

TV Show 361

Chapter 361: Down in the Dumps at Work, Winning Big in Love

Hospital room.

"A bovine valve? Awesome!"

Esther didn't even hesitate once she heard it wasn't from a pig—she was all in.

"Great. The valve'll take an hour to get here, so we need to start prepping for the OR now," Leonard said with a smile.

"Wait a sec," Esther cut in.

Adam's lip twitched. That phrase was his kryptonite.

"Miss Friedman, anything else?" he asked, keeping his professional smile intact.

"Just one last thing," Esther said, rolling her eyes at him. "I'm fine with the surgery, but before we start, I need an Orthodox Jewish rabbi to pray for me."

"No problem," Adam nodded, shooting Leonard a quick grin.

Leonard got the hint immediately. If Adam could book a wedding banquet at the Plaza Hotel on a dime, finding an Orthodox rabbi? Piece of cake.

Do whatever you want! That's the plain, boring life of the rich.

"Do you have a faith?" Esther asked out of the blue, watching Adam handle the rabbi situation with a single phone call.

"I believe in science," Adam said with a smile.

In the West, admitting you've got no faith raises more eyebrows than being a heretic. When in Rome, right? He'd picked up a trick from Sheldon and crew—claiming science as his religion. It dodged a lot of hassle. After all, science has its own church these days. Believing in it? Totally legit.

"Your name's Adam—the first human, the first man, made from dust in God's image," Esther murmured, staring at his face like she was in a trance. "But you know what kids these days are like? My friends are all about hooking up and partying till they drop. You're probably the same, huh?"

"We doctors are busy as hell all day. Where's the time to mess around or party?" Adam laughed.

"I don't buy it," Esther said, eyeing him. "A guy like you doesn't even need to try. Those pretty nurses look at you like they're ready to gobble you up."

"Alright, time to head to the OR," Adam said, shutting down the topic.

She'd called herself Esther and clocked the origin of his name. Clearly, she was a little too fixated on his face. Surgery or not, he wasn't about to flirt with a patient.

Operating Room.

Esther lay on the table while a female rabbi, now in surgical scrubs, crouched beside her, holding her hand and praying. Adam stood on the other side.

An old-school satellite TV was set up, with Dr. Chesney from the Cleveland Clinic ready to guide the bovine valve transplant remotely.

The prayer wrapped up. Esther turned her head to look at Adam. He gave her a reassuring smile.

"Let's get started," Leonard, the lead surgeon, called out.

The anesthesiologist placed the mask over Esther's face, releasing the gas. She was out in seconds.

"She's ready," the anesthesiologist confirmed.

"This is Dr. Chesney from the Cleveland Clinic, an expert in bovine valve transplants. He'll be assisting us via satellite," Leonard announced to the OR team.

Complex surgeries demand tight coordination. Prepping everyone on the procedure and their roles is non-negotiable. Before heading in, Leonard had Adam run through the steps, key moments, and contingency plans one more time—just to be triple-sure.

"Thanks, Doctor," Leonard said to Chesney on the screen.

"Open the chest, start the bypass. We'll make a lateral incision in the left atrium to expose the valve..."

As Chesney's instructions came through, the team sprang into action around Leonard. This time, he took the scalpel himself, with Adam as first assist, backing him up the whole way.

The surgery went off without a hitch.

"I'm still alive?" Esther asked weakly as she came to.

"Of course," Adam said with a grin.

"My heart," Esther smiled. "Is it beating—or mooing?"

She's got a sense of humor, huh? Adam couldn't help but chuckle. He placed the stethoscope on her chest and handed her the earpiece. "Definitely not oinking."

"Heh," Esther giggled, listening to her heart's steady, strong beat. She was just a 17-year-old girl, her life barely started. Even as a devout believer, she wasn't exactly itching to meet God yet.

"Adam, do you have any Jewish friends?" Esther asked, her eyes drifting back to his face as her smile lingered.

"Yeah," Adam said, immediately thinking of Howard Wolowitz—saucy, Jewish, and still a future acquaintance. That guy broke every Jewish rule in the book and still married Bernadette from a Catholic family. Imagining Howard with this Esther? Disaster. She was tall and sturdy—Howard, a grown man in oversized kids' clothes, wouldn't stand a chance, berserk mode or not.

Then there were Monica and Ross—also Jewish. Ross's penny-pinching was peak "calculating Jew" stereotype.

"Any Jewish girls?" Esther pressed, fishing subtly.

"Yeah, Monica. We're good friends. She married my best friend—happy couple," Adam said, picking up the stethoscope. "Alright, rest up. I've got other patients to check on. See you tomorrow morning."

In the hallway.

Christina and the crew were sprawled out, unwinding from a long day's grind. Adam stopped to chat about the surgery.

No surprise, Meredith had scrubbed in on another neuro case with Dr. Shepherd. Christina was handling a 47-year-old patient who'd never had kids, finally got pregnant, and then got slapped with a breast cancer diagnosis—now facing the brutal "save the mom or the baby" choice. Liz had a psychic with epilepsy.

"Adam, you think anyone can actually talk to spirits?" Liz asked.

"Nope," Adam said, laughing. "Don't fall for it."

"Yeah, yeah—reading faces, body language, psyching people out with vague guesses. I know the drill," Liz said, still torn. "But this Mr. Duff guy feels real. He guessed my mom's secret cupcake recipe—nailed it, said I forgot a spoonful of coconut extract."

"He got lucky," Adam explained. "Cupcake ingredients are pretty standard. A guy like that's been around, seen it all. He picks up your accent, figures where you're from, maybe even tasted the local version before. Smells cupcakes on you, notices no coconut vibe—hardly a stretch. If he's wrong, he shrugs it off. No loss. Cast a wide net, and a few guesses hit dead-on. Looks psychic, but it's the same old tricks."

"Ohh, that makes sense," Liz said, visibly relieved. The unknown can freak you out.

Just then, Alex strutted by, scanning the group with a smug little smirk.

"What's up with him now?" Adam asked, curious.

"Heard he hooked up with a hot older woman this afternoon," Christina said, too wiped to care. "Work's a bust, but he's killing it in the romance department."

"He's still hitting on patients?" Adam shook his head. "Guy's got guts."

Chapter 362: Who's Dr. Clive?

`Ring ring.

The phone chimed.

Adam swallowed his latest rant about Alex's relentless self-sabotage and picked up the call.

"Leonard?"

"Adam, tomorrow's Saturday—got any plans to kick back?" Leonard's voice hinted at something over the line.

"Oh, really?" Adam's lips quirked up as he played dumb. "Time flies, huh? Been so slammed I forgot. Nah, I'm working tomorrow. What's up?"

"..."

Silence from the other end. Even through the phone, Adam could feel Leonard's mood sour.

"Hahaha!" Adam couldn't hold it in and burst out laughing. "Relax, man, I've got it covered. Sunday's the day—I'll swing by then."

"Heh heh heh." Leonard's grumpy vibe melted away, replaced by a goofy chuckle.

"Just so we're clear," Adam warned, "I'm only setting you up with the chance. I'll introduce you, then I'm out. The rest is all on you."

"What?!" Leonard yelped. "You're leaving me alone with her?"

"Of course you're on your own," Adam shot back. "What, you want me sitting there holding your hand? If it works out, whose win is it—yours or mine?"

"Uh..." Leonard hesitated, clearly torn.

He knew Adam was right. But facing his second-favorite goddess solo? The guy barely had the guts to talk to girls, period.

"How about... it's your win?" Leonard mumbled, half-serious, half-whiny.

"..." Adam's mouth twitched. "You sure about that?"

