

TV Show 351

Chapter 351: The Title of "Grim Reaper"

Medical Center.

"Got another big surgery waiting for you?"

Alex sneered as he saw Liz rushing toward him.

Even though Liz had bailed him out yesterday, he didn't appreciate it.

Because no matter how things played out, the result was the same—he got humiliated in front of everyone and was hit with severe punishment.

For an intern, every second counts in gaining surgical experience to improve their skills. After all, in a year, they need to pass their exams to officially start their residency training.

But now, he was banned from the OR for two weeks—only allowed to do rectal exams.

And now, that ban had been extended to three weeks.

His progress had been set back way too much.

And Liz?

Not only had she performed open-heart surgery, but Dr. Burke even praised her.

More importantly, Liz and the others were getting close to Adam.

The friend of your enemy is also your enemy.

"Did your gunshot patient have any other wounds? Did you ask him?"

Liz asked urgently.

"Hey! That's my patient!"

Alex snapped, irritated. "I'm a doctor just like you! I know what I'm doing!"

"So you checked?"

Liz's temper flared as well. "Are you sure? Just like you were so sure yesterday that I didn't page you?! If not, then go check right now! If he has an infected wound, the stress response from the gunshot could worsen it. You might end up killing your patient—again!"

Alex froze.

He hadn't asked.

He had been too busy chatting with the guy, trying to build rapport. Who had time to ask about that?

Besides, the guy was Black and believed in pain control—if he wasn't feeling pain, he'd make some just to regain control over it.

Even if Alex had asked, the guy might not have answered.

If he could've handled the gunshot himself, he wouldn't have come to the hospital in the first place.

Then Alex's face changed as he glanced down at the lab report in his hands.

Liz snatched it from him, scanned it quickly, and her expression darkened.

"White blood cell count is extremely high—27,000. Sixteen percent are band neutrophils. That's way beyond a typical stress response."

Beep beep!

Alex's pager went off.

One look at the screen and his face turned black. He had no time to argue with Liz anymore—he turned and sprinted toward the patient's room.

Liz didn't need any more confirmation. Adam had been right—there really was a severe infection.

"Page Dr. Burke! Page Dr. Duncan!"

She shouted to a nurse before running after Alex.

Inside the patient's room.

"What's going on?"

Alex pushed open the door, frowning.

"I'm freezing, Doc. I can't stop shaking."

The Black man was curled up on his side, shivering violently.

No more friendly "bro" or calling Alex by name. Just "doctor."

A clear distinction—he was the patient, and Alex was the doctor responsible for saving his life.

"Doctor, his temperature is rising, and his blood pressure is dropping," the nurse reported.

"Mr. Owens, do you have any other tattoos? Any new ones?"

Liz asked immediately.

"Yeah, on my leg. Just got one recently," Owens replied, his voice trembling.

Liz pulled up his pant leg—and her face changed dramatically.

There, on his calf, was a massive spider tattoo.

But it wasn't just a spider anymore.

It was a rotting spider—decayed and necrotic.

"Oh my God!"

Owens forced himself to look, then let out a horrified yell. "It didn't look this bad this morning!"

"It's severely infected," Alex muttered, then glared at the patient. "Why the hell didn't you say something sooner?"

"It wasn't bad at the time," Owens mumbled, unable to look anymore. He lay back down, trembling.

"What's the situation?"

Adam entered the room.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Alex's expression darkened.

"I paged him," Liz cut in quickly. "Adam predicted this would happen. If he had been Owens' attending physician, this wouldn't have gotten this bad."

"I can handle my own patient!"

Alex shouted.

"Adam, what do we do?"

Liz ignored Alex and turned to Adam as she stepped up to the patient. "Mr. Owens, your infection is serious. Before Dr. Burke gets here, I strongly recommend you let Dr. Duncan take over your case."

"He's just an intern like me!"

Alex scoffed.

"I agree—let Dr. Duncan be my attending physician."

Owens didn't hesitate.

Alex was stunned.

If he had known things were this bad from the start, he would've listened to Dr. Burke's advice and let Adam handle his case.

All that talk about "Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger" and "Only death can make me admit defeat"?

That was just tough talk before facing death.

Now, he could barely breathe, let alone act tough.

Nothing makes you fear death more than standing on its edge.

Loyalty and camaraderie? That was nonsense.

The only thing that mattered now was who could save him.

And Alex clearly wasn't that person.

"Page Dr. Burke!"

"Already did!"

"Page him again!"

"Start antibiotics!"

"The patient is showing signs of multi-organ failure. The secondary infection has led to sepsis. Move him to the ICU now! Get respiratory support ready—prepare epinephrine!"

The moment Owens abandoned Alex for him, Adam stepped in and took charge without hesitation.

He wasn't happy about Owens' earlier attitude, but saving lives—and gaining lifespan points—was Adam's core principle.

To him, Owens was just another patient—an opportunity to gain experience in emergency care and rack up some extra lifespan points.

Even the smallest gains still counted.

Business was business.

Besides, given Owens' condition, even if he survived, he'd probably be crippled.

If he wasn't confined to a hospital bed for the rest of his life, that would already be a win—forget about wrestling or talking big again.

In America, losing your job and income meant that even if you survived, life could still be hell.

There was always talk of "Angels of Death" in medical dramas—nurses or doctors who, either out of extreme compassion or mental instability, secretly ended the suffering of patients who were in unbearable pain.

Of course, in many cases, those patients asked for it themselves—too weak to do it on their own.

One dose of morphine, and it was over.

But that was a serious crime. Few were willing to take such a risk, even out of compassion.

And then there were those with mental disorders—if they decided you wanted to die, you wouldn't have a say in it.

That wasn't a mercy killing. That was a murder spree.

Even truly compassionate "Angels of Death" could eventually break under the pressure, their minds warping over time.

That's why the law forbids doctors from performing euthanasia—because you never know if there's a personal agenda involved.

"Angels of Death" were rare.

If Owens survived but was stuck in a hospital bed, suffering and watching his life crumble, he'd probably start wishing for one.

Alex had a connection with death—but if anyone thought he'd risk his career to be Owens' "angel," they were dreaming.

A Grim Reaper title suited him much better.

Chapter 352: A Cold Farewell

Medical Center

"What's the situation?"

Dr. Burke jogged over quickly, asking with urgency.

"...The patient is now basically stabilized," Adam reported.

"Well done."

Dr. Burke gave Adam a peculiar look.

He had already held this intern in high regard, yet Adam kept surpassing even those expectations.

Even if he had arrived first, he wasn't sure he could have handled things better than Adam.

Was this really just an intern?

Adam's reputation had preceded him. A few years back, when he was a medical intern at the center, Dr. Burke had heard whispers about him.

But he had always assumed Adam's success was due to his connection with Leonard, artificially inflated by others.

Look at Alex, another intern who got in through connections—it was clear what the usual standard of such "connected" interns was.

Yet Adam, also supposedly a beneficiary of nepotism, had somehow raised the bar so high that Alex was left in the dust.

What was once an acceptable level of competence was now glaringly inadequate. The contrast exposed Alex's true abilities, making it impossible for senior doctors to ignore his shortcomings any longer.

Repeatedly defying superior orders, lacking medical ethics, offending patients, and demonstrating subpar professional skills—

Someone like him would have been fired long ago if not for his connection to the hospital director.

But even so, Dr. Burke was done tolerating it.

Yes, the director had influence.

But Dr. Burke was a renowned cardiothoracic surgeon, with his own dignity and reputation to uphold.

Did being the director's protégé mean Alex could keep disregarding his authority?

Even if Alex had been right, it would still be unacceptable. But the problem was, Alex was wrong over and over again.

This couldn't be ignored any longer.

A superior's authority had to be maintained.

