

## TV Show 231

Chapter 231: MAX – If She Agrees, I'm In

At the Channing family villa.

"Wow!"

As soon as they arrived, Monica and Max were both momentarily stunned.

It couldn't be helped—women naturally have no resistance to shiny things.

And the banquet hall was dazzling.

"This is how rich people celebrate birthdays," Monica sighed.

Her family wasn't exactly poor, and she had attended some high-society events before, but compared to this, there was simply no comparison.

"I didn't even know birthdays needed to be celebrated," Max muttered. "My mom just narrowed my birthday down to a two-week window."

"That's all superficial," Adam said with a smile. "If you're living well, every day is a birthday. If you're not, every day is a funeral."

"Well said," Max praised. "Is that another one of those profound sayings from the East?"

"Yes," Adam replied with a straight face. "Anytime you hear something deeply philosophical, it's from those three brothers."

In truth, this was a realization from Adam's past life.

In movies and TV shows, birthdays always seemed like the most important thing in the world.

It was almost like, "You only lost a leg, but she missed her birthday party!"

In his past life, Adam had never celebrated a birthday, nor had most of the people around him, and no one seemed to be any worse off for it.

Most of the time, birthday parties weren't for the person celebrating but for everyone else watching.

Happiness is all about comparison—people like to show it off.

Everyone knows it.

And Carolyn Channing's party was a perfect example.

Unlike a typical birthday party, this was a coming-of-age celebration.

In other words, Carolyn Channing had officially turned eighteen, and her family was publicly announcing her entry into society.

It was somewhat similar to the *jijī* ceremony that ancient Eastern girls had at fifteen.

The wealthier the family, the more extravagant the event.

This coming-of-age party was as grand as a wedding.

And just like a wedding, Adam and the others hadn't even seen the main star of the night yet. Carolyn Channing would only make her grand entrance at the right moment, dressed like a princess, walking down the stairs on her father's arm under the gaze of the entire crowd.

"Excuse me for a moment—I need to say hello to some people," Peter said as he led Monica away.

At an event like this, he had acquaintances to greet.

"So, are we just going to stand here like idiots?" Max grumbled. "I told you we shouldn't have come."

"What about now?"

Adam plucked two glasses of champagne from a passing waiter's tray and handed one to Max with a grin.

"I'm starting to like this place a little more," Max admitted.

She enjoyed drinking, but usually, she only had access to beer or cocktails. Champagne, especially high-end champagne like this, was a rare treat.

Adam didn't know many people at the event either, but he wasn't in a hurry. He leisurely strolled around the venue with Max, taking in the scene.

"This year's returns are fantastic. Martin really is a genius investor—we can trust him."

"Absolutely. Outside of Wall Street, the line to get into Martin's investment fund stretches all the way to Los Angeles. Luckily, we got in early. With our capital, we probably wouldn't even qualify to join now."

"Martin built his empire from nothing. In just a few decades, he's amassed billions. He's the embodiment of the American Dream."

Small groups of elite guests were gathered around, discussing investments and heaping praise on the host of the evening—Martin Channing.

Adam found it amusing.

"Is this Martin guy really that impressive?" Max asked in a hushed voice. "Did you invest any money with him?"

"No," Adam shook his head with a meaningful smile. "I don't qualify."

"Good," Max exhaled in relief, clutching her chest. "Someone this 'brilliant' sounds like a scam artist. Not investing was the right move."

Adam gave her an appreciative look but said nothing. He simply clinked his glass against hers and took a deep sip.

Logically, every one of these so-called elites should have had better financial instincts than Max.

Yet, they were all completely immersed in the illusion Martin Channing had created.

Not one of them stopped to consider the simple logic—was it really reasonable for an investment of that scale to maintain such astronomical returns year after year?

When the bubble burst and the truth about Martin's scheme came to light, there would be bankruptcies and suicides all across New York and the American financial sector.

But whose fault would it be?

Was Martin too skilled?

No.

They were simply too greedy.

Blinded by the prospect of massive profits, they became fools.

Max, who had no financial education and whom these elites would sneer at as "low-class," had spotted the problem instantly, purely on instinct.

Now that was ironic.

Seeing Adam's expression, Max tilted her head and gleefully downed the rest of her champagne.

She understood.

This was the first time Adam had looked at her like that.

He hadn't said a word, but the silent admiration in his gaze spoke volumes.

"I'm done—drink at your own pace! Same goes for tonight when we get back!"

"Pfft!"

The quiet understanding between them was instantly shattered by Max's suggestive joke.

Adam nearly spat out his champagne.

"You sure about that?"

Adam's interest was piqued.

"Of course."

Max smirked. "Tonight, I'm all yours..."

Just then, the music changed, the lights dimmed, and a spotlight illuminated the top of the staircase.

Everyone turned to look.

A stunning blonde beauty, escorted by a refined-looking man, began her descent.

"She really does look like a princess," Max murmured, momentarily lost in thought.

"Every woman is a princess. She is, and so are you," Adam said with a smile. "Who knows? Maybe you two will become best friends one day."

"Hah!"

Max was so amused she almost burst out laughing—until Adam, with lightning-fast reflexes, clamped a hand over her mouth.

Still, she had already drawn some attention, including that of the night's star, Carolyn Channing.

The smile on Carolyn's face momentarily froze, but years of etiquette training helped her resist the urge to glare at Max.

"Don't let it bother you, sweetheart," her father, Martin, whispered, feeling her grip tighten around his arm. "Tonight is your special night."

"I know," Carolyn composed herself and continued her elegant descent.

Meanwhile...

"Sorry," Max whispered, realizing she had caused a scene.

"It's fine," Adam said. "But was it really that funny?"

"You said I'm a princess and that I might become best friends with her?"

Max barely held back another laugh. "How is that not funny? It's the biggest joke I've ever heard!"

"Hey, you never know. Dreams can come true," Adam teased.

"Oh yeah?"

Max's eyes twinkled mischievously. "If that actually happens, and she's okay with it, then I'm all in!"

Adam's smile twitched.

"What? Don't like the idea?"

Max smirked. "Come on, you guys love this stuff. Too bad—it's never gonna happen."

"You sure about that?"

Adam grinned. "I'm keeping track of this."

"Go ahead," Max shrugged. "If I somehow end up best friends with a rich princess like her, it's gotta be divine intervention. At that point, anything goes!"

Adam laughed, his smile growing increasingly... mischievous.

Chapter 232: I'm Super Fierce!

At the Channing family's villa.

Caroline made a dazzling entrance.

The center of attention.

Under Martin's lead, every step she took triggered a wave of flattery.

If compliments could be cashed in, Caroline would instantly go from a princess to a queen.

"Congratulations, Miss Channing," Adam said with a smile.

"Thank you."

Caroline glanced at Max and replied with a reserved smile, "I love \*Lord of the Mysteries.\* Do you think I look like Audrey?"

"..."

Adam paused, examined Caroline again, and nodded. "You do. You just need a Susie."

Though he said that, he couldn't help but internally complain—why did every fan he met love comparing themselves to Audrey? The confidence was unreal.

That said, Caroline did have some resemblance. With her blonde hair, sweet and innocent looks, and a personal trust fund worth 800 million dollars, she was undoubtedly a financial powerhouse—kind of like Audrey.

"I do have a Susie," Caroline said with a smile. "She's just not suited for this kind of occasion, so one of the maids is taking care of her."

"Looks like you really love Audrey," Adam remarked.

"Yes, I see a lot of myself in her," Caroline said playfully. "Are you sure you didn't model her after me?"

"Hahaha!"

Adam couldn't help but laugh.

No, definitely not. You're overthinking it.

"And this is...?" Caroline turned to Max, her gaze scrutinizing.

She couldn't help it—she was naturally tall, and with her high heels, she was practically looking down at Max.

"I'm Max," Max replied.

