

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1831

Next to Rowan sat a young man, Evan Hartman, with sharp eyebrows and bright eyes, his expression cold and stern. He looked at Rowan with adoring eyes, though he hid it well, and smiled gently.

He whispered, "Rowan, Joseph should have no trouble advancing."

Rowan scoffed. "Of course I know that, but I still want to piss off Matthew... and those two pathetic suck-ups, Gabriel and Riker."

Evan chuckled helplessly. "We're here to witness the trial, not stir up trouble. You're a girl, after all. Maybe tone it down just a little?"

Rowan rolled her eyes. "Why should I? What, girls can't speak their minds now? Everyone keeps saying I'm born of winter's essence, cold inside and out. Well, screw that. I'll show the world they're full of crap. I am blazing hot through and through. Anyone who messes with me? I'll burn them alive!"

Evan shook his head with an adoring look in his eyes. Whenever they argued, he always gave in. After all, Rowan was the girl of his dreams.

The second round of trials, which was also the final one, was not done in bulk like the previous matches. Instead of all candidates fighting at once, the five matchups were held one at a time.

Currently, they were on the fourth bout.

Zachary and Joseph, the fifth pair, were next in line.

Rowan glanced around, her gaze sweeping to the back of the hall. "I hope this Zachary guy's got something decent up his sleeve. If he gets wrecked the moment he steps up, I'll be so embarrassed!"

She muttered while scanning the crowd and soon spotted Zachary in a far-back corner.

Right in front of him was someone holding golden needles, working on acupuncture points on Zachary's body. Even though she could only see his side profile, she squinted in surprise.

Still watching her closely, Evan asked, "What is it?"

Rowan narrowed her eyes, studying Andrew's profile, then looked away, unsure. "Nothing. Just thought I saw someone familiar. But it's probably my imagination. That annoying guy vanished ages ago, and he's probably dead in a ditch by now."

At that moment, the fourth bout ended. Alex announced the four winners of the previous rounds.

Each would now register their identities and officially be welcomed as Jerome's inner disciples.

From here on, the road to glory was wide open.

Meanwhile, Andrew had just helped Zachary unlock a series of key acupoints, giving his martial power a serious boost. With the last needle removed, he glanced toward the four winners and could not help but smirk.

All four came from top-tier factions, either one of Gabo Creek's three major guilds or a noble family from Goldridge.

So much for a "public trial" that welcomed all talents. What a joke.

Clearly, the corrupted Alex had been pulling strings from the shadows. Too bad for him, he could rig other matches, but not this one.

Andrew's eyes turned cold as he patted Zachary on the shoulder. "Go. The first place is yours."

Zachary gave a firm nod and strode up to the stage.

At the far end of the hall, Alex sneered and announced, "Let the final match begin!"

At once, the entire hall shifted focus to the two men stepping into the arena.

Joseph, of the Yeager family in Goldridge, needed no introduction.

Among all of Jerome's outer disciples, he was widely recognized as the strongest, an undeniable genius. This round was supposed to be his easy win, his final step into the inner circle.

Across from him stood Zachary, face

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Creek ermined, hailing from Gabo

Creek Not many people knew who

he was, but from his presence alone, he was clearly no pushover

Matthew sat proudly, smiling with ease. There was no suspense in his mind that his son Joseph would not only win but would also be the star of the entire trial.

Many others in the crowd agreed.

Only Rowan seemed distracted, looking around instead of watching the stage.

Evan frowned and asked, "Rowan, what are you even looking at? You've been zoning out this whole time."

Rowan snapped, "Mind your own, business. Just keep watching the show. swear, that guy over there looks super familiar. But the jerk won't turn this way, and it's driving me insane!"

Evan offered, "Want me to send someone to bring him over?"

Rowan looked appalled. "Don't bother. You'll probably just fetch me another drooling fanboy."

Soon, two heavy footsteps echoed in the grand hall.

Zachary and Joseph moved at the same time, and the final trial had officially begun.

Chapter 1832

Just as Andrew had predicted, Joseph went in with a full-on blitz from the very first move. His fists tore through the air with relentless speed, launching a brutal offensive on all sides of Zachary.

As a practitioner of physical techniques in martial arts, Joseph's greatest advantage was his explosive, fast-paced assault.

Zachary clenched his jaw and stayed rooted, holding his ground with steady footwork. Whenever he was about to get overwhelmed, he took a step back. However, the moment he saw an opening, he reclaimed his position without fail.

Joseph's expression remained cold. "Is that all you've got? Just standing there and taking hits? A pathetic approach to martial arts will only lead to a pathetic end!"

