

# Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Henry asked, "You didn't forget about Luna, did you?"

Scarlett's face darkened slightly. "Of course I didn't forget that bitch. Because of her, the Driscoll family still can't move freely in Blumendale. But this time, no matter how capable she is, she won't be able to stop my plan. Truth is, I was the one behind the parasite poisoning incident in Gabo Creek."

She continued, "And now, Derek's chief of staff, Chantelle, is already heading over to investigate. This is my first step in taking Derek down. Hank, that pervert in Special Ops, is going to help me finish the job perfectly."

Henry clapped his hands, his expression full of admiration. "Scarlett, now I believe you might just have what it takes to sit at the top of the Union. Your setup, one move leading into the next... I have to say, I'm impressed." Scarlett looked even more pleased with herself. Her eyes swept across the room and landed on Andrew. She asked, "So, how's the hypnosis going on that little bastard?"

Henry nodded, then shook his head. "It's going okay, but pretty soon, he'll be fully under my control."

Scarlett's eyes grew wary as she glanced at Eric's back. "You teaming up with Mr. Humphrey is a deadly combo. It's such a shame for the Driscoll family. No matter how hard they tried to please Mr. Humphrey, he never gave them the time of day."

Henry puffed out his chest and grinned slyly. "Well, of course. My charm isn't something the Driscoll family can compete with."

Scarlett let out a strange laugh and turned to leave. She was well aware that Henry's so-called 'charm' was just sleeping with Eric. Too bad Eric was not into women. Otherwise, she might have taken off her clothes and tried seducing him herself.

Scarlett's phone rang as soon as she stepped out of the villa.

"Scarlett, I want some milk!" came the voice on the other end.

She forced down her disgust and cooed, "Joseph, you're so naughty. I'll give you some when I get back, okay?"

Joseph chuckled lewdly. "Then I'll get us a room at the usual spot and wait for you!"

After hanging up, Scarlett's expression turned dark and grim. She was nearly 40 years old and had to entertain some horny 20-something punk like Joseph. Honestly, it disgusted her.

Just thinking about that greedy brat crawling all over her made her want to crush his skull with her bare hands.

However, Joseph was deeply favored by the Yeagers' elders. If she wanted to poison someone, she still needed his help.

Scarlett had never married or had children in her entire life. When it came to using men, she always knew when to stop and never let herself get too carried away. Her relentless pursuit of martial arts mastery, power, and status meant she could not afford to slow down for even a moment.

Scarlett was a woman with massive ambition. Unfortunately, she ran into Andrew.

Back in the villa, Eric had already finished the hypnosis session. Then, he and Henry headed upstairs together.

Andrew's expression had turned icy.

So Scarlett was the one behind all the evil that happened in Gabo Creek?

First, there was the parasite poison incident. So many innocent civilians were affected, and it was her doing.

Now, she was planning to target Chantelle, using that as a move against Derek. What a ruthless two-birds- one-stone plan.

Hank's abuse of Hannah from the Keller family was meant to crush them completely, and Scarlett was behind it all.

This woman clearly needed to be sent straight to hell.

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

[Chantelle, watch out for Hank. I'm on my way!] Andrew sent the text message and quickly turned off his phone.

The next steps were clear. First, find a way to leave Goldridge, and second, take Eric with him.

If Eric did not cooperate, he would knock him out and drag him away. Once he met up with Chantelle, it would be time to take Hank down.

Before all that, Andrew had one more thing to consider: whether it was worth the risk. He was thinking about making a trip to the Yeagers and revealing everything about Scarlett and Henry's plans.

The problem was that the Yeagers already saw Andrew as an enemy. Even if he went to tip them off, it probably would not help. He might even get himself killed on sight.

Truthfully, Andrew did not care what happened to the Yeagers. However, the people he most wanted to take down were Henry and Scarlett.

And as the saying went, your enemy's enemy would be your friend. If he could use the Yeagers to strike a heavy blow against Henry, it would make escaping Goldridge that much easier.

Once he made up his mind, Andrew was ready to act. He had never been one to hesitate, and this time he was going to give Henry and Scarlett a massive surprise.

The next morning, Eric continued his daily hypnosis session on Andrew, and the Phantom Mirage had dug in deeper, supposedly corrodig Andrew further.

Eric seemed confident. "By now, whatever resistance he had deep in his soul should be gone. All I need is more time to condition him. Soon, he'll be the perfect killing machine."

Henry looked pleased. "No problem. I've got all the time in the world if it means taming this guy. Alright then, I'm heading out to meet with Scarlett today. You be a good boy and wait at home. I'll bring you back some ham sausages!"

Eric frowned. "Probably just soggy veggies again."

Henry's smug grin stiffened. "You little brat... Getting bold, huh? Talking back to me like that now?"