Having been around the block, Max was highly sensitive to these kinds of looks. She immediately straightened her back, puffed out her chest, and silently declared: \*I'm super fierce!\*

"Adam must be really funny," Caroline glanced at Max again, growing more irritated. She couldn't hold back any longer and said with a hint of sarcasm, "What did he say just now that made you laugh so much? He wasn't talking about me, was he?"

"He actually was," Max said bluntly. Feeling Caroline's aggression, she got fired up. Suddenly, she wasn't tired anymore—her back didn't ache, and her breath didn't falter. She declared honestly, "He said you're a princess. But I'm a princess too. Everyone's a princess. Maybe one day, we'll even become best friends..."

"Hahaha!"

Before Max could finish, Caroline burst into laughter. "That's hilarious! Adam, no wonder you're a writer—you're really funny. I love that about you."

Max's face darkened. Her sharp tongue kicked in immediately. "Glad you liked it. Funny, right? I thought so too, which is why I told him—if I really do become your best friend one day, we'll both keep him company. What do you say, sis?"

"Sure," Caroline replied casually, but her eyes were full of arrogance and disdain, clearly saying: \*Yeah, right. You and I? Best friends?\*

Little did she know that her seemingly unstoppable, glamorous family would collapse in just a few years.

By then, she would fall from being a high-and-mighty billionaire heiress to being completely broke and alone.

Even worse, her father's financial scams had ruined countless wealthy investors, causing bankruptcies and even suicides. He had not only offended those he scammed but had also terrified the entire elite class of New York and the country.

The billionaires who had almost invested but pulled out at the last second were especially shaken.

After all, the worst nightmare for the rich isn't dying—it's losing all their money while still being alive.

The wealthier they were, the more they feared falling from grace.

So even though Caroline would later graduate from Wharton, a top business school, and had incredible talent—having been trained by her financial genius father from a young age—no one would hire her.

No one dared to.

The Channing family name had become synonymous with fraud, even demonic deception.

That was the real reason Caroline ended up waiting tables.

With so many angry victims and fearful elites out there, her future in finance was doomed.

And outside of finance, what skills did a former billionaire heiress even have?

The answer: none.

Starting from the bottom and building something from scratch was a struggle she couldn't even imagine. Even though she tried to stay positive and plan her comeback, every time she hit a major obstacle, she would think about giving up.

If it weren't for a stroke of luck—meeting Max—she probably would've broken down completely, no matter how optimistic she tried to be.

And Max?

She had been through endless hardships since childhood. The last thing she feared was obstacles.

Most importantly, she still had a kind heart, which perfectly balanced Caroline's arrogance and inability to endure hardship.

That's why they made the perfect duo—the *\*Broke Girls.\**

But at this moment, they had no idea what fate had in store for them.

Every single one of them was overflowing with confidence.

Caroline's reaction said it all. She wasn't even focused on the wild \*threesome\* joke—she was just amused by the idea of becoming best friends with Max.

Adam listened from the side, feeling incredibly conflicted. He really wanted to warn them: \*Whatever you do, don't jinx it!\*

But at this point in time, no one really got the joke about jinxing things, so he just smiled helplessly.

Should he step in when the time came, or...?

After Caroline left.

"Bitch," Max muttered under her breath. "Rich girls like her are always the worst."

"That's just because she's never been hit by the reality check of society," Adam said with a smile. "If she ever does, who knows? Maybe you two really will become best friends."

"You \*really\* want that, huh?" Max shot Adam a side-eye. "If you've got the guts, go over there right now and give her a brutal reality check. I wouldn't mind helping out—teach her a lesson or two."

"..."

Adam was speechless.

Though the idea had crossed his mind, hearing Max say it so bluntly made him too embarrassed to respond.

"\*Sigh.\* Guess I really am too much of a gentleman," Adam sighed internally.

If it were Joey, Barney, Howard, Lü Xiaobu, or Oleg, they wouldn't have hesitated for a second. Their jokes would've been even wilder.

Compared to them, Adam really *was* a proper gentleman.

The rest of the party continued to revolve around Caroline.

Meanwhile, Adam and Max focused on eating, drinking, and gossiping. They overheard quite a few juicy tidbits.

Caroline was set to graduate next year and had already secured a spot at Wharton in Pennsylvania. That meant the Channing family's collapse was still about four years away.

If Adam were more experienced in short selling and didn't naturally distrust risky investments, he could've made a fortune by betting against Martin Channing.

After all, in finance, you don't just make money when prices go up—you can profit when they fall too. That's why the saying goes: *\*It doesn't matter if the market goes up or down. As long as there's volatility, there's profit.\**

The bigger the fluctuations, the bigger the profits.

With the scale of Martin Channing's scam, if someone could time the crash perfectly, they'd make an absolute killing by shorting it.

But Adam wasn't willing to take that risk.

Even knowing the general outcome wasn't enough—predicting the exact timing was nearly impossible. One wrong move, and instead of profiting, you'd be wiped out.

That's how brutal finance could be.

Those legendary time travelers who supposedly made fortunes with vague memories? Yeah, they must've had cheat codes.

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Chapter 233: Sugar Daddy

Duncan's Apartment.

Late at night.

"Holy shit!"

MAX scrambled to push Adam away with all her strength and shouted, "I was just joking with you! Did you really take me that seriously?"

"I'm an honest man."

Adam withdrew, lying beside her with a smile. "Whatever you say, I take it literally—no exceptions."

"Beast!"

Any warmth MAX had felt from Adam's appreciative gaze vanished completely. She glared at him and snapped, "At this rate, you're bound to join the Mormon Church. Otherwise, any woman who marries you is doomed. You're a total freak."

The Mormon Church was a religious group in America that promoted polygamy and all sorts of chaotic beliefs, making it seem almost like a cult.

"No interest."

Adam lazily replied, "That's the wrong path, not the right one."

"You're not on the wrong path?"

MAX scoffed, "I'd say you love taking detours down the dark road."

"Heh."

Adam chuckled but didn't argue. Instead, he changed the subject. "MAX, have you thought about what I said last time—going to college for further studies?"

"Not really."

MAX replied unhappily.

Whenever this topic came up, she felt uneasy.

She had always dreamed of becoming a children's book illustrator.

But to her, dreams were dreams because they were unattainable.

She had enrolled in community college to study illustration mostly to experience her dream—to get a little closer to it.

But honestly, she had never truly considered pursuing it seriously, let alone dared to hope she could achieve it.

In fact, the thought of getting too close to her dream filled her with an inexplicable sense of fear.

"Tell me."

Adam turned to face her. "What are you afraid of?"

"There's a lot I'm afraid of."

MAX, true to form, started with a dirty joke. "You and your brother are at the top of the list."

"Oh, really?"

Adam grinned. "Then you better confess everything, or your fears might just become reality."

MAX rolled her eyes, fell silent for a moment, then chuckled self-deprecatingly. "Maybe I'm just a coward. Every time things start going well, it doesn't feel real. I always have this nagging feeling that when I wake up tomorrow, something unexpected will happen. And it's never something good."

"I get it."

Adam nodded.

This was a kind of coping mechanism—a form of self-protection.

If you don't expect good things to happen, then when bad things come, you won't be disappointed or, worse, devastated.

"So, what do you think meeting me was? A good twist of fate or a bad one?"

Adam smiled.

"Half and half."

MAX quipped, "Good when we're out of bed, bad when we're in it."

"..."

Adam was speechless. Maybe he had been a little too indulgent with MAX, but could he really be blamed? She was the one who kept making dirty jokes and teasing him.

Like tonight—it was her idea to let him do whatever he wanted. She said she was fine with anything.

What was Adam supposed to do?

Naturally, he took her at her word.

"No one is lucky forever, and no one is doomed forever."

Adam pulled MAX into his arms and offered her some heartfelt encouragement. "Maybe you've had a tough time so far, but I have a feeling that from now on, your luck is about to change."

"Because of you?"

MAX smiled.

"Yes."

Adam said seriously, "Maybe I'm your lucky star. What do you think?"

