

## The Ashes 781

### Chapter 781

Andrew hesitated for a moment before saying slowly, "The reason I pushed you to improve your skills across the board is because I have other plans. Very soon, you might face a real test against much stronger opponents."

Dylan, completely unfazed, smirked. "Mr. Lloyd, you gave me this life, so whether it's stronger opponents or even Jesus himself, I'll make sure he's running with that cross on his back!"

Natasha, more perceptive than Dylan, narrowed her eyes at Andrew. "Darling, you're not about to tell us you've got enemies, are you?"

Andrew shrugged. "Wouldn't call them enemies, but chances are, there's gonna be a fight."

Natasha chuckled. "In Jayrodale? Please. I doubt there's anyone here who could even try to take you on. The Wellers, the Rhodes—none stand a chance against you. Even Mr. Yates on our side, so who else could you possibly be up against?"

Andrew smiled. "Just because I don't have rivals in Jayrodale doesn't mean I don't have them elsewhere. For example, the Golding and the Driscoll families over in Blumedale."

Natasha and Dylan froze, their expressions tightening before exchanging uneasy glances.

Dylan let out a dry laugh. "Mr. Lloyd, you really don't do easy mode, do you? Damn, I almost pissed myself just now."

Natasha shot Andrew a look. "Darling, do you have some kind of death wish? The Goldings and the Driscolls... Do you even realize how powerful the Goldings and the Driscolls are? Those families are absolute giants in the capital!"

Andrew shrugged. "Of course, I know. That's exactly why I had to toughen you up -otherwise, they'd crush you in a second."

Dylan and Natasha fell silent.

A year ago, just hearing the names "Golding" or "Driscoll" would have been enough to make them back down without a second thought. Nonetheless, things were different now as they had Andrew leading them.

"Whatever you say, I'll follow," Natasha muttered, throwing him a look that carried a mix of frustration and devotion. "My heart and soul already belong to you."

Dylan snickered. "Mr. Lloyd, you might as well give her what she wants. She's been living like a widow all these years, stuck alone in bed every night—it's pretty sad, honestly."

He added, "Now she's given herself to you, and you're still holding out? Even I feel bad for her!"

Andrew rubbed his temple. "Let's get through this mess first."

Just then, his phone buzzed. It was Marcus.

"Mr. Lloyd, the whole company is in complete chaos right now. Mrs. Rhodes is losing her mind and demanding you to fix the situation!" Marcus' voice was filled with urgency.

Andrew's expression remained indifferent. "Even you're siding with her now?"

Marcus sighed. "I don't have a choice. I can't just sit back and watch the Rhodes Corporation's situation worsen."

Andrew let out a cold chuckle. "Michael's supposed to be so capable, isn't he? Tell Mrs. Rhodes to go find him instead."

With that, he ended the call. Andrew was going to save Rhodes

Corporation for Lauren's sake. As for Tiana, she could stew in her frustration a little longer—it was time

to humble that so-called Iron Lady.

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Meanwhile, inside Rhodes Corporation's headquarters, Tiana's furious voice

echoed through the entire building.

"Useless! All of you are absolutely useless! The company spends a fortune keeping you people around! You strut around acting high and mighty, demanding pay raises, but the second a real crisis hits, you're all dead weight!"

She yelled, "Every minute that passes, over a hundred people are dragging our name through the mud online! Find a solution—every single one of you—now!"

She slammed her hands on the table, her breath coming in sharp gasps, her face burning with rage. Dozens of executives, department heads, and senior managers stood before her, heads bowed, too terrified to utter a single word.

## Chapter 782

There was no way around it no one in the room could afford to bear the brunt of Tiana's wrath. Yet, at the same time, there was nothing they could do to fix Rhodes Corporation's current crisis.

Hence, they could only stand there in silence, listening as she vented her fury.

Michael finally lifted his head and could not help but say, "Aunt Tiana, none of us wanted this situation to happen either. Yelling at us won't change anything—we've all done our best!"

Tiana's icy gaze snapped to him, and she let out a sharp laugh. "So, you're saying that Rhodes Corporation should just sit back and wait for its downfall? We should just watch as our reputation and profits continue to spiral until there's nothing left?"

Michael clenched his jaw. "This is obviously the work of someone orchestrating an online smear campaign against us. But I believe if we keep our heads high and stay firm, public opinion will eventually shift, and this whole mess will blow over."

Tiana slammed her hand on the table and roared, "Bullshit! If we had sat around waiting like you suggested, this company would've collapsed in the storm a long time ago!"

