

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren) 1341-1350

Jared glanced over at Andrew, letting out a bitter laugh. "Well, look at that. You actually managed to beat me this time. Guess even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while."

Andrew just rolled his eyes. If this were a competition for speed alone, he would have crushed Jared from the very first round. However, rushing ahead for the sake of being first was pointless. Only someone as desperate for attention as Jared would care about such empty gestures.

It was like those students who smugly handed in their tests first, thinking they were the smartest, when in reality, the real champions were the ones who ended up with the highest scores.

The competition continued into the third and fourth rounds, steadily thinning the herd.

By the end of the fourth round, fewer than 40 contestants remained, which meant ten contestants had been eliminated.

The tension in the crowd grew palpable. Someone exclaimed, "My palms are sweating! I just hope that cute girl I'm rooting for can hang in there!"

"I don't expect much, but if our hospital's contestant can just make it to the seventh or eighth round, I'll be happy. God, please let them survive a little longer!"

One commented, "Hey, that guy who challenged the rules earlier is still in the game.

I have to admit, that's a bit surprising."

Another clicked his tongue. "It's only the fourth round. We're not even halfway through. If he drops out now, he'll just prove himself to be a total joke."

Eyes from every corner of the stadium were fixed on the stage, each supporter silently cheering for their chosen contestant. A few had started to notice Andrew's steady progress and could not help but mutter in surprise. After all, they had expected him to be one of the first to fall.

Meanwhile, Mosby, standing confidently near the center, cast a glance over at Thomas. "Dr. Bozzelli, here's hoping you and I both make it through all ten rounds and share a laugh at the end."

He appeared relaxed, the picture of a man utterly in control.

On the other hand, Thomas' expression remained stoic. "Dr. Lake, you flatter me. We at Blumedale Hospital can hardly compare to a medical master like you."

Mosby chuckled, his confidence unwavering. Well, it's great that you're self-aware. That loudmouth Andrew kept insisting on a single champion-well, he's about to find out what a real first place looks like. After all, who but me could possibly deserve it?"

Thomas' lips twitched slightly. "Confidence is a good thing, Dr. Lake. I suppose we'll see soon enough who truly deserves first place."

For men like Mosby and Thomas,

the prize money and trophies meant little. They already had wealth and fame. So, what they truly craved Was the prestige of being crowned & Grand Physician, a title that would solidify their legacies and set them even further apart from their peers.

After all, no one would ever truly be satisfied with their own status or influence. Everyone craved to climb higher, to stand above the rest as the supreme authority.

Mosby and Thomas were the true focal points of this Grand Medical Summit-the most fiercely contested, heavyweight opponents. This was clear not only to Malcolm but also to Preston and Clifford. Hence, their attention remained fixed on these two throughout the competition.

As for Andrew, while Derek, Malcolm, and others acknowledged his skill, they still believed the real battle for supremacy lay between the two experienced seniors- Thomas and Mosby.

"Round five is now starting. Contestants, prepare yourselves!"

The host's announcement signaled the start of the new round.

Francesca's expression darkened as she looked at the objects placed in front of her. She commented, "The competition is getting tougher."

Jared clenched his teeth, muttering, "Damn it, picking out the poisonous substance from this junk pile? This is just sadistic!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

In front of Andrew was a pile of various items. At a quick glance, there were pieces of horn, bones, and some dark, lumpy objects. He immediately understood that this round was testing a doctor's ability to identify medicinal substances and distinguish toxic materials. It was not exactly difficult, but it was definitely designed to be tricky and misleading.

After a brief inspection, Andrew picked out a bone and a dark, knobby lump. While unremarkable at first glance, this lump was actually a highly toxic tree root.

The examiner standing in front of him raised his eyebrows, clearly surprised at Andrew's speed. He had barely paused before picking out the correct items.

The old, bald examiner let out a low whistle and gave Andrew a thumbs-up. "Not bad, kid. One word-impressive!"

Andrew smiled, replying modestly, "Thanks, it's just a bit of good luck."

The examiner muttered to himself as he scribbled on his clipboard. 'This kid had seemed cocky earlier, but maybe he actually has some real skill after all.'

Around him, the other contestants also began selecting the toxic items from their piles.

Francesca's face was tight with concentration, and she could not help but glance nervously in Andrew's direction. When she saw him flash her a reassuring wink, she let out a long breath, relief flooding her face. She was glad she had picked the right items.

Not far away, Jared's expression was growing darker by the second. Lowering his head, he muttered, "Damn it, this is just a guessing game at this point. Who the hell can tell which of these things is toxic and which isn't?"

