

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1761

Aspen gracefully leaped through the air, kicking against the falling dagger. The blade gleamed in the light, bouncing up again. Then, she snatched it mid-air with her other hand and thrust it toward Andrew again.

Andrew casually brushed aside the sweat-soaked Aspen's attack, jumped back, and laughed. "Let's stop!"

Aspen looked dejected and asked, "We're stopping? Am I not good enough?"

Andrew chuckled and flicked her forehead. "Not good enough? You're really amazing! You and Lauren both have what it takes to reach the top of the Titan List someday!"

Francesca pouted unhappily. "What about me? Am I the only one who's not good enough?"

Andrew smiled. "No way, Fran. You're excellent too! Just keep training, and you three ladies will become legendary martial artists before you know it!"

The three girls immediately brightened up with excitement.

Natasha watched from the side, her eyes showing both happiness and envy. Nonetheless, she hid her feelings well. She turned her head away and focused on her training again, throwing punches and strikes.

She still remembered Andrew's advice that hard work would compensate for lack of genius. Since she was not naturally gifted, the only way forward was through hard work and discipline.

Suddenly, a warm hand caught her arm, steadying her.

Natasha turned around in surprise, blurting, "Darling, you..."

Andrew smiled and said, "The last move was a bit off. Let's try it again!"

Her heart warmed. She quickly corrected her form, her chest feeling sweet and fluttery inside.

At last, this man was not brushing her off like she was invisible.

Meanwhile, Andrew himself had mixed feelings. He could open his heart freely to Lauren, Francesca, and Aspen, spoiling them as he pleased. Yet, Natasha was different.

He knew just how deeply she felt for him. If she did not, she would not have followed him all the way from Jayrodale to Blumedale.

With her strength, she could have stayed in Jayrodale, ruled the scene, and lived like a queen. However, she left it all behind without hesitation, just to follow Andrew.

Sure, Natasha had dreams of growing stronger too, but her feelings for him were the real reason. Honestly, the hardest debts to repay had always been a beauty's favor.

If Andrew had been heartless, he could have just taken Natasha into his bed. She might not have the same stunning looks as Lauren and the others, but her body was every bit as alluring.

She was sensual, teasing, skilled, and knew exactly how to tease a man. Hence, she was absolutely the best kind of partner in bed, capable of giving any man the ultimate pleasure.

Moreover, if Andrew did sleep with Natasha, Lauren, Francesca, and Aspen would not even bat an eye. They understood her situation and never treated her like an outsider.

If Andrew really did get intimate with Natasha, at worst, they would just have another friend sharing the bed, making things even more lively.

Nonetheless, Andrew could not bring himself to do it. His pants might be eager to act on impulse, but he refused to be ruled by desire.

After all, his own father had already been a living, breathing cautionary tale.

Victoria and Tiana were

understanding enough not to turn love into hate. However, Andrew knew Reginald had nearly lost his life more than once in Chetvine, all thanks to troubles with women.

One time, a violent heiress from an old noble house almost castrated him on the spot, and this was back when Reginald was already a martial saint, a man who could crush steel balts with his bare hands.

He had gone around claiming he was the strongest in the world, chest puffed out proudly.

Yet, even a powerhouse like that got chased halfway across the country by angry lovers, just because he could not keep it in his pants.

Fooling around would lead to trouble, and Andrew could not agree more.

Chapter 1762

Across the frozen man-made lake stood Joe's massive mansion.

At that moment, a man and a woman stood side by side on the rooftop. The icy wind whipped around them, but the biting cold did not seem to affect them at all. Moreover, neither of them was wearing much.

The man on the left wore all white, stylish and striking. He was so handsome, like a male escort from an upscale club.

The man was none other than Joe Driscoll!

The person on the right wore military attire, and her beauty was so stunning that

no words could do it justice. Wherever she stood, she became the center of attention.

It was Luna, just returned from her vacation.

It was an extremely rare sight to see two of the Gabo Creek province's most exceptional prodigies together in one frame.

"So, what do you think of Andrew's martial arts skills? Pretty impressive, right?" Joe broke the silence first.

Luna shrugged. "Not bad, I guess."

Joe shook his head. "Not just 'not bad'... He's incredible, next-level, totally unique. The way he trains Lauren, Francesca, and Aspen is completely tailored to each of them. He teaches exactly what each of those ladies needs to grow strongest."