The sheer force of her voice sent a visible shudder through the room. Even Michael instinctively shrank back, his shoulders stiffening as a flicker of fear crossed his face.

Soon, that fear turned into anger-burning, humiliated anger. He was sick of Tiana and her domineering ways. Once Bane made his move, he would make sure this arrogant woman was dragged through the dirt where she belonged. By then, Michael doubted Tiana would act as high and mighty anymore.

Tiana suddenly sneered and said, "Michael, my dear nephew, let's not forget that this whole mess started because of you. If you hadn't torched the Wellers' warehouse, none of this would have escalated into such a disaster."

She leaned back in her chair, her smirk deepening. "You've been so eager for me to hand over the CEO position, but your reckless actions are making me reconsider."

Michael's face darkened. "Aunt Tiana, you can't go back on your word! We agreed -whoever saved the Pharmaceutical Division, developed the new formula, and performed best in the company would take over as CEO."

He continued, "I admit, my results didn't turn out as expected, but at least I did something. Lauren, on the other hand, has done absolutely nothing! By all logic, the position should go to me!"

Tiana scoffed. "I keep my word, but right now, you need to clean up the mess you made first."

Michael threw up his hands. "Sorry, Aunt Tiana, but this situation is beyond me."

He was not an idiot. He knew

Rhodes Corporation had become a target, and anyone who tried to step up right now would only get torn apart. So, instead of trying to show off, he played the smart move-he backed down.

Tiana let out a sharp laugh. "So, you're admitting you're useless and incompetent?"

Michael's expression turned dark. "Maybe I am, but Lauren is even worse! The company is in total crisis, yet she's nowhere to be found. She hasn't contributed a damn thing!"

He added, "If you're looking for someone to blame, she should be first on your list!"

Tiana's face twisted in frustration as she turned to Marcus. "Mr. Chapman, what did Andrew say?"

Marcus shook his head. "Mrs. Rhodes, I tried my best, but Mr. Lloyd has no intention of stepping in."

Tiana clenched her teeth. "That bastard is really pushing me to my limit, huh?"

She had already sent Jerry to ask Andrew for help once, and he had outright refused, not giving her even the slightest bit of face. Now, for the second time, he had completely ignored her plea.

Tiana's patience had finally snapped-this time, she was truly furious.

## Chapter 783

Michael felt a deep sense of frustration creeping up and let out a cold laugh. "Aunt Tiana, of all people, Andrew is the last person you should be asking for help. Who does he think he is? Like he could actually save Rhodes Corporation? The moment trouble showed up, he disappeared without a trace!"

Tiana smirked. "Oh? So if Andrew isn't capable, does that mean you are?" Tell you what-if you can contain the media backlash and turn the pharmaceutical division around, I'll make you CEO on the spot. How about that?"

Michael's face darkened immediately. While Tiana made it sound like she was giving him an opportunity, in reality, she was humiliating him in front of everyone.

Her words did not just question his abilities-they made it clear to the entire room that Michael simply was not on Andrew's level.

That was the only reason she could afford to make such an offer.

Michael clenched his teeth. "Fine, Aunt Tiana. I admit, I can't fix this mess. But Andrew? He's even worse-he doesn't deserve the position either!"

Tiana chuckled, her laughter dripping with mockery.

Michael's face flushed with anger-was she really looking down on him that much?

Tiana turned to Marcus. "Mr. Chapman, call Andrew again. This time, I'll speak to him myself."

The entire boardroom fell into stunned silence, wondering if she was personally asking Andrew to come back. No one would have thought they would see the day.

After all, Tiana held the highest authority in Rhodes Corporation, and there was no reason for her to lower herself to plead with a mere board member. With that, they all wondered what was so special about Andrew.

One of the senior executives, an old-timer who had been beaten up by Andrew twice before, immediately spoke up. "Mrs. Rhodes, the company is in trouble, and we should work together to find a solution. But having you personally ask for help? That's unacceptable! It would make all of us look like failures, and worse, it would damage your dignity!"

Another executive quickly chimed in. "Exactly! Mrs. Rhodes, you represent the entire company, and more importantly, you carry the Rhodes family's name. If someone has to ask for help, it should be us, your subordinates."

"That's right! No matter how desperate we are, we can't let you lower yourself to this level. If anyone has to grovel, it should be us!"

As the room erupted with passionate declarations, Tiana's lips curled into a faint smirk.

"Alright then. Since you all agree that it would be humiliating for me to personally ask Andrew... Which one of you will go and invite Mr. Lloyd back to take charge?"

