling at Andrews feet like some sniveling dog.

The humiliation was unbearable this betrayal felt like a slap across Michaels face.

He could not believe Troy was disrespecting him this way.

As Michael hurried to Laurens office, his mind raced, trying to figure out what could have driven Troy to such an extreme

He wondered if Troy had gone mad or if he was under some sort of spell.

Meanwhile, in Laurens office.

Troy was on his knees, tears streaming down his face.

Mr.

Lloyd, Dr.

Lloyd, please! You're a genius doctor, a godsend ! You have to save me I'm begging you! I don't want to lose my manhood! Andrew sat leisurely on the couch, watching the desperate Troy with mild amusement

Mr.

MacAfee, what are you doing? Kneeling like this? Come on, I'm not worthy of such a gesture. Troy shook his head vigorously, sobbing

No, Dr.

Lloyd, you are worthy! You're the only one who can save me ! He continued, his voice trembling with fear.

The doctor said... said I'm infected.

If I don't get treated soon, in the best case, I'll lose it entirely.

Worst case ... my whole body could rot, and I'd die in agony ! The terror in his voice was palpable.

After racing to the hospital earlier, Troy had undergone a thorough examination.

The doctor had confirmed his worst fears with a grim look, they told him that he was indeed infected. From that moment on, all the light in Troy's eyes seemed to dim.

Andrew chuckled softly.

If the hospital has already diagnosed you, why come to me? Shouldn't you just stay there for treatment? Troy's desperation was evident.

I don't trust the hospital! I only trust your medical skills, Mr.

Lloyd ! And the tests ... They said it's not just any infection

My manhood might already be gone for good! ask! He added, Mr.

Lloyd, your skills are legendary! Please, have mercy, save me ! Ill do anything you Andrews amused

expression faded as he picked up his phone and idly played a game, speaking in a detached tone.

I warned you earlier.

I told you there was a rotting smell on you.

But you didnt listen

And now ? Now you come crying to me? Too late.

I only treat people when Im in the mood.

Troy, teary eyed, tried to gauge Andrews mood.

I understand your rules, Dr.

Lloyd.

So, if I may ask, hows your mood right now? Andrew smiled faintly.

Oh, terrible.

So, Im sorry no treatment for you.

Troys expression twisted with anger and desperation before finally settling on humiliation.

He gritted his teeth and said, Mr.

Lloyd, Ill apologize.

I was wrong before I shouldnt have offended you.

Im sorry.

Andrew raised a brow.

Is that all ? Troy hesitated, then added, Ill also promise you this if you help me, Ill never interfere with anything concerning Mr.

Rhodes or Ms.

Rhodes again.

Andrew smirked

Thats it? Thats all youve got? Not enough, Mr.

MacAfee

Not even close.

Frankly, neither Lauren nor I care about your involvement in their affairs

So, I suggest you get used to the idea of living with your ... rotting problem. Troys face turned red with fury.

He roared, Andrew, are you really going to watch me suffer and do nothing? 1

Chapter 533 Troy roared, Andrew, are you really going to watch me suffer and do nothing ?!
Despite prostrating himself repeatedly, Andrew remained indifferent, showing no intention of

helping Troy felt utterly humiliated, thinking this was beyond cruel it was ruthless! Andrew leaned back with a cold smile

And what if I am? Who said Im obligated to save you? Youre in this mess because of your own choices. Dont blame anyone but yourself.

Troy wailed, Mr.

Lloyd, just tell me! What will it take for you to treat me ? III do whatever you want- anything! Normally, Troy was not the type to bow his head, but this was different.

His very manhood and his reputation were on the line.

The mere thought of people discovering his condition, that he was suffering from an incurable disease with a rotting situation, was unbearable.

Troy could already imagine the disdainful looks and whispers behind his back.

If he did not fix this, his career in the business world would be over.

He would be forced to live in a small rented room, rotting away in both body and spirit, dying a lonely, miserable death.

