

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1826

That dumbass Calvin had already been let off the hook once. But this time, Andrew had no intention of showing mercy again. To him, it made no difference whether Calvin died in Blumedale back in Gabo Creek or right here in Goldridge.

Calvin's face twisted with rage. He had not expected Andrew to provoke him so openly. Yet, before he could say another word, a sharp scream rang out in the center of the hall.

Startled, he whipped his head around and shouted, "Terry, what happened to you?"

Terry, who had been locked in a fierce fight with Zachary, took a hard kick to the chest and stumbled backward. He landed flat on his butt, his face pale as a sheet.

Zachary pulled back and shook his head. "Terry, you're no match for me. Just step down. I'm holding back out of respect for the Peck family. I don't want to go too far."

Terry clutched his chest with a twisted expression. "You bastard, I just wasn't paying attention earlier! Come at me again! This time, I'm gonna kill you! You think you're good enough to steal my spot, you filthy mutt?"

He charged forward in three aggressive steps, aiming a direct strike at Zachary's center.

Zachary shifted back, dodging Terry's blows with swift and precise palm strikes. Terry's eyes turned red with rage, and in a sudden frenzy, he drew a dagger and lunged straight for Zachary's chest.

Zachary let out a furious shout. "Screw you!"

He spun on his heel and slammed into Terry with a move like a charging bull.

Terry let out a blood-curdling scream and was sent flying like a broken kite, blood spraying from his mouth. However, the dagger in his hand flew loose with deadly force and drove straight into Zachary's shoulder.

Blood gushed instantly.

"Terry!"

"Stop this!"

Two voices rang out at the same time.

One was Calvin, panic-stricken and pale. The other was Alex, the man in charge

of the trials, storming toward the center of the hall with a dark expression.

"You idiot! This is a formal

evaluation, and there are strictly no weapons allowed! Who told you to bring a dagger and pull a cheap shot? Get off the floor. You're

disqualified and permanente.ne

banned from becoming one of Mr. Thornton's inner disciples!"

Calvin rushed to his bleeding son, shouting in desperation. "Mr. Wallace, please! You can't do this! Terry is still young and reckless. I'm begging you, please give him one more chance!"

Terry was writhing on the ground, howling in pain with hatred twisting his face. "Kill him, Dad! Help me kill him! That filthy bastard dared to hurt me! I swear I'll make him pay with his life!"

His unhinged tantrum made several onlookers frown. The supposed heir of the Peck family was clearly spoiled beyond saving.

A loss was a loss, yet he was even trying to kill someone over it. What kind of nonsense was that?

Still, with the Peck family's power behind Calvin, most people, even if annoyed, did not dare speak up.

Alex's tone turned firm. "Mr. Peck Senior, rules are rules! Even if he's still young, he has no respect for honor. So there's no other way. He's out."

Calvin growled, "That's unacceptable! Terry has to become one of Mr. Thornton's inner disciples! I'll pay more if I have to!"

Alex's face remained unmoved. "Mr. Peck Senior, this isn't about money. It's about upholding the rules set by Mr. Thornton."

Calvin's face turned darker as he blurted out a number. "300 million. Is that enough? If not, I can offer more!"

At that moment, the other disciples

taking the examination were fighting

intensely in the great hall. No one paid any attention to the exchange between Calvin and Alex since

everyone was focused on their own

promising candidates and was

oblivious to everything else.

Alex glanced around quickly, then leaned in and lowered his voice, looking visibly conflicted. "Um..."

Chapter 1827

Calvin nearly cracked his teeth from clenching so hard. "500 million. The Peck family is willing to offer 500 million to secure Terry's advancement. Does that work

for you?"

The wrinkles on Alex's face slowly smoothed out, one by one.

He chuckled and said, "Mr. Peck Senior, come on now. Why bring up money between us? We've known each other for years. Talking about money only hurts the relationship. Alright then, I'll see what I can do for Terry."

He continued, "Now, I can't guarantee he'll get into the inner circle for sure, but let's just say the odds are looking a lot better."

Calvin finally let out a long breath of relief and shot Zachary a sinister grin. "What the hell do you have to compete with me, Zachary? This isn't over. Just wait for the Peck family's revenge."

Terry staggered to his feet, hatred in his eyes. "Dad, I'm not just getting into Mr. Thornton's inner circle; I want you to find a way to kill that bastard. I want him begging for death, suffering like hell!"

Calvin doted on him without hesitation. "Don't worry, Terry. Whatever you want to do, I've got your back!"

Zachary's face darkened with rage as he turned to Alex. "Mr. Wallace, what is this supposed to mean? I clearly won the first match! Terry used a dagger and blindsided me, and he should've been disqualified!"