"Lucky star."

MAX murmured, then pressed her face against Adam's chest and smiled, neither confirming nor denying it. "Maybe."

"So..."

Adam got back to the point. "Do you still have any concerns? You can tell me anything."

"Tuition, I guess."

Unable to resist Adam's persistence, MAX finally started opening up. "Community college is already expensive enough, let alone a regular university. And even if I do manage to graduate, there's no guarantee I'll find a good job. It's not like struggling artists are rare."

The cost of community college was relative.

Compared to traditional universities, community college was much cheaper.

But for someone like MAX, who was juggling school and waitressing, it was still a heavy burden.

If paying for community college was an occasional splurge to bring her a little closer to her dream, then the cost of a four-year university was entirely out of reach.

Besides, even if she got her degree, there was still the issue of employment.

Art-related fields were notorious for high unemployment rates.

Most graduates couldn't find jobs in their field and were forced to switch careers, rendering their expensive education practically useless.

At just 19, MAX had already learned how tough life was. She wasn't naïve enough to believe that every struggling artist was just a misunderstood genius.

After all, talent is like pregnancy—sooner or later, it shows.

And if most artists were struggling, it was clear the issue wasn't just about being unrecognized. The industry simply wasn't big enough to support everyone trying to make a living from it.

Given that reality, she wasn't confident enough to assume she'd be one of the lucky few to succeed. So, how could she not hesitate?

"That's exactly why I said you're lucky to have met me."

Adam smiled. "Both tuition and employment aren't problems anymore. Actually, they're the same problem—you're only worried because you don't have confidence that you'll find a job after graduation and pay off student loans, right?"

"Well, obviously."

MAX rolled her eyes.

"What if I told you I've already secured a job for you in advance?"

Adam had thought about this before, so he was completely confident. "All you need to do is go to college, study hard, and improve your skills. The moment you graduate, a job in your field—one with great pay—will be waiting for you. Would you still be worried then?"

"What kind of job?"

MAX was intrigued.

"A children's book illustrator."

Adam smiled. "Isn't that exactly what you've always dreamed of doing?"

"For real?"

MAX gasped, but then her excitement faded. She shook her head. "Forget it. You probably had to ask someone for a favor, right? I'd rather not."

"Asking for favors is pointless."

Adam laughed. "You know I'm a writer, right? I have an idea for a project, but to bring it to life, I need an illustrator. You'd be responsible for the artwork while I handle the story. Together, we'll create a high-quality children's book. What do you think?"

"I've already given you everything—I don't have any more tricks up my sleeve. You don't need to keep sweet-talking me."

MAX was skeptical. "If you really had a great idea, wouldn't you just hire a professional artist right now? There are plenty of talented illustrators out there. Why wait for me to graduate?"

"Well, for starters, it's just an idea right now. Good projects take time to develop—two years is perfect. Plus, hiring the right person isn't just about skill, but also trust. And I trust you more."

Adam said with a straight face, smoothly mixing truth with fiction. "Of course, I won't deny that I want to help you. But those two things aren't mutually exclusive. We're friends, right? Helping you when I can is totally normal."

"This isn't just a friendly favor anymore."

MAX pushed Adam's wandering hand away, sat up, and looked at him. "Are you trying to be my sugar daddy?"

Chapter 234: MAX's Choice

Duncan's Apartment.

"Are you trying to be my sugar daddy?"

MAX asked with a serious expression, posing a deadly question.

Adam was caught off guard.

This was not an easy question to answer.

If he said no...

Most of the reasons he could give would sound like complete nonsense. A little thought would reveal the flaws.

Helping a friend—does it really require this much effort?

Of course not.

In the original timeline, when Chandler was promoted to manager and needed an assistant, Phoebe was unemployed at the time. Yet, his first instinct wasn't to hire her. Even after being reminded by others, he hesitated repeatedly.

There were valid reasons for this—friends shouldn't mix personal relationships with professional hierarchies—but ultimately, it highlighted an important truth: help among friends has limits.

Lending a hand when convenient is expected.

But persistently reminding someone who clearly isn't interested, securing them a high-paying job two years in advance to eliminate any financial concerns—that level of assistance goes beyond what even close family members would do. That's what a real father would do.

MAX wasn't stupid—how could she not see through this?

She smacked away Adam's "divine hand" that had nearly rearranged the letters of "MAXAM" into "NAXAN" and asked her question with utmost seriousness. If he tried to play dumb now, it would be outright insulting to her intelligence.

But if he answered yes?

That wouldn't work either.

A sugar daddy is basically the equivalent of a "godfather" in some Eastern cultures, except with an entirely different—and much more scandalous—connotation.

In America, there are even sugar daddy dating websites, making the whole concept seem almost socially accepted. But make no mistake—it's still a derogatory term.

Claiming to be someone's sugar daddy? That would be an undeniable insult to any self-respecting woman.

So here was the dilemma.

Answering yes or no was equally unacceptable.

If this wasn't a trick question, then what was?

"Hahaha!"

Seeing Adam's conflicted expression as his emotions shifted rapidly, MAX suddenly burst into laughter.

"You were trying to scare me?"

Adam immediately understood.

In his eyes, MAX was a good girl—but she was also a bit of a troublemaker.

Sometimes, during playful banter, she would jokingly call herself a \*dirty girl\* or a \*naughty girl\*—especially \*naughty girl\*. That tone? It paired perfectly with the term \*sugar daddy\*.

Under normal circumstances, Adam wouldn't have fallen for it.

But just moments ago, he had been reflecting on how he had been acting too casually around MAX. Sure, MAX was often the one making inappropriate jokes, but he had also pushed the boundaries a little too far.

And with the serious look on her face, he really thought she had been offended and was confronting him for real.

That was why he hesitated.

"Hahaha."

MAX laughed, saying, "Candy has always been my favorite. And I've always wanted a dad growing up. A \*sugar daddy\* is practically my god! How could I not love it?"

\*Smack!\*

Adam immediately swatted her.

Of course, not on the face—one shouldn't hit someone's face, after all.

"Sugar daddy~"

MAX blinked at Adam with teary eyes.

Adam took a deep breath, cursing in his mind:

\*Damn this decadent, free world!\*

MAX was indeed an expert at mischief. Even after all that, she still dared to tease him like this.

No hesitation—he couldn't back down.

One Hour Later

The late night returned to its usual tranquility.

Adam continued reading, occasionally glancing at MAX, who was now fast asleep. He couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment.

After an hour of "friendly negotiations," MAX had finally agreed to his suggestion—she would go back to college to further her studies and, after graduation, work with him.

Adam wasn't just making empty promises—he genuinely had an idea.

In his previous life, he had nieces and nephews, and for a while, they were obsessed with a certain cartoon about a little pig named Peppa. Because of them, Adam had watched a few episodes and even researched it.

What stuck with him the most was how shockingly influential that little pig was. The show became a worldwide sensation, its merchandise selling like crazy, and its licensing fees bringing in over a billion dollars annually.

The only thing that might have surpassed it? Probably \*Harry Potter\*.

But \*Harry Potter\* had an extremely high production cost compared to \*Peppa Pig\*.

What was \*Peppa Pig\* exactly?

A cheaply animated kids' show.

Of course, just like \*Harry Potter\*, its success wasn't purely accidental—promotion played a big role.

But no phenomenon goes viral without \*some\* intrinsic appeal.

The show's humorous dialogue and its surprisingly educational yet eerie storytelling captivated not just children but also parents. That was the real foundation of its global success.

Adam planned to first outline the storyline, then have MAX illustrate it for publication—securing the copyrights early.

As for whether to license the animation to another company or produce it himself, that could be decided later.

The only costs involved were MAX's salary and a bit of mental effort on Adam's part to recall and refine the story.

If it worked out in the future, it would be an absolute \*cash cow\*.

A billion-dollar annual revenue stream? If it became a publicly traded company, its market value could easily reach hundreds of billions. That meant its stock value would outshine even his investments in Apple and Google.