Inside, Troy cursed Ruby a thousand times over, swearing she would pay for ruining his life.

Meanwhile, Lauren stood at the side, thoroughly enjoying the spectacle.

Watching Andrew have Troy completely at his mercy was a level of entertainment she had not expected. She had to resist the urge to laugh out loud.

Mr.

MacAfee, youve really been careless, Lauren said with mock pity.

Sure, sneaking around might be thrilling and fun, but did you ever stop to think about who you were with

? Ruby just got out of prison, for crying out loud.

Who knows what she mightve picked up in there! She shook her head and added, Honestly, its no surprise this happened

Troys face contorted with anger and regret.

He spat, That filthy bitch! I trusted her completely, and this is how she repays me ? Lauren leaned against the desk, her tone sharp.

Before you start blaming her entirely, let me ask are you sure you caught it from Ruby? Do you have any other ... entanglements recently? Troy swore on his life.

No one else! I swear, Ms.

Rhodes, Im one 100 % certain

It was only Ruby just that wretched woman! Lauren crossed her arms, her expression unimpressed Mr. MacAfee, you really are a fool.

Correct me if Im wrong, but arent you married? And dont you have a kid in middle school? Yet here you are, running around with other women.

Troy looked like he was about to cry, his face a mix of regret and frustration

Ms.

Rhodes, youre absolutely right.

But as a man... sometimes, we have our struggles, you know? My wife shes fierce.

Loud, harsh, and with no sense of romance or fun.

My lifes biggest regret is marrying a woman as dull as her.

But Ruby ... even though shes... infected and manipulative, she knows how to play.

She has

ways of making a man feel alive He continued, Im only human, not

a saint! Faced with that kind of temptation, that level of ... ecstasy, how could I resist? Troys voice cracked as he poured out his grievances.

I was clear he regretted his actions, though whether he would make a different choice given the same temptation was questionable.

Lauren sneered

So, let me get this straight.

You looked down on your wife, thinking the grass is greener on the other side, and now youre here whining? Troy, all I can say is you deserve this.

Troys face paled as he crawled forward on his knees, pleading with Andrew.

Mr.

Lloyd, Im begging you.

Please save me ! If you dont, my body, my career, my life, and even my family theyll all be destroyed! Andrews tone remained calm and detached

Whether or not I save you depends on three things.

First, your sincerity.

Second, my mood.

And third and most importantly it depends on Ms.

Rhodes opinion.

Chapter 534 Troy immediately turned to Lauren, his face full of desperation.

Ms.

Rhodes, please, Ive worked tirelessly for you in the past.

Im begging you just this once, grant me mercy! Lauren crossed her arms, giving him a cold glance.

I can consider it, but theres one last question you need to answer.

What exactly have you done with Ruby besides sleeping with her? Any other shady dealings I should know about? Troy hesitated, his face paling

After a moment, he clenched his teeth and confessed, I... I showed her three of the Pharmaceutical Divisions formulas

But please, Ms.

Rhodes, understand I only showed her.

She didnt copy them, so it shouldnt be a big problem ... right? Before Lauren could respond, an enraged voice boomed from the doorway.

Troy, youre asking for death! The furious shout echoed through the office, followed by the sharp, rapid clack of dress shoes on the tile

Moments later, Michael stormed in with several high ranking executives, his face twisted with fury. Without a word, Michael lashed out, kicking Troy hard in the chest.

Troy collapsed to the floor, gasping in pain

You idiot! Michael bellowed, his face red with rage.

Do you have any idea what youve done? The Pharmaceutical Divisions formulas are the product of decades of research.

Each one is priceless! And you... you gave them to Ruby just like that? Do you realize what youve done ? I could kill you right now! Michaels voice was nearly a roar, his fury blinding him.

He had come here intending to defend Troy and figure out why he was groveling to Andrew, but hearing Troy confess to leaking the companys trade secrets was a blow that felt like a death knell.