Eric stared blankly. "Boring."

Andrew was already tired of their annoying flirting and tuned it out completely.

Soon, Henry left the house, clearly off to plot with Scarlett about poisoning the Yeagers. That meant Andrew had to move first and warn them.

Eric gave him his usual morning hypnosis session as expected. Then, dragging his exhausted body, he walked over and collapsed on the couch.

After stripping off his teal robe, he began to self-harm. He tore at his own flesh and pinched himself viciously, and soon his body was covered in black and purple bruises.

With his head hanging down, Eric stared blankly into space. "Hunter, are you doing okay over there? Dad's fate is unknown now. I suddenly have no purpose left in living. Maybe I should just end it all and come find you!"

With a loud clink, he pulled out a gleaming knife. Then, he started tracing it across his wrist.

Andrew wanted to shout, "If you're going to die, just do it already! Stop being so dramatic."

Seeing a grown man living in such a twisted state was unbearable to watch. Then again, thinking it over, Andrew felt his emotions become complicated.

Eric seemed to be another poor soul captured by his own obsessions. Seeking revenge for someone he loved had warped his mind, which only showed how deeply Eric truly cared.

Suddenly, Eric's eyes sharpened as he looked directly at Andrew with a burning gaze. Andrew cursed inwardly. He had not been careful enough just now and might have given something away, allowing Eric to notice.

If this crazy bastard discovered something was wrong, Andrew would have to subdue him immediately and force his way out of Goldridge.

Everything else would have to wait!

Andrew quietly steeled his resolve.

Fortunately, Eric came over and sat in front of him with the dagger in hand, showing no particular reaction. Looking at Andrew's face, he murmured, "Do you know what longing feels like?"

Andrew remained expressionless, though he wanted to roll his eyes so badly.

Eric used the dagger to lift his chin and suddenly smiled. "If Hunter were still alive, he'd probably be just as handsome and charming as you, you unlucky bastard!"

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Eric said, "No, Hunter would definitely be more handsome than you, way more charming too! Since we were kids, he was the best-looking guy in all of Goldridge. I was happy just following him around, even if it meant being his sidekick and doing whatever he told me to."

Andrew wanted to snap, thinking, "Alright, that's enough. I'm not your beloved Hunter. I'm more handsome than he ever was anyway!"

Eric withdrew the knife and let out a twisted little laugh. He mumbled, "Henry, you think I betrayed Dad just for you. But the truth is, not only did I betray him, but I'm also dragging you to hell with me. I hate all of you, every single one of you."

Suddenly, he clutched his head and started sobbing again. "Dad, I failed you. I really did! I didn't want to kill you, but I couldn't stop myself! I loved Hunter. When he died, my whole world went dark. So now I have to kill you. I'm sorry, Dad!"

Andrew really wanted to pat his head and say, "Stop crying. I'll punish you myself on Mr. Thornton's behalf, you ungrateful mess."

After crying himself out, Eric finally got up and went upstairs to rest.

Eric spent every day either sleeping or sitting around in a daze. Most of the time, he was completely shut off from the world.

Andrew did not hesitate for a second and immediately climbed out of the villa. Then, he rushed straight toward the Yeagers' place without stopping. Having just been attacked, the Yeagers had security locked down tight everywhere.

However, Andrew did not care and charged straight for the main gate. He did not have time to play games with the Yeagers or waste any more time because this had to be quick and decisive.

When the Yeagers' guards saw him approaching, they were all shocked.

"Stop right there!" they shouted angrily.

Andrew raised his hand and sent both men flying.

"You little bastard, how dare you show your face again! Today, we'll make sure there's nothing left of you to bury!"

Matthew charged out with his men.

The moment their eyes met, hatred flared up instantly.

Seeing that Andrew had come alone, Matthew's eyes immediately turned blood red with rage. In seconds, he was surrounded.

Adam stood in the back, his beard wild, his face tight with fury. His eyes burned with murderous rage.

Andrew spread his hands and said in a deep voice, "I'm not here to cause trouble."

Matthew's face twisted with fury. "You brat, I don't care what you're here for! You're going to die!"

After being beaten by Andrew twice and just recently coughing up blood because of it, Matthew wanted him dead more than anything.

Andrew's expression turned ice-cold. "Back off! Everyone from the Yeagers, listen up! I came alone because I have something important to say. If you don't hear me out, disaster is going to fall right on your heads!" Adam snorted. "Let's cut your damn head off first. Matthew, stand down. I'll handle this myself."

Andrew sneered. "First of all, don't flatter yourself! You think you can handle me? And second, ever heard of something called Frostblossom? Because I'm telling you, this poison is coming your way fast... And soon, you'll be seeing stars and saints all at once."

Adam, who had raised his palms to strike, slowly lowered them, clearly shaken. "Frostblossom? The deadly poison from Eastonia? Andrew, what are you saying?"

