

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren) 1331-1340

The moment the words left her lips, Aspen froze in shock. She could not believe she had just said that.

Had she truly sunk this low, craving his punishment like some twisted masochist? This was exactly what Chantelle had just said!

Andrew blinked in surprise, then broke into a wicked grin. His hand came down again, delivering a series of crisp, stinging slaps to her upturned backside. He made sure to strike with just enough force-not enough to truly hurt her, but enough to make her feel the sharp, tingling pain.

Aspen's face twisted in a mix of discomfort and pleasure, her emotions caught in a confusing whirl. However, Andrew did not stop there. He explored every inch of her trembling body, pushing her to the very edge.

Soon, Aspen's limber, sweat-soaked form arched on the mattress.

Andrew quickly realized that Aspen did not just tolerate the pain-she craved it. The more he pushed her, the more alive she seemed, her reactions only growing wilder.

It was completely unexpected. On the surface, this sharp-tongued, aloof servant girl always acted like an ice queen, impossible to crack. But now, it was clear she was not just repressed-she was deeply, desperately craving this rough, unrestrained passion.

"Oh, Master, please keep spanking me, punish me! Not just my backside-I want you to grab me, whip me, make me yours..."

Her trembling, tear-tinged voice echoed through the room, tinged with a hint of desperate longing.

Even with Andrew's iron will, her words shot through his veins like a lightning bolt, setting his blood on fire. With a growl, he gave up any pretense of restraint. His hands grabbed the thin silk of her nightgown, and with a single, brutal motion, he tore it into pieces.

The shredded fabric fluttered to the floor, revealing her flawless, snow-white skin, as smooth and delicate as fine porcelain.

Aspen instinctively crossed her arms over her chest, her body trembling. "Y-You can't take the final step..."

Andrew's smile was cold, his breath coming out in hot, ragged bursts. "At this point, do you really think I'm going to stop?"

Aspen barely had time to react before he seized her, twisting her into a deeply humiliating position. In the next moment, he took her completely without hesitation.

A blinding, explosive sensation ripped through Aspen's mind like a bolt of lightning shattering the darkness. She threw her head back, her long, pale neck arching as she gasped for air.

At first, the pain was overwhelming,

sharp enough to push her to the

edge of unconsciousness. But then

came a

flood of warmth that

washed over her, enveloping her in a deep, all-consuming heat.

"Andrew... I love you... Don't stop... Harder..."

She managed to choke out the words between breathless gasps, just before the

next wave crashed over her, pulling her under completely.

That night, Aspen experienced a kind of pleasure she had never imagined, a feeling that wrapped around her soul like a vine, tightening with every pulse. At the same time, a deep, bone-weary exhaustion set in, making her entire body feel boneless, her thighs trembling with

lingering spasms.

It went on for nearly four hours. Even Andrew, for all his stamina, felt his strength sapped by the time it was over. As soon as he collapsed beside her, he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Aspen nestled against his chest, her

breathing soft and steady,

completely spent. The moment he

released her, she slipped into

unconsciousness, her lips still curled

into a faint, contented smile.

'To hell with Stockholm syndrome, to hell with masochistic tendencies. I want him.

I crave his touch-his raw, unrestrained passion. Nothing else matters," she thought.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

"Mr. Lloyd, Ms. Stevens, the sun's already up! Are you still not out of bed?"

The next morning, Andrew was woken up by a loud commotion outside. He got out of bed and looked out the window.

Downstairs, the Serenity Villa was already surrounded by official cars. Everyone attending the Grand Medical Summit had a government car assigned for transport, a clear sign of the province's importance to the event.

Aspen slowly sat up, her pale, delicate body covered in red marks. Last night, Andrew's relentless assault had left almost no part of her unscathed. She let out a slight hiss as she moved her legs, feeling the soreness between them. Glancing down at the bed, she saw a faint red stain on the sheets. Moreover, her lower body felt swollen and sore.

She mumbled, "What a jerk! He doesn't know how to go easy at all!"

She shot a resentful glance at Andrew, her eyes filled with a mix of

embarrassment and lingering shame. She could not believe that she had actually slept with the man who had enslaved her.

Just thinking about it made her feel both humiliated and oddly excited.

Andrew picked her up from the bed and grinned. "Come on, let's take a shower together. Ms. Garcia is already waiting."

Aspen immediately turned her head away. "No!"

Andrew raised an eyebrow. "No?"

Aspen nodded firmly. "Yeah, no! I'm afraid if we shower together, you'll start messing with me again!"

Andrew laughed, completely unapologetic. "Not bad, my little servant. You know me too well. Aspen, you have no idea how addictive you are."

Aspen could not help but feel a tiny sense of pride mixed with embarrassment. She asked, "Addictive? What do you mean?"

Andrew leaned in, his hot breath brushing against her ear. "It means I can't get enough of you—I just want to keep doing it."