As the CEO, Michael knew the gravity of the situation.

This was not just a minor blunder it was catastrophic

The thought of those formulas being leaked could mean devastation for the Pharmaceutical Division, perhaps even the entire Rhodes Corporation.

Worse, it reflected directly on him, the leader of the company.

If the family found out about this, his position and his dreams of becoming the family head would be over

Grabbing Troy by the collar, Michaels face contorted with rage.

Ill ask you one last time.

Did you or did you not leak the Pharmaceutical Divisions formulas to Ruby? Troy was trembling as he stammered through sobs, Mr.

Rhodes... I didnt mean to ... I wasnt thinking straight... Please, fet me explain! Michael responded with two vicious slaps, the sound of which echoed through the room.

Explain? Explain what, you moron? Michael shouted, his voice raw with fury.

The only thing I want to know is did you give the formulas to Ruby or not? Troy broke down completely, wailing like a child

I ... let her see them, but I swear, it was just curiosity! I dont think she memorized them or had any ulterior motives! Michael was seething, his breath coming in harsh gasps.

You dont think? You imbecile ! Youre telling me you thought she wouldnt betray us? Youre a damn fool you deserve to die! His bloodshot eyes darted around the room, scanning for something he could use to finish Troy off right then and there.

He was trembling with rage, on the verge of losing complete control.

Fortunately, the other executives stepped in, holding Michael back before he could act on his murderous

intent.

たべ Mr.

Rhodes, please, calm down! This isnt the time to lose your head, one of them urged. Yes, Mr.

Rhodes, another chimed in.

Troy has made a grave mistake, but punishing him now wont solve anything.

Our priority should be apprehending Ruby and preventing her from leaking the formulas.

Michael froze for a moment, his anger giving way to fear.

You're right... we need to catch Ruby immediately

We can't let those formulas leave the hotel ! Turning back to Troy, Michael barked, Where is she?
Which

hotel ?! Tell me right now! Still trembling, Troy quickly gave up Ruby's hotel's location.

Without wasting another moment, Michael ordered a team to head to the hotel and capture Ruby.
Chapter 535 Lauren crossed her arms, smirking.

Michael, didn't warn you about Ruby? I told you she couldn't be trusted, but no you insisted I was just jealous of that bitch.

Now look at what's happened

If those formulas fall into the hands of other pharmaceutical companies, the Pharmaceutical Division won't just take a hit it'll collapse entirely

You might as well prepare to announce its closure

Michael's face darkened further, his rage building like storm waves, each one crashing harder than the last.

He felt trapped.

Troy was his man, and the deal with Ruby was his decision.

Now, with such a colossal mistake, he could already imagine the backlash from the Rhodes family's upper ranks

The humiliation would shatter any dreams he had of becoming the family head.

Worse, he would be remembered as the one who brought disgrace and ruin to the company.

Seething with anger, Michaels eyes fell on Troy, who was still sprawled on the floor.

With a growl, he lunged at him, unleashing a brutal flurry of punches and kicks, each strike aimed at Troys face and head.

Mr.

Rhodes, stop! Stop, please! Troy screamed, his voice hoarse with desperation.

I was wrong, wrong! Please, dont hit me anymore! I was He shouted, Ms.

Rhodes, help me ! Please ! Ill take full responsibility whatever it takes.

Just make him stop! Troys blood curdling cries echoed through the entire Rhodes Corporation office floor

, drawing the attention of company veterans and department heads alike.

Initially, they had rushed over to calm Michael down, but the moment they heard Troy confess to leaking the formulas, they froze, stunned into silence.

For any pharmaceutical company, proprietary formulas were its lifeblood its most valuable asset.

These formulas were not just products; they represented years of research, billions in investment, and exclusive dominance in the market.

Hearing that three formulas had been compromised was not just alarming it was catastrophic.

