

RISING FROM THE ASHES (ANDREW AND LAUREN)

Chapter 1846

Alex and Zachary had already stepped out, leaving only Eric seated quietly by the bedside.

Andrew did not even look back. "Eric, I don't like distractions when I'm treating someone. Would you mind stepping out as well?"

Eric remained seated, smiling gently. "Don't worry, Dr. Lloyd. I'll just stay here silently. I'm more concerned for Dad's safety than anyone else. I wouldn't feel at ease if I weren't nearby."

Andrew frowned and was about to insist again when Jerome spoke up. "Eric, go on and step out. Don't worry. Dr. Lloyd's here. I'll be fine."

Only then did Eric rise to his feet and say softly, "Alright, Dad. I'll step out now. Dr. Lloyd, I'll leave him in your care."

Even while walking out, Eric did not forget to politely acknowledge Andrew, warm and courteous as ever. However, Andrew could not shake the discomfort crawling over his skin. Something about Eric always made him feel like a needle was pressed against his back.

Jerome gave a soft chuckle. "Dr. Lloyd, my apologies. Eric's martial art is a rare one. It naturally comes with a hypnotic influence. His control over it is still limited, so he can't fully regulate its effects. It tends to influence others even when he doesn't mean to."

Andrew said half-jokingly, "Mr. Thornton, I hope you don't take offense, but he's clearly a man. Is it really appropriate for him to practice such dark arts?"

Jerome shook his head. "Phantom Mirage is not a dark art. It's one of the most unique techniques in existence. At first, I didn't want him to practice it either. Like you said, Eric is a man, and learning this kind of technique comes with a lot of complications.

"But the technique chose him. When I took him in years ago, he somehow stumbled into it by fate. After that, even I couldn't stop him. It was meant to be." Only then did Andrew understand.

In the world of martial arts, some people were simply born to sync perfectly with certain techniques, as if drawn together by destiny.

Luna was one such martial prodigy. Andrew still did not know the exact technique she used, but she obviously trained in a style that cultivated inner and outer strength.

People like her were basically invincible as long as they kept advancing in martial arts.

His three closest companions were similar.

Aspen leaned into stealth and agility, with an extremely flexible body. Naturally, her technique focused on softer movements. Lauren pursued internal energy cultivation and had a natural resonance with internal arts, while Francesca followed the external martial path, making her perfect for those bold, direct combat techniques.

As these thoughts raced through Andrew's mind, his hands never stopped moving. He said, "Mr. Thornton, brace yourself."

The golden needles pierced into several of Jerome's core pressure points with swift precision.

Usually, Andrew could insert needles into anyone's pressure points with ease. However, Jerome's points were as tough as iron. So, he had to use not only skill but force, and even his arms started to tremble slightly from the pressure.

Jerome smiled in appreciation. "Dr. Lloyd, you're not only a master of medicine, but your martial skills aren't lacking either."

Andrew was not surprised. Jerome was ranked eighth on the Titan List and was a true martial saint. It was only natural that he could sense Andrew's strength through a few movements.

"Compared to the vast ocean of energy running through your body, Mr. Thornton, I'm far behind."

With a light smile, Andrew began the process of drawing out the poison.

Time ticked by, and before long, a full hour had passed.

Chapter 1847

Without proper preparation, it was impossible for Andrew to remove the Frostblossom toxin completely. If it were that easy to deal with, this poison would not be considered such a deadly weapon.

The black energy on Jerome's face began flowing in one direction.

Andrew brought two fingers together like a blade and sliced down swiftly at the point. Immediately, a wound appeared, and black blood began streaming out steadily.

Jerome kept his eyes tightly closed and gasped, "Impressive! To be honest, before this, I had several elders from the Advanced Medical Institute help me. But all of them were forced back by the sheer intensity of the Frostblossom's toxin. None of them could even open a proper channel to drain the poison. They were too terrified to make a cut."

Andrew's focus remained sharp, though his tone stayed calm. "It's not that the Institute lacks talent, but those elders are just mediocre."

Jerome chuckled. "Confident and bold. Dr. Lloyd, your honesty is refreshing."