Alex casually waved his hand. "Are you trying to teach me how to do my job? You won the first round. End of story. As for the rest, just pretend you didn't see anything."

He did not even bother offering a proper explanation.

After all, Zachary was only an outer disciple under Jerome, and outer disciples under Jerome did not mean a thing at the main headquarters. There were hundreds of them.

Only those who became inner disciples had the right to inherit Jerome's teachings, and only then would elders like Alex show them any real respect.

Zachary was fuming inside but dared not speak up. He had not expected those under Jerome's to be this corrupt behind the scenes. Just then, a calm voice echoed in Calvin, Terry, and Alex's ears.

"Mr. Wallace, excuse me. Do you happen to have Mr. Thornton's contact?"

Alex turned, looking utterly baffled. "Who the hell are you? Maybe check the mirror before you talk about getting his number, huh?"

Zachary was stunned, wondering what Andrew was doing. After all, asking for Jerome's contact information seemed rather inappropriate right now.

Then, he heard Andrew continue with a smile. "Who I am doesn't matter. I just want to contact Mr. Thornton and send him a video, This video is about the conversation between you and the Calvin O father-son duo colluding to manipulate the inner disciple selection."

He added, "Just now, I recorded every detail of your pathetic display of being unable to resist bribes! I'm sure Mr Thornton will be quite shocked when he sees it. He never would have imagined that someone so close to him could be so greedy, bold, and disgraceful!"

Just as Andrew was about to continue, Alex's face turned ashen, his eyelids twitching wildly. "Bastard, shut up! Shut your mouth right now! Where's the video? Hand it over to me and delete everything, or till make you regret it!"

Calvin also broke out in a cold sweat. "Andrew, you were eavesdropping on our conversation and recording video? Damn it, delete it! Delete the video right now!"

His panicked and frantic appearance looked like Andrew had him by the throat.

Chapter 1828

Andrew held up his phone with a smirk. "Why should I delete it? You two are in cahoots here, and if this gets out, I'm sure plenty of people would love to watch the show!"

He added, "Especially you, Mr. Wallace. You're supposed to be one of Mr. Thornton's trusted men, yet here you are, taking bribes without shame. With how much he values justice and fairness, I doubt he'd let this slide, at least not without consequences."

Alex's expression changed again and again, until his face turned as dark as a storm cloud. This was not his first time doing such things. However, others who knew either kept quiet out of fear or respect for his position.

Yet, this random punk not only recorded everything, but he even threatened to report him.

Alex felt like he had swallowed week-old garbage, sick to his stomach and furious.

Calvin gave a sharp, cold warning. "Andrew, you'd better delete that video and act like nothing ever happened. This is the Southern Martial Union's main hall,

and Mr. Wallace is a key figure under Mr. Thornton himself! You really think he would believe you and punish Mr. Wallace?"

Andrew looked completely unbothered. "Alright then. If you two are that stubborn, I'll just go to Mr. Thornton myself. He's right there in the high seat. I don't think he would protect Mr. Wallace in front of all these witnesses, would he?"

With that, he turned to walk straight toward Jerome.

Alex panicked and shouted through clenched teeth, "Stop! You stop right there! Alright, damn it. What do you want from me?"

Andrew gave a mocking laugh and pointed straight at Terry. "Simple. Follow the rules. This idiot broke the rules by using a weapon and pulling a cheap shot. Kick him out of the hall immediately, then announce Zachary as the rightful winner."

Terry growled with hatred. "Who the hell do you think you are? I'm a big deal here in Goldridge, and you country bumpkins think you can make demands? Screw you!"

Andrew remained unfazed. "Mr. Wallace, my patience is wearing thin. If this clown doesn't get out of here now, and you don't stick to the rules, then we'll take it straight to Mr. Thornton."

Alex was fuming. He turned to Calvin and said, "Mr. Peck Senior, I can't help you anymore. Please, take your little brat and get out!"

Calvin froze and shouted, "Alex, what about our deal just now? Are you saying the price I offered wasn't tempting enough for you?"

Alex was beyond irritated. "Just get

out! This isn't about money anymore! Thanks to you and your brainless son, this kid now has me by the throat! Do you think the Peck family's money is

worth more than my position? If Mr. Thornton finds out I've been pulling this kind of stunt behind his back, neither of us will survive the fallout."

Calvin felt as if his world were falling apart. He had already paid Alex a full hundred million in advance. He had spared no expense for the sake of Terry, his illegitimate son. Yet in the end, it all went down the drain.