With a sharp battle cry, his muscles bulged visibly. Then, he slammed a punch straight at Zachary's face.

Zachary crossed his arms to block, but it was useless. A wave of pain shot through his entire body, like his meridians were splitting open. He staggered two steps back and had just enough time to raise his arms again before Joseph's next blow came crashing down like a storm.

With a loud tear, Zachary's sleeve burst open, revealing a bloodied arm with mangled flesh.

A collective gasp rippled through the audience below.

Someone cheered, "Joseph really lives up to the hype!"

"That's the Yeagers' Eighteen Avalanche Blows! Every punch hits like a freight train!"

"Zachary's already starting to fall apart. Joseph's got this in the bag!"

From the other side of the hall, Matthew's booming laughter echoed proudly. He was absolutely glowing with pride. After all, his son was dominating, and as far as he was concerned, that made him look just as good.

Meanwhile, Andrew stood calmly among the crowd, blending in. His face carried none of the tension others had, just a hint of boredom and mild amusement.

Next to him, a burly man grinned and said, "What's with that look? You look like you're not impressed."

Andrew shrugged. "I'm not. I really don't get what you all are so hyped about. Joseph is obviously going to lose."

The man cursed, clearly annoyed. "What the hell are you smoking? He's going to lose? Are you jinxing him or what? Look around! Every big shot here can see Zachary's on his last leg! Quit trying to stand out with this nonsense. It's lame."

Andrew chuckled. "I'm not trying to be edgy. Joseph may look unstoppable now, but watch his

falter You know what that meat

footwork. It's already starting to

His stamina and internal energy are both running dry."

The man shook his head, no longer interested in arguing with this short-haired country boy who clearly had no clue. In his mind, the

Yeagers' golden boy was at his peak, and Zachary was getting pushed further back every second

And this clown was talking about footwork and energy?

The man wanted to ask, "Are you even in the martial arts world? What's your rank, huh? Do you even know how to fight?"

As far as he was concerned, Andrew was just a clueless spectator pretending to know the game. Little did he know that Andrew could send him home crying to his mother with one punch.

Just then, Joseph landed another brutal punch, swinging recklessly at Zachary's arm.

Flesh tore open, and bone nearly showed beneath the blood. Sweat dripped from Zachary's forehead like rain, but his eyes never wavered.

Andrew had taught him one word: endure. However, it did not mean taking hits without fighting back. It meant resisting the urge to clash head-on during a storm of attacks.

Just like in war: when the enemy's blade is at its sharpest, you avoid it.

Then, when that edge dulls and the momentum fades, that is when you strike.

Joseph's breathing started to hitch, his chest rising and falling with effort. He was clearly growing frustrated and growled, "What are you, a coward? Don't you even know how to fight back?"

Joseph gritted his teeth. His rapidly depleting stamina made his face flush red. However, he forced himself to hold on, not wanting others to see that he was all show and no substance.

Zachary stayed expressionless as he stepped forward and aimed a sharp kick toward Joseph's throat.

Joseph sneered and dropped his palm, ready to snap Zachary's ankle in retaliation. Little did he know that Zachary's move was a feint, not a real attack. The kicked foot retracted in mid-air and pulled back, and taking advantage of this opportunity, his other leg suddenly stepped forward.

Using the retracted leg as a pivot point, he delivered an explosive kick toward Joseph's neck.

"Crap!" Such rapid changes in technique, combined with the heavy force, left Joseph scrambling and finally cursing out loud.

He frantically raised his arms, trying to protect his head and neck. However, having lost too much energy, he was still a beat too slow.

A crisp slap echoed as Zachary's kick landed with the precision and mastery of true legwork.

Even Andrew, watching from the sidelines, could not help but clap once.

"Good job!"

Joseph's head tilted sideways, and like a drunk person, he pitched forward toward the ground. His head was buzzing, narrowly dodging a concussion from Zachary's kick.

"You bastard!" His arrogant pride made him furious and flustered.

At that moment, his body was about to hit the ground. He forcefully channeled his energy and stamped one foot on the ground, regaining his lost balance.

However, his internal energy was jolted, and a mouthful of blood surged up his throat. If he had not swallowed it down by force, he would have coughed it out on the spot.

Andrew shook his head and muttered, "Joseph might as well go home to his mother now."

The burly guy next to him and a few others turned on him with glares.

"What the hell did you just say?"

"Watch your damn mouth!"

"He's not losing. No way!"

Andrew looked unfazed. "Whether he is or isn't, don't take my word for it. Just see for yourselves."

