

The Ashes 761

Chapter 761

Lauren's expression immediately fell, and she quickly pulled out her phone to check the news online.

Then, she looked up at Andrew and said, "Dr. Lloyd, it's true-The Wellers' pharmaceutical warehouse was set on fire. Billions worth of supplements have been burned to ashes, and the entire place went up in flames!"

Francesca added, "This is huge! I saw an interview-Harvey is completely losing it. He swore he'd catch the culprit and tear them to pieces!"

With such a juicy scandal, Andrew naturally wanted in on the drama. He grabbed his phone, ready to check out the Wellers' disaster for himself.

However, before he could even open the news, his phone started ringing. It was Donald, the chief commissioner of the Jayrodale Police Department.

Andrew put the call on speaker, and Donald's voice came through immediately. He said, "Mr. Lloyd, I need to give you a heads-up on something. Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division is under investigation for unfair competition.

"The vice CEO, Michael Rhodes, was caught setting fire to the Wellers'

warehouse. Our entire department is on this case now. Every Rhodes Corporation executive and all pharmaceutical division employees are being called in for questioning!"

Since Andrew had his phone on speaker, Lauren, Francesca, and Cedric all heard the announcement.

Francesca was stunned, mumbling, "Wait... Michael started the fire?"

Lauren instantly grasped the severity of the situation and demanded, "Mr. Warren, are you saying Michael set fire to the Wellers' warehouse? Do you have proof?"

Donald sighed. "Not just proof-it's ironclad evidence. Their surveillance cameras caught everything, and the security guards at the entrance saw Michael and four other Rhodes Pharmaceutical executives walking in and setting the place ablaze. "Ms. Rhodes, since you're with Mr. Lloyd, I won't be questioning you for now. But as for the rest of Rhodes Corporation, I have a job to do I need them all at the station."

Lauren's face went pale. She gritted her teeth and cursed, "Michael is such an idiot! Is he trying to take all of Rhodes Corporation down with him?"

She knew this fire had pushed Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division straight to the edge of a cliff, and the situation was beyond dire.

Donald spoke in a grave tone. "Mr. Lloyd, I hope you understand I have no choice. The Wellers have presented solid evidence, so I have to make arrests."

Andrew, however, did not seem

fazed. He replied, "Mr. Warren, do what you need to do. I'm just an ordinary Citizen-I wouldn't dream of interfering with the police. Besides, what Michael did was absolutely unforgivable. Even I can't defend him."

Donald clearly felt relieved and chuckled. "As long as you're not upset, Mr. Lloyd, that's all that matters. I'll leave you to it. Goodbye!"

After hanging up, Andrew turned to Lauren. "Lauren, don't worry. Mr. Warren won't come after you."

Francesca also reassured her, "Lauren, don't stress. This was Michael's doing-it has nothing to do with you."

Even so, Lauren was burning with

frustration. "I don't care what happens to Michael. But Rhodes Pharmaceutical... this is going to put us right at the center of a media firestorm!"

She added, "Arson to destroy a competitor's warehouse-once that label sticks,

who's ever going to trust Rhodes Pharmaceutical again?"

Francesca fell silent, knowing it was a serious problem. After all, Rhodes Pharmaceutical's reputation was about to take a nosedive-possibly even to the point of being shut down entirely.

"Dr. Lloyd, my mind is all over the place right now," Lauren said, her voice tense.

"I need to head back to the company and see what's happening."

Chapter 762

Lauren looked at Andrew and spoke quickly, "I won't be staying at Moonlit Apothecary for now. I'll need you and Mr. Aicker to discuss the endorsements for the two miracle drugs!"

Andrew replied, "If you're heading back, there's no way I'm letting you go alone. Come on, I'll go with

you and check things out."

Lauren hesitated. "But Dr. Lloyd... you know how my mother and Michael feel about you. You really don't have to care about what happens to Rhodes Corporation!"

Andrew sighed. "I don't care about Rhodes Corporation's fate, but I do care about yours-how could I not?"

Lauren's eyes welled up with tears, and she nearly broke down.

Andrew's voice softened. "Come on. No matter what happens, I'll face it with you." Francesca immediately chimed in, "Lauren, Andrew, I'm coming with you!"