If these formulas ended up in a competitors hands, they could immediately replicate the products, undercut prices, and destroy Rhodes Corporations monopoly

As Michael continued to beat up Troy, the executives exchanged uneasy glances.

Some even seemed to silently agree that Troy deserved his punishment.

However, Andrew finally had enough

Thats enough Beating him to death wont fix anything

Troy was barely conscious, his body limp, his face bloodied and swollen, yet Michaels fists kept flying. Andrew stepped forward, his tone sharp and cutting

Michael, if you keep this up, youre going to kill him.

And then what? Do you think being the CEO gives you a free pass to commit murder ? Michaels head snapped toward Andrew, his eyes wild with fury.

He shouted, This isnt your business, Andrew ! Andrews patience wore out.

He grabbed Michael by the collar and yanked him back, glaring at him.

Idiot.

Do you even hear yourself right now? If you kill him, this goes from corporate negligence to outright homicide

Is that the legacy you want for yourself? Michael froze, Andrews words cutting through the haze of his rage like ice water

He staggered back, suddenly realizing the gravity of the situation.

If Troy died here, it would not just ruin his career it would destroy his life, On the floor, Troy lay curled up

in a pitiful heap, barely conscious and covered in blood.

He could not even muster the strength to speak.

Andrew grimaced at the sight, muttering under his breath.

He turned to Eunice and instructed her to bring the first aid kit.

Once it arrived, he crouched beside Troy and began treating his injuries with practiced precision.

Afterward, Andrew scribbled down a prescription and handed it to him.

Take the medicine on this list for six months, and the infection in your body should gradually clear up. But, Andrew added, his tone sharp and unyielding, remember this: theres still a high chance of a relapse

If you have even an ounce of sense left, stay away from random flings.

Chapter 536 Troy, who had been on the verge of losing consciousness, seemed to regain his spirit upon hearing Andrews words.

Trembling

all over, he looked up with tears of gratitude.

Thank you, Mr.

Lloyd ! I cant thank you enough! Michaels face darkened, and he shot Andrew a questioning glare.

Whats going on with Troy? And whats with the prescription you gave him? Andrew smirked.

Oh, you didnt know ? Mr.

MacAfee here caught himself a pretty nasty case of an STD-so bad his nether regions have started to rot

He came groveling to me, begging for treatment.

Michaels face went pale.

What? That idiot actually managed to catch... that? As someone who was no stranger to questionable flings himself, Michael suddenly felt an uncomfortable chill.

This news hit a little too close to home.

Lauren sneered

He got what he deserved

Messing around with Ruby landed him in this mess

And when it got too bad, he had no choice but to beg Mr.

Lloyd for help.

Under Mr.

Lloyds pressure, he confessed everything about his dealings with Ruby, including how he leaked the formulas.

Otherwise, do you think he wouldve admitted to stealing the companys secrets so easily ? Michael shuddered at the thought.

A wave of relief washed over him as he realized how close he had come to making a fatal mistake.

He had considered making a move on Ruby himself, tempted by her allure.

Now, he silently thanked his lucky stars he had not followed through.

That woman's a walking biohazard, he thought grimly.

Then, his eyes flicked to Troy, his expression a mixture of disdain and pity.

What a tragic idiot.

Just as he was processing this disaster, a commotion erupted outside the office.

The gathered employees quickly parted, lining up along the corridor with looks of respect and fear etched across their faces.

Eunice came rushing into the room, her face pale as a sheet.

Her voice trembled as she announced, Ms.

Rhodes ... Mrs.

Rhodes is here! She just arrived at the building! Lauren's expression tightened as she immediately glanced toward the door.

Michael's face also changed, and he quickly composed himself, rushing toward the hallway to greet her.

Aunt Tiana, you should've let us know you were coming.

I would've personally come to welcome you! Michael said with an ingratiating smile.

Through the crowd stepped a stunning woman with a frosty demeanor

She bore a striking resemblance to Lauren, though her aura was far more imposing.

