

The Ashes 541

Chapter 541 Andrew smiled faintly and said, Mrs.

Rhodes, your wisdom is admirable.

Allow me to elaborate further on what it truly means to uphold fairness and justice with clear rewards and punishments.

First, Andrew continued, the punishment for Michael is far too lenient.

Given the gravity of his mistake, theres no need for further deliberation he should be immediately reassigned to a lower department.

Making him a department manager or supervisor would suffice.

Letting him keep a supervisory role is already plenty generous.

Michaels anger flared, barely restrained

He felt as though Andrew was stabbing him in the heart.

A department manager or supervisor? That was a massive demotion, pushing him miles away from ever reaching the CEO position.

The audacity of Andrew to suggest such a punishment felt like a public flogging.

Tiana, with a cold sneer, interjected, Youve spoken about punishments

Now, isnt it time to talk about the rewards you think are warranted? Andrew, unfazed by the sarcasm in her tone, carried on as if he hadnt noticed.

Indeed, Mrs.

Rhodes, its time to discuss the individuals who deserve substantial recognition Under the scornful glares of several executives, Andrew calmly pointed to Lauren and said, The first is our vice CEO, Ms. Rhodes.

She may not hold the position of the companys president, but she certainly takes on responsibilities befitting one.

When Troy leaked the formula, she was the first to notice something was amiss.

Moreover, it was she who uncovered Ruby as the corporate spy and did her utmost to stop her. Though she was unable to fully prevent it, due to Michaels poor judgment, Ms.

Rhodes contributions cannot be overlooked

At the very least, its thanks to her that Rubys treachery was exposed

Even though Ruby managed to obtain Rhodes Pharmaceuticals formula, the fraudulent nature of the so called partnership between Rhodes Pharmaceutical and Amberpeak Corporation has now been revealed.

In short, Lauren, single handedly, has saved the company from incalculable losses

Therefore, she rightfully deserves the highest merit for her efforts! Andrews words flowed smoothly, his confidence unwavering.

Laurens cheeks flushed as she listened.

She didnt think of herself as being nearly as impressive as Andrew described, but his glowing praise left her feeling both surprised and flattered

However, being praised so openly front of so many people made her a bit self conscious.

Stealing a glance at Tiana, she was startled to see that Tiana didnt sneer or mock.

Instead, she nodded in agreement and said, Indeed

Laurens performance in this matter is worthy of the highest commendation.

Michaels heart sank, and he couldnt hold back.

Aunt Tiana- Tiana raised a hand to silence him.

Be grateful Im not demoting you to a department head.

So, at this point, its best if you dont entertain any more unreasonable thoughts Crushed and humiliated, Michael bit his tongue, though inwardly he burned with fury, wishing he could tear Andrew apart.

Andrew continued, The first merit goes to Lauren

As for the second, I believe it should go to the former head of the Pharmaceutical Division, Mr. Chapman

Standing quietly in a corner, Marcus, who had been trying to avoid everyones gaze, involuntarily looked up in shock at Andrew.

His expression was a mixture of surprise, joy, and unease

He didnt want Andrew to risk confronting Tiana on his behalf

Knowing Tianas personality, pushing her too far would only provoke a harsh reaction.

Marcus wasnt afraid of suffering further consequences himself; he had already resigned himself to his fate.

However, he couldn't bear the thought of Andrew or Lauren being dragged into trouble because of him. Summoning his courage, Marcus stepped forward and said Mr.

Lloyd, the punishment I've already received was well deserved.

Please... don't speak on my behalf anymore.

I'm content with things as they are now.

Chapter 542 Andrew snorted coldly.

I said I'd help you get justice, and I always keep my word.

Turning to Tiana, Andrew continued, The former director of the Pharmaceutical Division was Mr. Chapman.

But Michael, using a fabricated excuse, removed Mr.

Chapman from his position and replaced him with one of his cronies

With tactics like that, it's no surprise that Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division ended up in such

a mess

There's only one phrase for this: they deserved it.

Michael's face contorted with rage.

Andrew, instead of thinking about how to help the company recover its losses, are you going to just stand here and make sarcastic remarks? Andrew glanced at him dismissively.

Trash is trash.