Aspen's heart skipped a beat, her face flushing pink. She did not feel angry or embarrassed, just an inexplicable joy bubbling up inside. She wanted it too—she wanted to be taken by him, again and again.

Aspen whispered softly from his arms, declining him gently, "But you still have to represent Blumedale Hospital later! Be good, let's not do it now. You need to save your strength!"

For one, her body could not take much more after last night. With Andrew's wild energy, if they continued, she might really end up in the hospital.

Besides, the Grand Medical Summit was crucial. She did not want Andrew to be worn out and embarrass himself on stage.

And lastly, last night had been a moment of reckless indulgence. Now that her head was clear, she could not help feeling a bit shy about it all.

Andrew sighed, a little disappointed. "Fine, after the summit, we'll pick up where we left off."

Aspen pouted. "Still thinking about that? I can't just let you have me for nothing. After the Grand Medical Summit, I promised my parents I'd go back to Bridgefields with them!"

As she spoke, a hint of sadness appeared in her eyes, and her voice grew shaky.

Andrew pulled her into his arms, his tone soft and sincere. "Don't go. Stay here and keep being my little servant."

Aspen's body stiffened in shock. "Y-You want me to stay?"

Andrew nodded. "Yes, I want you to stay. A hundred times yes!"

Tears welled up in Aspen's eyes, and she could not help but feel wronged. "Then why didn't you tell me earlier? I kept thinking you didn't want me around, that you wanted me to leave!"

Andrew felt a headache coming on. "I swear, I never wanted to kick you out. You're my right-hand woman. I'd be crazy to let you go."

Aspen sniffled, her lips trembling. "Are you just saying this because I slept with you? Are you just trying to sweet-talk me now?"

Andrew gave a wry smile. "No, even if you hadn't slept with me, I'd still want you to stay.

Of course, now that you did, I want to keep you even more."

Aspen gave him a doubtful look. "Keep me? Why?"

Andrew smirked. "Because you're tight and wet-I just can't get enough of you!"

Aspen's face flushed bright red. She huffed, "Pervert. You're such a shameless jerk. I bet you've said those sweet words to Francesca and Lauren too!"

Andrew quickly shook his head. "No, absolutely not. I've only ever said them to you."

Aspen could not hold back a giggle, wiping her tears away as her mood lightened. "Andrew, I like being your servant. Hike it when you punish me, spank me... I even like it when you're rough with me, pushing hard. I can't say it anymore. You're just a big, bad jerk!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Blushing furiously, Aspen grabbed a towel and hurried into the bathroom.

On the other hand, Andrew rubbed his temples, feeling a slight headache coming on. Not being able to control his desires was a mistake any man could make. Hopefully, when he explained this to Lauren and Francesca one day, they would understand.

Thinking it over, he believed they probably would. After all, this was a mistake every man found hard to avoid.

Once he was done freshening up, Andrew headed downstairs, stepping into one of the official cars waiting outside. Meanwhile, Aspen joined Dylan and Natasha in another car, heading out to pick up the Stevens family.

Chantelle sat beside Andrew in the back seat. Unbothered by the driver's presence in the front, she shot him a sharp, mocking smile and said, "Mr. Lloyd, I didn't expect someone as vigorous as you to look so drained this morning."

Andrew raised an eyebrow. "Do I look tired to you?"

Chantelle's smirk deepened. "Come on, you and your little servant must've gone at it for hours last night, right? Don't tell me you didn't get worn out-you look like you've been completely drained."

Andrew snorted. "Drained? Ms. Garcia, you can always test me yourself."

Chantelle froze for a moment. Then, her eyes narrowed as she realized what he meant. Her cheeks flushed slightly, but she quickly recovered, her tone turning sharp. "The Grand Medical Summit is today. You should be at your peak, not wasting your energy the night before. I hope you won't hold us back today!"

Andrew's expression remained calm. "You're exaggerating. I just got a bit less sleep than usual. As for my energy, don't worry. If I really need it, I can just take a few pills."

Chantelle's eyes widened. "Andrew... are you even a real man? You need pills just to handle a girl?"

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Don't get the wrong idea. I'm talking about supplements, not Viagra."

With that, he pulled out two bright yellow-orange pills from his pocket and popped them into his mouth. The potent medicine instantly spread through his body, restoring his slightly sluggish spirit to peak form.

Chantelle's eyes sharpened, clearly intrigued. "T-Those are Titan Essence Pills, aren't they?"

Andrew gave a slight nod.

Chantelle hesitated for a moment, then reached out her hand. "Give me two."

Andrew frowned, pulling back. "No way. These Titan Essence Pills are incredibly valuable, and the ones I have are the enhanced version."

Chantelle gritted her teeth. "Would it kill you to share two? I know the ones you carry are the good stuff, which is exactly why I want them. Mr. McCormick hasn't been sleeping well lately. I want to give him some."