Cedric nodded and said, "Dr. Lloyd, you three go ahead and handle things at Rhodes Corporation. As for those two miracle drugs-you mentioned needing endorsers, right? I happen to have the perfect candidate in mind. When you have time, we can pay them a visit together."

Andrew had not expected Cedric to be this efficient, and he chuckled. "That would be ideal. Mr. Aicker, I'll have to leave Moonlit Apothecary in your hands for now."

Cedric laughed heartily. "No trouble at all! We're family-no need for formalities."

Andrew raised an eyebrow, thinking, 'Family? When did I become family with the Aickers?'

Nonetheless, it was not the time to argue over Cedric's wording. Lauren was visibly shaken, and her anxiety over Rhodes Corporation was written all over her face.

Without further delay, Andrew grabbed the keys and rushed off with Lauren and Francesca.

Ten minutes later, the three arrived at the Rhodes Corporation headquarters. To their shock, a massive crowd of reporters had already swarmed the entrance, completely blocking the doors.

Banners were stretched across the

scene, plastered with furious

slogans condemning Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division as heartless criminals

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Some even labeled them as crooked frauds.

Francesca was stunned. "H-How did it get this bad?"

Andrew remained calm. "Michael's fire didn't just destroy a warehouse-it ignited

public

outrage across Jayrodale. And these reporters, along with some of the people here causing a scene, were definitely instigated by someone. If I had to guess, they were sent to fuel the fire and crush Rhodes

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Corporation even further."

Francesca gritted her teeth. "Harvey, or one of our other competitors, must be behind this. They're taking advantage of Rhodes Corporation's crisis and pushing things to the extreme!"

Andrew's expression remained indifferent. "It's the classic 'kick them while they're down' strategy. Nothing new-this has happened throughout history."

Lauren's face was ashen as she tried to push through the crowd, her voice trembling. "I don't care about anything else! Even if the

pharmaceutical division collapses, I couldn't care less! But I need to make sure my mother is okay!"

Andrew's eyes narrowed slightly at her words. It dawned on him that Lauren and Tiana's relationship was not as simple as it seemed.

On the surface, they appeared distant-cold, even. Deep down, they clearly cared about each other more than anyone realized.

Lauren struggled to get through the crowd, but she could not move an inch. The more she tried, the more desperate she became, and soon, tears streamed down her face.

Seeing her distress, Andrew stepped forward, pulling her behind him. He shoved his way through the mob without hesitation, forcing a path open with sheer strength.

"Move aside! If you want to yell, fine, but at least show some basic decency-don't block the entrance!"

Several men who had been cursing Rhodes Corporation suddenly found themselves pushed aside. Furious, they turned around, and without hesitation, one of them swung a fist straight at Andrew.

Chapter 763

Andrew let out a cold scoff and lashed out with a series of rapid kicks. Several of the men who had been hurling accusations at Rhodes Corporation cried out in pain as they collapsed to the ground, clutching their injuries.

At the building's entrance, the police officers stationed to control the scene noticed the commotion and were about to step in.

However, the moment they saw Andrew, their expressions shifted, and they quickly put on polite smiles. "Mr. Lloyd, you're here!"

Andrew nodded. "That's right. Would you mind letting us through?"

The officers immediately stepped aside, more than happy to comply. Andrew grinned. "I'll treat Mr. Warren and you guys to drinks sometime."

The officers beamed, clearly honored, and began thanking him profusely. In Jayrodale, Andrew had become a legend-someone with influence in both high society and the underground. These officers worked under Donald and knew exactly how formidable Andrew

was.

Across the street from Rhodes Corporation, a few luxury cars were parked. Inside a sleek black Mercedes, the window rolled down, revealing Harvey's face, twisted in amusement.

He mocked, "The Rhodes family really is nothing special. All I had to do was let them burn down an empty warehouse, and I turned it right back on them. This victory was way too easy- not even a challenge!"

As he spoke, his smile widened into a full-blown laugh.

"Masterful move," one of the Wellers' elders remarked, nodding approvingly. "We barely lost anything, yet we reported billions in damages. The Rhodes family is getting skinned alive for nothing!"

Another elder frowned slightly. "That guy who just walked in-wasn't that Andrew?"

Harvey's expression darkened. "That bastard had the nerve to lay hands on my men. He's got guts, I'll give him that!"

