

The Ashes 771

Chapter 771

Andrew said nonchalantly, "Mrs. Rhodes, say whatever you want to discredit me. It doesn't matter. I didn't come here to fight over a man-I came for an

explanation."

Tiana could not help but feel irritated. She had made her words sharp and blunt on purpose, yet Andrew remained completely unbothered. There was not even a hint of anger on his face.

Most young men had hot tempers, especially the exceptional ones. The more talented they were, the more prideful they tended to be, refusing to be compared to others. When someone pointed out their flaws, they would usually snap, act tough, or lash out in frustration.

But Andrew? Nothing.

That was what annoyed and deflated Tiana the most. This kid did not react at all. She figured it had to be because Joe's brilliance was just too overwhelming, too dominant. Andrew probably did not even have it in him to feel resentful or competitive.

Against a giant like Joe, it was impossible for a small fry like Andrew to make any big moves.

Tiana smirked, convinced she had seen through Andrew's pathetic inner world. Taking a deep breath, her expression turned cold. "You're right. There is a reason why I'm standing up for Michael today."

She added, "I know that bastard was behind the warehouse fire at the Wellers'. I also know he's nothing but a useless disgrace. Honestly? I've never thought much of Michael. I never even considered making him CEO of Rhodes Corporation."

Andrew frowned. "If you've always known he's worthless, then why-"

Tiana cut him off with a cold laugh. "You're wondering why I'd still go to such lengths to protect him, even going up against the police to keep him safe, aren't you?"

Andrew did not answer, simply waiting for her to continue.

Tiana explained, "It's simple. If I don't, Lauren's father-my husband-might not make it out of Blumedale alive.

Her tone was calm, almost indifferent, but Andrew could hear the hatred and fear beneath her words.

"You mean Lauren's father, the head of the Rhodes family? How could someone like Michael possibly be a threat to him?"

Andrew's frown deepened. The deeper he looked, the more complicated the Rhodes family seemed.

Tiana's face suddenly looked weary, and she let out a bitter smile. "Michael himself? He's nothing. If I wanted to, I could have him wiped off the face of the earth in an instant."

"But Michael's father-Kenny, the elder of the Rhodes family-is a different story. Andrew, since I no longer consider you an outsider, I might as well tell you the truth about the Rhodes family. Lauren's father, Jameson, may be the head of the family and hold the power, but ever since the Rhodes family decided to expand into Blumedale, things have been a mess.

"For starters, Blumedale is filled with many powerhouses. It's crawling with ambitious people, far beyond

what the Rhodes family ever imagined. Carving out a place for ourselves there has been nothing short of a struggle."

She added, "Then, there's Kenny. Ever since the family stepped into Blumedale, he was handed an opportunity of a lifetime. His

daughter married into the Golding

family-the most powerful family in

Blumedale.

"You know what they say when one person makes it big, their whole family rises with them. Kenny used to be

just another unremarkable member of the Rhodes family, but with the Goldings backing him, he flipped the tables. Now, he's a serious contender for the head of the family.

"Michael, sitting in the CEO seat while doing absolutely nothing in Jayrodale-did you really think that was my choice?"

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Tiana clenched her teeth and said, "You're wrong. This is all because Kenny has been pressuring Jameson in Blumedale. On top of that, the Golding family has been scheming, using Kenny as a pawn to take over the Rhodes family."

She explained, "So I have no choice but to protect Michael! If I don't, Jameson will be isolated in Blumedale, and I won't be there to support him. If Kenny decides to make a bold move against the head of the family, then Lauren may never see the father who loves her most again!

"And Lauren's success has far outshined Michael, directly threatening Kenny's family's interests. Under Kenny's manipulation, Joe learned about Lauren and fell for her at first sight. Now, the whole marriage arrangement with the Driscoll family.

"People think I'm just trying to curry favor with them as if I'm the one pushing for this marriage. But the truth is, the Driscoll family is powerful, wealthy, and filled with dangerous men. They didn't ask for Lauren's hand- they're forcing it!"

After spilling everything, Tiana looked utterly exhausted. It was not just physical fatigue but the kind of exhaustion that came from powerlessness-having no choice but to endure humiliation and frustration.