"You'll be responsible for Mr. Owens' follow-up care," Dr. Burke instructed after checking the patient.

"Understood."

Adam nodded.

Standing off to the side, Alex looked utterly miserable.

As long as Dr. Burke didn't officially remove him from the case, even if the African American patient verbally requested Adam as his doctor, Alex didn't dare walk away.

Passive resistance was one thing; openly defying a superior was another matter entirely.

If he really dared to do that, he had no doubt Dr. Burke would immediately push for his termination.

And at that point, even the director wouldn't be able to protect him.

Rules were rules.

"What are you still doing here? Done with your rectal exams?" Dr. Burke asked coldly.

Alex turned and left without another word.

He knew he had completely offended Dr. Burke.

There was no point arguing.

Sometimes, you had to admit defeat.

Dr. Burke gave a few more instructions before leaving—after all, as an attending physician, he had a busy schedule.

"Adam, you're amazing," Liz said admiringly.

"You're the amazing one," Adam replied modestly. Since it was their competition break time, he smiled and added, "You just marched right over and took Alex's patient."

"His patient?" Liz scoffed. "Honestly, he should just stick to rectal exams. At least then he wouldn't be endangering lives."

"Adam, you really pulled it off," Cristina and Meredith approached, impressed. "You actually managed to take the patient back."

"Adam, if I ever make a misdiagnosis, promise me you'll secretly correct me," Meredith joked. "It's clear you consider more factors than we do."

"I remember Adam has a degree in psychology," Cristina mused. "Maybe I should get a psychology degree too. Otherwise, even if I encounter the same situation, I wouldn't be able to handle it like Adam did."

"Huh?" Meredith and Liz looked at her.

"Patients lie all the time," Cristina explained. "Take that tattooed masochist, for example. A small tattoo infection—he wouldn't have mentioned it even if you asked because, to him, it's insignificant. Bringing it up would just make him feel embarrassed."

But Adam didn't even ask—he immediately identified the possibility. How? Because he could read the patient's psychological behaviors and quickly deduce the real condition.

That's what makes him so impressive."

"Almost every patient lies," Adam said with a smile.

"Because that's human nature—to highlight strengths and downplay weaknesses. Unless absolutely necessary, most patients won't reveal everything to their doctors."

When patients answer our questions, their responses are already filtered—just like writing a diary.

Of course, in most cases, their descriptions still provide useful information, and we can make reasonable diagnoses based on that.

But the real problem arises when a patient hides critical symptoms or causes of illness, which could lead to serious misdiagnoses.

That's when understanding psychology becomes invaluable—it helps us determine when a patient might be lying during medical consultations."

"That's a skill only the truly exceptional can master," Meredith sighed. "We're already drowning in work as interns—who has time to study psychology on top of that?"

"Exactly," Liz, who had graduated from a regular medical school, strongly agreed.

"You're exhausted?" Cristina shot a side glance at Meredith. "What kind of exhausted? I remember we were classmates at Harvard Medical School."

"..."

Meredith was speechless.

She wasn't lacking in intelligence. If she had been willing to put in the effort, getting a psychology degree wouldn't have been impossible.

But during school, she had been more focused on enjoying life.

Now, as an intern, she was entangled in an emotional mess with a certain "dreamy" attending physician.

Not to mention the nights of headboard banging that left George with a face as dark as charcoal and Liz complaining that she should oil the bed springs.

On top of that, being an intern was already exhausting—how could she not be tired?

As they chatted, George walked over.

"Looks like Alex is in serious trouble!"

"Oh? What happened?" Liz's eyes lit up.

"I just passed by the director's office. Dr. Burke was there, arguing with him. I overheard something about Alex... and the phrase 'encouraged to resign.'"

"It's finally happening," Cristina smirked. "Remember what the director told us during orientation?"

"We started with 20 surgical interns. Eight will transfer to easier departments, five will crack under pressure, and two will be forced to resign," Adam recalled with a smile.

"Looks like Alex might be the first one from our group to be dismissed," Cristina said, grinning.

"Who knows?"

Adam shrugged.

Getting rid of someone with connections wasn't so easy.

After a few more exchanges, the group dispersed.

"You need something?" Adam turned to George with a smile.

"Yeah."

George glanced around cautiously. Seeing no one paying attention, he pulled Adam into a hospital room, shut the door, and closed the blinds...

Chapter 353: If You Can Still Laugh, That's a Good Sign

Inside the hospital room.

"What's going on?"

Adam's expression was somewhat strange.

"I... I need to ask you something."

George hesitated.

"Go ahead."

Adam looked at him.

"I think I might have a skin problem..."

George stammered.

"Oh, boy!"

Adam couldn't help but let out a Sheldon-like exclamation.

He already had a pretty good guess.

George clearly realized that Adam probably knew as well. Blushing, he said, "It looks like a rash. I think I know what it is, but I can't get a close look at it myself, so I'm not sure."

"Take off your pants."

Adam sighed, rubbing his forehead.

He had been about 80% sure before, but now he was 95% certain.

"I think I can just describe it. It's red..."

George hesitated, his hands resting on his waistband, making one last attempt to avoid it.

"If you can describe it and you already suspect what it is, why not just go straight to treatment? Why ask me?"

Adam wasn't too eager to examine him either. With that, he turned to leave.

He needed to wash his hands.

At this moment, he finally understood Sheldon's germophobia and obsessive-compulsive tendencies a little better.

In the world of American TV shows, frequent handwashing and disinfection aren't just the paranoia of a 'crazy person'—they're actually quite necessary. You never know what you might come into contact with.

"Wait."

George reached out to stop Adam.

Adam swiftly dodged him. "Stop!"

George's chubby face turned crimson with embarrassment.

Adam's reaction said it all.

Realizing he had overreacted, Adam reminded himself that this wasn't the response of a professional doctor—it was his past life instincts as an ordinary person, blindly fearing STDs.

"You have two choices: either diagnose yourself, and I leave."

Seeing George's expression, Adam's professional instincts kicked in again, and he softened his tone. "Or, you take off your pants and let me examine it. No matter what it is, early diagnosis and treatment are key."

George hesitated for a moment but ultimately unbuckled his belt, turning his head toward the ceiling while letting Adam examine him.

"So?"

"It looks like syphilis."

Adam recognized it at a glance.

"Whew."

George let out a sigh of relief.

He was sure he hadn't had it before, and given that he had been intimate just last night and was already showing symptoms, it was likely early-stage syphilis.

Treatment was simple: a sufficient dose of penicillin would take care of it. At least it wasn't something as terrifying and incurable as HIV.

"Don't relax just yet."

Adam warned, "This is just a preliminary diagnosis—it's not 100% certain. You need to get tested immediately. A pathogen culture is necessary to screen for all types of gonorrhea. You should know, syphilis isn't the only one out there."

"R-right."

George tensed up again.

"There's an old saying in hospitals: Don't hop on random public buses."

Adam smirked. "So, who gifted you this lovely present?"

"I don't know how this happened..."

George looked distraught. "Olivia... She didn't seem like that kind of person."

"Just her?"

Adam's expression twitched, secretly relieved that he had stuck to his principles.

Olivia was that pretty young nurse who had admired him and even tried to pursue him.

If he hadn't been strict about his own rules, he could have been the one infected.

Hospitals in TV dramas really were chaotic and dangerous.

Looks like Barney might just win that bet after all...

"Of course."

George nodded. "I'm not that kind of guy. If we didn't truly love each other, I wouldn't have done it."

"You sure?"

Adam looked at him strangely.

Even now, he still thought they were in love?

If George had been faithful, then the only logical conclusion was that Olivia... had not been.

"..."

George read the meaning in Adam's eyes and fell silent for a moment before asking, "Adam, what should I do?"

"I already told you—get screened for gonorrhea and start treatment as soon as possible."