After a moment, he scoffed. "Let him do whatever he wants. It's just a desperate tantrum from a man who knows he's lost."

Harvey pulled out his phone and made a call, ordering, "Send more people to stir up trouble at Rhodes Corporation. I want the entire company to be reeking of scandal until no one in Jayrodale will ever trust them again!"

The two elders exchanged looks before giving him a thumbs-up. "Seizing the moment to crush them completely-brilliant, Mr. Weller!"

Harvey smirked. "Once Rhodes Corporation falls, the business world in Jayrodale will belong to the Wellers. Even Stevens Corporation will be next. Soon, we'll be the only power left standing!"

Not far from the Wellers' cars, another luxury vehicle had its window rolled down. Inside, Christina sat next to Aspen, both watching the chaos unfold.

"I can't believe Michael pulled such a dumb move," Aspen remarked with a mocking smile. "Setting fire to the competition? Seriously? What an idiot."

Christina spoke coldly. "I've already sent in more reporters and hired people to escalate the scene. This should be more than enough to drown Rhodes Corporation in scandal."

Aspen raised an eyebrow. "Christie, you've changed. You're starting to act like a true power player."

Christina remained indifferent. "You think I've become ruthless and calculating, don't you? But I don't care. Andrew always looked down on me on my family. He thinks I'm beneath him. Fine. I'll prove to him that if he can climb to the top, then so can I. And I'll go even higher than he ever could!"

Aspen clapped her hands and laughed. "Christie, with that ambition, we're going

to take over Jayrodale! Let's go. Rhodes Pharmaceutical is as good as dead!"

Meanwhile, Andrew, Lauren, and

Francesca reached the upper floors

of Rhodes Corporation. As soon as

they stepped out of the elevator, they saw Marcus and several other executives being escorted away by the police.

Marcus pleaded desperately, "Officers, Michael was the one who set the fire-it

had nothing to do with me!"

Chapter 764

Marcus kept trying to explain himself, but it was useless.

One of the officers snapped the cuffs onto his wrists and said, "Mr. Chapman, as the head of Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division, you're under investigation. The authorities are taking this case very seriously-everyone from Rhodes Pharmaceutical is being detained for questioning, so I hope you understand."

Marcus sighed in frustration. He knew there was no way he could talk his way out of this.

Michael had caused an absolute disaster, and everyone at Rhodes Pharmaceutical was being treated like high-risk suspects. A few of Michael's close associates, used to being arrogant, started cursing and resisting the officers.

That did not last long-each of them took a hard baton strike to the stomach, doubling over in pain before getting cuffed and thrown to the floor.

At that moment, Andrew stepped forward. "Officers, Mr. Chapman is one of my people. Can you let him go?"

The officers looked up and immediately straightened. "Mr. Lloyd!"

One of them smiled. "Since you're vouching for him, we can make an exception. Mr. Chapman, you're free to go-for now."

With a click, Marcus's handcuffs were removed. He was stunned. "Mr. Lloyd, you have connections in law enforcement?"

Andrew replied casually, "A little."

Marcus did not believe that for a second. If Andrew could get someone released with just one sentence, that was not 'a little'-that was some serious influence.

Michael's lackeys, seeing Marcus freed, lit up with hope. One by one, they started shouting at Andrew.

"Mr. Lloyd, we're innocent too! Please help us!"

"Mr. Lloyd, I can't go to jail-please, I'm begging you!"

"Sir, you're powerful and generous-have mercy and get them to release us too!"

One of the officers turned to Andrew and asked, "Mr. Lloyd, are these men with you as well?"

Andrew glanced at the ceiling and answered indifferently, "Never seen them before. I can't stand criminals-hurry up and take them away. Honestly, execution wouldn't be a bad idea."

The officers immediately scowled and tightened their grip on the men, shoving them toward the exit.

Michael's associates instantly felt dread washing over them, and their faces fell. Not only had Andrew

refused to save them, but he had et

also thrown them under the bus, labeling them as criminals and even suggesting they be executed.

It was pure psychological warfare.

"Andrew, you heartless bastard! You'll rot in hell for this!"

"We didn't do anything! It was Michael, not us!"

"Andrew, you son of a bitch. I'll never forgive you for this!"