Andrew stayed silent for a moment before chuckling. "Mrs. Rhodes, the Rhodes family may seem stuck in Blumedale's mess right now, but there is a way out. And honestly? It's pretty simple."

Tiana scoffed. "You say that like it's easy. Alright then, tell me how exactly do we fix this?"

Andrew shrugged. "Since we're talking simple, why not go with the simplest solution? Just get rid of Kenny."

Tiana stared at him, stunned for a long moment. Then, she suddenly let out a mocking laugh.

"That's your brilliant idea? What a reckless and naive solution. Do you think it's that easy to just take Kenny out? Even if we ignore the chaos it would cause within the Rhodes family, there's still the Golding family-we won't be able to handle the moment they retaliate."

Andrew remained calm. "If Kenny's gone, no matter how much internal chaos there is, the head of the family would still have control in the end. As for the Golding family? They're not as untouchable as you think. If they refuse to back down and insist on making this a war, then they can be dealt with too."

Tiana's face darkened in anger. "Andrew, you're getting more outrageous by the second-do you even hear yourself?"

"Do you actually think the Golding family is just some weak little business we can push around? Let me tell you, in Blumedale, they're just as powerful as the Driscoll family. The fact that you can even say something this absurd -if it reaches the Goldings' ears, you might not live to see the sunrise."

She shook her head, then let out a bitter laugh, waving a hand dismissively. "I must be losing my mind, actually arguing with you about this. You and Marvin may be doing well for yourselves in

Jayrodale, but Blumedale is a whole different world. In that place, you're

nothing but a flicker of light in a storm. There's no point in taking your words seriously."

Andrew remained indifferent. "Doesn't matter to me. This is your problem, not mine. I only have one goal-if Lauren doesn't want this, then no one can force her."

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Tiana let out a cold huff. "She's my daughter. Do you think you love her more than do? More than her own father? Listen to me, Andrew. Everything I've done, every painful choice I've made, even hurting my own daughter -it's all to give her a little more safety, a little more freedom."

She added, "But do you even understand what you're doing You claim to love her,

but you're only putting her in

danger. If you stay by her side, you're dragging her straight into the fire."

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Andrew spoke calmly. "Mrs. Rhodes, if I resolve the Rhodes family's crisis, will you stop forcing Lauren into this?"

Tiana let out a mocking laugh. "You? Solving the Rhodes family's crisis? Andrew, you're too young, too impulsive, and you think way too highly of yourself. Remember, don't ever bring up such ridiculous ideas in front of me again.

"I was just starting to see you differently, but now, I'm reminded why I had no respect for you in the first place! In short, you and Lauren are impossible! You can't protect her and you can't give her what she needs!"

Her tone was dripping with scorn and dismissal, but Andrew's expression remained composed. From the very beginning, he had never taken the Rhodes family-or even the so-called powerful Driscoll and Golding families in Blumedale- seriously.

Just then, the door swung open, and Lauren rushed in, her face pale. She said weakly, "Dr. Lloyd, let's go. I have nothing left to say to this cruel woman. If she insists on being reckless and stubborn, then let her be. From now on, I'll never care what happens to her again!"

She grabbed Andrew's arm and pulled him toward the door

Andrew sighed. In truth, Tiana had been secretly protecting Lauren all this time. No matter what she said or did, he could not bring himself to hate her or even be angry with her.

"Andrew, remember what I told you," Tiana warned as she watched them leave. "If you're a real man, think about Lauren's future instead of selfishly dragging her into danger. Do you really want her to end up destroyed because of you?"

Andrew did not respond, nor did he look back. He simply walked out with Lauren. Once they returned to the office, he gently pressed her shoulders down, making her sit.

He said, "You should rest a little longer. You're still too weak."

Lauren's eyes were red and swollen, and she looked completely lost and broken.

"I always thought she didn't love me, that she resented me as her daughter," she murmured. "But I never imagined she'd be this heartless-choosing Michael over me without hesitation."

Her voice cracked, and before she could finish, tears spilled down her face. She buried herself against Andrew's shoulder and sobbed uncontrollably.