Andrew decided to play it humble. "As long as you don't think I'm full of myself, I'm good."

Jerome laughed heartily. "Not at all! I've long heard about your name, Dr. Lloyd, but seeing you in person, someone so young and already this accomplished... Well, it's really impressive. And honestly, you remind me very much of an old friend of mine."

Andrew's eyes flickered, and he casually asked, "Oh? May I ask who this friend of yours is?"

Jerome smiled faintly. "I won't share his name since it's inconvenient to mention. But I can tell you this: his last name was also Lloyd. Back in the day, whether it was in Goldridge or throughout the entire Southern Martial Union, that friend of mine was just like you. He was a prodigy, famous far and wide."

Andrew winced internally. Jerome might not have said the name, but Andrew was almost certain that the "friend" had to be none other than his own father, Reginald Lloyd.

Back then, Reginald had left the royal family of the Lloyds and sworn an oath that he would never return unless he defeated every martial legend in the land.

Since Jerome was the union's top leader, it was inevitable that he and Reginald had once crossed paths. However, Andrew had not expected them to become friends.

Feigning curiosity, Andrew asked casually, "What's become of this friend of yours? I'd love to visit him someday. Anyone you hold in such high regard must be an extraordinary man."

Jerome let out a rare sigh, his voice tinged with weariness.

"His whereabouts are unknown now.

I don't even know if he's still alive. In

our world, people who walk the

marital path are often fated this way. We chase the peak of power, thinking we can rise above all laws and limits... But in the end, the ones who die the fastest are usually the same people who believe they're invincible."

Andrew's hand trembled slightly. He asked in disbelief, "You mean... he's dead?"

Jerome looked surprised at

Andrew's reaction, then gave a quiet chuckle. "Not exactly. I'm not saying he's dead. It's just that I haven't heard from him in ten years. For all I know, he could be alive... or gone.

"The last time we had any contact was a decade ago. He sent me a message, asking for help. He said he was trapped and needed me to head e

north and get him out. I was shocked. With his background and strength, I never imagined he'd fall

into such serious trouble"

Andrew, for once, was visibly tense. "He was in Chetvine? That place is a war zone. Did you go?"

Jerome gave a faint smile. "Of course, I went. I may be rough around the edges, but loyalty always comes first. Unfortunately, by the time I reached Chetvine, it was already too late. I never got to see him. The only thing I could do was protect his family and help hold off the enemies who were hunting them."

He sighed deeply. "In the end, I couldn't do much. I heard that the whole incident turned into a bloodbath. Many people died, and all of Chetvine was shaken. Even his only son didn't survive it.

"I searched the battlefield on the outskirts like a madman, over and over. If I'd managed to bring his child back that day, he would've been about Eric's age now."

As he spoke, pain flickered in Jerome's eyes.

He gave a self-deprecating laugh and shook his head slightly. "Forgive me, Dr. Lloyd. I've said too much. It's been a long time since I talked to anyone about that part of the past. I'm not even sure why, but something about seeing you reminded me of my friend, and the words just spilled out."

Andrew smiled. "No harm done. Just think of it as a friendly chat."

Jerome fell silent after that, and Andrew turned his full attention back to drawing out the poison. Still, his mind was anything but calm.

Ten years ago, he and Reginald had fled from Chetvine together.

Reginald had turned back at the last moment to cover Andrew's escape, launching a suicidal counterattack. He had been surrounded by three of the major families and was forced into a deathtrap.

To this day, Andrew did not know how he had escaped, and Reginald had never spoken of it. Just like that, both of them had been drifting in exile for ten years.

Throughout that time, they had never once reestablished contact, not directly, at least.

Andrew knew Reginald was still alive, maybe even living freely somewhere. However, both of them had instinctively chosen to stay distant, without ever saying it aloud.

The reason was simple: fear.

Yes, even Andrew felt fear.

The seal inside his body had kept him from returning to Chetvine for vengeance. It had prevented him from revealing his true identity as the Dragon Prince of the Lloyds.

Moreover, even unlocking the second seal was just the beginning. It was simply not enough. He needed to break the final seal and become stronger than he had ever been. Only then could he bring down the monstrous force hiding behind everything.

