

# RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

## Chapter 1716

Still using his Dragon-Slaying Palm, Andrew seized Xavier's remaining arm.

Just like that, Xavier's other arm was destroyed too. The shock wave of excruciating pain finally became unbearable for him. He opened his mouth, blood streaking across his lips as he howled in agony, "I'll kill you!"

He roared, but as Xavier charged forward, he discovered that both his arms hung limply at his sides, completely useless.

Andrew leaped up, bent his legs, and drove both knees heavily into Xavier's chest. With a choked scream, Xavier spat a mouthful of blood and flew backward, crashing hard onto the ground.

Andrew landed and planted one foot directly on Xavier's face. He ground half of Xavier's cheek into the sand-covered field, embedding thumb-sized gravel deep into his flesh.

Leslie finally lost control and shouted, "Andrew! Get your foot off him! Do you know that killing an officer is a capital offense?"

In response, Andrew stomped down hard and snapped one of Xavier's legs. He glanced sideways. "What did you say? I didn't quite catch that."

Leslie shrieked, "I said step away from him! If something happens to Colonel Haywood, you'll be held responsible!"

Andrew shattered Xavier's other leg with another sharp kick. "Lieutenant Terrell, what was that? Held responsible? A capital crime? Wow, I'm so scared."

He added, "You know what happens when I get scared? I panic, and when I panic, I do crazy things! When I do crazy things, I end up doing stuff even I can't control!"

Andrew's mock-serious expression made even Rachel and Logan's scalps tingle with fear.

"M-Maybe we should get you on Xanax!" Logan stammered, making a nervous joke.

However, nobody laughed.

Leslie felt her vision blur. She was completely at a loss, feeling like the world was collapsing around her.

She never could have imagined things would develop this way. With Luna absent, Xavier was one of the strongest fighters in the entire base. Yet, this elite warrior had now been crippled in all four limbs. His face was being ground into the dirt under Andrew's boot.

Meanwhile, Andrew, the bastard she had looked down upon, was now playing deaf and dumb, ignoring her warnings while torturing Xavier as brutally as possible.

In complete desperation, Leslie broke down and brought up Luna's name.

"Andrew, let go! I order you to let go immediately! Otherwise, I'm calling General Phelan right now, and you'll be in deep shit!"

Andrew sneered and lifted his foot. Xavier lay on the ground with half his face buried in the dirt, his eyes wide open and filled with hatred and terror.

Andrew stomped on his face again, his voice ice-cold as he asked, "What's with that look? Think I don't dare kill you?"

Xavier growled through bloody teeth, "You wouldn't dare!"

Andrew raised his foot again, this time aiming for the neck. There would be no coming back from that.

Rachel cried out, "Mr. Lloyd! Please don't!"

Logan quickly stepped in, trying to defuse the moment with a forced grin.

"Andy, come on. Chill out. Let's not kill anyone today. I'll take you for a steam and line up a few foreign ladies, help you cool off."

Truthfully, even if Andrew killed Xavier, the Keller family would not be afraid of the fallout. Logan just did not want Andrew to provoke Luna because that woman was truly dangerous.

Leslie screamed, covering her

mouth as she backed away, tears nearly streaming down her face. "Andrew, are you really not afraid to die? If Colonel Haywood gets hurt, especially on a military base the entire military will be shaken up. When that happens, you' face certain death."

Andrew sneered coldly. "Now you're scared? This is all you and Colonel Haywood have got? You're really making your general proud! A bunch  
iel

up to me to lead this unit, I wouldn't need anyone else to clean up Xavier. I'd have killed him myself."

of pathetic weaklings. If it were ch

He spat and walked away.

Andrew had not actually planned to kill Xavier, but sometimes, a brutal lesson was necessary.

Leslie rushed over with a few soldiers and helped Xavier sit up.

"Colonel Haywood, how are you feeling?"

Xavier looked completely crushed. He groaned, "My arms and legs... they're ruined! I want revenge! I'll make him pay!"

Leslie quickly cut in, "Forget about revenge. The General is not around, so I'll get you back to the Haywoods to see what can be done."