Adam frowned.

"I mean Olivia."

George looked conflicted. "How should I deal with her?"

(This part is intentionally obscured in the original text.)

"Do you really have to ask?"

Adam scoffed. "Obviously, you need to find out who else she's been with. He or they—along with her—will all need treatment. And just so you know, whether you tell her or not, I will be reporting this. Otherwise, this could spread, and the entire hospital could turn into a petri dish of disease."

Who knew how many people in the hospital had already been exposed?

Although these infections are primarily transmitted through sexual contact, blood, and saliva, other transmission routes can't be entirely ruled out.

For instance, syphilis-contaminated clothing can still pose a risk.

It's impossible to only play defense forever—you have to take action.

Adam had been living in this environment for a long time, and he needed to ensure safety.

Reporting it to the hospital was the best way to handle the situation: if people were infected, they could get treated; if they weren't, they could take preventive measures. Containing the spread was the best solution.

"No, wait!"

George panicked. "If you report it, I'll be exposed!"

"You really think you can keep it a secret?"

Adam looked at him with pity. "You'll need to go to the lab for the tests, right? Hospital gossip spreads faster than viruses."

"I could do it anonymously."

George protested.

"The lab staff are all seasoned pros."

Adam shook his head. "Your guilty expression alone will give you away. Besides, we're doctors. If we get sick, we get treated. It's not a big deal. It's not like you're the only one."

"That's easy for you to say."

George was still reluctant.

If he had the guts to face this head-on, he wouldn't have dragged Adam into a hospital room for a secret checkup in the first place.

"Well, of course, it's easy for me—I actually practice self-discipline."

Adam couldn't help but chuckle.

"..."

George was at a loss for words.

He had always assumed Adam was a playboy, but now he was the one infected while Adam was totally clean and confident.

That just didn't make sense!

"Alright, I won't report it yet. You have until this afternoon to get tested."

Adam decided after some thought.

"Really? Thanks."

George was overjoyed. He thanked Adam and rushed off to get tested.

Watching George's retreating figure, Adam shook his head.

It wasn't that he was truly looking out for George.

He just knew that, even without his intervention, the moment George got tested, the news would spread like wildfire throughout the hospital. The senior staff would definitely take action.

If, by some chance, they didn't, Adam could report it later.

After all, reporting this kind of thing wouldn't exactly enhance his reputation either.

Sure enough, Adam was right.

That afternoon.

As Adam was washing his hands for the third time, Cristina and the others crowded around, gossiping.

"Have you heard? George has syphilis! Who would've thought our sweet, innocent boy would turn into a playboy and a syphilis poster child? Hahaha!"

"He got lucky."

Adam couldn't help but laugh as well.

Early-stage syphilis was easy to treat—especially since they were in a hospital with plenty of penicillin to wipe it out completely.

If it had been a more severe type of gonorrhea, Cristina and the others—his friends—wouldn't be laughing.

Chapter 354: The Big Moment Arrives

Medical Center

While Adam and the gang were chatting and laughing, George snuck over again, trying to keep a low profile.

"Here comes our playboy," Liz teased. She and George were tight—bestie-level tight. The kind where she could brush her teeth and chat while he showered, no big deal. And the closer you are, the harder you laugh when your buddy screws up.

George's face darkened, especially when he spotted Meredith giggling at him from the side.

"Adam, I need your help with something," he said, sounding desperate.

"Is this about the shot?" Adam asked, shaking his head. "You should ask Meredith or Liz for that. They're your roommates and BFFs, after all."

"I'll help you, George," Meredith chimed in with a cheeky grin.

"Me too!" Liz added, egging him on.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Cristina laughed. "Let's get it done!"

Before George could protest, Liz grabbed him and dragged him toward a nearby patient room.

"Why are you all following me?" George grumbled as Liz half-pushed, half-pulled him inside. When he saw Adam and the others pile in after them, he lost it. "Out! Get out!"

"Quit whining and drop your pants already!" Cristina said, grinning.

Liz didn't waste time—she shoved George onto the exam table face-first and yanked his pants down in one swift move.

"Cute little tushy," she cooed.

"Hmm, not bad," Meredith added.

"Seriously, it's like a baby's," Cristina chimed in.

The three of them officially turned into a pack of shameless hooligans.

"Don't look at me!" George pleaded, shooting Adam a pitiful glance.

Adam stood there, arms crossed, trying not to laugh. "If you don't want it to get infected or end up losing your mind later, just let them do it."

"I've always fantasized about being in a room with you three, doing all sorts of unspeakable things," George muttered, giving up the fight as Liz jabbed a needle into each cheek. Wincing in pain and embarrassment, he added, "But reality's clearly way more exciting than my fantasies."

"Hold off on the excitement for a sec," Adam said, cutting in with a grin. "Did you talk to Olivia yet?"

"Yeah, I did," George replied, yanking his pants back up and glaring at the trio still cracking up. "She didn't say a word—just looked at me and bolted. Like I'm the one who gave it to her. Do you guys think I'm misjudging her here?"

"Don't overthink it," Adam said, shaking his head. "Nobody wants to admit they're the one who passed it on. Her reaction's pretty normal. Let's just hope word spreads and the hospital does something about it. Who knows how many people could end up with this?"

"Well, Cristina and I are definitely in the clear," Liz said confidently. "One perk of not messing around with guys."

Cristina's smile froze for a split second.

"I'm fine too," Meredith huffed. "I've only been with Shepherd..."

"But can you be sure Shepherd's only been with you?" Liz shot back, her tongue sharp as ever. "He's Mr. Dreamy, after all."

"So you're saying the more charming someone is, the more likely they are to catch it?" Meredith asked, sneaking a glance at Adam.

"Unless they keep it in their pants," Liz clarified.

"Shepherd's pretty good about that..." Meredith started, but Liz wasn't letting it go, and the two launched into a full-on bickering match.

Beep-beep.

Beep-beep.

Beep-beep.

George's pager went off. Then everyone else's followed suit, buzzing like crazy.

"Here we go," Adam said, glancing at his pager. The message said to head to the admin meeting room. He smirked knowingly.

"George, you're really in for it now," Liz teased, checking her own pager and joining the others in ribbing him again.

The group headed to the meeting room, laughing and chatting. Along the way, more people joined them—clearly, everyone had gotten the memo.

Conference Room

A big crowd of surgeons, nurses, and staff filled the room. Richard, the Chief of Surgery, stood there with his arms crossed, his face grim as he scanned the group. "Three surgical interns, four residents, and six nurses have tested positive for syphilis," he said, each word landing like a hammer. "And that's just what we know so far."

"Every year, over 70,000 new cases pop up. If it's not treated early, syphilis can lead to blindness, insanity, even death."

Patricia, Richard's no-nonsense admin assistant—an older lady—sat nearby and picked up where he left off. "So treat it ASAP."

"If you've had unprotected, uh, fun with anyone in surgery—or honestly, anyone in this hospital—get yourself checked immediately!" Richard barked, his expression icy. "This isn't a suggestion."

Olivia and George locked eyes for a second before both turned away, fuming.

Some people shifted nervously. Others, confident they were safe, smirked to themselves. Partly because the whole thing was kind of hilarious, and partly because of what was on Patricia's desk: a banana and a square little packet. Everyone knew what was coming next.

And sure enough, it didn't disappoint.

Richard rolled his eyes, looking defeated. "Patricia's going to demonstrate safe, uh, practices for you all." With that, he stormed out.

You'd think doctors and nurses wouldn't bat an eye at this stuff—it's routine, right? But that's exactly why Richard was mortified. His team knew better, and yet here they were, screwing up so bad it led to a full-blown outbreak. Talk about a hit to his reputation.

Now he could only hope the numbers didn't climb too high—and that maybe the internal medicine folks would mess up even worse. Misery loves company, after all.