"Yeah," Leonard said, calculating. "You've got Dr. Adler already. You'll ditch Dr. Plimpton eventually anyway."

"So you're ready to swoop in and pick up the pieces?" Adam asked, floored.

"No, no!" Leonard backpedaled fast. "I just meant, as a friend, I'd be there to... you know, console her."

"Not swooping in, huh?" Adam probed. "Good, 'cause I wasn't planning on anything more than friendship with Plimpton anyway. She won't need your shoulder to cry on."

Dead air on the line again. Adam's mouth twitched—Leonard's disappointment was practically oozing through the phone.

Not swooping in, my foot! Adam thought, stunned. But then again, this was peak Leonard. Chasing Penny, he'd watched her hook up with guy after guy, never giving up, and still landed her in the end.

From Adam's perspective, it was mind-blowing. But in the Western lens? Leonard's move wasn't even that wild. How many TV shows had leading ladies with a mile-long list of exes, yet the hero still fought tooth and nail to win her? Leonard, with his shaky confidence, probably thought tagging along behind Adam to play cleanup was some genius shortcut—especially since Adam's taste was top-tier.

"This guy!" Adam's face darkened.

Leonard might not care, but Adam sure did. No way he'd vibe with a friend poised to swoop in on his leftovers.

"Two options," Adam said firmly. "Drop it, or go after her yourself. Don't even think about playing the rebound guy—I hate that crap from friends."

"Adam, I didn't mean it like that!" Leonard panicked, hearing the edge in Adam's voice.

It'd just been a fleeting thought—he'd never risk ticking off his proudest, best bud over it.

"I swear, I didn't! Let's just hang out with Dr. Plimpton together. That's enough for me," Leonard rushed to say.

"If you're into her, chase her yourself," Adam softened his tone. "We're buds, but we're not gonna be those kinds of wingmen who muddy up the friendship. Got it?"

"Got it," Leonard nodded like a bobblehead.

"Cool. See you Sunday, then." Adam hung up.

"What's with all the staring?" he asked, smirking as he glanced around at the gang.

"Good friends can't be on the same path'? Why do you have to make it sound so gross?" Meredith snapped, clearly annoyed. "What do you take us women for?"

"Yeah!" Liz piled on. "We're people with feelings, not tools! Women don't belong to anyone. Why can't a woman who's been close to you end up with your friend?"

"Chauvinist!" Cristina added, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

And just like that, the three of them ganged up on Adam.

"See you tomorrow," he said, tossing out the words and bailing. No point in arguing—they'd never see it his way.

Next Day

No big surgeries at Green Clinic, so Adam hit up the ER instead. Susan was stitching up a homeless guy's head wound when he walked in.

"Adam, perfect timing," she said. "We've got a guy who swallowed keys. Go fish 'em out."

"On it," Adam replied, heading over.

"What's the deal?" he asked, spotting a young couple. The guy was gagging, mouth open, while the woman glared daggers at him.

"He swallowed my car keys," she said.

"Didn't want her to leave," the guy said, looking smug despite the discomfort.

"Didn't want me to leave?!" she exploded. "Where were you earlier?! I'm done with you—swallowing keys won't keep me here. Swallow the whole car for all I care—I'm not coming back!"

"Let's get an X-ray first," Adam cut in. He wasn't here for their soap opera.

With Adam on the case, the X-ray tech bumped them to the front of the line—shot and printed on the spot. The film showed the keys lodged in the guy's esophagus.

"I'm gonna use an endoscope to pull them out, Mr. JP," Adam explained, noting the treatment plan. He paused, feeling a weird twinge at the name. JP—flip his old initials, PJ, and you've still got bathroom vibes either way.

The endoscope was a thin tube with a tiny camera and magnet. Adam had JP lie down, slid the tube through his mouth, past the throat, and onto the screen. The keys popped up clear as day—one quick pull, and they'd be out.

Alex, mid-rectal exam nearby, wandered over and smirked. "We're not so different, you and me."

Adam ignored him, focusing on easing the keys out.

Outside

"Who's Dr. Clive?" a low, gravelly voice asked.

"I am," Alex said, peeling his eyes off Adam and turning with a hand raised, flashing his brightest grin.

"Alex Clive?" the voice pressed.

Adam's eyelid twitched, alarm bells blaring in his head.

BANG!

A gunshot rang out.

Time slowed to a crawl. Adam watched the bullet streak through the air. Alex's smile froze, his eyes wide with terror, mouth still shaped around "That's me..."

Chapter 363: Well, You're Having a Blast Now, Huh?

Medical Center.

Emergency Room.

A gunshot rang out.

"Holy shit!"

In a world slowed to a crawl, Adam's mind was buzzing like crazy.

"Here it is, here it is—I knew it. Happy America, gunfights every day. Nine years since I crossed over, and I've barely seen a handful. Almost thought it was all hype.

The target? Alex.

The shooter triple-checked before pulling the trigger. Looks like a personal grudge, not some nutjob playing real-life Call of Duty."

Adam couldn't help but feel a tiny wave of relief. If this was like that terrifying video he'd seen in his past life, even he'd be in danger. Chicago typewriter-level firepower? No amount of foresight would save you. Dodge one bullet, sure—but a whole storm of them?

Relief aside, the bullet was still flying. Adam's brain kicked into gear again. "What kind of grudge escalates to straight-up shooting?"

He wasn't that shocked, though. With Alex's track record—insulting patients, nearly killing them—getting shot wasn't exactly a stretch. It was bound to happen eventually.

But he'd only been an intern for a couple of months. The two patients he almost screwed over? Liz and Adam saved them both. They're still kicking, so the odds of this being some over-the-top revenge for that were slim.

The giant-tumor girl he'd called a disgusting freak who deserved it? She was too insecure to even report him, and her mom was a spineless pushover—no way they'd go this hard.

The old guy he told should've died already, whose condition Alex worsened? Now that could be it. Maybe the guy passed away by now, and a family member heard something, snapped, and went full-on revenge mode. That tracks.

"Wait, hold up."

Adam suddenly clocked the bullet's trajectory. Something was off. Normally, you'd aim for the chest—big target, easy hit, plus the heart's a kill shot. But this bullet was way lower. In a flash, he calculated it: the shooter was aiming for Alex's, uh, fifth limb.

"Oh, right—last night he hooked up with that hot older woman."

It all clicked for Adam. The revenge vibe was screaming loud and clear.

Right then, he yanked the bronchoscope faster, pulling it out just as Alex screamed. He barely managed to suck a key out of patient JP's mouth in the nick of time.

"Ahh!"

Alex let out a howl as the bullet's force knocked him back into the ward door, crashing through into the room.

"Shit!"

Adam cursed under his breath, dragging JP and his shell-shocked girlfriend to a corner away from the door. He yanked over the bronchoscope monitor's metal stand and some other cabinets to shield them. Sure, he figured it was a "green" revenge thing—personal, not random—but you don't take chances. People lose it and go overboard all the time.

Risk his life to save Alex? Sorry, despite all this slow-motion thinking, that idea didn't even cross his mind.

Outside, panicked screams erupted, echoing Alex's wails.

A tall, imposing guy stepped into Adam's line of sight.

"Alex, you really pissed off the wrong dude this time," Adam thought, sizing him up. Military vibes were obvious—every move screamed discipline.

"Don't kill me!" Alex pleaded, the threat to his life momentarily overriding the agony in his crotch.

"I'm not gonna kill you," the tall guy said coldly. "I only kill people who wrong me. You didn't wrong me."

Alex didn't find that comforting. Adam could figure it out—how could Alex, the guy in the crosshairs, not?