Following her were a dozen bodyguards, including Jerry, who had been knocked unconscious by Andrew not long ago.

Mrs.

Rhodes, welcome! the gathered employees greeted in unison, bowing slightly.

However, Andrew remained seated, his gaze fixed on the woman with quiet curiosity.

He could immediately tell from her cold and commanding presence that Tiana was no ordinary person.

One of the senior executives, who had previously been knocked out by Andrew during a confrontation, glared at him and barked, Andrew, how dare you remain seated? Show your respect to Mrs.

Rhodes and greet her properly! Andrew replied with an even tone, I'm a board member of Rhodes Corporation, not a servant of the Rhodes family.

Why should I bow? The executives' faces flushed with anger.

Michael snapped, Andrew, watch your tone! Rhodes Corporation is part of the Rhodes family's holdings, and Mrs.

Rhodes is no ordinary person.

She oversees all Rhodes Corporation operations in Jayrodale, holding ultimate authority.

More importantly, she is the rightful wife of the Rhodes family head, our matriarch! You are obligated to show respect! Andrew shrugged nonchalantly.

Apologies, but I don't bow to anyone.

My back has never been particularly flexible for that kind of thing

Besides, he added with a faint smile, I don't bow to anyone whether it's the matriarch of the Rhodes family, a general from Holtien, or the head of some grand aristocratic family.

It's just not my style

Chapter 537 Andrews' calm yet defiant words caused an uproar among the gathered crowd.

Michael, seething with anger, was on the verge of losing his temper.

Meanwhile, the senior members of Rhodes Corporation exchanged sneering glances

Andrew, you're just a lowly board member, yet you dare act all high and mighty in front of Mrs.

Rhodes? You must have a death wish! Exactly.

Forget being the fifth board member, do you remember when the third board member, who also chaired the Jayrodale Chamber of Commerce, dared to cross Mrs.

Rhodes? He was nearly beaten senseless and left crawling out of here like a worm! In the Rhodes family's company, you bow, or you break.

And Mrs.

Rhodes isn't just the matriarch; her status is leagues above what you could ever understand.

Tiana's frosty gaze locked onto Andrew, her presence radiating silent authority.

Lauren's face tensed, and she quickly stepped in front of Andrew.

Mom, Mr.

Lloyd just recently joined the company

Hes not yet familiar with all the rules and customs.

Please, forgive him! Michael sneered.

Unfamiliar with the rules? Then he should learn them.

Andrews nothing special

Even Jayrodales mayor, Mr.

Thatcher, wouldnt dare show disrespect to Aunt Tiana.

Lauren clenched her teeth, ready to argue, but Tiana silenced the room by calmly walking straight toward Andrew

Standing directly in front of him, Tianas icy gaze met Andrews steady and unwavering eyes

Interesting

You have guts, III give you that, Tiana said coldly, her tone laced with contempt.

I didnt expect Marvin to pull off such a move in Jayrodale to nurture someone like you as his pawn. Andrew smirked.

Im sorry, Mrs.

Rhodes, but I dont understand what you mean.

Tianas lips curved into a thin, mocking smile.

Dont understand? Or are you just pretending not to ? You and I both know the truth.

She turned sharply and called out, Michael, come here! Michael, who had been watching nervously from the side, immediately rushed forward, bowing his head.

Aunt Tiana, Im here

Please, tell me what you need.

Without warning, Tiana raised her hand and slapped Michael hard

The crisp sound echoed through the office, and a bright red handprint bloomed on his cheek.

Aunt Tiana, what- Michaels voice quivered with fear.

He dared not show the slightest hint of anger or resistance, only terror and confusion.

I slapped you because youre an idiot! Tiana snapped, her tone as cutting as her slap.

The disaster in the Pharmaceutical Division Ive heard it all.

And your handling of it? Youre so pathetic! Even I cant stand it.

Michael stammered, I I was wrong.