He glanced toward Thomas, hoping for a hint. However, his mentor did not even spare him a glance.

Jared's heart sank further, the bitter taste of frustration rising in his throat. As much as Thomas appreciated his talent, he was also a strict perfectionist-there was no way he would break the rules to help him here.

Seeing that both Andrew and Francesca had already passed the round, Jared's anxiety only grew.

The examiner leaned in, asking, "Have you finished identifying the toxic items?" Jared's heart skipped a beat, and he forced a strained smile. "Uh, sir, would you mind giving me a little hint? This round is a bit tricky, you know?"

The examiner, clearly someone from the Advanced Medical Institute, responded curtly, "Scram."

Jared's face fell, and for a moment, he nearly cursed out loud. Naturally, as someone from the Advanced Medical Institute to help out was foolish-it was like sticking his head in a lion's mouth.

Seeing the examiner glaring at him with disdain, Jared had no choice but to grit his teeth and push through.

"Fine. I've made my selections," he said.

Just then, eight contestants were eliminated on the spot for failing to identify all the toxic substances correctly.

Jared felt a cold sweat trickling

down his back. He wondered if he would be the next to fall. If he got knocked out here in the fifth round, he would not even be able to keep up with Francesca, let alone challenge Andrew.

The examiner finally looked at him, his expression as cold as ever. "Unfortunately, you missed one toxic item among the eight in front of you."

Jared's heart plummeted, his pulse hammering in his ears. He started to panic, wondering if he was really about to fail here.

Had he really slipped up so badly that he would be eliminated in the fifth round?

Suddenly, the examiner continued, his tone still flat. "However, according to the judges' rules, a single oversight is allowed. So, I have to say that you got lucky this time."

Jared's face lit up with sudden relief. He had scraped through the fifth round by the skin of his teeth.

Thomas finally chimed in, "This is what happens when your fundamentals are weak. If you had failed just now, I would have had to reconsider whether you were still worth my mentorship."

Jared's face flushed bright red, and he gritted his teeth. "Don't worry, Dr. Bozzelli, That was just a momentary slip. From now on, no matter how tough the challenge, I'll make sure I push through! I'll be unstoppable."

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Andrew nearly choked at Jared's declaration. He burst out laughing, mocking, "Unstoppable? You got through on sheer dumb luck, and you're talking about being unstoppable? Aren't you worried about making a fool out of yourself?" Jared's face turned an ugly shade of red. "Andrew, I just made a small mistake! You'll see soon enough just how terrifying my true strength is!"

The sixth round quickly followed. When a small white mouse appeared in front of each contestant, a wave of shocked gasps spread through the audience. They had brought in live test subjects-the difficulty had clearly taken a huge leap.

On the stage, the contestants' faces grew even more strained. They only had one word to describe this round: tough.

Clifford's voice boomed across the arena, dripping with mockery. "To all you future great physicians and national medical masters, each little creature in front of you has a health issue.

"Some have organ damage, some have blood poisoning, and others have

external wounds. But no matter what the problem is, my only requirement is that these adorable little creatures come back to life under your care, jumping around with energy again!"

As soon as the elder finished speaking, the remaining 30-something contestants sprang into action, racing against the clock.

He let out another sinister chuckle. "Oh, by the way, you only have five minutes! If you go over time, you automatically fail and can see yourselves out."

The contestants' heart rates instantly spiked. Five minutes was ridiculous-they might as well have asked them to perform brain surgery with a butter knife.

Jared grabbed his mouse, muttering curses, "Five minutes? Are you kidding me? Those elders from the Advanced Medical Institute are clearly trying to screw us over!"

Thomas's voice cut through the chaos. "Follow the rules and focus. Keep your mind steady and your hands sharp. Or, if you're going to fail anyway, just quit now and stop embarrassing Blumedale Hospital."

Jared clamped his mouth shut and threw himself into his work, a fierce grin creeping onto his face. He thought, 'I'll make it through this round. But Andrew, you can go to hell...'

Of course, there were a few

contestants who seemed to be handling the pressure just fine. People like Mosby and the two elite students from the Advanced Medical Institute moved with practiced ease, their hands steady

and their expressions calm.

This kind of practical task was almost second nature for someone like Thomas—a test of skill he could handle without breaking a sweat.

Meanwhile, Francesca was visibly struggling. Ordinarily, performing surgery on a small animal would not have been a big deal for her. However, her mouse had internal organ damage, which significantly raised the difficulty.