The second the shot went off, he'd recognized the shooter. Last night, at the hot older woman's place, he'd locked eyes with this guy's face in the wedding photo on the wall for a good long while. Back then, he'd been smug as hell. Now? He was scared shitless.

Damn it! She'd said her husband was overseas on rotation, not back for ages. Alex figured he'd have a few rounds of fun and bounce. Judging by her vibe, he wasn't the only sidepiece. By the time her husband rolled back, she'd probably have forgotten his name.

No way he'd have messed with a Marine otherwise, no matter how bold he was. He never dreamed that after one night, payback would hit this fast. The searing pain down there was killing him—and so was the regret.

The woman's husband, stone-faced, planted one foot on Alex's leg, then used the other to pry apart Alex's curled-up second leg, forcing him into a trembling, spread-eagle heap on the floor.

"Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth!"

The Marine raised his gun, aiming at Alex's blood-soaked crotch with a cold smirk. "Had a real good time last night, huh?"

Bang!

"How about now?"

Bang!

"Feeling even better?"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He fired six shots, one for every taunt, straight into Alex's "little brother." Alex passed out cold.

Peeking from behind the metal cabinets, Adam winced on Alex's behalf. Ouch.

"Ahh!"

Just when Adam thought it was over, Alex screamed again. Looking closer, he saw the Marine, still fuming, slam a heavy combat boot down on Alex's mangled crotch—then twist it back and forth.

"Hiss." Adam sucked in a breath. That was brutal.

"Doctor, come save him!" the Marine barked, satisfied with his "enemy's" ruin, glancing at Adam behind the cabinets.

Without waiting for a reply, he strolled off like a badass.

Adam didn't have time to process the absurdity—like he was waiting for cops to "clean up the mess." Doctor's duty kicked in. He rushed over to check Alex's condition.

One look, and he sucked in another breath.

It was bad. Real bad.

"Drop the gun!"

"Get on the ground!"

Hospital security's shouts rang out from outside. No more gunshots followed.

Adam hoisted Alex onto a gurney and bolted for the OR, yelling to nurses along the way: "Call Dr. Green, Dr. Burke, Dr. Shepherd!"

Whoever could make it, get here.

The nurses snapped into action—some ran to fetch the docs, others cleared a path.

"OR 3's open!"

Adam wheeled Alex into OR 3. While stabilizing his vitals, Leonard and the others showed up.

With the surgical chief out, Dr. Burke stepped up to run the show and took charge of the rescue. He despised Alex—had pushed to get him fired more than once—but not like this. Right now, Alex was just a shot-up colleague.

They had to save him, full stop. Everything else could wait.

Chapter 364: The Most Tragic War God Returns

Medical Center

Operating Room 3

"Put on your goggles."

As soon as Dr. Burke said it, everyone in the room got the hint.

The news about Alex, the Patient Zero of the hospital's aphrodisiac poison scandal, was no secret around here. If something went wrong during treatment—like blood spraying—it could get into your eyes and infect you.

Thankfully, it wasn't AIDS, so they didn't need full-body protective gear. That would've taken too much time anyway. Goggles and a mask to cover the face? Good enough.

Time wasn't on their side.

Adam had already been treating patients, so he was geared up with gloves and the usual stuff. When he lifted Alex onto the stretcher, he'd been extra careful. No issues there. Still, the second he stepped into the OR, he had a nurse slap goggles and a mask on him.

Seeing Adam suited up like that, Dr. Burke immediately remembered Alex's special case—the aphrodisiac poison patient. Normally, they'd just wear masks for surgery.

Once everyone was ready and they got a look at Alex's wounds, they couldn't help but exchange glances.

"Call Plastics," Dr. Burke told a nurse.

With injuries like that, Plastic Surgery would definitely need to step in later to clean things up.

With so many attending surgeons in the room, the procedure went smoothly.

"Who did this to him?" Dr. Burke asked, eyeing Alex's wound again, unable to hold back.

"Probably some soldier husband of a female patient Alex slept with," Adam summed up casually.

"No wonder," Dr. Shepherd chimed in. "The guy's aim was dead-on."

"He said it was 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' Nothing personal against Alex," Adam added, the corner of his mouth twitching slightly.

"..."

The room went silent.

Because the shooter had really followed through.

Whoever wronged him got payback—every single shot landed right on Alex's "brothers." And afterward, he'd stomped on them for good measure.

One look, and you knew it was over. Completely wrecked.

"Did they catch the guy?" Dr. Burke asked, frowning.

He was the acting Chief of Surgery right now, and Alex was an intern in his department. For someone gunning for the permanent Chief spot, having this kind of mess pop up the second he took over wasn't exactly a good sign.

"They probably did," Adam replied while assisting Burke with the surgery. "After those six shots at Alex, there weren't any more gunshots. The guy didn't seem like he was planning to resist."

Thinking back to how the shooter told him to "clean up the mess," Adam added, "He was eerily calm."

"That's not calm," Dr. Shepherd said, glancing at the wound again, his tone heavy. "That's terrifying."

Normally, when someone pulls a trigger, they're aiming to kill. If that were the case here, death would've come quick. But this guy? He held back from killing. His aim was insanely precise, and the fact that he showed up at the hospital made Adam wonder if he didn't want Alex to die.

If he'd wanted Alex dead, he could've stalked him, taken him out somewhere quiet with no cameras, staged it, and walked away. With the cops' track record and the military's influence, it'd probably get buried.

But he didn't.

He risked getting caught instead.

Sure, there was the thrill of public revenge, but Adam's gut told him something else—based on the shooter's cold, calculated style, he didn't want Alex to die fast.

Wounds this bad? Anywhere outside a hospital, Alex would've been a goner—no chance of making it to the ER. Inside the hospital, though, he had a shot at surviving.

So why go through all that just to keep Alex alive?

Because living like this would be a million times worse than dying quick.

"Life worse than death" fit the bill perfectly.

When the plastic surgeon arrived, the team handed things over. But honestly, with damage this severe, Plastics didn't have much to work with.

It was gone. All of it.

Only option? Full removal.

Surgery wrapped up, and Adam stepped out of the OR, heading straight to scrub down head to toe.

"Oh my God!"

"That's insane."

The hospital buzzed with freaked-out exclamations.

Empathy's human nature, after all. Whether Alex deserved it or not, he was a doctor—one of their own. Even colleagues who couldn't stand him felt a little queasy about the whole thing.

"Adam, you okay?"

Bianca came over, her voice full of concern. She'd moved out of Adam's place because she couldn't deal with him anymore, but her feelings for him still ran deep—way deeper than his for her, at least. Hearing he'd been at the shooting? She freaked.

"I'm fine," Adam said with a smile and a shake of his head.

Liz and the others crowded around too.

"How's Alex?"

"He's... well, alive," Adam said. "But he's done for."

"That's too much," Liz snapped, her face flushed with anger. "No matter what Alex did, this is way too brutal."

"But I heard Alex stole the guy's wife first," George countered.

"It takes two to tango," Meredith shot back. "Alex didn't force her. She came onto him. Yeah, he messed up, but this? This is over the line."

"Exactly," Liz said, getting more worked up. "The guy's been stationed overseas forever. If his marriage fell apart, that's on him too. Who leaves their wife alone that long?"

"Let's not jump to conclusions," Adam cut in. "Maybe it's not just about the cheating."

Westerners tend to shrug off affairs pretty easily. You don't risk prison over something like that unless it's the last straw. Because when you're locked up, you're the one who loses—your gorgeous wife isn't gonna sit around pining for you.

"What do you mean?"

Christina, always the cool-headed one, caught on quick. "You think Alex passed the aphrodisiac poison to the wife?"