A low-cost, high-reward opportunity that could also change MAX's future—how could he \*not\* do it?

And choosing MAX wasn't a random decision.

She wasn't without advantages—in fact, she had plenty.

Her loyalty? That was only half a joke.

Sure, he could hire someone else and use contracts to prevent plagiarism or early leaks.

But if he could work with someone who was naturally loyal, why wouldn't he?

Besides, \*Peppa Pig\* was aimed at young children, meaning its storytelling and art style had to be appropriate.

Adam had only seen parts of it, not the full series, so he could provide an outline and an initial concept—but the rest would require someone to refine and complete.

That person needed artistic skills, a sense of humor, and a childlike heart.

MAX had all three.

Her sharp tongue and risqué humor were legendary, but that didn't mean she lacked the ability to be genuinely funny in a child-friendly way.

Her current style was a defense mechanism—a way to protect herself from the harsh realities of life, much like Chandler's self-deprecating humor or Susie's rebellious antics.

If given the opportunity, MAX could shift that humor into something that parents and children alike would enjoy.

That brought up another key requirement—a childlike heart.

You wouldn't ask someone who writes \*adult\* stories to suddenly write \*pure romance\*. It's just not their style.

Without a genuine childlike perspective, no matter how well-written something is, kids simply won't care—because their view of the world is entirely different.

And did MAX have that childlike heart?

Absolutely.

If Adam hadn't stepped in, she would have ended up working as a nanny for wealthy housewives—so skilled that she would make actual mothers look bad in comparison.

Plus, she still loved watching robotic dolls in kids' cartoons.

Loyalty, humor, and a childlike heart—MAX excelled in all these areas.

The only thing she lacked was advanced drawing skills, but that was something she could learn.

\*Peppa Pig\* didn't explode in popularity until after 2010, meaning there were still more than ten years to go.

There was \*plenty\* of time.

MAX had all the right qualities. She was also a good friend.

Waiting a few years for her? No problem at all.

Chapter 235: 13 "No"s\*\*

The next day.

\*\*Morning jog time.\*\*

"Hey, Monica, you're here?"

Adam had originally planned to drag Chandler out for a run, but he didn't expect to see Monica there as well.

"Where else would I be?" Monica shrugged.

"At Peter's mansion," Adam said with a smile. "Don't tell me he just sent you home after the party last night?"

"Of course not," Monica shook her head.

"So... he sent you home after getting intimate?" Adam teased. "Wow, that's pretty heartless of him!"

"..."

Monica was speechless. "I asked him to bring me home."

"Why?"

This time, not only Adam but also Chandler looked surprised.

Men and women are different. After an intimate moment, women usually prefer to cuddle and prolong the warmth, whereas men just want to sleep—preferably alone.

Otherwise, Ross wouldn't have come up with his famous "hug and roll" technique.

Monica voluntarily asking Peter to take her home after such a moment was definitely unusual.

Normally, they would have spent the night together and met up again next time.

Just like in \*The Big Bang Theory\*, when Howard and Bernadette were dating. Because of Howard's overbearing mother, Bernadette didn't want to go to his house, but Howard also had a strict "curfew" and had to go home every night.

As a result, every time they were together at Bernadette's place, Howard would follow the routine: a brief cuddle session after their "quality time," then he'd leave, which annoyed Bernadette to no end.

It made her feel undervalued, like she didn't matter.

She often wished Howard would just stay the night—or better yet, move in with her.

But Howard kept making excuses to delay it.

On one hand, he had spent his entire life with his mom and was used to it. They both depended on each other.

For example, even as a grown man, Howard still relied on his mom for all his daily needs. She even took him to the dentist. Shockingly, he didn't even know that you could take your temperature orally until he went to college...

Meanwhile, Howard's mom never remarried and used food to fill the emptiness in her heart. She kept gaining weight, making it harder for her to move around, which meant she needed Howard's help with many things.

On the other hand, there was also the simple reality: after they had already "been together," staying longer with Bernadette just seemed boring. Wouldn't it be more fun to go home and play video games?

Raj once shared a wild thought with Stuart:

His ideal life would be if Stuart were a woman—so they could read comics, play video games together, and at night... well, Stuart would "take care" of him.

Of course, that was just an absurd idea born out of loneliness, even too much for someone like Stuart.

But it did reveal something about men's true thoughts:

When intimacy isn't a factor, guys often prefer hanging out with other guys.

That's also why, in Adam's past life, female gaming streamers were so popular—because they combined both aspects: someone to play games with \*and\* someone you could fantasize about.

A girl who enjoys gaming and is also physically attractive? That's the dream.

Especially if, instead of post-intimacy cuddling, the couple spent that time discussing games or playing co-op together. In that case, the guy probably wouldn't get sleepy so fast.

This fundamental difference between men and women made Monica's behavior stand out even more.

"It's nothing. I just didn't want to stay over," Monica shrugged.

"Come on~"

Adam instinctively put on the classic \*How I Met Your Mother\* Barney Stinson expression—the one he used when pressuring someone to tell the truth.

"I'm serious," Monica insisted.

"Monica, come on~"

Adam repeated the same look, full of "I see right through you, just admit it."

"Okay, okay."

Unable to handle Adam's persistent tone, Monica finally raised her hands in surrender. "I just don't feel comfortable. I don't think I love him."

"Is it because of...?"

"No, it has nothing to do with \*that\*," Monica cut him off immediately. "It's an emotional thing. Peter is great—amazing, even—but I just don't love him. It's that simple."

"Ohhh."

Adam chuckled. "Congratulations, Monica, you've evolved. You're just like me now—enjoying \*that\* without worrying about love."

"No."

Monica instinctively shook her head and then...

"No, no, no, no, no..."

Her tone shifted from denial to hesitation, then to fear.

Just like in \*How I Met Your Mother\*, when someone casually suggested that Robin and Barney would make a great couple—prompting Robin to frantically repeat "No" sixteen times to emphasize how impossible that was.

Adam counted carefully. Thirteen "no"s.

Looks like he was still slightly better off than future playboy Barney Stinson.

"OMG!"

After saying her thirteenth "no," Monica finally reacted, covering her mouth in shock. "I \*am\* kind of like Adam!"

"Is that really such a big deal?"

Adam rolled his eyes. "Didn't you ask me to introduce you to guys before, saying you just wanted to balance your hormones?"

"I was just \*saying\* that," Monica said in horror. "But intimacy without love? What does that even mean?"

"A playboy," Adam said matter-of-factly. "Though, to be fair, that term is mostly used for men."

"OMG!"

Monica gasped again.

"Relax," Adam said, getting straight to the point. "You just went through a heartbreaking relationship. You need time to recover. Right now, real love isn't possible with anyone, so this setup actually works out. Peter is a refined, generous millionaire—perfect for a rebound."

As he spoke, he glanced at Chandler out of the corner of his eye. \*He's the one you're truly meant to be with.\*

Besides, there was something else Adam didn't say out loud—Peter's status as a wealthy businessman was also a major obstacle.

Class divisions in America are real and well-established.

The working class sticks with the working class. The middle class stays within the middle class. The wealthy date the wealthy. It's practically an unspoken rule.

In movies and TV shows, you see Cinderella stories where an ordinary girl marries a rich guy and lives happily ever after—but that's just Hollywood fantasy.

Sure, it happens in real life too, but those are rare exceptions. Survivorship bias at play.

Monica was likely aware of this on some level.

And given her personality, she was never one to chase wealth or status.

So she was never going to fully commit to Peter.

But love requires full emotional investment to grow.

With her deep feelings for Richard still lingering, and her own reluctance to invest in Peter, it made perfect sense that her emotions were all over the place.

Adam had no intention of persuading her to stick with Peter.

To him, Chandler and Monica were the perfect match.

And this wasn't just because Adam had seen the ending—there had been signs all along.

For example, when Monica first met Chandler back when she was still overweight, she clearly had a crush on him.