Their furious curses echoed even as they were dragged away.

Francesca covered her mouth, laughing. "Andrew, do you have a personal grudge against them?"

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Of course I do. They've always strutted around with Michael, acting like smug little tyrants. Foday, I finally got my chance. If I don't make them suffer a little, I'd be letting myself down."

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Just then, a commotion erupted as Michael was hauled out in handcuffs. Leading

the arrest was none other than Donald himself.

He sneered. "Mr. Rhodes, claiming you're innocent won't do you any good. We'll

see what the court has to say after a full investigation."

Michael was in complete disarray, his hands cuffed behind his back, his face twisted in rage. Donald, you fat pig! I'm the heir of the Rhodes family! Do you think you can just throw me in jail? The Rhodes family won't let this slide!"

Donald smirked darkly. "You really think you can threaten me? You're nothing but

an arsonist.

With that, he grabbed Michael by the hair and smacked him twice across the face.

Chapter 765

Michael's face was swollen from the blows, but he still snarled, "Donald, just you wait! Mrs. Rhodes is still in the building-once she steps in, let's see who the hell dares to touch me!".

Andrew strolled over, chuckling. "Michael, it's only been half a day, and you've already switched careers?"

Michael gritted his teeth the moment he saw Andrew. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? Are you mocking me?"

Andrew shook his head. "Mock you? No way-I admire you Not everyone can go from being Rhodes Corporation's vice CEO to a convicted felon in less than 24 hours. That takes real talent!"

Michael's expression twisted in fury. "Andrew, don't get cocky! With my influence and connections, even if I get locked up, I won't stay in there for long!"

Andrew smirked. "Wow, listen to yourself-so impressive! So what, that means you can commit arson and still walk free? The law doesn't apply to you?"

Michael sneered. "You're damn right it doesn't. That's what power is-that's what a family name, a legacy, and true influence mean. You, on the other hand, are just some street rat who clawed his way up. You'll never understand what it's like to be born untouchable."

Andrew turned to Donald with a grin. "Mr. Warren, you heard that, right? He just admitted to everything. Full confession-no coercion needed!"

He added, "Sounds to me like you can skip all the unnecessary formalities and send this arsonist straight to trial. No need to waste time!"

Donald let out a chuckle. "Mr. Lloyd, you really are a genius This guy was just swearing up and down that he was innocent and that all the evidence was fake. But the moment you show up, he just hands us a confession on a silver platter. Mr. Lloyd, you're a crime-fighting legend!"

Michael finally realized he had walked straight into Andrew's trap. Fuming, he cursed at Andrew, "Andrew, you son of a bitch. Did you just bait me into confessing?!"

The officers holding him nearly lost their grip as Michael thrashed violently.

His eyes were bloodshot as he lunged at Andrew, roaring, "If I'm going down, I swear I'll take you with me!"

Andrew slapped him so hard that Michael flew backward, crashing onto the floor.

"You're already screwed, yet you still have the nerve to threaten me?" Andrew dusted off his hands. "You sure don't know your place."

Michael scrambled to his feet, his face burning with humiliation. He turned to Donald and barked, "Mr. Warren, he just assaulted me! I'm still a citizen with rights-I demand you arrest him immediately!"

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Donald blinked, looking completely clueless. "Mr. Lloyd hit you? Huh? I didn't see anything."

The other officers shook their heads and chimed in, "Yeah, didn't see anything either!"

"Must've been your imagination, Mr. Rhodes!"

Another said, "Mr. Lloyd is a respected friend of the department-there's no way he'd resort to violence!"

Michael's expression twisted into utter disbelief. His mouth opened and closed as

if he was trying to process what had just happened.

He mumbled, "Y-You..."

He had just taken a full-force slap, his lip was split, and his entire face was throbbing in pain. Yet, these bastards were all acting like it never happened. This was not just a li-it was blatant gaslighting!

At that moment, Tiana emerged from the building, flanked by Jerry and her security team.

Lauren's eyes widened, and she rushed forward. "Mom, are you okay?"

Tiana looked at her daughter with a rare warmth in her eyes. She smiled. "At least, in a moment like this, you still remember to care about me."

Lauren opened her mouth but hesitated, her expression dimming slightly.