"When the time comes," Patricia said, picking up the banana and the packet, "gentlemen, you know when that is. Carefully tear open the wrapper..."

The lesson wrapped up, and everyone scattered—some to line up for tests, others to get back to work.

"Adam, you finally came to see me!" Barney exclaimed from his wheelchair as Adam pushed him along. "Guess how many I've hooked up with already? You'll never guess. Not one, not two, not even three—six! Yeah!" He flashed a proud six with his fingers, grinning smugly. "In just two weeks, I'm almost done. You're toast, man."

"Impressive!" Adam said, giving him a thumbs-up.

"You're jealous, huh?" Barney beamed, then glanced around. "Wait, where are we going?"

"To get you checked out," Adam said with a smile.

"Checked for what?" Barney asked, then his eyes lit up. He leaned back, nodding toward the long line of people. "Look over there—one of my six is in that line. Cute, right? And that one too! Oh, and her! Wait... why are they all lining up?"

Before Adam could answer, Barney's face lit up even more. "Is this some kind of hospital group party? Nice! Adam, high-five me!"

"Sorry, can't do it," Adam said, shaking his head.

"Why not?" Barney pouted.

Adam handed him a colorful syphilis info pamphlet. "Take a look at this first."

"Noooo!!!"

Moments later, Barney's scream of despair echoed through the halls, loud enough to shatter the cosmos and break the fourth wall.

Chapter 355: I Can't Shake the Feeling You're Bullying Him

Medical Center.

Nighttime.

Ted, Matthew, and Lily had already rushed over after hearing the news.

"Eww!"

"That's so gross!"

"Get it away from me!"

They flipped through the stack of gonorrhea symptom pamphlets Adam had deliberately left in Barney's hospital room, and every single one of them felt their stomach turn.

"Barney, you okay?" Ted asked, his voice full of concern as he looked at Barney lying motionless on the bed, his eyes blank and unfocused.

Ever since Barney broke his leg and ended up in the hospital, then made that bet with Adam, he'd been pouring all his energy into this place. The old Barney Stinson—the one who'd show up at Ted's place every night yelling "Legendary!" and begging him to "suit up," only to get brushed off—had been gone for a while now. Ted had to admit, he missed him.

You don't appreciate what you have until it's gone, right?

Back then, Barney was always chasing Ted's approval, shamelessly trying to edge out Matthew as Ted's best friend. He was way too pushy about it, and Ted would half-heartedly go along, throwing in the occasional eye-roll or complaint. It was basically the classic "goddess and backup guy" dynamic flipped on its head.

Now, with "backup guy" Barney hitting a rough patch in his "love life" and sulking, "goddess" Ted figured it was time to step up a little. Time to throw Barney a bone, let him feel some warmth from the "goddess," and keep him happily in his backup role—no climbing any higher branches.

"I'm fine," Barney mumbled, his voice shaky.

"I'll go get Adam," Lily said, noticing Barney's off vibe. She turned and left the room to track him down.

"This is all Adam's fault!" Ted grumbled. "If he hadn't roped Barney into that stupid bet, Barney wouldn't have caught this... whatever it is, and he wouldn't be so wrecked right now."

"Let's not go that far," Matthew countered, sticking up for Adam. "I don't think Adam knew this would happen. He just wanted to teach Barney a lesson with the bet. I mean, last time Barney joined that Death Baby Car Race, two innocent bystanders—breadwinners for their families—ended up dead."

"Couldn't he have picked a different way to punish him?" Ted shot back. Desperate to save his backup guy, he refused to pin any blame on Barney, instead aiming all his frustration at Adam—the "rival" stealing his sidekick. "He's always making bets like this. It's too much."

"If not this, then what?" Adam's voice cut in from the doorway.

Ted glanced over, a little guilty.

Adam strolled in, decked out in a white lab coat, smirking faintly at Ted. "What else would actually stick with Barney and make him think twice? Go ahead, name something. Enlighten me."

"..."

Ted froze, at a loss for words.

Barney was a reckless mess—nothing seemed to faze him except this.

"Adam, this thing Barney's got—is he really okay?" Matthew asked, steering the conversation elsewhere.

"Well, it's fine... but also not fine," Adam said, his tone turning serious as he dropped the smirk.

"What?!" Lily gasped. "What do you mean, 'not fine'?"

"Barney got lucky this time," Adam said flatly. "It's just a single strain of syphilis, and since he's here at the hospital, we can treat it. But what if it'd been something worse? Full-blown gonorrhea, a mixed infection, or even HIV? You saw the pamphlets, right? You can picture how bad that gets."

Lily, Ted, and Matthew all shuddered as those pamphlet images flashed through their minds.

"No way it's that dramatic," Ted said, unable to resist pushing back. "What are the odds?"

"Dramatic? Bad luck?" Adam scoffed. "Barney's been hooking up every night for years, working his way through half of New York. You call that dramatic? Even if his luck held out at first, with that kind of volume, catching something was inevitable. You should be saying it's dramatic how lucky he's been to only get syphilis this late in the game. What, you really think Barney's the son of the luck goddess or something? Come on."

Without some main-character plot armor, Barney's lifestyle would've landed him gonorrhea—or AIDS—ages ago, no question.

Back in the day, Barney saw himself as some unbeatable supervillain, living it up without a care, totally untouchable. But then he ran into Adam, who—playing off the trope of medical staff getting screwed over in TV dramas—shattered Barney's villain halo. And bam, he got hit.

Ted didn't have a comeback for that.

New York's a city of excess, and Barney's one-night-stand habits lined up perfectly with the kind of crowd that's prone to picking up nasty stuff. They'd never really thought about it before, but now that Adam pointed it out? Yeah, it was terrifying to consider. Barney really had been dodging bullets like some blessed child of fortune.

"Ted, you should be on my side here," Adam said, clapping a hand on Ted's shoulder with a knowing grin. "With Barney's track record, whether you two were on the same page before or not, you're definitely in the same boat now. If Barney's got it, you could too. You want that?"

"No!" Ted yelled, practically jumping out of his skin in panic. "I mean, no way am I in the same boat as Barney. We've got the Bro Code!"

Noticing Adam's smirk after his outburst, Ted felt deeply offended and scrambled to explain.

"Wow, you still buy into Barney's Bro Code?" Adam said, shaking his head in mock amazement. "Okay, fine, let's say Barney sticks to it. But doesn't the Bro Code only cover current girlfriends and stuff? You two could still end up in the same mess. So, I'm thinking you should side with me. What do you say?"

"Ted, I think Adam's right," Lily chimed in first. "Barney can't keep playing around like this, or he's bound to catch something disgusting. This syphilis thing is a wake-up call."

"Yeah," Matthew agreed, nodding. "If you guys could just find your own Lily like I did and settle into a happy life, wouldn't that be better?"

Ted wavered. Lily and Matthew's engagement had already sparked some envy in him last time, pushing him to find his own "Lily." He wasn't exactly a fan of Barney's wild lifestyle either.

"So, what do we do?" Lily asked with a smile. After hanging out with Ted for so long and sharing so many firsts, she could read his thoughts with one look.

"Keep an eye on him," Adam said, grinning. "For the first three weeks, he'll need a solid dose of penicillin once a week. In theory, he'll be fine after that, but he'll need follow-ups at three months, six months, and then every six months for three years. For at least the first six months, he shouldn't be doing anything... unmentionable. You don't want him spreading it to someone else, right? So, you guys need to watch him closely."

Lily, Ted, and Matthew exchanged sympathetic glances at Barney but nodded in agreement. It was basic human decency—they couldn't say no.

"Barney, with all this going on, let's call off our bet," Adam said, turning to the still-dazed Barney. He plopped a crown on Barney's head. "You finished most of it in two weeks anyway, so you win. Here's the crown I owe you—I'm putting it on you. You're the best!"