If you cant handle criticism after making a mistake, you might as well just end it all by smashing your head against the wall

Tiana smirked playfully

Youve said all that, so youre implying you want me to give the position of director of the Pharmaceutical Division back to Mr.

Chapman, right? Andrew replied earnestly, No, Im not asking you to give it back.

That position belongs to Marcus by right.

Now that Troy is done for, looking across the entire company, Mr.

Chapman deserves fair treatment.

He should be reinstated to his original role.

Tiana nodded.

Fine.

As you suggest, Mr.

Chapman will resume his position as director of the Pharmaceutical Division.

Marcus, who had long since given up hope and expected nothing, froze in disbelief.

Tiana, known for her cold indifference, had actually agreed to give him another chance ? For someone

like her, a Pharmaceutical Division director was an insignificant figure, barely worth a second glance. Even if Marcus had been outright fired, Tiana likely wouldn't have batted an eye.

Then, a sudden realization struck Marcus like a jolt of lightning.

No, it wasn't that Tiana was willing to give him a chance.

It was Andrew who had convinced her, securing a fair resolution for him.

Gratitude swelled in Marcus's chest, an emotion he hadn't felt in a long time.

Andrew and Lauren had gone all out to help him, sparing no effort.

While Marcus's heart was filled with joy, Michael was far from calm.

Aunt Tiana, I believe the position of pharmaceutical director is critical, Michael argued.

Since Marcus has already been transferred to another department, bringing him back would be inconsistent.

It's like playing a game with personnel changes, and that kind of instability isn't good for the company.

Moreover, Michael added, I've already identified someone even more qualified than Troy to take on the role of director.

Tiana raised an eyebrow, her tone sharp.

I don't care who you want to promote

I just have one question for you: if you put your person in the director's chair, can you guarantee they'll recover the department's losses and restore Rhodes Pharmaceuticals' most profitable division? Michael froze, his expression shifting between anger and fear.

Uh... I will certainly try my best, he stammered

He knew he couldn't make that promise, so he resorted to vague assurances.

Tiana's tone turned icy.

Try your best? That's meaningless, just empty words.

In other words, you're useless too

If that's the case, your person doesn't deserve the role.

The position goes to Mr.

Chapman

Humiliated, Michael's face turned crimson

His fists clenched so tightly that his nails almost pierced his skin.

Andrew, you bastard! Everything you've taken from me, I'll take back tenfold ! Michael's mind roared with fury.

His blood red eyes burned with rage, like those of a feral beast.

Tiana sneered.

Andrew, you've been incredibly persuasive, talking nonstop like this.

So, how about ending it by singing your own praises now?

Chapter 543 Andrew maintained his composure and said, I wouldnt call it singing my own praises, but if theres merit, then rewards must follow.

Troys leak of the formula, and the Weller familys previous schemes against Rhodes Pharmaceutical if I may say so, I contributed significantly to resolving those issues.

Pausing briefly, Andrew dropped a bombshell, I dont dare ask for much, but Madam, why not make me the CEO of Rhodes Corporation? The moment those words left his mouth, it wasnt just Michael and his loyal supporters who were stunned- Lauren herself was left speechless.

Andrew wanted to be the CEO of the corporation? Wasnt that an ambition far too bold? Michaels face twisted in fury

Andrew, you really have no shame, do you? CEO of Rhodes Corporation? Why not go all the way and just rename the company to Lloyd Corporation while youre at it? Andrew replied earnestly, Mr.

Rhodes, while that idea is brilliant, it doesnt align with ethical principles.

So Im afraid I must decline your suggestion

Michael was so furious he almost coughed up blood on the spot.

His remark had been sarcastic, rhetorical a figure of speech

But Andrew took it literally? How thick skinned could one man be? If nothing else, Mr.

Lloyds shamelessness is truly unparalleled.

I bow before his audacity

Theres an old saying: Clear waters have no fish, and the shameless has no equal.

Mr.

Lloyds art of shamelessness surpasses even that of the legendary poet! Andrew, do you even hear yourself? Asking to be CEO of Rhodes Corporation? Do you think thats even remotely possible?
No

matter how you rank it, itll never be your turn! Executives and veteran employees chimed in with sneers and laughter, mocking Andrews seemingly outlandish request.

The idea of Andrew becoming CEO? It would only happen if the sun rose in the west.