"Could be," Adam said. "Picture this: A soldier, gone for months overseas, comes home early to surprise his beloved wife. Things heat up, she's all over him, and then he spots these weird red marks. He's seen enough to know exactly what they mean..."

The war god returns, finds his wife "in the doghouse," and loses it—cue the poor pup whimpering.

"No wonder he went that hard," Christina said, shaking her head.

Liz and Meredith just stared, stunned.

In Hollywood blockbusters, those homecoming scenes are always heartwarming—quick, easy ways to sell the audience on a couple's bond in under two hours. Family and friends don't cut it for that kind of moment. It's unmistakable.

Unless it's rated R, of course.

But that's exactly why Adam's twist hit them so hard.

"I fought tooth and nail to come back, and this is what I get?"

Talk about tragic.

Chapter 365: I'm Not the Old Me Anymore

The next day unfolded like any other—or so it seemed.

The hospital was steeped in an odd atmosphere, a strange vibe hanging over everyone.

By 6 p.m., things took a turn. Unlike the usual dawdling, everyone clocked out right on time. They all scattered to shake off the day's tension—no need to dwell on that.

Bianca, for once, didn't wait for Adam to invite her. She just tagged along to his apartment without a word.

"No, don't," Adam said gently, picking up on her good intentions. She wanted to comfort him, but he turned her down with a soft refusal.

For one, he wasn't rattled. Two, when it came to Alex's ordeal, he barely felt any empathy—certainly not enough to need consoling. And three, even though he'd scrubbed himself clean over and over afterward, he still wasn't in the mood for anything "indescribable" these days. Call it a mix of his germaphobe tendencies and OCD flaring up.

In his past life, Adam already had a hint of this quirk. Every time he locked the door before leaving, he'd twist the knob repeatedly to triple-check it was secure. Even then, after heading downstairs, he'd still feel uneasy—half-tempted to march back up and twist it a few more times, just to be sure.

In this life, spending so much time with little Sheldon and Monica had rubbed off on him. Their influence dialed up his cleanliness obsession and kicked his OCD into overdrive. Back in his old life, if he was sure everything was fine, he'd never have said no to Bianca's eager affection. No chance.

The reason he didn't stop her from getting in the car earlier was simple—he didn't want her to misunderstand. Bringing her into the apartment, holding her close while he explained, felt way more convincing than a thousand words out in the open.

And judging by the glee on Bianca's face? She was happier than Adam had ever been in his past life during New Year's break. This was probably the moment she'd been dreaming of—a night of just cuddling, no strings attached, none of that love-hate chaos she usually got from him.

If Adam had been willing to do this sooner, she'd never have moved out on her own accord.

They lingered in that cozy moment for a bit.

Ring ring.

The phone cut through the silence.

Adam glanced at it, got up from the bed, flashed Bianca a quick smile, and headed to the study. "Juno? Yeah, you heard about it too, huh?"

News spreads faster than a virus—no exaggeration there. No bug could zip from New York to Boston in record time, but gossip? Oh, it absolutely could.

The medical world's a big place, sure, but it's also a tight-knit circle compared to society at large. In that little bubble, a doctor getting shot? That's the kind of bombshell that sets everyone off. Juno knowing about it didn't surprise Adam one bit.

"I was right there..." Adam recounted the whole thing from his perspective.

"You've really gotta be careful from now on," Juno said with a light laugh over the line. "This time it was fentanyl. Next time it could be AIDS. We've got a case here—patient hid their HIV status, coughed, and splattered blood right in the doctor's face."

"Did they get infected?" Adam asked, stunned.

AIDS wasn't in the same league as fentanyl. Right now, it was still a death sentence, plain and simple. Sure, future medical breakthroughs might stretch out a patient's lifespan, but the quality of life? Don't even get him started.

"You know the drill—tests first, then post-exposure prophylaxis right away," Juno explained. "The odds of infection are low, but they've still gotta do three rounds of antiviral meds: Nelfinavir, Zidovudine, and Lamivudine."

"Those all come with side effects," Adam pointed out. "Headaches, nausea, vivid dreams—you name it."

"Yup," Juno agreed. "Plus HIV tests at six weeks, three months, and six months. If any come back positive, Dr. Cameron's screwed. The hospital won't just quietly cover endless medical bills. They'll probably drag it to court, claim Dr. Cameron's a junkie, and say she got HIV from shooting up."

"Ugh," Adam sighed.

It sounded brutal beyond belief, but that was standard procedure. In the U.S., it's a well-oiled machine—especially with the insane number of addicts propping up the global drug trade. High-purity stuff aside, custom "sandwiches" were even legal in plenty of states.

Back when Adam was at Columbia, he ran into Ted and Matthew—those two clowns got blitzed off sandwiches more than once. Among young people, less than 40% could say they'd never tried one. That's a terrifying stat when you realize it means almost everyone around you has.

The herd mentality it breeds? That's the real killer.

The higher the work stress, the more likely someone's hooked. Take the wolves of Wall Street—work hard, party hard, drink hard. Without drugs, they couldn't function or schmooze. Doctors aren't much different. The pressure's insane, and addictive meds—like painkillers—are way too easy to come by.

Take Dr. House next door. Guy's got a limp and pops pills like candy—can't go a minute without them.

In a society like that, when the suits want to pin blame, they don't miss. Guilty or not, bled for the hospital or not, if your worth doesn't outweigh the cost, they'll show their ruthless side without blinking.

Capital doesn't have a shred of humanity.

"You stay safe out there," Adam couldn't help but warn.

He had his "bullet time" edge, so threats like that didn't faze him much. Blood splatter wasn't a speeding bullet—it moved slow enough to dodge or block. He just had to shield his eyes, mouth, and ears, the vulnerable spots. Easy enough.

"Don't worry about me," Juno chuckled. "I can spot a sketchy patient a mile away, and I'm always on guard. You, though? You'd better watch yourself."

"Watch myself for what?" Adam knew she was teasing and rolled his eyes. "Let me tell you, I've got a gorgeous woman lying in my bed right now, and I told her to wait a few days. You have no idea how many hints and offers I've turned down lately. I'm not the old me anymore."

"Tsk tsk, so you're serious about Peggy, huh?" Juno said, clearly amused.

Yup, she knew all about Adam and Peggy. Last Sunday night, an excited Adam couldn't resist calling her up to spill the beans. He had to tell someone, right? Juno was his best friend—never judged him, never lectured him about his love life. He always shared everything with her, no hesitation.

"Has she reached out lately?"

"Nope," Adam said, his lips twitching. "And I'm not getting serious with her either. I'm just past that phase where I see a hot girl and instantly want to make a move."

"Heh," Juno laughed, her tone loaded. "Looks like your first time really meant something special to you. Not surprising, though—you've always been more like an Eastern guy than an American one."

"..."

Adam didn't know what to say to that.

Juno was sharp as hell. If she didn't have zero clue about stuff like system transmigration, he'd bet she'd have sniffed out his hidden soul ages ago.

Chapter 366: The Overbearing CEO Leonard

The two of them chatted for quite a while.

After hanging up the phone, Adam couldn't help but smile to himself. Talking with Juno was always so "pleasant"—it felt a bit like that old saying about reflecting on yourself three times a day.

Back in the bedroom, Bianca was already fast asleep. This was the norm for a medical intern. Most of the time, the indescribable allure of romance couldn't compete with the overwhelming need to just crash and sleep like a log.

It reminded him of Howard and Bernadette from *The Big Bang Theory*—parents of two kids, daydreaming about a child-free getaway. They'd book a fancy suite with a massive bed, only to do nothing but sleep soundly. Before they could even finish the thought, they'd end up passed out at the table like a couple of grade-schoolers during nap time.

