

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

1546-1550

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"Mr. Lloyd, wait for me!" Chantelle shouted from behind.

Andrew cursed loudly, "Are you crazy? Why did you follow me?"

Despite his harsh words, he slowed down slightly to let Chantelle catch up. The passage was not particularly long, and after running about 300 feet, they could see the end ahead.

Andrew made a split-second decision, grabbing Chantelle and ducking into a side chamber. Like the previous chambers they had seen, this one also contained coffins, and one of them happened to have its lid open.

Andrew wrapped his arms around Chantelle and leaped into the coffin. Then, he reached back and swiftly pulled the stone lid shut.

Outside, they heard a loud crash followed by gunshots. Andrew did not need to think twice to know that Kevin was battling the Night Hag, but the commotion lasted only a moment before falling silent.

"Is Mr. Wright Senior dead?" Chantelle whispered.

Andrew shook his head, indicating he did not know either.

The stone coffin had a musty smell, but thankfully, there were no other strange odors. Both of them held their breath, listening intently for any sounds from outside.

Time crawled by slowly, and the outside remained eerily quiet.

Andrew had long since discarded his torch, but fortunately, his phone's backlight provided just enough illumination for their cramped space.

"Ms. Garcia, you're really heavy!" Andrew complained.

Chantelle's face was pale, though it was unclear whether from fear or her usual complexion. "Just deal with it. Once that monster leaves, I'll get out! And for your information, I'm not heavy-I only weigh 110 pounds, thank you very much!"

She was lying on top of Andrew, who was flat on his back inside the coffin. The two were face-to-face, close enough to feel each other's breath in the phone's dim glow.

One minute passed, then two. After half an hour, Andrew finally spoke quietly, "That Night Hag should be gone by now. Ms. Garcia, why don't you push open the coffin lid and take a look outside?"

Chantelle gritted her teeth and refused, "I'm not looking! If you want to check, you do it!"

She could not believe he was asking her to go out and risk her life.

Did Andrew not realize that she was genuinely terrified of ghosts?

Andrew replied helplessly, "I'd love to go look, but you're pinning me down. I can't get up!"

Chantelle was speechless at his logic.

Another half hour passed, and Andrew's attention remained focused on listening for outside sounds. Indeed, he could not detect any movement whatsoever.

"Get up. We can't stay in this coffin forever," he urged.

Chantelle remained reluctant, saying, "If you want to get up, you get up. I'd rather stay in this coffin than face that horrible thing!"

Andrew grew impatient. "You don't want to face that creature, but are you willing to face the owner of this coffin?"

Chantelle froze. Then, she began trembling as realization hit her. "You're right— this coffin was empty when we got in. It couldn't be that... that..."

Andrew smiled grimly and said, "Exactly what you're thinking. If we stay much longer, a Blood Ghoul might just crawl in here with us!"

Chantelle's scalp prickled with terror, and she immediately tried to sit up. However, in her haste, she smacked her head directly against the stone lid, nearly bringing tears to her eyes from the pain.

"Mr. Lloyd, you bastard! This is all your fault!" she accused resentfully.

Andrew sneered back, "You're

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seriously blaming me for your own

clumsiness? Ms. Garcia, your performance on this treasure hunt

has been seriously below standard."

Chantelle knew that her performance on this trip was far from satisfactory.

"Don't get cocky, Mr. Lloyd! We

haven't found the treasure yet, and

I'm the one with official credentials

here. If you don't protect me properly, you'll be the one who suffers in the end." '

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Andrew did not deny it, saying, "You're right. It's precisely because of your official status that I've been looking out for you this whole time because of your official status."

Chantelle frowned and complained, "What's that thing poking into me from below?"

Andrew's face turned red as he stammered, "I-It's nothing! Let's get up-we can't stay cramped in here forever."

"Wait, let me see what's been jabbing me this whole time," Chantelle said, reaching down to grab Andrew's manhood.

"Mr. Lloyd, you're shameless, perverted, and disgusting!" she shouted, her face flushing as she pushed open the coffin lid and quickly climbed out.

Even if the Night Hag was outside, she could not care less anymore. This guy had actually gotten aroused while she was on top of him, which made her feel utterly humiliated.