He added, "The Driscoll family's martial instructors are all famous veterans who've stepped down from the Chetvine circuit. Holtrien's southern martial scene spans an entire continent. So, there's no shortage of powerful folks. But even in that massive talent pool, very few have what Andrew brings to the table."

Luna turned slightly, her face unreadable as she glanced at him. "Joe, you sound almost disheartened."

Joe gave a bitter smile. "Those who are too rigid will break easily—that's the advice my master gave me the day I started training, and now, I finally get it."

A mocking smile curled on Luna's lips. "So what? You got 'broken' by Andrew?"

Joe's face flushed red, anger

flashing in his eyes. Eventually, he calmed down and admitted honestly, "Yes, I'm no match for him. Only two people have defeated me in my entire life. The first was you, you cold-hearted woman. Second, Andrew."

Luna's voice remained flat. "Andrew doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as me, and you do know that, right?"

Joe nodded. "Yeah, you're not wrong. But I still have this feeling that he might actually be a worthy rival for you, maybe even a great stepping stone."

Luna scoffed. "I don't need a stepping stone anymore. I'd just swing my blade and split the stone in half."

Joe shrugged, clearly bored. "Alright, I'm done chatting with the golden child. I'm off to see my mentor."

Luna blinked. "Your mentor? You mean the Driscoll family paid a fortune to hire the head of the Southern Martial Union to teach you?"

Joe shook his head. "Nope."

Luna snorted. "Besides him, I can't imagine anyone in the entire southern region qualified to teach you!"

Joe scratched his head, looking uncharacteristically sheepish. He mumbled, "Technically, she's not really my mentor. I tried to formally become her student, but she ignored me and told me to get lost. But I'm fully committed to martial arts. I'm chasing the peak, and no matter what, I'm going to train under her."

Luna gave a half-smile. "Do I have the honor to know who this mystery woman

is?"

Joe shook his head. "Sorry, can't say. She's currently working the dish pit at a fast food joint, and I don't you bothering her. Anyway, that's all. Goodbye." fo

Luna couldn't be bothered in the slightest. Everyone in Blumedale had always assumed Joe was number two, and she was number one.

But the truth was, Luna never saw it that way. She was number one, and she could be number two. Hell, she could be number three if she felt like it.

The point was: she decided on her own ranking.

Chapter 1763

If Luna did not want someone ranked a certain way, then no one had the right to claim that spot. An example would be Andrew's ranking.

With that, she walked away from Joe's mansion.

Leslie was already waiting by the military vehicle. She asked, "General, would you like to visit Colonel Haywood first?"

Luna got in the car and questioned her coldly, "Why bother with that useless man?"

Leslie forced a smile. "But Colonel Haywood was injured for your sake, and for the sake of the entire camp!"

Luna paused for a moment, then gave a slight nod. "Fair point. I suppose I should at least make some kind of gesture."

Leslie quickly agreed. "Exactly, General. It wouldn't hurt to say a few kind words. The Haywoods are pretty upset right now. They're expecting you to stand up for Colonel Haywood!"

Luna nodded and made her decision. "Alright then. In my name, send a message to the Haywoods. Xavier failed his mission and proved to be completely useless. As of today, he's no longer qualified to serve under my command. Tell him to go back to his original post. I don't take in garbage."

Leslie's hands froze on the steering wheel, his eyes wide in disbelief.

"General..." Luna barked, "Drive! Take me to Aroma Exchange, and don't say another word. If you speak again, I'll see to it that your tongue gets trimmed by an inch."

Leslie turned as pale as a sheet. He trembled as he started the engine, not daring to breathe too loudly.

Serving someone like Luna was like working beside a tiger; you never knew when you would get bitten.

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After breakfast, Andrew stayed home and received a delivery of rare medicinal herbs.

Rachel was the one who brought them. She said, "Mr. Lloyd, I figured you'd need these. They're all freshly looted from Marcelo's turf."

Andrew took the box and nodded. "Much appreciated. You can go now."

However, Rachel did not move. She fidgeted awkwardly and muttered, "Mr. Lloyd, can I come in for a little house tour?"

Andrew glanced at her. "No."

Rachel looked annoyed. "Mason got sent to a retirement ward, and he's already getting tortured there. Ryder's really not holding back!"