Andrew gently stroked her back, his voice soft with reassurance. "Lauren, have you ever considered that

yet to get

maybe Mrs. Rhodes does love you? She just has her own way of

showing it... a way that's buried under a lot of pain."

Lauren sniffled, shaking her head. "It doesn't matter. I won't forgive her this time, Dr. Lloyd, I have no one

now... only you. Don't leave me. Take me away from here, please?

Andrew let out a quiet sigh and tightened his arms around her. "Silly girl, don't worry. I won't ever let go of your hand-I'll always be here for you."

There was deep love between Tiana and Lauren, but the walls between them were thick, built over years of misunderstandings and painful choices.

Andrew wanted to bridge that gap, but there were some things he could not bring himself to say. If he told Lauren that her father was barely holding on in Blumedale, she would undoubtedly drop everything and rush to save him.

Yet, with the crisis the Rhodes family faced there, how could a single woman like Lauren possibly turn things around?

As Lauren cried, soaking the fabric of his shirt, Francesca stepped forward with concern. "Andrew, I think Lauren should get some rest. She's been through too much today.

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Andrew agreed with Francesca's suggestion. Then, he pressed a point on Lauren's shoulder, and she immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Just then, noise erupted outside. Andrew frowned and was about to ask Francesca to check it out when Eunice, secretary, rushed in with a panicked expression.

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She reported angrily, "It's Michael. He's been released without charges."

Francesca's face darkened. "Released? He committed arson How the hell did the police let him walk free?"

Eunice sighed bitterly. "I don't know, but Michael is absolutely smug about it. He's out there right now, celebrating while his lackeys kiss up to him."

Andrew remained calm. "No need to speculate. Let's go see for ourselves."

In the Rhodes Corporation's banquet hall, Michael was surrounded by a crowd of sycophants, popping champagne and reveling in his so-called victory. The entire scene was loud, obnoxious, and filled with arrogance.

"Mr. Rhodes, you're incredible! Even the cops couldn't touch you!"

"Say no more-after today, I swear, I'm sticking with Mr. Rhodes!"

"With Mr. Rhodes in charge, Jayrodale is as good as his playground. Who the hell would dare challenge him?"

The endless flattery only made Michael grin wider, his arrogance reaching new heights.

Just then, Andrew and Francesca stepped into the room.

Michael, cigarette hanging from his lips, sauntered over and chuckled. "Andrew, what do you think now? I told you-those cops couldn't do a damn thing to me. You didn't believe me then, but I bet you do now."

Andrew smiled lazily. "Then congratulations, Mr. Rhodes. You've managed to crawl out of the lion's den and live another day."

Michael's face darkened. His smile twisted into a sneer as he spat, "Andrew, I've told you before-no matter what you do, you'll never outplay me. Even the police in Jayrodale couldn't touch me. So tell me, who the hell do you think you are?"

Andrew remained unfazed as he replied, "I'm nothing. But you, Mr. Rhodes you're something, alright. A worthless mutt. A pathetic pile of garbage. That's what you are. Satisfied?"

Michael's lackeys immediately flared up and lunged toward Andrew. "You think you can talk to Mr. Rhodes like that? You're digging your own grave!"

Michael raised a hand, stopping them. "Hold on. Don't touch him."

His smirk deepened as he exhaled a cloud of smoke. "I'll personally make sure this bastard doesn't leave here alive."

He looked Andrew up and down with disdain. "Let me teach you a little something, Andrew. Out here in the real world, power and connections are what matter. You might think you're tough, but Jayrodale is just a tiny dot on the map. Someone like me? I'm on a whole different level one you'll never reach."

Andrew chuckled. "And you think that level comes from your daddy, Kenny, right? Let me make this clear-if you dare pull any more stunts, if you so much as try to hurt Lauren again, you won't make it out of Jayrodale alive."

Michael's expression flickered for a split second before he let out a sharp laugh. "Well, well, seems like you've

done your homework. You actually know about my old man. But do you even realize how much power he holds? With just a flick of his finger, he could crush you."