Just then, Andrew's voice reached her, cutting through her panic. "Take a deep breath, Fran. Pick up your surgical tools and imagine that this little creature is a critically ill patient who needs your help. Anesthetize it, make the incision, follow the procedure step by step-you'll be fine."

Francesca's body stiffened for a moment, but then the panic cleared from her mind, and her hands stopped trembling.

Suddenly, the bald examiner standing in front of Andrew snapped at him. "No talking! And why haven't you started yet?"

Andrew just leaned back, arms crossed, looking completely at ease. "Start? We've got five whole minutes. What's the rush?"

The examiner's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "Five minutes, and you're not in a hurry? Young people these days are so arrogant, so full of themselves! Can't you see that Dr. Lake and Dr. Bozzelli are already racing against the clock, every second counts!"

Andrew just chuckled. "Relax. As a certain show-off once said, let the bullets fly a while longer..."

The bald examiner's face twitched. He thought Andrew was too damn arrogant.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Up on the viewing platform, Derek frowned. "What's going on with Mr. Lloyd? Why hasn't he started yet?"

Chantelle, sitting beside him, grew anxious. "I don't know. Could it be that he's completely stumped?"

Derek hesitated. "I'm not sure... but it shouldn't be. After all, this is just the sixth round."

Preston and Clifford, the two elders from the Advanced Medical Institute, burst into mocking laughter. "Mr. McCormick, the young man you've put your faith in doesn't seem to be holding up very well! Look at him, standing there like a statue. It's like he's just waiting for the clock to run out so he can throw in the towel!"

Derek and Chantelle's faces instantly darkened.

Meanwhile, Aspen and Lauren clutched each other's hands tightly, their anxiety plain to

"Aspen, do you think Andrew has hit a roadblock he can't get past?"

Aspen's voice was firm, though her heart raced. "I don't know, Lauren, but we have to believe in him. No matter what, I don't think he'd fall here."

Despite being love rivals, the two women found themselves standing on the same side, and their addressing each other had taken on a noticeably warmer, more familiar tone.

Zephyr shook his head. "Regardless, making it to the sixth round is already impressive. Mr. Lloyd has earned our respect."

Jameson chuckled. "I actually think Andy looks pretty relaxed. It's almost like he's got this under control."

Tiana's eyes were sparkling with amusement as she added, "Everyone, stop worrying so much. Andrew isn't the type to lose so easily. If he embarrasses me by getting knocked out in the sixth round, I'll make sure to spank him when I see him."

The people from the Rhodes family did not find this remark strange at all, but the Stevens family members could not help but exchange puzzled glances.

Aspen and Esther both looked up at Tiana, surprise flashing in their eyes.

Aspen, in particular, felt a strange chill run down her spine. She had always had an extraordinary sense of smell, a natural talent for picking up scents that others missed.

She noticed that the scent clinging to Tiana now was the same one she had noticed on Andrew that night.

As Tiana, the graceful and charming mother of Lauren, spoke of Andrew, Aspen could not shake the strange tone she heard a mix of affection, flirtation, and unmistakable fondness.

Aspen shivered. Her own thoughts felt dirty, even to her.

Was she really linking Andrew and Lauren's mother together? The mere idea of them together was absurd. Blasphemous, even.

Shaking her head, she tried to push the idea away. It was just her exhausted mind playing tricks on her, a side effect of Andrew wearing her out the night before.

She convinced herself that she was overthinking it.

...

On the other side of the platform, Quinton let out a cold laugh. "He's done for. Andrew is dead meat."

Christina's voice was icy. "I've said it before—he's no match for the likes of Dr. Lake."

Yara snapped, "Christina, you'd better shut your mouth!"

Christina frowned. "I'm just stating the facts."

Yara shot back with a sharp laugh. "Even if it's a fact, keep it to yourself! I don't get you, Christina. You keep saying you want Andrew to come back to you, to be by your side, to love you again. But then you get all bitter and jealous the moment he shows even a hint of success. Seriously, Christina, you're the textbook definition of a two-faced bitch!"

Christina's face flushed with anger, her lips pressed into a thin line. However, she did not know how to fight back—she had never been good at this kind of verbal sparring.

"Attention, esteemed doctors—one minute remaining! Those who make it through this sixth round will one day become renowned medical masters!

"Those who don't, well... you'd better get used to being small-town doctors, living quiet, uneventful lives. Medicine requires true talent. Not

everyone has what it takes to be a

great healer!"

