

TV Show 381

Chapter 381: New York Metro News One Williams Clinic, New York.

It's a private clinic.

Specializing in gynecology.

At this hour, if you want a check-up without an appointment, aside from your own medical center, a private clinic's your only bet.

Of course, you've got to shell out some extra cash.

Otherwise, if you rely on insurance-approved hospitals and their surgery schedules, you'd hit a snag—Christina might end up giving birth before her appointment even rolls around, thanks to some unforeseen delay.

Though if she could line up a second or third kid right after, maybe that'd work out...

Adam drove, with George and Meredith sandwiching a reluctant Christina in the backseat, pulling up to this well-known private clinic.

"I've already booked it—surgery's the day after tomorrow," Christina grumbled. "This place doesn't take my insurance."

"Tonight's game made you the big winner," Adam said with a grin. "I'm the loser, so think of this as my bet payout. It's just a check-up—won't cost much.

If it's not ectopic, you can totally wait till Wednesday.

But if it is ectopic, I'd say it's worth every penny.

Plus, we're all doctors—chances are we'll open our own clinics someday. Let's call it a sneak peek, a little field trip. Sound good?"

"Yep!"

"Christina, come on, it'll be like a group learning experience!"

George and Meredith chimed in eagerly.

"I'm unlucky, but not that unlucky!" Christina muttered, half-mocking herself.

Still, with Adam laying it out like that, she didn't argue further. Sure, insurance wouldn't cover it, but it's not like she couldn't afford it out of pocket.

Stepdaughter's a daughter too, right?

Rich man's daughter—get to know her.

Half an hour later:

"How could this happen..."

Christina stared at the ultrasound image, her face paling.

She didn't need a doctor to explain—she was a doctor.

"It's really ectopic..." Meredith said, eyeing her with concern.

"It's a big win wrapped in a big loss," Adam said reassuringly. "Catching it early and getting surgery beats a ruptured tube, losing it—or worse, bleeding out with no time to save you, right?"

"Now that you put it that way, yeah," Meredith replied, her eyes—sobered up by the scare—starting to glaze over again.

"Shit!" Adam cursed under his breath. "No way. Is her '100% drunk pants-drop' move some kind of unstoppable superpower? I threw her off, and she's still gearing up for it?"

He couldn't help but overthink it—Meredith's hazy stare was locked right on him.

"Let's do the surgery now," Adam said, ignoring her look and turning to Christina. "The sooner it's done, the sooner you recover. Interns don't have time to waste."

"Yeah," Christina agreed without hesitation this time.

As a doctor, she knew full well how dangerous an ectopic pregnancy could be. With her work schedule, she probably wouldn't last till Wednesday.

"Dr. Williams, set up the surgery," Adam said to the gynecologist waiting for their call.

"Got it," Dr. Williams replied with a smile, heading off to prep.

"Christina, should we let Dr. Burke know?" Adam asked, knowing the answer.

"No need," she said firmly, as expected.

Adam nodded. "Meredith, go with Christina into the OR."

"Sure," Meredith said, her gaze drifting back to Adam, even hazier now.

"..."

George's already pale face went whiter.

A private clinic with a little extra cash thrown in? Lightning-fast service.

Christina, with Meredith by her side, was in the operating room in no time.

Waiting area:

Adam lounged there, flipping through TV channels with the remote.

"What's up?"

"Nothing."

George's eyes darted around nervously.

Adam knew what was on his mind, but since he wasn't spilling, Adam was happy to play dumb.

Still, he figured George wouldn't hold it in for long.

Sure enough, a minute later:

"Adam, don't you think Dr. Shepard's gone too far?" George blurted out. "He's married and still pretended to be single to fool Meredith!"

"Mm-hmm," Adam hummed, flipping channels. "What's your plan?"

He agreed Dr. Shepard was kind of a jerk.

Meredith and Shepard had hooked up the night before her first day as an intern, and now, over two months into the gig, he'd been crashing at her place publicly for more than a week. All that time, and he never mentioned something as huge as being married? No excuse for that.

Adam also remembered a few days back—Meredith had said their thing was more heart than love, and she barely knew the guy. She'd chased him down from home to the hospital, grilling him during work hours to learn more about him.

And what'd he do? Took her to his "home"—a trailer—spouting off some generic checklist: a few sisters, a couple nephews, favorite foods, drinks, hobbies, books, bands, colors.

It sounded sincere enough to make Meredith swoon—she nearly tore the trailer apart that night.

But the one critical detail—married—he conveniently left out.

Barney's famous words: "Touching bubbles and breakup bubbles are the ultimate experiences you can't miss."

Adam could only nod and say, "Expert."

"I'm going after Meredith," George said, clenching his jaw.

But Adam didn't react like he'd hoped—just kept staring at the TV.

"Adam!" George huffed, annoyed.

"Shh!" Adam hushed him, pointing at the screen.

George blinked, following Adam's gaze, and saw the TV airing a news segment—with two familiar faces.

"Ban the strippers!"

"Women deserve better!"

On-screen, a crowd was protesting outside a strip club, blocking the entrance. A reporter was mid-interview.

"Excuse me, are you two heading into the strip club?"

A stunning female reporter hurried after bald Chris and chubby white Stu, who'd just walked up and were already turning to leave.

"Of course not—we're here for the protest," bald Chris said, quick on his feet.

"We're worried about the kids," chubby Stu added, nodding solemnly.

"Then what's that in your pocket?" the gorgeous reporter pressed, signaling the camera to zoom in on a fat wad of bills sticking out of Stu's jacket.

"Uh, uh, that's 38 bucks in change. I bought a paper for 40, and this is what I got back," Stu stammered, flustered.

"Pfft!"

Adam and George cracked up.

Buddy, there's no such thing as a 40-dollar bill.

And even if there were, who's handing you 38 singles as change?

The sharp reporter clearly saw through it too, ready to turn it into a big scoop, when—*thud!*—she spun around to see her cameraman collapse.

"Neil!"

"OMG!"

"Sir?"

The crowd gasped in shock.

Bald Chris and chubby Stu sprang into action.

"No pulse."

"Starting CPR."

"Call an ambulance."

The reporter, no slouch herself, hoisted the fallen camera, aimed it at the rescue, and started narrating.

"You're watching live as two young doctors fight to save my cameraman... This is New York Metro News One, Robin Scherbatsky."

Chapter 382: Dude, You See That Girl?

New York.

Ted and Marshall's apartment.

"She's here!"

Ted was sprawled out on the couch, eyes glued to the barely-watched New York City News Channel One. The second Robin's face popped up on the screen, he bolted upright.

"...And now we're headed to the medical center to check on my colleague Neil..."

"Medical center!" Ted muttered, grabbing his jacket and making a beeline for the door.

"Huh, what a coincidence—Barney and Adam are both over there," Lily said, raising an eyebrow.

Before she could finish, Ted froze for a split second—then took off like he was running the 100-meter Dash.

"What's up with him?" Lily asked, genuinely curious.

"Babe, isn't it obvious?" Marshall grinned. "Ted's trying to win Robin back. Why else would he go through all this trouble tracking her down for a 'casual' run-in? But with Barney and Adam around? Those guys are lady-killers and every man's worst nightmare. Of course he's freaking out."

"Ted's lost it a little," Lily said, shaking her head. "First, he drops 'I love you' on their very first date and scares her off. Now he's turning into a full-on stalker. I'm starting to regret setting him up with Robin in the first place."

A few days earlier, at McLaren's Pub:

Marshall and Lily's mushy PDA was blinding, and Ted was rambling on again about his quest for true love. Then, mid-rant, he spun around—and there she was: Robin, looking drop-dead gorgeous.

It was like a scene from an old movie. A sailor spots a girl across a crowded dance floor, turns to his buddy, and says, "See that girl? Someday, I'm gonna marry her."

"Hey, Mom, Dad—check out that girl!" Ted said, doing a dramatic lean-back and nudging the couple who were busy making out like no one else existed. "I just found the future Mrs. Ted Mosby."

Marshall and Lily's relationship was rock-solid—practically married already. Lily was the queen of giving friends life advice, and Marshall was shaping up to be a smooth-talking lawyer. So, living together, Ted sometimes jokingly called them "Mom and Dad."