Francesca clenched her fists. "Michael, what the hell are you so proud of? The head of the Rhodes family isn't your father-it's Lauren's father, Mr. Jameson Rhodes!"

Michael scoffed and waved her off. "Francesca, you're hot, but honestly, the only thing you've got going for you is your looks. Let me give you a little reality check. The one running the Rhodes family right now isn't Uncle Jameson. It's my father, the man who just secured an alliance with the Golding family in Blumedale.

"As for Uncle Jameson? Please. If I'm feeling polite, I'll still treat him like an elder, and let him keep up the act of being the head of the family. If I'm not I'll call him by his name to his face-and he wouldn't dare say a damn thing about it."

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Francesca let out a cold laugh. "You really think I'd believe word you say? Everyone in Jayrodale knows that Mr. Jameson has always been the backbone of the Rhodes family. Mr. Kenny? He's been irrelevant for years."

Michael whistled arrogantly, his grin widening. "Ever heard the saying? Tables turn every. Did you really think my father and I would stay nobodies forever? Fran, if your brains were even half as big as your chest, you'd know better.

"Go ask around-aside from not officially taking the family head title, my father has already stripped Jameson of all his power."

Feeling triumphant, Michael took a long swig of champagne, reveling in his own audacity.

"Oh, and let me really open your eyes. The Wellers' warehouse? Yeah, I torched it. Not just that—I took a few lives while I was at it. But so what? Dad made one call to the Golding family, and they made another straight to the governor's office.

"After that, the governor put pressure on Mr. Thatcher, and Mr. Thatcher cracked down on that fat pig Donald, forcing him to cut me loose immediately. And just like that, I walked out of there untouched. That, my friends, is real power. That's what it means to be untouchable."

Watching Michael bask in his arrogance, Francesca felt nothing but disgust. "Michael, you might escape for now, but karma has a way of catching up with people like you."

Michael sneered, his eyes flashing with malice. "Francesca, if you were smart, you'd ditch Andrew and Lauren while you still can. Spend some quality time with me instead. If you can satisfy me, maybe I'll be generous and help out your little Aickers family."

His gaze shifted to Andrew, a cruel smirk curling on his lips. "And you-watch your back. My old man's got his eye on you now. I'd be careful if I were you-wouldn't want to take a wrong turn one night and end up in a ditch."

Andrew grabbed Francesca's hand and turned to leave. "Fran, there's no point wasting time on this scumbag."

After taking two steps, he suddenly stopped and glanced back, his expression unreadable. "When I first came to Rhodes Corporation, I was only planning to teach you a lesson. But now, I've changed my mind. Michael, I'm going to make sure you don't walk away from this. Mark my words."

Michael's expression twisted in fury as he clenched his teeth. That bastard actually dared to threaten him?

He had already laid all his cards on the table, yet Andrew was not the least bit afraid-he had not even flinched.

That pissed Michael off. Normally, people would be trembling the second they heard his father's name.

"Bane!" Michael suddenly barked.

From the shadows, a figure

emerged a man who had been sitting quietly like a ghost in the

corner. His voice was eerily calm.

"What do you need, Mr. Rhodes?"

Michael's eyes gleamed with vicious intent. "Poison, That's your specialty, isn't it? I'm done waiting. I want Andrew dead. I don't care how you do it-make his body rot from the inside out, make him suffer until he begs for death. And when you're done, bring him to me. I want to be the one to crush his skull under my boot."

Bane let out a chilling laugh. "I've

already started preparing for

Mr. Rhodes. You won't have to wait longer." Content he wait

much

Michael's smirk grew even darker. "And after Andrew, I have one more job for you-take care of Tiana for me."

Bane's expression shifted immediately, his confidence faltering. "That..... is impossible. Tiana isn't just strong-

she's stronger than me. If you want me to go after her, you might as well be sending the to my grave."

Chapter 776

Michael sneered. "Fortune favors the bold, Bane. Haven't you always wanted to take over the Aickers and replace Cedric? My father has already agreed. In fact, he's even willing to pull some strings for you-help you get in with the Golding family. So, are you in or out? Think carefully."

Bane's expression shifted, torn between hesitation and ambition.