Preston and Clifford's voices echoed through the stadium as the

countdown began. Their words were dripping with condescension, showing just how little respect they had for most of the contestants.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Thomas and Mosby stopped their movements almost simultaneously. In front of each of them, the small white mice they had treated were already squeaking and scurrying around, looking full of life.

"Dr. Bozzelli, it seems we're a match!" Mosby chuckled.

Thomas remained calm, not bothering to respond. Instead, he turned his attention to his prized student. He thought, 'Good. The surgery is nearly complete, with only the final injection left. As long as Jared chooses the right injection, the procedure will be a complete success.'

His gaze then shifted to Francesca, and his eyes lit up with genuine admiration. He thought Malcolm's student truly was a rare talent. Her precision was impressive, the stitches on the tiny incision were flawless, and her speed was just a fraction behind his and Mosby's.

It was a remarkable feat.

'She'll likely become a great female medical master in the future,' Thomas thought, giving her silent praise.

However, when his eyes finally landed on Andrew, his expression froze for a split second.

Andrew was still standing there, arms crossed, with that same carefree grin on his face. It was as if he had not even started, like he was just there to watch the show.

Thomas thought Andrew had not even figured out how to proceed. Shaking his head, he looked away, a faint sneer flickering across his lips. "What a fool!"

He had already judged Andrew to be nothing more than a mediocre talent. Malcolm must have been too sentimental in his old age, making a poor choice in this case.

Meanwhile, the bald examiner standing in front of Andrew could not hold back any longer. "Hey, kid! You're not even going to try? You were so loud earlier, acting like you didn't even care about Mr. Fuentes and Mr. Phelps. But now you're just standing there, waiting to lose? Isn't this just proving that you really are as useless as they say?"

Andrew just smiled. "I already said, let the bullets fly for a while." Alright, only forty seconds left-guess it's time to reel them in."

With that, Andrew did not reach for the surgical tools provided by the tournament. Instead, three slender golden needles appeared between his fingers, moving so quickly they almost blurred as he inserted them into the tiny mouse's body.

The needles carried a paralyzing effect, instantly causing the sickly mouse to collapse onto the operating table.

Andrew picked up a scalpel, and with a precise flick of his wrist, he severed one of the mouse's diseased legs. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he grabbed a tiny metal brace from the tray and attached it to the stump, aligning it perfectly.

With a sharp tearing sound, he split a piece of bandage into thin strips. Next, he quickly wrapped the wound, securing the brace in place.

For the final step, Andrew pulled out a single hollow golden needle-his own custom design.

With a subtle flick of his wrist, he drew the growth factor and hormone mixture into the needle, then injected it directly into the mouse's body, using the fine

of his internal energy to guide the fluid.

With a final twist of his wrist, he withdrew the needle and stepped back, his work complete. A quick glance at the timer told him he still had five seconds left.

The bald examiner, who had been watching the entire process with his jaw practically on the floor, felt his mind go blank.

Was this guy a lunatic?

The sheer speed and unconventional approach he had just witnessed defied all reason. On second thought, he thought maybe Andrew was not out of his mind.

After all, as insane as this method seemed, it had clearly worked. The line between madness and genius was a thin one, and Andrew seemed to be walking it perfectly.

"Time's up! All contestants, hands off your subjects! Anyone still moving, pack up and get out!"

Preston and Clifford's harsh voices boomed across the arena as the final second ticked down.

Jared, who had just finished injecting his own mouse, threw his head back and laughed. "Perfect! That was a flawless procedure!"

Then, he glanced over at Andrew and burst out laughing again. "What the hell was that? You just threw a bunch of nonsense together, and your test subject can't even stand up! Andrew, that mouse isn't even close to the 'bouncing with life' the judges demanded! Pack your stuff and get off the stage, you clown!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Francesca looked at Andrew's lab mouse, which could not even stand up due to the effects of its amputated limb. In other words, he would inevitably fail the test.

She immediately felt anxious. After all, she knew that with Andrew's medical skills, this should not be happening.

"No improvement in the test subject's condition. Fail!"

"Test subject lost too much blood. Fail!"

"Test subject died during surgery. Complete disregard for life. Get off the stage!"

One cold verdict after another rang out. Without exception, all were failures, with contestants ordered to leave the stage.

One of the Advanced Medical Institute examiners was particularly cold-blooded. Any contestant who failed to pass was inevitably subjected to harsh mockery.

One female doctor's lab mouse died right on the table, and the examiner yelled at her several times. She immediately walked off the stage, trembling and wiping away tears.

