

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren) #Chapter 1691 - Read Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren) Chapter 1691

Andrew turned back to face Francesca and the others.

Natasha spoke sympathetically, "Darling, Joe might not be on our side, but he's not really a bad person either. Why did you have to be so harsh on him?"

Francesca nodded in agreement. "Exactly, honey. What you said back there was honestly pretty hurtful. I'm afraid he's going to feel terrible about it."

Andrew sneered. "I was just telling the truth. Is that somehow wrong? Besides, since when do I need to worry about his feelings?"

Aspen crossed her arms and twisted them behind her back. Then, she curled her body and threaded her arms through from below her feet. Her body was incredibly flexible and limber.

She took a moment to address Andrew, saying, "I think you went too far. Joe is dealing with heartbreak and crushing defeat right now. It's not a bad thing to show a little empathy!"

Andrew snorted, half amused, half annoyed. "Wow, what is this? You're all turning against me now? Siding with an outsider to scold me? Today's training is doubled, and nobody's going home until it's finished!"

The four students groaned in despair, but none dared to complain. They knew that Andrew was absolutely ruthless and showed no mercy to anyone during training.

Just then, Rachel arrived at Serenity Villa. She was wearing a fur coat and swaying her hips as she walked. "I'm looking for Mr. Lloyd."

Someone replied, "He's there at the back lawn."

Rachel immediately checked her appearance, adjusting her makeup and hair accessories in her compact mirror before heading to find Andrew.

She chirped sweetly, "Mr. Lloyd, hello there!"

The smile was lovely, no doubt. However, for a woman in her 40s, no amount of charm could quite compete with a fresh-faced 20-something. Still, she was curvy, rich, and confident. That much was undeniable.

Thanks to high-end cosmetics and a closet full of designer labels, she did have a certain sophisticated charm. Unfortunately, Andrew was not interested in that type at all.

"Oh, Madam Gardner. What can I do for you?" Andrew greeted her casually.

He was wearing just a tank top on his upper body. Bending down, he effortlessly lifted two massive stone spheres, each one as big as a lorry tire.

They had actually borrowed these from the entrance of The Sovereign Residences. Each one weighed several hundred pounds and normally just sat there like oversized lawn ornaments.

Occasionally, some of the female residents would sit on them when they had cramps, though Andrew had no idea why that helped.

Rachel let out a surprised gasp, her eyes lighting up as she covered her mouth.

Andrew set down the stone spheres and looked at her strangely. "Madam Gardner, what are you gasping about?"

Rachel giggled and blushed. "Oh, it's nothing. It's just that your muscles are so incredibly attractive! I've seen hundreds, maybe thousands of handsome men in my life, but this is the first time I've seen someone with such a perfect physique like yours, Mr. Lloyd."

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Well, stop staring then. I charge ten thousand dollars per look."

Rachel immediately pulled out her checkbook, wrote a large string of numbers on

it, and tossed it to Andrew. "No problem. I'll prepay for 1000 looks!"

Only then did Andrew remember that this woman was ridiculously wealthy. Duncan had once joked that even her underwear was diamond-studded.

"Alright, you win. Now tell me what you want. If it's nothing important, don't interrupt my training session."

Rachel reluctantly pulled her gaze away. "Mr. Lloyd, Cillian has kicked the bucket!"

Andrew raised an eyebrow. "He's dead? What happened?"

Rachel shook her head. "I don't know the details, but it's confirmed that he died at the nursing home. And word on the street is that his death is connected to you!"

Andrew scoffed. "Connected to me? Which idiot is spreading that bullshit?"

Rachel replied, "I don't know where the rumors started, but now that Cillian is dead, you're caught up in a media storm. Everyone's saying that you not only interfered in the Ulrich family's private affairs, but after taking the chairman position, you've been eliminating anyone who opposes you."

"They're calling you petty and

vindictive, saying you wouldn't even spare an old man like Cillian. There's speculation that you orchestrated his death behind the scenes!"

Andrew nodded. "Got it. You can go home now."

Rachel was stunned. "Mr. Lloyd, aren't you going to say or do something about this?"

Andrew chuckled. "Sure. My official statement is... screw whoever's talking. I don't give a damn!"

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No matter the weather, training on the back lawn of Serenity Villa began like clockwork every morning before dawn. Even if it rained or the wind howled, Andrew never allowed a break.