"Mr. Thornton, you knew there were dangers there, yet you still went. Your friend was lucky to have someone like you."

Andrew pulled the last needle from Jerome's shoulder and said it from the heart. He truly meant it.

At that moment, Andrew finally began seeing Jerome as one of his own. Nonetheless, he chose not to reveal his true identity. With Jerome's character, he would likely try to defend Andrew openly if he learned the truth.

And that would only bring catastrophic consequences.

"Is it done?" Jerome sat up and exhaled gently. After channeling his energy, he broke into a smile.

"Amazing. Dr Noyd, your skills really are otherworldly. I can feel the

Frostblossom's cold poison weakening. The toxin's vitality has been suppressed. This gives me some breathing room and time to seek out a permanent cure.

Andrew finally voiced the question that had been sitting in his chest. "Back during

the outer disciple trials, I saw you make a brief appearance. You looked fine on

the surface, but I sensed something off even then."

He continued, "And after today's treatment, I can tell that this poison's been in your body for more than just a few days. It's been some time now. Why haven't you sought a full cure sooner?"

Jerome shook his head and

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hesitated. Then, he gave a strained smile. "Dr Lloyd, I can't say too much. A'll tell you is that things around me have gotten complicated.

I don't even have the freedom to step away and seek treatment. If you hadn't happened to come to Goldridge, I probably would've had no choice but to endure this until the bitter end."

Chapter 1849

Andrew narrowed his eyes. "You said there's trouble around you, Mr. Thornton? What kind of trouble?"

Jerome let out a cold snort. "Some people in the Southern Martial Union think I've held the position for too long. They're getting impatient, and I think you know exactly what that means. To be honest, even though all the evidence

points to the Eastonians being responsible for my poisoning, I know for a fact that someone else is behind it."

Andrew's unease, which had been quietly simmering, surged to the surface. "Do you have any idea who it is?"

Jerome's expression turned icy. "I have a good guess. But right now, I don't have any concrete evidence yet. Still, it doesn't matter. These people aren't capable of flipping things around just yet. I am still more than enough to handle these rats in the dark."

Andrew suddenly recalled something and gave a light laugh. "I believe that. It's clear everything's under your control. No wonder I was questioned by a martial king when I arrived earlier. Looks like you've got high-level protection all around."

Jerome paused. "A martial king questioned you? At the entrance of the main hall?"

Andrew nodded. "Exactly. There was a martial king guarding the front gate personally."

Jerome's face shifted instantly, his voice rising in alarm. "Dr. Lloyd! Did you recognize him? Can you describe him?"

Andrew immediately sensed something was off from the seriousness in Jerome's eyes. As the image resurfaced in his mind, he quickly shared the details. "He was a short old man. Oh, and he had a red ribbon tied around his sleeve!"

"A red ribbon... Red..." Jerome repeated it softly under his breath, then suddenly gasped and inhaled sharply.

He exclaimed, "This is bad. That's the Fischer family's elite guard! They've already made their move! Dr. Lloyd, go! Use the back exit and get out of here now! Go, now!"

He shoved Andrew toward the rear just as he shouted urgently. Just then, a deafening crash rang out.

The side hall doors blew apart as a wave of raw energy surged in like a storm cloud, instantly swallowing the entire room.

Andrew's muscles visibly rippled under the pressure. A terrifying sense of danger gripped him, one he rarely ever felt. And whenever he did, it meant only one thing: this was extreme danger.

His instincts kicked in like clockwork. Within seconds, Andrew realized that it was already too late.

At least two martial saints had already locked down Jerome's private chamber, forming a net that could not be escaped.

'Two martial saints?' Andrew was shocked. He had not expected the situation to spiral this fast.

He had done everything he could to avoid getting sucked into this storm. Yet, he somehow still ended up right at the center of it.

"Mr. Thornton, looks like we're completely surrounded," Andrew said with a bitter smile, knowing escape was impossible.

He had no intention of fleeing alone

anyway. After learning about

Jerome's past connection with Reginald and how he had traveled north to Chetvine for a rescue

mission ten years ago, his

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conscience would not allow him to

abandon Jerome and leave.