After a long pause, he let out a sinister chuckle. "You've got guts, I'll give you that. Ruthless-just the way it should be. Fine. Once I take care of Andrew, I'll roll the dice with you and go after Tiana. But you and your father better keep your word. I don't work for free."

Michael's eyes darkened. "In Jayrodale, Lauren is fighting me for Rhodes Corporation. In Blumedale, Jameson is fighting my father for the Rhodes family throne. Those two should've been dealt with long ago, but my father and I have been waiting for the perfect opportunity.

"Tiana has always been the one standing in our way. She's the only person my father actually fears. But if you can take her out? Then Lauren and Jameson won't even be a threat anymore."

"I can't believe Michael and his father are actually making a comeback," Francesca fumed as they returned to Moonlit Apothecary. "They committed crimes in broad daylight, and they still walked free. Do bad people really get to run wild forever in this world?"

Cedric let out a weary sigh. "You're still young, Francesca. You'll see a lot more of this in your lifetime."

He continued, "There's no such thing as good and evil-only the strong preying on the weak. With the Golding family backing them, Jameson really doesn't stand a chance against Kenny. No matter how rotten Michael is, he's got the kind of protection that makes him untouchable."

Andrew had brought Lauren back to Moonlit Apothecary to recover since he did not feel safe leaving her alone at Rhodes Corporation. The chaos surrounding the company had not settled; it had only escalated.

With the Wellers and Stevens fanning the flames in the background, Rhodes Corporation's Pharmaceutical Division had become a disgrace, its reputation sinking to rock bottom. The damage was not just limited to one department either- every branch of the company was now suffering.

Revenue was plummeting by the day, and deals were falling apart left and right. Dozens of businesses had already cut ties, and lawsuits and contract breaches were piling up.

Andrew came downstairs and found Cedric and Francesca. He gave them a few quick instructions. "Mr Aicker, from now on, you can pick up Vitality Pills and Titan Essence Pills directly from Glorious

Pharmaceuticals-no need to check in with me.

"For now, Lauren will be staying at Moonlit Apothecary to rest. I need you both to keep an eye on her. As AST for finding brand ambassadors for the two signature pills, Mr. Aicker, I'll leave the initial arrangements to you. Once I have time, we'll go together to finalize things,

Cedric nodded. "Dr. Lloyd, don't worry. Anything I can handle on my own, I will. You won't need to check in. As for Ms. Rhodes, rest

assured-I'll make sure she's well taken care of."

Francesca clenched her fists. "Andrew, no matter what, we have to help Lauren take back the CEO position. If we don't, all of this will just be handed over to that bastard Michael!"

She added, "And with Mrs. Rhodes turning her back on Lauren, if she loses this fight, she'll be left with nothing."

Andrew's gaze turned ice-cold. "Don't worry. Everything that rightfully belongs to Lauren-I won't let anyone

take it away from her. It's time to clean the house. And I know exactly where to start." 2

Chapter 777

A storm was brewing in Jayrodale. For Lauren's sake, Andrew knew he could no longer stay confined to this city he had to extend his reach into Blumedale.

Leaving Moonlit Apothecary, he sent a message to Dylan and Natasha, instructing them to meet him in West Side. He needed to strengthen their abilities if they were going to handle the changes ahead.

On the drive, his phone rang-Donald was calling.

"Mr. Lloyd, I hate to say this, but I failed. I couldn't bring Michael to justice."

There was frustration in Donald's voice, thick with unwillingness to accept defeat.

Andrew remained calm. "No need to be discouraged, Mr. Warren. Tell me exactly what happened."

Donald's tone hardened with anger. "The order came directly from Mr. Thatcher. He commanded Michael's unconditional release. I was furious and demanded to know why, but all Mr. Thatcher said was that Michael had people backing him from above.

"I've dealt with plenty of criminals trying to pull strings before, but in the end, justice always caught up with them. Yet somehow, Michael walked free like nothing happened. Word is, his father, Kenny, reached out to someone powerful in Blumedale-a high-ranking figure who made a single call to the state office.

"You know how it works, Mr. Lloyd. When an order comes from the state, I have no choice but to obey. Even Mr. Thatcher had to comply without question."