The only exception was Lauren, who had been sidelined due to an injury. However, seeing her lounging around, grinning from ear to ear, Andrew casually remarked, "One more week tops, then you're joining in for beginner drills. Don't even think about making excuses. No one's getting special treatment."

Instantly, the beauty's smile froze. She huffed, "Honey, do you even realize how heartless you are? At this rate, the three of us are going to drain you dry!"

Andrew just chuckled at that comment. Through their recent intimate encounters, he had confirmed that merging spiritually and physically with the three women was beneficial for breaking through his sealed power.

However, he still had not figured out the exact reason behind this phenomenon.

Across the artificial lake, Joe stood there like a pole, showing up faithfully every single day.

At first, Andrew used to walk over every morning just to throw some verbal jabs his way. Joe would sneer and brush past him with a dramatic flick of his sleeve.

But over time, Joe stopped reacting.

No matter how Andrew mocked or provoked him, the guy just stood there and ignored him completely, like Andrew was invisible.

It ticked Andrew off. He did not want Joe leeching off his techniques. However, if the guy refused to leave, there was not much he could do about it since the space across the lake was technically Joe's turf.

Andrew approached The Sovereign Residences' management staff to negotiate, asking if they could buy out Joe's area.

The management staff immediately threw up their hands and said, "Mr. Lloyd, you're really putting us in a tough spot here! To be honest, every single person at The Sovereign Residences would rather jump off a building than deal with Mr. Driscoll!"

Andrew could only rub his forehead in frustration, knowing there was nothing else he could do.

Just then, Chantelle drove her Audi A6 to Serenity Villa for a visit.

Seeing Andrew huffing and puffing while training his four disciples, she looked somewhat stunned.

"What are you doing? Don't tell me you're trying to turn Ms. Aicker and Ms. Stevens into world-class martial artists," the cold beauty teased.

Andrew replied calmly, "You're absolutely right."

Chantelle shook her head and suppressed a laugh. "Mr. Lloyd, you're delusional. Sure, Ms. Stevens' got a bit of a foundation. But frankly speaking, her talent is limited, and she won't be going far."

Andrew smiled. "Go on. I'm listening."

Chantelle scoffed. "Then, there's Ms.

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Aicker. Don't get me wrong... Her chest? I'll gladly admit defeat there. hereby crown her Queen of Cleavage. But martial arts? Please. I'm blunt by nature, and honestly, she started way too late. At best, it's just for fitness and stress relief."

Andrew nodded. "You're absolutely right, except for one thing."

Chantelle narrowed her eyes. "What's that?"

Andrew replied, "You're completely overlooking who their instructor is. You're acting like I don't even exist As long as I'm training them, they can have average talent or a late start. But in the end, they won't be weak. I'll make damn sure they can stand toe-to-toe with you?"

Chantelle let out a short laugh. "Do you even hear yourself? You do remember'm the Secretary-General for Governor McCormick, right? You don't seriously think this is just a vanity title? Let me clue you in, I've been pushing myself nonstop. feel it... I'm not far from hitting the martial king level."

Andrew grinned. "Knew you wouldn't take that lying down. Why don't we set a date and put it to the test?"

Chantelle shot back, "Whatever test you have in mind, I'm ready anytime!"

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Andrew said, "It's simple. In three months, I'll have my students spar with you. Then we'll see who comes out on top."

Chantelle replied dismissively, "What if they lose? What happens then?"

Andrew looked at her. "Nothing much to say. How about I give you my full attention for three straight nights?"

Chantelle first blushed with anger. Then, her face turned red as she glared at Andrew. "Make it a full week. That's my final offer. Either agree or forget about it."

Andrew raised an eyebrow. "Women in their 30s really do have bigger appetites!"

Okay, no problem."

"But what if you lose?" he asked smoothly.

Chantelle did not even hesitate. "I won't lose. But if I do? You can do whatever you want."

Andrew chuckled lazily. "Ms. Garcia, you never learn, do you? Remember our first

bet? You lost that one too, and the price you paid... Well, let's just say that scene

is still burned into my memory. It was glorious."

By now, Chantelle was mostly immune to Andrew's teasing. After all, he'd already

pushed her buttons more than once.

"That was then. This time, I'm not losing. Martial arts isn't some casual hobby. You're seriously overestimating yourself."

She was being very assertive.

Andrew smiled. "Fine, let's leave it at that. If you lose, I'll deal with you however I

want. I don't have any good ideas right now, but I'll probably make you wear black

stockings. So you better prepare yourself mentally!"