Tianas voice was icy as she spoke, So this is Marvins pawn.

I see the game is unraveling faster than I expected

Unfortunately for you, Mr.

Lloyd, the CEO position of Rhodes Corporation is reserved strictly for family members. So dont even think about it.

What shocked everyone was Andrews calm reaction.

Instead of anger, he smiled and said, Youre absolutely right, Mrs.

Rhodes

The CEO position is for family members only.

So, since Im not eligible, Ms.

Rhodes is the most suitable choice.

Michael immediately shouted, I object! Andrew remained unfazed.

Mr.

Rhodes, please remember that your position as vice CEO is still in question.

On what grounds are you objecting to this? Michael roared, You- ! Tiana cut in sharply.

Enough! Everyone, shut up.

The CEO position, she declared, will remain with me for now.

There wont be any other appointments.

Andrew shrugged.

So, Mrs.

Rhodes, after all this talk of merit and rewards, youre telling me theres nothing to Yeward? Even Tianas typically calm demeanor faltered under Andrews relentless pressure

Irritated, she snapped, Id naturally reward those who contribute to the company.

But how I choose to reward them is my business, Mr.

US Lloyd.

You have no say in it.

Andrew countered, Im not interfering.

Im just asking.

When will you reward the contributions? And with what? Tiana frowned.

Andrew, thats enough

Ive already given you plenty of what you want.

Dont push your luck.

The other executives exchanged glances, some annoyed but others secretly impressed.

Andrews boldness might seem reckless, but to push Tiana his far? That took guts maybe even a stroke of foolish luck.

Andrew shook his head and chuckled coldly.

At the end of the day, all this talk boils down to one thing : Mrs.

Rhodes is only interested in punishments, not rewards.

I see that clearly now.

Chapter 544 Im an outsider, so its fine if Mrs.

Rhodes doesnt reward me, Ms.

Rhodes hasnt even been promoted in the slightest.

It seems the corruption within Rhodes Corporation is quite thorough, Andrew said.

Tiana was truly enraged this time.

Andrew, watch your tongue! Do you even realize that not even Marvin, the man behind you, would dare speak to me like this? Andrew replied indifferently, If Mrs.

Rhodes can do as she pleases, why cant others speak their minds ? If you want to shut me up, then just go ahead and distribute the rewards fairly.

Give Ms.

Rhodes what she deserves without delay.

Tiana, clearly exasperated, gritted her teeth.

Lauren is my biological daughter.

What shes due, III never withhold from her.

Fine

Ill satisfy your little scheme

Lauren will be the first priority candidate for the CEO position.

Is that enough for you now? Andrew smiled.

Mrs.

Rhodes is fair and just, as expected from the matriarch of Rhodes Corporation.

Im impressed.

Tiana snorted coldly

This little troublemaker actually claimed to admire her? What nonsense.

It was nothing but an act of smooth talking! Michaels face turned pale

Aunt Tiana, what about me? You cant be biased! At the very least, it should be fair competition between Lauren and me.

How can you give her priority? Tiana snapped in frustration.

Enough! Dont you think youve embarrassed yourself enough already? Not demoting you to a department manager is already my greatest mercy.

Michael dared not push further.

His face was ashen, his fists clenched tightly, and he looked as though he was about to collapse.

The executives who had sided with Michael were also devastated, sighing heavily.

If they had known this would happen, they wouldnt have thrown their support behind Michael so quickly. Now it was clear.

With Lauren having Andrew as her formidable ally, even if Michael had the numbers and controlled more than half of the corporations departments it wasnt enough to win.

Andrew Lloyd ... What a troublesome figure to deal with! At this moment, Tiana let out a cold laugh. Marvin taught you how to be sharp tongued and relentless when youre on top

But it seems he never taught you the importance of knowing your limits, understanding reason, and knowing when to advance or retreat.

Thats how you survive longer

Her face was full of contempt as she looked at Andrew, her expression mocking

It was the look of someone in a position of power, gazing down at someone she considered a mere nuisance

She stepped closer to Andrew, sneering.

Do you think that as a nobody, stirring up trouble and giving orders within Rhodes Corporation, youve achieved something great? Andrew shrugged.

Honestly? Its not bad at all.

Tianas face turned icy as her tone grew colder.