"Whoa! She's hot!" Lily exclaimed—not Marshall.

Robin was stunning, with this sharp, confident vibe that made guys swoon and even some girls take notice.

"Ted, what are you waiting for? Go for it!" Marshall urged.

"I can't just walk up to her. I need a plan. Maybe wait till she heads to the bathroom..." Ted hesitated, overthinking as usual.

"Hey, have you met Ted?" Lily rolled her eyes, channeling Barney's classic move. When Robin came up to the bar to order a drink, Lily tapped her shoulder, tossed out the line, and promptly ditched the scene, leaving Ted to take over.

It started off great—until Ted got too eager, blurted out "I love you," and spooked Robin, who was only looking for something casual.

Still, she hit it off with Lily and became fast friends. When Lily let slip that Robin wasn't into anything serious right now, Ted hatched a new plan: Operation Casual. He couldn't just ask her out—that'd be too direct. Instead, he'd track her down, stage a "coincidental" meetup, and "casually" invite her to a totally nonexistent party he'd throw together on the fly.

Ted dubbed himself the "Prince of Casual."

Lily, a fellow romantic, thought he was losing his damn mind.

"Marshall, let's head over too. Might as well check in on Barney and Adam," Lily suggested.

"Yeah, sounds good," Marshall agreed, always down for whatever.

At the medical center:

"Ted?"

Robin was in the hallway, mid-conversation with Bald Chris about her passed-out colleague Neil's condition, when she caught a familiar figure out of the corner of her eye. She couldn't hide her surprise.

"Robin? Whoa, small world!" Ted said, playing it cool. He'd spotted her ages ago but turned away, waiting for her to call out first. His tone and expression weren't even that over-the-top—pretty smooth, actually.

But the sweat dripping from his forehead after sprinting over? To a seasoned pro like Robin, it was a dead giveaway. Hilarious, even. Still, she liked him enough not to call him out.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Me?" Ted faltered for a second, then remembered Lily's tip. "Oh, I'm visiting a friend. My buddy Barney's in here—hospitalized."

"The Barney from Lily's stories?" Robin grinned. "I haven't met him yet. Wanna go see him together?"

"No!" Ted yelped, then caught her puzzled look and backpedaled. "Uh, his condition's kinda... not visitor-friendly. Trust me, you don't wanna see it." He pulled a grossed-out face for effect.

"Oh, got it," Robin said, nodding like she totally bought it. She dropped the subject.

"So, what about you? What brings you here?" Ted asked, steering the conversation away.

"My colleague..." Robin explained the situation.

"He okay?" Ted asked.

"Should be," Robin shrugged. "That's what the doctors said."

"Good to hear," Ted said, relaxing a bit. Then the "Prince of Casual" kicked in, laying it on thick with exaggerated nonchalance. "Oh, since we bumped into each other—there's this party tonight, Friday night thing. If you're up for it, you should swing by. Totally casual, no pressure!"

"Aw, I'm heading home for the weekend," Robin said, genuinely bummed. "If it were tonight, I'd be in."

"It is tonight!" Ted corrected himself lightning-fast. "My bad—I keep saying Friday 'cause I'm so used to it. But yeah, it's tonight! Tonight! Just a chill party, you know, super casual~"

"Cool, I'm in," Robin said with a laugh.

"Marshall, Lily—you guys made it!" Ted spotted them arriving and rushed over, dropping his voice to a whisper. "Party's tonight. Don't spill the beans. I'm heading back to set it up."

After a quick hello, he shot them a wink and bolted.

At Williams Clinic:

"Hey," Adam answered a call from Lily. "I'm off work, not at the hospital anymore. A party? Sure, if I'm free later, I'll swing by."

He hung up.

"You're going to a party?" George asked, a little jealous.

"Gotta wait till Cristina's out of surgery first," Adam said, shaking his head.

It'd been a while since he'd hung out with Marshall, Lily, and the crew. They were good friends—each one had helped him rack up some "attribute points" in life—but catching up over drinks couldn't compete with surgery. Every seasoned doc tells patients or their families the same thing: "Surgery comes with risks!" Anesthesia alone was never 100% safe. Even with a top-tier surgeon handling Cristina's case, Adam wasn't about to ditch and party just yet.

Two hours later:

Surgery wrapped up. No drama, everything went smooth.

"Meredith, Cristina's in your hands tonight. You good staying with her?" Adam asked.

"Of course," Meredith nodded.

They were med school buddies and besties—it was a given, no question needed. But after Meredith's rough day and a few too many drinks, Adam figured a heads-up couldn't hurt.

"George, let's roll," Adam called, motioning him out.

He wasn't about to leave George behind. After tonight, if George wanted to hook up with someone and accidentally cuckold Shepherd right in front of him, Adam would just grab popcorn and watch. But tonight? No way. Losing Shepherd's favor was one thing—getting on his bad side was another.

"I—"

"Meredith's got this. Go home, rest up. You've got early shift tomorrow, plus you're covering for Cristina the next couple days," Adam cut George off, dragging him out before he could argue.

Back at Marshall and Ted's apartment:

Thanks to Ted's frantic last-minute hustle, the party was in full swing. The place was packed.

When Marshall and Lily walked in with Robin, they quietly flashed Ted a thumbs-up. But Ted barely noticed—too busy grabbing his architect sketching tools. His original plan? Flirt with some hot girl while sketching, showing off his charm and "casual" vibe to impress Robin. Problem was, the only person in front of him now was a flamboyantly gay dude.

Still, with Robin approaching, Ted powered through.

"Hey, hi there~" he said, spinning around "casually" with a tactical lean-back as he sensed her behind him.

"Hey, cool party!" Robin said, genuinely impressed.

"Make yourself at home~" Ted tossed out, turning back to chat up the guy about his "super cool" architecture stuff.

Robin wanted casual? Oh, he'd give her casual.

Robin blinked, a little thrown off when Ted actually ignored her. Shrugging, she wandered over to Lily.

Ted smirked to himself. Step one: ignore her for an hour. Step two: "casually" invite her to the rooftop later. Moonlight, stars, a dreamy night sky—no one could resist falling in love up there. Flawless plan!

"What's up with Ted? He's acting weird," Robin complained to Lily.

Lily gave a wry smile. She knew exactly what was going on but couldn't say a word. If she did, Robin would realize she'd blabbed—spilling the stuff Robin had explicitly told her not to tell Ted.

"Robin..." Lily racked her brain for an excuse, but Robin cut her off.

With a dramatic lean-back of her own, Robin nudged Lily, her voice bubbling with excitement. "Hey, Lily—see that guy over there? If I ever get married, that's the one I'm marrying!"

Lily: "..."

Chapter 383: Shouldn't It Be Love?

An apartment party.

The same scene, nearly the same lines.

Last time, it was Ted who said it.

This time, it's Robin.

If only it could just be the two of them in these moments.

"Oh, Ted~"

Lily couldn't help but glance at Ted, who was still pretending to play it cool. Her eyes were full of pity and guilt.

This was her fault.

She'd known Adam for so long that she'd forgotten just how magnetic he could be to women.

That's right!

Who else but Adam could make someone like Robin—gorgeous, worldly, and a total pro at this—lose her cool like that?

"Adam!"

Before Robin could say anything even more over-the-top, Lily quickly waved at Adam as he walked in. Then she leaned toward Robin and whispered, "That's Adam, the one I told you about earlier."

"The surgeon~"

Robin's eyes lit up even more as she murmured, "You didn't mention he was this hot and classy. But I guess he's a surgeon, so it makes sense. How else would patients trust them so much?"

"..."

Lily's mouth twitched, her eyes filling with more wry amusement and self-blame.

This vibe... it was exactly like when Ted first met Robin—completely smitten, head over heels.

But this wasn't going to end like it did for Ted.

Robin was all about casual flings.

And Adam? He was famously laid-back—there was no way he'd say something cheesy like "I love you."

Plus, last time it was a guy chasing a girl.

Now it's a girl chasing a guy.

If Robin went full-on aggressive like Ted had, with her looks, not even Lily could resist—let alone Adam, a guy.

That's right!