When it was Francesca's turn, her examiner announced her success with a smile. "Pass. Congratulations!"

Francesca finally released her tightly clenched hands. If there were not so many people around, and if this weren't a competition, she would have rushed over to hug Andrew in celebration.

"Fran, congratulations! Just as expected, the future medical master is truly impressive—you're already in a league of your own," Andrew said with a grin.

Jared mocked coldly, "Andrew, maybe you should worry about yourself. Of the four contestants from Blumedale Hospital, you're the worst and will be the first to get kicked out."

Andrew replied calmly, "Shut your foul mouth. Results aren't out yet, so why are you barking?"

Jared sneered, "Fine. Let's watch you crash and burn."

The examiner approached him, and Jared immediately folded his arrogantly.

"Sir, kindly evaluate my surgical work. As you'll see, my lab mouse is thriving."

The examiner maintained a blank expression. "Hmm. It's a high completion rate—likely a pass."

Jared laughed. "Likely? It's 100%, absolutely certain. I'm a contestant who will advance to the seventh round!"

Just as he finished speaking, the lab mouse in front of him suddenly whimpered, collapsed on the table, and began convulsing violently. Then, blood seeped out from beneath it as the mouse let out an extremely painful squeal. After that, its limbs stiffened, and it died on the table with its belly facing upward.

The examiner glanced at him, "Is that all?"

Jared was in disbelief, his entire body trembling. "How is this

possible? How could this happen? This shouldn't be! I checked and rechecked. Could this little creature have had some other hidden illness I didn't discover?"

The smile and smugness on his face had completely vanished, replaced by a deathly pallor.

The confidence Jared had moments ago shattered in an instant, his pride turning into a painful slap across his own face.

The Advanced Medical Institute examiner barked, "Test subject deceased on the spot. You failed. Get off the stage!"

Jared was in denial. He grabbed his head and shouted, "No! I refuse to accept this! I demand a review by the judges!"

The examiner's eyes flashed coldly. "You want to be the first troublemaker at this year's Grand Medical Summit?"

Jared, still gripping the lifeless body of his test mouse, pointed a trembling finger at it. "This is a setup! There's no way this is right! I won't accept this result without an investigation! I won't back down!"

His outburst drew the attention of both the audience and the high-ranking figures on the platform.

Francesca felt a chill run down her spine. She silently grumbled, 'Jared, what the hell are you doing?'

Accusing someone of cheating at the Grand Medical Summit, where the elders of the Advanced Medical Institute and top medical experts from around the region sat in judgment, was sheer madness.

That was the kind of move that could get one torn apart by Derek and the other officials.

She quickly tried to intervene. "Jared, do you realize who's watching? The elders of the Advanced Medical Institute and all the other experts are right there! Do you really think

anyone would dare cheat under their noses? Just stop this-don't make it worse!"

However, Jared's eyes were bloodshot, his rage boiling over. "No! I demand a fair ruling! Give me another chance, or I'll never let this go!"

Andrew did not even bother to laugh. With a dismissive shrug, he drawled, "It's not a setup, and no one is being unfair. Jared, you're just painfully average at your

job."

Jared's murderous glare shot over

at Andrew, but Andrew remained

unbothered: He said, "Take a good look at the vial you used for the injection. Only a complete idiot would mistake adrenaline for a growth factor and inject it into a freshly operated mouse. Do you really think a tiny, post-op animal could handle an adrenaline rush?"

Jared looked down at the vials in front of him, his lips trembling. "No... no, that's impossible. I didn't use adrenaline! Andrew, you're talking out of your ass!"

Two heavy slaps came out of nowhere, landing squarely on Jared's face. The blows were so strong his head buzzed, and for a moment, the world spun around him.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The slaps had not come from the Advanced Medical Institute examiner or any random bystander. Instead, they came from Thomas-Jared's own mentor.

"You little brat! As a medical practitioner, you don't even have the courage to face failure or take responsibility for your mistakes? Who accused you? Who wronged you? And now you want another chance? You won't let it go? Are you trying to drag Blumedale Hospital and my own reputation through the mud?"

No one had noticed when Thomas had moved to stand beside Jared, but there he was—face twisted in rage, veins bulging in his temples, his fury palpable.

For someone like Thomas, who valued his reputation above all else, this was an unforgivable disgrace. After all, his prized student's current behavior was pathetic. Moreover, various bigwigs were watching from the high platform.

If the student were garbage, then he, as the teacher, would inevitably be accused of poor teaching.