Chapter 766

Lauren cared about Tiana, but no matter how much she did her mother still insisted on forcing her into marriage with the Driscoll family. There was no crueler irony in a mother-daughter relationship than this.

The moment Tiana appeared, Michael's eyes lit up with hope. He shouted desperately, "Aunt Tiana, I'm innocent! You have to save me!"

His plea, however, only drew mocking laughter from the crowd. At this point, it was clear-Michael had set fire to the Wellers' warehouse. This was a major felony, and no matter how powerful Tiana was, even she could not cover for him now.

Hence, begging for help was useless.

Andrew thought Tiana likely was about to abandon Michael her puppet, for good. Yet, what happened next shocked everyone.

Tiana turned to Donald and said coldly, "Mr. Warren, Michael is part of the Rhodes family. If you want to take him, you'd better show me absolute, undeniable proof!"

Donald frowned. "Mrs. Rhodes, don't make this difficult for me."

Tiana's voice turned sharp. "No, you are making things difficult for me! Let him go immediately. I will not tolerate you taking one of my own!"

Donald's expression darkened. "Mrs. Rhodes, I know the Rhodes family has immense influence in Jayrodale. But have you considered the consequences? If you openly shield an arsonist, you'll be treated as an accomplice."

Tiana let out a cold laugh. "Do you think I, Tiana Lambert, am someone who can be intimidated? Release him, or I swear, none of you will be leaving this building today!"

Donald's face twitched in fury. If anyone else had dared to threaten him like that, he would have drawn his gun on the spot.

Lauren, Marcus, and the others panicked.

"Mrs. Rhodes, you can't go against the law like this!"

"Yes, please reconsider! Mr. Rhodes is the prime suspect right now. If he's truly innocent, we can appeal later, but this isn't the time to challenge the authorities!"

Even Jerry was taken aback, staring at Tiana in disbelief. "Mrs. Rhodes, no matter how determined you are you can't save him. You should be focusing on the Rhodes family and the company. That's what truly matters."

Tiana's expression remained icy. Her voice dropped to a chilling tone. "Since when did my words stop carrying weight? Have you all forgotten who I am?"

She continued, "I'm making myself clear-no one is taking Michael! If anyone lays a hand on him, they'll be my enemy!"

Lauren stared at Tiana in shock, her eyes welling up with tears. "I rushed here in a panic, terrified that something might have happened to you. I was worried sick about you. But now, you're willing to go to war with the police over an arsonist?"

"Tiana Lambert, have you lost your mind? When did you become

someone who can't even tell right from wrong?" By the time she finished, Lauren was sobbing uncontrollably. For the first time, she

catted her mother by her name, tears streaming down her face,

Tiana's blind devotion to Michael, to the point of losing all reason, was something Lauren could neither

understand nor accept.

Tiana's expression darkened, and she struck Lauren across the face. The slap was brutally heavy, instantly leaving Lauren's cheek red and swollen.

Tiana said coldly. "Listen here-you're just a daughter who will be married off soon-a woman whose future no longer belongs to this family. Michael, on the other hand, is the heir to the Rhodes family.

"He is the future CEO of Rhodes Corporation. I'll never allow anything to happen to him. Even if you had to be sacrificed, I still wouldn't let anything happen to Michael. Do you understand now?"

Each word was like a knife plunging into Lauren's heart.

Chapter 767

Michael threw his head back and let out a cruel, triumphant laugh. He taunted, "Lauren, I told you-you never beat me! Whether it's Aunt Tiana or the entire Rhodes Corporation board, they're all on my side.

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"They favor me because they know I am the future of this company. So what if you and Andrew keep defeating me over and over? At the end of the day, you will always be beneath me!"

A sharp gurgle sounded, and Lauren suddenly coughed up mouthful of blood. The pain in her heart was unbearable-it felt like someone had carved a hole straight through her soul.

She looked at Tiana and let out a hollow, bitter laugh, blood trickling from the corner of her mouth. She whispered, "I see now... you never loved me. You're still the same person-always saying it's for my own good, always pretending to care, but it's all a lie."

Marcus and the others clenched their fists, their eyes burning with fury as they glared at Tiana. What she had just done to Lauren-her own daughter-was beyond cruel.