Despite the danger outside and everyone being so tense, he could still get hard— what a perverted creep.

Andrew followed suit and climbed out of the coffin, feeling genuinely helpless about the whole situation.

After all, it was a man and a woman alone together in very close proximity. Most importantly, despite Chantelle's cold personality, she had an incredible figure that rivaled even Francesca's.

Her two large assets had been pressed against his chest while her entire body lay on top of him. With all that friction and movement, Andrew's natural reaction was completely beyond his control.

"Mr. Lloyd, I hope what just happened was a one-time thing and never happens again!" Chantelle warned him sternly.

Andrew shrugged and replied, "Even if you wanted a second time, I wouldn't be interested."

"You..." Ms. Garcia was nearly speechless with rage.

Andrew peeked out of the chamber toward the passage outside. The corridor was eerily quiet and pitch black, with no sign of the Night Hag for the moment. He no longer had a torch, though he still carried a flashlight.

However, Andrew did not dare turn it on easily, as bright light would likely attract the Night Hag's attention. He gestured for Chantelle to follow him as he used his phone's weak

backlight to feel his way toward the passage exit.

Just as they neared the entrance, his hand suddenly touched a mass of hair. At first, Andrew thought it belonged to Chantelle, but when he turned around, he saw a large clump of hair hanging between them as well.

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Chantelle covered her mouth tightly to prevent herself from screaming while pointing frantically upward. Andrew did not need her signal to understand the situation—he slowly looked up to see a grotesque face with no pupils and a twisted neck hanging less than three feet above their heads.

Andrew's eyes widened in shock, but he made no sound. After carefully avoiding the dangling hair, he led Chantelle back into the passage.

This Night Hag was clever, having blocked the passage exit completely. Escape was impossible now that its hanging hair had sealed off the corridor entrance, and any significant movement would cause the creature to attack immediately.

"What do we do?" Chantelle whispered once they returned to the chamber. Andrew pondered for a moment before shaking his head, indicating he had no good solution for now.

The two stood there helplessly, unsure of their next move.

Chantelle gradually became restless, occasionally glancing toward the passage entrance, where the Night Hag remained hidden above, its hair still blocking their escape route.

Just as Andrew was about to tell her to stop fidgeting, a crack echoed through the chamber. The lid of another stone coffin beside the one they had hidden in began to open slowly, and a blood-covered hand emerged from within.

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Chantelle's mouth opened wide as she was about to scream. Fortunately, Andrew reacted quickly and covered her mouth with his hand while drawing his hunting knife to watch the slowly opening coffin lid.

The owner of the bloody hand stood up with a pained expression, muttering, "Damn it! I swear I'm going to kill that monster."

Both of them breathed a sigh of relief as they watched Kevin climb out of the coffin.

Andrew looked at him suspiciously and asked, "Are you injured?"

Kevin's face was grim as he replied, "That monster took two clips from me, and I nearly lost an arm. Luckily, I learned from you and hid in a coffin, which saved my life."

"Kevin, you're pretty quick-witted," Andrew said with a smile.

Kevin snarled back, "Cut the crap, Andrew! The Wright family hasn't gained anything on this treasure hunt, and we've lost more than half our people. Now you're going to figure out a way to get me into that tomb chamber, or I'll blow your brains out!"

Then, he pressed his Desert Eagle directly against Andrew's head with a vicious expression.

Chantelle angrily protested, "Mr. Wright Senior, what's gotten into you? There's an evil spirit right outside! If you fire that gun and attract the Night Hag, you'll die too."

Kevin replied menacingly, "Screw that! If this guy doesn't follow my orders, I'll kill him first and then escape on my own. The Wright family can withdraw from this treasure hunt if necessary, but Andrew, you're going to die!"

With a sharp crack, Andrew slapped the Desert Eagle right out of Kevin's hand.

Kevin could not believe it. "Are you really not afraid to die?"

Andrew stepped forward two paces, getting right in Kevin's face with ice-cold eyes. "Kevin, if you've got the guts, shoot me right now! I

if you pull that trigger. And I

guarantee you'll be the one who dies

the

Wright family's deaths have

absolutely nothing to do with me! Your incompetent rage is just showing that you're responsible for all the casualties your family has suffered."