Jared stammered, his mind in a daze. "Dr. Bozzelli, I-I just..."

Thomas roared, "Shut up! I don't have a student as foolish as you! Y-You utter fool! Do you even realize how deeply you've disappointed me? Are you blind? You can't even tell the difference between adrenaline and growth factor?"

"Andrew was right—you really are an idiot. That poor mouse's life ended just because of your incompetence. If this had been a real patient, didn't you just kill someone on the operating table?"

The harsh rebuke struck Jared like a hammer, draining the color from his face. Two hot streams of shameful tears rolled down his cheeks.

It was just as Andrew had said he had indeed mixed up the injections.

Jared could not understand how Andrew, a mere bystander, could notice it so clearly. He was supposed to be the young star of Blumedale Hospital, yet he could not tell the difference. He began to doubt that he might actually be worse than Andrew.

After failure came resentment and deflection of blame. Pointing at Andrew, Jared shouted, "Fine, I admit I failed. I should get off the stage! But Andrew, you'll end up just like me! You won't pass this round either, damn it!"

Thomas' face darkened even further. He wished he could bury Jared six feet

under right there and then. It was one thing for him to fail, but now he was turning on a fellow Blumedale Hospital contestant, a fellow representative of their hospital.

This was a betrayal, a stab in the back-pure, petty spite.

Up on the main platform, Malcolm slammed his fist onto the arm of his chair. He thundered, "Enough of this nonsense!"

Thomas flinched, his body shaking for a moment as he silently cursed, 'Shit!'

Malcolm, one of the most respected figures in Blumedale Hospital, had lost his temper. There was no doubt that once this summit ended, Thomas would be facing a severe reckoning for Jared's behavior.

Around him, the Advanced Medical Institute students and even Mosby himself burst into open, mocking laughter, their voices echoing in Thomas' ears, and it felt to him like a series of sharp slaps.

Just then, Andrew's calm, steady voice cut through the noise. "Who says I didn't pass this round? Who says my test subject isn't alive and well?"

He casually reached into his pocket, pulling out a small piece of bread. "Come on, little guy. Show them what you can do."

As he spoke, all eyes turned to his operating table. There, his three-legged test mouse, having adjusted to its prosthetic limb, suddenly darted forward. It zipped around the table, spinning in circles, then rolled over, sprang to its feet, and continued to chase the small piece of bread in Andrew's hand.

Andrew tossed the bread off the edge of the operating table, and the tiny creature leaped after it, landing gracefully on the ground a full meter below. Without missing a beat, it grabbed the bread and began gnawing at it, its little tail flicking with excitement.

The bald examiner next to Andrew, who had been frozen in shock,

managed to stammer out the verdict. "It's a perfect surgery. The procedure completion rate is 100%, and the test subject's health is nearly 100%. It's a flawless pass!"

The entire arena erupted in applause. Thousands of spectators, including Derek, Chantelle, the Stevens family, and the members of the Rhodes family, stood up, their claps ringing out like thunder.

Andrew's performance could only be described with one word: stunning.

Francesca's heart soared. Her eyes sparkled with admiration, unable to hide the pure adoration she felt for Andrew. That was her man—a man who, at this very moment, held the entire crowd's attention.

Meanwhile, Thomas and Jared looked ashen.

Jared, in particular, felt like his very soul had been hollowed out, his spirit shattered. With a bitter, broken laugh, he collapsed to his knees on the stage.

He was utterly defeated, and he was overwhelmed with humiliation.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Preston and Clifford's expressions could not have been darker. The two elders exchanged a glance, each seeing the same frustration and grudging admiration in the other's eyes.

Andrew had cleared the sixth round flawlessly, and even with their decades of medical expertise, neither of them could have done it better.

Derek let out a hearty laugh. "So, esteemed elders, what do you think of Andrew, the contestant I've been keeping my eye on?"

Preston and Clifford both responded with a cold snort, their faces dark and stony, refusing to answer.

Meanwhile, Lauren and Aspen, seated together, shared a quick high-five, their faces glowing with pride.

Lauren exclaimed, "See? I told you, Andrew wouldn't stop at the sixth round. He's always been amazing!"

Aspen agreed enthusiastically. "Exactly! That guy really never seems to lose— even if I never admit it to his face."

On the other side of the arena, Yara's eyes sparkled as she watched Andrew. Powerful, exceptional men had always been magnetic to her, and Andrew was no exception.

Before, her interactions with him had been purely professional, with a hint of reluctant cooperation. But now, seeing him in action, Yara realized she might have fallen for his undeniable charm, even without those earlier connections.