Francesca's tears had already spilled over. She could not hold back anymore and cried out, "Mrs. Rhodes, Lauren is your daughter-your own flesh and blood! How could you hurt her like this for Michael? Are you really willing to destroy your own child just to protect him?"

Tiana's body tensed, her fingers twitching slightly. No one else noticed, but Andrew did.

Her fists were clenched so tightly that her nails dug into her palms. When she finally spoke, her voice remained cold and emotionless.

"She defies me at every turn and refuses to listen to me. A daughter like that is not worthy of being called mine," she spat.

It was as if she had completely given up on Lauren.

Then, the room gasped as Lauren's body suddenly gave out. She collapsed, crashing to the floor. Even as she lost consciousness, tears continued to stream down her face.

Andrew caught her in time and gently passed her into Francesca's arms.

Francesca sobbed. "Andrew, is she okay? Please, let's get her out of here-I don't want to stay in this place a second longer!"

Andrew's face remained emotionless. "I'll take her away. But first, I have something to do."

Without another word, he turned and walked toward Tiana.

Jerry and the other guards immediately tensed, cold sweat forming on their brows.

Jerry barked, "Andrew, what are you doing?! Stay away from Mrs. Rhodes-don't do anything reckless!"

Even Marcus could feel it-the violent, simmering rage emanating from Andrew. If anything happened to Lauren, there was no question that Andrew would be the first to explode.

Marcus pleaded, "Mr. Lloyd, please-calm down! Mrs. Rhodes is Lauren's mother! If you do anything to her, it'll only put Lauren in a worse position!"

Andrew suddenly stopped three steps away from Tiana. Without hesitation, he lifted his foot-and stomped Michael's head into the ground.

Michael did not even have time to scream. Blood splattered from his mouth as he blacked out on the spot, completely unconscious.

Tiana's pupils shrank, her

expression flickering for the first

time. Her lips curled into a sharp,

almost crazed smile. "Andrew,

you've got guts. Do you really think I

won't end you right now?"

Her heart was racing-faster than it should have been. No one else could tell, but she could feel it.

That instinctive, gut reaction that only surfaced when standing before a true threat. Still, she refused to believe that Marvin's pawn-this so-called 'Andrew Lloyd'-could actually challenge her.

She thought there was simply no way.

Andrew met her gaze, his voice eerily calm as she growled, 'I'll end whoever dares to hurt my woman. don't care what kind of schemes

you're running or what het

you're hiding, Mrs. Rhodes. But listen tome carefully-this is the first and last time I let this slide."

Chapter 768

Andrew said coldly, "If this ever happens again, then you and the Rhodes family will be done!"

Tiana's rage was palpable, but she was not the only one stunned. Everyone around them stared at Andrew in shock, their eyes wide with disbelief.

They could not believe that Andrew had just openly threatened Tiana. Moreover, it was not just her, but all of the Rhodes family.

He did not even try to hide it-this was a blatant, unfiltered warning. The sheer audacity of it was beyond anything anyone had ever seen.

Even Donald felt a shiver crawl down his spine. This was a war between giants, and in a battle like this, bystanders could be crushed just by standing too close.

If Tiana truly decided to attack Andrew, what side could he even take?

Not that it mattered-no matter which side he chose, he was powerless here.

Tiana was from the Lamberts, a name that carried immense weight in Gabo Creek. Additionally, she was also backed by the Rhodes family. With both powerhouses supporting her, Donald would not be able to do anything to her, even with his position as the police chief commissioner.

And Andrew? Donald could not even begin to measure his reach.

Jayrodale's underground ruler, the one who held all the power in the shadows. Connected to Marvin, the wealthiest man in Jayrodale, and Mark, the mayor, and

a network of forces that even Donald did not fully understand.

But more than anything, what terrified Donald the most-was Andrew himself. Donald had known Andrew for some time now, and the deeper he dug, the more one thing became clear.

There was only one way to describe Andrew: unfathomable.

Lauren had only passed out because of emotional distress. Physically, she was not in critical danger, but her spirit had been shattered.

Andrew carried her to the couch in her office, gently lying her down before placing a vitality pill between her lips. That should calm her nerves.

Only after ensuring her condition stabilized did he finally exhale. Then, he turned

to Francesca and said, "Fran, stay here and watch over Lauren."