Andrew's eyes darkened. "Kenny called in a favor from the Golding family. That 'high-ranking figure' you're talking about is likely one of their top leaders-maybe even the head of the family himself."

Donald sucked in a sharp breath. "What? Michael and his father actually managed to form ties with the Goldings? No wonder! That explains everything!" Andrew asked, "Mr. Warren, how much do you know about the Golding family?"

Donald hesitated before replying, "I wouldn't say I know them well, but their name carries weight across all of Gabo Creek. I went to college in Blumedale, and even back then, the Golding family was an unstoppable force.

"They're one of the 'The Five Apex Families' of Gabo Creek, and their influence runs deeper than most people can comprehend."

Andrew raised a brow. "The Five Apex Families? Tell me about them."

Donald took a breath before answering. "Gabo Creek is one of the strongest regions in the southern provinces. Nationally, people talk about 'The Three Titans and Five Apex'-eight of the most powerful families in the country."

"The Three Titans refers to the three ruling families in the capital-untouchable forces that no one dares to challenge. The Five Apex are the Wrights, the

Ramseys, the Goldings, the Ulrichs, and the Haywoods."

Andrew smirked. "So tell me, if I mobilized all of Jayrodale's underground forces, could we take down the Golding family?"

Donald nearly choked, his voice filled with panic. "Mr. Lloyd-please don't joke like that! My heart can't take it!

"The Golding family has its own

private security force, and their members are trained from childhood by top-tier masters. Sure,

Jayrodale's underground groups have the advantage in numbers, but when it comes to high-level combat power, we won't stand a chance!"

Andrew hummed thoughtfully. "I see."

Donald quickly added, "Wait - Mr. Lloyd, you're not seriously thinking about making a move against the Goldings, are you?"

Andrew dodged the question. "That's not your concern. But let me ask you-what about the Driscoll family? Where do they stand in Blumedale's hierarchy?"

Donald hesitated before answering, his voice even more cautious. "That's... even scarier than the Goldings. One of the Three Titans in the capital is actually from the Driscoll family.

"Anyone from their bloodline walks through Gabo Creek like they own the place. Hell, not just Gabo Creek- throughout the entire southern region, they're a force no one dares to cross."

Andrew chuckled. "Why do you sound so scared? You talk like you've personally

suffered under the Driscolls before."

Donald let out a bitter sigh. "To be

honest... have. When I was in

college some rich punk from the Driscoll family bullied me. Cornered me in the bathroom and tried to make me drink piss."

Andrew's expression darkened. His voice turned cold. "Tell me you didn't bow your head. Tell me you fought back and shoved that Driscoll brat's face into the damn toilet instead."

Chapter 778

Donald sighed in shame. "No, I didn't do anything. I chose to bow my head."

Andrew was speechless. "So, in the end, you actually drank it?"

There was silence on the other end of the line. After a long pause, Donald muttered, "Mr. Lloyd, goodbye."

Andrew had not expected Donald to have such a humiliating past. With a cold chuckle, he said, "Wait a minute. You still remember the name of that Driscoll brat

who bulled you, don't you?"

Donald gritted his teeth. "Of course, I do. How could I forge? Even now, after climbing my way up to chief commissioner of Jayrodale's police force, I still hate that bastard. But at the same time, I can't shake the fear I felt back then."

He continued, "His name is Rafael Driscoll. He was just a spoiled rich kid back then, but now, he's grown into one of the Driscoll family's enforcers."

Andrew nodded calmly. "Got it. If the opportunity comes, I make sure you get justice."

Donald let out an awkward laugh, not taking Andrew's words seriously. At this point in his life, he had authority and success. However, when

Came to dealing with the elite families from the capital, he knew his place he avoided them at all costs.

Andrew's offer to help him settle that old grudge? Donald figured he was just saying that to make him feel better. There was no way it would ever happen.

By the time Andrew arrived at the West End headquarters, Dylan and Natasha were already waiting for him. "Darling, I heard about what happened to Rhodes Corporation. Is Ms. Rhodes alright?" Natasha asked hesitantly.