Even though Lily was head over heels for Marshall, she couldn't deny Robin's charm. Sometimes her eyes would wander, lost in a little fantasy.

That's part of why she and Robin had become besties so fast.

"Oh, poor Ted~"

Thinking about it, Lily couldn't help but sigh inwardly for her friend.

Same mindset, deeper empathy.

She got it...

"Hey, Lily."

Adam walked over.

"Let me introduce you two."

Feeling Robin nudge her from behind, Lily reluctantly started the introductions. "Adam, this is Robin. Robin, this is Adam."

"Hey, Robin."

"Hey, Adam~"

In his past life, Adam had watched *How I Met Your Mother*, so Robin's presence didn't faze him at all. He greeted her calmly.

Robin, though, was a little too enthusiastic.

"So, you're a surgeon?"

"Yeah."

Adam smiled. "Those two doctors you interviewed on TV earlier? They're surgical interns from my team."

"Wow!"

Robin let out an exaggerated gasp. "That's such a crazy coincidence~"

Adam shot a quick glance at Lily.

This wasn't quite right.

In his memory, wasn't this supposed to be the part where Ted and Robin were a thing?

Lily kept throwing him looks.

But they came so fast and furious, it was less like subtle hints and more like her eyelids were having a seizure.

Adam was a little thrown off.

This was... eye chaos...

"Your colleagues were hilarious—going to a strip club with a wad of singles and saying it was change from buying a \$40 newspaper. Are all surgeons that funny?" Robin piped up again when Adam didn't respond right away.

"Only Chris and Stu are like that," Adam said, quick to distance himself.

Those two clowns—had they not pulled off that live emergency save, and had it not been on a random NYC news channel no one watches, they'd be total laughingstocks.

They chatted a bit more about it.

Adam didn't say much.

"Haha, you're so funny!"

It was a pretty normal conversation, but Robin acted like he'd hit her funny bone. She reached out with her left hand, patted his chest, and kept tossing her long hair back with her right. In a weird, dramatic tone, she laughed, "So, so funny~"

As she flipped her hair, her signature perfume wafted stronger.

Adam's mouth twitched.

He knew this move!

Back when Rachel had set her sights on him, she'd unleashed her full arsenal—standard, super, ultimate, final flirt mode—and it was eerily similar.

Rachel's approach was subtle, getting him to open up, playing the soulmate card.

Robin's was over-the-top, gushing about his "humor," playing the admiration card.

Rachel would walk away mid-chat, letting him admire her silhouette.

Robin kept flipping her hair, letting him catch her scent.

Rachel traced circles on the back of his hand.

Robin gave his chest a playful tap.

Adam had no doubt—if Robin knew about the whole parallel-universe-S.H.I.E.L.D.-deputy-director thing, she'd pull out her own ace, just like Rachel with her invincible red cheerleader uniform. She'd strut in wearing her S.H.I.E.L.D. Deputy Director/Sky Carrier Commander outfit, all icy and commanding, demanding he hand over his weapons of mass destruction for S.H.I.E.L.D. oversight...

He'd turned Rachel down—not because she wasn't stunning, but because he didn't want to mess up his friendship with Leonard or derail his path as a doctor.

He'd turn Robin down—not because she wasn't gorgeous, but because Ted and Barney would be tangled up with her forever. Keeping his friend group drama-free was his rule.

Wait.

What if he just... didn't stay friends with Ted and Barney?

Barney would totally get it.

Hmm...

Adam started to waver.

"Adam."

"Marshall."

Lily stepped away for a sec, and Marshall swooped in, his conflicted expression screaming that he'd been sent on a mission.

Adam sighed inwardly.

Ted and Barney? Whatever.

But Marshall and Lily? They were friends he genuinely admired.

And they were inseparable from Ted.

For the sake of friend-group harmony—and to avoid the messy musical-chairs dating chaos—Adam decided to let it go.

Robin was hot, sure, but not drop-dead hot.

Plus, she was a seasoned player—maybe even more so than him. She might have that trick where she's all "madly in love" one second and "totally over it" the next...

Adam kept piling on the excuses in his head.

But none of them felt solid enough.

"Wanna step aside for a sec?"

Marshall gave Robin an apologetic smile and shot Adam a look.

"You guys chat. I've got something to talk to Lily about," Robin said, surprisingly chill as she walked off.

"Adam, Ted threw this party on a whim just to confess to Robin again..."

He didn't outright say, "Don't hit on her."

Robin was single, after all—fair game, technically.

But the nudge was clear.

"I get it," Adam said, clapping Marshall on the shoulder. "The heart's not everything. To me, friendship's way more important."

"Yeah!"

Marshall nodded hard, genuinely touched. He couldn't think of anyone who valued friendship more than Adam.

But then it hit him—something felt off.

Huh?

Shouldn't it be love?

Why'd he say "heart"?

Marshall's look at Adam shifted, a little weirded out...

Chapter 384: Straight to the Razor

The apartment party was in full swing.

"So, this is the real Adam, huh?" someone teased.

"Yup, I'm just that loyal," Adam shot back with a grin.

Matthew caught on quick, exchanging a knowing glance with Adam.

Sure, that's what they said.

But deep down, Matthew knew Adam was the kind of guy who truly got friendship and valued it above all else.

Because, let's be real—how much of this world is actually about love?

What's the most basic thing driving a guy to chase a girl? Isn't it just instinct—heart, or something like that?

For Adam to put friendship over that? That was pretty damn impressive.

Okay, fine—Matthew conveniently ignored the fact that Adam wasn't exactly hurting for options like Robin...

Meanwhile, in Matthew's bedroom:

"Lily, where's your razor?" Robin demanded, gripping Lily's shoulders with both hands.

"No way!" Lily yelped.

"Yes way! Hand it over!" Robin insisted. "It's been days since I shaved my legs."

Western dating tradition 101: Shave your legs before a date. It's a basic courtesy to the other person.

Monica swore by it.

Honestly, that was tame compared to some.

Take Penny and the gang—they'd be getting regular bikini waxes down the line. Like that time Amy spent six or seven years wearing Sheldon down, and for her birthday, he decided to "gift himself" to her. Penny and Bernadette dragged her straight to the waxing salon.

Not every girl was like that, though.

Some had a vibe more like East Asian women—less maintenance, less fuss.

"You made your own rule, remember?" Lily shot back. "No shaving your legs for the first three dates. You said it'd build self-control—legs hairy, dignity intact!"

She paused, then added, "This doesn't even count as a first date. Where's your resolve?"

"It got surgically removed by the perfect doctor," Robin quipped, smirking at her own joke.

"No!" Lily shook her head, stubborn as ever.

She was regretting this more by the second.

Who could've guessed Robin would be this shameless—ready to go all-in the second they met?

"Please, Lily," Robin begged, clasping her hands together. "I don't want to be like this, but Adam's just too hot. You get it, right? You know how I feel!"

"..."

Lily had no comeback.

Robin wasn't wrong.

She did get it...

"Adam's a total player," Lily warned, trying to talk some sense into her.

"Really?" Robin's eyes lit up like Christmas lights.

Lily groaned inwardly.

Bad boys, huh? Women can't resist 'em. A guy with a reputation like that only made him more appealing.

"He's the worst kind of player," Lily pressed, psyching herself up. "His motto's literally 'more than friends, less than lovers'—and he'll never let you level up to 'lovers.'"

"That's perfect!" Robin gushed. "We're so alike! I almost never make it to the 'lovers' stage either—it just fizzles out naturally. It's chill, easy, free. I love it."

"..."

Lily was exhausted.

She hadn't realized Adam and Robin's weird worldviews matched up so perfectly.

What a pair of oddballs!

Ted, it's not that I didn't try. Their vibes are just too bizarre, Lily grumbled to herself.

"Lily?" Robin stared at her with puppy-dog eyes.

"Adam dates multiple girls at once," Lily blurted, making one last desperate move. "Word is, his stamina's insane—one girl can't even keep up."

"No way, really?" Robin frowned.

"Swear to God," Lily said, seizing the moment. "His energy's legendary. One of his old roommates—a girl—couldn't handle it and moved out. She just let his sleazy behavior slide. You'd never survive, emotionally or physically. Double whammy!"