Your smooth talk proves nothing.

All it shows is that youre a petty man with a little wit, trying to act clever.

Once a small man gains power, he seizes on others mistakes relentlessly.

Meanwhile, his own abilities are hardly worth mentioning.

People like that? Thats you

Andrew replied calmly, If you dont like me, thats fine, because, honestly,

I dont care for your lofty attitude either.

Everyone, including Michael and his supporters, drew in sharp breaths.

Andrew was truly bold or insane to confront Tiana so openly.

Even Jerry, who had remained silent all this time, subtly signaled to Andrew, trying to warn him not to clash head-on with Tiana

Clearly, Jerry thought that while Andrew might be exceptional, he wasnt yet on Tianas level.

Lauren, on the other hand, was growing increasingly anxious.

She worried that Tiana might hold a grudge against Andrew and retaliate recklessly.

If that happened, it would be real trouble!

Chapter 545 Tiana let out a laugh, though it was a cold and disdainful one. So stubborn, refusing to admit your weakness, hiding behind a facade of apparent strength. This is one of Marvin's old tricks, and you've learned it well.

Andrew frowned.

Tiana kept bringing up Marvin, and he couldn't figure out what her intent was.

Her words implied she viewed Andrew as Marvin's pawn or lackey, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Andrew couldn't understand her logic.

His relationship with Marvin was nothing like what she imagined.

In fact, they were completely unrelated.

With a flick of her sleeve, Tiana turned away and instructed The Pharmaceutical Division's issues: whoever can solve them will earn the CEO position.

Michael, Lauren, you're both outstanding members of the Rhodes family.

Let's not dwell on the past.

From now on, it'll be a fair competition between the two of you.

Fair? What a joke! 1 Andrew felt a chill in his heart and nearly exploded in anger What was Tiana even thinking? Lauren was her biological daughter, and yet she refused to help her.

But now, when it was clear Lauren was far more suited to lead Rhodes Corporation than Michael, she

had to play this twisted game of internal conflict, forcing the two to compete against each other

Sure, this kind of scheme was common in wealthy families, but Tiana's so-called fairness disgusted Andrew.

To him, it was the greatest insult to the word fair.

Dr.

Lloyd, don't! Noticing Andrew's rising anger, Lauren grabbed his arm and pleaded with her eyes.

It was rare for Andrew to see Lauren look so vulnerable.

Thinking back, he realized that since Tiana had arrived at Rhodes Corporation, Lauren had grown uncharacteristically quiet and timid, even

In Andrew's mind, Lauren had always been bold, decisive, and willing to confront challenges head on. Fine, Andrew sighed, exhaling his frustration.

I just can't stand seeing my girl being wronged! Reluctantly, Andrew held back from confronting Tiana. Tiana had already left with her entourage, moving swiftly and decisively.

Michael lingered behind, pausing to glance back at Andrew with a sinister smirk.

Andrew, I've told you before no matter how you play, you'll never be a match for me.

So what if you've won a round? As long as I'm a man of the Rhodes family, you'll never surpass me. Andrew's expression remained cold.

Feeling pretty smug, aren't you? Maybe I should find an opportunity to cut you down to size and see if you can still smile then.

Michael's grin froze.

Andrew's icy gaze was so menacing that it genuinely frightened him.

Rumor had it that just days ago, a young master named Rodney from the Madblade Martial Academy had

a cousin, LEVE Nasty Hugh, who offended Andrew.

As a result, the poor man had been forced to eat kitchen slop. Apparently, the original punishment had been even worse. But since it was hard to find such foul items in a city, he had. This devil Andrew was utterly ruthless! Michael cursed inwardly, his wariness of Andrew growing. Back in the office, Lauren spoke softly.

Dr.

Lloyd, I've decided anymore.

Andrew looked at her.

Lauren, is this because of your mother? Lauren let out a bitter laugh.

No matter what, she's still going to marry and leave the family.

Deep down, she always saw Andrew sneered.

If you were anyone else, you might not have obediently followed the family's plan.

Nasty Hugh, who offended Andrew.

As a result, the poor man had been forced to eat kitchen slap

Apparently, the original punishment had been even worse Nasty Hugh was supposed to eat actual excrement.

But since it was hard to find such foul items in a city, he had been spared.