Andrew finally relented, handing her two pills. "Alright, fine. Since it's for Mr. McCormick, I'll give you these. But be careful-his body might not be able to handle the full strength of these pills. Make sure he only takes one at a time, and for heaven's sake, make sure Mrs. McCormick is present when he does."

Chantelle blinked in confusion. "Why does Mrs. McCormick need to be there?"

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Andrew chuckled, his grin wicked. "Because this enhanced Titan Essence Pill isn't just a regular supplement. Once he takes it, the rush of energy will be... intense Mrs. McCormick

being there is just a precaution, in case he needs release. I'm sure you understand what I mean."

Chantelle's face turned bright red, and she spat out a sharp, embarrassed hiss. "Your pills are so twisted!"

Andrew just laughed. "Twisted? No way. These are a godsend for men. You just don't get it. Ms. Garcia, you really should find yourself a man. Trust me, once you've got someone, have him take one of these pills, and I guarantee you'll be the one who's grateful."

Chantelle's face darkened. "Shut up. I hate men. I especially hate men who try to put their hands on me-it's enough to make me sick."

Andrew shrugged. "You say that now, but you're just like my little servant was—all uptight and man-hating before she got a taste. But once you get a real taste, you might find yourself craving it, day and night."

Chantelle scoffed. "I'm nothing like Aspen. That girl's twisted nature isn't something you've fully unleashed yet. Mark my words, Andrew-once Stockholm syndrome reaches its peak, Aspen will turn into exactly what you just described-a girl who can't get enough, day in and day out. She'll drain you dry."

Andrew blinked, a hint of doubt flashing in his eyes. "Seriously? You think Aspen is that intense?"

He wondered if she could actually be worse than Francesca.

Just then, the blaring sound of loud music cut through the air, jolting them both. Andrew looked out the window and realized they had arrived at the Grand Medical Summit.

The stands on one side of the venue were packed with VIPS, while the other three sides were swarming with excited spectators.

It was extremely lively.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Someone commented, "Look, the two elders sitting up front in the center are the senior masters from the Advanced Medical Institute. Both of them are renowned physicians, true medical legends!"

Another chimed in, "Looks like the championship this year is as good as theirs again."

"If it's not the Advanced Medical Institute, then it'll be Mosby. No one else stands a chance."

"I heard Blumedale Hospital has some new medical genius on their side this time. It might not be so clear-cut after all!"

The crowd around the Grand Medical Summit buzzed with chatter, their voices blending into a chaotic hum of debates and predictions.

As soon as Andrew arrived, Francesca rushed over to meet him. "Andrew, Dr. Goddard and Dr. Bozzelli have already arrived. They're just waiting for you!"

Andrew grinned. "Fran, you've gotten even curvier. Every time you run, they practically bounce."

Francesca's cheeks flushed, and she shot him an annoyed glare. "Stop messing around the summit is about to start! Can't you take this seriously for once?"

Andrew chuckled. "Alright, alright. Let's go find Dr. Goddard."

The two quickly found Malcolm and Thomas among the gathering crowd. Before they could even greet them, Jared stormed over, his face twisted with rage.

He growled, "Andrew, I will never forgive you!"

The fury in his eyes was so intense that Andrew almost burst out laughing.

"Jared, are you sure you're mad at the right person? Today, our opponents are Mosby and the Advanced Medical Institute. If you want to vent your rage, aim it at them."

Jared's fists clenched, his face turning a deep shade of red. "Don't try to change the subject! I know it was you who made me lose control of myself before! You poisoned me, didn't you?"

Andrew raised an eyebrow, his expression cool. "Sorry, Jared, but you've got the wrong guy. You're accusing an innocent person."

Jared's eyes turned bloodshot. "Stop lying! The tea I drank that day tested positive for the rabies virus! If it wasn't you, then who else could it be?!"

Andrew let out a cold laugh. "You found the virus, and now you just assume it was me? Jared, that's a pretty weak accusation. That's like me saying I lost five dollars yesterday, and you must have stolen it."

Jared's face turned bright red, his whole body shaking with barely contained fury. "Y-You bastard!"

"Enough! You two, stop bickering!" Thomas stepped in, his expression stern. "Jared, sit down and calm yourself. The competition is about to start."

He turned to Andrew, his eyes cold. "And you, Andrew-you knew how important today was, yet you still showed up late. I told Malcolm long ago that you're too arrogant and unreliable for serious work!"

Andrew's gaze turned icy. "It doesn't matter if I'm late or early; we're still on time for the competition. But really, Dr. Bozzelli? The competition is about to start, and you're still wasting time with small talk. Do I look like I give a damn about you-or your Blumedale Hospital's

reputation?"

Thomas's face turned an ugly shade of purple as he pointed at Andrew. "You"

Andrew's tone grew colder. "Listen

carefully, Dr. Bozzelli-I'm not your student or your subordinate. You have no right to lecture me. I'm representing Blumedale Hospital in favor of Dr. Goddard. Otherwise, do you really think I'd bother to p

with your attitude?"

