

## TV Show 22

### Chapter 22: My Classmate Is Simply Too Reliable

Everyday life passes by quickly.

In the blink of an eye, another semester ended.

The summer of 1990.

Adam turned 16, and like most American teenagers, he could finally start learning to drive.

Interestingly, the United States doesn't have a national ID card like some countries. A driver's license serves as an ID, making it quite significant.

"Adam, are you sure you don't want me to teach you? I'm really good at it," Adam's dad, Bob, grumbled in disappointment.

"No need. I've already arranged it with Emmett. He's a good driver and has plenty of free time—it'd be a waste not to use it," Adam politely declined.

Compared to Bob, Adam naturally preferred learning with a peer.

In the United States, there are hardly any professional driving instructors. Typically, someone with a driver's license teaches you instead. You first familiarize yourself with the basics, find an empty lot, and under the guidance of someone experienced, you directly practice driving: moving forward, turning, reversing, uphill starts, and parking. It's actually pretty straightforward.

Even someone like Sheldon, who had an intense fear of driving and often crashed catastrophically in simulators, eventually managed to get his driver's license in secret.

The key is consistent practice. Some people get the hang of it in half a day. Driving schools in other countries take much longer because a single instructor has to train many students, who take turns driving. Actual practice time is minimal and often interrupted by long waits.

"Alright then," Bob relented, a bit disappointed. He had been hoping to show off his excellent driving skills to his son.

Although the Duncan family now had four children, the one Bob had invested the most emotion in was undoubtedly Adam, the eldest.

Unfortunately, ever since Adam outgrew his clumsy and adorable phase in the past two years, the father-son relationship had grown distant. Activities like fishing or playing football together had all been canceled.

Now even learning to drive didn't require him.

Bob naturally felt a little dejected. However, he understood that as boys grow older, they prefer spending time with their peers. What he didn't know was that Adam wasn't the same Adam anymore.

The current Adam had no interest in fishing or football. While he had seamlessly integrated into the warm atmosphere of the Duncan household, there was still an underlying sense of detachment.

**\*\*Beep beep beep!\*\***

"Sorry, Emmett's here," Adam said with an apologetic smile toward Bob.

"Go ahead," Bob replied, collecting himself and patting Adam on the shoulder. "Stay safe."

"Don't worry," Adam reassured him with a smile, quickly leaving the house.

He hopped into the passenger seat and said to Emmett, "Let's go. The sooner we practice, the sooner we're done."

"I really don't get it," Emmett said, stepping on the gas. "Why didn't you ask Gretchen to teach you? Her car's way cooler."

"Not safe," Adam replied calmly.

"..."

Emmett froze, then rolled his eyes and muttered a curse. "Tch."

"So you *\*do\** understand. Why ask, then?" Adam teased.

"You shameless jerk!" Emmett muttered. His expression showed frustration but also a hint of envy, as though he were thinking, *\*A man ought to live like this—I could do it better than him.\**

"This is nothing," Adam thought to himself, amused. "A truly shameless man would charge for everything."

Out loud, he joked, "Don't you have Ivy? Or did you break up again?"

Ivy, Adam's younger sister Ted's best friend, was also an African-American like Emmett. Unlike Emmett's slim build, Ivy was round and cheerful, with an inexplicable confidence in her 'beauty.'

Emmett had mixed feelings about this. He preferred being single over dating Ivy, but part of him still resented the situation.

Thus, their on-and-off relationship had become a running gag.

"Don't bring up Ivy! This time, it's really over between us!" Emmett declared, repeating his usual dramatic lines. When Adam didn't react, he snapped, "Don't believe me?"

"I believe you," Adam replied nonchalantly. He believed it about as much as he believed in empty promises.

"Hmph," Emmett snorted. He knew Adam was being dismissive but couldn't refute it. Frustrated, he changed the subject. "Why haven't I seen Juno around lately?"

Adam's expression immediately grew serious.

Recently, Juno had been acting mysteriously, often skipping group activities with the Candy Hearts gang.

While Emmett and Sheldon simply found it strange and annoying, Adam felt a bit uneasy.

Ever since Juno started poring over thick medical textbooks, Adam had an inkling of what she was up to.

Out of both friendship and a sense of self-preservation, he knew he should probably talk her out of it. But every time he thought of Juno's deep, knowing gaze and her chilling ideas about surgeries inspired by *\*The Sunflower Manual,\** his courage wavered.

Sometimes ignorance is bliss.

All he really wanted were the intelligence points Juno provided. Why overthink it? If Juno's plans failed because of the butterfly effect caused by his arrival in this world, then so be it. That would just be fate.

After all, he only had a garbage system that didn't grant any extraordinary powers. As a self-preserving coward, staying out of it was both the best and only option.

Besides, Adam doubted someone as meticulous as Juno would fail because of him.

In the original timeline of the *\*Candy Hearts\** movie, Juno's counterpart, Hailey, didn't actually make the photographer undergo the surgery. It seemed like she only used the medical books to scare him. But Adam knew better—Juno wasn't bluffing. She was fully capable.

Her biology teacher had once praised her dissection skills as "phenomenal." There was no way she had gotten that good without practice. In a small town surrounded by forests full of wildlife, she'd had plenty of opportunities.

After all, many infamous serial killers started by hunting animals. The most famous example? Mads Mikkelsen's Hannibal Lecter.

At the end of the day, humans are animals too.

Every bit of information Juno had revealed to the photographer—her name, family details, hobbies—had all been carefully premeditated. She'd been preparing for at least a year. Someone as frighteningly reliable as her didn't need his help.

**\*\*Beep beep!\*\***

"Hey! Hey!" Emmett honked the horn, snapping Adam out of his thoughts. "What are you zoning out about?"

"Nothing," Adam said, shaking his head to clear his mind. For now, the most important thing was to focus on learning to drive and getting his license.

"We're here," Emmett said as he pulled into an open field and parked. He got out of the car and said, "Let's practice here."

"Okay, you're the coach," Adam replied with a shrug. He switched seats with Emmett and climbed into the driver's seat.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Emmett went over the basics again before saying, "You're a beginner. Start in first gear—hey, hey! What are you doing?!"

Adam smoothly stepped on the clutch and shifted straight into second gear. "People with high levels always start in second gear," he said with a grin.

Emmett: "..."