This devil Andrew was utterly ruthless! Michael cursed inwardly, his wariness of Andrew growing day by day.

Back in the office, Lauren spoke softly.

Dr.

Lloyd, Ive decided I dont want to compete for the CEO position anymore.

Andrew looked at her.

Lauren, is this because of your mother? Lauren let out a bitter laugh.

No matter what, shes still my mother.

But the truth is, Im a woman.

Eventually, Ill marry and leave the family.

Deep down, shes always seen Michael as the rightful heir to Rhodes Corporation. Andrew sneered

If you were anyone else, you might not have the power to resist this kind of bias. Youd just obediently follow the familys plan.

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hapter 546 But now, youre my woman, Lauren, and I wont let you be treated unfairly like this, Andrew declared firmly

Laurens eyes brimmed with tears, and she suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to cry.

Dr.

Lloyd, youre so kind.

Without warning, she hugged Andrew tightly.

Andrew felt increasingly uneasy.

Was Tianas presence truly such a significant threat to Lauren? He had never seen Lauren cry before.

A discreet cough came from behind them.

Lauren quickly let go of Andrew, wiped her tears in a hurry, and shot him a shy glare.

Andrew turned around, completely unbothered, and smiled.

Oh, my apologies, Mr.

Chapman

I didnt realize you were here.

Marcus scratched his nose and chuckled awkwardly.

Its fine.

I should be the one apologizing for interrupting Ms.

Rhodes and Mr.

Lloyds moment.

Andrew waved a hand.

No worries.

I take it youre here to discuss the Pharmaceutical Division? Marcus nodded solemnly.

Yes, Mr.

Lloyd.

I truly owe both you and Ms.

Rhodes a debt of gratitude I can never repay.

Thats why, no matter what, Ill do everything I can to support Ms.

Rhodes in reclaiming the CEO position that rightfully belongs to her.

Andrew replied, The Pharmaceutical Division is the bargaining chip Mrs.

Rhodes put on the table.

Between Lauren and Michael, whoever can stabilize and revive the department will take the top position. Our dear Mrs.

Rhodes sure knows how to play her cards, doesnt she? Dumping such a mess into our laps like this. Marcus nodded.

Mr.

Lloyd, its now confirmed that the Pharmaceutical Divisions three most valuable formulas have been stolen.

The best course of action is twofold

First, recover the formulas to prevent them from being leaked and neutralize the crisis entirely.

Second, we must prepare for the worst that the formulas are fully exposed.

In that scenario, well need to accept that other pharmaceutical companies will be able to manufacture what was once exclusively ours.

Andrew frowned

If that happens, the value of those three formulas will plummet.

What was once Rhodes Corporations exclusive, groundbreaking product will become just another generic offering

How do we compete with that? Marcus gave a bitter smile.

Exactly

Once the formulas are out, they lose all competitive edge.

This is why I brought up the second point to ask you and Ms.

Rhodes to start planning for the worst case scenario.

Well need to act immediately.

Lauren, now seated behind her desk, shifted into work mode instantly.

Mr.

Chapman, are you suggesting we abandon hope of recovering the formulas and instead focus on developing new ones? Marcus nodded.

Precisely, Ms.

Rhodes.

Thats exactly what Im suggesting.

In fact, when the Weller family started aggressively taking over our market share with their health supplements, I began to think along these lines.

Lauren pondered for a moment.

Thats a good idea

The Weller familys supplements have already made our Pharmaceutical Division less competitive, and

our performance has been steadily declining, Now, with the loss of three major formulas, it feels like a disaster

But in reality, its just another blow to an already weakening department.

Whether were slightly weak or significantly weakened doesnt make much difference.

I understand your reasoning, Mr.

Chapman

Chapter 546 Marcus smiled.

Exactly.

Thats why I dont see this crisis as entirely a bad thing.

After all, if the Pharmaceutical Division is to break through its current limits and achieve new heights for

the company, relying solely on old successes will never be enough.

Only by continually innovating, developing new formulas, and creating superior products can we dominate the market with absolute authority!

Chapter 547 Lauren shook her head

The development of formulas is incredibly costly and time consuming, Just looking at the history of our Pharmaceutical Division at Rhodes Corporation, after decades of effort, weve only managed to develop a few formulas with good market reception.