Kevin's face contorted with intense hatred. He walked over to pick up his gun but

did not dare point it at Andrew again.

"Fine, I won't settle my beef with you

right now since that beast is still lurking outside. So what do you think we should do?" He asked through

gritted teeth while treating the

wound on his arm.

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Fortunately, his combat skills were decent enough to escape from the Night Hag's claws.

"There's no way out. Death is our only ending," Andrew stated coldly.

Kevin was stunned and turned to Chantelle. "Ms. Garcia, make him think of something. He's the only one here who knows anything about tomb raiding."

Chantelle looked troubled. "Mr. Lloyd, please try to find a way to locate the others first. We've been separated for so long-aren't you worried about them?"

"I drew the Night Hag over here, so they should be safe as long as they don't run around carelessly. So, there's nothing for me to worry about," Andrew replied calmly.

Chantelle was speechless. "What about yourself? Are you just going to wait here to die?"

Andrew sneered and said, "If I were

alone, escaping would be incredibly

easy. The only problem is that you

are a deadweight. So once you two leave, I'll naturally have my own way to get out."

Chantelle became furious with embarrassment. "Mr. Lloyd, are you trying to abandon me?"

Andrew replied coldly, "You've basically ignored everything I've said this whole trip and opposed me at every turn!"

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"Chantelle, you're absolutely right-I do want to abandon you right now," Andrew said bluntly. "A disobedient person who's also arrogant and stupid has no use except being a burden."

Chantelle felt utterly insulted, but she did not dare argue with Andrew. In this underground tomb, she would be completely helpless on her own and would likely be scared to death or killed by various monsters if she were not careful.

Therefore, Andrew was truly her lifeline at this moment. "Fine, I'll listen to you and stop opposing you from now on. I'll do whatever you say, okay?"

She stomped her foot hard in frustration as she finally submitted.

Andrew nodded with satisfaction and suddenly said, "Very good. Now let's work together to kill Kevin first."

Chantelle was stunned. "What did you say?"

Kevin also looked shocked and pleaded, "Andy, buddy, Ms. Garcia, you can't be serious! One more person means one more way out. Killing me won't benefit you at all."

The man who had just been pointing a gun at Andrew had suddenly become a coward.

With two people ganging up on him, Kevin really did not stand a chance. Plus,

with that creature outside, he did not want to cause too much commotion since he might escape Andrew's hands only to die under the monster's claws.

Andrew snatched the Desert Eagle from his hands. "Hand it over! If you don't want to die, then cooperate obediently."

Kevin was furious but did not dare speak up.

Andrew barely glanced at him as he peered outside for a moment before stepping out, with Chantelle quickly following and Kevin bringing up the rear. This time, he did not try to sneak past the Night Hag-that was unrealistic.

Instead, he felt his way toward the end of the passage, having noticed during their earlier escape that the corridor was not very long.

Sure enough, when they reached the end, a passage turning left appeared before them.

Chantelle exclaimed with delight, "There's another route here!"

Andrew glanced at her and explained, "Having another path is perfectly normal. Passages in ancient tombs are rarely sealed off completely, just like the passage we came down from Gallow's End."

Ancient people were very particular when building tombs, especially regarding geomancy principles that

emphasized openness rather than

closure. This was particularly important in tomb passages, and

unless there were or

the tomb owner did not follow conventional practices, passages would not be sealed.

Of course, the opposite of openness was closure-the concept of balance meant

that where there was openness, there must also be closure.

If all passages in a tomb were connected, then the entire tomb had to be completely sealed off from the outside world.

Andrew understood these basic geomancy principles, but his knowledge did not extend deeper.

This reminded him of Magnus, who had dared to enter this underground tomb alone. Andrew could not help but wonder if the old man was still alive.

After walking along the current passage for several minutes, Andrew heard the sound of rushing water.

"It sounds like water!" Chantelle observed.

Andrew said nothing but continued forward a few more steps until they reached the passage exit, where the sound became much louder. It was indeed the sound of flowing water, and ahead they could see faint lights flickering in purple and red hues, creating an eerie atmosphere.