He had absolutely zero patience left for Thomas and Jared. If they wanted to talk shit, he would bury them in it.

Meanwhile, Thomas' entire body shook with rage. He had never been so blatantly challenged, so openly disrespected.

Malcolm quickly stepped in, letting out a heavy sigh. "Alright, that's enough fighting. Thomas, get the team ready to enter the venue. The judges are watching us."

He turned to Andrew, his eyes warm. "Andy, I'm counting on you to give Mr. McCormick and me a pleasant surprise today."

Andrew gave a small nod. "Don't worry, Dr. Goddard. I won't disappoint you."

Francesca chimed in with a bright smile. "I believe in Andrew too! I'm sure he'll do great!"

Jared snorted, his expression twisted with disdain. "Talking big before the match even starts? How typical. Do you think you're going to place in the top ten,

Andrew? I'd be impressed if you even got close."

Thomas added in a mocking tone, "The higher the expectations, the greater the disappointment. Malcolm, you've always had an eye for talent. I just hope you're not making a mistake this time. It would be a shame to ruin your spotless record."

Andrew did not bother explaining himself. Instead, he would let his skills do the talking.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew simply chuckled.

At that moment, the loudspeaker crackled to life. "Now entering the arena-the Blumedale Hospital team!"

Immediately, led by Thomas, Andrew, Francesca, and Jared stepped onto the stage.

The Grand Medical Summit was being held in Blumedale's largest stadium. All four sides of the arena were packed with spectators, and a large platform, spacious enough for 50 competitors to battle it out, had been set up in the center. Thunderous applause filled the air, echoing off the stadium walls.

Blumedale Hospital held a special place in the hearts of Gabo Creek province's residents, and their supporters were out in full force.

Someone said, "Look, that's Dr. Thomas Bozzelli, one of the top physicians at Blumedale Hospital. He's a respected expert in our province."

"Behind him is his star student, Dr. Jared Bridges. I've heard his skills are impressive."

Another chimed in, "And that beautiful, doll-faced woman beside them is Dr. Goddard's student. She's said to be quite talented too."

One asked, "Those three are famous enough, but who's that guy at the back? I've never seen him before."

Amid the roaring applause, whispers of curiosity and confusion rippled through the crowd as they noticed Andrew. Many had no idea who he was or what his abilities might be.

Meanwhile, Aspen sat with her family in the VIP stands. Thanks to the special seating arrangements Chantelle had secured through Andrew's connections, they had a perfect view of the arena.

Still nursing his bruised pride from the previous night's beating, Oscar leaned over with a sneer. "Aspen, it looks like Andrew isn't all that special. Hardly anyone in the crowd even recognizes him—all I hear are confused whispers."

Aspen replied calmly, "Andrew only arrived in Blumedale recently. It's normal that people don't know him yet. But that doesn't mean his medical skills are lacking."

Oscar snorted. "Well, we'll see. Let's just hope your 'badass' CEO can last more than a few rounds on stage."

Zephyr added, his tone thoughtful, "The Grand Medical Summit is the pinnacle of medical competition in Gabo Creek province. It's filled with geniuses and masters.

If he can even last a few rounds, that's already an impressive feat."

Esther nodded with a smile. "That's true. Aspen, for him to be this young and already skilled in medicine-that's really something special."

Hearing her parents praise Andrew, Aspen's heart swelled with a sweet, comforting warmth. However, a shadow of doubt crept in when her gaze drifted to Francesca, standing beside Andrew on stage. After all, Francesca was one of Andrew's real women, someone with a much deeper bond with him.

Aspen still had not reached that level. To Andrew, she was just a little servant girl.

Esther glanced at her daughter, frowning slightly. "Aspen, what happened to your neck and wrists? Why are they covered in bruises?"

Aspen's heart skipped a beat. She

quickly tugged at her sleeves and

collar, trying to cover the marks. She chuckled nervously, mumbling, "Oh, that...I've been training in martial arts lately and practice with a wooden dummy every day I guess I just overdid it."

Esther's eyes filled with concern. "Be careful, sweetheart. Don't push yourself too hard. You're a girl, not a man-you should take better care of your skin."

Aspen forced a laugh. "I know, Mom. I'll be more careful next time."

In her heart, she thought to herself, 'Next time, it might be even worse. That devil Andrew nearly broke my soul last night.'

Yet, despite the soreness, she could not help but crave his rough touch again. After all, she was already a senior grandmaster in martial arts. No matter how intense, no matter how wild the position, she could handle it. swnovel

"Mr. and Mrs. Stevens, mind if we join you to watch the match?"

Aspen looked up as a group approached their seats.

Zephyr quickly stood up, his face lighting up with surprise. "Oh, it's Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes! Please, take a seat!"