Mr.

Chapman, while your proposal is excellent, the manpower, resources, finances, and, most critically, the time needed to implement it are like insurmountable mountains

Marcus replied seriously, Resources and finances wont be an issue.

Ive been managing the Pharmaceutical Division for years, so Im confident in our foundation.

We can reallocate tens of billions as an initial budget without any problems ! As for time, with the current market share of our thirty plus products, the department can hold on for a while longer without being completely overtaken by the Weller family or other competitors.

But manpower thats the real challenge.

Mr.

Lloyd, Ms.

Rhodes, Im sorry, but thats where Im stuck.

Lauren said, Its not your fault, Mr.

Chapman.

Research personnel are usually highly experienced international pharmacists, pharmacologists, medical specialists, and professors

Its not just you, but even I cant recruit such high level experts on short notice.

This is not a problem that any single person can solve.

Andrew, who had been quietly listening to their discussion, suddenly smiled.

Why dont I take care of the manpower issue? Marcus was stunned.

Mr.

Lloyd, you can handle that ? Laurens eyes sparkled with curiosity.

Dr.

Lloyd, are you planning to personally lead research for Rhodes Corporation? Andrew waved his hand.

I dont have the time or the patience for that.

But I do have a collection of formulas

I can provide Rhodes with a few suitable ones as needed.

Marcus was utterly shocked.

Mr.

Lloyd, you actually have formulas you can provide? Realizing his question might have come across as rude, Marcus quickly smiled and added, Please forgive me, Mr.

Lloyd.

I didnt mean anything by it Im just amazed.

Lauren was equally incredulous.

Dr.

Lloyd, such formulas are incredibly rare.

Each one is the result of countless hours of effort, wisdom, and cutting edge techniques.

Even if you do have some, theyre far too valuable.

Rhodes Corporation cant accept them.

Andrew smiled calmly.

Dont worry

If I say I have them, have them

Once I sort through them, I'll select a few suitable ones and have them verified by the Pharmaceutical Divisions experts

Marcus's expression twitched as he listened.

Was Andrew implying he had more than just a few formulas ? How could that even be possible? Marcus knew Andrew's medical skills were exceptional, but being a skilled doctor didn't necessarily mean he could develop formulas.

Even Dr.

Aicker, the famed miracle doctor of Jayrodale, had spent his entire life painstakingly developing just a handful of formulas

Those formulas had been the backbone of the Aicker family's success, earning them an untold fortune. As for Andrew, while his medical talent might be unparalleled, he was still so young. Researching formulas was like studying ancient poetry; it required an immense amount of time and effort.

Young people simply didn't have the patience for something so tedious. Lauren shook her head firmly.

No, even if you have formulas, I won't take them.

Dr.

Lloyd, I don't want our relationship to lead you into helping me without limits.

At that moment, Laurens resolve was unwavering, She realized that the man she admired had already

reached level where she had to look up to him.

It seemed he truly was capable of everything.

Lauren couldn't help but think back to when she first met Andrew

Back then, he was nothing more than a man everyone dismissed as a so called freeloader, introduced as Christina's live in boyfriend.

Had Andrew grown this much in such a short time, or had he been hiding his true abilities all along? Andrew smiled and said, Don't worry.

Think of it as my dowry for you.

And besides, what's yours is mine it's all the same.

Marcus was at a loss for words.

Using pharmaceutical formulas as a dowry ? If Mr.

Lloyd presented this kind of gift to marry a princess from one Vestra's lesser known royal families, it would

be more than enough! At fifty billion per formula in today's market, even the seemingly untouchable royal families with their noble bloodlines would line up for such a proposal.

Not only could he marry a princess, but he could even pick and choose from the most beautiful among them

Fifty billion! That was an astronomical figure! Some of Vestra's smaller royal families, despite their glamorous titles of princes and princesses, were truly impoverished

In fact, a countys richest person in Jayrodale could easily outshine the wealth of an entire Vestran microstate

And if it were a provincial tycoon in Etharia, they might even have the local king of the Vestran microstate lighting their cigarettes in gratitude! Although Andrew had proposed providing formulas, he didnt present them immediately

It wasnt because he couldnt, but because he had so many formulas, and many of them couldnt be casually shared

While Marcus wasnt an outsider and was trustworthy, Andrew understood the unpredictable nature of people

To be cautious, he decided to give the formulas directly to Lauren at the right moment.