Or the fact that, before their friend group even officially formed, Monica and Chandler had lived across the hall from each other and were already extremely close.

One classic moment?

Monica wanted Chandler's cookie, so he licked all over it to stop her.

In response, Monica picked up Chandler's coffee—thinking it was his—and licked all around the rim.

(Though she later realized it wasn't actually his coffee.)

Still, that kind of playful, casual "exchange of germs" speaks volumes about how uniquely close they were.

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Chapter 236: Breakup Season

Adam's words made Monica start doubting herself.

The Following Week

Monica and Peter broke up.

And then it was as if a switch had been flipped.

Saturday Night

MAX's Diner

Since both Monica and MAX worked here, the group had recently started gathering at the diner more often. After all, they couldn't just drink coffee and have awkward conversations every day.

A little alcohol every now and then made the emotions hit just right.

"Enough!"

Rachel and Ross were arguing—again.

"I think we need to take a break."

Rachel suddenly said.

"Okay, waiter! Two cold drinks, please."

Ross tried to crack a joke.

"No."

Rachel looked at Ross, suddenly feeling nothing at all. She spoke calmly, "I mean we need to take a break from each other. We need some time apart to cool down."

"What?"

Ross was stunned. That "temporary break" was just a polite way of saying "breakup." As soon as he realized what was happening, his anger exploded. He roared, "Fine! We're done!"

With that, he shoved his chair back, ignored the stunned looks from their friends, and stormed out.

"What happened?"

The commotion was so loud that MAX, who was still working as a waitress, hurried over to ask.

That's right.

Even though she had a sugar daddy—Adam—she wasn't like the other girls who relied entirely on their wealthy benefactors, spending all their time dressing up and pleasing their sponsor.

She still worked as a waitress, earning a modest income and striving to be financially independent.

Even when she later enrolled in college, she chose to take out student loans and continue working part-time to cover her living expenses rather than using Adam's money.

Adam, as her sugar daddy, mostly gave her the confidence to strive for a better future.

It might seem like a failure in some ways.

But at least Adam still got all the benefits of being a sugar daddy. Otherwise, he would have protested long ago...

"I just can't take it anymore."

Rachel explained, "He's too insecure. He keeps interfering with my work."

Everyone immediately understood.

After Rachel ran away from her wedding and started working, it had already been nearly three years. Her main job was waitressing, and on the side, she tried writing.

But she wasn't good at anything.

Even with Adam's guidance, she never managed to write anything publishable, and over time, she lost interest.

As for her waitressing? A total disaster.

Three years in, she still frequently got orders wrong and kept customers waiting until they gave up and left.

Adam was very familiar with this kind of behavior.

It was the classic case of someone who didn't care and wasn't even trying.

So, even if she worked another three years, Rachel's skills wouldn't improve much.

At least she had Gunther, her manager who secretly liked her, helping her out. But when the owner noticed her incompetence, even Gunther could only convince them to give Rachel one last chance—a full retraining.

But the moment Rachel heard about the retraining, she lost it.

Being a waitress was humiliating enough. After working there for three years, she was practically a senior staff member. And now they wanted to treat her like a newbie and train her from scratch? That was beyond embarrassing.

But when they tested her on basic restaurant knowledge, she was completely clueless. Even she was embarrassed.

So, she quit.

She wanted to pursue her passion for fashion.

Attractive people live life differently.

While chatting with Monica, a man who worked at a department store overheard their conversation and interrupted, saying he had a job that was perfect for Rachel.

Rachel, of course, was thrilled and immediately accepted. And the job really was great.

But Ross immediately realized that this guy was obviously interested in Rachel. Otherwise, why would a complete stranger go out of his way to offer her a job?

To make sure Rachel wouldn't be "stolen" by this guy, Ross launched a full-scale "marking my territory" campaign.

He sent her flowers, love-themed gift baskets, and even hired a singing telegram to perform love songs for her at work.

That guy backed off—for now—but Ross's antics seriously disrupted Rachel's work and put her in an incredibly awkward position.

The worst part?

When Rachel needed to stay late to make a good impression at her new job, Ross insisted on celebrating their "relationship anniversary" in her office. She was so distracted that she almost made a huge mistake at work.

That's what led to Rachel's explosive reaction tonight.

"Uhh..."

MAX was speechless.

This was way too much drama.

"Heh."

Adam just chuckled and said nothing.

He honestly didn't care about their constant breakups and makeups.

To be fair, Ross did bear a lot of responsibility for what happened.

But Rachel wasn't blameless either.

Because Ross's instincts about that male colleague? Completely correct.

Everyone knew it.

Rachel knew it too.

But she pretended not to notice and kept accepting invitations—dinners, seminars, networking events. Her intentions might not have been romantic, maybe she just wanted to integrate better into her new workplace.

But her lack of rejection led to more and more interactions, which directly triggered Ross's insecurity.

He foolishly thought Rachel was naive and unaware of the guy's true intentions, so he panicked and felt the need to constantly mark his territory—leading to all those cringe-worthy gestures.

Even the "anniversary" office incident was Ross's desperate attempt to hold onto Rachel when he sensed she was drifting away.

Mathematically speaking, Ross had an irrational "if I don't act now, I'll lose her forever" mentality. It turned him into an overbearing, possessive version of himself.

If he kept being denied intimacy for too long, it was only a matter of time before he snapped.

In reality, both of them were equally at fault.

From Adam's perspective, it was hard to tell if Ross and Rachel even had real love.

Ross's feelings seemed more like an obsession with his childhood crush.

Rachel's feelings, on the other hand, were more about comfort during a vulnerable period.

Their relationship was a mix of friendship and romance, but it leaned more toward friendship than actual love.

So, Adam didn't bother getting involved. He just let things play out.

"I broke up with Susie too."

Chandler suddenly announced.

"What?!"

Everyone was shocked, including Adam.

Adam immediately turned to Chandler with concern. "Did you break up with her, or did she break up with you?"

You couldn't blame him for treating Chandler differently.

When you had a big friend group, it was impossible to care about everyone equally.

Right now, the Friends group was still intact, so things were manageable.

But soon, there would be the How I Met Your Mother crew, the Big Bang Theory gang, the hospital colleagues, and his close female friends.

Do the math, and suddenly he'd be juggling nearly thirty people.

Naturally, some friendships would be closer than others.

That's why Joey and Phoebe often seemed to disappear from his priority list.

Among the six, Chandler was number one.

Since Monica and Chandler were a pair, they were the two Adam cared about most.

Chapter 237: Heading to Boston

**\*\*MAX's Diner.\*\***

"It's nothing."

Chandler shrugged and said, "You guys know that Susie has been working in a field team for a long time. We rarely see each other, and over time, our feelings naturally faded. Breaking up was inevitable."

Seeing Adam still looking at him, Chandler added, "Neither of us initiated it—we both felt the same way. It was an amicable breakup."

"I have the most experience with these kinds of calm breakups. It's really no big deal."

Adam patted Chandler on the shoulder.

"..."

Everyone was at a loss for words.

Because, honestly, that was the truth.

But why did it sound so strange?

Seeing MAX giving him a weird look, Adam leaned in close and whispered in her ear, "A sugar daddy and a naughty girl can't just have a calm breakup~"

"Right, if we were to break up, I'd accuse you of domestic violence."

MAX quipped sarcastically, "You wouldn't be able to explain yourself, and my body would be covered in evidence."

"..."

The corner of Adam's mouth twitched, and he suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"Relax, I'm just joking."

Noticing Adam's discomfort, MAX was surprised.

"You don't understand—this kind of thing is no joke."

Adam said seriously.

In his past life, the scandal involving Dong Ge had been so explosive that even a bystander like Adam had been deeply impressed by it. He had heard that this kind of setup was an old American trick—what some people called the "American honey trap."

Even though he knew MAX wasn't that kind of person, the idea still gave him chills.

"Got it."