Andrew looked annoyed. "Didn't you say you didn't want to hear it? Tell your Yeager meatheads to step back. I need a drink first."

Matthew's jaw clenched hard. "You son of a...."

Adam raised his hand. "Matthew, wait. He came alone. He can't turn the world upside down!"

Immediately, the Yeagers' experts stepped aside, still glaring daggers at Andrew.

Andrew ignored them all and walked straight into the Yeagers' living room, boldly asking for tea.

Matthew laughed in fury. "Andrew, what the hell are you trying to pull?!"

Andrew gestured calmly. "Relax, Mr. Yeager Senior. Make yourself at home. Don't be shy."

Matthew nearly exploded. He sat down, only to jump back up again, eyes locked on Andrew like he wanted to strangle him.

He thought, 'Damn it. This guy is seriously shameless!'

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew scoffed. "Quit glaring. You're no match for me, and the last two times I spared you were out of respect for Mr. Yeager Senior. If I hadn't held back, you'd be half-dead by now."

Matthew clenched his jaw but did not say a word. Truth was, he was scared of Andrew now.

Adam stood calmly, hands behind his back, and said, "Andrew, just say it. What exactly do you want? If you can't give us something solid, you won't be leaving here alive."

Andrew let out a cold laugh. "Sir, don't try to scare me. I'm a coward. When someone threatens me, I tend to forget everything I was about to say. But there's one thing I do remember.

"Henry and Scarlett are already planning to take down the Yeagers. I know you're confident, and you probably think they're just digging their own graves. But I can promise you this: when the time comes, your entire family will end up six feet under."

Adam fell silent. He did not trust Andrew, but he could not afford to ignore him either.

Matthew snapped impatiently, "Andrew, just get to the damn point!"

Andrew took a sip of tea and said in a low voice, "Frostblossom, the deadly poison from Eastonia. You've heard of it, right? Scarlett plans to use it to send your two elders off to their graves. That's the message I came here to deliver."

Matthew sneered. "You think the Yeager elders are beggars on the street? Just waiting with their mouths open for Scarlett and Henry to feed them poison?"

Andrew gave him a glance and nodded. "Exactly. The fact that you realize that's not how it works means you're not completely brainless."

Matthew snapped, "Andrew, stop being so damn sarcastic. Tell me what else you know!"

Andrew replied flatly, "I know Scarlett's already has someone inside the Yeagers, and the one who's supposed to poison your elders... is one of your own. Which means there's no way to guard against it."

Matthew's expression finally changed. He and Adam exchanged a glance, both looking furious and alarmed.

"Andrew, please be clear. Who did that bitch Scarlett get to? Once I know who the traitor is, I'll rip them out myself!"

Matthew's tone instantly shifted to buddy-buddy, trying to play nice.

Andrew gave him a dry smile. "Well, well. Mr. Yeager Senior, already calling me so fondly? You sure changed your face fast. Weren't you trying to kill me just a minute ago?"

Matthew raised a hand and slapped himself twice, loud and sharp. "You see that? I'm punishing myself. That's how sorry I am!"

Andrew took another sip of tea and said calmly, "That's a decent start, but still not quite enough."

Matthew was getting desperate. All he wanted was to find the traitor. "What else do you want? Name it: cash, women, whatever you want. The Yeagers won't shortchange you!"

He was offering both money and women to Andrew, wanting to corrupt both his body and soul.

Andrew gave a small smile. "None of that interests me. How about this... I'll tell you who the traitor is. But you have to do one thing for me."

Matthew asked cautiously, "What's that?"

Andrew replied, "Put on black tights and do a dance from that viral internet trend!"

Both the Yeager family elders cleared their throats. They could not help but think that young people these days were truly bold with their taste.

Andrew chuckled. "Relax, I'm messing with you. Watching you dance would burn my retinas. I'm not into horror shows. The traitor in your clan is your favorite son, Joseph. And don't even bother arguing. You think it's impossible? Let me ask you: where's Joseph right now?"

He added, "You know what. Don't bother looking. Right now, he's probably on top of Scarlett, working hard to release a whole generation of Yeager grandchildren all over her belly."

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew did not dare stay at the Yeager estate any longer. After saying everything he needed to say, he immediately got up and quickly returned to the villa on Mount Zircon.

To his surprise, Matthew actually sent someone to escort him part of the way. Of course, it was not out of kindness, but because Andrew had just handed the Yeagers a piece of intel that could determine life or death.

At this point, both sides were stuck on the same sinking ship. If they did not paddle together, Henry would drown them all.

Andrew quietly slipped back into the villa. He climbed in through the window and made his way toward the couch, where he was usually hypnotized, ready to play dumb and act like he had never left.