After work, Lauren blushed, her cheeks a soft pink, as she shyly asked, Can I come over and spend some time at your place? Andrew grinned.

Of course.

You can even stay the night if you want.

Lauren pouted playfully.

Dr.

Lloyd, youre getting cheeky Andrew pushed his luck further

They say women love bad boys, dont they? Lauren playfully pinched his waist and leaned in, whispering softly, As long as its you, I love everything

Meanwhile, in Michaels office, Tiana sat cold as ice, glaring at a financial report from the company.

Michael stood by nervously, too afraid to sit down, his posture stiff with unease

Since you took over as CEO, the companys performance has visibly declined, Tiana began coldly.

I havent even brought that up yet, but this latest mistake of yours is no small matter.

Her frustration mounting, Tiana threw the report at Michaels face.

Michael didnt dare show any displeasure

He quickly picked up the report and replied obediently, Youre absolutely right, Aunt Tiana.

This time, its entirely my fault.

Tianas tone turned sharp.

The Pharmaceutical Division cannot afford any missteps.

If it fails, it will be like a fire in our backyard, and it will undoubtedly jeopardize the family heads operations in Blumedale

Michael quickly responded, Rest assured, Aunt Tiana.

Ive already come up with a way to make up for this mistake.

Tiana scoffed

I cant even come up with a good solution, and youre claiming you have one? Michael smirked.

Aunt Tiana, you may not be aware, but Ive long had a master of medical arts at my side.

If I can persuade him to step in, he'll surely be able to resolve the Pharmaceutical Division's urgent crisis.

Tiana raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

A master of medical arts? Who?

Chapter 549 Michael said, This person doesn't have the best reputation. He's a disgraced disciple of Advanced Medical Institute.

But as for his medical skills, they are absolutely top notch even Dr.

Acker doesn't measure up in his eyes.

Tiana looked surprised.

You're not talking about the Master of Poisons, Bane Eslinger, who defected from Advanced Medical Institute years ago, are you? Michael's face lit up

Exactly, Aunt Tiana.

You know of the Master of Poisons? Yes, it's him.

Tiana's eyes narrowed as she spoke slowly.

Bane is said to be erratic and eccentric, completely unlike ordinary people.

Years ago, he used live subjects for experiments, causing countless deaths, which led to his expulsion and punishment by the Advanced Medical Institute

But his medical skills are indeed as legendary as his reputation suggests, even surpassing Cedric .
Fine, let's see what you can do

If you can bring the Master of Poisons into our fold, Ill count that as a great achievement for you.

I Michael was ecstatic.

Thank you, Aunt Tiana! Please rest assured, I will do whatever it takes to get the Master of Poisons to revitalize our Pharmaceutical Division and develop blockbuster formulas for us! Tiana glanced at him, her expression softening slightly.

Michael, you should understand why Im so strict with my own daughter but show favoritism to you, right ? Michael immediately bowed his head.

I understand, Aunt Tiana Its because youre willing to groom me, not just to take over Rhodes Corporation but the entire Rhodes familly in the future.

Tiana sighed.

Youre correct

Thats exactly the plan of both myself and the family head.

Laurens father, the head of the Rhodes family, is in a powerful position, but unfortunately, he and I were unable to have a son only Lauren, our sole daughter.

Originally, it wouldnt have been impossible for Lauren to succeed Rhodes Corporation; she has the capability for it.

But ever since Joe became infatuated with her, the family has developed different and more advantageous plans for her.

Thats why, for the sake of family stability, Im willing to suppress my own daughter and grant more authority to you.

You must understand the sacrifice and foresight behind our decision.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, Michael immediately dropped to his knees.

I will forever remember your kindness, Aunt Tiana! However, as Michael knelt, he failed to notice the icy and mocking glint in Tiana's eyes as she looked down at him.

By the time Michael stood up and looked back at Tiana, the frost and ridicule in her gaze had vanished, replaced by the kind and supportive look of a senior admiring a promising protégé.

At that moment, Jerry and Laurens secretary, Eunice, entered the room together. Mrs.

Rhodes ! Mrs.

Rhodes! The two greeted her in unison.