Although MAX didn't fully understand, she nodded in agreement.

"I want to go home."

Rachel, noticing that the conversation had gone off track and that no one was paying attention to comforting her anymore, stood up unhappily.

"Should I take some time off and go back with you?"

Monica asked with concern.

"No need. I just want to be alone for a while."

Rachel waved her hand.

"That's probably a good idea."

Adam said, "Being alone to think might help you realize that arguing serves no purpose. Of course, that is—if you really want to be alone and don't want anyone to keep you company?"

"No, I don't."

Rachel shook her head.

Since she insisted, no one tried to persuade her otherwise.

After Rachel left—

"What was that look?"

MAX noticed Adam's expression when he last looked at Rachel and asked.

"It's nothing."

Adam smiled. "I just hope Rachel really is spending time alone thinking. If that male colleague calls her again, insisting on keeping her company and helping her 'work through it,' and she agrees... then I'd say she and Ross are completely done."

"No way."

Monica exclaimed in shock.

"A woman's words are full of deception."

MAX snarked. "Adam's guess is totally possible."

"No, I have to take time off and go back."

Monica couldn't sit still anymore.

Ross was her brother, and Rachel was her best friend. She had always believed in their relationship and didn't want things to be permanently ruined over a moment of impulse.

Thinking from Rachel's perspective, if she were in Rachel's position—having just broken up because she couldn't stand her boyfriend interfering in her work—and a handsome male colleague who had always been supportive insisted on coming over to comfort her, she probably wouldn't be able to refuse such kindness.

In fact, deep down, she might even be a little happy about it.

And if they had a few drinks, the atmosphere got emotional, their eyes met... sparks could fly.

Then, things would definitely go downhill from there.

After Monica left, MAX had other customers to tend to, leaving only Adam and Chandler.

"You're really fine?"

Adam smiled.

"Really fine."

Chandler shrugged. "To be honest, Susie is great, but our relationship was always more about comfort than passion. We never had that feeling of 'I can't live without you.'"

"I get it."

Adam chuckled. "It's that 'more than friends, less than lovers' kind of situation. Now you understand why I don't do relationships? I just can't seem to find that one person who makes me feel like I can't live without them."

"We're not the same."

Chandler gave him a look of disdain. "I wanted to be in a relationship but just didn't find the right feeling. You, on the other hand, never wanted to be in one in the first place. One is by accident, the other is by choice—how is that the same?"

"So, you're really fine."

Adam said with a deadpan expression.

If he could think so clearly about all this, then he was obviously fine.

Watching Chandler in good spirits, Adam held back from saying something:

\*If I hadn't been so firm about not dating in the first place, you might have ended up calling me stepdad by now.\*

---

The Next Few Weeks

As the semester neared its end, Adam became busier. And knowing all the drama going on between Ross and Rachel, he decided to skip every gathering, only catching up on the latest gossip during his morning runs with Chandler and Monica.

Monica had been too late.

Even though she was only delayed by a few words and arrived just minutes later, the heavy traffic slowed her down. By the time she got there, the handsome male colleague had already arrived.

As Monica mentally cursed Rachel and that guy for moving at light speed while also feeling relieved that she had come in time to prevent further escalation, the phone rang.

That handsome male colleague casually walked over, picked up the phone, and answered it.

One could only imagine Ross's reaction when he heard that guy's voice on the other end.

He hung up immediately.

Then, he went out and started partying with some girl at a bar.

Only then did Monica realize what had happened. She snatched the phone, trying to explain things to Ross, but he was already gone.

What could Rachel say at that point?

The guy had rushed over at lightning speed just to comfort her, and picking up the phone was an accident. It wasn't intentional...

The next morning, Rachel went to Ross's apartment to try to reconcile, nearly catching him with the girl he had met at the bar.

Luckily, the bar girl was decent enough to slip away quietly.

Now, if Ross had just kept his mouth shut, the issue might have blown over.

But no—he had to go and tell Joey about it.

And Joey, of course, insisted that Rachel *\*had\** to know the truth.

Honesty is key in relationships, right?

Tsk, tsk.

Way too naive. Way too reckless.

The result, unsurprisingly, was a complete breakup.

And with such a messy split, how could they possibly stay friends?

Now, their friend group was fractured.

If they hung out with Rachel, Ross couldn't come.

If they hung out with Ross, Rachel couldn't be there.

Both of them kept trying to get their friends to take sides.

Events were planned so far in advance that their schedules were filled for the next year.

If they went to one person's gathering, the other felt upset.

Stuck in the middle, their mutual friends were miserable—having to put on a polite smile while feeling completely torn.

Even Adam got dragged into the drama.

Since they were all good friends, whenever Monica and the others were with one of them, the other would come to Adam for comfort—completely ignoring any sense of timing.

Some even stayed overnight, seriously disrupting Adam and MAX's study sessions.

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"What? You're going to Boston?"

Ross was in the middle of his \*nth\* rant about how he technically hadn't cheated when Adam suddenly spoke up. Ross looked at him in shock.

"Yeah."

Adam said, pretending to be reluctant.

"Boston is a cultural hub, and my publisher has been trying to get me to do a live book signing there. Since \*Lord of Mysteries IV\* is about to be released, they're insisting I go to promote it.

I'm just an author—I can't say no to the big bosses. No choice."

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Chapter 238: Say One More Word, and I'll Spit in Your Face

Duncan's Apartment.

"Are you really going?"

Ross frowned.

"I'm really going," Adam sighed.

"Well, that's good then."

Ross suddenly grinned. "I'll go with you. It'll be a nice little getaway."

"..."

Adam immediately had a bad feeling.

He had chosen to go to Boston for two reasons.

First, to visit Juno and Karen and take the opportunity to explore the city.

After all, Boston was home to two of the world's most renowned universities—Harvard and MIT—along with many other excellent schools.

A cultural hub of the United States.

A true college town.

Definitely worth seeing.

Second, *The Lord of Mysteries IV* was about to be released, and Random House hoped he would help with the promotion.

Of course, it was just a request, not a requirement.

At Adam's level, Random House treated him like royalty—there was no way they would dare force him to do anything.

Boston, being a cultural hotspot, had one of the highest book sales in the country. Holding a book signing and promotional event there was a no-brainer.

But neither of these reasons was the real reason he wanted to go.

The most important reason was that he wanted to take Max on a trip to get away from Ross and Rachel.

If he couldn't win against them, he could at least avoid them.

But he never expected Ross to be so clueless that he insisted on tagging along!

"No way!"

Adam instinctively refused.

"Why not?"

Ross looked at him with a pitiful expression.

Adam twitched.

For Chandler's sake, their friendship had to continue—so he couldn't tell the truth.

"I'm going there for work. I won't have time to hang out with you."

With no other choice, Adam had to make something up.

Lu Xun once said: One lie requires countless others to cover it up.

This was exactly that situation.

"That's fine," Ross chuckled. "I won't bother you. I can explore during the day, and at night we can go out together. I've never been to Boston before."

He was excited about it.

"..."

Adam almost swore out loud but forced himself to smile. "Do you even have vacation days? We're leaving on a Tuesday."

"Huh?"

Ross frowned. "Why would they schedule a book signing on a weekday?"

"No choice," Adam continued his nonsense. "If it were on a weekend, way too many people would show up. I'd probably sign books until I drop dead. Having too many fans is such a burden, you know?"

This time, Ross twitched.

Was he complaining... or showing off?

"Besides, I probably won't even have time for you in the evenings."

Afraid that Ross would still insist on coming, Adam quickly added, "There are promotional events at night too."

"Can't you take me with you?" Ross asked stubbornly.

"Are you a woman?"

Adam finally snapped. "If I bring you along, by the next morning, every newspaper will have headlines saying I came out as gay! Unless—of course—you're willing to wear a dress. Then we can talk."

Talk?

If Ross was actually willing to do that, Adam might just spit in his face.

A burly dude in a dress? No one needs to see that.