He flashed two big thumbs-up.

"..."

Everyone stared, speechless. They couldn't shake the feeling that Adam was messing with Barney—again. And not for the first time...

Chapter 356: Angry Birds

Saying Goodbye to Lily and the Crew

Outside the Ward

Adam was feeling pretty good as he left the room. Every time Barney's outrageous antics got under his skin, he couldn't resist the urge to mess with him a little. Sure, the payback might come with a delay, but it always showed up eventually.

There's nothing like the thrill of roasting someone—and keeping it going? Even better. That's just how it works.

In the Hallway

"Huh, surgery tonight?" Adam asked, spotting Meredith heading toward the OR.

"Nope," she replied, shaking her head.

"Come on!" Adam threw his hands up. "What, you think I'm gonna steal your case?"

"That's not it," Meredith said, glancing at him. "I just... can't tell you."

With that, she sidestepped him and kept walking. A few steps later, she turned back with a smirk. "And yeah, even if I could tell you, I wouldn't!"

Last time, she and her boyfriend, Dr. Shepherd, had planned a surgery together—practically a date night in bed plotting it out—only for Adam to swoop in and snag it. She wasn't about to let that slide.

"Another one of Shepherd's surgeries?" Adam called after her, grinning.

Meredith didn't even turn around—just flipped him off with both hands and kept going.

"Guess it's a secret surgery," Adam mused to himself.

Some big shots or VIPs liked to keep things hush-hush, and this had that vibe all over it. He thought about it for a sec, then shrugged it off. Sure, he loved cutting, but he wasn't dying for this one. Secrets usually meant trouble, and he wasn't in the mood to stir any up.

Locker Room

Adam was changing when George and Alex walked in.

"Dude, you should be grateful," Alex said, dead serious as he spouted his twisted logic. "Syphilis is probably the best thing that's ever happened to you. Think about it—before, all the girls thought you were gay. Now? You're a total player in their eyes."

"They're calling me Syphilis Boy!" George snapped back, clearly not amused.

"Exactly—boy!" Alex grinned, leaning into his punk vibe. "Not girl, not gay. That's a win. Plus, Syphilis Boy? It's like Superboy, just with a little extra baggage."

"Oh yeah? And what about you?" George fired back. "What are you, huh? The Scoop Master? Backdoor Alex?"

"Watch your mouth!" Alex's face darkened, his voice dropping to a threatening growl. "Or I'll show you what a real Scoop Master looks like!"

George shrank back, avoiding Alex's glare. Honestly, it's no wonder Liz and the girls treated him like their gay bestie. The guy had zero edge—too soft, too easy to push around. He couldn't hold his own against Liz and the crew, let alone stand up to a bulldog like Alex. He didn't dare say another word.

SLAM!

Adam shut his locker hard, making his presence known.

George's face lit up. "Adam! You're here too? Heading home?"

"Yup," Adam said, shooting a sideways glance at Alex, who looked like he'd swallowed a lemon. "Hey, any idea what Meredith's up to tonight?"

"No clue," George said, blinking. "Haven't heard anything."

"Alright," Adam nodded, letting it go. It was just a casual question anyway.

"Catch you tomorrow, then."

"Wait up—I'll walk out with you," George said, fumbling with his locker. He didn't even bother changing out of his scrub shirt—just threw on his jacket and followed Adam out, ignoring Alex's smug, mocking stare.

Outside the Hospital Doors

"George!" Olivia called out, stopping him in his tracks.

"You two chat," Adam said with a grin, stepping away.

"About before..." George started, hesitant.

Olivia cut him off. "George, I just want you to know..." She paused, choosing her words. "That night at 2 a.m., it was totally spontaneous. I was kind of seeing someone else at the time. I didn't expect to fall for you so hard. But when I realized it, I broke it off with him right away."

"Someone else?" George frowned. "Who?"

Olivia went quiet.

"It's not Adam, is it?" George's head whipped around to where Adam was still lingering by his car. "I remember you had a thing for him!"

"No, it's not," Olivia said, her face clouding over.

George mentally kicked himself. If it was Adam, why would Olivia dump him for George? He knew all too well what it felt like to pine after someone who didn't feel the same.

"Sorry," he said quickly.

"It's fine," Olivia said with a bitter little laugh. "Now that I think about it, Dr. Duncan's got the right idea—never dating coworkers. Smart move."

"So who was the guy?" George steered the conversation back on track.

Olivia hesitated, then dropped a name.

"Alex?" George blinked, his face screaming You've got to be kidding me. When he saw she wasn't joking, his voice shot up. "Alex?!"

He flashed back to earlier—Alex mocking him over the syphilis thing, acting all high and mighty. And now it turns out Alex was the real source?

A wildfire of rage exploded inside George.

"*ALEX!!!!*"

He spun around and bolted back toward the hospital.

"George!" Olivia yelled, startled by his reaction. She took off after him.

Meanwhile, Adam—who'd been eavesdropping from a distance—couldn't help but chuckle. Talk about a plot twist. But when he thought about it, it kind of made sense. Alex was a player through and through. The fact that he didn't line up for testing? Either he already knew he had it and shot himself up with penicillin, or... well, there wasn't really another explanation.

Alex had been playing the blame game like a pro, and even Adam hadn't caught the hypocrisy in the moment. Shaking his head, he decided not to head home just yet and jogged after them. Judging by George's fury, this was about to get wild. As George's buddy, he had to back him up... not just watch the drama unfold like some popcorn-munching bystander... right?

Back in the Hallway

Alex, freshly changed, strutted out—just as George came charging at him like a runaway train.

"*ALEX!!!!*" George roared, launching himself into a full-on tackle. He slammed Alex to the ground, rearing back his fist and swinging it straight at Alex's face. "You're the one who gave me syphilis, you jerk!!!"

Alex hadn't seen this coming—not from soft little George. Caught off guard, he took a solid punch to the eye. But he'd wrestled enough to recover fast. Blocking George's wild swings with his arms, he glared up, ready to hit back hard.

"George, chill!"

Just as Alex swung, George suddenly floated backward, dodging the punch perfectly. Alex squinted with his good eye—and nearly lost it when he saw why.

Adam stood there, holding George back, playing the peacemaker. But the glee in Adam's eyes? Blinding. He was loving every second of this.

Chapter 357: There's Only One Truth

Medical Center.

The hallway.

With all the commotion, it didn't take long for a crowd of nosy onlookers to gather.

Especially after George let out that ambiguous, booming yell—it had everyone's eyes glinting with juicy speculation.

"What's going on?"

"George caught syphilis from Alex!"

"What? You're kidding, right?"

"Syphilis spreads mostly through, uh, you-know-what—and the unprotected kind, no less. If George got it from Alex, doesn't that mean..."

"Uh-huh, you get it now, right? What kind of protection would they even need? Of course it's the no-holds-barred, unprotected you-know-what! Otherwise, how do you explain why, even with all the 'true love' talk in the gay scene, the chaos and STD rates are way higher than with straight couples?"

"Heh, Durex must hate them. If everyone followed their lead, condom companies would go bankrupt!"

"Hahaha!"

"We all knew George was gay, but Alex? Never saw that coming!"

"What's so surprising? A playboy like Alex? He's always been the type to swing both ways—guys, girls, whatever. If he wanted to try it, you think George would say no?"

"Yeah, makes sense. Think about it—Alex was originally punished with a week of latrine duty, but now it's stretched to two weeks, three weeks, maybe even permanent. Doesn't that strike you as weird?"

"What are you getting at? He's being punished because he keeps pissing off Dr. Burke

"That's the obvious take—or what Alex wants you to think. But look at this mess now. Doesn't the truth just hit you in the face?"