Even though Lauren was Andrew's woman, and it left a sour taste in Natasha's heart, she was not foolish. She understood her place. No matter what happened, Lauren would always come first.

So Natasha made sure to keep her attitude in check-there was no room for reckless jealousy.

Andrew reassured her. "She's fine. The one in trouble is Rhodes Corporation, but that has nothing to do with me."

Dylan's voice was serious. "Mr. Lloyd, I went to check out the Wellers' warehouse fire. I have a feeling that Michael got set up by Harvey."

Andrew raised a brow. "Oh? Tell me more."

Dylan explained, "That warehouse? There was nothing valuable inside. Definitely nothing close to the billions of dollars worth of goods that the Wellers claimed.

"My informant was the security

guard at the entrance. He saw Michael set the fire with his own eyes. But the moment the flames started, Harvey showed up, and instead of panicking, he actually started laughing and clapping."

He continued, "Thinking back on it, it's obvious-Harvey set Michael up. He knew Michael was coming to burn the place down and let him walk right into the trap."

Andrew was surprised. He knew Harvey was a snake, but this was next-level manipulation-Michael had no idea he had played right into Harvey's hands.

Natasha scoffed. "Serves him right. Michael and Harvey are both garbage. One's a sleazebag who sleeps with his

stepmother, and the other's a useless brat who thinks he's untouchable. Let them tear each other apart-It's what they deserve

Andrew waved his hand. "Enough about them. Did you get everything I asked for? The herbs and the other materials?

Dylan and Natasha responded in unison. "Everything is ready!"

Andrew nodded. "Good. This time, I'm not just training the two of you-I'm going to enhance the strength of everyone under your command as well. How much

improve will depend on your lo

talent and dedication."

Dylan and Natasha both took deep, heavy breaths.

In the underground world, money and power were important, but there was nothing more valuable than raw strength. After all, at the end of the day, the one with the strongest fists made the rules.

Chapter 779

For martial artists, strength and skill could be enhanced directly through specialized herbal tonics or even more potent alchemical pills. Nonetheless, whether it was a tone or a pill, these were luxuries that most people could

not afford.

Hence, it was often said such a journey was only available to the rich. If one wanted to master martial arts, they needed lots of money.

However, having wealth and power was only the foundation. It was not nearly enough to reach the highest levels.

Plenty of rich kids trained in combat, but most were nothing more than show-offs. Their skills were shallow, nothing beyond a few flashy moves.

When faced with real martial artists, they would not last more than a few strikes. At best, they would get slapped around and humiliated. At worst, they would end up dead.

To truly improve, money alone was not enough. One needed someone who could refine and craft the right tonics or enhancement pills. And those alchemists? They were not just rare—they were nearly impossible to hire.

Take Natasha and Dylan, for example. They were both filthy rich, yet most of the time, they had no idea how to spend their money wisely. To them, even the most basic enhancement pill was a rare treasure.

More often than not, they had to risk their lives, fighting and killing, just to get their hands on a single dose.

Why? Because alchemists stood at the top of the hierarchy unreachable, untouchable, and completely in control of their craft.

Even though Dylan and Natasha ruled over Jayrodale's underground world, in front of an alchemist, they were nothing. Andrew spent a good amount of effort refining the herbs and rare ingredients they had gathered, turning them into a powerful batch of tonic.

For him, brewing enhancement tonics for ordinary fighters was easy-it was practically second nature. However, the amount he had to produce this time was overwhelming since he needed enough to supply Natasha and Dylan's entire crew-over a hundred people.

By the time he finished, he was completely drained.

Natasha, ever the opportunist, stuck by his side the entire time. She massaged his shoulders, kneaded his back, brought him water, and wiped away his sweat. When he was too focused to notice, she even stole a few kisses on his cheek.

She took care of everything, acting like a devoted personal maid.

Andrew was not fooled. He knew Natasha was not just being considerate-this was her way of buttering him up. After all, the tonics he had made were meant for her and Dylan's people.

Right now, in Natasha's eyes, Andrew was the ultimate prize. If she had her way,

she would cling to him every night, never letting him leave her bed.