He had only been gone for less than an hour. Judging by how busy Henry had been lately, he was not likely to be back so soon. As for Eric, he usually spent his days lying around like a hibernating bear.

However, just as Andrew tiptoed toward the living room, he spotted a familiar silhouette.

Someone in a teal robe WAS sitting on the couch with his back to the balcony.

It was Eric!

'Crap!' Andrew silently cursed, his eyes widening in alarm. This was not good.

It did not matter when Eric came downstairs. What mattered was that he had, and he would have noticed Andrew was gone. In other words, his cover was likely blown.

Eric slowly turned his head toward the balcony.

Andrew steeled himself. There was no turning back now. He strode in boldly, ready to take Eric down the second he got close enough and drag him out by force.

Besides, the Yeagers could not afford to wait any longer.

"No command... Yet you came back anyway. Even chose the balcony to sneak in and stay hidden. Seems like my hypnosis skills have taken another leap forward," Eric said with a satisfied smile. "Andrew, you'll be the finest masterpiece under my supreme hypnosis!"

Andrew almost could not keep his expression steady. This crazy bastard thought his going out and coming back was the result of his technique?

Andrew really wanted to ask him if his so-called divine technique was really that amazing.

Nonetheless, this lucky coincidence worked perfectly in his favor. He sat down naturally, keeping his body rigid and his face stiff and numb, with blank, lifeless pupils.

He was just like a seasoned actor!

Eric sat down and studied him for a long time, then began another hypnosis session.

Andrew continued playing along while secretly circulating his Inferno Strike technique smoothly. He was perfectly fine.

Meanwhile, back at the Yeager estate, the mood was heavy and silent. Matthew sat in the main seat, his face grim.

Adam snorted coldly. "Is that bastard Joseph really involved with Scarlett, just like Andrew said?"

Matthew forced a smile. "Please calm down! Joseph hasn't returned yet! In my opinion, this matter still needs to be confirmed!"

Adam exploded. "What's there to confirm? That little bastard has obviously fallen into their trap already. When he comes back, won't he just turn the knife on his own family?"

Matthew frowned. "To be honest, I don't believe someone like Scarlett could manipulate Joseph. If he wanted women, there are plenty of decent matches within our circle. Ladies from good families, well-connected and clean. But Scarlett? She's scheming, ruthless, and practically ancient. She's already teamed up with Henry and is clearly up to no good. Joseph's only 21. You think he'd really stoop that low?"

This was a tricky question that left all the Yeagers stumped.

One by one, they looked awkward and kept coughing uncomfortably.

Adam did not hold back. "Matthew, stop lying to yourself! You know what kind of woman Scarlett is. She's from the Driscoll family in Gabo Creek, and you know what kind of person she is. She has exceptional martial arts skills, and she's brilliant."

He added, "Sure, she's not particularly attractive and getting on in years! But an older woman's charm is irresistible to younger men. When it comes to a mature woman's appeal, no one can resist it!"

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Matthew blinked. "That saying... how come I've never heard it before?"

Adam snorted. "Of course, you haven't. You've probably never been spoiled by an older woman in your life! As they said, the older the woman, the more charming and wonderful she is!"

"Joseph's just a hot-blooded young punk, and Scarlett's the type who's clever, powerful, and knows exactly how to reel someone in. Taking control of him wouldn't even be a challenge."

Then, almost involuntarily, Matthew muttered, "Don't tell me... back in your day, you had a taste of older women too?"

Every member of the Yeagers stood there with their mouths hanging open, completely shocked by Matthew's question.

Even Matthew realized he had screwed up the moment the words left his mouth.

Adam was over 100 years old. Was he really the person to joke with like that?

To his surprise, Adam simply stroked his beard and smirked. "Take a guess."

That wink and cheeky grin made Matthew seriously wonder if he was hitting his second puberty.

The entire Yeager family felt collectively uncomfortable. It seemed that while Adam was old, his heart was still young, and he had been quite the player in his youth.

Just then, a servant announced from outside that Joseph had returned.

Matthew and the other high-ranking members became serious, exchanging glances but saying nothing as they waited for Joseph to arrive.

"I'm back!" Joseph strode into the living room, looking refreshed and beaming with smiles.

Matthew kept his expression neutral and smiled. "Joseph, where did you go? I was worried you'd be in a bad mood after failing the selection. I didn't expect you to bounce back this quickly."

Joseph puffed his chest and scoffed. "Jerome's dead now anyway. Why would I even want to be one of his inner disciples? As for the so-called failure... Whatever, it was just a fluke. I know exactly how strong I am, and I don't need to prove it to anyone."

He was dripping with confidence.

Matthew nodded. "It's good for young men to have pride, just don't let setbacks break you. Alright, go rest." Joseph gave a casual nod, bowed to Adam, and returned to his room. The moment he walked in, he glanced around suspiciously. Once he confirmed no one had followed, he locked the door behind him.