Thinking of Howard and Bernadette, Adam—now lying in bed—couldn't help but think of Leonard, and tomorrow's leading lady, Dr. Elizabeth Plimpton. Ten years from now, she'd be a full-on cosplay fanatic, the kind who'd crank the heat up to fifty degrees Celsius. He wondered if she already had that little quirk now. Adam kind of hoped she did. Otherwise, Leonard probably didn't stand a chance.

A genius physicist even Sheldon respected? In terms of intellect and academic chops, she'd probably never notice "half-man" Leonard. As Leonard's friend, Adam didn't want to see him constantly let down, staring at him with those sad, pouty puppy-dog eyes.

The next day.

"Adam, isn't this a bit much?" Leonard fidgeted uncomfortably in his seat as a flamboyant designer fussed over him, trying out all sorts of looks.

"Doesn't Dr. Plimpton deserve you putting in some effort?" Adam replied casually, flipping through a fashion magazine with a grin.

"Of course she does," Leonard said confidently at first, then hesitated. "But this..."

"Do you know why you came to me for help?" Adam closed the magazine and smiled. "It's because you lack confidence. Whenever you're around a beautiful woman, you shouldn't hold back or shrink away. You need to show your confident side. And to do that, first, we've got to revamp your image—bring out all your best qualities."

"Don't worry, darling. I, Tony, am the best in the business. I'll make you absolutely irresistible," said the famous fashion designer standing behind Leonard. He struck a dramatic pose with an orchid-finger gesture and winked at Leonard in the mirror.

Leonard shivered involuntarily.

"Confidence, huh?" he muttered. Still, Adam and Tony's encouragement made him sit up a little straighter.

Two hours later, Leonard stood in front of a full-length mirror, his nerdy vibe completely gone. He looked at the transformed version of himself, and a smug little smirk crept onto his face.

"I think I know what to do now."

"Perfect! Show me!" Tony pointed at him with a flourish.

"Hey, I'm Leonard" He took off his glasses, shook out his hair, leaned in with a brooding tilt, and gave Tony a sultry look, lifting his chin slightly. His voice dropped low and smooth: "You're a vision—smart, youthful, wild, and radiant. I'll pick you up at 8 tonight and give you a night you'll never forget"

"Where are we going tonight?" Tony asked, genuinely captivated, staring at Leonard with a dazed expression.

Leonard cleaned up nice—standard "fresh meat" material. With a little polish, he was actually pretty charming. No wonder a billionaire widow would later take a shine to him, even footing the bill for a shiny new centrifuge for Caltech's physics department.

"See that?" Leonard coolly slid his glasses back on and turned to Adam, beaming. "I nailed it."

Adam's mouth twitched.

"What, not good enough?" Leonard asked, deflating a little.

"No, it's great!" Adam flashed two thumbs up. "A confident man's the hottest kind. Keep that energy—you've got this."

He'd almost told Leonard to tone it down; that act was way too over-the-top. But then he reconsidered. An over-the-top Leonard was still miles better than a stammering one. Who knows? Maybe Dr. Elizabeth Plimpton was into the whole "overbearing CEO" vibe.

Worst case, Adam could duck out if things got weird. He wasn't about to stick around turning Leonard into some Casanova. Even if he had the time and skills, he wouldn't bother. Nerdy Leonard was way more likable than slick players like Barney or Joey.

New Jersey. Princeton University.

"Lisa, when you see me run my hand through my hair, give me a call, got it?" Adam instructed.

The emergency phone call—a classic, old-school move, but super effective. Plus, it was a step up from pretending you had to pee to escape.

Adam wasn't planning to linger. Once he set the stage for Leonard, he'd bounce. Then he'd go check on Paige. He was a guy, after all—no way he'd just sit around waiting for her to call him.

"No worries, boss," Lisa said, patting her chest confidently. "I've got this."

"Maybe we won't even need it," Leonard chimed in, his confidence practically bursting at the seams.

"Oh yeah?" Adam gave him an amused look. "Then how about I skip it, and you 'run into' her solo? That might actually work better."

"Uh..." Leonard froze. He wanted to say he could handle it, but his ballooning confidence shrank back to a pinpoint. He gave an awkward laugh. "Nah, let's go together. If things go well with Dr. Plimpton, you can take the call and dip."

Adam chuckled softly. Still not quite there on the confidence front.

He was suddenly really looking forward to this meet-up.

"Lisa, here's what I need you to do..." Adam leaned in and whispered something to her.

"Got it." She nodded and took off.

"What's she up to?" Leonard asked, curious.

"Nothing much," Adam said with a cryptic smile.

A historic moment like this deserved to be captured on camera—it'd be hilarious. But a photographer might make Leonard nervous, so Adam kept it on the down-low.

When Lisa flashed an "OK" sign from a distance, Adam patted Leonard's shoulder. "Let's go. Don't keep Dr. Plimpton waiting."

With that, he led Leonard toward the campus cafeteria.

Leonard knew her routine like the back of his hand. Right now, she'd be sitting by the glass window, eating while reading a book—a picturesque scene everyone at Princeton recognized.

As they approached, there she was: long hair cascading over her chest, an air of quiet intellect about her. She sat by the window, head bowed over her book, while no one dared sit nearby to interrupt. Farther off, though, the place was packed with people stealing glances at her, their eyes practically glowing with admiration. When they spotted Adam and Leonard walking over, those gazes turned hostile.

The glares didn't faze Adam one bit. Leonard, though? His legs started wobbling.

"Hey, Dr. Plimpton! I'm Adam Duncan, and this is my good friend Leonard Hofstadter. Great to meet you," Adam said, stepping up with a friendly smile.

Elizabeth Plimpton looked up from her book, her long hair slipping to the sides, revealing a youthful, striking face. She met Adam's smile with a dazzling one of her own. "Hi~"

"Y-you—hi~" Leonard stammered as Adam pulled him forward. Facing this version of Elizabeth, his "CEO confidence" vanished. The "hello" on his lips got swallowed by a nervous "hi," and he was a mess all over again.

Chapter 367: How Am I This Smart?

New Jersey.

Princeton University.

The moment Leonard, the overbearing CEO type, laid eyes on his goddess, he instantly turned back into the wobbly-kneed, timid Leonard we all know.

"No surprise there!" Adam thought to himself with an internal eye-roll. Still, he had to smooth things over for his buddy. "Leonard's not just your junior here, he's also a huge fan. He's super impressed by your academic work."

"Oh, really?" Elizabeth Plimpton said, finally tearing her gaze away from Adam for a second to glance at Leonard. "You're a Princeton student too?"

"Y-Yes, I..." Leonard stammered, completely falling apart.

"He's just too excited to meet his idol," Adam chimed in, barely able to watch. But he had to keep propping Leonard up. Otherwise, this version of Leonard might go home, blast some heartbreak ballads, and—God forbid—buy a cat.

This wasn't ten years from now, when that geneticist in San Diego would breed those adorable, hypoallergenic transgenic kittens. With Leonard's asthma, getting a cat now would basically be suicide.

In American TV shows, normal people like dogs. Weirdos go for cats. Dogs suck up to you; cats don't—and they trigger allergies with those creepy, shadowy stares. A young, single guy like Leonard—already a "lone dog"—getting a cat? That's a clear sign he's been crushed by life, given up all hope, and is basically socially self-destructing.

Adam couldn't just stand by and let Leonard off himself like that.

"Leonard, you're a physics guy too, right? Weren't you always going on about how amazing Dr. Plimpton is?" Adam said, forcibly dragging him into the conversation.

"Y-Yeah, yeah," Leonard managed. After a moment to catch his breath, he was doing a little better. His words were still shaky, but at least they made sense now. "D-Dr. Plimpton, I've read all your papers. So many times."