"Oh..."

Ross finally gave up, though he looked reluctant. "Fine, I won't go. Just come back soon."

Come back?

With the way you're acting, maybe I'll just transfer to Harvard Medical School and never return.

Adam rolled his eyes.

After halfheartedly walking Ross out the door, Max chuckled. "Are you really going to Boston?"

"We are," Adam grinned. "I'm taking you to meet two of my good friends, explore the city, and get away for a bit."

"You mean Juno and Karen?"

Max was curious.

"Yep," Adam nodded. "I was planning to go over the weekend, but I guess I'll have to leave a few days early. You can get time off, right?"

A random line of text suddenly appeared: No one makes a mistake, no one sends a message, no one shares content on 69ShuBa.

"Are you kidding?"

Max smirked confidently. "One of the perks of being a waitress is that I can take time off whenever I want. Especially someone like me—places are always hiring. I can leave whenever, come back whenever. No problem at all."

"That's true."

Adam chuckled.

Max's confidence reminded him of Penny from The Big Bang Theory.

There was that one time when Bernadette suggested skipping work to go to Disneyland and dress up as princesses.

Amy, despite being relatively normal when dealing with Sheldon, was actually a weirdo herself.

So how did she request time off?

First, at around 7 PM, she called her boss to casually discuss some lab issues and casually mentioned she was going out for seafood.

At 9:30 PM, she called again, casually mentioning that one of the scallops tasted off.

At 11:30 PM, she called to say she had been violently throwing up.

At 12:45 AM, she called again—saying nothing—just dry heaving into the phone.

By then, her boss finally got the hint and offered to give her the day off.

Now that was a ridiculous way to get time off, but it had a certain charm to it.

Back in his previous life, Adam would always cough a few times when calling in sick—just to make it sound real.

Whether or not the boss believed it was another story.

But adding that little performance? It forced them to be a "good boss" and approve the request.

And how did Penny request time off?

Just like Max—she simply said, "See ya!" and walked out.

And when Penny decided to quit her waitressing job to focus on acting, she confidently told her boss and coworkers that they should "keep their eyes open" because she'd be on TV soon.

Of course, when things didn't work out, she just as confidently walked back in like nothing happened.

Being pretty or intimidating had its perks.

If an average person tried that?

They'd be replaced in seconds.

Three-legged frogs are rare.

Two-legged waiters? Plenty.

Originally, Adam planned to take time off and leave early with Max. But his med school schedule was too packed, so he had to stick with the weekend plan.

Still, to dodge Ross, Adam had to pretend he was leaving on Tuesday.

Luckily, he was rich and a pro at this.

To sell the lie, he and Max booked a room at the Four Seasons instead of going back to his apartment.

A change of scenery can be surprisingly refreshing.

No wonder so many big shots preferred hotels.

By the end of it, Adam's resentment toward Ross and Rachel had mostly faded.

He was too busy enjoying himself.

As for the Boston book signing?

Ross had no idea when it was actually happening.

And whenever Max had a break, Adam called Monica and the others—urging them to end the Ross and Rachel drama once and for all.

Just break up already!

No need to drag their friends down with them.

He even suggested they explode at both of them—yell, scream, whatever it took—so they'd finally stop.

Ross and Rachel deserved to be put in their place.

Why didn't Adam handle it himself?

Because with Leonard around, he'd definitely take Rachel's side.

And Ross?

Ross wasn't exactly calm—if Adam too obviously favored Rachel, Ross might just snap and start ranting in a thick Northeastern accent.

"What's going on here?! This doesn't look right at all!"

So letting Monica and the others handle it was the best plan.

They were neutral—they had no bias.

Only they could put an end to the madness before Adam returned from Boston.

Chapter 239: The True Colors of a Player

Boston.

Near Harvard University.

Inside an apartment.

"Tsk, tsk."

Adam and Max followed Juno into the apartment. As soon as they stepped inside, their eyes lit up with admiration.

This apartment was about the same size as Adam's—both were two-bedroom, one-living-room layouts—but the atmosphere was completely different.

Adam's place was unmistakably a bachelor pad.

Though it wasn't as deliberately over-the-top as Barney Stinson's from *How I Met Your Mother*, where even a box set of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* DVDs was displayed as a badge of singlehood, anyone who walked in would immediately know it belonged to a single guy.

Juno and Karen's place, on the other hand, felt like a home.

"You two are really living the good life—classy."

"You could too," Juno replied with a smile. "If you actually wanted to."

"Heh."

Adam chuckled but didn't respond.

The idea of settling down was nice, but that was something to consider after he had seen all the excitement the world had to offer.

Right now, he still wasn't satisfied.

Adam and Max had flown to Boston, and since they had informed Juno in advance, she had picked them up from the airport.

"Hey, Karen."

"Hmm."

When Karen walked in with tea, Adam quickly greeted her.

"Thanks a lot," Max added, expressing gratitude.

"You're welcome."

Karen remained cold toward Adam but greeted Max with a warm smile.

That night, Adam and Max didn't check into a hotel; instead, they stayed in the guest room.

While Karen helped Max settle in, Juno gave Adam a look, signaling him to step outside. The two of them went downstairs for a walk.

"New girl again, huh?"

Juno teased, "As broad-minded as ever—and getting broader, I see."

"Can't help it," Adam said with a grin. "It just happens. I'm not picky."

"Right. As long as she's pretty, you're interested."

Juno rolled her eyes before sighing. "This Max is nice. How do you always end up meeting such great women?"

"Is that a humblebrag?" Adam shot back.

"Not at all."

Juno smirked. "I don't count as one of those 'good girls.'"

"To me, you are."

Adam looked at her seriously.

"Heh."

Their eyes met, and they both smiled.

Friendship was a fascinating thing.

There were acquaintances, friends, good friends, and best friends—each level growing deeper.

The longer the friendship lasted, the stronger the bond. But even after years, most friendships only advanced to the "good friends" level. To become true best friends, though, required something more—a connection that just clicked.

In American TV shows, a best friend was often a singular title.

For women, it was the Maid of Honor; for men, the Best Man.

Think The Big Bang Theory: Sheldon and Leonard, Howard and Raj, Penny and Amy. Or How I Met Your Mother: Marshall and Ted.

Barney was always obsessed with the title of Best Bro, often getting jealous when Ted referred to Marshall as his best friend.

Because in many ways, a true best friendship transcended even the usual definition of friendship. Like love, it could evolve into family—becoming a different kind of home.

Marshall wasn't called "Lily's Dad" (Lilypad) for nothing.

When Penny married Leonard, her hug at the ceremony wasn't just with her new husband—it included Sheldon too.

A true trio.

When Raj struggled with being single and considered marriage, he planned to leave—but Howard chased him down at the airport, making Raj ultimately choose him over a potential wife.

Their dramatic embrace even led onlookers to applaud their "true love."

Amy once worried that Raj and Howard would sleep together before she and Sheldon did.

Even Bernadette, after marrying Howard, would joke, "Are you cheating on me with Raj?" whenever Howard acted suspicious.

It was all in good fun, but their friendship had undeniably surpassed the usual boundaries—it was a lifelong bond.

Nothing could come between them. Not even women.

If Adam's system weren't so useless, a Friendship Meter would probably show a long list of "good friends."

But in the Best Friend section?

It was either empty—or Juno would definitely be there.

That was due not just to their instant connection when Adam first watched Hard Candy in his past life, but also the long-term camaraderie they had built in this one.

"Honestly," Juno said with a laugh. "Max is great, but I actually liked Heather more. It's a shame she decided to stay in Texas."

"Sigh."

Adam let out a deep sigh.

His thoughts mirrored Juno's.

Max was wonderful, but if he had to choose... he still liked Heather more.

Of course, their reasons were different.

Juno admired Heather's personality.

Adam? He just preferred Heather's looks and figure.

Among all the women he had been involved with, Heather had the best overall appearance.

"You could go visit her sometime," Juno suddenly suggested.