Then, grinning slyly, he pulled a miniature camera from his pocket. With a perty little chuckle, he turned it on and hit play.

The footage showed a luxurious hotel suite, where Joseph, completely naked, was tangled up with a curvy older woman, kissing her all over.

That was just the start.

The video got increasingly wild, with Joseph clinging to the woman, begging for more. She giggled and called him a greedy brat, teasing him between sighs.

The video quality was extremely high, but unfortunately, the content was too graphic to describe in detail. Joseph was completely satisfied as he saved the video in separate files. Then, he collapsed onto his bed, hands behind his head, grinning like an idiot.

After that, he started jerking off.

Joseph was in his early 20s with an insatiable appetite, having no idea what self-control meant.

"Scarlett is just incredible! If I can score a woman like her, no one in Goldridge can talk shit to me ever again. Time for a nap first. Tonight, Scarlett asked me to meet her personally. No doubt she's going to feed me again. Life is sweet!"

After finishing his business, Joseph fell asleep with a lecherous grin on his face. When dinnertime came, he took a phone call and eagerly ran out the door.

Matthew and the others had been monitoring Joseph all along. Seeing him sneak out, they sent people to follow him while Matthew and Adam headed to Joseph's bedroom door.

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The door was locked from the inside, and only Joseph had the key.

Adam scoffed, slammed his palm against the knob, and shattered the lock with a loud crack.

Matthew took the lead and walked into the room. As soon as he entered, he was hit by a strong musky smell. Adam muttered grimly, "That little bastard's been draining himself like this? And he still thinks he's training for martial arts?"

Matthew gave an awkward laugh. "Don't be too harsh. Every young man goes through his wild phase."

Adam walked over and picked up a tablet off the desk. He stared at it for a while, visibly frustrated, then set it down with a grumble. As expected, modern gadgets were not his thing.

Matthew felt somewhat proud and volunteered. "Why don't you sit back. I'll look around and see what this kid is up to!"

When he opened the tablet, he was immediately greeted by a video of Joseph wrapped around Scarlett.

Adam watched with fury, his fists crackling audibly. The smile on Matthew's face also disappeared without him realizing it.

After all, the evidence was irrefutable.

It seemed that Joseph had indeed been seduced by Scarlett, just as Andrew had said. He then opened Joseph's laptop, desktop computer, and several USB drives from the drawer.

After taking one look, both Matthew and Adam gasped in shock.

Adam cursed out loud, "How many damn copies did this bastard make?"

Even Matthew was torn between shame and admiration. Joseph had made backups in at least seven different places.

Was he planning to save this stuff for the future, to rewatch it with his grandkids or something?

Adam stormed toward the door, fuming. "Enough. Joseph's definitely been brainwashed by that woman! When he gets back, I'll execute him myself right then and there!"

Matthew panicked. "Wait! He's still young, you can't just kill him!"

Adam narrowed his eyes, voice icy. "What did you say? Can't kill him? You've completely lost it! Scarlett is clearly using him. Like Andrew said, she's targeting Isaiah and me next! If we get poisoned, who's left to defend the Yeagers? We'll all be sitting ducks!"

Matthew's face turned serious. "Exactly. I'm saying we shouldn't let Scarlett and Henry get away with this so easily. Let's follow Andrew's plan and turn the trap around. You and Mr. Isaiah pretend to be poisoned. When Henry and Scarlett storm in with their people, that's when you two strike back and kill every last one of them." Adam immediately agreed. "Done. That's exactly what we'll do."

The rage he felt toward Henry and Scarlett had already ignited the entire Yeager family. If they wanted to play dirty, then they were ready to finish this with blood.

In Goldridge, Scarlett lived a life of luxury. Whether it was food or accommodation, she demanded only the best.

At this moment, Joseph made his way expertly to Scarlett's residence. As soon as he entered, he wrapped his arms around her waist. "Madam Driscoll, I want some milk!"

Scarlett's face twitched as she suppressed the urge to bash this brat's brains out. "Silly boy, don't call me Madam... Call me by my name, okay?"

Scarlett spoke softly, trying her best to act sweet and delicate.

Joseph shook his head. "But considering your age, I should call you that! Look at you..... You're over 40, a full 20 years older than me. It's perfectly appropriate for me to call you that!"

He continued, "Besides, I love older women! They know how to take care of you, they're well-endowed, and they're so responsive!"

A flash of coldness crossed Scarlett's face. Even a woman like her could not escape the one thing most women hated: being reminded of their age.

This little brat was mooching off her, sleeping with her, and still calling her 'Madam' to her face. If he were not still useful, she would have skinned him alive on the spot.