"I don't buy it," Robin said, suddenly grinning. "Guys love to exaggerate. If he's really like that, I'll take it."

Raised by her dad like one of the boys, Robin was tough as nails—competitive, fearless, obsessed with violent sports and guns. A total gun nut.

Her? Scared? Please.

If anything, this made her more curious about Adam.

Lily slapped her forehead.

She was out of moves.

"Lily, I just moved to New York from Canada," Robin said earnestly. "My career's just getting started. Sure, I can say I'm a reporter for New York Metro News One, but all I get are tiny, forgettable stories no one cares about. And let's be honest—New York Metro News One's a nobody in the media world. I've got big dreams, though. I want to be the best journalist out there—a Pulitzer's gotta have my name on it someday. That means pouring my time and energy into work. Romance? Right now, I just want something casual. You get me?"

She went on, "It's not like I'm marrying Adam tomorrow. I need to test the waters and see what he's really like. With me being me, and him being him, neither of us is losing out, right?"

"The razor's in the bathroom," Lily said with a wry smile. "I'll grab it for you."

What else could she say?

Other than shouting "Hell yeah!" and handing over the razor, she'd done all she could.

"Thanks!" Robin beamed.

Back in the living room:

"Babe, what's wrong?" Matthew asked, rushing over as Lily emerged looking glum.

She spilled the whole story.

Matthew's jaw dropped.

"Maybe we should talk to Ted?" Lily suggested, glancing at Ted, who was still over there trying way too hard to play it "cool." She sighed. "Robin's after real casual—Adam-style casual. Ted can't fake that."

"Yeah," Matthew agreed. "Robin's all about her journalism career, Adam's obsessed with his doctor gig. They both put work first, heart and soul—relationships are just a side dish. Ted? He's all about love and marriage, heart and soul. They're on totally different wavelengths."

"So what do we do?" Lily fretted. "Ted seems super serious about this! Not that I blame him—Robin's got the looks, the personality, the vibe. If I were Ted, I'd think she was my soulmate too."

"I'll talk to him," Matthew said with a sigh. "Either way, this party's for Robin—Ted set it up. We can't let Adam and Robin mess with him tonight. I'll get Adam to leave early. After that, whatever happens happens."

"Think Adam will go along with it?" Lily asked skeptically.

"He will," Matthew said, grinning. "Honestly, he'd even turn Robin down flat for Ted's sake if it came to it."

"No way, really?" Lily raised an eyebrow.

"Babe, Adam might be a flirt like Barney, but their character? Night and day," Matthew said seriously. "He's all about loyalty to his friends—that's what I admire most about him. So yeah, he'll agree. But whatever happens later with him and Robin? We've gotta stay out of it. Ted and Robin aren't a thing, and if she keeps throwing herself at Adam, we can't expect him to hold out forever. That'd be inhumane."

"I get it, babe," Lily nodded.

With that, they split up.

Lily went to grab the razor for Robin.

Matthew headed off to convince Adam to ditch the party before Razor Robin pounced.

Chapter 385: Encrypted Folder

Apartment Party

"Whatever, I'm chill," Ted said, striking a pose with way too much effort.

"Nobody's more chill than me," he added, vibing hard.

He was clearly waiting for his big moment—half an hour from now, he'd explode onto the scene.

"Ted!"

Matthew and Lily walked over, catching him still trying so hard to look casual. They couldn't help but feel a little sorry for him.

"Stop pretending. Robin's gone," Lily blurted out.

"What?"

Ted froze. He hadn't even stepped into the spotlight yet, and the leading lady had already left the stage?

"Robin's into Adam..." Lily explained, laying it all out.

"No!"

Ted couldn't handle it. Especially when he heard how Robin acted when she first met Adam—it was eerily similar to how he felt when he first saw her. It wrecked him.

"It's the truth," Matthew said, his gaze suddenly steady. "Ted, face it—Robin's not your one true love."

"No! She is!" Ted shouted.

"Oh, really?" Matthew shot back. "Got any proof? That love-at-first-sight vibe doesn't count. Robin's reaction already showed it's just hormones talking."

"We've got the same interests," Ted argued, scrambling for evidence that he and Robin were meant to be. "She likes dogs, Scotch whisky, quoting Ghostbusters lines. She hates olives—yes! The olive theory! You guys came up with that one yourselves."

Lily loved olives. Matthew hated them. When it came to olives, no fights, no fuss—just perfect harmony. They'd dubbed it the "olive theory."

Matthew pressed his lips together and turned to Lily. "Babe, I'm sorry. I lied—I actually like olives too."

"What?"

Lily and Ted gasped in unison.

"It was our first date," Matthew explained, sheepish. "Lily, you asked if you could have my olives. I was just an 18-year-old horndog back then, waiting my whole life for a girl to take my olive branch—figuratively speaking. What was I supposed to say besides, 'Sure, I hate olives'?"

"No!" Lily groaned, pained.

Ted just stared, dazed.

"I'm sorry, Lily, I lied," Matthew said. "But does our relationship really need some olive theory to hold it up?"

Lily paused, then locked eyes with him, her voice soft but certain. "No, it doesn't."

"Ted," Matthew continued, holding Lily's hand and turning to him, "you've seen every first Lily and I ever had. Remember what it was like when we started dating? Was it anything like you are now—barely even in a relationship, already throwing around 'I love you' and 'you're my soulmate'?"

Ted went quiet.

Back when Matthew first started dating Lily, he'd been straight with Ted: "Bro, it's just a fling. You don't think I'd give up the whole forest for one tree, do you?"

"Relationships take time to build," Matthew pressed on, his wannabe-lawyer energy kicking in. "If you really believe in soulmates, then you should trust that you don't have to try so hard to find her. One day, she'll just show up—like Lily did when she knocked on my dorm room door.

"But you've gotta be ready. Don't rush it. Take it slow, get to know her. What's yours will always be yours. If you keep doing what you've been doing—falling head over heels for every girl you meet, going all-in too fast, burning hot one second and ice-cold the next—you're gonna hurt a lot of good women.

"And if you don't change? Even if your 'one true love' shows up—or even if it's Robin and she falls for you—can you say you'll still feel this way in a month? What about a year? How many 'Robins' have you already left in the dust?"

Ted opened his mouth but couldn't answer.

Without a photographic memory, he honestly couldn't keep count.

"You've been hanging around Barney too much," Matthew sighed. "You're too goal-oriented. You see me and Lily getting engaged, and bam—you want love, you want a ring, and you lock onto that. How's that any different from Barney and his random challenges? Where's the Ted who used to cry over a picture of his high school sweetheart, Helen? Can you even feel that way anymore?"

"Yeah," Lily chimed in. "Even if the olive theory was real, so what? It's just one tiny thing you and Robin might click on. How many olives do you even eat in a year? The real difference between you two is how you see love and work. She's all about her career, chasing it across the country—maybe the world. You're all about feelings.

"Imagine her reporting news all over the U.S., or even globally, and you barely see each other a few times a year. Even if it's true love, what then? That's the big, unfixable problem—not some theory we made up, but the long-distance reality everyone knows about. You're not some kid scamming high school girls before college anymore."

"Ted, take some time to figure yourself out," Matthew said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Don't rush. If destiny's real, then today, tomorrow—someday—she'll show up."

Ted stood there, silent.

Was he really wrong? Had he already let his true soulmate slip away?

The Next Day

Medical Center

"How's Cristina doing?" Adam asked, running into Meredith outside the hospital.

"They got her into surgery in time. She's fine—she's even itching to get back to work today," Meredith said with a faint smile.

"Heh," Adam chuckled.

That sounded exactly like Cristina.

"George!" Meredith called out as George hurried past.

He didn't even glance her way, just stormed into the hospital.

Meredith gave a wry smile.

"No!" Adam muttered, a bad feeling creeping up. "Don't tell me George went back to the clinic last night?"

Meredith didn't answer. She just dropped her head and walked inside.

"No!" Adam groaned, rubbing his temples.

This vibe? Something was definitely up.

And there went the favor he'd earned from Dr. Shepherd, the attending—poof, gone.

Damn that 100% drunk-pants-dropping curse.

Locker Room

SLAM!

George changed into his scrubs and slammed his locker shut.