Francesca nodded but still looked shaken. "What about you, Andrew? I-I was so mad before, but now I

just feel scared. Please don't go n

after Mrs. Rhodes. Even my grandfather fears that woman!"

Andrew scoffed. "Tiana truly lives up to her 'Iron Lady' title. She's ruthless- especially to her own daughter."

He continued, "If she doesn't give me an explanation, then I'll burn Rhodes Corporation to the ground myself."

With that, he turned and left the office. Earlier, he had not backed down from Tiana out of fear. He simply had more urgent matters-Lauren needed him first.

If not for that, he would not have just knocked Michael out he would have personally confronted Tiana then and there.

For as long as he could remember, Tiana had always looked down on him. To her, he was nothing more than a disposable pawn under Marvin's control. Someone unworthy of even being mentioned in the

same breath as the

Driscoll heir from Blumedale,

Andrew never bothered proving himself to her. He had never needed validation he knew exactly who he was.

Tiana's previous attempts to make things difficult for him? He let them go.

Partly out of respect-Tiana, despite her iron grip, was still a woman with principles,

And partly because she was Lauren's mother. Nonetheless, she had crossed a line today.

Not only had she physically struck Lauren, but she had also wounded her so deeply that she collapsed from sheer heartbreak.

Andrew was not the kind of man to let things slide.

Michael was just an obnoxious pest-someone he could easily swat away. However, if anyone dared hurt the woman he cared about, he would make sure they paid-even if that person was Tiana.

Destroying her would not be difficult.

Chapter 769

Before long, Andrew arrived outside Tiana's office. Jerry and his men stood at the door, guarding the entrance. The moment they saw Andrew approaching, they tensed up "Mr. Lloyd, why are you back?" Andrew's voice remained calm. "Move aside. I need to speak with Mrs. Rhodes."

Jerry frowned and took a step forward to block the door. Andrew barely spared him a glance-just one look. Yet, in that instant, Jerry felt like he had been struck by lightning. A wave of cold terror washed over him as if he had just been locked in the sights of a predator.

His entire body froze, and he mumbled, "M-Mr.Lloyd..."

Jerry pointed at Andrew, his heart pounding violently. He had only experienced this feeling once before.

It had come from a grandmaster, a legendary figure in the southern martial arts world. That man's strength had already surpassed the senior grandmaster level ten years ago, and his name alone commanded fear across all of Holtrien

Could it be that Andrew had reached that same level? If so, then this man was not just a monster. He was a monster among monsters.

Jerry gritted his teeth but did not dare step aside. Tiana's orders were absolute, and he could not disobey them.

Fortunately, at that moment, Tiana's voice sounded from the office. "Let him in, Jerry."

Jerry let out a deep breath, instantly relieved. He quickly stepped away, afraid that Andrew would take him out with a single punch if he did not.

Andrew pushed the door open and walked straight inside.

Tiana sat behind her desk, looking exhausted. She forced a tired smile. "Andrew, you're here. Take a seat."

Andrew remained standing. "No need. But Mrs. Rhodes, you look... drained." Tiana was silent for a moment, then suddenly asked, "How is Lauren?" Andrew let out a dry laugh. "Oh? Now you care?"

A flicker of irritation crossed Tiana's eyes, but instead of lashing out, she leaned back in her chair and exhaled slowly.

"I suppose, by now, she must completely resent me," she murmured. "Her hatred and distance from me must have reached their peak."

She let out a bitter chuckle. "Tell me, Andrew-do you see me as a failure? A heartless woman? A mother who would rather strike her own

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daughter than abandon a worthless manike Michael? A cruel, ruthless woman?"

Andrew frowned, studying her carefully. "Mrs. Rhodes, what exactly are you hiding? Why do you insist on protecting Michael? Why are you willing to hurt your own daughter so brutally?"

Tiana let out a long sigh. She said, "I knew it. I can deceive others, but I can't fool you."

She glanced at him and smirked slightly. "To be honest, Andrew, I still don't like you. I hate how you never bow your head to anyone and refuse to acknowledge authority."

She continued, "I hate that even in my presence, you never show an ounce of humility. And more than anything... I hate that you've stolen Lauren's heart from me-over and over again."