Fighting the wave of disgust rising inside her, Scarlett gave in and reluctantly satisfied Joseph once again. Afterward, she finally started laying down her real request. "Joseph, I need a favor from you. You promised me, remember? That you'd spoil me from now on, protect me from everything?"

Joseph chuckled lecherously. "Of course! Say whatever you want! For you, the Yeagers will give you anything. Just promise you'll scream louder next time and wear those black tights I like."

Scarlett thought, 'Why don't you go home and ask your mom to wear them for you?'

On the outside, she stayed gentle and persuasive, carefully bringing up the subject of poisoning. Afraid Joseph might panic or refuse outright, she played it smart. She started by acting pitiful, claiming she was cornered in Goldridge and had nowhere left to turn.

Then, she said it was not real poison, just a mild sedative. It would only temporarily numb the two Yeager elders, nothing dangerous at all.

At first, Joseph flat-out refused.

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Scarlett had already figured out Joseph's weakness. She reached down and grabbed him below the belt, and Joseph gasped sharply, completely dazed, instantly losing all sense of place and reason.

From that moment on, whatever Scarlett said, he nodded along without hesitation.

Eric appeared silently, stepping out in front of them. Without a word, he slapped Joseph across the face twice until his cheeks were flushed red and his mind was spinning, then began his hypnosis.

Already a lust-driven fool, Joseph was no match for Eric's mind tricks. His willpower was pitiful compared to Andrew's, so Eric barely had to try before Joseph's mind was completely hijacked.

With a single command, the suggestion was planted: poison the two Yeager elders.

Thrilled, dazed, and with a lingering headache, Joseph eventually stumbled out of Scarlett's house.

Henry walked in with a slow clap, laughing. "Ms. Driscoll, you're something else!"

Scarlett slipped on her fur coat and replied, "Mr. Fischer, everything's in place. All that's left is the final push."

Henry grinned coldly. "Exactly. Just one last push! The Yeager elders? Please. If I could take down Jerome, what are two old relics to me?"

Scarlett rolled her eyes in disgust and suddenly said, "Mr. Fischer, feel free to stay. I need a shower. That little brat reeks. I feel like throwing up."

Henry chuckled. "That punk from the Yeagers is lucky, though. If I could've scored someone like you at his age, I would've bragged about it nonstop."

Eric cut in with a cold voice. "Disgusting."

Henry did not care and followed him out with a smirk.

Back at the villa atop Mount Zircon, Henry and Eric returned and sat on either side of Andrew.

Henry glanced at Andrew's face, who was in a particularly good mood. "Tomorrow we'll crush the Yeagers. Eric, you've done well this time. Say it... What do you want as a reward?"

Eric remained emotionless. "I don't want anything."

Henry shook his head. "Come on, that's not healthy. You keep closing yourself off like this... It's not good for you. Once this is over, I'll take you out for a break. Clear your mind."

Eric dismissed him flatly. "Not interested."

Henry's brow twitched, clearly irritated. However, he held it back and forced a smile. "How about I assign Andrew here to be your companion? You can use him however you want. He can take my place when you're in the mood to play."

Eric gave him a side-eye and said calmly, "No thanks. His size is bigger than yours. I might start comparing and lose interest in you altogether."

Henry's face turned black. He glanced at Andrew's crotch, then scowled and stomped upstairs without another word.

Finding no joy in lingering either, Eric stared at Andrew blankly for a moment. Then, he went upstairs too.

Left alone, Andrew finally let out a deep breath. His patience was wearing thin.

Henry and Eric, those two sick freaks. If shamelessness were a sport, the two of them would have been world champions. They really had the nerve to treat him like their personal toy.

Andrew shuddered at the thought. Truthfully, he had been genuinely panicking for a second there.

He did not fear a fight, nor did he fear death. However, he did fear being trapped between Henry and Eric's twisted desires.

Thankfully, tomorrow would be the end of it all. Everything was going according to plan, step by step.

Henry and Scarlett thought they had successfully lured the Yeagers into their trap, but in truth, the Yeagers were just waiting to bite back.

The hook baited in blood was one Andrew had personally forged for them.

Perfect.

Feeling the burning Flame Surge energy within his energy core, Andrew had a hunch that this first level of Inferno Strike was becoming increasingly full, and breaking through to the second level was not far off.

Andrew was not in a rush for the second level, Volcano Smash, because being anxious would not help. You could not force progress with Heavenly-tier martial arts. It was not like drinking water; you could not just gulp it down.

Martial arts training required taking things step by step. There were times when you could advance rapidly. However, those opportunities were rare and could not be forced, and they involved various chances and fortunes that could not be rushed.

He slowly exhaled a stream of heat and returned to his practice, waiting for tomorrow's decisive moment. Just then, a nimble black shadow slipped in through the balcony where Andrew had exited during the day.