The room that had been buzzing with energy just moments ago suddenly fell dead silent. The executives glanced around at each other, but not a single one volunteered.

They had no problem putting on a show of loyalty for Tiana, but when it came to actually swallowing their pride and asking Andrew for help, not a single one of them had the guts.

After all, many of them had been Andrew's enemies at some point and some had even suffered under

his hand. Asking them to beg

Andrew for help? That was worse

than eating dirt.

Tiana scoffed. "Oh, so all that talk just now was for show? The moment you

actually have to do something, you all

play dead?"

Her patience was wearing dangerously thin. If these idiots were not vital to the company, she would have fired them all on the spot.

Her gaze landed on one particular executive and said, "Mr. Mitchell, you're a senior figure in this

company, respected and

experienced. And just now, you

the first to pledge your loyalty to

me."

were

She added, "Then let's put that loyalty to the test-go and ask Andrew to come back."

Charlie Mitchell's face twisted into an awkward grimace as if he had just swallowed something bitter. "Mrs. Rhodes, y-you see, I'm already

at an advanced age. Asking me to beg some kid for help us-'

Chapter 784

Before Charlie could even finish his sentence, Tiana cut him off coldly. "Right now, what's more important-the company's future or your pride? I don't think I need to spell it out

r you."

Charlie's stomach twisted. He knew there was no way out of this-whether he liked it or not, he had to go through with it.

At Tiana's signal, Marcus dialed Andrew's number again and then handed the phone to Charlie with a polite smile.

Charlie forced out a stiff chuckle. "Mr. Lloyd, it's Charlie Mitchell, one of the senior board members. I was just wondering when do you plan on returning to the company?"

He tried to keep his tone as respectful as possible, swallowing his pride. A second later, Andrew's voice came through, completely indifferent. "Get lost."

The call cut off-no hesitation, no explanation.

Charlie stood there, gripping the phone, his face turning a deep shade of red. "That little bastard! He actually told me to get lost! Me!"

Fuming, he raised the phone, ready to smash it against the ground.



Marcus quickly called out, "Mr. Mitchell, that's my phone! If you break it, you're paying for it!"

Charlie's hand froze in midair, his entire body stiff with rage. Around the room, several people struggled to contain their laughter, their shoulders shaking as they covered their mouths.

Andrew had guts, that was for sure. He did not just ignore Charlie-he had straight-up dismissed him like he was nothing.

Tiana, unfazed, glanced around the room. "Since Mr. Mitchell couldn't bring Mr. Lloyd back, we'll move on. Next -Mr. Olson, head of security, your turn."

The moment she called his name, David Olson's face twisted into something close to despair.

Some executives, especially those on better terms with Andrew, were not too worried. Even if they failed, at least they would not be completely humiliated.

But Michael's lackeys? They were in for hell.

One by one, they dialed.

"Mr. Lloyd, the company really needs you. Could you please come back and take charge?"

"Fuck off."

"Mr. Lloyd, please, don't be upset! This was all just a

misunderstanding. We're all in this

together now, so you can't just abandon us!"

"Who the hell are you? Do I know you? You want me to save you? What are you, my kid? Get lost."

"Mr. Lloyd, we're in a crisis. Instead of holding grudges, shouldn't we all work together? As a board member, how could you be so crude and irresponsible?"

"So what if I'm crude? So what if I don't give a damn? What are you gonna do?"

Bite me? Screw off!"

The calls ended one by one, and

Rhodes Corporation's executives fell

into a suffocating silence.

Frustration, humiliation, and outright

fury spread through the room like wildfire.

"This is outrageous! That bastard actually dares to treat us like this! He owes us an apology!"

"Unbelievable. I've been in business for decades, and never in my life have I been insulted like this. Andrew, you've gone too far!"

"I mean, fine, if he doesn't want to help, whatever! But does he have to go out of his way to humiliate us? Screw him!"

The executives who had been personally cursed out were trembling with rage, barely keeping themselves together.

Meanwhile, Marcus and his team stood quietly off to the side, looking perfectly composed. But deep down? They were enjoying every second of it.

After all, nearly half of Rhodes Corporation's top executives had just been publicly humiliated by Andrew.

And Marcus? He was lucky enough to be excluded from the massacre.

This was history in the making. Not even Tiana or the head of the Rhodes family had ever dared to go this far.

Yet Andrew, a single board member, had just single-handedly torn through the entire company's leadership like it was nothing.

And the worst part? There wasn't a damn thing anyone could do about it.