Tiana paused, then smiled again-this time, strangely self deprecating. "But even though I hate you," she admitted, "I have to admit, I've started to respect you."

She added, "Even if you are Marvin's pawn, even if you were meant to be nothing more than a weapon in

someone else's game... I can't deny

it-your skills, presence, and sheer

it-your

force are undeniable.

"I've been watching you for some time now, and I can see why Lauren is so drawn

to you. She loves you enough to defy me, to turn her back on our entire family...

all for you."

Tiana let out another hollow laugh. She was not a woman who gave compliments.

If anything, she was harsh, demanding, and relentless.

Howard, Michael-even the younger men in the family had never received an ounce of warmth from her. She had always been critical, always full of harsh words and expectations. When it came to Andrew, her initial instinct had been utter disdain-she had wanted to crush him

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Even Tiana was surprised by herself. She never expected that her view of Andrew had changed so drastically. She hated to admit it, but she had misjudged him-her perspective had been too narrow.

Andrew was not just some reckless upstart. He was exceptional.

Andrew remained calm. "Mrs. Rhodes, I appreciate your compliments but don't need them. What I do need is an explanation. Otherwise, know that I wasn't joking earlier."

Tiana scoffed, her expression darkening. She looked at him coldly and said, "Just because I appreciate you doesn't mean I approve of you. You spoke out of turn earlier, disrespecting me. You even had the audacity to threaten Rhodes Corporation itself."

She asked, "Do you have any idea how close I was to putting you in your place right then and there?"

Andrew smirked. "Well, Mrs. Rhodes, I'd say you were very lucky you didn't. Because if you had, you wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation with me."

Tiana narrowed her eyes. "What are you trying to say?"

Andrew shrugged. "I'm saying you'd be on your knees instead."

Tiana's aura instantly darkened. Suddenly, a wave of cold, murderous intent surged through the room-she was

deadly serious.

Andrew, however, did not flinch. He simply met her gaze, unbothered.

So, the infamous Tiana Lambert, the Iron Lady, had been hiding her true strength

all this time. She was not just powerful-she had crossed the senior grandmaster threshold, putting her on the verge of an elite powerhouse.

That kind of strength made her untouchable in a place like Jayrodale.

Andrew could not think of anyone here who could go toe-to-toe with her. But even so-so what?

Even if he gave her the benefit of the doubt, even if he assumed she was at peak form, he could still wipe the floor with her in under a hundred moves.

And if it was a fight to the death? He would not need nearly that many.

He was certain he could take her down before Jerry and the others even had time to react.

Tiana let out a sharp breath, reigning in her killing intent. She gritted out, "Andrew, I have to say-you have a death wish. You make people itch to cripple you."

Then, she sighed. "Unfortunately, I still need you to clean up this mess. So, I'll let that slide. But this is a one-time thing. I know you've hidden your martial skills well-most people wouldn't even notice."

"But don't fool yourself," she added with a cold chuckle. "No matter how well you hide, in the face of absolute power, you'll still be crushed without mercy."

Andrew let out a light laugh. "Mrs. Rhodes, you really do have sharp eyes. You even noticed that I've been holding back. But I'm afraid you might have miscalculated."

Tiana sneered. "Miscalculated? Do you think that's possible? You young so-called 'geniuses' love this whole playing dumb until the grand reveal nonsense. Joe from the Driscoll family does it. And now you do it too But in my eyes, you're both nothing more than naive children."

Andrew smirked. "Mrs. Rhodes, to think you'd compare me to Joe-I'm honored."

Tiana snorted. "You should be honored. He's the Driscolls' golden boy, a prodigy among elites, Word is, he's already reached peak senior grandmaster level. And you? You're barely in the senior grandmaster tier yourself.

"Sure, that makes you impressive-for a small town like Jayrodale. But here's the thing about people, Andrew, they're like products on a shelf. You might think you're valuable-but the moment you're placed next to something better, you instantly look inferior. And in a side-by-side comparison?

"You might be a prodigy-but Joe? He's a legend. A true,

once-in-a-century genius. Not only does he have the talent, but he also has the Driscoll family backing him-an empire at his disposal. So, no matter how skilled you think you are, standing next to him...you're just a flickering candle in the face of the sun." z