Aspen's heart skipped a beat. 'Wait a minute... the Rhodes? Is it who I think it is?'

She tried to act casual as her eyes scanned the group, and sure enough, there she was—Lauren, with her fiery red lips, as striking as a blooming rose.

"Ms. Stevens, hello! Mind if I sit beside you?" Lauren's smile was dazzling, her eyes sparkling with a playful glint.

Aspen forced a strained smile, her heart sinking. She replied, "Ms. Rhodes, please, have a seat."

She had just survived a night of wild passion with Andrew, and now she had to sit beside one of his other lovers.

Aspen could not help but wonder if the universe was playing some kind of cruel joke on her.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The announcer's voice echoed through the stadium, the microphone crackling as he called for the next wave of competitors. "Now, would the representatives from the Advanced Medical Institute and Dr. Mosby Lake, please enter the arena!"

"Would the representatives from each of the provincial hospitals, please enter the arena!"

"Would the representatives from Gabo Creek's various clinics and medical centers, please enter the arena!"

Andrew looked around as more and more medical practitioners stepped onto the competition platform.

Though Blumedale Hospital, Mosby, and the Advanced Medical Institute were the main contenders for the championship, many skilled doctors from across Gabo Creek Province fought their way through the preliminary rounds to stand here today.

Soon, all 50 contestants had gathered on the platform. Every single one of them was a well-known medical expert in their own right, except for Andrew, whose reputation was still largely unknown. Only a handful of people truly understood the depth of his medical skills.

Standing right next to him, Francesca stuck out her tongue in a playful, nervous gesture. She whispered, "Andrew, what should I do? I'm so nervous!"

Andrew chuckled. "Fran, relax. If you want to reach the peak of the medical world someday and make real breakthroughs in this field, you'll have to get used to facing storms, big and small."

Francesca took a deep breath, nodding firmly. "With you here, I feel like I can push myself further and take on the challenge. I don't know how far I'll make it in this tournament, but I believe in you. I know you'll be the best!"

Andrew smiled and glanced to the other side. Through the crowd of contestants, he locked eyes with someone glaring at him from across the stage.

It was Mosby, the top physician in Blumedale, whose face was twisted with cold, seething hatred.

He hissed, "Andrew, you've crippled two of my apprentices one after the other. Today, at this Grand Medical Summit, I will make sure you understand the taste of defeat. You may walk away with your life, but once I get my hands on the Lazarus Blueprint, that will be the end of you."

They were too far apart to exchange words, but the murderous intent in Mosby's eyes was unmistakable.

Andrew met his gaze without flinching. Mosby's apprentices had brought their fate upon themselves, and as for the Lazarus Blueprint, he had no intention of letting it fall into anyone else's hands-least of all Mosby's.

The stadium gradually fell silent as all eyes turned toward the central platform. Everyone knew this meant the opening speeches were about to begin.

Derek said, "I don't have much to say. I just wish all the brilliant medical talents here today the best of luck. May the spirit of healing and the art of medicine forever thrive in Gabo Creek Province!"

Derek kept his speech brief and immediately took his seat afterward. Next, the two elders from the

Advanced Medical Institute, Preston and Clifford, stepped forward, clearing their throats before

addressing the crowd and explaining the rules of the competition.

"The rules for this year's Grand Medical Summit are as follows: First, any participant caught

cheating or engaging in

underhanded tactics will be

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permanently expelled from the

medical community, their reputation shattered beyond repair.

"Second, as with every Grand Medical Summit, we are here to find the best of the best, the true masters of medicine. Therefore, only the top three will be recognized all others will be considered defeats."

A wave of discontented murmurs rippled through the crowd. This rule was harsh, even by the Grand Medical Summit's standards. This was a provincial-level event, yet only three would be recognized.

It went without saying that those who did not make the cut would be disheartened. But the top three? They would bask in glory, instantly becoming the most celebrated figures of the moment.

Nonetheless, no one dared to voice their objections openly. After all, the path to becoming a true master of medicine was meant to be brutal and unforgiving. Only those who could withstand the pressure and overcome countless challenges would be truly worthy of the title.

"And the final rule-this competition will consist of ten rounds. In other words, if you can survive all ten rounds and overcome every medical challenge presented, then you will be crowned the champion."

Preston and Clifford stepped back, and their announcement met with a fresh wave of enthusiastic applause.

The entire stadium buzzed with anticipation as the real excitement was just about to begin.

Suddenly, a voice cut through the clamor. "Mr. Fuentes, Mr. Phelps, Mr. McCormick, and respected judges, I have a question!"

The crowd fell silent, tens of thousands of eyes turning in the direction of the voice.

Who dared interrupt at a time like this, just as the competition was about to begin?

Francesca's face turned pale, and she almost raised her hands to cover her face in embarrassment. "Andrew, what are you doing?"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The one who had just shouted was none other than Andrew.