## Chapter 785

Michael's eyes burned with fury. "Aunt Tiana, I suggest we make Andrew pay for his arrogance and blatant disrespect!"

Tiana nodded without hesitation. "You're right. He's gotten way too full of himself- it's time he faced the consequences. Tell you what-why don't you go over there right now, tie him up, and drag him back here? I'll personally take care of him. Sound good?"

Michael's throat tightened as he stared at her in disbelief. He thought, 'Is she joking? Did she seriously expect me to go up against Andrew in a fight?'

After all, if he could take Andrew down, he would not have needed to rely on Tiana in the first place.

Tiana shot him a condescending look. "If you're not up for the task, then shut up." She turned to Marcus. "Give me the phone. I'll ask Andrew myself."

This time, no one in the room dared to protest. They had all tried-and they had all been humiliated. Now, their only hope was Tiana.

Tiana took the phone and, after a deep breath, spoke in a calm but firm tone. "Mr. Lloyd, name your terms. What will it take for you to come back and fix this mess at Rhodes Corporation?"

Andrew's voice came through the line, light with amusement. "Now, this is a rare moment—Mrs. Rhodes, you're finally asking me for help."

Tiana replied, "Andrew, cut the games. You've had your fun humiliating everyone. Just tell me your conditions."

Andrew chuckled. "It's simple. Just one thing. If you can do it, I'll come back immediately."

"Fine. Whatever it is, I'll make it happen."

"Good. Have Michael bring a team to Moonlit Apothecary and kneel before Lauren, bowing and begging for her mercy. That's my condition."

The line went dead.

Tiana slowly lowered the phone, her face unreadable as she turned to the room full of executives. Her gaze finally landed on Michael.

Michael instantly tensed, his skin crawling under her stare. "Aunt Tiana, why are you looking at me like that?"

Tiana spoke flatly. "Andrew named his terms."

Michael instinctively took a step back. "Well, good for him, but what does that have to do with me?"

Tiana's lips curled. "You really are my dear nephew-so sharp. Yes, Michael. The condition is all about you."

Michael felt his stomach drop. His voice came out dry. "That bastard... what does he want?"

Tiana's expression did not change. "He wants you to go to Moonlit Apothecary, bowing and begging for mercy before Lauren. Only then will he return. So, Michael-don't let me down. Go." en

Michael's mind went blank. It was as if a power drill had just been jammed straight into his skull.

A second later, he exploded. "You want me to kneel and beg him to come back? Aunt Tiana, you can't do this to

me! You just can't! No way! I'd rather die than suffer that kind of humiliation! I will never kneel before him!"

His furious shouts sent a shiver through the rest of the executives.

This was beyond ruthless,

Andrew actually demanded that a direct member of the Rhodes family kneel and beg?

Did he think he was some kind of king?

Marcus' eyelid twitched. He knew Andrew was bold, but this? This was playing with fire.

Tiana's eyes turned ice-cold. "If you won't go, do you expect me to do it?"

Michael opened his mouth, ready to snap that he would not go even if she did. Of course, the words died in his throat.

Right now, Bane had not made his move yet, and he still had a chance to rise. He couldn't afford to cross Tiana completely.

"Mrs. Rhodes, we can send someone else. I'm a Rhodes. The blood that runs in my veins is noble!"

Michael spoke quickly, desperate to

make her reconsider. "If I kneel

before Andrew, it'll disgrace the

entire Rhodes name! This is exactly what he wants-to step on us and humiliate us!"

Tiana remained unmoved. "I don't care about any of that. Right now, no one else can save the company except Andrew, and he specifically wants you to kneel and welcome Lauren back."

She continued, "So, Michael, don't disappoint me. And don't disappoint your father and the family head, watching from Blumedale. You're a Rhodes. You're supposed to be the family's shining star. If anyone is worthy of handling this, it's you."

## Chapter 786

As she spoke, Tiana's expression softened, her tone turning almost coaxing. Seeing the situation, the other executives also jumped in, their voices filled with persuasion.

"Mr. Rhodes, true courage lies in sacrifice for the greater good!"

"Mr. Rhodes, if you bring Mr. Lloyd back, you won't just be saving the company- you'll be a hero of the Rhodes family!"

"It's just bowing and begging for mercy. Think about it-history remembers those who endure humiliation for a greater cause. You'll have the chance to be remembered!"

Michael listened as one voice after another filled the room, each word supposedly well-meaning, yet every sentence stabbing deeper into his pride. Once red with fury, his face turned eerily pale.