Terry, the arrogant little idiot, was now too terrified to act tough anymore. His face turned pale. "Dad, I'm not leaving. I refuse to go! I want to be an inner disciple... I want a future! I don't care how, but you have to figure it out. Just keep paying! Pay more!"

Calvin hissed through his clenched jaw, "Terry, there's nothing I can do now. No

one can break Mr. Thornton's rules, not even us. We'll have to swallow this humiliation for now, no matter how bitter it is."

Terry instantly burst into tears, bawling like a madman.

The commotion drew curious glances from nearby participants.

Alex's face tensed up. "Mr. Peck Senior, take your crazy son and get out. This ends here. No one can help you anymore."

Calvin dragged Terry away from the hall in defeat. But just before leaving, he turned and gave Andrew a throat-slashing gesture.

What should have been a guaranteed win had turned into a disaster.

Calvin would remember this, and he would make Andrew pay.

This was a perfect opportunity and excuse to kill Andrew in Goldridge.

Once the father and son were gone, Alex's face was dark with fury. "You can delete the video now, right?"

Andrew calmly pulled out his phone and deleted the footage before him. "Since you're so committed to doing the right thing, Mr. Wallace... it's only natural that I show you a little good faith."

Then, he flashed Alex a casual smile.

Alex watched the video vanish, but his eyes grew cold and sharp. "I'll remember this."

Chapter 1829

Alex hissed, "And you too. Zachary Fischer, right? This is only the first round of the examination, and the road ahead won't be smooth!"

The threat in his words was loud and clear.

Zachary snapped, "Mr. Wallace, I've done nothing wrong from the very beginning! On the contrary, I was ambushed by Terry and got hurt. And still, I didn't complain about any of it!"

Alex let out a mocking laugh. "Getting ambushed and injured? That's your problem, not mine. Your idiot friend just blocked my payday and ruined my plans! Zachary, you're just a nobody, an outer disciple. I'm telling you now: you're in trouble. And not just any trouble, big trouble!"

With that, he scoffed, clasped his hands behind his back, and strutted away.

Zachary's face was grim. "I can't believe a snake like that is hiding right under Mr. Thornton's nose."

Andrew stayed calm. "Relax. You passed the first round. Now all you need to do is clear the final trial, and you're practically in."

Zachary still looked uneasy. "But Captain... Mr. Wallace clearly won't let this go. He's no lightweight. He's already a martial king and one of the most respected elders under Mr. Thornton. Who knew someone like that could be

so disgusting and low? Now that he's set his sights on me, I doubt I'll survive the next round."

Andrew snorted and pulled out his phone again.

Zachary stared in confusion as Andrew opened his gallery and tapped on the deleted items folder.

Then, with just a couple of taps, he restored the supposedly erased video. Zachary's jaw dropped. "No way! Captain, you could do that?"

Andrew shrugged. "Please. A guy like him? Total dinosaur. He probably still uses a flip phone. Modern phones don't fully delete stuff right away. As long as it's within the window, recovery's a breeze."

Zachary looked hopeful for a second, but then he slumped again. "What good does it do? Mr. Wallace is definitely already gunning for me."

Andrew's voice went sharp. "If he's going to play dirty, then we'll play dirtier. Don't worry. I'll make sure that inner disciple spot is yours no matter what."

That made Zachary finally grin.

If Andrew said he would do something, Zachary believed it with his whole heart.

Andrew then helped patch up the wound on Zachary's shoulder and stopped the bleeding with some quick first aid. After that, the two returned to the sidelines to quietly wait for the first round to finish.

Half an hour later, the dust had settled. Eight fighters were officially announced as winners, moving on to the next stage.

With Zachary added in, that made nine.

The last candidate was Joseph, the guy who had skipped the first round due to a bye.

Altogether, it was a neat group of ten.

These ten would go through one final elimination. The five remaining would then be taken under Jerome's wing as inner disciples.

At this point, the trial had reached its most critical moment. Looking at the remaining ten contestants, each was exceptional with extraordinary talent.

Even Andrew found himself nodding silently. These ten were real martial artists in the making. Their potential stood out like stars in the dark, though still, only a fraction of Andrew's own level, maybe 0.00001 of it. Śwnovel

In the front row, Scarlett, Henry, Rowan, and Riker all looked serious. Each of them had someone they were rooting for, and whether those candidates could enter Jerome's inner circle and transform their destinies depended on this moment.

At the main seat at the far end of the hall, Jerome appeared somewhat mentally exhausted.

Alex leaned down and whispered something in his ear, and after Jerome nodded, Alex cleared his throat and addressed everyone on both sides of the great hall.