"Wait, are you saying Alex actually likes latrine duty, so he's been deliberately ticking off Dr. Burke to drag out the punishment?"

"Pfft!"

"Don't laugh—okay, fine, laugh, but not in my face!"

"Sorry, I can't help it!"

"..."

"Look, maybe the first punishment was an accident. But after that? Unless he's an idiot or genuinely into it, why else would a lowly intern keep provoking Dr. Burke over and over again? That takes some serious guts!"

"Right? He's not dumb—he couldn't be a doctor if he was. So what's he after? He knows messing with Dr. Burke will get him punished, yet he keeps doing it..."

"Exactly! Peel back the surface, look at all the evidence, rule out the other options, and no matter how ridiculous it sounds, there's only one truth left: He loves latrine duty. He went from straight, to bi, and now he's diving headfirst into full-on gay territory with no turning back. Or maybe this is the real Alex all along. Like a lot of closet cases, he couldn't face it at first, but now he's free—finally brave enough to be his true self."

"Whoa, that... actually tracks."

"Impressive! With logic like that, you could totally do diagnostic work. Maybe you're the next Dr. House!"

"Heh, no big deal. I just tossed out some casual reasoning. It's not even hard—the evidence is so obvious it's practically blinding. I couldn't ignore it if I tried!"

"..."

George's one loud outburst had been twisted into "the only truth" by a bunch of self-proclaimed logic geniuses. Alex's supposed emotional journey and his tangled love-hate saga with George were being unraveled bit by bit in the gossip mill.

Back in the East, a sage taught the art of divination to interpret the heavens and earth. Over here? The crowd was using it to decode "freedom and love." Talk about a waste of potential.

"Asshole!"

Alex was already fuming, and the not-so-subtle whispers from the onlookers weren't helping. Every word rang clear as day in his ears, and he couldn't take it anymore. Clenching his fists, he charged forward.

"Back off, Alex!" Adam called out, raising a hand to stop him.

"Go to hell!"

Seeing Adam block his path, Alex swung a fist straight at his face. Compared to George, who'd landed a punch on him earlier, it was this face he despised more.

He loathed it with every fiber of his being.

"Ahh!"

"Dr. Duncan, watch out!"

The moment Alex switched targets, a chorus of gasps erupted from the female onlookers. Their perfectly synced screams threw the guys in the crowd off their gossip game for a second.

Do you have to be that coordinated? What are you, a cheerleading squad?

"Hit him hard!"

"Yeah, right in the face!"

"He's still smirking at them—unbelievable!"

"Still playing cool? Pound him harder!"

"Mess him up so bad even a plastic surgeon can't fix it—let's see if they still swoon then!"

The male onlookers exchanged glances, united by a shared goal. In that instant, their silent eye contact spoke volumes—pure, unfiltered resentment toward Adam.

Adam totally got where their grudge came from. Nine years since he'd crossed into this world, he was used to it by now.

Yep!

In that split second, with a fist flying toward him, Adam not only had the presence of mind to flash a dazzling smile at his female supporters, but he also had the bandwidth to clock the mental meltdown of his male colleagues.

Why? Simple.

Alex's punch was "too slow."

Back when his IQ shot past 180 and he hit super-genius territory, Adam had a fleeting moment where the world seemed to slow down in his eyes. It passed quickly, and he brushed it off. But now? He knew it wasn't an illusion.

His perception had genuinely leveled up.

When he focused—whether by choice or reflex—his brain kicked into overdrive. His thoughts sped up, and paired with his already above-average reflexes, it created a kind of bullet-time effect.

It wasn't that Alex's fist was slow. Adam's mind was just that fast.

Think of Rajesh's scavenger hunt in *The Big Bang Theory*. The puzzles stumped most geniuses for a bit, but super-genius Sheldon? He'd glance at them and spit out the answer instantly. Why? His brain processed everything at warp speed.

Adam's mental hardware was on that same tier now. And unlike Sheldon—who'd open a door, take a deep breath, and call it "exercise"—Adam's muscle speed was no slouch either.

Sure, with his current abilities, he could track a bullet's path, but his human-level speed still couldn't dodge it outright—unless he saw it coming and reacted before it was fired.

Alex's fist, though? That wasn't a high-velocity bullet. It was just a regular punch, and to Adam—who could semi-dodge a bullet—it was laughably slow.

"I'm just trying to break up the fight," Adam said with a grin, sidestepping Alex's swing by a hair's breadth. "Why're you coming after the peacemaker?"

"Because it's you I want to hit!"

Alex threw another punch, but it missed again. Staring at Adam's smirking face right in front of him, his rage boiled over. Ignoring a bewildered George, he went full berserk, swinging wildly at Adam.

He didn't even graze his shirt.

"What are you two doing?"

The hospital's big boss finally showed up—Dr. Burke, drawn by the chaos.

"Stop it!"

Alex was too far gone to listen.

"Dr. Burke said stop!"

Adam dodged another swing, then grabbed Alex from behind, pinning him firmly against the wall.

"What's going on here?" Dr. Burke demanded, his face dark with anger.

Adam explained the situation, backed up by a flurry of female colleagues chiming in with details. It didn't take long for Dr. Burke to piece it all together.

"You again!"

Dr. Burke glared at Alex, still pinned to the wall. He couldn't believe this scandal—potentially a black mark on surgery, or even the whole hospital—might've been sparked by Alex of all people.

He'd suggested to the surgical chief before that they push Alex out, but the chief shot it down. Now? He couldn't wait to see what the chief—humiliated by this mess—would say about it.

With that thought, Dr. Burke gave Alex a cold, thin smile.

Chapter 358: The Devil's in the Details

Medical Center

"Dr. Duncan, let him go," Dr. Burke said, tilting his head toward Adam.

Adam nodded and released his grip.

Alex rubbed his face where it'd scraped against the wall, turning to glare at Adam. But when he caught Dr. Burke's icy smirk, the bravado he'd had a minute ago deflated instantly.

Back in his wrestling days, Alex lived by the rule that the bigger fist wins. Just now, Adam had pinned him with one hand, and despite swinging like a madman, Alex hadn't even grazed Adam's shirt. The message was clear—Adam was on the winning side of that rule. Plus, Dr. Burke was the big boss, and Alex wasn't dumb enough to challenge his wrath.

And just like that, the chaos fizzled out.

"Nice one, George!" Liz said, slinging an arm around him after the crowd dispersed, her tone half-praise, half-tease.

"I don't wanna talk about it," George muttered, his face stiff.

He'd heard all the gossip from the onlookers—same as Alex had—and now he was starting to regret it. Not one person questioned the story; they all acted like it was obvious.

"Damn it!" he growled under his breath. Why had he blurted out something so easy to twist like that?

"Chill out," Liz said, trying to smooth things over. "You landed a solid punch on Alex. Everyone knows you're a man now."

Cristina, lounging nearby, couldn't resist a jab.

George whipped his head around, glaring at her.

"Alright, knock it off," Liz said, switching gears. "Think Alex is getting canned this time?"

"Who knows?" Cristina said with a shrug. "Burke's seriously pissed, though."

"But do you guys think Alex is really what they're saying?" Liz's gossip radar pinged again. "I mean, how else does he have the guts to pull that stunt?"

"Ask George," Cristina quipped, stabbing him with another verbal dagger. "He'd know best."

George exploded, and if Liz hadn't held him back, he'd have lunged at Cristina right then and there.

"Adam, what do you think?" Liz asked, calming George down with a few quick moves before turning to Adam.

"Hard to say," Adam said, shaking his head with a grin. "A guy like Alex, who's always out playing the field? It's not a stretch he swings both ways. But to say he's out there picking fights with Burke on purpose, playing the Scoop Master? That's a bit of a leap."

"Then why'd he do it?" Liz pressed, puzzled.