Please, Aunt Tiana, guide me

Tell me what I should do! Tianas expression turned even colder.

Track down Ruby and retrieve the stolen formulas if you can.

If not, ensure that shes eliminated permanently.

The employees standing nearby shuddered at her words

Tiana was not just known for her ruthlessness she was infamous for it.

Stories about her were whispered across Jayrodale.

One particularly chilling tale involved her disfiguring a rival heiress in a jealous rage and ultimately having the woman drowned in a well

The scandal had been huge then, yet Tiana remained untouchable and unscathed, continuing her reign as the Rhodes familys matriarch

And as for Troy, Tiana continued nonchalantly, hes finished.

Hes no longer of use to Rhodes Corporation.

Michael nodded hastily.

Youre right, Aunt Tiana.

His gross negligence warrants immediate dismissal.

Tiana shot him a sharp look.

Dismissal ? Do you think Rhodes Corporations reputation can be salvaged by mere firing? No.

Hes going to jail.

This incompetent fool caused immense damage to the company.

If we don't make an example out of him, the Rhodes family's prestige will be tarnished beyond repair. Michael's breath hitched, and he bowed his head low.

Understood

Everything will be done according to your orders.

Inside, Michael was fuming.

Troy had been one of his key players in the Pharmaceutical Division, a trusted ally he had personally placed in a position of power.

With Troy being sent to prison, it felt as though his own left arm had been severed.

Yet, Michael could only grit his teeth and swallow his anger

Troy's reckless actions had doomed him, and no amount of loyalty could undo the mess he had created.

Chapter 538 Tiana scanned the room, her icy gaze sweeping over the high ranking executives, and not one of them dared to meet her eyes

One final matter effective immediately, I'll take over the position of CEO at Rhodes Corporation, she announced, her tone devoid of emotion.

And if there are any more incompetents like Troy causing chaos, I won't just send them to prison.

I'll make sure they're permanently dealt with

Her cold words sent shivers through the room, leaving the executives visibly uneasy.

The ones who had aligned themselves with Michael looked particularly pale, their faces betraying their mounting anxiety.

Tiana stepping in as CEO spelled doom for Michael, and if he lost power, they knew they would suffer alongside him

Michaels expression darkened as he forced himself to speak.

Aunt Tiana, if youre taking over as CEO... then what happens to me? Tiana waved dismissively.

Youll return to your previous role as vice CEO and continue overseeing the departments youve been managing

Once the Pharmaceutical Divisions crisis is resolved, you and Lauren can compete for the CEO position. Michaels fists clenched, and his voice grew sharp.

Aunt Tiana, thats unfair

Tiana did not even flinch at his protest, responding with a chilling calmness.

If you think its unfair, youre welcome to resign and head to Blumedale immediately.

Im sure the family elders there will appreciate your help building connections and expanding into new markets

You always wanted to prove yourself as the future head of the family, didnt you? Beads of sweat began to form on Michaels forehead as he hurriedly backtracked

Oh, Aunt Tiana, you must be joking.

Im far too inexperienced to take on such a significant task in Blumedale

Id rather stay here in Jayrodale and ensure the stability of Rhodes Corporation

Blumedale was a battleground where the Rhodes family struggled to gain a foothold, and Michael had no interest in being sent there as cannon fodder

Stories of young family members collapsing under pressure or worse, ending up in psychiatric wards made it clear that the city was no place for the faint of heart.

Here in Jayrodale, Michael was a big fish in a small pond, but in Blumedale, he would be little more than prey

Tiana turned her attention to the gathered executives her voice cutting through the silence.

I've laid out my decisions

If anyone has objections, now is the time to speak.

A chorus of hurried replies followed, each more deferential than the last: We fully support your decisions, Mrs.

Rhodes! Mrs.