At the same time, a wave of heat washed over them. All three unconsciously quickened their pace, they needed to get out and see for themselves whatever lay ahead. They had been trapped in the passage for too long with the Night Hag lurking behind them, and they could not stand it anymore.

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Stepping out of the passage, they found themselves on a narrow stone walkway. Above them stretched a massive natural cave with water dripping steadily from the ceiling, while the strange, multicolored lights reflected off the cave's rock formations, creating an unexpectedly beautiful sight.

The rushing sound of water came from beneath their feet. When Andrew peered down, he spotted a substantial underground river flowing rapidly below them.

Shining his flashlight downward, he saw steam rising from the water's surface, making it impossible to determine the depth. He could estimate that the river was about 15 feet wide—a fairly large underground waterway.

"There's such a strong sulfur smell! This river water must be from a natural hot spring—I'd love to take a dip!" Chantelle exclaimed, her feminine nature showing as she smiled at the sight of water.

Andrew shook his head and warned, "Underground river water has very complex chemical compositions. There might be toxic substances in it, so forget about hot spring bathing, and let's keep moving."

"Should we go left or right?" Kevin asked.

Andrew examined both directions the right walkway extended downstream along the dark river to an unknown destination, while the left path led upstream.

"Left," he decided immediately and started walking in that direction.

"Mr. Lloyd, why are we going left?" Chantelle inquired.

Andrew rolled his eyes and replied, "If I had chosen right, would you have asked why we're going right?"

Chantelle laughed despite her annoyance and said, "You're absolutely right—I just want to know the reasoning."

This time, Andrew did not mock her and explained, "For safety reasons, the tomb chamber would only be located upstream from the dark river. If it were downstream, it could be eroded or even flooded by the flowing water—it's that simple."

Chantelle reluctantly offered a compliment: "You know quite a lot."

"More than you do!" Andrew replied without mercy.

Chantelle was frustrated but could not think of a comeback. Kevin grew impatient and said, "Hurry up, you two! If you're going to flirt, pick a better time and place!"

Chantelle's face instantly turned red as she retorted coldly, "Mr. Wright Senior, please watch your language!"

Kevin snorted and continued, "Did I say something wrong? Ms. Garcia, haven't you noticed how agitated you become around Andrew?"

"You used to be famous for being frigid when you worked with Governor McCormick, but look at how ruffled you're now. I'm starting to wonder if Andy has gotten under your skin in more ways than one."

"Mr. Wright Senior, you're disgusting!" Chantelle shouted in shame and anger.

Kevin chuckled and said, "Just kidding! You know me, Ms. Garcia. This treasure hunt has everyone under a lot of stress, so I'm just trying to lighten the mood."

As they continued upstream, Andrew realized this underground river was surprisingly long. He estimated that if they kept walking, they would probably emerge beyond the mountains behind Gallow's End village, meaning they were now deep underground below the mountain range.

Ever since entering this underground world, everything had been dark. Combined with constantly running for their lives or facing dangerous situations, Andrew had completely lost track of time. Whether it was day or night outside had become meaningless to him.

Glancing at his watch, he saw it was past two in the afternoon. They had descended through the dry well near dusk when the valley was growing dark, meaning an entire night had passed and most of a new day.

After about half an hour, Andrew's group finally reached the dark river's upstream source.

The water emerged from beneath a massive black cavern, which immediately revulsed Andrew—he would rather die than fall into that hole. However, his attention was not focused on the enormous cavern at all.

Above it, carved into the hard stone mountainside, a narrow stone staircase wound upward in spiraling curves, extending roughly 300 feet to where two bird sculptures stood guard on a protruding platform.

In the center between the stone carvings, a modest bronze door stood prominently.

"An entrance! It must be another entrance to the tomb chamber!" Kevin exclaimed excitedly, his voice trembling.

Chantelle was equally thrilled as she looked at Andrew. "Mr. Lloyd, that's an entrance to the tomb chamber, right?"

Andrew smiled and replied, "It should be, though this entrance is probably a back door or side entrance to the tomb chamber. Generally, ancient burial sites only had one main entrance."