These backstabbing bastards had made up their minds and had all collectively decided to throw him under the bus to save themselves.

Being remembered in history? To hell with that! Even with his limited education, he knew that kneeling would only bring him shame for a lifetime. They were sugarcoating it, but in reality, they wanted him to humiliate himself so they could keep their hands clean!

"Say whatever you want, but I will never-

Michael gritted his teeth, determined to make his stance crystal clear. However, before he could finish, his phone

rang.

He glanced at the screen. His father, Kenny, was calling from Blumedale. His stomach tightened, but he still answered. "Dad, what's wrong?"

His

eyes flickered toward Tiana, and he hesitated for a second before putting the phone on speaker.

Kenny's voice came through, rough and angry. "Tell me the truth-things are falling apart at Rhodes Corporation aren't they?"

Michael forced a laugh. "It's not that bad. Just a little setback!"

Kenny's furious roar nearly blew out the speaker. "You useless piece of shit! Do you think you can lie to me? The entire Rhodes family already knows about the disaster unfolding in Jayrodale!"

He shouted, "I don't care what you have to do-you'd better stabilize the company immediately! That's our stronghold in this region, the foundation of our family's power in Blumedale. If you keep dragging it into the gutter, then even if I become the next family head, what's the point of inheriting an empty shell?"

Kenny was beyond livid. His words were sharp, his frustration seething through the phone.

Michael felt a wave of frustration. "Dad, the company is under massive public scrutiny. We're getting attacked from all sides, and I have no way to fix it right now! What do you expect me to do?"

Kenny's voice turned ice cold. "I

don't give a damn what you do-you fix it, or you deal with the

consequences. If this mess ruins my plans in Blumedale, and you end up being the one dragging me down...

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"I swear to God, I'll disown you myself. Hell, I might even have you castrated just to make sure you never produce another disappointment like yourself!"

With that, Kenny slammed the phone down, ending the call with a loud bang.

Michael's face went from pale to utterly lifeless as he realized it was over.

Even his father was pressuring him to clean up this disaster. If he failed, the old man threatened to castrate him. He could not believe his own father would do it.

But the worst part? Michael had no solution, and he had no way out of this.

Did that mean he really had no choice but to follow Tiana's orders and beg Andrew to return?

Tiana's voice cut through his spiraling thoughts. "Michael, that was Kenny on the phone, wasn't it?"

Michael forced a dry chuckle. "Yeah... my dad."

Tiana's lips curved slightly. "Then I assume his message was the same as mine-fixing the company's downfall is the top priority. So, are you ready to offer up your pride for the family?" en

Michael blinked. "Offer up... my pride?"

Tiana's smirk deepened. "That's right-your pride. Andrew doesn't want your life-he just wants you to apologize. So really, there's no need for all this dramatic resistance."

Michael's face darkened like a thundercloud. He clenched his fists, his knuckles turning white.

"Fine!" he finally spat out. "I'll go get him. I'll go pick up that damn bastard myself! Happy now?"



## Chapter 787

At Moonlit Apothecary, Andrew had just returned from the West End headquarters. The moment he stepped inside, he saw Lauren, now awake, sitting up in bed.

Nyla and Francesca were by her side, chatting with her. Nyl greeted him with a smile, "Dr. Lloyd, you're back! Ms. Rhodes is awake!"

Andrew nodded and walked over, lightly touching Lauren's forehead. After checking her temperature, he smiled. "No fever. You still look a little pale, but you'll be fine."

Lauren hesitated before asking, "Dr. Lloyd, what's happening with the company right now?"

Francesca huffed in frustration. "Lauren, look at yourself! You're still recovering, and you're already worrying about Rhodes Corporation? Mrs. Rhodes and Michael can handle it you don't have to keep pushing yourself!" Lauren shook her head. "It's not about them. I'm worried about my father's position in Blumedale. Right now, a huge portion of our family's operations over there rely on Rhodes Corporation. If the company collapses, Dad will lose his foothold entirely!"

Cedric nodded. "She's right. Rhodes family was ambitious enough to expand beyond Jayrodale and establish itself in Blumedale-something neither the Aickers nor the Wellers could pull off.

"But if it starts to crumble, then everything Jameson had built in Blumedale could fall apart before he even has a chance to establish real power."

Andrew gave Lauren's hand a reassuring pat. "Don't worry. Rhodes Corporation isn't going down. I'll step in and stabilize everything. And while I'm at it, I'll make sure you become the CEO."