Suddenly, Irene gasped. "Christie, where are you going?"

It turned out Christina had already risen, clutching her handbag, preparing to leave.

Quinton frowned. "Christie, you're leaving already?"

Christina forced a bitter smile. "I don't want to stay and watch anymore. It just makes me feel like a fool."

Quinton snorted. "Just because he got lucky this round? There are still four more rounds. Clearing the sixth round isn't that impressive."

Part of her wanted to see Andrew fail, to witness the moment his confidence shattered.

What she did not realize was that the hits she would soon take to her pride would only become more brutal.

"For the sixth round, 20 contestants have been eliminated! There are only 12 contestants remaining! Let the seventh round begin!"

As the announcer's voice echoed across the arena, the atmosphere grew heavier, and the tension intensified. Everyone knew that the real battle of the Grand Medical Summit was only just beginning. The earlier rounds had been mere warm-ups—the actual fight for dominance was about to start.

Jared, his spirit shattered, was carried off the stage, his feet dragging as if his very soul had been crushed.

Thomas returned to his seat, his

gaze briefly settling on Andrew. " admit, reaching the seventh round is impressive. You've surprised me, but this must be your limit, yes?

Andrew chuckled. "Maybe, or perhaps it's your limit, Dr. Bozzelli."

Thomas snorted. "Having a bit of arrogance is good at your age. But Jared couldn't handle the pressure and fell apart, and I don't believe you'll fare much better."

Andrew let out a soft laugh. "So, you're comparing me to that trash of a student of yours? He deserved to get kicked out. As for me, I'm just warming up for first place."

Thomas fell silent, choosing not to waste any more words. Claiming first place like it were a casual prize just proved how outrageous Andrew's confidence was. Even he, with his decades of experience, did not dare to make such bold claims. He thought Blumedale Hospital's hope had always been himself—no one else mattered.

Francesca, standing nearby, could not help but warn Andrew. "Andrew, don't get cocky. Make sure you hang in there until the end!"

Andrew smiled. "Relax, Fran. I'll win that set of ancient gold needles you've had your eye on."

Francesca's heart swelled, her smile brimming with faith. Thomas might not believe in Andrew, but she did completely and without reservation.

"The seventh round is a live patient challenge! This time, it won't just be mice you're playing with!"

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

Preston and Clifford's voices, dripping with malicious intent and carrying an overwhelming pressure, echoed across the arena. "Whoever causes a death, takes full responsibility!"

For a brief moment, the entire stadium fell into a stunned hush. Even the audience held their breath, the weight of those words settling heavily over them. The seventh round of the Grand Medical Summit was a live patient operation. This was not just about losing a round anymore—it was about real lives hanging in the balance.

Lab mice were experimental subjects—at worst, killing one meant failure. However, the current round meant potentially killing a patient. The consequences would be unimaginable.

The sound of sharp intakes of breath rippled through the crowd. This approach was nothing short of the harshest way to test the contestants' willpower and medical skills.

Someone exclaimed, "Man, this is intense! I know it's a life-or-death thing, but I can't help being curious. I want to see how these so-called medical geniuses handle it!"

Another sighed, "Oh no, one of our guys already looks like he's about to crack under the pressure!"

"This round is brutal. No wonder they say studying medicine is a life-or-death job!" Gradually, the crowd began to stir, murmurs turning into a low, anxious buzz.

Up in the stands, Derek frowned. "Esteemed elders, isn't the seventh round a bit too extreme? Lives are at stake here."

Preston and Clifford simply snorted. "Too extreme? Medicine's ultimate purpose is to save lives. If these so-called geniuses can't handle that, then they don't deserve the honor of this Grand Medical Summit."

Derek raised a hand, trying to calm the tension. "Even so, if something truly catastrophic happens, it won't be good."

The two old men chuckled. "Relax, Mr. McCormick. Of course, we have contingency plans. There are expert teams standing by, ready to intervene if any contestant makes a critical mistake. We won't actually let anyone die—we're not monsters."

Hearing this, Derek finally let out a small sigh of relief. He had been genuinely concerned about the potential fallout.

On the competition floor, Andrew gave a small nod. The Grand Medical Summit was not just a competition—it was a forge for the sharpest medical minds. Moreover, the title of the Grand Physician was an absolute honor indeed.

Now, finally, things were getting interesting. If the earlier rounds had felt like warm-ups, this was the real deal.