"Alright," Andrew said, exhaling as he looked over the tonics. "Follow my instructions and dilute these in warm water before use."

He explained, "Since the supply is limited, I suggest distributing it only to your most talented and promising subordinates. With this tonic, their training speed will skyrocket. Some might even see progress overnight."

Andrew carefully explained the usage, making sure Dylan and Natasha understood every detail. They both listened intently, committing every word to memory.

Andrew had not bothered to hide his refining process from them, which sparked their curiosity. Both of them watched closely, hoping to learn a thing or two.

Yet, as they observed, their heads started to spin.

Andrew's techniques were far too complicated. The process was intricate, with countless steps and precise

sequences.

After a while, they both realized something—alchemy was not just about mixing ingredients. It was a high-level craft, requiring insane precision and knowledge.

Dylan rubbed his hands together and flashed a flattering grin. "Mr. Lloyd, now that we have the tonics, what

about us? How do you plan on enhancing me and Natasha?" en

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Andrew said, "The two of you already have a solid foundation. This tonic won't do much for you. That's why I've prepared something different—pills, specifically

made for you."

The moment they heard the word pills, Natasha and Dylan's faces lit up with excitement. They watched eagerly, waiting for Andrew to take them out.

However, instead of moving, Andrew simply looked at them and said coldly, "All medicine carries poison to some degree. And pills—especially high-grade ones—are the most dangerous of them all."

He continued, "For an ordinary person, swallowing a single high-grade pill could make their blood boil and explode within hours. The reason is simple these pills contain an overwhelming amount of energy. So don't assume that just because a pill is rare and powerful, it's automatically good for you."

Natasha frowned. "Darling, are you saying the ones you made for us are high- grade pills?"

Andrew pulled out a small box and placed it on the table. His voice remained indifferent. "These are Cleansing Pills. They will purge all impurities from your body and heal the hidden injuries you've accumulated over the years.

"Once absorbed, your entire physique will be reborn, but only if you can endure the process. I'm warning you now—if you can't handle the pill's effects, the best- case scenario is that your blood vessels rupture and your strength regresses. The worst? You end up half-dead, with your meridians completely destroyed."

Natasha had already reached for the box, but at those words, her hand trembled slightly before she slowly pulled back.

Dylan stared at the pills, the eagerness in his eyes fading, replaced by a trace of fear.

Andrew glanced at both of them, smirking. "Combat training is like rowing against the current—if you're not moving forward, you're falling behind. Martial arts isn't just about fighting others. It's about fighting yourself. It's akin to going against the will of god itself.

"Every step forward is a battle. Every inch of progress is fought with blood and sweat. You both want strength, but you're afraid of the risk. If that's the case, then I might as well not waste my time."

Dylan gritted his teeth. "Mr. Lloyd, it's not that I'm afraid of dying!"

Andrew let out a cold chuckle. "Oh? Then why don't you take the pill? Weren't you two just begging for high-grade pills?"

Natasha remained silent, her expression tense. However, Andrew's words had clearly struck a nerve—her pride flared, and frustration flickered in her eyes.

"Fine! I'll take it!" With a sharp glint in her eyes, Natasha, true to her Black Widow nickname, grabbed the box without hesitation.

Dylan followed, his voice firm. "I'm in too. You're right, Mr. Lloyd. Training isn't for cowards. Either I push forward, or I get left behind. If I back down now, I'll never reach the top. I'll never become someone truly powerful."

He added, "Before I met you, I was nothing more than an inexperienced and naive man-I had no idea how vast the world really was. But now thanks to you, I understand what it means to stand among true giants. And I want to keep climbing higher. I want to see the view from the top."

Natasha scoffed. "Do you think I clawed my way to the top by being afraid of death? Darling, don't underestimate me. I fully intend to get stronger. Stronger than you even. And once I do, I'm going to pin you down in bed and have my way with you."

Andrew laughed. "Then you better work hard. But no matter how hard you try, that day will never come."

Natasha gritted her teeth in frustration. She already could not beat Andrew in a fight. Now, she could not even win an argument against him.

It seemed she would have to find another way to make him surrender-perhaps

by using her body to make sure he was too weak to stand.