Andrew said flatly, "Relax. I only crushed his arms and snapped his legs. His meridians and energy core are still intact. He won't be useless in martial arts, but he's definitely going to be stuck in bed for a year or two."

Leslie shouted, "How's that any better? That doesn't earn you any gratitude from us!"

Andrew said impatiently, "Nobody needs your gratitude. Go get Ryder from the Ulrich family. I have business with him!"

With Xavier down, Leslie had no choice but to take charge herself. "You can leave now. Our base doesn't welcome you, and we're not agreeing to any of your demands!"

Andrew frowned. "So, Lieutenant Terrell, everything you said before was just hot air? You provoked us first, and when you get beaten, you turn into cowards and won't face the consequences?"

Leslie's chest heaved as she exploded with rage. "Then what do you want?"

Andrew said coldly, "I already told you to go get Ryder! I have business with him, and if he doesn't come out, I'll destroy the entire Ulrich family. That's my exact message. Make sure he hears it."

Leslie was infuriated. She pointed at Andrew, trembling with rage. "Y-Y-You..."

Andrew sneered. "Inside this base, you may be in charge, Lieutenant Terrell. But outside? You've got no say over me. If Ryder won't come out, then his whole family's done for. Logan, we're leaving!"

He walked away casually with his group in tow.

Behind them, the soldiers clenched their fists, seething with anger.

"Lieutenant Terrell, they almost killed Colonel Haywood. Are we really just letting them go?"

"We need to detain them and wait for the General to return!"

"This is Gabo Creek Base! We've never suffered such disgrace!"

Listening to the chattering soldiers around her, Leslie felt her irritation building to the breaking point.

"Shut up, you're all useless too! Who among you morons is going to stop them from leaving? Go ahead, which one of you has the guts? Go kill that Andrew!" She shrieked, and the soldiers looked dejected, hanging their heads in shame.

...

Andrew and his group left the base gates. Once inside the car, Logan asked, "Andy, were you really planning to kill Xavier back there?"

Andrew replied calmly, "I definitely wanted to finish that guy off, but this is a military base, so that would be quite an inconvenience."

Rachel patted her chest. "Thank

goodness you held back! Ms. Phelan

is an untouchable force in

Blumedale. She herself is

a top-tier

existence, and her backing comes from Holtrien's military department!"

Andrew appeared thoughtful as he wondered if he could handle Luna if he unlocked his second seal. But currently, he was not that confident.

Before long, Ryder came out of the

base gate with his head hanging low, wearing a different set of clothes. He spotted Andrew's cold profile through the car window and immediately walked over.

"Mr. Lloyd!" His tone was polite, worlds apart from how he acted before.

Andrew said, "Open the door and get in."

Ryder hesitated. "Mr. Lloyd, whatever you need, we can talk right here. I don't think I need to get in the car."

Andrew simply flashed him a smile.

Ryder's stomach clenched, and with a shiver, he pulled the handle and got in. The moment he did, Logan, seated in the back, wrapped an arm around his neck.

"Wow, moving up in the world, huh? Already a junior officer! You sure were acting high and mighty before. How does it feel being Xavier's lapdog? Bet you got real comfortable down there."

Ryder's face turned red as he slapped Logan's arm. "Let go! Please let go. Spare me!"

Andrew said calmly, "Logan, let him go."

Logan released him, but not without slapping the back of Ryder's head.

A cold glint flashed in Ryder's eyes, but he dared not make another sound.

Andrew gave him a half-smile. "I know you're still upset, but tough luck-this world runs on strength. Anyway, I called you here because I've got a job for you."

Ryder whispered, "Yes, Mr. Lloyd. I'm listening."

Andrew's tone turned sharp. "I'm no longer supporting your father as the head of the Ulrich family. Your two

brothers are both worthless, so I've

decided I'm going to back you

instead. Now tell me-are you in or out? Don't waste my time.

Ryder's breath caught. "What? Mr. Lloyd, y-you're really planning to back me?"