Thomas immediately snapped at him. "Andrew, what do you think you're doing? If you embarrass Blumedale Hospital, I won't let you off easily!"

Andrew ignored him, keeping his hand raised high.

Up in the VIP stands, Aspen and Lauren exchanged confused glances.

"What's Dr. Lloyd doing? Does he need a bathroom break?"

"I'm not sure... Maybe his back is acting up?"

"His back? Why would you say that, Ms. Stevens?"

"Oh, um... just a random guess. He did look pretty worn out last night, after all."

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One of the Advanced Medical Institute elders, Clifford, frowned as he looked down at the bold figure standing in the center of the stage. "Contestant, what is your issue?"

Andrew's voice rang out clearly. "I believe the competition rules have a flaw."

The crowd erupted into whispers. They all wondered who Andrew was for being so bold to question the rules before the match had even started.

In another section of the stands, Quinton, Yara, and Christina's family sat together. Quinton spat in disgust. "He's such an attention-seeking fool. What a joke."

Irene and Leroy quickly joined in, muttering insults under their breath.

Yara, however, just chuckled. "Quinton, if you think he's such trash, why don't you get up there and replace him?"

Quinton's face flushed red, and he quickly shut his mouth. If he had the skills to compete, he would not be sitting in the stands like a mere spectator.

Clifford and Preston looked at Andrew. "What are you questioning the Medical Institute's rules?"

Andrew replied, slightly irritated. "Are you questioning the Advanced Medical Institute's rules?"

Andrew's tone remained calm. "Not exactly questioning, just pointing out a small oversight."

Clifford and Preston snapped back in unison, "Get straight to the point, or we'll strip you of your right to compete!"

Andrew's expression remained unbothered. "Mr. Fuentes and Mr. Phelps, as you just announced, the competition has ten rounds. Anyone who makes it through all ten rounds will be crowned the winner, correct?"

Clifford and Preston huffed. "That's correct!"

Andrew continued, "But what if multiple contestants clear all ten rounds? How do you decide the final champion then?"

His question caught Clifford and Preston off guard, their eyes widening in surprise.

A scornful laugh suddenly echoed across the stage-it was Mosby.

He mocked, "Andrew, do you really think you're some kind of miracle worker?"

Multiple contestants making it through ten rounds? Do you honestly think that's possible? Aside from me, the rest of you are nothing but amateurs and pretenders."

Thomas cut in, his voice cold.

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"Andrew, stop making trouble. The Grand Medical Summit's difficulty is already at its peak. The idea of multiple contestants clearing all ten rounds is ridiculous. If you can make it past even three rounds, you should count yourself lucky."

Andrew ignored him, keeping his gaze firmly on the two elders. "Mr. Fuentes and

Mr. Phelps, I'm waiting for an answer."

Preston and Clifford looked like they were about to explode. They silently cursed

at Andrew for being so audacious as to challenge them so openly.

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Finally, one of them spoke, his tone grudging and annoyed. "Fine, you're right-the possibility you mentioned does exist. However, the Grand Medical Summit is only held once every three years. Clearing atten rounds and earning the title of the Grand Physician is nearly impossible.

"Even we, with our decades of experience, wouldn't dare claim we could do it. So stop worrying about unlikely scenarios—it's irrelevant to someone like you."

Though clearly irritated, Preston and Clifford begrudgingly gave Andrew a response. Even so, their dismissive tone made it clear they were not taking him seriously at all.

Andrew did not get angry. He simply smirked, his tone turning even more casual. "It's understandable if you two elders are too old and weak to manage it. But just because you can't do it doesn't mean no one else can. So, I suggest you clarify the rules now, instead of causing disputes when someone eventually fights me for first place."

Andrew's bold declaration sent a shockwave through the crowd. Many spectators blinked in disbelief, wondering if they had just misheard.

One whispered, "My God, did he just say what I think he said? Did he just call the two legendary figures 'old and weak'?"

"Not only that, he basically just declared he's going to take first place! This guy has to be the most arrogant competitor in the history of the Grand Medical Summit!"

Someone exclaimed, "Who the hell does he think he is? Even Dr. Lake and Dr. Bozzelli haven't made such outrageous claims!"

The stadium erupted into a chorus of angry shouts and jeers, the crowd clearly unhappy with Andrew's audacious attitude.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Aspen and Lauren exchanged a weary glance. Both women understood that this kind of bold, reckless attitude was just part of Andrew's nature. He was not trying to intimidate anyone-this was simply who he was.

Chantelle, sitting beside Derek, was practically grinding her teeth in frustration. She growled, "That bastard! The competition hasn't even started, and he's already making enemies left and right!"

Derek, however, just chuckled. "Elders, why not just give the young man an answer? I have to admit, he makes a good point."

Meanwhile, in another section of the stands, Quinton let out a scornful laugh. "What a clown. He's got no real skills, so he's resorting to playing the fool."