Loud thuds sounded from the arena as Zachary's counterattack began. Just like Joseph before him, a storm of punches and kicks rained down mercilessly.

Joseph was overwhelmed,

constantly dodging and roaring

angrily. Yet, it was useless. He could not keep up with the speed or even dodge in time. Several times, he tried to fight back to show his fury, but the result was that he disrupted his own formation.

Zachary grabbed his wrist and threw him over his shoulder, slamming him hard onto the ground.

Joseph rolled and scrambled,

refusing to admit defeat. However,

Zachary drove his knee up and wrapped his elbow around, forcing Joseph's lower body to kneel on the ground while Zachary firmly controlled his vital weak point-his neck.

Zachary's arms were covered in blood. Combined with his shoulder wound from Terry's earlier sneak attack that had reopened and was bleeding again, he looked battered, but his face showed pure excitement.

He said in a deep voice, "Mr. Yeager, surrender now! Otherwise, I can snap your neck at any time!"

Joseph's face turned red, then a darker shade, and he could not say a word. He could not accept that he

had actually lost like this. Just a second ago, he had been vigorous and aggressive, and he was

completely confident he could destroy Zachary.

The burly man next to Andrew and several other fans of Goldridge's Yeagers stood stunned and speechless.

"Mr. Yeager... lost?"

"That bastard actually called it right!"

"He's done for. Mr. Yeager just got humiliated!"

A loud crash rang out as Matthew smashed the teacup in his hand in fury.

"Bastard! You'd better release Joseph immediately, or I'll bury you six feet under!"

Zachary looked grim as he endured his injuries and demanded angrily, "Mr. Yeager Senior, are the Yeagers just a bunch of sore losers?"

Matthew avoided the main issue and refused to discuss winning or losing, instead continuing to pressure him. "You bastard, I'm giving you one last chance. Let go of my son. I told him to go easy on you earlier, but I never expected you to be so heartless and ungrateful!"

He added, "This match doesn't count, and you have to do it over. And this time, my son's going to bash your damn skull in!"

As the tide turned, Matthew completely abandoned any pretense of dignity. His prized son had just lost, and he was desperate to rewrite the outcome.

And in Goldridge, the Yeagers had the power to do just that.

Gabriel and Riker both frowned and quickly stepped in to back him up.

"Zachary, was it? Let Joseph go. There were irregularities in the match. It's only fair to redo it," Gabriel said.

Riker chimed in, "That's right. You should know you're not really on Mr. Yeager's level. Let him go and restart. This is your best shot. Otherwise, things could get unpredictable."

The entire audience was stunned at how far this was going. Everyone's expressions twisted with discomfort as they watched the powerful pull strings.

Matthew was clearly abusing his influence, and now Gabriel and Riker were chiming in to help him flip the script.

A legitimate trial was turning into a full-blown mess.

Then, Alex completely lost it and roared from across the hall, "Zachary! I told you let go. Did you not hear me? Or do I have to come over there and make you let go?"

The threat could not have been more obvious.

Zachary stood torn, furious, and deeply unwilling, but he knew where he stood. In Goldridge, he was an outsider, a nobody.

And now even Alex was siding against him. If he did not let go, things could spiral out of control.

Rowan burned with fury, ready to lash out at Matthew's shameless bullying.

However, Evan quickly stopped her. "Rowan, let it go this time. Picking a fight once or twice is one thing, but this... don't do it."

Rowan snapped, "Can't you see Zachary won? These people are twisting everything, trampling on fairness. I can't just sit here!"

Evan's voice turned low and serious. "Even if you can't stand it, you have to. This isn't about right or wrong, but politics and power. The Yeagers are untouchable in Goldridge. Even Mr. Ackermann and Mr. Lamar have to show respect to them.

He added, "If the Onyx Serpents speak out now and oppose the Yeagers, Matthew will never forget it, and that would cripple our influence in Goldridge."

Rowan fumed, fists clenched tight, but in the end, she bit down her rage. She hated everything about this, but she also carried the title of Onyx Serpents' president. If she acted on emotion now, she would drag her entire faction into the fire.

While everyone was silently mourning the injustice being done to Zachary, a calm voice suddenly rang out.

It was not loud but clear enough for most people in the hall to hear it.

"Zachary, if they won't admit defeat, what are you waiting for? Choke him out. Kill

him if you have to. I'll take the blame."

Gasps echoed everywhere as the entire room erupted.

Someone whispered, "Who the hell was that?"

"Who's so gutsy to speak out like this, right in front of Goldridge's powerhouses?"

Another asked, "Is that man out of his damn mind?"