Chapter 1718

Andrew grinned. "You heard me right-I meant exactly what I said. To put it bluntly, I need the Ulrich family under my control. I need a puppet to manage things on my behalf."

Ryder's face darkened. "So basically, you want me to be your puppet? Trying to 'hold the king and command the lords'?"

Before he could finish his dramatic analogy, Logan smacked him across the face. "Ryder, you're seriously a pile of crap. 'Hold the king'? Who the hell do you think you are, royalty?"

He added, "The Ulrich family isn't an empire, and you're no emperor. Can you stop flattering yourself and spouting this nonsense like you passed eighth-grade civics?"

Ryder turned red, realizing just how out of touch he sounded.

Even Andrew could not help but smirk, thinking this guy was something else. All he wanted was someone obedient to help him steer the Ulrich family, and here Ryder was, acting like he had just been offered a crown.

After thinking for a moment, Ryder shook his head, essentially refusing. He said, "My dad currently controls the Ulrich family, and I'm not old enough to take over yet! Besides, if I were to take over the Ulrich family, what would happen to him? What you're saying is completely unrealistic!"

Andrew smiled. "Alright, I understand what you mean. Get out of the car and scram!"

Ryder was somewhat angry but held it in. "Mr. Lloyd, what exactly are you trying to do?"

Andrew waved dismissively. "Get lost! A golden opportunity is right in front of you, and you refuse to cherish it. If that's the case, I'll hand this opportunity to your two brothers instead. Especially that little brother of yours-that kid has real potential!"

Logan picked up the conversation, laughing. "Exactly! Reece is still in elementary school, but he is way more impressive than you! At least that kid has ambition. He's young but has a big appetite. You just keep playing soldier in your military base!"

He continued, "Someday, when you return to the Ulrich family, he will be sitting in the head of family position, demanding you submit to him! If you don't, then there won't be a place for you in the Ulrich family!"

Rachel chuckled lightly. "Mr. Ulrich, even with Mr. Lloyd's support, you're still too scared to take over the Ulrich family. That just shows you're all bark and no bite-a complete coward! I guess it means we'll have to look for someone else, someone with guts and ambition."

She said, "And you, Mr. Ulrich? You've still got a long way to go."



The three of them tag-teamed the mockery, and Ryder could barely contain the fire burning inside. He snapped, "Say whatever you want, but I'll never betray the Ulrich family!"

Andrew looked him over. "Are you really that loyal to the Ulrich family? I can see that your appetite, ambition, and abilities are all much greater than those of your two brothers. Are you not tempted by power? Not fascinated by the position of Ulrich family head? Don't you want to call the shots in the Ulrich family?"

"Stop fooling yourself. Why would you be Xavier's lapdog if you didn't want any of this? To put it plainly, aren't you just trying to cozy up to the Haywoods so you can smoothly take over the Ulrich family's power later? I can give you control of the Ulrich family right now, while you're still young!"

Ryder was half-convinced. "Mr. Lloyd, are you really willing to help me?"

Andrew smiled. "Absolutely. It couldn't be more real! But there's one condition-you need to understand why I'm doing this."

Ryder blurted out, "I know... It's because my dad won't listen to you!"

Andrew's smile grew wider. "Smart kid. So if you take power, would you be willing to listen?"

Ryder's face showed excitement as he nodded repeatedly. "If I could really seize power right now and control a major family, then of course I'd listen to you, Mr. Lloyd! But what about my father? I can't possibly commit treason against him!"

Andrew shook his head. "Don't worry about what's possible or impossible. Just ask yourself if you can do it! As for the follow-up support and backing, are you doubting my ability to deal with your old man?"

Ryder pondered for a moment, then gritted his teeth. "Fine. I agree to cooperate with you! As long as you can help me take the head of family position, Mr. Lloyd, I'll be your man from now on! As for my father, I guess it can't be helped. I can't worry about that too much."

He paused, then continued. "To be frank, my grandfather's incident at the nursing home was entirely my father's doing. The Ulrich family has always had a tradition of sons inheriting from their fathers. Since he treated my grandfather that way, I think it's perfectly normal for me to treat him the same!"