Christina, who had been silent until now, sneered. "With Dr. Lake and the Advanced Medical Institute here, he's just waiting to get crushed. Let's see how long his bravado lasts."

On the other hand, Yara calmly tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and smiled. "I don't know. I think Andrew's just being real. He says what he thinks-that's what real confidence looks like."

Leroy, sitting beside her, frowned. "Ms. Wright, you seem to think quite highly of Andrew. Shouldn't you be on our side, though? Supporting him is like slapping your own family in the face."

Yara's eyes turned icy. She leaned in and spat directly into Leroy's face, her expression cold. "Trash like you think you can lecture me? I do what I want. If I say I support Andrew, and I like him, what are you gonna do about it? Bite me?"

Leroy's face turned a sickly shade of green, still dripping with her spit. His expression was one of pure humiliation, like he had just watched his own funeral. "You fucking b—"

Even so, he did not dare finish the sentence. He knew full well that Yara could crush him without breaking a sweat.

Beside him, Irene quickly fumbled for a tissue, hurriedly wiping her son's face. She usually had a sharp tongue, but when faced with someone like Yara, a true blue-blooded heiress, she could only shrink back, her usual fire extinguished.

Christina ignored the pathetic scene beside her and instead fixed her sharp gaze on Yara. She asked, "What did you just say? You like... Andrew?"

Yara's cheeks turned a faint shade of pink, and she let out a shy, almost bashful giggle.

"Yes, that's right. I like Andrew. Tell me, what girl wouldn't be drawn to a man like him?"

Christina felt a sharp, bitter pang in her chest. First Aspen, and now Yara?

Andrew's luck with women was becoming downright infuriating. And what about her?

She was already yesterday's news, slowly forgotten.

Quinton's face darkened as well. His little sister was slipping further out of his grasp; her loyalties shifting to Andrew Worse, Kevin had recently begun favoring Yara over him, further eroding his once secure position.

Back on the main stage, Preston and Clifford finally responded, their faces twisted with suppressed fury. "Fine Since you're so obsessed with this 'first place' business, we'll give you an answer! If multiple contestants clear all ten rounds, then they'll share the title of champion. Will that satisfy you?"

Andrew raised two fingers and slowly waved them side to side. "Nope, still not good enough."

A fresh wave of curses erupted from the stands. They all thought Andrew just did not know when to quit.

Even Derek, who had been enjoying the show, could not help but step in. "Mr. Lloyd, that's enough. Don't push your luck."

Andrew's voice-boomed through the stadium. "Apologies, Mr. McCormick, but I'm going to need just a little

more time. You see, the idea of met 'shared first place just doesn

sit

right with me. If there's a first place, it should be a true first place-one person at the top, not a split title. Why should I have to share the spoils with someone else?"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew asked, "Then what's the point of calling it a championship or a crown if the title can just be shared?"

Preston and Clifford let out a cold, furious laugh. "Oh? And what do you propose instead?"

Andrew's voice rang out confidently. "Simple. If multiple contestants make it

through all ten rounds, the competition shouldn't just stop there. There should be additional rounds, pushing the limits further, until every other contestant has been eliminated, leaving only one true champion.

"Only then can you truly call that person the first-place winner, the sole bearer of the Grand Physician title, and the sole recipient of the grand prize."

Preston and Clifford's faces hardened. They could not believe Andrew thought he could be the last one standing.

Did he truly have that much confidence?

From across the stage, Mosby burst into mocking laughter, clapping his hands loudly.

"Wonderful! Simply wonderful! An arrogant fool spouting the most absurd nonsense. Andrew, I'll be right here, watching you embarrass yourself."

Meanwhile, Thomas shook his head, his face full of regret. "This brat is not only damaging Blumedale Hospital's reputation, but he's also making a fool of himself. Letting him take up a slot in this tournament was a huge mistake."

Jared's sneer grew even more venomous. "Dr. Bozzelli, why bother with that idiot?"

He's all talk and no substance. The real hope of Blumedale Hospital lies with us- we should just ignore him like the noise he is."

Francesca, standing beside Andrew, felt a flicker of concern. She understood that Andrew was not just causing trouble for the sake of it-he clearly had a plan. However, his bold words had already stirred up too much resentment and hostility. The audience would see him as nothing more than a brash upstart, someone asking for a beating. After all, Andrew was immediately gunning for first place and even refused to share the spotlight. He was not just reaching above his weight class-he was begging for a knockout.

In the stands, Malcolm's expression darkened as well. He started to doubt if he had misjudged Andrew.

Preston and Clifford finally spoke, their voices dripping with disdain. "Fine. We'll do as you suggested. If multiple contestants survive all ten rounds, the competition will continue until only one remains.

"In the history of the Grand Medical Summit, you are the first to challenge us like this. I hope not all talk-don't embarrass

yourself and disappoint

thousands of spectators here today."

of

With a grim expression, Preston and Clifford officially announced the rule change.