The shadow moved fluidly with a slender, graceful figure, clearly a woman. As she approached, Andrew distinctly caught a refreshing, heart-stirring fragrance.

What the hell? For a moment, Andrew was speechless. He wondered if a burglar had broken into Henry's villa.

He remained perfectly still, observing the situation. Finally, the shadow approached him and pulled off her black mask.

"I finally found you, you troublemaker! I'm here to rescue you. Don't make a sound and come with me quickly!" She grabbed Andrew and started dragging him toward the exit.

Andrew was completely stunned.

It was actually Rowan!

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew would never have expected that after all these years, the only person in Goldridge who cared about his safety would be Rowan. However, the lady standing before him now was completely different from the bratty little girl from five years ago.

Her intoxicating fragrance, soft little hands, a smooth face, and those long legs that could make any man drool. Everything about her screamed that she was a real beauty.

Andrew remained perfectly still because he never expected Rowan to secretly come to rescue him. However, if he left with her now, everything he had worked for would be wasted.

"Come on, let's go! What's wrong with you?" Rowan whispered urgently.

Seeing Andrew's blank, dull look, she began to panic. Then, a terrifying thought struck her, draining the color from her face.

She gasped and mumbled, "Phantom Mirage... No.... Don't tell me you've been brainwashed by Phantom Mirage! Grandma told me that Mr. Thornton's adopted son, Eric... that bastard's hypnosis technique is terrifying! Anyone who falls under it loses their mind little by little until they become a puppet, just a shell, completely controlled..."

Her voice trembled, and her thoughts spiraled. She waved a hand in front of Andrew's face, but there was no reaction. Then, she shook his shoulders, but still no reaction.

Finally, she slapped him across the face. "Snap out of it!"

Andrew cursed silently, 'Damn, this girl hits hard! That hurt!'

Still, he held still, determined to stay in character and pay her back later.

Rowan tried everything she could think of, but nothing worked. Her face fell, eyes filled with heartbreak as she stared at him. "You jerk... five years ago, you promised you'd come back to see me. Did you know? I waited for you for five years. Five whole years!"

She murmured the words to herself, then suddenly dropped to the floor and broke into sobs. Her shoulders trembled as she cried without holding back.

Andrew's scalp tingled in panic. 'Lady, if you keep crying like that, you're gonna alert those two psychos upstairs! Also, what did you just say?'

Did she just say that she had waited for him for five years? He vaguely remembered healing her five years ago, and that was how they met.

Back then, Rowan had been fierce and unreasonable, not particularly likable at all. So, Andrew's impression of her was not good. Besides, she seemed to hate him too, especially when the treatment required touching her body, which had caused unpleasant scenes.

Who could have imagined she would actually come crying to this den of thieves because of him?

Andrew found it all very strange, wondering what the hell Rowan was up to. He needed to find a way to get her out of here before things went south.

Just then, footsteps echoed from the stairwell, and the lights flicked on.

Andrew's heart skipped a beat, and he thought, 'This is bad! Either Eric or Henry is coming downstairs!' Rowan, who had been crouching and sobbing on the floor, reacted with extraordinary speed. To Andrew's amazement, she stood up, bent her slender waist, leaned down, and gently kissed his lips.

She whispered, "Goodbye, Andrew. The Onyx Serpents are being crushed by the McCormick family and threatened by people like Henry. We have no choice. Either we submit, or we get wiped out. Grandma and I have no choice but to take the Onyx Serpents and leave Goldridge."

After that brief kiss, Rowan's delicate face flushed with color.

Cupping Andrew's face, she cried and laughed at the same time, whispering softly, "Andrew, I fell in love with you five years ago. Don't worry. Grandma and the others are leaving Goldridge, but I won't go. I'll secretly stay behind and find a way to save you! You idiot, you touched my breasts back then, you know. So I'm stuck on you now! You can't escape!"

With one last lingering look at Andrew, Rowan turned around and, like an agile white cat, flipped over the balcony and left the mansion.

Andrew breathed a sigh of relief, but he quickly froze again. 'Wait... What the hell did she just say? She's in love with me? Since when? And she's saying I touched her breasts?'

Honestly, Andrew could not remember.

Nonetheless, Rowan's confession just now had been crystal clear and unmistakable.

The young girl from five years ago had now become a charming, voluptuous, graceful, and alluring lady.

Then again, when had she secretly fallen for him?

Andrew could not figure this out and found it troublesome. After all, he did not want to harm Rowan. Originally, he could have followed his plan to toy with Henry and the others, then slip away when the time was right.

However, Rowan had appeared out of nowhere. If it were just anyone else, he would not have cared.