Andrew studied him for a long moment, then burst into laughter. "I didn't expect you to catch on so quickly!"

Chapter 1719

After chatting for a while longer, Ryder finally got out of the car with a heavy heart and returned to the military base.

In the vehicle, Rachel laughed and said, "Mr. Lloyd, you're really going to trust this kid so easily?"

Andrew chuckled and asked back, "What do you think?"

Rachel looked completely puzzled and replied, "Mr. Lloyd, I can't figure out what you're thinking!"

Logan sneered. "Andy would never just trust Ryder like that. That mutt was Xavier's lapdog five minutes ago. You think he flips that fast and suddenly becomes our loyal guy? Everything he said earlier was just for show-he was playing along."

Rachel's face went cold. "Then why are we supporting him at all? His two brothers would be way easier to control."

Andrew shook his head. "You're right. Ryder's brothers are easier to control, but that also makes them useless. Even with our backing, they wouldn't stand a chance against Mason for the family seat."

He continued, "Ryder, on the other hand, has decent overall skills and a bit of cunning. It's not much, but enough. And from the look in his eyes, he won't be able to resist the temptation of becoming the next head of the Ulrich family."

Meanwhile, Ryder had returned to his quarters, his mind a storm of thoughts. He sat alone, pacing mentally, heart pounding. Truthfully, he had been pretending earlier, just acting submissive in front of Andrew.

After all, the guy had taken down Xavier, and Ryder had no choice but to play it safe.

Still, Andrew's offer to make him the head of the Ulrich family, and that idea had shaken him more than he wanted to admit.

He did not want to expose his ambitions for fear that Mason would find out and destroy him.

Mason had gained his position by murdering Cillian, so he was extremely paranoid and suspicious. Sometimes, he even suffered from delusions of persecution, constantly worrying that people around him were plotting to steal his position as family head.

Ryder knew very well that if he showed any desire to challenge his father's position now, it would likely be a death sentence. But with Andrew's support, the situation became entirely different.

The Ulrich family was a major member of the Gabo Creek Chamber of Commerce, which was headed by Andrew himself.

With such a golden opportunity before him, he wondered if he should take the gamble and shoot his shot or play it safe and continue lying low, waiting for another chance.

Mason was currently in his prime and would likely remain in the family head position for at least another 20 years.

Ryder thought, '20 years is such a long time. If I can take the throne now, I'll finally get to live the way I want and become a major player in Blumedale. I can't wait that long. A man should make his mark early. I wasn't born to be mediocre.'

The more Ryder thought about it, the more fired up he became. He stood up suddenly, fists clenched tight with conviction.

Just then, a voice startled him. "What are you doing?"

Ryder jumped and turned toward the door, immediately putting on a smile. "Leslie? What brings you here?"

Leslie stepped in with a cold expression. "What did Andrew say to you outside?"

Ryder quickly waved his hands. "Oh, nothing, really. He just brought up some family stuff, but I brushed him off and walked away right after."

Leslie narrowed her eyes. "Captain Ulrich, do you really expect me to believe that?" You're one of General Phelan's people. I hope you won't fall for Andrew's sweet talk and do something reckless. Because if you do the consequences won't be something you can handle."

Ryder panicked and said, "Leslie, I swear! I didn't say anything to Andrew. I wouldn't lie to you, of all people!"

Leslie's expression softened slightly,

and she gave a slight nod. "I'll take your word for it... for now. But Captain Ulrich, stay away from that man. He's offended our entire military division, and trust me, he

won't walk away from the he  
unscathed."

Ryder nodded immediately. "Absolutely. I'll keep my distance from him."

Leslie sighed. "Colonel Haywood's injuries are too severe. I've already contacted the Haywoods. They're sending someone to take him back and call a miracle doctor. I just hope it's not too late."

Ryder hesitated. Then, he suddenly looked at her with a serious expression. "Leslie, about what I asked you before... have you given it any thought?"

Leslie froze, then firmly refused, "Don't even think about it. Captain Ulrich, even though your

development has been quite good, don't forget who I work for. It's not that look down on you, but the gap between us will only grow wider in the future!"