Thanks to Andrew's insistence, the entire competition structure had been altered on the spot. The audience erupted in fresh waves of murmurs and whispers, unable to contain their shock.

Andrew's audacity had pushed the limits of what anyone thought possible, making him the undeniable center of attention. Even so, many were certain he would only end up

eating his words. After all, the loudest voices often crumbled the fastest.

"Now, the Grand Medical Summit officially begins! The first round—herbal identification!"

The announcer's voice boomed across the stadium, finally shifting the crowd's focus back to the competition itself, away from Andrew's earlier drama. This was what the audience had come for: a

showdown of medical geniuses.

Someone whispered, "I swear, if Andrew makes it past three rounds, I'll eat my own waste!"

Another scoffed. "I bet that arrogant little punk won't even last half the competition!"

"He's got confidence, I'll give him that. Pity he'll be face-down by halftime."

"Even Dr. Lake wasn't this cocky. Mark my words: he's not just mediocre he's gloriously stupid."

As soon as the match began, those with grudges against Andrew started muttering their bets, openly mocking his chances. Not a single one of them believed he could last to the end.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

On the VIP platform, Preston and Clifford glanced over at Derek, asking, "Mr. McCormick, is there any particular contestant you have your eye on?"

Derek chuckled. "Our Gabo Creek Province is full of talented individuals. Of course, I'm keeping an eye on a few."

The two elders straightened their backs, their expressions turning smug. "We imagine the contestant you have in mind must be one of our Advanced Medical Institute students, right?"

Derek shook his head. "No, actually. The one I'm interested in is that contestant from earlier—his name is Andrew Lloyd."

Preston and Clifford's faces immediately darkened. They scoffed and replied, "Then I'm afraid you might be mistaken, Mr. McCormick. That boy has no right to stand alongside our Advanced Medical Institute students, much less challenge someone like Mosby."

Just watch-you'll see soon enough."

They had only brought it up to confirm whether Derek's attention was focused on their side. Hearing that his interest lay elsewhere, their disdain was obvious.

Derek just continued smiling, unbothered. "Of course, your students have been trained from a young age and are exceptional in their own right. But there's always a bigger fish, and Andrew might just be the dark horse of this tournament."

Preston and Clifford snorted in unison. "A dark horse? Our institute has crushed countless so-called 'dark horses' over the years. We'll see how long this one lasts."

On the competition platform, the first round had started. It was on herbal identification.

"Ghostwhiskers!"

"Bride's Bane!"

Jared and Francesca both called out their answers almost simultaneously, identifying the herbs placed in front of them without hesitation. The other contestants quickly followed, each offering their own responses as they examined their herbs.

By the end of the first round, 49 out of 50 contestants had passed, with only one unfortunate competitor failing to identify the herb correctly and shuffling off the stage in shame.

Jared let out a dismissive snort. "How pathetic. Did that idiot actually think he had a chance against us? What a joke."

Francesca frowned. "Jared, we passed the first round, but it's only the beginning. There's nothing to brag about yet. Instead of looking down on those who failed, we should feel sympathy for them."

Jared just smirked, his eyes full of contempt. "Come on, Fran. I'm not being heartless—I'm just being realistic. If someone can't even handle a basic

identification test like this, then they're nothing but a fool."

Francesca shook her head, a trace of disappointment in her eyes. Jared was still too arrogant for his own good.

Andrew, standing nearby, let out a quiet chuckle. "Those who mock others for failing often end up as the

ones being mocked themselves e

Some people take pleasure in others' misfortune, without realizing that they might be the next ones to fall."

Jared's expression darkened. "Andrew, are you saying I'll be the next one to fail? Didn't you see that I was the first to identify my herb just now?"

Andrew clicked his tongue in mock admiration. "Oh, very impressive. Recognizing common medicinal herbs is the bare minimum for a medical professional, and you're already boasting about it?"

Jared's face twisted into an icy sneer. "Keep talking, Andrew. The second round is about to begin, and the difficulty is about to spike. We'll see who gets kicked off the stage first."

Andrew just smirked. "Don't worry. The only one getting kicked off will be you."

At that moment, the announcer's voice rang out again. "The second round of the Grand Medical Summit will now begin!"

The second test also involved herbs, but with a twist. "Each contestant has six herbs in front of them, each with a similar appearance. Your task is to identify the one herb that appears the least frequently among them."

Andrew only needed a single glance to solve the problem. He

immediately noticed that three of

the herbs were of the same type

two were another type, and only one was unique. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up the lone herb and handed it to the examiner.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Francesca doing the same, her round face breaking into a relieved satisfied smile. A few feet away, Jared was frowning, his brows

facet

deeply furrowed as he struggled to

find the correct herb.

After a few tense seconds, he finally selected the right one, but it was clear he

needed more effort.