Chantelle froze in place. She could not understand why she had become so different from before. Previously, she had focused on her career, and the man she

admired most was Derek, her superior.

Back then, her eyes were full of pride and disdain, and she did not take Andrew

seriously at all. But now, everything had changed imperceptibly. She had given

her virginity to this guy and shamelessly came back for another round with him.

Now, she did not even feel disgusted by his demand for her to wear black stockings. Instead, she felt somewhat eager and excited about it. She thought, 'Am I actually a closeted freak? Or am I just as messed up as Aspen?'

Chantelle's expression kept changing as her thoughts raced wildly, making her feel extremely embarrassed.

Andrew waved his hand and said, "If there's nothing else, Ms. Garcia, I need to get back to training."

Chantelle gave a cold smile and stepped closer. Her voice dropped to a whisper.

"You might've just ruined a life."

"Ruined a life? What the hell do you mean?" A bad feeling rose in his chest.

Chantelle pointed at her stomach and raised her chin. Her pale neck gleamed in the light as she said, "I'm pregnant. And guess what? You're

the father. So, if that's not ruining a life, what is?"

Andrew's face turned dark immediately. He silently cursed at his luck.

Damn it. He had taken her that night by the riverside, after their treasure hunt in

the mountains, and there had been zero protection involved.

He had not thought it would come back to bite him.

"Don't worry. I'll take responsibility." Taking a deep breath, Andrew accepted it calmly.

Chantelle suddenly chuckled. "Just kidding, I'm not pregnant! Well, that's all for now. Bye! Oh, and be careful lately. Luna isn't in Blumedale. She went to the southern beaches for vacation. Her soldier boys might cause you trouble!"

With that, she walked away smugly, swaying her hips.

Andrew was fuming and beckoned to Dylan, "Come here, let's spar for a while!"

Moments later, Dylan's agonized screams echoed across the lawn. "Mr. Lloyd!

I get that you're pissed, but don't take it out on me!"

When training finally wrapped, Andrew got a call from Logan. "You need to get

over to the Ulrich residence. If you keep dodging them, everyone's gonna start thinking you really killed Cillian."

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At the Ulrich residence, Mason moved incredibly fast. Cillian had just died, and he was already holding the funeral the very next day.

The Ulrich family women were wailing loudly at the wake, and guests were whispering among themselves.

"Cillian had such bad luck this year. He shouldn't have died like this!"

"Bad luck? Please. He was clearly taken out by someone with an agenda," another hissed.

"Exactly, Mr. Lloyd is pretty petty and ruthless!"

"Yeah, that bastard snatched the chairman seat and still wasn't satisfied. He had to go after a loyal elder like Cillian too? He's a damn monster!"

Some hot-headed mourners did not bother hiding their outrage and cursed out loud.

Mason knelt dutifully in front of his father's casket, dressed in all black, looking every bit the heartbroken son.

Guests whispered praises about his love for his father, but no one noticed the faint smirk of satisfaction curling at the corner of his mouth.

"Mr. Lloyd has arrived!" someone shouted at the entrance.

Immediately, everyone inside perked up with renewed energy. Some were cracking their knuckles, looking like they had been waiting for Andrew's arrival for a long time.

Mason suddenly let out a wail and began crying loudly. "Dad, rest in peace! Mr. Lloyd has come to see you. Whatever debt you owe, it's all over now! You can go in peace. I'm sure Mr. Lloyd, out of respect for the deceased, won't hold anything against you!"

His sobs were loud, dramatic, and perfectly timed, drawing even more angry glares toward Andrew as he walked in.

"Apologies for being late," Andrew said calmly. "Cillian was a respected member of the chamber. His passing is a great loss to us all."

Dressed in all black, with dark sunglasses on, Andrew entered the room accompanied by Aspen and Logan.

Mason wiped his eyes and bowed low. "Your presence is already a great honor to the Ulrich family, Mr Lloyd. We're truly grateful. My father may have offended you in the past, but even in the end, he kept hoping for your forgiveness. Sadly, he passed with regrets, never having heard your pardon. Now that he's lying here, are you still holding a grudge against him?"

Aspen frowned and stepped forward. "Mr. Ulrich, I suggest you choose your words carefully. There was no personal feud between Mr. Lloyd and your father. Speaking this way will only lead to misunderstanding."

Mason nodded repeatedly and apologized, "Yes, you're right, Ms. Stevens! Mr. Lloyd had no grudges with my father whatsoever. My father was perfectly fine, and he died suddenly because of his old age.