"You understood them?" Elizabeth asked, genuinely curious. "Any thoughts?"

"Uh, uh..." Leonard's face turned bright red, and he was back to babbling nonsense.

He was just a physics student, driven by his crush to read her papers over and over. Sure, he could kinda grasp the basics, but deep insights? No way. IQ's just the hardware—without serious training, it's like a computer with no operating system. Useless. Plus, theory wasn't his strong suit anyway; it's why he'd later become an experimental physicist. And Elizabeth Plimpton? She was deep into the mind-bending world of quantum cosmology.

Adam rubbed his forehead. This guy was impossible to carry.

"You're in the physics department too? My junior?" Elizabeth asked with a light laugh, turning to Adam.

Leonard was the type she saw every day—nothing new there. But Adam? He was different. She'd never met anyone quite like him.

"Nope," Adam said, shaking his head with a grin. "I'm just Leonard's good friend. I've heard so much about you, Dr. Plimpton, from him—my ears are practically calloused over. Didn't expect him to clam up like this when he finally met you, though."

Elizabeth was in her prime, radiant and stunning, but Adam kept the conversation orbiting around Leonard, showing zero interest in diving deeper with her.

The future version of her? Way too wild. She'd left too strong an impression on him.

"Just call me Elizabeth," she said, her eyes lingering on Adam.

Leonard, standing awkwardly between them, suddenly felt like he'd turned invisible. A bad vibe hit him hard.

"No!" he blurted out in a panic.

"What's wrong?" Adam asked, startled.

"Dr. Plimpton, I'm Leonard! I've read all your papers—you're incredible!" Fear of fading away somehow kicked him into gear. He shoved down his nerves, stuck out his hand, and rambled, "I'm Leonard, a physics student here at Princeton. Sorry about earlier—I just wanted to seem smart."

Adam: "..."

You didn't need to say 'I'm Leonard' twice for me to believe you're still a mess.

"No worries," Elizabeth said with a smile, shaking his hand. Then she glanced at Adam. "Why don't we all sit and chat?"

"Thank you, thank you! You're so down-to-earth," Leonard gushed, finally slipping into full fanboy mode.

Adam felt a wave of relief.

Once they sat down, with a little nudge from Adam's眼神 (eye signal), Leonard finally got it together. He started asking Elizabeth some academic questions—mostly begging for advice.

At first, she wasn't that into it. But when she noticed Adam looking interested too, she warmed up, happily tossing out some basic physics tidbits.

Back-and-forth like that, Leonard's confidence grew. He even landed a few nerdy jokes that had Elizabeth giggling.

Adam watched, amazed.

"You can go now—I've got this," Leonard whispered, poking Adam under the table. When Elizabeth wasn't looking, he shot Adam a "fierce" glare with those big eyes, signaling him to get lost.

"Seriously?" Adam's mouth twitched.

This guy was ditching him now?

Adam's first instinct was to smack some sense into him. But then he remembered last Sunday—Leonard waiting all day downstairs for Peggy, looking pathetic—and that flustered mess from earlier.

"Fine, guess I'm just too good a friend," Adam sighed to himself, running a hand through his hair.

Ding-a-ling.

Lisa, who'd been secretly snapping pics nearby, caught Adam's signal and dialed his phone right on cue.

"Sorry, gotta take this. You two keep chatting," Adam said with an apologetic smile, grabbing his phone and stepping away.

Leonard's grin was practically bursting. In his head, he was screaming, "Adam, you're the best bro ever! I almost misjudged you!"

"He's always so busy," Leonard said quickly, noticing Elizabeth watching Adam walk off.

"Oh? What does he do that keeps him so tied up?" she asked, turning back to Leonard with a warm smile.

That smile stopped Leonard's heart for a second. He stared at her, lovestruck, yelling internally, "It's just us now! I'm done for! I'm done for!"

"Leonard? Leonard?" Elizabeth called, snapping him out of it.

"Uh, what'd you say?" He blinked back to reality, already forgetting her question, his face flushing.

"I asked what Adam does. He's so busy," she repeated, still smiling.

"Oh! Adam's a doctor. Just graduated from Columbia Medical School this year. He's doing his residency at New York Medical Center..." Leonard rattled off, eager to make up for spacing out on his goddess.

Seeing her smile and look so interested, he was over the moon. He spilled everything he knew—and some stuff he didn't—about Adam.

"Praise Adam!" he cheered in his head. Without Adam, he'd have nothing to talk about with her!

"So that's who he is," Elizabeth murmured after a while.

"Yep!" Leonard nodded hard, smirking to himself.

With an IQ of 173, he wasn't clueless about romance like Sheldon. Sure, chatting with his goddess using Adam's stories was a blast. But he wasn't about to let his guard down.

So, in his version, Adam became this flirty, kinda sleazy guy.

That should kill her interest, right?

Heh heh heh, how am I this smart?

Chapter 368: Adam and Paige

New Jersey. Princeton.

Leonard's little smear campaign? Adam, who'd ducked out with a phone call excuse, had no clue about it. Even if he did, he'd probably just laugh it off. Honestly, he might even prefer it that way.

Once, drunk, I whipped a famous horse; I feared too much passion would wear out a beauty.

Leonard could never understand that kind of melancholy.

Right now, Adam's focus was entirely on Paige. As he headed toward her apartment, he listened to Lisa give him the rundown on Paige's week.

"Paige's mom still hasn't come back?"

"Nope," Lisa said, shaking her head. "She called once, said she's at her boyfriend's hometown. Apparently, he landed a big gig, so she's staying there for a while."

"What, boyfriend takes priority over her daughter now?" Adam chuckled, shaking his head. "What's the guy do?"

"He's a furniture designer, I think," Lisa replied after a moment. "Used to work at a big company, quit recently. Met Paige's mom while on a break, and it was love at first sight. Now he's starting his own business—designing and making furniture back in his hometown, some little place in Washington."

"Huh, interesting." Adam nodded. "How's Paige taking it?"

"She doesn't seem to care much," Lisa said with a grin. "She's a total science nut. Ever since I moved in across the hall to look after her, she's been lost in her thoughts or scribbling equations. Barely says a word to me."

"Has she mentioned me at all?" Adam couldn't help but ask.

"Nope." Lisa shot him a weird look.

Seriously?

Her flirty boss was acting like this?

Guess a beautiful scientist's charm really was something else.

Seeing Lisa's expression, Adam's mouth twitched. He'd just asked offhand—did she have to make a thing of it?

They'd reached the apartment building by then, so he dropped it and headed upstairs.

Outside Apartment 3A, the sound of a guitar melody drifted through the door. Adam perked up instantly.

"Paige really loves that little ukulele guitar you gave her," Lisa said with a smile. "She plays it every now and then."

Adam glanced at her. Lisa lowered her eyes, but a sly smirk tugged at her lips.

This little tease.

Adam knew she was messing with him, but he wasn't mad. Lisa was young, and looking after Paige probably worked better with a bit of playful energy anyway.

He didn't barge in. Instead, he lingered outside, listening quietly, picturing Paige cradling the ukulele and strumming away.

Suddenly, a clear, sweet voice joined the guitar. Paige was singing.

"Two months ago, I was still a teenager. A week ago, I officially went from girl to woman. A few days ago, I wrote this song."

Her voice was captivating, but the lyrics made Adam's mouth twitch. A bad feeling crept up on him.

What is this? Personal experience turned into a song?

No way. No way. Please, no...

"Looking back on growing up, when things got tough and confusing, I stumbled, even thought about giving up. But lucky for me, I had a half-friend—a dork, and half an idiot..."