That much anger? Did he strike out?

Adam kept his thoughts to himself, playing it cool like he hadn't heard a thing.

Last night's memories were fuzzy—just telling Meredith to look after Cristina and dragging George out. Beyond that? Nada.

With that, Adam mentally locked away his guesswork.

File name: 19980901. Size: 30MB. Encrypted.

He glanced at his mental "folder." Next to it, file 19980831 stood out—48GB of space.

Having a photographic memory like this wasn't surprising to him. He'd "copied" it from Sheldon.

Little Sheldon could recall his parents' unmentionable moments from infancy, triggered by his dad's "damn" over some beef. Grown-up Sheldon once stewed for years over something that ticked him off, only unleashing it to teach Leonard a lesson.

How'd he manage that with his personality? Easy—encrypt the maddening memory, whether it's taking the initiative or being passive..., tuck it away until the right moment to crack it open.

If Sheldon could do it, so could Adam.

Chapter 386: Whose Tears Are Falling? Medical Center

Cafeteria

When Adam asked the question, George froze on the spot.

Crying during that moment—whether from joy or pain—neither seemed like a reason for him to be this mad.

"I'm not just some tool!"

After a brief daze, George snapped back, "Meredith and I have a real connection. Her choosing me proves it. Otherwise, why didn't she pick you?"

"Pfft!"

Bianca burst out laughing.

Adam's lip twitched.

Talk about selective blindness.

If I hadn't ignored her and dodged that whole mess, you wouldn't be stuck wondering which kind of tears they were! It'd be the full package—complicated, layered, dramatic, everything!

After lunch, Adam passed by a patient room and couldn't help but pause.

Inside, a patient was openly mocking Meredith.

"So, what's it like stealing someone else's husband?"

"What did you say?"

Meredith couldn't believe a patient was joining the pile-on.

"I didn't say you..." the woman replied, but her tone and expression screamed, "I'm totally talking about you husband-stealing tramps!"

"Jeff moved in with some long-legged chick who answered his phone. I was three weeks pregnant! I was carrying his twins, and he ditched me—ditched our kids—for that slut!"

Meredith stayed silent, quietly spreading ultrasound gel on the woman's belly.

"It's too cold!" the pregnant woman yelped.

"Sorry," Meredith mumbled. After a beat, she added, "I'm sorry about your husband, too."

"Are you sorry about Dr. Montgomery-Shepherd's husband as well?"

The patient didn't let up, jabbing right at Meredith's sore spot.

Dr. Shepherd's wife was Addison Montgomery-Shepherd—originally just Montgomery, she'd tacked on her husband's name after marriage. Both were top docs in their fields, but Addison insisted on being called Dr. Montgomery to stand apart, showcasing her independence and skill.

"...I'll run a few more tests," Meredith said after a long pause, swallowing her frustration and anger, her face blank.

"I bet Dr. Montgomery's the one making you work with her," the patient sneered, not letting Meredith off the hook. She was treating her like the poster child for homewreckers. "If it were me, I'd do the same!"

"I'll grab your test results!"

Meredith stood abruptly, threw out the line, and bolted. She wasn't sure she could keep it together much longer.

Hallway

"Don't overthink it. At least in this case, it's not your fault," Adam said, trying to comfort her.

"It is my fault!" Meredith shot back, her face still a mask. "If I weren't so blind, I'd have seen what a scumbag he was ages ago. So yeah, it's all on me!"

She turned and stormed off.

Adam shook his head, checked in at the Green Clinic—nothing major going on there—and headed to the ER.

With Snowy and Leonard looking out for him, plus his skills earning nods from attending docs like Leonard, Burke, and Shepherd, he had a ton of freedom. He was starting to feel more like a resident than an intern.

Afternoon

Near Clock-Out Time

ER

"What's the situation?"

"Multiple gunshot wounds. Pulse 150, irregular. BP's 50. We've got two IV lines running, but his pressure's still dropping!"

"Page Dr. Green! OR 4, now!"

Adam rushed the gurney toward the operating room. "Prep six units of O-neg!"

OR 4

"No blood pressure reading," a nurse warned. "Capillary refill's abnormal."

"He's bleeding out. Set up a pressure transfusion," Adam directed calmly. "Get me bilateral chest tubes. Prep to roll him!"

Once they flipped the patient over and Adam saw the gunshot wounds on his back, his pupils shrank.
"Page Dr. Green again!"

"Yes, Doctor!" The nurse darted off.

"What's going on?" Leonard asked, rushing in moments later, scrubbed up.

"Young guy, multiple shots to the back, no exit wounds. Bilateral hemothorax. We've drained a liter from the left chest already. Breath sounds weak on both sides. I'm suturing the airway now," Adam reported, hands steady as he worked.

"Oh, God!" Leonard glanced at the wounds and winced. "Did someone hit him with a cannon?"

He grabbed the X-ray from a nurse and scanned it. "Bullet in the right ventricle."

"Cardiac tamponade, Dr. Green!" Adam said.

"Open him up, now!" Leonard ordered. "Thoracotomy kit!"

The surgical nurse handed it over.

Latest updates first on 69 Book Bar!

Leonard sliced into the chest with precision.

"No heartbeat. Tachycardia at 140. Pulse is faint, no BP," the nurse called out.

"Retractor," Leonard said.

Adam took it from the nurse and expertly held the incision open, giving Leonard a clear field.

"Prep 10 more units of O-neg!" Leonard instructed, mid-procedure. "Adam, get the cardiopulmonary bypass ready."

"Yes, Doctor!" Adam jumped into action, swift and decisive as ever.

But a strange feeling stirred in his chest.

If he was right, this patient would be the first he'd lose—despite all the effort, despite the surgery, dying right there in his hands.

The injuries were just too severe.

Leonard knew it too—why else would he blurt out that cannon comment? They were doing all they could and leaving the rest to fate.

And fate didn't pull through.

After 30 minutes of fighting, the patient succumbed to his wounds on the table.

"Doctors aren't gods," Adam sighed inwardly.

He stitched up the incision and stepped out of the OR.

The police were already there, asking basic questions. Adam learned the story from them.

The guy was an innocent bystander.

Walking past a little Eastern European-owned hotel, he got caught in a shootout between a Black robber and the store owner. The owner took out the robber on the spot. But the robber's bullets? Nearly all of them slammed into the poor guy's back.

Adam hated this kind of thing.

Amateurs who barely practiced, grabbed a gun, and hit the streets were way more dangerous than trained shooters. If Adam had been that bystander, he might've gotten hit too.

Who'd expect a guy spraying bullets at the owner to somehow send them flying the opposite way? Adam could practically picture it: the robber spinning, arm flailing, firing wildly.

Impossible to dodge. Terrifying.

Nurse's Station

"What's this?" Adam asked, eyeing a blood-stained gift box. "The patient's stuff?"

"Yeah," the nurse nodded.

"Have we reached his family?"

"We just found his emergency contact in the system. Calling now," she said, dialing.

Adam picked up a note attached to the box. It read: "So you'll have some music to go with your breakfast singing. Love, Max."

Ugh. Another kind, innocent soul.

In just over two months, this was the third one Adam had come across.

Whose tears were falling this time?

The call connected, and the nurse slipped into her professional tone. "Hello, this is New York Medical Center. Am I speaking to Tracy McConnell...?"

Chapter 387: La Vie en Rose

Medical Center.

Hallway.

Meredith and Liz leaned against the wall, slumped on a gurney, staring blankly ahead. Both of them looked drained, their moods in the gutter.

Adam walked up.

"Meredith, you worked on a TTTS case this afternoon?"

TTTS—twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome. A rare condition where twins sharing a placenta are connected by blood vessels, but the balance is off: one gets too much blood, the other too little. It's dangerous for both.

Sheldon often joked about how he should've taken out his twin sister, Missy, back in the womb, but that was a flawed flex. For one, he probably couldn't have beaten her—Missy would've laid him out with a swift kick to the jewels. And two, if something like TTTS had hit, trying to hog more nutrients might've ended with both of them toast.