Lauren's expression dimmed. "I doubt it... Mom has probably chosen Michael's side completely by now. She doesn't want me there."

Andrew's gaze softened-he could tell how deeply hurt she was. Lauren had completely lost faith in her mother, but Tiana had her own burdens to bear. In the end, both mother and daughter were trapped in painful circumstances.

"Whether Tiana supports you or not doesn't matter," Andrew said casually. "The deal was clear-whoever saves Rhodes Corporation earns the right to be CEO."

He smiled. "Silly girl, haven't you realized it yet? I already told Michael to come pick you up."

Lauren's eyes widened. "Wait... Dr. Lloyd, what did you just say? You told Michael to come pick me up?"

Andrew nodded. "That's right. And not just that-he's going to kneel and bow while begging you to come back."

Lauren stared at him, completely speechless.

Francesca and Cedric, sitting nearby, were just as stunned.

Francesca let out a sharp laugh. "Andrew, you expect Michael to beg for her forgiveness? You might as well say you've already killed him!"

Cedric frowned. "That guy is just like his father Kenny-arrogant, entitled, and full of himself. Asking him to get down on his knees? Impossible. No, scratch that-it's beyond

impossible."

Andrew leaned back in his chair, his expression unreadable. "Well... we'll find out soon enough."

Then, as if he did not have a care in

the world, he casually poured

himself a cup of tea and sipped it.

He even started chatting with Nyla like nothing was happening.

Lauren, Francesca, and Cedric exchanged uneasy glances, wondering if he was being serious. Did he really expect Michael to show up and beg for Lauren's forgiveness?

Their doubts did not last long.

Moments later, several cars pulled up outside Moonlit Apothecary. The doors swung open, and Michael stepped out, leading over a dozen executives toward the entrance. Francesca's jaw dropped. "No way. No freaking way. Andrew, you're amazing-Michael really showed up!"

Lauren frowned, her instincts kicking in. "Be careful. He brought a lot of people

with him... This might not be as simple as it seems."

## Chapter 788

Andrew stood up and said calmly, "If he dares to come with bad intentions, then I'll make sure he never leaves."

Michael led the way, forcing a smile. "Andrew, Lauren, I'm here to take you both back to the company."

Andrew raised a hand. "Hold it right there. Moonlit Apothecary doesn't let stray dogs just wander in."

Michael's smile froze instantly, his expression darkening. Andrew, don't push it too far."

Behind him, the group of executives also looked uncomfortable. The first thing Andrew did was put him in his place this guy really had no shame.

Andrew tilted his head. "What? Do you think calling you a dog is too much? Look at your attitude- does this look like you're here to ask someone for help? Get on your knees before you speak to me."

Michael's temple throbbed with rage. "Andrew, I already came here in person. That should be enough. If you push things too far, it won't end well for anyone!"

Andrew chuckled. "Oh no, I'm not pushing anything-I'm simply stating the terms. Kneel and talk, or turn around and leave. Your choice."

Michael clenched his fists, his whole body shaking with anger. He turned on his heel, ready to storm off.

However, before he could take a step, the executives behind him quickly grabbed him.

"Mr. Rhodes, we came all this way-don't waste the trip!"

"You already agreed to this with Mrs. Rhodes. If you go back empty-handed, what are you going to tell her?"

"It's just kneeling-what's the big deal? Once you've done it a few times, you'll get used to it!"

Michael was about ready to murder someone. He cursed at the executives for being a bunch of bastards. It was not them being forced to kneel, so of course, they had no problem saying all this nonsense!

Telling him he would get used to it was ridiculous. He could not help but wonder why the hell they hired these kinds of people for Rhodes Corporation.

At that moment, Lauren, with Francesca supporting her, stepped to the entrance. "Michael, what kind of game are you playing?"

She still did not believe he was actually here to take her back. Yet, before she could even process what was happening, Michael did something unthinkable-he dropped to his knees.

Lauren and Francesca froze in shock, their eyes wide with disbelief.

Michael clenched his jaw, his voice low and bitter. "Lauren... Andrew... on behalf of Rhodes Corporation, I ask you to return."

His voice dripped with humiliation. Every word felt like it was being ripped out of his throat.

Francesca's mouth hung open as she turned to Andrew. "H-He actually knelt?"

Andrew crossed his arms, leaning against the doorframe, enjoying the spectacle. "Kneeling isn't enough, though. Mr. Rhodes, what's with that stiff posture?"

Michael's eyes burned red, his entire body trembling with fury. "Andrew, I'm already kneeling. Do you really have to humiliate me this much?"