Lisa couldn't hold it in. She covered her mouth and turned away, avoiding Adam's gaze.

His face darkened.

Of course. What I feared most.

Paige really was an experiential songwriter. Fine, put your life into your lyrics—but calling Sheldon a dork was one thing. Why drag him into it as "half an idiot"? That was too much.

Adam's teeth itched with annoyance. Seeing Lisa still snickering, he shoed her off.

After listening to the whole self-written, self-sung performance from outside, he finally pushed the door open.

Inside, Paige sat on the couch, hugging her tiny ukulele. She looked up at him as he entered.

"You're here~"

That smile, that tone—half of Adam's irritation melted away instantly.

Whatever.

Why should a grown man like him squabble with a girl like her? For a science-obsessed free spirit like Paige, teasing you meant she cared. Otherwise, she'd just ignore you completely.

One day, when his IQ climbed higher and his math research got deeper, he'd blow her mind with something big. Then she'd see who's the "half-idiot."

"Heard you like that little guitar?" Adam said, sitting beside her with a grin.

"It's a song I wrote and composed myself. Do you like it?" Paige countered, ignoring his question.

"..." Adam's mouth tugged to one side. "The melody's nice."

"You showed up at the perfect time." Paige set the ukulele down, threw her arms around his neck, and giggled. "My ideas aren't flowing like they did last Sunday. I'm running low on inspiration."

I'm not your inspiration muse! Adam screamed internally. But his body? It was like it'd been hexed—completely out of his control.

The wind howls, the river runs cold. A hero rides forth, never to return.

With a dramatic, tragic flair, Adam scooped Paige up and strode toward the bedroom.

Noon.

Across the hall in Apartment 3B, Lisa was torn. Normally, she'd bring Paige lunch around now. But today, the boss was here...

Maybe a phone call?

After agonizing for an hour—well past lunchtime—she finally dialed Adam.

"The number you've reached is turned off."

Lisa blinked at the automated message. When did he turn off his phone?

After a moment's thought, she grabbed her keys, crept over, and quietly unlocked 3A. Then she heard Paige's singing drifting from the bedroom, faintly mixed with Adam's backup vocals. Her face flushed red instantly.

She turned to bolt, but paused at the door. Blushing, she lingered a little longer, eavesdropping, before finally slamming the door shut and scurrying off.

Nightfall.

"Boss?"

Lisa, who'd dozed off without realizing it, picked up a call from Adam.

"I'm on it!" She leaped up, whipping together a big meal. Mid-prep, she dialed her old boss, Ada, asking her to send someone to buy a new guitar and drop it off.

After bustling around, the guitar arrived. She grabbed it, packed up the food, and headed over, knocking on the bedroom door.

"Boss?"

"Just leave it on the dining table," Adam's voice called back, tinged with Paige's playful laughter.

"Got it." Lisa set down the food and guitar, then hightailed it out of there.

If she stayed any longer, she wouldn't be able to drag herself out of bed tomorrow.

Once she was gone, the bedroom door cracked open. Adam, wearing next to nothing, peeked out, dashed to grab the food and guitar, and slipped back inside.

"Wanna eat something first?" he asked, opening the takeout container and setting it by the bed with a smile, glancing at Paige nestled in the covers.

"Not hungry." Paige poked her head out, her bright eyes lighting up at the new guitar. "Let's play something together! I remember you started that Fruit Hard Candy band way back. This time, play my song—I'll teach you."

"Sure, why not?" Adam felt refreshed, not the slightest urge to say no.

He set the food aside, handed Paige her little ukulele, picked up the new guitar, and sat across from her. They locked eyes, grinned, and started strumming together...

Chapter 369: Doctor, Do You Make House Calls?

New Jersey.

Peggy's apartment.

Unlike last time, Adam didn't head back to New York until the wee hours of the morning, driving through the night.

When he finally got back to his apartment and turned on his phone, he nearly jumped out of his skin. Dozens of missed calls from Leonard.

Yup, you heard that right!

After calling Lisa to grab a late lunch or dinner, Adam had gone full tactical blackout—phone off. He was just a lowly intern right now, not some irreplaceable surgeon with emergencies begging for his magic hands. Even robots need a break, right?

Shutting off for a bit? No big deal.

Once he became a resident or attending physician, though, he'd never pull this again. That's when you're on call 24/7, ready to roll at a moment's notice.

"Leonard, what's going on?" Adam said, quickly dialing him back.

The call connected almost instantly. Clearly, Leonard was a nervous wreck, probably glued to his phone.

"Adam..." Leonard's voice came through, dripping with that choked-up, speechless vibe.

"What's wrong?" Adam pressed.

"I messed up so bad," Leonard whined, his tone a mix of regret and self-pity. "I thought if I painted you as some sleazy playboy, Dr. Plimpton wouldn't be into you. But... but..."

"What did you say?" Adam's mouth twitched.

Jerk!

Sure, he'd been a bit of a flirt back in the day, but sleazy? When had he ever sunk that low? A guy like him didn't even belong in the same sentence as "sleazy."

"Sorry," Leonard said, realizing he'd let the cat out of the bag. He dialed back the whining and apologized fast. "I just wanted to kill any chance she'd be into you. I mean, competing with you? I've got no shot."

"Hmph," Adam snorted.

"I screwed up," Leonard said, sounding genuinely down. "I shouldn't have done it. But the thing is, after I said all that, she somehow got more interested in you..."

"You idiot!" Adam groaned.

Wasn't it obvious?

"Bad boys get the girls" isn't exactly rocket science—even a nerd like Leonard should've known that. And Elizabeth Plimpton? She's a Fifty Shades-level cosplay legend. She was already curious about Adam, and hearing he's some "flirty sleaze" just poured fuel on the fire.

Adam could practically see it now:

"Doctor, do you make house calls?"

"Doctor, my chest hurts."

"Doctor, thanks for fixing me up, but I can't pay the bill. How about a special deal instead~?"

"..."

As Adam laid out the logic, Leonard sounded like he was about to cry. He'd totally outsmarted himself.

"...After you left, we talked for ages, but it was all about you. When I ran out of stuff to say, she asked for your number and took off."

"You gave it to her?" Adam asked, suddenly thinking about those other mystery missed calls.

"She asked! How could I say no?" Leonard mumbled awkwardly. "Adam, has she called you?"

"No clue," Adam snapped. "I just turned my phone on and saw you blowing it up with fifty calls."

"Sorry," Leonard said meekly. "Adam, what do we do now?"

"'We'? Oh, no, no, no, buddy! There's no 'we' here!" Adam cut him off. "This is all you! What are you gonna do?"

"But—" Leonard started, only to get shut down again.

"No buts," Adam said, exasperated. "I've done everything I could. I even let you trash-talk me without punching you in the face. And you still can't seal the deal? What else do you want—me to swoop in, charm Dr. Plimpton, break her heart, then shove you in there to pick up the pieces?"

Silence on the other end. Then Leonard let out a sheepish laugh. "Adam..."

Click. Adam hung up.

No need to say more. That one "Adam..." and the mental image of Leonard's "Hey, that could work, I'm cool with it" face said it all.

Sometimes, Adam really wanted to tell him, "Dude, you're such a creep~."

Leonard wasn't dumb, though. He didn't call back to bug Adam again.

Adam glanced at those few missed calls from the same unknown number. He was tempted to ignore them.

But what if he was overthinking it? If it wasn't Elizabeth Plimpton with some flirty "emergency," and someone else actually needed him, brushing it off wouldn't be smart.

Besides, as long as he kept his cool, he could just say no once and be done with it.