Rhodes, your leadership is exactly what this company needs! Under your guidance, Rhodes

Corporation is sure to reach new heights! Though the words were effusive, Tiana's expression remained cold and unreadable

Her stoicism made it impossible to tell if she appreciated their flattery or found it tiresome

Suddenly, Andrews' voice cut through the air, stark and unexpected.

I have to say, Mrs.

Rhodes, I find your decisions somewhat unfair.

The room fell silent

Every head turned toward Andrew in stunned disbelief.

He continued, unfazed by the shocked stares.

Your actions lack balance.

You fail to reward those who deserve recognition while punishing others far too harshly.

The silence deepened as the room collectively held its breath.

Even Lauren and Michael stared at Andrew in astonishment, unsure whether he was brave or just outright reckless for questioning the matriarch of the Rhodes family.

Chapter 539 Lauren tugged lightly on Andrews sleeve, her voice low and cautious.

Dr.

Lloyd, let it go

She despises anyone questioning her decisions.

Michael let out a mocking laugh, his tone dripping with disdain.

Andrew, youve got some nerve ! Aunt Tiana isnt just the Rhodes familys matriarch; she now holds absolute authority over this corporation.

And you think you can strut in here, questioning her with your puny board member title like its some golden ticket? The other executives quickly joined in, eager to pile on Mr.

Lloyd, it was one thing for you to act high and mighty before, but youre out of line speaking this way to Mrs.

Rhodes.

Clearly, Mr.

Lloyd doesn't grasp Mrs.

Rhodes' power.

Let me enlighten you one word from her, and your precious board position is history.

Mrs.

Rhodes shouldn't waste her time on this clown.

If not for Ms.

Rhodes shielding him, who knows how much trouble he'd have caused by now? Tiana remained calm, her icy demeanor unshaken as her sharp gaze locked onto Andrew.

The head of the family has entrusted me with full control over the Layrodale estate and Rhodes Corporation while they handle matters in Blumedale.

Do you understand what that means, Mr.

Lloyd? Her voice grew colder as she continued

You're the first person bold enough to challenge my authority openly.

Andrew raised an eyebrow, his expression composed.

I wouldn't call it a challenge, Mrs.

Rhodes

Im merely pointing out the flaws and injustices in your decisions.

As a board member or even just an employee I have both the right and the responsibility to speak up when I see something wrong.

Ignoring the growing tension in the room, Andrew went on.

That said, Rhodes Corporation is a family-run business

If youre intent on ruling with an iron fist, disregarding fairness and logic, then theres nothing more to discuss

Tianas lips curled into a frosty smile, her tone laced with sarcasm.

Youre quite the clever one

Are you suggesting Im being unreasonable, throwing my weight around? Andrew did not miss a beat.

I never said that, but if the shoe fits... He gave a casual shrug, his tone calm but pointed.

Michaels patience snapped.

Guards, throw him out! This board member thinks hes above everyone else! The other executives, emboldened by Michael, sneered at Andrew.

This guys really outdone himself now.

Just because hes a board member, he thinks hes someone to question Mrs.

Rhodes does he have a death wish? To them, Andrews days of comfort and safety were clearly numbered.

Even Michael, the companys former CEO and a prominent member of the Rhodes family, had to bow his head and tread lightly in her presence

The truth was that Tianas power did not just come from her position as Mrs. Rhodes.

Her family background carried even more weight

She hailed from the Gabo Creek region, where her family held high ranking status within the infamous Onyx Serpents, one of the top three martial sects in the area

It was said that even the leader of the Onyx Serpents showed her the utmost respect, treating her as an elder of the organization.

Mr.

Lloyds words may have been harsh, Lauren interjected suddenly, her voice steady and firm, but I dont think they warrant any sort of retaliation.

11 She stepped forward, standing directly between Andrew and Tiana.

Her tone was resolute as she said, Lets not forget that Mr.

Lloyd just did the company a massive favor

He uncovered Troys betrayal and prevented further damage to Rhodes Corporation.