"Simple—his personality," Adam said, shrugging. "He can't control himself."

Anyone with a shred of self-control wouldn't tank their career like that, let alone keep doubling down on the chaos.

"Come on, let's hit Joe's Bar and celebrate," Liz suggested.

"Nah, I've got stuff to do," Adam declined politely.

Lately, he'd been pouring a ton of energy into studying math. It's a vast ocean of knowledge, and even with a brain on par with Sheldon or Paige, Adam knew he couldn't catch up to them without years of grind. Those two had been at it for over a decade with their genius-level hardware, and they never stopped.

Adam's schedule was brutal—13-hour shifts on a 5-6-6 rotation. Factor in a couple hours of random downtime, and he's left with 9 hours. Even with his "show-off" stamina, he still needed 3 hours of sleep to function. That left him 6 hours a day—barely half the time Sheldon or Paige could dedicate to studying.

If knowledge didn't have its limits and bottlenecks, Adam figured he'd never catch them in a lifetime. Luckily, he wasn't aiming to outdo them—just to speak Paige's language. Plus, he wasn't starting from scratch; he had a solid foundation. With a few years of effort, he'd get there. And since his IQ was still climbing, it might even take less time than he thought.

Sure, hanging out with people matters, but compared to leveling up his own skills? That's gotta come first. Besides, constant group outings were for tight-knit squads—like the Friends crew, the How I Met Your Mother gang, or the Big Bang Theory bunch. Adam wasn't here to form a doctor BFF club; he just wanted good coworker vibes.

Cristina, Liz, Meredith, George—they all had their quirks. Even if they were as chill as Chandler or Monica, Adam wouldn't dive in like that. Unlike those sitcom pals, he and this crew were colleagues first, friends second—maybe besties way down the line. Friendship's simple; coworkers? Messy. Competition's a massive divide.

That said, it's not the worst part. Intern year's just 12 months—after that, they'd split into specialty residencies. Different departments, less friction. The real killer issue? When a close friend asks for help, you say yes. But what if that favor screws your career? Do you still say yes?

Take a simple example: that time Cristina and Liz broke Burke's orders to keep a crash victim alive for the Chief's VIP heart transplant patient. If they'd asked Adam to back them up, what then? Say no, and

they'd hold a grudge, even if they didn't say it. Say yes? No chance—he couldn't afford even a hint of that risk.

Or how about this: the hospital's strict 5-6-6 rule was in place, but Cristina and the gang ignored it to cram in more learning. For most doctors, that's normal—even their uptight boss, Dr. Bailey, turned a blind eye. She'd come up the same way, genuinely believing interns and residents should live at the hospital.

One slip leads to two, two to three. Two months into internship, and they'd already racked up at least three rule-breaking stunts. In that kind of mess, Adam figured keeping some distance was the smart move.

Distance makes things prettier, right?

Turning down a bestie feels personal—it stings, dents the bond. But a coworker saying no? If it's fair, consistent, and not aimed at anyone specific, they'd just see Adam as "upright." After the initial awkwardness, they might even respect him for it.

The devil's in the details, after all.

After parting ways with them, Adam headed back to his apartment. He scrubbed his hands a few times—gotta kill those hospital germs—then sank into a hot bath. With a math book in hand, he let his mind drift into the cosmic mysteries of the universe, soaking in both the water and the knowledge.

Chapter 359: Who's the Real Doctor Here?

The next day.

Medical Center.

Green Clinic.

"Adam, you're on rounds today," said resident physician Sydney, assigning the task.

"Got it," Adam replied with a nod.

"There's definitely gonna be some good cases today," bald Chris muttered under his breath.

"No case beats mine," chubby white guy Stu said with a sleazy grin. "Plastic surgery's got a breast augmentation lined up today. It's a small step for me, but a giant leap for some Hollywood starlet's happiness."

"You're so into it, why don't you just get your girlfriend an extra one while you're at it?" Chris teased. "Bigger and more— you'd be in heaven."

"Great idea!" Stu didn't get mad; his eyes lit up instead. He rubbed his double chin, thought for a second, then clapped his hands in delight. "Put the extra one right in the middle. Then..."

He stretched out both hands, mimicking some crude move straight out of a cheesy comedy, his head bobbing side to side. The whole vibe was so skeezy that everyone winced, promptly scattering to avoid dealing with the over-the-top creep.

Sure enough, once rounds started, Adam saw Chris wasn't wrong. There was a solid case today.

"Give me the rundown," Leonard said as he arrived for work and joined the rounds, nodding at Adam.

"17-year-old female, admitted for nonstop bleeding after a root canal. She's showing heart murmurs linked to a fever. Antibiotics brought her temperature back to normal," Adam reported.

"Your diagnosis?" Leonard asked.

"She might need a heart valve replacement," Adam said. "But since she's showing hemophilia symptoms, we should add a clotting test to see if she can handle blood thinners and an artificial valve."

"Good call. Contact her parents and get the tests started," Leonard instructed.

"My parents are here at the hospital," the girl piped up, her tone dripping with sass. "Probably at the cafeteria right now. My weird dad's obsessed with the hospital buffet."

"Alright, reach out to them," Leonard said with a nod before heading off.

Adam got in touch with the girl's parents and set up her tests. Time flew by, and soon it was noon.

Hospital cafeteria.

The crew gathered around for lunch as usual.

"Why's it so quiet?" Liz asked, jutting her chin toward Alex, who was sitting alone at a table with no one daring to join him.

Normally, news zipped through the hospital like wildfire—especially after last night's bombshell. Once word got out that Alex was basically Patient Zero in this syphilis mess (think Kung Fu Panda-style "master of offense and defense"), anyone infected despised him. Those who dodged the bullet kept their distance. Even the few who shared his reckless vibe and wouldn't mind hanging out were too paranoid about people assuming they'd been "conquered" by him.

So there he was, Alex, hogging a whole table to himself, totally isolated. His nickname had evolved from "jerk" and "demon" to straight-up "trash." Vivid, loaded, and right on the nose.

"Heard the chief's tied up with something and won't be around for a few days," Christina said, always in the know. "Dr. Burke can't exactly go over the chief's head to the dean, so it's stalled out."

"Lucky break for him," Adam couldn't help but remark.

Stuff like this often fizzled out if it got delayed long enough.

"Come on, guys, don't be like that. We all started together," Meredith chimed in. She'd pulled an all-nighter on a surgery, followed by some quality time with her "McDreamy," leaving her hormones perfectly balanced and her mood sky-high. She was all about spreading the good vibes today and couldn't resist sticking up for Alex. "He's one of us. Yeah, he's got issues, but I believe there's more to him than the shallow, cold front he puts up..."

"Heh," Adam let out a snort, unable to hold it in.

"What's so funny?" Meredith shot him an annoyed look.

"Your speech—it's hilarious," Adam said, shaking his head with a grin. "What's next? You gonna say he's only shallow and cold because he had an unhappy childhood?"

"..." Meredith blinked, caught off guard, but nodded anyway. "Yeah, that's exactly what I think. It's not weird—I get it. I've always been a handful too, but look at me now, I turned out fine. People grow. We should give others some slack..."

"Heh," Adam chuckled again, cutting her off.

"Now what?" Meredith's face soured.

"I thought you were joking," Adam said, genuinely surprised.

"Which part sounds like a joke?" she snapped, frowning.

"All of it," Adam replied, still smiling. "'People grow, we should give others slack'? Sure, it sounds nice—real feel-good, chicken-soup-for-the-soul stuff. But don't forget, we're doctors. We hold patients' lives in our hands. If your 'growth' comes at the cost of a patient dying when they shouldn't have, why should they pay with their life just so you can heal from your sad little childhood? Who's the doctor here, and who's the patient?"