Tiana gestured for Jerry to wait and turned to Eunice.

Where is Lauren ? Tell her to come home with me after work.

Eunice hesitated, her expression awkward.

Ms.

Rhodes... she already left.

Tiana's face darkened

Where did she go? Contact her and have her return to the Rhodes residence immediately.

Eunice looked even more uncomfortable.

Ms.

Rhodes left with Mr.

Lloyd, and her phone has been turned off

Right now, no one ... knows where they are

Tianas fury erupted as she immediately tried calling Lauren, only to be met with the same message : her phone was off.

This is infuriating ! After several failed attempts, Tianas chest heaved with anger.

Jerry stepped forward and said, Mrs.

Rhodes, please calm down.

Ms.

Rhodes is a dignified and sensible woman.

I dont think she would do anything inappropriate.

And as for Andrew, he can be considered a man of integrity.

He should know the boundaries he mustnt cross.

Tiana gritted her teeth.

Forget about those two for now.

Jerry, has Ruby been captured ?

Jerry shook his head

Based on the leads provided by Mr.

Rhodes, we conducted surprise inspections of all the hotels, but we didnt find her.

Ive already reported the situation to Mr.

Warren at the Jayrodale Police Department.

If even he cant find her, then itll be a real problem.

Michael frowned, visibly unsettled.

Thats strange

Troy was just captured theres no way Ruby couldve sensed it and escaped so quickly.

Tiana snapped, Shut up.

Do you think everyones as incompetent as you ? Keep searching for that wretch ! After the loss shes caused the Rhodes family, I wont rest until shes torn to pieces! Meanwhile, Lauren lingered at the Moonlit Sanctuary until late at night before reluctantly returning home, The moment she stepped inside and turned on the lights, Tiana was already there, like a ghost waiting in the darkness.

Laurent surprised

She said calmly, Please leave.

I need to rest.

Without a word, Tiana strode forward, pulled up Laurens sleeve, and inspected her arm before exhaling in relief

Lauren sneered.

Relax.

The mark is still there.

Im still a virgin.

Tiana instinctively wanted to lash out but, for some reason, her expression softened

Taking Laurens hand gently, she asked in a quiet voice, Lauren, do you hate me as your mother?

Lauren shook her head.

Hate is too strong a word.

Theres just no bond between us.

You gave birth to me but didnt raise me

When I finally grew up, you found me, only to talk endlessly about how amazing the Driscoll family is, how wealthy and powerful they are, and how deeply rooted their legacy is.

All you wanted was for me to marry Joe for the familys sake.

Ive never heard of a mother like you someone who didnt care for their child growing up but swoops in

later to dictate their marriage and force them to marry for convenience.

For a brief moment, a flicker of pain appeared in Tianas eyes, but she quickly concealed it.

Without saying another word, she turned and walked out of the room.

Lauren stood frozen, her composure finally breaking as she began to sob softly, Unbeknownst to Lauren

, Tiana had stopped just outside the door.

Leaning against it, she listened to her daughters quiet cries and murmured softly, My child, no one in this world loves you more than I do

It breaks my heart to see you unhappy

But there are things you dont understand yet.

One day, youll know that everything Im doing is for your own good.

Ms.

Stevens, theres nowhere left for me in Jayrodale.

Please arrange for me to leave the city immediately! At a secluded location, Ruby appeared in a state of panic, urgently pleading with Aspen.

The Rhodes family had issued a powerful warrant against her within the aristocratic network, effectively turning her into a fugitive with no choice but to run

Chapter 550 Aspen gritted her teeth

How did this plan go so wrong? Where exactly did things fall apart? How did the Rhodes family find out you stole the formulas ? Ruby cursed angrily.

Its all because of that idiot Troy.

He confessed everything to the Rhodes family! Aspens tone turned icy.

Thats impossible

Troy wouldnt be that foolish

Besides, considering his infatuation and desire for you, he wouldnt betray you to the Rhodes family.

Doing so wouldnt win him your favor it would only bring him their wrath.

From what youve said, Troy was utterly obsessed with you.

Men like that driven by lust are easily controlled

Once youve got a hold of them, they become nothing more than obedient dogs

Her words dripped with disdain and contempt for men, revealing her deep rooted hatred and scorn for them.