Soon, patients were being wheeled onto the stage one by one. Some were missing limbs, others groaned in pain, a few stared into space, and others had severe burns covering their bodies.

Every single one of them carried a unique, severe medical condition—a true test of the remaining contestants' skills.

The loudspeaker crackled to life. "Your mission is simple—heal the patient in front of you and relieve their suffering. Healing may sound straightforward, but in reality, it's anything but.

"True medical masters overcome

impossible odds, while average doctors just throw pills, give

injections, or administer IVs to a net

problem. Today, you either prove yourself a master or get exposed as mediocre!"

The moment the announcement ended, one of the contestants shot his hand into the air, shouting desperately.

All eyes in the stadium snapped to him-it was a middle-aged doctor, his face pale, sweat pouring down like rain.

Andrew, watching him, shook his head slightly-he already knew what was coming.

Preston and Clifford's voices cut through the sudden quiet. "You there, what is it you want?"

The man's lips trembled. "I-I want to withdraw!"

The entire stadium, whether

audience members or VIPs on the main stage, instantly erupted in commotion. The competition had finally reached the point where someone could not withstand the pressure and voluntarily forfeited.

Rising from the Ashes (Andrew and Lauren)

The doctor's actions might have seemed cowardly, but they were also responsible in a way. After all, when lives were on the line, not everyone had the courage to take on such a heavy burden.

Francesca sighed. "I understand where he's coming from."

The announcer's voice echoed across the arena. "Very well. The judges have approved your request. You may voluntarily withdraw."

The male doctor staggered off the stage, his steps heavy with shame. As soon as he reached his seat, he broke down, burying his face in his hands as sobs wracked his body.

Those around him tried to comfort him, but his cries of regret and frustration only grew louder. Walking away from the Grand Medical Summit meant saying goodbye to the chance of ever reaching the top three-a wound that would likely haunt him for the rest of his life.

His gut-wrenching sobs echoed across the stadium, reaching the ears of the remaining contestants. Immediately, it made the contestants in this high-pressure situation even more nervous, with sweat increasingly forming on their palms.

Yet, there were a few who remained calm-Mosby, Thomas, a student from the Advanced Medical Institute, and, of course, Andrew. They all maintained their composure, steady as rocks.

Even Francesca, despite her strong foundation and impressive talent, felt the strain. After all, this round required each contestant to independently treat a critically ill patient without the aid of machines, assistants, or experienced mentors.

Nonetheless, she had grown up under Cedric's guidance and had a natural gift for medicine. Besides, Andrew had taught her plenty of unconventional yet effective techniques.

With that, Francesca quickly tuned out the distracting noise and began focusing on her patient.

Thomas, Mosby, and the Advanced Medical Institute student also sprang into action, each moving confidently to assess and treat their patients.

Meanwhile, other contestants found themselves completely lost. Some were unable to even diagnose their patients, let alone begin treatment.

One unfortunate doctor stared helplessly at his patient, who lay motionless on the hospital bed. The patient's vital signs were stable, and his breathing seemed normal, yet he remained in a deep, unresponsive coma.

The panicked doctor tried every method he could think of, but nothing worked. Finally, in a moment of sheer desperation, he snapped, slapping his unconscious patient repeatedly. "Wake up! Wake up, damn it! Just wake up already!"

The outburst drew immediate attention, and a nearby judge rushed over, grabbing the frenzied doctor by the arm and pulling him back.

"Loss of composure, failure to administer proper treatment, and patient abuse! Guards, escort this contestant off the stage. He is disqualified and barred from participating in the next three Grand Medical Summits!"

The disgraced doctor's face turned ashen, his eyes wide with horror. He fell to his knees, sobbing and begging for another chance, but the two burly security guards dragged him off without a second glance.

Andrew, arms crossed, watched the scene unfold with a faint smirk. "Young and reckless a dangerous combination."

The bald, middle-aged examiner beside him let out an exasperated sigh. "Why are you just standing there? You haven't even started treating your patient. Shouldn't you be a little more concerned about your own situation?"

Andrew chuckled. "There's no need to rush."

The examiner snorted, cutting him off. "Yeah, yeah. Let me guess you're about

to say, 'Let the bullet fly for a while,' right?"

Andrew could not help but chuckle. "Not exactly. I'm just waiting. If Fran runs into trouble, I want to be ready to guide her."

The examiner followed Andrew's gaze to where Francesca was hard at work, a hint of admiration in his eyes. He clicked his tongue, shaking his head as he asked, "Kid, do you even realize how hard everyone here has worked to stand on this stage?"