Andrew shrugged. "I didn't ask for just kneeling-I asked for bowing and begging for mercy. You look like a stiff

corpse down there-who's supposed to believe you're sincere?"

Michael's face twisted in rage, his body tensing. He could not take it anymore he had enough. Kneeling before the two people he swore he would destroy was already breaking him.

Yet, he was asked to beg? He had never even shown such a level of respect for his own elders.

The executives noticed his resistance and immediately pushed him down.

Michael roared in fury. "What the hell are you doing?! Let go of me! Do you want to die?!"

Pinned to the ground, he struggled violently, but his subordinates held him down. He was in disbelief that they were seriously forcing him into this.

"Mr. Rhodes, you've already knelt. If you back out now, all that humiliation was for nothing!"

"Exactly, Mr Rhodes! It's like... once

you sleep with someone, you're already there-whether it's once or ten times doesn't make a difference! You might as well see it through!" 1

"Mr. Lloyd, please watch closely! Mr. Rhodes is about to offer you his grand

apology!"

"I'm sorry!" Michael shouted as he bowed.

"I'm sorry!" His hands curled into fists as his body shook with rage.

"I'm sorry!" The moment his forehead touched the ground for the third time, the

entire place fell silent. 2

## Chapter 789

Michael roared in fury, thrashing violently as the group of executives pinned him down. Like a pack of butchers restraining a wild hog, they forced him into a deep bow.

One by one, they followed suit, completing the bowing and begging for mercy.

Michael's forehead slammed into the floor with each bow, the impact echoing through the room. Within moments, his forehead was red and swollen.

Lauren and Francesca stood frozen, staring in utter disbelief. Seeing Michael, of all people, humiliated like this felt almost surreal.

Lauren finally turned to Andrew. "Dr. Lloyd, was this your doing?"

Andrew replied calmly, "How could I possibly arrange something like this? Mr. Rhodes simply had a change of heart. He realized he owed you an apology, so he's making amends in the most respectful way possible-by personally inviting you back to take charge."

Lauren narrowed her eyes at Michael. "Is that really what you're thinking?"

Michael's lips trembled as he held back tears. "Y-Yeah... That's exactly what I'm thinking!"

At this point, he would go along with whatever Andrew said. It was like being force-fed humiliation-since he could not resist, he might as well swallow it whole and endure it.

Deep in his heart, though, Michael vowed-one day, he would make Andrew pay for this.

Lauren took a deep breath. "I don't care why you're doing this, and I don't care what your real intentions are. I was never planning on abandoning the company anyway."

Andrew arched a brow at Michael and snapped, "Didn't you hear that? Ms. Rhodes is ready to return. Well, what are you waiting for, Michael? Go get the car ready!"

Michael gritted his teeth. "You have a car. We don't have enough room for you."

Andrew smirked. "Oh, I have a car. But that's my car. Lauren and I are returning for official business, so we'll be taking a company vehicle. You're not telling me you don't understand basic protocol, are you?"

Michael's face twitched violently as he cursed at the shameless, petty bastard. If he wanted to leech off the company's resources, he should just say so why act all high and mighty about it?

With no choice, Michael begrudgingly arranged a Rhodes Corporation car for them.

Andrew and Lauren boarded without another word, and as the vehicle pulled away, Moonlit Apothecary fell into an odd silence.

Francesca and Cedric exchanged glances, both savoring the moment.

"Mrs. Rhodes actually bowed her head to Dr. Lloyd," Francesca murmured. "Honestly, I never thought I'd see the day. It feels..... satisfying."

Cedric laughed heartily. "And Michael? Coming all the way here just to kneel and beg? That was definitely Andrew's doing. This kid is getting more cunning by the day!"

Cedric then turned to Francesca, giving her a knowing look. "By the way, you're

not going back to the Aicker residence tonight."

Francesca frowned. "Huh? Why not? I haven't moved out yet-what's wrong with staying at home?"

Cedric's tone left no room for argument. "I don't care. You're staying at Moonlit Sanctuary tonight. Where exactly? That's up to you. But the Aicker residence is undergoing renovations—the air is full of chemicals and toxic fumes. You shouldn't be anywhere near it."

Francesca's face flushed bright red. She glared at Cedric and snapped, "You dirty old man!"

Cedric smirked. "You love the idea, but you're just pretending to be embarrassed. Not bad, kid. That performance? Award-worthy."

Francesca's frustration boiled over. "Grandpa, I hope you live a long, long life-so I can torment you forever!"