Rowan whipped her head around and finally saw the man's face.

Her eyes widened with shock and lit up with unmistakable fire. "It's really you, you bastard... It's really you! You disappeared for so long, and now I've finally got you! This time I'm not letting you get away again!"

Chapter 1835

Matthew exploded with fury, his aura surging outward in a shockwave of rage. "Who the hell dares threaten to kill my son? If you've got the guts, then step out and say it to my face!"

All eyes turned, instinctively locking onto Andrew's direction. Eventually, he strolled casually into the central aisle of the grand hall.

He looked straight at Matthew and said flatly, "I said it. Got a problem with that, Mr. Yeager Senior?"

Matthew roared, "Who the hell are you? Name yourself! The Yeagers don't waste time killing nobodies!"

Andrew gave a sharp chuckle. "Who I am doesn't matter. What matters is that Joseph lost, and you just can't seem to handle it."

Matthew's eyelid twitched violently as he growled, "Listen, the Yeagers are a noble family of Goldridge. If you knew our name, you wouldn't dare say such things!"

Andrew scoffed. "I don't give a damn if you're the Yeagers, the Wallaces, or Goldridge royalty! Tell Joseph to admit defeat and get the hell out. Zachary's the real winner here!"

His patience had reached its limit. Matthew, just like Calvin, was way too full of himself.

Matthew had not expected Andrew to still hold his ground after hearing who he was. "If he refuses to surrender, are you really going to have Zachary kill him?"

He glared at Andrew, murderous intent pouring from his eyes. If this were not Jerome's territory, he would have already called for a Yeager elite to wipe the floor with him.

Andrew raised a brow. "So you're saying he won't admit defeat?"

Matthew hissed coldly, "No, he won't. So what can you do about it?"

In his mind, this nobody did not have the nerve or the power to back up his threats.

Andrew gave a chilling smile. "Zachary, end him."

Without a moment of hesitation, Zachary tightened his elbow. With two sharp cracks, Joseph's breathing was cut off, and his throat began to constrict.

"Dad, h-help me... H-He's really going to kill me! Quick, s-save... me!"

His face turned blue, his voice cracking and fading as the air left his lungs.

Matthew could not believe what he was seeing.

This madman really dared to follow through?

"You bastard!" With a furious roar, Matthew shot into the air.

A violent blast of martial king-level energy erupted from him, sweeping the air outward like a shockwave.

The people nearby barely had time to gasp before they saw Matthew launch himself like a thunderbolt, aiming a deadly palm strike straight at Zachary's skull. He was clearly breaking the rules, interfering with the trial, and going straight for the kill.

"How shameless!" Rowan shouted in fury.

Then, her eyes widened as she saw something no one else had. Out of nowhere,

a figure had appeared at Zachary's side.

It was Andrew.

No one had seen how he moved, but he was just suddenly there. He raised a single fist, wrapped in a swirling red aura of murderous energy, and met Matthew's descending strike head-on.

The thunderous impact echoed through the entire hall.

Matthew's face turned white, and he nearly coughed up blood on the spot. His heart shook with pure dread as he thought, 'Who the hell is this guy? What kind of power is this?'

He flew backward several feet and crashed hard onto the stone tiles of the grand hall. Staggering several more steps, he only managed to stay upright because Riker rushed in to support him.

However, Matthew shoved Riker's hand away, his whole body trembling. He pointed a shaking finger at Andrew, eyes red with disbelief. "Who... are you? When did Goldridge start breeding monsters like you?!" s̄novel

Andrew calmly retracted his fist and answered with cold indifference. "Who am I? You're not qualified to know. Now tell me, is Joseph surrendering... Or rather, are you?"

Matthew's face instantly darkened. "We surrender! Release Joseph right now!"

He forced the words out through clenched teeth, practically choking on them.

As soon as Joseph was released, he bolted to safety, trembling in fear. Andrew's energy had shaken him to the core.

Matthew grabbed Joseph by the shoulder and turned to leave without another word. However, his icy, venom-laced voice echoed through the hall behind him.

"The Yeagers won't forget this grudge! You've got two choices: vanish from Goldridge forever, or wait for us to send you six feet under!"

Andrew remained unfazed and handed two hemostasis pills to Zachary.

As the rest of the crowd watched, stunned into silence, whispers spread like wildfire.

"Is this guy serious? Or is he just putting on a front?"

"Mr. Yeager Senior practically threatened murder, and he still didn't flinch?"

"The Yeagers are rich, powerful, and ruthless. Even if that guy's strong, how can one man possibly take on a whole family like that?"