Separating the twins' blood vessels is insanely tricky, so TTTS is usually untreatable—unless you've got a top-tier OB-GYN. Enter Dr. Montgomery, Shephard's wife. Surgical Chief Richard had invited her for two reasons. First, he knew Shephard was messing around with intern Grey—Meredith—and as the boss, he hated seeing hospital rules broken. Plus, Montgomery was his friend, and he didn't want their marriage to tank, so he figured she could reel Shephard in. Second, they'd just admitted a pregnant patient with TTTS, and Montgomery was the best in the game.

Bringing in elite doctors to boost the hospital's rep? That was Richard's job. When Shephard confronted him, he had a rock-solid excuse. Business is business!

"Yeah, I did," Meredith said, her voice flat. No trace of the excitement you'd expect from assisting on a surgery that big.

What a waste! Adam thought. If it were him—cluelessly getting cozy with a hotshot doctor's wife, only for her to slap him with a rare, high-level procedure and demand he scrub in—he'd be over the moon. Sign me up for a dozen of those!

"So, how'd it go?" Adam asked, swallowing his inner commentary. "Give me the surgery details."

"You only care about the surgery details!" Liz cut in, glaring at him. "Don't you get Meredith's situation? Don't you care how she's feeling?"

"Alright, my bad," Adam said, raising his hands in surrender. Then he pivoted, all concern: "Meredith, how'd you feel during the surgery? What did Dr. Montgomery do—every move—what ran through your head?"

"..." Liz's face darkened.

"I'm fine," Meredith said, forcing a tough front. "I'm good."

"Glad to hear it," Adam nodded, then got serious again. "So, what was Dr. Montgomery doing when you felt that? Oh, I bet it was when she made the incision, right?"

"..." Meredith's fake smile cracked. Sure, the patient had ripped into her with snide remarks and public humiliation, but she wasn't petty enough to feel glee over Montgomery cutting into someone.

"Okay, enough about my feelings—let me just tell you the surgery details!" Meredith blurted, cutting Adam off before he could ask another nerve-jangling question. She launched into it: "We started with a laparoscopy, using a thin blade for a three-millimeter incision... The surgery went perfectly. You know what I felt then? Watching her, so focused, I forgot she was Shephard's wife—my rival. Forgot the

hostility. I just stared, totally caught up in it. It hit me—my aunt used to say all the time: 'It's always the men and their brothers' fault, never us women. Never!'"

"Heh," Adam chuckled, satisfied with the detailed rundown. Then her last bit sank in, and he couldn't hold back a laugh.

"What's so funny?" Meredith snapped. "You don't think it's the men and their brothers' fault?"

"Nah, not that," Adam grinned. "I'm just thinking—you were so mesmerized by her focus, saying it's all the men's fault, never the women's, ever? Sounds like you might've awakened your inner lesbian. If that's the case, you two could ditch Shephard and live your own legendary love story."

"I'm here for it!" Liz chimed in. "Men are unreliable anyway—that's why so many women are going full-on lace-curtain these days."

Adam shot her a sideways glance, wondering: Is this solidarity with Meredith, or is Alex about to transition, and Liz is laying the groundwork for her own lace-curtain era...?

"I just admire her skill and authority," Meredith said, shaking her head. "And her courage."

"Courage?" Adam raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

"After the surgery, Mrs. Phillips—the patient—lost it," Meredith said, her expression tangled. "She didn't want me anywhere near her. Montgomery could've piled on, but instead, she shut her down. Said it wasn't my fault, that she wouldn't have had my grace or patience. Said it wasn't me or her husband cheating—it was her who cheated first. Told Mrs. Phillips she owed me an apology."

"She actually said that?" Liz's jaw dropped.

"Yeah," Meredith nodded.

Whoa. This redheaded doctor had some serious guts. Adam was impressed.

"So, are they divorced or what?" Liz asked, still confused.

"No idea," Meredith said, lost.

"Definitely not," Adam said, breaking it down. "If they were, this whole scene wouldn't be happening. From what we know, it sounds like Shephard found out Montgomery cheated, stormed off in a rage, and she showed up two months later—probably after he'd cooled off—to patch things up."

"Then what's Meredith in all this?" Liz asked, indignant.

"Probably a tool to smooth things over with Shephard," Adam said matter-of-factly. "Otherwise, no woman—well, most women—would treat their husband's mistress like this..." He didn't say the rest out loud: Meredith should know—she's the queen of using tools herself.

Meredith froze.

A tool? Me?

Just then, a sweet melody floated in through the window—someone strumming a guitar.

"Hold me close and hold me tight,

Whisper softly by my side,

Life blooms sweet like roses bright.

Kisses deep, the heavens sigh,

Eyes shut tight, my heart's alive,

Life blooms sweet like roses high.

When you stormed into my soul,

Joy flowed free like rivers roll,

Roses blossom, full and whole.

Soft words hum, angels take flight,

Daily chatter turns to rhyme,

Stay with me, body and mind,

Life will bloom like roses, time after time."

The song—"La Vie en Rose"—was sung with a aching, tearful beauty. Everyone who heard it stopped in their tracks, mouths shut, ears tuned in. The woman's voice carried a sadness so raw it hit straight to the core.

Adam just zoned out a bit, lost in it.

Meredith and Liz, though? They were already sobbing...

Chapter 388: Leave It to Me

Outside the window,

a rendition of La Vie en Rose played on repeat, over and over again.

Meredith and Liz had already cried themselves into a sobbing mess.

Even Adam couldn't help but feel a lump in his throat.

Music has a way of hitting you hard like that sometimes.

And why wouldn't it?

If it didn't have that kind of power, how could those invincible people truly conquer everything in their path?

A soft drizzle started falling outside, pattering lightly against the ground.

Adam instinctively stood up, ready to grab an umbrella and head out.

Because he'd already figured out who was playing that music beyond the window.

At this moment, in this place, it couldn't be anyone other than Miss Tracy McConnell—no one else fit the bill.

"Move it, out of my way!"

Just then, a figure came barreling toward him, shouting as they ran.

"Ted?" Adam said, startled.

Ted didn't even glance at him. He brushed past Adam and bolted straight for the hospital exit.

"Did something happen?"

Adam's heart skipped a beat. He took off after Ted, catching up in just a few strides.

"Ted, what's going on?" Adam asked, jogging alongside him, not even breaking a sweat.

"Nothing's wrong—don't follow me!" Ted waved him off in a panic, picking up his pace.

By now, they'd made it outside the hospital.

"Could it be...?"

Adam's eyes landed on a small figure in the direction Ted was running toward. He slowed to a stop, a guess already forming in his mind.

In the rain,

under the corner of the hospital wall,

a petite figure slipped a small guitar into its case and clutched it to her chest.

This time, she didn't strum the strings or sing her sorrow. Instead, she let loose in the pattering rain, crying her heart out without restraint.

Ted dashed over, peeling off his jacket and holding it above her head, quietly shielding her from the wind and rain. He stood there, letting the water drip down on him without a word.

The small figure didn't seem to notice—or care—about anything around her. She just poured out her emotions, as if challenging the heavens to see who could drown in sadness first.

Adam watched from a distance, a wry thought crossing his mind: "Damn, that's some tender, romantic nonsense right there."

Ted had this quality about him—an almost deceptive charm.

At just the right moment, he'd pull off something gentle and romantic that caught you off guard and tugged at your heartstrings.

Like right now.

Even Adam had to give him props for that.

But those "key moments" were rare by definition. Most of life wasn't made up of them.

So, after a while, Ted's less savory side would inevitably slip out, hurting the women who'd fallen for his sweetness and charm.

Adam wasn't sure why Ted was even here—whether he'd come to stir up trouble or to visit Barney.

But he figured Ted must've been moved by Tracy McConnell's raw, heartfelt grief, which explained this whole dramatic rain-shielding scene.

Should I stop him?

Adam hesitated.

The guitar speaks the heart, and for Tracy McConnell to play like that, her love for her boyfriend Max must've been deep—profoundly moving, even.

She was, without a doubt, one of the good ones.

She'd already been dealt such a brutal blow. Did she really deserve to get hurt again by Ted's eventual mess?

He mulled it over, but his feet wouldn't budge to intervene.

How could he stop it?

"Leave it to me?"

Uh... yeah, no.

Time ticked by, second by second.