...

Meanwhile, Rhodes Corporation's situation was spiraling. With negative press mounting by the day, the company's reputation was hanging by a thread.

In the age of social media, a bad

public image was not just a setback—it was a death sentence. By the time Andrew and Lauren arrived at the company headquarters, they were

over

immediately surrounded.

At the front of the crowd stood Tiana, Rhodes Corporation's First Lady. Behind her

were executives, managers, and countless employees.

Everyone was desperate-if the company collapsed, they all had something to lose. They had been waiting, hoping, and praying for Andrew and Lauren to return.



"Mr. Lloyd, you have to come up with a plan!"

"Mr. Lloyd, the entire company is depending on you and Ms. Rhodes!"

Several senior executives swallowed their pride, looking at Andrew with pleading eyes.

Yet, Andrew ignored them. What happened next would depend entirely on Lauren.

## Chapter 790

If Lauren was not willing, then Rhodes Corporation could crash and burn, and

Andrew would not spare it another glance.

Tiana hesitated before stepping forward. "Lauren, are you alright?"

There was a flicker of guilt in her eyes—pain and regret flashing for just a

moment. She was still tormented by the fact that she had slapped Lauren, and no matter how much time passed, she could not shake the guilt.

However, this kind of pain-Tiana could not bring herself to express it.

Lauren's face remained emotionless. "Why the act, Mrs. Rhodes? Do you actually care whether I'm fine or not? "Would it really matter to you?"

Tiana was at a loss for words.

Andrew, sensing the tension between the mother and daughter, cut in. "Mrs. Rhodes, we can take over this mess. But there's one condition-you need to step back and give up control."

Tiana quickly nodded. "As long as you can clean this up, you can run the company however you want!"

Andrew's tone sharpened. "I don't just need everyone else to cooperate-I need you to follow orders too."

Tiana's expression stiffened. "Even I have to follow your orders?"

Andrew met her gaze head-on. "Of course. Because I don't like people hovering over my shoulder, second-guessing my decisions."

Tiana hesitated for a moment before letting out a cold scoff. "Fine. If you can actually prove you have what it takes, I'll do as you say."

Andrew smiled. "Mrs. Rhodes, you're quite reasonable I admire that. In that case, here's your first task."

Tiana raised an eyebrow, amused. "Mr. Lloyd, you don't waste time, do you? Giving me assignments already? Alright, let's hear it!"

Andrew smirked. "Your assignment is simple-do nothing. In other words, for everything that happens from this moment on, stay out of it. Go get a facial, do some shopping, or go home and get some beauty sleep."

Tiana's expression darkened instantly. "Andrew, you're trying to sideline me."

Andrew remained indifferent. "If that's how you see it, I won't argue."

The only person who could save Rhodes Corporation was Lauren, and as long as Tiana was around, she would interfere.

Lauren's biggest emotional roadblock was her mother, so Tiana had to go.

Tiana clenched her jaw. "Fine. I'll step back this time."

"But Andrew-if you fail and the company collapses, I hope you understand what the consequences will be."

Andrew shrugged. "If that happens, Mrs. Rhodes, you can do whatever you want. I really don't care."

Tiana let out a cold snort and walked away with her people.

The moment she left, Marcus beamed. "Mr. Lloyd, Ms. Rhodes-what's the plan? We're waiting on your orders!"

One of the senior executives, clearly anxious, chimed in, "Every minute we waste, the company's image and

losses are getting worse! If this continues, we'll lose half of our assets-maybe more!"

Andrew chuckled. "Lauren, you're the CEO now-it's all up to you."

Lauren's face flushed. "I-I'm not the CEO, Dr. Lloyd! You're joking, right?"

Andrew shook his head. "I'm not joking. Right now, the power is in your hands. You may not hold the

title, but you're in complete control. So, you decide what happens next."

Lauren was not the type to hesitate when things needed to be done. She took a deep breath, straightened her posture, and scanned the room.

"First, the Marketing Department and PR Department-I need both of you to work together and compile a full report on our losses and negative

press. I want everything-not a

single detail can be missed!"

Marcus nodded approvingly. "Good. If we can identify the exact damage, we can start finding solutions!"

The head of Marketing immediately responded, "Understood! We'll get started right away!"

However, the head of the public relations department was one of Michael's people, and he hesitated. His eyes darted to Michael, waiting for a signal.

Seeing Michael's dark, irritated expression, he instantly knew what to do.

"Apologies, Ms. Rhodes," he said smoothly, "but the PR department can't comply with your request."