Moving against him now would be nothing short of biting the hand that feeds you.

Tiana responded with a cold, humorless chuckle

Oh? It seems youre quite protective of him.

She waved a hand, signaling the rest of the executives to step back, leaving just her, Lauren, and Andrew in the spotlight.

Fixing her sharp gaze on Andrew, she said with an air of calm menace, Rest assured, I wont touch you without a good reason, nor will I make things unnecessarily difficult for you.

But since youve accused me of being unfair, Im genuinely curious to hear what brilliant insights you think you have, Mr.

Lloyd.

Go ahead enlighten me.

Chapter 540 Michael warned through gritted teeth, Andrew, Aunt Tiana is gracious enough to let this slide, but youd better watch your mouth.

The first time might be luck, but the second time? Even if she you, I certainly wont.

spares Andrew glanced at him with a faint smirk and said, Michael, youre no longer the CEO, so stop pretending to be someone important in front of me.

Lets face it, youre just a washed up vice CEO now, only capable of managing a few departments. As a board member, I answer to the company, not you.

Michaels face turned crimson with anger, but he could not find a rebuttal .

Stripped of his CEO title, he no longer had the authority to give Andrew orders.

Ignoring Michaels silent fury, Andrew turned his attention to Tiana and said firmly, Troy made mistakes and deserves to be held accountable.

But throwing him into prison at the drop of a hat makes the Rhodes family seem cold and ruthless.

After years of loyalty, handling him this way feels unnecessarily harsh and vindictive.

Tiana let out a cold chuckle and said, Do you even realize the scale of the damage he caused by leaking three proprietary formulas from the Pharmaceutical Division ? Andrew nodded calmly.

I understand the gravity of the loss perfectly, Mrs.

Rhodes.

However, what I am suggesting is that Troys actions should go through the proper channels of commercial crime procedures.

Using your influence to send him straight to prison feels like an emotional vendetta rather than a measured response.

Tianas eyes narrowed, but after a moment, she replied, Fine.

Lets assume you have a point.

I can consider dealing with Troy with some leniency.

But tell me this what do you mean by accusing me of being unclear in my rewards and punishments? Andrew leaned back slightly and said, Its simple

Troy is one of Michaels people, and now that hes made such a colossal mistake, his career and reputation are in ruins.

But I have to ask when someone below makes a mistake, are we just going to let the person above him walk away unscathed, washing their hands of any responsibility? Michaels face twisted in rage.

Andrew, what are you implying? Are you seriously suggesting that I should be held accountable for what Troy did? Andrews tone hardened as he continued, Troy fell into Rubys trap because of poor judgment, but as his superior, you share the blame for enabling the collaboration.

During the meeting, you fully endorsed Troys partnership with Ruby

Now that disaster has struck, all this proves is that your leadership is incompetent, brainless, and reckless! Michael clenched his fists, his teeth grinding as he barely contained his fury.

Alright, youre great at running your mouth, Ill give you that, he spat.

Butve already been demoted to vice CEO.

Isnt that punishment enough for you? Some of the other executives chimed in to back him up. Thats right Mr

Rhodes has already been stripped of his CEO position.

Surely, thats a sufficient punishment.

Another added, Mrs.

Rhodes has always been known for her fairness.

If this is the judgment shes made, it should be enough.

The elder who Andrew had previously slapped glared at him and said furiously, Mr.

Lloyd, why do you keep harping on Mr.

Rhodes? What are you trying to achieve? Andrew shook his head, his gaze filled with disdain.

He said calmly, Youre all nothing but accomplices, birds of a feather flocking together.

Thats exactly why Rhodes Corporation is in todays mess

Michael and his supporters immediately bristled, ready to hurl insults and accusations at Andrew, their anger boiling over.

However, Tianas icy voice cut through the tension like a blade.

Enough! she commanded.

Let him continue.

I want to hear everything he has to say.

Lets see if he can back up his bold claims with anything worthwhile.