Thunderous laughter echoed from outside the hall. "Jerome! We're here today to send you off to the afterlife!"

The pressure of martial energy roared in from every direction, seeping into every inch of the space.

Andrew's gaze sharpened as he

watched the rooftop of the side hall rip clean off under an invisible force.

Massive timber beams, thick enough for two adults to wrap their arms around, were uprooted with a sickening crack.

Outside, positioned at three corners of the building in a triangular formation, stood

three figures, each giving off an overwhelming presence.

It was Henry, Grace, and Edwin Pennyworth, a sharply dressed gentleman in a

pristine tuxedo, flawless leather shoes, and a gold-threaded cane.

There was not just one martial saint, but three!

Chapter 1850

More than a dozen figures were sent flying across the courtyard, screaming in agony as they hit the ground. Blood spewed from their mouths as life left their bodies almost instantly.

"Mr. Thornton, even Mr. Wallace has betrayed us. You need to be c-careful!"

The last survivor clutched his chest and managed to get out a warning before his eyes bulged wide and he breathed his final breath.

Andrew's expression grew sharp and alert. This man had clearly possessed martial king-level combat ability and was one of Jerome's trusted confidants. Yet, after just one exchange, he was already dead.

Goldridge's martial world really played on another level. Not only were martial saints openly making moves, but they came in threes. Back in Blumedale, no matter how intense things got, they had never escalated to this scale.

"Dr. Lloyd, stay close. Even if I die today, I won't let you get caught in the crossfire!"

Jerome stood tall and fearless. He gave Andrew a nod before stepping over the bodies of his fallen guards and walking straight toward the entrance of the side hall.

Andrew followed him out and immediately saw Zachary being held captive.

Eric was leading a team of fighters, engaged in battle with Scarlett and several other martial kings.

The entire Southern Martial Union headquarters had descended into chaos, filled with war cries and the clash of steel. What was once a clear sky now hung in a blood-red hue, thick with tension and killing intent.

Jerome stood at the heart of it all, facing down Henry and the two other martial saints.

"Mr. Thornton, are you enjoying the view?" Grace sneered with a raspy cackle, her voice grating and twisted.

Jerome ignored her and turned his gaze toward a specific direction. "Alex, we've been friends for years. I've always treated you fairly. So tell me, why?"

Alex chuckled darkly, his expression twisted. "You're right, Jerome. You have treated me well. But I'm sorry, I've simply decided that I don't care. You gave me a lot, sure. But you? You're too rigid. Too self-righteous!"

"This is the Southern Martial Union we're talking about. We have so much power, so many resources! You could've split it into factions and ruled like a king with just one call! But instead? What did you do? You tied our hands with rules and codes and your damn morals!"

He hissed, "While we followed you around, you always had a rule for everything! Please! We train our entire lives for what? To stay poor and righteous while the world.

moves path, acting all noble and uptight, then what's the point of all our power?

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What's the point of being better than the rest?"

Jerome stepped forward. His voice was calm but firm. "No. You're wrong. We train

and kill, yes... but that's exactly why we must show restraint. The stronger you are, the greater your responsibility."

He continued, "These past years, I'm not saying I've been perfect. But the Southern Martial Union has grown. Our martial artists have flourished. Hasn't the entire region seen improvement?"

Alex barked, "Shut up! You're making me sick! Don't even get me started on that

nonsense! I trained my whole life! Do you know how much I suffered? And in the

end, you want me to serve others? To build a better martial world for them?"

He grumbled, "Sure, people worship
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you. They say the world's better
under your rule. But what about us?

The ones at your side? We got nothing out of it! And the few scraps I tried to
keep for myself? You punished me for that, too! told you long ago that being
too righteous would be your downfall."

Jerome said nothing for a moment. His eyes dimmed with sadness. "So that's
how

it is. That's how all of you really see me... Then you're right. Maybe I was
never fit

to be the union's leader."

Alex was about to lash out again when Andrew cut in first, voice dripping with
contempt. "Alex, don't assume everyone's as greedy and shameless as you.
Mr. Thornton led with honor. He brought prosperity to the Southern Martial
Union for two whole decades, and the martial world of the South knows it.
They remember it."