"What?" Adam blinked in surprise.

"Karen and I visited her ranch."

Juno smiled.

"You went there?" Adam frowned, looking at her in confusion.

"Yep," Juno said meaningfully. "She can't leave easily, but you could make time to visit her. She's had a tough time, and I know she still has feelings for you."

Adam fell silent. After a long pause, he sighed.

"Is she okay? She told me I shouldn't go—that it wasn't convenient for her to leave..."

"Not convenient to move permanently," Juno clarified. "But a short visit? No problem. She can arrange that, and Karen and I can go with you. Just like when we used to go hunting at the cabin—just the four of us. Nothing to worry about."

"Are you sure?" Adam looked at Juno intently.

"I'm sure."

Juno met his gaze head-on.

"Alright."

Adam nodded. "If Heather is okay with it."

"She will be," Juno said confidently.

Adam hesitated, then asked, "You think I'm kind of a player?"

"Huh? Why are you suddenly asking that?"

Juno gave him a "Do I even know you?" kind of look. "Haven't you always been? You were already two-timing back in high school. Don't tell me you thought I didn't know. No way... No way, right?"

"..."

Adam's mouth twitched. No response.

"Relax, I know you're a 'respectable' guy," Juno said, throwing an arm around his shoulders with a grin. "It's not like you'd be visiting Heather every week. Just once in a while. As long as you don't do anything that would ruin your respectable image, you're fine, right?"

Seeing Adam's deadpan expression, she added with a smirk, "Besides, I doubt things with Max will last long anyway. We can just wait for your 'single phase' and plan the trip then. That way, you're not a typical player—just an atypical one."

"Why wouldn't things with Max last?" Adam protested.

\*"Come on~" Juno said, imitating Barney Stinson's classic "Just admit it" tone and expression.

Except this time, she wasn't mimicking Barney.

She was mimicking Adam himself.

Adam opened his mouth—then shut it.

He had no comeback.

Chapter 240: Two Female Fans

The two walked side by side for a while.

After much internal debate, Adam finally asked, "What exactly is going on with Heather?"

"Heh."

Juno smirked playfully. "I thought you weren't going to ask."

"...."

Adam twitched his lips, realizing she was teasing him.

He knew that she knew that he knew about some of her unspeakable matters.

But because of their unspoken understanding, neither of them ever brought it up.

That was actually the best arrangement for both of them.

"I don't even know if I want to know."

Adam muttered before straightening up and asking seriously, "Juno, you tell me—should I know?"

"In that case, it's better if you don't."

Juno thought for a moment and said, "The more you know, the more trouble you have. You were better off before."

"Alright, I trust you."

Adam sighed in relief.

Even though he was now powerful enough to not fear many things, as a future doctor who pursued high ideals, he had no need to delve too deep into the darker sides of life.

Life is what you choose to make of it.

Lu Xun once said: "When you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you."

Why did Monica, Chandler, and the others in *\*Friends\** live happily ever after? Because they never dwelled on the dark side of life. Instead, they embraced its bright and wonderful aspects.

Take Joey, for example—he once insisted on building a cabinet in their apartment, only to accidentally drill straight through Chandler's wall. At the time, Chandler was leaning against that very wall, and the drill bit narrowly missed his head.

And what did Chandler say afterward?

A few complaints, and that was it.

But think about it—if the drill had shifted even slightly, his skull would have been pierced!

Of course, Joey didn't do it on purpose. But if Adam had been in Chandler's place, he would never have let Joey off so easily.

The sheer terror of a near-death experience would have made him deeply resent Joey, possibly even to the point where they could no longer be friends.

And when these kinds of events accumulate, the darkness inevitably overshadows the light. When negativity starts to dominate one's thoughts, even the smallest incidents become unbearable.

Over time, a person's character can become warped.

It's a vicious cycle.

But Chandler and his friends chose to see things positively. They knew Joey didn't mean any harm, so they just made a few jokes and moved on, never staring too long into the abyss.

One choice leads away from the abyss, while the other spirals into it. Over time, Chandler and his friends moved further and further from negativity, avoiding the darkness altogether. That's a virtuous cycle.

Adam couldn't be as carefree as Chandler and the others, especially since his unique aura often attracted strange people to his side. If he weren't careful, he could easily slide into a downward spiral.

So when Juno told him he didn't need to know, even though he was a little curious, he decided to ignore it—just like before, acting as if nothing had happened.

After all, Juno was there. She wouldn't let anything harm him.

That kind of trust—backed by his system, instincts, and experience—was well-founded.

"What's the plan for the next two days?"

Juno smoothly changed the subject.

"Tomorrow morning, there's a book signing event. In the afternoon, we'll take a break, and then in the evening, there's a writers' gala."

Adam thought for a moment before adding, "Tomorrow afternoon, you can take us around Harvard. The day after, we'll check out MIT and a few other places. That should cover it."

"A writers' gala?"

Juno teased, "Aren't you afraid of running into \*Amazing Amy\*?"

"She's still in Boston?"

Adam was surprised.

"Yep."

Juno chuckled. "She's still quite a big name in the literary scene here."

"If she is, she is."

Adam shrugged with a smile. "Even if I run into her, it's no big deal."

He was no longer the same person he was eight years ago—the one who had to become a full-fledged actor just to protect himself out of fear.

"Still, be careful."

Juno warned, "She's not someone to take lightly. One of her ex-boyfriends was accused by her of sexual assault. I investigated and even spoke to him directly—it was all fabricated. She secretly got back together with him, then turned around and framed him. I believe he was telling the truth."

Because of Adam, even the usually cautious Juno had kept a close eye on \*Amazing Amy\*.

"I know."

Adam's mouth twitched.

That whole story was insane—it left such a strong impression that there was no way he could forget it.

That was exactly why he had always kept his distance from Amy. Back then, he had gone to great lengths to make her lose interest in him and break up on her own.

"If only she ran into Batman."

Adam couldn't help but joke.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

Juno didn't get the reference.

"She has a deeply twisted psyche and an extreme need for revenge."

Adam couldn't exactly say that her future husband had played Batman, so he made something up instead: "Her personality leans toward darkness. I just wonder—if she married the Dark Knight, what would happen? Who would be darker? Who would outmaneuver the other?"

"The premise being that she could actually marry Batman."

Juno followed his train of thought, adding with a grin, "With Batman's hyper-vigilance, even if she did marry him, he'd probably always keep an eye on her—maybe even a hundred eyes."

"Haha."

Adam burst into laughter.

"But..."

Juno suddenly changed the tone, smiling mischievously. "There's another possibility. Batman lost his parents at a young age and values relationships deeply. If \*Amazing Amy\* really managed to marry him, that would mean she gained his trust. With careful planning, she might just manage to outplay him."

While Adam and Juno were chatting during their walk, someone else was talking about him elsewhere.

At a Harvard University book club meeting...

"Adam Duncan's book signing is tomorrow—I'm so excited!"

"Yeah! I absolutely love \*Lord of the Mysteries\*."

"I heard he's super handsome, too!"

"There's going to be a huge crowd tomorrow. Should we go early and line up?"

"Great idea!"

The book club members chatted enthusiastically, especially the female fans. Those who had seen Adam's pictures had stars in their eyes.

In a quiet corner, a long-haired girl with glasses sat silently, blending into the background. Only when everyone had left did she raise her hand slightly and murmur to herself, "I'll go too~"

As she spoke, she forced a smile as if she were still part of the conversation.

At another Harvard book club...

A red-haired girl walked in, holding a well-worn copy of \*Lord of the Mysteries\*.

"The Cthulhu elements are indeed mysterious and eerie. Compared to other Lovecraftian myths, \*Lord of the Mysteries\* is even more vivid and engaging. Adam Duncan is truly a genius."

"He's having a signing event tomorrow—let's all go!"

"..."

Hearing the excited chatter, the red-haired girl froze. After confirming the news, a dazzling smile appeared on her face.