Say that to a patient or their family, and you'd get decked.

Part of why med school requires a bachelor's degree is to set a bar—keep out anyone too young or emotionally immature. Then you've got four years of school, plus seven years of residency, all to hone your skills and drill in the mindset of sticking to protocol. The goal? Minimize the chance of a patient suffering because of your personal baggage.

If you can't manage that, why should anyone pay you to treat them? If they're shelling out cash just to die pointlessly, they might as well skip the doctor and pray to God instead.

Meredith's words sounded warm and fuzzy, but her perspective was totally skewed.

Doctors do need room to grow—nobody's perfect, not even attendings. Mistakes happen. But some mistakes you just can't make. Some you can't forgive. Otherwise, what's the point of laws?

Take Alex. First off, the guy's got no ethics—telling an old lady she deserves to die, calling a tumor-ridden girl a disgusting freak who had it coming. Is that something a doctor should say? Hell, is that something a person should say? Then he's been negligent twice, nearly killing patients, and just laughs it off afterward with zero remorse.

And this guy gets a pass because of an "unhappy childhood" and a "fake" shallow, cold exterior? Give me a break.

Fake or not, doesn't matter! Like that old saying goes: "We don't care what you say, only what you do." Cure patients, and they'll thank you even if you're a sarcastic jerk. Fail at that and play the cold card? That's not an act—that's real. That's a problem.

If you've got a problem, get help. Don't use patients' lives as your personal therapy tool.

Then again, Adam remembered Meredith once dozed off and punctured a patient's heart—talk about a freak accident. So maybe today it's Alex, but tomorrow it could be her. Birds of a feather, right? Better to stay forgiving—after all, it's not her paying the price.

Meredith was speechless, floored by Adam's takedown.

Some things are easier done than said. Once you poke holes in the logic, unless you've got thick skin and can shrug it off—pretending it's all fake while everyone nods along or stays quiet—truth is truth, and wrong is wrong. No amount of fluffy platitudes can cover that up.

Meredith clearly wasn't at that level yet. She knew Adam was right, and she was wrong.

Chapter 360: Save Face for Others, Save Face for Yourself

Medical Center

Cafeteria

Lunch ended on a sour note.

Adam's blunt logic cut through the warm fuzzies like a scalpel, exposing the rot beneath the chicken-soup-for-the-soul vibe. Meredith wasn't the only one squirming—Liz felt it too.

George and Cristina, though? They didn't bat an eye. Cristina's all about survival of the fittest—she's gunning to be a legendary female surgeon and has zero patience for screwups like Alex. Plus, she's cocky enough to think she'd never make such a rookie mistake. No personal sting, no offense taken.

George, meanwhile, might be soft as heck, but he's decent at heart with a mostly solid moral compass. He vibed with what Adam said. Alex, with his total lack of ethics—letting him grow as a doctor would be what? A disaster waiting to happen? In just over two months, even with residents and attendings watching him, the guy's already caused this much chaos. Imagine if he actually got good. The bigger the power, the bigger the responsibility—and the bigger the damage.

Green Clinic

"Here's the test results," Adam said, handing the chart to Leonard. "The patient can't get an artificial heart valve."

"No biggie—we can use a pig valve," Leonard replied, glancing at the chart with a smile.

"Not gonna work," Adam said, shaking his head. "The patient, Devo, was up this morning and afternoon, dragging herself out of bed to pray by the window. She's a devout Orthodox Jew— even wants to change her name to Esther. Good luck convincing her to take a pig valve."

Esther's the ancient Persian queen from the Bible—a beautiful, kind Jewish heroine who saved her people with her wits. Leonard's mouth twitched; he clearly knew the reference.

Jews see pigs as unclean. For an ultra-conservative Orthodox Jew, sticking a pig valve in their life-pumping heart? That's straight-up blasphemy.

Leonard rubbed his temple. "Try to talk her into it anyway."

"If the pig valve's a no-go, we could look at a bovine valve," Adam suggested. "Jews don't mind those, and they work better too."

"Bovine valve?" Leonard frowned. "That's newer tech—pretty complicated..."

Adam got it. Medicine's always evolving—new ideas, new techniques popping up constantly. Doctors have to be lifelong learners. But when you're older, the energy and efficiency for picking up new tricks? They tank. Big, complex surgeries can stretch 10, 12, even more hours, and that's brutal on aging docs. Leonard's hesitation screamed one thing: he'd never done a bovine valve surgery, didn't feel confident, and wasn't eager to try.

"We could call in an expert—do a video consult," Adam said with a grin. "There's always a first time, right? I'd love to learn the technique from you too. Of course, it's just a backup plan—better safe than sorry. For now, we'll push for the pig valve option."

"Hmm. Let's go see her," Leonard said, a smile creeping onto his face. He gave Adam an approving nod.

They were old friends, and no one else was around, but Adam's tact—giving him an out while keeping things smooth—meant a lot. Leonard appreciated it.

Patient Room

Devo's—or Esther's—parents were on board, but she blew up the second she heard the plan.

"What?! You actually agreed to this?!" she yelled, gripping her IV pole and glaring at her mom and dad.

"Honey, it's to save your life," her mom said, trying to calm her down.

"Enough!" Esther snapped. "You don't respect my faith—or me! You're seriously okay with them sticking a filthy pig in my body—in my heart?! An animal that breaks every Jewish law! My heart's my life source! If you swap it out with that, what am I even left with?!"

"It's just the valve, not the whole heart," Adam pointed out.

"I don't care!" Esther whipped around to him, unloading full blast. "Putting pig parts in me? I'd rather die."

"See? Told you we shouldn't have let her join the Orthodox crowd," her dad grumbled. "Should've stuck with the Reform crew like everyone else."

"You don't even light candles on Friday nights, and you can't name all ten plagues from Passover!" Esther fired back at him. "You've both lost your faith—and now you're whining about me being devout?!"

Her parents hung their heads, saying nothing. They couldn't win against an Orthodox zealot's verbal onslaught. They'd gone Reform—like most Jews—for the freedom, the lighter rules. By that metric, yeah, they'd ditched the faith hardcore.

"Miss Friedman," Leonard cut in, no choice but to step up. "We respect your devotion, but without surgery, you'll die."

"Then figure something else out," Esther said, still rational enough not to book a one-way ticket to heaven just yet. "As long as it's not snorting and oinking like Wilbur, I don't care what it is!"

Adam stayed quiet, glancing at Leonard. In front of patients—especially with family around—you don't undercut your attending. It's basic. Like how Jia Baoyu, the spoiled brat from Dream of the Red Chamber, got away with murder at home but played the perfect gentleman outside, earning his grandma major street cred. If he hadn't, she'd have had him beaten to a pulp, no question.

Leonard could dote on Adam all he wanted, but Adam wasn't about to get cocky and stomp on the unwritten rules. If anything, he'd double down on propping Leonard up. Even though he knew the bovine valve was the perfect fix, unless Leonard greenlit it, Adam wouldn't breathe a word to the patient or her folks.

"We'll think it over," Leonard said, mulling it over before heading out with Adam in tow.

Office

"Adam, since you brought up the bovine valve idea, I'm guessing you've already done your homework. You know who the experts are, right?" Leonard paced a bit, then stopped and looked at him.

He knew Adam's habits. Back before med school, Adam had bought a cabin in the woods and hunted animals just to practice surgery years ahead of time. Now? The guy was meticulous—thought of everything. When Shepherd once said Adam reminded him of someone, Leonard's first guess was the infamous Dr. House. Not a stretch.

"Yeah," Adam said with a grin. "Dr. Chesney at Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Kens at Johns Hopkins, and Dr. Morton at Mass General—they're the big names for this."

"Great," Leonard said, clearly sold. "Set up a call. We'll study it first. If it's doable, we go with the bovine valve."