"Fellow martial artists, this examination has only one round left! We'll be sticking with the classic method: one-on-one matches. The winner becomes a disciple under Mr. Thornton. No gimmicks.

"Now I'll randomly call names. When your name is called, please find your opponent and begin the match immediately!"

He paused, and his gaze swept coldly and subtly toward Andrew and Zachary. "First group:

met

vener

Goldridge's Arthur Hopkins versus Crimson Alliance's Brandon Ackermann!
Second group: Cody Fischer versus Kian Lott!

"Final group! Joseph Yeager from the Yeagers! Your opponent is... Zachary Fischer from Gabo Creek Province!"

Andrew's brow shot up.

This old bastard was really asking for it now.

Chapter 1830

"Captain, I don't think I've got much of a shot going up against Joseph," Zachary said, his expression darkening.

The thing he feared most had finally happened. It was not that he lacked confidence; he just had a realistic understanding of his own limits.

Moreover, Joseph came from one of Goldridge's elite families, with superior talent and unmatched resources. On the other hand, Zachary came from a military combat background. He was always direct: if he could win, he would say so. If he could not, he admitted it. No ego, no excuses.

Andrew nodded, his face as calm as ever. "Joseph wins in explosive power. You saw his build. He was just like Henry. He's built for external strength. But Joseph's strength is nowhere near Henry's level. He's not unbeatable."

He continued, "Zachary, do you still remember the combat principles I drilled into you back then? How should you fight when you're up against someone with raw strength?"

Zachary's eyes gradually steadied. "Simple. Tank the first storm, then take his opening strikes head-on. Once he's exhausted the first, second, and third waves of attacks, that's our moment to counter."

Andrew grinned. "Exactly. If you can endure that, you won't lose."

Zachary's gaze lit up with fire. "But Captain, I don't just want to survive. I want to win. I'll probably rank first in this outer disciple selection if I beat Joseph. Then, Mr. Thornton might finally take me seriously and might start passing down more advanced techniques."

Andrew chuckled. "I figured you'd aim big. Alright then. Since I promised to help you get what you want, I'll push you one more step forward. Go out there and grab first place."

Zachary broke into a wide grin, barely restraining the urge to jump for joy.

This man in front of him never let people down, and that was why he was always respected, even feared.

Meanwhile, in the front row. Matthew, the head of the Yeager family, one of Goldridge's major clans, smiled warmly and said, "Joseph, it's time. Remember, just go easy. No unnecessary injuries. A true martial artist should always act with restraint."

With his arms crossed, Joseph replied flatly, "I'll try."

Matthew gave a helpless smile. "You little rascal. You're so competitive. You just can't rest until you've crushed everyone, always giving me a headache."

From the side, Riker let out a hearty laugh. "Mr. Yeager, with Joseph's strength, it's not even possible for him to hold back."

Gabriel, head of Crimson Alliance, smoothly chimed in with praise. "Exactly. Joseph's name has been known across Goldridge for years. Everyone knows the Yeagers raised a prodigy. If it weren't for his young age, he'd probably already be Mr. Thornton's personal disciple."

Matthew could not hide his pride. He beamed as he nodded at the others. "You flatter us. Truly, I appreciate the kind words. Joseph may be gifted, and I do favor him, but he's still young. There's plenty he has to learn."

Just then, a crisp, melodious voice rang out from the side, laced with biting sarcasm. "Joseph may be talented, sure. But Mr. Yeager Senior, those wrinkles on your face say you're celebrating too early.

"His opponent, Zachary Fischer from Gabo Creek, isn't exactly a pushover either.

If you ask me, it wouldn't be shocking if Joseph ends up defeated."

Matthew's smile froze mid-expression, and his face took on a subtle scowl.

He turned and snorted. "I understand Joseph may not meet your high standards. But I'm not fond of that tone. He may not be perfect, but defeating some no-name from Gabo Creek shouldn't be too difficult."

The one who had just walked all over his pride was none other than Rowan, the ice-cold, sharp-tongued president of the Onyx Serpents.

With her neck held high and a mischievous smirk on her lips, she shot back, "Oh, really? You sound a little too sure of yourself, Mr. Yeager Senior. Well then, let's watch and see how your golden boy performs."

Riker and Gabriel exchanged awkward glances.

Among the three great alliances in Goldridge, Rowan was by far the most fearless. She was blunt, outspoken, and gave zero thought to status or face.

Despite being a stunning beauty and exceptional talent, she was born with a sharp tongue that fired shots in all directions. Relying on Onyx Serpents' fierce reputation, Rowan had offended plenty of people.