He sighed deeply. Maybe being too attractive really was a curse for a man. Also, he secretly suspected that deep down, he might be a pervert too. Otherwise, he would not have been disturbed by Rowan's pitiful appearance and heartfelt confession just now.

As they said, women were nothing but distractions. Even though Andrew knew it well, he still could not help himself. Women, especially beautiful women, were dangerous.

They had two mouths, and both could devour you.

That night passed without further incident. As dawn broke, Henry and Eric were fully geared up and ready to launch their assault on the Yeagers.

This time, even Eric was coming along, which showed Henry was ready to go all in.

Scarlett also showed up early, dressed for combat, and seething with killing intent. She asked, "Where's Alex? I don't see him anywhere."

Henry answered flatly, "Dead."

Scarlett's eyes widened. "Dead? He died at the Yeager estate?"

Henry glanced at Andrew. "Yeah. He died there. Andrew used him as a scapegoat and threw him out to die!"

Scarlett walked up to Andrew and sneered. "Who would have thought that even as a puppet, you little bastard could still do such shameless things! It just shows how truly rotten you are!"

'Rotten, my ass!' Andrew resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Staring at Scarlett's ugly face, he really wanted to slap her hard.

"Everyone, let's head to the Yeager estate. Move out!" Henry barked.

With that, about seven SUVs roared to life, heading straight for the Yeager estate in a mighty convoy.

## Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Meanwhile, over at the Yeager estate in Goldridge, everyone had been woken up in the dead of night and ordered to stay alert. No one was allowed to sleep.

Over 500 guards were now fully armed and ready for war. If necessary, they would paint the ground red with blood.

Adam slapped Joseph across the face twice.

Joseph was tied up like a prisoner, tears brimming in his eyes. He sobbed and begged, "I messed up! I swear I won't do it again! Please, just give me one more chance!"

The poor guy was barely into adulthood, yet he was already begging for his life.

Adam glared at him coldly. "You worthless brat. You were willing to betray your entire family because you couldn't think with the right head! Why the hell should I let you live? So you can turn around and destroy the family from within?"

Joseph was miserable. "I was young and stupid! I didn't mean for any of this to happen! It's just... my junk, it has a mind of its own!"

Adam raised his hand to slap him again, but stopped mid-air.

Matthew stepped in, raising a brow. "Why'd you stop? If you're pissed, just hit him. I've got more sons. I won't miss one! Besides, I can still... make more!"

Joseph wanted to dig a hole and crawl into it. He thought, 'What kind of father says that?'

The two Yeager elders stared at Joseph with disgust. "Forget it. Beating him won't solve anything. And to be fair... he has a point. Every man's got a phase when he can't control what's in his pants."

Isaiah said, "Even I was like that once. But I never imagined the price of giving in to temptation would be plotting to kill the two family elders and nearly dooming the entire clan."

Matthew barked, "Joseph! You don't need me to tell you what you have to do next, right? This is your one chance to make things right."

Joseph nodded hard, desperately shouting, "I get it! I do! I'll text Scarlett right now and tell her the mission was a success!"

Matthew waved his hand. "No."

Joseph blinked. "No? Then what do you want me to do?"

Adam frowned, too. "Matthew, don't overdo it. What we need is for Henry and the others to fully believe Joseph pulled it off, so they'll attack head-on. Once they're in, Isaiah and I will crush those bastards for good. No need to play extra games."

Matthew replied, "It's not about doing anything extra. Think about it..... If Joseph just sends a simple message saying, 'All done,' won't that seem too easy? It might tip Scarlett off."

Adam's eyes narrowed. "You've got a point. So what do you suggest?"

Matthew pulled out Joseph's phone and smirked. "Simple. We'll have Joseph send a voice message, telling her he wants to sleep with her. Tell her everything at the Yeagers has been taken care of. And after this, she has to wear black stockings and a nurse's outfit to give him the reward of his life!"

Adam sneered coldly. "Matthew, I'm afraid that's what you want to say to Scarlett yourself, isn't it?"

Matthew coughed repeatedly, choking badly. "How could you think that of me? That's unfair. I just want to make the performance convincing. The more desperate and pervy Joseph sounds, the more Scarlett will believe him. Isn't that what we want?"

He cursed inwardly, 'Seriously, we're all adults here. Can't we just stick to the unspoken rules? See it, but don't say it out loud!'

Ever since he saw those explicit clips of Scarlett in Joseph's files, Matthew could not deny that he had developed an itch for her, too. She was the type of strong, dominant woman he secretly wanted to conquer.

Joseph was untied and handed the phone. He took a deep breath, gathering himself for a moment, then used a high-pitched voice to send Scarlett exactly what Matthew had instructed him to say.

Adam waved a hand. "Take this brat away! Out of everything, I hate that damn squeaky voice the most!"

Meanwhile, Scarlett, still en route to the Yeager estate, just received the voice message.