Chapter 1720

Leslie said, "So I hope you never let yourself get carried away with these kinds of

assumptions again."

Ryder's face turned red with embarrassment. Feeling humiliated, he snapped,

"Leslie, are you saying I'm being delusional? Then tell me what I have to become,

what I would have to do, to be good enough for you? What level would be enough

to not be a 'delusion' in your eyes?"

Leslie gave him a long, slow look, and her eyes were filled with scorn. It was not

just rejection, but the way she looked at him was deeply insulting.

After a pause, she spoke coldly, "Captain Ulrich, you know my current position,

don't you? I'm the General's adjutant. And once she rises, I'll rise with her. If we're

talking family background, sure, the Terrell family might not be as powerful as the

Ulrichs.

"But the gap isn't as big as you think. And you? You may be the eldest son, but

who knows how long it'll take before you're actually in charge. I'm not like that. All

I need to do is stay on course, stick with the General, and someday I might just

marry into the elite families of Chetvine."

As she spoke, a look of pride and dreamy ambition bloomed across her face.

Ryder was instantly crushed, feeling deeply ashamed and bitter. He had not expected this from Leslie. When they first entered the military, they were both naive young people who felt helpless and lost.

However, he had never stopped caring for and looking after Leslie.

Leslie had also appreciated his kindness back then, calling him by his first name

in private. During those warm moments, they would even sneak away together to

watch the sunset while leaning against each other.

Back then, Ryder had thought Leslie had agreed to be his girlfriend and that they

had pledged their love to each other. However, everything changed after Leslie

became Luna's aide.

She became aloof and distant, barely acknowledging him anymore. She stopped

calling him by his first name and started addressing him as "Captain Ulrich".

Moreover, she would follow closely behind Luna wherever she went, never giving

anyone else a second glance.

Once, when Ryder was punished at the base, he begged Leslie to ask Luna to give him a break. However, Leslie flatly refused and said some very heartless things to him.

Actually, from that moment on, Ryder knew that the once innocent girl had changed completely-he had just been lying to himself, unwilling to admit it.

Leslie said coldly, "That's enough,

then. I hope you'll keep everything

that happened between us buried

forever. Captain Ulrich, you can find other better girls. It's just that I personally feel we're not compatible, so don't think there's anything wrong with you."

Her words sounded like comfort, but they did not feel like it.

Ryder was normally pretty thick-skinned. Otherwise, he would not be thinking about overthrowing, his own father to become family head. However, he felt like he had been hit by a massive blow, and his face turned pale.

This young man had made the same mistake that most young men make. Instead of enjoying his youth with drinking, partying, or other pursuits, he had chosen to become a simp.

At the peak of his youth, when he could have been doing anything. Drinking, gambling, chasing thrills. He chose the worst path possible-foolishly committing to a lady.

Ryder exhaled deeply, gritting his teeth as a cold smile crept onto his face. He



finally learned the hard truth that the nice guy would not finish last. Instead, he ended up being the butt of jokes.

"I hope you won't regret this," he said, taking a deep breath as he seemed to wake up from his delusion, gritting his teeth in a cold smile.

Leslie laughed mockingly, "What makes you think you could ever make me regret

anything?"

Ryder growled back, "Just wait and see. I'll take over as head of the Ulrich family!

I'll become the youngest leader of a major family in Blumedale!"

Leslie walked away dismissively, saying, "Keep dreaming! You really think you're like Andrew? Someone who got fucky and achieved success at a young age? Captain Ulrich you need to wake up and be more realistic! General Phelan is top-tier, and that Andrew is at least second-tier."

She continued, "And me? Well, I'm also second-tier, not inferior to Andrew at all!

But you? If you can reach fourth-tier status, I'd say that's pretty impressive!"

Her condescending words echoed in his ears long after she walked away.

Ryder stood frozen in place, staring at the empty door. Suddenly, he slammed his

fist down on the bedframe.

"From now on," he growled through clenched teeth, "I swear I will never be a damn hopeless fool again..."