

## TV Show 19

Chapter 19: "What Do You Take Me For?"

Night fell.

At Gretchen's house.

This was a true mansion. Driving from the entrance to the fountain courtyard took some time. Tall gateposts towered over marble-paved grounds, exuding opulence.

Under the dazzling lights, uniformed staff members worked methodically. These employees, hired from a professional party planning company, were responsible for organizing this birthday celebration.

As the host and the guests, all you needed to do was dress to impress.

"Damn!"

Emmett, who only managed to sneak in thanks to Adam, couldn't help but exclaim at the sight.

"Invitation, please?"

A polite usher stopped Adam and his two companions at the entrance.

Emmett pursed his lips but, catching sight of the uniformed security guards nearby, shuddered slightly and swallowed his sarcastic remark.

He couldn't help it—he was scared!

It was a situation much like Rajesh in *\*The Big Bang Theory\**.

Remember, Rajesh's family was considered the "Indian Stark family," fabulously wealthy. Yet, when American officials came knocking, even if they weren't after him, Rajesh was nearly scared out of his mind, yelling, "I love America!" while desperately disowning his heritage—a thoroughly humiliating display.

Of course, that was an exaggerated portrayal for TV. Still, art imitates life, and there was likely a real societal basis for such behavior that terrified characters like Rajesh.

Given such a climate, timid Emmett's trembling at the sight of security guards was no joke.

Carrying coffins is amusing when it's someone else, but being the one inside is a nightmare.

"Right this way."

The usher glanced at Adam's invitation, paused briefly on Emmett, then smiled and led the trio inside.

"Mr. Duncan, Miss Venus has requested your presence upstairs."

Another usher approached with a message. Seeing Emmett trailing along, he quickly added, "She meant just you, sir."

"You two go ahead and get ready; I'll join you shortly," Adam said with a smile to Juno and Emmett before following the new usher upstairs.

As the birthday party's star, Gretchen Venus, was naturally saving her appearance for the grand finale. She was still upstairs getting her makeup done. The process, meant to ensure a stunning entrance, had been underway since the afternoon.

"Adam, you're here~"

Inside an opulent boudoir, Gretchen, standing before a full-length mirror while a professional stylist worked on her, greeted him with delight. Her custom-designed gown, created by a renowned designer, perfectly showcased her stunning hourglass figure.

Her bare shoulders hinted at allure; her gaze was full of charm.

Of course, there was no such thing as a second choice or a backup plan in her mind.

Adam regarded her with admiration and respect.

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Finally, the party began.

Adam rejoined Juno and Emmett downstairs. The band performed *\*Don't Cry,\** sparking another wave of enthusiasm.

But Adam was well aware that this was fleeting. The song would soon spread across the rock scene, and professional bands would inevitably play it repeatedly. Their amateur band, Fruit Hard Candy, couldn't compare to professional performances. Besides, even the most beautiful music becomes routine after a while.

At this moment, though, it was undeniably Fruit Hard Candy's brightest hour.

Getting paid, having fun—that was enough!

After all, they were still high schoolers, bound by parental curfews. Adam, Juno, and a reluctant Emmett eventually left.

Since Emmett was a year older than Adam and had already gotten his driver's license, he took the wheel this time.

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In the car.

Emmett couldn't hold back his curiosity any longer. "Adam, you were upstairs for so long—what were you doing?"

"Nothing much," Adam replied lazily.

For some reason, he suddenly felt tired tonight. Maybe the recent pressure was taking its toll.

Fame is a double-edged sword; with glory comes the weight of expectation.

"Heh."

Juno chuckled from the passenger seat. "How much did Miss Venus pay you?"

"Take a guess." Adam perked up and grinned.

"\$100?"

Excited, Emmett chimed in. He desperately needed gas money; otherwise, owning a car was pointless if he couldn't drive it.

"Is it \$100 each?"

"Guess again!"

"\$200 per person?"

When Adam still didn't answer, Emmett slammed on the brakes in excitement. "How much?!"

"\$3,000!"

Adam pulled out a stack of bills.

"Holy shit!" Emmett's eyes widened as he shouted in disbelief. He grabbed the money, scrutinizing it while muttering, "This isn't fake, is it? \$3,000? Even if it is fake, I might still spend some of it... No, no, I can't. If the cops find out, I'll be doomed..."

Even Juno was surprised. "Looks like Gretchen was really satisfied with you!"

In this era, the average monthly income in the U.S. was about \$3,000. For high schoolers, \$3,000 was a huge amount—especially for just singing a few songs.

"What do you take me for?" Adam frowned. "She hired Fruit Hard Candy as a band and paid us as a group. It wasn't just for me. Besides, do you think \$3,000 is a lot for her? Our \*Don't Cry\* just debuted last night. Isn't it worth that much?"

"It's worth it, absolutely!" Emmett happily counted the money, nodding vigorously.

"Calm down," Juno said, rolling her eyes at Adam.

Realizing he might've overreacted, Adam added awkwardly, "I'm not that kind of guy. We're clean, alright?"

"Sure, I believe you," Juno replied seriously, then added, "But why?"

"Why what?" Adam asked, confused.

"Isn't Gretchen hot?"

"She is."

"Isn't she forward?"

"...She is."

"And aren't you Adam Duncan?"

"..."

Adam was speechless.

The logic was flawless—he really wasn't the same Adam Duncan anymore.

What could he say?

It wasn't that he feared anything...

It was just that his values had changed. He didn't want a relationship—not even in name.

This was chaotic, drama-filled America, where social circles often turned into full-blown dating matrices.

For instance, in *\*The Big Bang Theory,\** Penny broke up and immediately jumped into a "36-hour Penny-style healing fling." Leonard was her boyfriend, yet his close friends Howard and Raj frequently joked about stepping in to take his place, even fighting over who'd get the first chance.

Raj often fantasized about Howard's wife, even writing a vulgar poem about her, and once had a fling with Penny during one of her breakups.

Similarly, in *\*Friends\**, Rachel dated Ross, then Joey, and eventually ended up back with Ross.

In *\*How I Met Your Mother\**, Robin dated Ted, then Barney, and finally circled back to Ted.

These were their closest friends, practically inseparable.

Adam couldn't stand that kind of chaos—even in name.

As Barney from *\*How I Met Your Mother\** once said: "When dating a girl, rule number one is to ensure you've got more options than she does. Otherwise, it's not worth it."

Adam wholeheartedly agreed.

In this unpredictable America, where girls like Penny, with their "hundred-person conquests," were common, Adam decided it was safest never to fall in love.

At least, not while he was young.

There's more to life than love. Pure, meaningful friendships also exist.