Andrew shrugged. "Sounds like justice to me."

Rachel huffed. "Mr. Lloyd, I'm on my period and need to change my pad."

Andrew replied flatly, "Then change it outside."

Rachel was stunned speechless.

Andrew added, "Don't worry, no one else is around. No one's gonna see you."

Rachel scowled. "Mr. Lloyd, goodbye. I hope you stay single forever."

Andrew chuckled. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm living it up every night—nonstop action."

Marcelo's stash turned out to be pretty impressive. Combined with Andrew's recent haul, he had managed to stockpile a collection of premium herbs.

Wasting no time, he shut himself in for the whole day to craft medicinal pills.

Most of them were customized for his five elite disciples. Each had a unique constitution, so every pill had to be made specifically to fit their needs.

As for his own needs, the elixirs had to be even more refined, more advanced. So in the end, Andrew

managed to craft just one seventh-grade divine pill for himself.

He did not wait for it to cool, just tossing it into his mouth like a piece of candy and crunching it down on the spot. Then, he closed his eyes and started refining the energy using the pill's intense medicinal power to attack his internal seal.

Yet, nothing happened. Or rather, the effect was so faint, it was practically useless.

He mumbled, "A seventh-grade pill isn't cutting it anymore. Looks like I need to hit at least eighth grade, but the herbs for that formula aren't? easy to

gather. Seems like cracking the second seal will take something much more intense."

He sighed and shook his head, clearly frustrated.

Chapter 1764

The owner of Aroma Exchange was none other than Zachary, a ruthless figure ranked ninth on the Underworld Index. However, he usually left the daily management to his personal favorite, Ruth.

When Luna and Leslie arrived, the entire restaurant fell silent. All eyes turned their way, filled with awe and wild admiration.

Someone gasped, "Oh my, it's Ms. Phelan! She's so unreal... so stunning!"

"You're insane for crushing on her. Do you have a death wish?"

Another chimed in, "Get real. She's not just a military commander! She's a young general with once-in-a-generation martial talent. Everything about her is perfect. You're just being delusional."

The person sighed. "If Luna looked at me just once, I'd gladly give up 20 years of my life."

Luna ignored her admirers' gaze and the excited whispers around her. Her expression remained as cold as ice, and she headed straight upstairs with Leslie.

Wearing a bright red dress, Ruth hurried over to greet them, "General, you're here!"

Luna did not even look at her. She just gave an indifferent acknowledgement and said, "Get Zachary out here."

Ruth looked apologetic. "General, I'm sorry but Zac just stepped out!"

Luna's expression remained blank. "Lying to my face isn't wise. I'll ask one more time. Get Zachary out here, or I'll just tear this place down myself."

Ruth flinched, her face going pale. Without another word, she turned and ran off to get him.

Moments later, Zachary showed up, his face clearly tense. He asked, "Ms. Phelan. What brings you here?"

Luna was already seated. Her long legs, wrapped in tall leather boots, kicked up

on the coffee table, commanding the space with intimidating ease.

Leslie remained standing behind her, always ready to serve.

"Sit down. I have a few questions for you."

Her tone left no room for argument.

Zachary's expression hardened. If it had been anyone else, he would have smacked them across the room by now. However, Luna was not just anyone. He knew better than to test her, so he sat down

no'

obediently.

Luna looked him dead in the eyes. "Tell me everything you know about Andrew."

Zachary narrowed his eyes, but he quickly shook his head. "Sorry. I barely know the guy. I've got nothing to tell you."

Luna smirked, "Do you think I came here without doing my homework? Zachary, you're a real man; you've served in the military before. So I'm giving you a bit of respect and talking this through nicely. But if you don't appreciate that, I have no problem breaking both legs before we continue this chat."

Zachary let out a low snort. "I do know Andrew, but if you think you're getting information out of me, think again."

Luna smiled faintly. "So, you're not afraid to die?"

Zachary answered firmly. "Of course, I'm afraid. But there are people and things that matter more to me than my life."

Luna asked, "Like Andrew?"

Zachary nodded without hesitation. "Exactly. I won't say a single word about him.

Even if you kill me, I guarantee you'll get nothing from me."

Luna did not respond right away. She simply raised her gloved hand.