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That's nobody's fault! Even if we blamed anyone, it absolutely couldn't be connected to Mr. Lloyd.

During his lifetime, my father admired Mr. Lloyd the most!"

Even an idiot could tell that Mason was making insinuations and advancing by retreating.

Aspen was furious, but before she could say anything, there was a loud crash nearby.

A burly man in leather, Ezra Hurley, smashed the teacup in his hand. "Andrew, forget that you're just a small-time chairman of the Gabo Creek Chamber of Commerce! Even if you're the richest man in Gabo Creek, to those of us in the martial world, you're just a speck of dust!"

He continued, "Learn some humility! You're nothing but a lucky punk who climbed into power young. But going after an old man like Cillian? That's scummy behavior!"

Ezra's voice was full of fury and disdain as he glared at Andrew.

Logan chuckled grimly. "Ezra, you've made some waves in the southern martial arts scene, I'll give you that. You had a stroke of luck and made it onto the Underworld Index at number three. But don't let that go to your head. This isn't the place to run your mouth."

Ezra's scarred face twitched, his

tone growling. "Logan, this isn't about personal beef. This is about what's right. Or do you think that because this is Blumedale, the territory of the Five Apex Families, you can show off in front of me? Believe me, pick another time and place, and I'd kick you so hard, you wouldn't have anything left to pass down!"

Logan's eyes turned ice cold. "Fine then. I'd love to see what you've got."

A bystander barked, "This is a funeral, not a fight club! The Kellers have gotten

too full of themselves. Maybe it's time we bring this to Mr. Keller Senior and ask him to put them in their place!"

Logan was about to let loose with one of his legendary vulgar rants, but Andrew burst out laughing and clapped his hand on Logan's shoulder. "Logan, seriously? Today's not the day to throw punches."

He turned toward Mason. "Apologies, Mr. Ulrich. We got a little too loud."

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Mason was stunned, caught off guard by the unexpected gesture. Andrew had just bowed to him with a very sincere attitude, which Mason thought was absolutely impossible.

After all, Andrew was definitely no pushover. On the contrary, he was a tough guy who would not take any losses.

"You're too kind. As long as you don't hold the Ulrich family responsible, we'll count our blessings."

Even as he spoke, his words dripped with passive aggression.

He sneered inwardly. 'Andrew, you may have great power, but your foundation is unstable. Today, I've got you cornered!'

Andrew smiled and patted Mason's shoulder with a meaningful look. "Mr. Ulrich, we're about the same age. Let's go by first name! I remember when you first took your position; we had quite a pleasant conversation."

He added, "Although I don't know what caused you to develop unpleasant thoughts about me, I believe that since we're all part of the Chamber of Commerce, any misunderstandings can be cleared up."

Mason's face twisted into a mask of fear, his shoulders trembling as he lowered his voice. "Mr. Lloyd, please don't say such things. I'm just a nobody. I could never dare call you by your first name."

He continued, "I have only one humble request: please, stop holding the Ulrich family accountable. My father's gone now, and you've rightfully become the number one in the chamber. Let it go. Spare us, please. We won't go against you ever again."

Ezra, the third-ranked fighter on the Underworld Index, growled from the side. "You all saw that, didn't you? Andrew's persecution of the Ulrich family is just disgusting." Look at Mr. Ulrich! He's trembling like a rat in front of a cat! And this is happening in broad daylight. If no one speaks up, I'll be the first to say it—this has gone too far!"

The guests, already agitated, now turned furious eyes on Andrew.

Among them stood a tall man in a robe, dressed like he stepped off a period drama set. Anyone who did not know better would have thought he was into dressing up.

He was surrounded by about seven suited bodyguards, all with terrifying auras and prominently bulging temples.

This clearly showed that this man had an extraordinary background.

"I've never had any ties with the major families in Blumedale," the robed man said firmly.

He continued, "But the Ulrichs? They're family friends-blood-deep bonds. Andrew, I'll make this clear right now. If you ever lay a finger on the Ulrich family again, I, Marcelo Byrne, will personally take your head."

The man spoke sternly, looking at

Andrew with undisguised K

intent. After he spoke, no one around the brute

dared to say a word. Even

Ezra wisely kept his mout.

Logan growled, "Mr. Byrne, you're the Azure Dragon King. Don't you think it's a bit too much for someone of your standing to talk like this?"