Ted, still out in the rain, was soaked to the bone by now, looking like a drowned rat.

Tracy finally managed to stem her tears. She wiped her face with a hand, glanced at Ted, and murmured a soft "thanks" before standing up and walking off.

"I'll walk you home," Ted offered, holding his jacket up, ready to keep shielding her from the rain.

"Thanks, but no need."

Her voice was quiet, but the resolve in it stopped Ted cold.

He just stood there, jacket in hand, staring dumbly as Tracy vanished into the rainy haze.

"Go back inside, man. Don't just stand there getting drenched," Adam called out from under the hospital awning.

Ted ignored him, still rooted to the spot, gazing off into the distance.

Adam rolled his eyes. Whatever. He wasn't going to bother.

Romantic types always had a flair for the dramatic—getting soaked in the rain was basically their default move.

He'd said his piece. If Ted wanted to stand there and drown, that was on him.

For a girl like Tracy, the further she stayed from Ted—and Adam, for that matter—the better.

Back in the hospital corridor,

Meredith, who'd been bawling her eyes out earlier, was gone. Only Liz remained, quietly weeping.

"Where's Meredith?" Adam asked.

"She went to get some answers from Shepherd," Liz replied softly. "Who was that just now?"

Adam filled her in on Tracy's story.

Cue the waterworks—Liz started sobbing again.

Adam grimaced. What a mess.

Growing up, he'd always loved that line from *Dream of the Red Chamber* where Jia Baoyu, the lipstick-loving romantic, said women were made of water.

Looked like there was some truth to it after all.

He was itching to bail, but politeness won out. "Liz, you okay?"

"I'm fine," she choked out between sniffles.

"Cool..." Adam perked up, ready to make his escape.

"Alex is struggling..." Liz blurted, unable to hold back. She slipped into vent mode.

Adam's mouth twitched. Fine, guess I'm sticking around for the psychology lesson—straight from the sunflower manual.

"How's he doing?"

"He's leaving," Liz said through tears. "He says he can't stay here anymore. The way everyone looks at him—he can't handle it. But I swear I don't look down on him..."

Adam listened quietly as Liz spilled the details on Alex's last few days.

Thanks to the sharpshooting husband of that gorgeous woman—and some timely surgery—everything had been snipped clean. Alex's recovery was going surprisingly well.

Aside from having to squat to pee from now on, he'd probably be fine.

But being a doctor? That was likely off the table.

The new urethra was artificial—a wound, really—and prone to infection. Someone like that couldn't step into a sterile OR.

Even if he could keep practicing, Alex probably wouldn't stay at the medical center.

This place was his personal hell now. Too many familiar faces. Unless you had nerves of steel, the before-and-after contrast would eat you alive.

Even if no one else meant anything by it, Alex would overthink every glance.

Leaving, starting fresh somewhere new where no one knew him—that wasn't a bad call.

Adam was about to offer some polite advice when his eyes narrowed. Out the window, in the rain, a wobbly figure stumbled from the bar across the street toward the hospital.

With his sharp eyesight, he recognized them instantly.

"Joe?"

Adam bolted for the hospital entrance again.

Screeeech!

Just as he was about to reach Joe, a car came tearing across the road, fishtailing wildly. Tires squealed against the wet pavement as it barreled toward the hospital, showing no signs of slowing down.

Joe, unsteady on his feet from whatever was wrong with him, didn't stand a chance of dodging.

"Watch out!"

As the car drifted and charged forward, Adam's senses kicked into overdrive—everything slowed like bullet time. He calculated in an instant: he could make it.

With a burst of speed, he grabbed Joe and yanked him out of the way, narrowly avoiding the crash.

The car, meanwhile, plowed straight into the hospital.

Chapter 389: A Human Tragedy

Medical Center.

Front Entrance.

A car came barreling straight through the doors.

"Hands up!"

Armed security guards rushed over in an instant.

Just a few days ago, there'd been a shooting here, so the guards were on high alert, reacting lightning-fast.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I'm just delivering pizza! I've been stabbed! I'm dying! I need help!"

A panicked man's voice screamed from inside the car.

Adam was helping Joe hobble in when he overheard this. He glanced at Joe.

"Go on, I'm fine," Joe said.

Joe had been running a bar across from the hospital for over a decade. Even if he didn't know much about medicine, he'd picked up plenty over the years just from listening to the medical staff shoot the breeze every day. He understood how the hospital worked and what the doctors were thinking.

He'd walked over here on his own, but this pizza guy—yelling about being stabbed and on death's door—was clearly about to jump the line for surgery. His case was obviously more urgent.

"Mary!" Adam called out to a nurse.

"Hey, Joe."

"Hey, Mary."

Nurse Mary came over right away, taking charge of Joe with a familiar greeting. She was clearly a regular at his bar too.

"Where'd you get stabbed?"

Adam approached the car, looking at the young pizza delivery guy in the driver's seat. He didn't see any signs of heavy bleeding from a stab wound, so he asked.

"My side! My side!"

The pizza guy shouted, a mix of terror and fury in his voice. "I was just delivering pizza, and they stabbed me! I'm dying!"

A nurse rolled a gurney over by then.

"Relax! I'm a doctor! I'm here to help!" Adam said, trying to calm him down. "Listen, I need to lift you out of there first so we can treat you. Don't struggle—it could make the wound worse. Got it?"

"Got it," the pizza guy yelped.

Adam reached in, carefully pulled him out of the driver's seat, and laid him on the gurney.

"We've booked Operating Room 5. Should we prep for a peritoneal lavage?" an experienced nurse asked, following standard procedure.

"No, cancel the OR!"

Adam lifted the guy's shirt where he'd pointed to his right side and shook his head. "Just grab some antiseptic and a Band-Aid."

"What's wrong?!"

The pizza guy, still freaking out, saw Adam and the nurse freeze and roared, "Why aren't you saving me?!"

The nurse looked totally baffled too.

"Head hurt?" Adam asked.

"No."

"Chest pain?"

"No!"

"Neck pain?"

"No! What are you guys doing?!"

"Anywhere else hurt?"

"I don't know!"

"...It's just a scratch," Adam pointed out.

"A scratch?"

The pizza guy blinked, sat up, and looked down. Sure enough, there was a long red mark—but not a drop of blood.

Everyone stared at him, speechless.

He squirmed, embarrassed, then raised his hand like he was swearing an oath. "It was a really, really big knife!"

"I believe you!" Adam nodded.

Delivering pizza in New York—especially at night—you'd think this guy had seen it all. Pocket knives probably popped up every other day. But this kid had freaked out so bad he'd floored it all the way here, crashing through the entrance without even braking, screaming that he was dying.

If it wasn't a huge knife, that'd be the real shocker. It might not have been a 50-meter machete, but it was probably close...

Or, maybe this guy was just a total coward. First time getting stabbed, and even a tiny dagger morphed into a 50-meter blade in his mind. Maybe he'd bolted 49.999 meters before that "massive" knife barely grazed him.

Either way, this guy was a champ—outshining Glenn, the pizza boy from The Walking Dead who only lasted six seasons.

"I'm fine!"

Now fully calm, the pizza guy started patting himself down, overjoyed.

"Not necessarily. Got insurance?" Adam asked, nodding toward the car that'd smashed through the entrance.

"No!!!"

The pizza guy followed Adam's gaze, saw the wreckage, and let out a squeal like a pig at slaughter.

Looking at him now, Adam knew something definitely hurt.

Leaving this clown to the nurse, Adam turned back to Joe.

"Where's it bothering you?" he asked.

"Nowhere," Joe said, hesitating. "I just passed out for a sec earlier. Maybe low blood sugar?"

"Come on," Adam urged. "I know you hate coming here, but since you're already in the door, you've gotta tell me what's up so we can fix it."

"Treatment here's too damn expensive," Joe grumbled. "A couple tests, and I'm out months of work! It's highway robbery!"

"But you've got insurance, right...?" Adam started, then stopped, wide-eyed. "Don't tell me you don't have insurance?"

"I run my own bar—a small gig. Where am I supposed to get money for insurance?" Joe said with a self-deprecating laugh. "Besides, I'm healthy as a horse. No aches, no pains all these years. Shelling out cash every year for something I don't use? That's a waste!"