Immediately, Leslie stepped forward. Then, she grabbed Ruth by the hair despite her screams and dragged her over. With a sharp click, she pulled a pistol from her waistband and pressed it straight to Ruth's forehead.

Zachary's face twisted with rage. "Ms. Phelan, what the hell are you doing?"

Luna remained expressionless. "You have two options. Talk, or watch your woman's brains paint the floor."

Zachary's fury flared, but he did not explode. He knew full well that Luna could kill him in a second.

Ruth was shaking, tears streaming down her face as she begged, "Zac... please... save me... Help me!"

Zachary clenched his jaw, his heart torn, before finally turning his head away.

"Luna, do it then. But I'll remember this. Either kill me now, or you can wait for my revenge!"

Luna stood up and headed straight downstairs. "Put the gun away. We're leaving!"

Then, she warned, "Zachary, this blind loyalty of yours isn't a good thing. Maybe Andrew used to be something special. But now he's just a mediocre businessman playing petty tricks and feeling smug about it.

"His pursuit of money and fame will make him increasingly corrupt and ordinary! Eventually, you'll realize this person isn't worth dying for!"

She came and went like a storm, her moves swift and ruthless.

To Luna, a person's life or death could be decided in mere seconds, and it was how she carried herself in the entire province.

Zachary held Ruth in his arms and shouted, "I don't care who Andrew is now. That's not what matters. But as his friend, I'll always believe in him. What you dismiss as mediocrity merely reflects your own horizon. Beyond that horizon are taller summits that you haven't reached yet."

Downstairs, Luna paused briefly, and her eyes turned icy cold.

Taller summits that she had not reached?

She could not help but wonder if Zachary was implying that she could not reach Andrew's level. Nonetheless, she dismissed it as blind worship and pathetic delusion.

Ruth trembled with fear, "Zac, why didn't you cooperate with General Phelan? I'm so scared! Someone like her could take my life anytime she wanted!"

Zachary smiled reassuringly. "Don't be afraid. If she really wanted to kill someone, neither of us would survive. I don't think I've offended her, so she has no reason to act."

Ruth stammered, "B-But Zac, why would you risk your life rather than give her the information she wanted?"

Zachary took a deep breath and suddenly chuckled. "Because that person is worth risking my life for, no matter what! However, she's not someone to mess with because she has the military behind her, and the military connects to Chetvine! I need to find a chance to tip off Captain!"

As soon as Luna got in the car after leaving Aroma Exchange, her expression became ice-cold.

Leslie was terrified. Whenever this happened, it meant only that Luna was angry.

"He's hiding his background well, but that doesn't mean I can't dig it out," Luna muttered through gritted teeth.

Leslie tried to ease the tension and asked, "General, Andrew isn't that important, is he? If you wanted to crush him, it'd be as easy as flipping your hand."

Luna scoffed. "If I really wanted to destroy him, wouldn't be going through at this. I want to expose everything, including his origins and his secrets. I want them all laid bare. I admit that Andrew's medicine and martial arts skills are exceptional, but now he's even openly ignoring me?"

She continued, "I'm starting to suspect he's a planted pawn sent by one of the other two Titans. Or worse... a hidden piece from Chetvine's camp, embedded in Gabo Creek."

Leslie was stunned. "That can't be

right, can it? The Driscoll family

would love nothing more than to wipe him off the map! And Chetvine? That's a nest of elites and

over

aristocrats, Holtrien's most dangerous stronghold. Andrew doesn't even seem qualified to be their pawn!"

Luna smirked, "Mr. Driscoll Senior loves to play the long game, with smoke and mirrors, loops and traps. Andrew might appear to be an enemy of the Driscolls, when in fact, he could be their secret weapon. And Chetvine? That place is layered in schemes. Even I wouldn't dare assume anything too quickly. Let's go. I'll confront him myself."

Leslie frowned. "Confront him? For what?"

Luna replied flatly, "I want to learn alchemy. And right now, he's the most suitable teacher. Besides, as irritating as he is, he's still worth bringing under my banner."

Leslie muttered, "I don't like him. He's arrogant, dismissive, and full of himself. If you want to learn alchemy, General, why not go to the Advanced Medical Institute?"

Luna shot him a cold glance. "Their people all lost to him. Or have you forgotten?" Leslie shut her mouth immediately, choking on her words.