Elizabeth Plimpton was a genius scientist, a future quantum cosmology big shot. Even if she wasn't as hardcore as Peggy or Sheldon, she still poured most of her time into research. She wouldn't have that much free time to mess with him, right?

With that sorted in his head, Adam called the number back.

"Hello, this is Adam Duncan."

"Dr. Duncan! Hi, it's Elizabeth!" The phone rang a bit before she picked up, her voice bright and cheerful.

"Dr. Plimpton, something up?" Adam asked, playing dumb.

"Well, Dr. Duncan, I've got a little medical question I'd love to ask you in person. When are you free?"

Her soft, sweet tone sounded innocent enough, but to Adam, it felt... off.

"Can't we handle it over the phone?" he said, dodging.

"It's tricky to explain," she replied. "Is something making it inconvenient?"

"Yeah," Adam said with a nod. "I'm just an intern. I'm not licensed to do house calls. Don't you have a family doctor? They've got a full license and way more experience than me."

"I know," Elizabeth said, her voice still gentle. "But I believe someone ordinary could work their whole life and not match what a gifted genius can do in a day.

"Leonard told me all about you—how amazing you were in med school. Now that you're a real doctor, you must be even better. I bet you've got plenty of experience too.

"Plus, this is kind of personal. I'd rather it be handled by someone who's not just a doctor, but a friend. Dr. Duncan, could you be my friend?"

"..." Adam's mouth twitched.

Why did it feel like she was flirting hard?

But there was no proof.

And she wasn't wrong. With her own life as proof, a genius could outdo a regular person's lifetime of effort in a single day.

"Of course," Adam said, thinking of Leonard. He couldn't flat-out reject her friendliness, so he went for a sidestep. "If you really need help, you can come see me at the outpatient clinic at New York Medical Center."

"Really?" Elizabeth practically squealed. "I'll be there tomorrow!"

Adam: "..."

Chapter 370: You Live Long Enough, You See It All

Monday.

5 a.m.

Routine rounds.

No booming announcement of the dean leading the charge, no gaggle of doctors clogging the halls, no dramatic background music. Just grumpy patients woken up too early and interns plastering on apologetic smiles.

After wrapping up the usual checklist, Adam ran into Cristina in the hallway.

"What are you doing?" he asked, staring at her in confusion as she kept widening her eyes like a cartoon character.

"Testing the Staring Eye Technique—the Glaring Eye Technique," Cristina said, still trying to stretch her squinting eyes to their limit. "Legend has it there's this mysterious Dr. X in Cuba who glares like crazy during surgery, and her success rate's off the charts. They call it the Glaring Eye Technique. I'm seeing if it works."

Adam couldn't help but laugh. "Every doctor's got their quirks, but you don't seriously think that kind of habit can turn into some universal surgical superpower, do you? Besides, she probably rocks a pair of big, glamorous eyes. No matter how hard you try, you're not pulling that off."

Cristina shot him a glare, dropped the act, and stormed off.

Beep beep. Beep beep.

His pager went off. Adam glanced at it and hurried to Room 2.

"Dr. Burke, you called for me?" he asked, pushing the door open, a little surprised.

It was the first time Dr. Burke had paged him directly.

Inside, a Black man in his thirties lay on the bed, with a very pregnant Black woman standing beside him. Dr. Burke was chatting with them, his tone and demeanor screaming old friends. Adam put two and two together.

"Bill, Holly, this is Dr. Duncan, the best intern we've got. He'll be your attending resident, running all your tests. Don't worry—we'll figure out what's going on," Dr. Burke said, introducing them before turning to Adam. "Dr. Duncan, Bill's a good friend of mine. Take care of him, got it?"

"Got it," Adam replied with a nod. Called it.

Doctors are human too, and humans play favorites. When a buddy lands in your domain, you roll out the red carpet.

And who's the best intern around? Obviously Adam. His medical knowledge, ER skills, and sharp instincts were top-notch—less like an intern, more like a seasoned resident.

Dr. Burke, as the attending and acting surgical chief, wasn't about to babysit his friend through every tedious test and post-op detail. But illness is tricky, unpredictable. A solid attending resident could make all the difference in a pinch—maybe even save a life. That tattooed self-harm nutcase from last time was proof enough.

So even though Adam was Leonard's guy, Burke picked him without hesitation.

"The patient's got abdominal pain and blood in his urine. Initial tests came up inconclusive. Urology suggested a cystoscopy," Burke explained. "Get things ready and join me in the OR."

"Yes, sir," Adam said with a grin.

Something to do right out of the gate? Nice.

Cystoscopy also reminded him of Sheldon's classic line: "My bladder, my rules!" Picturing Sheldon solemnly declaring that, only to lose control and sprint to the bathroom, cracked Adam up even more.

In the OR, after sterilization and local anesthesia, Adam inserted the cystoscope with practiced ease. Dr. Burke watched from the side, quietly impressed.

Bill, the patient, lay on the table. The local numbed him enough that he didn't feel the scope—good thing, too. No guy wants to think about a tube sliding up their urethra.

"Thanks, Preston," Bill said to Burke. "I know this isn't your job."

It was technically a urology case, but since they couldn't pin down the issue, it'd landed here. For a regular patient, inconclusive results might mean a referral to a better specialist or just toughing it out at home. But as the acting surgical chief's pal? Different story. Best docs, best care, all hands on deck. Unless it was some unheard-of mystery disease, they'd crack it. And even if they couldn't, easing the symptoms or pain was a breeze.

"No big deal. Keeps my intern busy," Burke said with a smile.

"I bet he's running you all ragged, huh?" Bill teased, glancing at Adam. "We were in the same frat at Tulane back in the day—used to torture the pledges trying to join. Now he's torturing you interns, right?"

Adam chuckled. Another frat bro, huh? They always love hazing the newbies.

"I could spill way more dirt on him," Bill added, clearly warming up to the topic.

It made sense—he was probably trying to distract himself from the fear. But Adam wasn't about to join in or egg him on. Dishing gossip about the big boss to his face? Only an idiot would pull that.

"Bill, there's a cystoscope inside you right now. Maybe not the best time to air my dirty laundry," Burke cut in.

If his buddy spilled the beans, how was he supposed to keep any authority as the senior doc?

Adam caught Burke's glance and got the hint. He smirked to himself. Authority comes from skill, sure, but also distance. Take Dr. Shepherd, the other hotshot vying for surgical chief. Ever since he got tangled up with his intern Meredith in some unmentionable way, his senior-doctor cred hit the floor.

Last week, during a neurosurgery, Meredith had the gall to publicly question and argue with Shepherd's call. Thing is, Shepherd proved why he's a neurosurgery rockstar—his decision was spot-on. If they'd gone with Meredith's half-baked idea, the patient might've died. Normally, an underling pulling that stunt would've been toast. But Meredith? She got a sigh, a compliment, and a free pass.

Well, duh—Shepherd's dating her. What else is he gonna do but forgive her?

Adam's private amusement came from spotting the sparks between Cristina and Burke. Who knows when they'd turn into another messy Shepherd-Meredith situation? When that happened, Burke's authority would take a dive too.

"Is it bad?" Holly, Bill's pregnant wife, asked nervously from the OR sidelines. She'd picked up on Adam and Burke dodging her husband's jokes.

"We'll know once this is done," Burke reassured her. "Just focus on the baby—don't worry about anything else."

Adam noticed something odd on the scope and spoke up. "Dr. Burke."

"What's wrong?" Holly gasped.

Burke took a look, startled but keeping his cool. "Dr. Duncan, biopsy that and set up a CT," he said casually before turning back to his friends. "Could be a few things. No need to panic yet."

After the biopsy and CT, Adam stared at the results, dumbfounded.

You live long enough, you see it all...