"You're making bank off us medical folks every day, and we're keeping your bar buzzing every night. And you're telling me you won't even throw us a little business?" Adam teased. "Or what, you just ask a doctor at the bar about any little problem and skip the clinic bill?"

"I buy them drinks too," Joe said sheepishly.

Adam couldn't help but laugh.

Of course!

Live by the mountain, eat from the mountain; live by the sea, eat from the sea. Joe lived by the hospital, rubbing elbows with doctors and nurses daily, saving himself clinic fees.

Smart guy.

If he didn't have that perk, Adam wouldn't believe for a second that Joe could skip insurance for over a decade so confidently. Even without big illnesses, little stuff pops up, right? Without insurance, you're screwed—can't afford a thing.

Sure, a doctor hanging out at the bar might check you out for free, but you're still on the hook for meds. And drugs in the U.S.? Pricey.

Hospital meds, though? That's a whole other universe. Take a basic Tylenol pill: eight cents at a pharmacy, but \$15 a pop in here.

That's a 187.5-times markup.

One example tells the whole story!

That's why Joe avoided this place like the plague.

And it wasn't just Joe. Back when Joey was between acting gigs and his insurance lapsed, he got a hernia. Even in agony, he held off until he landed a job to renew his coverage before coming in.

No insurance safety net? You don't dare get sick. One visit could bankrupt you.

A real-life tragedy: alive, but broke.

Adam's face grew serious.

Because if Joe knew the system this well and still showed up, it meant he knew something was wrong. He wouldn't be here unless he had no choice.

With that in mind, Adam started a thorough check.

"Call Dr. Shephard," he told the nurse.

"Dr. Shephard?" Joe flinched. "Is it bad?"

He knew the name—Dr. Shephard, head of neurosurgery at the medical center. How could he not?

"We'll only know once Dr. Shephard takes a look," Adam said, reassuring him. "For now, just lie back and rest."

Joe's face went pale.

He'd heard all the stories about Adam—knew he wasn't just some rookie intern. But that's exactly why this hit harder.

Right now, he wished Adam was just a regular newbie—or even a slacker like Alex, who clocked in at the bar every night. Then maybe this could be a mistake.

But with Adam? It felt like a death sentence.

Chapter 390: Are You Even Human?

Medical Center

"Dr. Duncan, Dr. Shephard's looking for you," the nurse called out, holding the phone.

"Got it," Adam replied with a quick smile to Joe before stepping out of the room. He walked over to the nurses' station and took the receiver.

On the other end, Dr. Shephard's tone was off—clearly rattled. Not that it was surprising. His wife had shown up out of nowhere, his mistress had dumped him, and Dr. Burke had leapfrogged over him to become interim chief of surgery. With all that mess, anyone would be on edge.

Adam gave a rundown of the initial exam.

"Get a CT first. You're on watch tonight. Call me if his condition worsens; otherwise, I'll check in tomorrow morning," Shephard said briskly before hanging up.

Adam's sharp ears caught a snippet of Meredith's voice—shrill and dramatic—just as the call ended. Lines like "You're heartless, shameless, and unreasonable!" and "Oh, and you're not?" flashed through his mind like some cheesy soap opera script.

"Joe, we need to get you a CT," Adam said, stepping back into the room where Joe was waiting, eyes wide with anticipation.

"Okay," Joe agreed without hesitation this time.

When death starts feeling real, money suddenly becomes less of an issue. He'd grit his teeth and pay up. That's the leverage the medical industry has to charge outrageous fees without blinking: no tests, no treatment. No treatment, you die. Your call.

Adam personally took Joe down for the CT. If things went as expected, Joe was in for major surgery—a thrill for every intern.

"Adam!"

"Ted?"

Halfway down the hall, Ted came barreling toward him, all frantic energy.

"I need to ask you something," Ted blurted out, breathless.

"I'm working. Can it wait 'til I'm off?" Adam brushed him off, already guessing where this was headed.

"I can't wait that long," Ted insisted, practically buzzing with urgency.

"It's fine. I don't mind," Joe chimed in from the gurney, flashing a kind smile.

Adam glanced at him, reading the subtext. Joe was scared of the test results—any excuse to delay the inevitable probably felt like a relief.

"Fine, spill it," Adam said, keeping pace toward the CT room.

"You remember that girl outside earlier?" Ted asked, voice rushed. "Do you have her number?"

"Nope," Adam replied without missing a beat, though he'd seen this coming.

Ted narrowed his eyes. "The nurse said her boyfriend was the one you resuscitated. If I want her contact info, it needs your approval."

Clearly, he'd already tried the nurses' station, only to hit the hospital's patient privacy wall.

"And who are you to her, exactly?" Adam asked with a teasing grin.

"..." Ted faltered, stumped.

Adam shrugged and kept pushing Joe's gurney.

Ted stood there for a second before jogging to catch up. "Adam, I've got a gut feeling—she's the one. My future Mrs. Ted Mosby."

"Whoa, that sounds familiar," Adam quipped. "Didn't someone say that before? Oh, right—Lily mentioned you said the same thing about Robin the other day. So what's the plan, Ted? Moving to the Middle East for a harem of 'true loves' and future Mrs. Mosbys?"

"Robin's different from her," Ted shot back, giving Adam a sideways look. "And you'd know exactly why."

Robin had been his blue French horn—his big romantic fixation. Now? Not so much.

"..." Adam blinked, caught off guard. What did this have to do with him?

"So, give me her number. It's the best outcome for all of us," Ted said, his smile a weird mix of hope and strain.

Last night's party had been a disaster for Ted. He'd gone in carefree and come out crushed. When he heard Robin had chased after Adam, his heart shattered. He wanted to blame Adam, but Matthew and Lily both backed Adam up. Plus, Adam had left early on his own—above and beyond what friendship required. Matthew and Lily's words hit him hard, shaking him to his core.

He always ragged on Barney's wild antics, half-joining in while pretending to disapprove. But now? He was starting to act like Barney himself. After a sleepless night, he'd come to the hospital after work to see Barney, hoping to figure out if Matthew and Lily were right. Did he need to change?

Then he heard La Vie en Rose. As a guy who loved music and had a knack for bands, the raw emotion in that voice floored him. When it looped again and again before cutting off, that soulful, heartbroken

sound filled his head. Robin's image faded, replaced by the hazy outline of this singer he'd never even seen. His romantic side kicked into overdrive—she was his real true love.

That's what sparked his mad dash to shield her from the rain earlier. And when he saw her tiny figure sobbing freely in the downpour, he didn't need his friends to tell him: this was his destiny.

"Sorry," Adam said, shaking his head.

"Come on!" Ted pleaded. "I'm serious."

"You know why she's here, right?" Adam gave him an odd look. "You heard the love and pain in her voice. Her boyfriend—the love of her life—just died. And you're ready to swoop in now? Are you even human?"

Ted froze, flustered. "I didn't mean right now... I just don't want to miss my chance. I could wait quietly on the sidelines..."

"If that's the case, she's not changing her number anytime soon," Adam said with a smirk. "If you're really waiting quietly, you don't need to be near her. Let's talk in six months and decide if you should reach out."

"Six months?!" Ted yelped.

"Problem?" Adam shot him a disdainful look. "What, your so-called 'true love' can't survive half a year? Or do you think so little of her—that her grief won't last that long, and she'll just bounce into your arms, all happy and healed?"

"..." Ted had no comeback. Adam had him cornered with logic.

Wait—something felt off.

"We? No way!" Ted snapped out of it, glaring. "There's no 'we'! You stay away from her!"

"Depends on you," Adam said, grinning. "If your feelings hold steady for six months, it's just you—no 'we.' But if you waver and start chasing some new 'feeling,' then sorry, man. A girl like that deserves to stay far away from guys like us."

Guys like us? Were they even the same kind of guy? Adam had some nerve saying that.

Ted's mouth twitched. After a beat, he gritted his teeth. "Fine, it's a deal. But you cannot contact her on your own."

"Don't worry," Adam said with a cryptic smile. "Deep down, I lean toward option two. A girl like that should stay far away from guys like us."

"..." Ted was speechless.

Could he stop saying "us"? It was freaking him out.