Marcelo smiled. "Too much? So what? Logan, if your father were here, I might show some restraint. But you're not worthy of it."

With that, he gracefully waved the folding fan in his hand, looking very suave. Many women at the scene swooned a little, their eyes sparkling.

Meanwhile, Andrew found him painfully unbearable.

"So you're the Azure Dragon King of Blumedale's underworld gang?" Andrew asked flatly.

Marcelo smirked. "That's right. Got something to say about it?"

Andrew nodded. "Yeah. Just one thing—you look ridiculous. You're pushing 50, and still walking around in flashy robes like some overgrown theaterkid. Mr. Byrne, if you ask me, you should quit the criminal world and try out the escort business. Plenty of rich cougar-types with big wallets and bigger appetites would love a pretty peacock like you."

The room went silent.

Even Logan got chills. "Andy, you think maybe that was a little over the line? Mr. Byrne's not just anybody. He's a peak-tier martial king—one of the few in Blumedale who can stand toe-to-toe with the Five Apex Families."

Ezra let out a wild laugh. "Mr. Byrne, did you hear that? This punk actually disrespected you. Allow me to do you the honor. I'll take him down on your behalf!"

Outrage exploded from the crowd.

"Andrew, how dare you!"

"Mr. Byrne is a respected leader in the underworld. How dare you insult him?"

"Suggesting he should be an escort? Have you ever seen an escort with powers like his?"

Andrew chuckled. "Nope. That's why I said he should be the king of escorts."

Marcelo's black-suited bodyguards all surged forward in a blast of motion, attacking Andrew.

At the last moment, Marcelo roared angrily, "Stop!"

His subordinates finally held back, but they were all staring daggers at Andrew.

Logan quietly broke out in a cold sweat and whispered to Andrew, "Andy, what you just said was way too provoking! Marcelo really isn't someone to mess with. You went too far!"

Andrew kept smiling without saying a word.

Marcelo stepped forward through the crowd and came right up to him. He stared into Andrew's eyes for a full ten seconds before slowly nodding.

"They say the next generation always surpasses the last, and each generation gets stronger than the last. I've always only half-believed that. You're talented, and I can see you have great ambitions. If it were some other old fool, they might show some restraint, or even fear you a bit. But unfortunately, I'm not one of those people!"

He pointed directly at Andrew's nose, his face grim as his voice rose. "This is Cillian's funeral, and I don't want to be disrespectful. But I'm remembering what you just said! Once we leave the Ulrich residence, we'll settle this with our fists!"

He turned toward the casket, lit three candlesticks, and said a prayer. Then, he flicked his flowing robe and strode off with his men in tow.

Ezra followed closely behind, flashing a twisted grin. "You're screwed now, kid. Whatever chairman title you have is useless now! The Ulrich residence is the only place left where you might be safe. Step outside, and you're dead."

Around them, the other guests looked at Andrew with smug satisfaction. They were not even hiding it anymore. One by one, they watched him like vultures circling fresh meat.

Marcelo was one of Blumedale's infamous underground kings, and he was known to be the most mild-tempered but also the most dangerous to cross.

Andrew's outrageous words just now were tantamount to digging his own grave.

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Mason feigned sorry and said, "Mr. Lloyd, it's all the Ulrich family's fault! If it weren't for my father's situation, you wouldn't have had to come here. And if you hadn't come, you wouldn't have provoked a powerful figure like Mr. Byrne!"

These words were incredibly vicious. The implication was that Andrew was nothing compared to and now that he had ca

such

trouble, he was definitely doomed!

Andrew chuckled as if he had not caught Mason's mockery and sarcasm at all.

"When's the food coming out?"

The entire room blinked in confusion.

"Food?" someone from the Ulrich side asked stiffly.

Andrew nodded. "Of course. This is a funeral, isn't it? You guys still serve a banquet afterward, right? I have brought a generous condolence gift, and I'm not leaving without filling my belly."

Immediately, the Ulrich family members and other guests all showed expressions of utter contempt.

Someone laughed, "If you're scared and don't dare leave the Ulrich residence, just say so! Why put on this act?"

"Looks like he wants to use the food as an excuse to delay time so he can call for backup!"

Another mocked, "I think he actually wants to stay at the Ulrich residence, keeping his tail between his legs and never daring to step outside again!"

The more they whispered, the bolder they became. Some were even grinning, gleefully fantasizing about Andrew's downfall like it was their personal guilty pleasure.