

## TV Show 471

Chapter 471: Disaster of the Mad Python

Medical Center. Emergency Room.

Adam was patching up Ross's injuries.

The wounds on Ross's face looked pretty bad, but thankfully, they were mostly surface-level. Of course, the emotional bruising from that fancy French restaurant? That's not something Adam could fix with a bandage.

"OMG! What happened?!" Monica and the gang rushed in, jaws dropping when they saw Ross all banged up.

Adam chuckled and filled them in on the story.

"That's outrageous!" Monica snapped. He's her big brother, after all—she can slug him, but no one else gets a free pass. "We've got adults in the family, you know. I'll go sort this guy out!" She rolled up her sleeves, ready to march over and give someone a piece of her mind.

"Whoa, easy there," Adam said, calming her down. "It's not like the guy meant to do it. Ross kinda brought this on himself—single as a pringle but still waltzing into a couples-only spot. He's not totally innocent here."

"So this is my fault now?" Ross threw his hands up, incredulous.

"You're saying it's not?" Adam grinned. "Your daughter's about to pop into the world, and instead of being there for her mom, you're reminiscing at your ex's favorite restaurant. Then, when it feels off, you don't leave—you stick around, flirting with a cute waitress over a couples' meal. Getting clocked by her boyfriend? Yeah, you had that coming."

"You—!" Ross sputtered, fuming. "You're still taking Rachel's side! I've said it a hundred times: I asked her. She didn't want to get back together. It's not like I refused her!"

"Oh, really?" Adam gave him a long, knowing look. "Sure, you've explained it a hundred times now. But back then? You asked her once, half-heartedly, like 'Oh, if Rachel hesitates even a little, I'm out.' Ask Monica and Phoebe—if they were Rachel, would they have said yes?"

Rachel, pregnant and living alone in Ross's apartment, hadn't been called, so she wasn't there.

"No way," Monica and Phoebe said in unison, shaking their heads.

Women pick up on that stuff—whether a guy's sincere or just going through the motions. And whether they fall for it? That's up to them. Rachel, clearly, has her pride.

"And don't forget Mona," Adam added. "If I remember right, you asked Rachel, and that same night, you hooked up with Mona. How do you know Rachel didn't swing by later to talk after saying no?"

"What?!" Ross's brain short-circuited. "Rachel came looking for me?"

"Who knows?" Adam shrugged. "If she did, and saw you already cozying up with Mona right after asking her, she probably just slipped out quietly."

"Rachel..." Monica and Phoebe sighed sympathetically, feeling her pain.

"Here's the thing," Adam said with a shake of his head. "You move way too fast."

"..." Ross had no comeback.

And no, Adam wasn't just ribbing him about his stamina (though that was fair game too). Emotionally, Ross was a speed demon. Asking Rachel one minute, jumping to Mona the next? It wasn't even the first time. Back when he and Rachel broke up, he'd stormed off that night and brought home some random woman from a bar. Talk about seamless transitions.

"Ross, you're in your mid-thirties, man," Adam said, laying it on straight. "Even Joey's toning it down these days. How long are you gonna keep playing the field? You used to gripe about Ben being raised by

a pair of lesbians—now you've got a shot at giving Emma a normal, happy family from day one. But you just brush it off, barely trying. Is that really okay?"

"I..." Ross opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

"Adam's right," Monica said, slinging an arm around Ross's shoulders. "You need to think hard about this."

"Totally," Phoebe chimed in. "You two are each other's lobsters—meant to be!"

Ross's lips twitched into a small smile. That lobster bit? It started way back when the six of them first got tight—him crushing hard on Rachel, and Phoebe tossing out that line to cheer him up.

"Give it some thought," Adam said, clapping Ross on the shoulder before heading off. The ER wasn't exactly short on patients.

"Mr. Harold, what bit you?" Adam asked, flipping through a chart as he stepped into the next room.

"Oh, my pet snake," replied a chubby, goofy-looking white guy sitting there with a dopey grin.

"Pet snake?" Adam blinked, startled. "What kind?"

Americans are wild—keeping all sorts of crazy pets just for kicks. And pet snakes? A lot of them aren't harmless little garters. Nope, people go for the venomous ones—cobras, you name it. Stuff normal folks run from, they keep as houseguests. Oh, and here's a fun tidbit: —support some cool creators if you're into that! Anyway, back to the snake guy...

"Golden eyelash rattlesnake," the dude said, still grinning like an idiot.

"..." Adam's mouth twitched. Forget the fancy "golden eyelash" part—rattlesnake? That's a big, bold, venomous name right there. This guy got bit and was still chipper? Total goofball.

"Mr. Harold, are you feeling weak, nauseous, or shivery?" Adam asked, getting down to business.

"Nope," Harold shook his head.

"Where's the bite?"

Harold stuck out his arm. "Wanna see my little baby?" he asked, all giddy.

"Huh?" Adam's eyes narrowed. "You brought it here?" Then he spotted the paper bag by Harold's side and instinctively took a few steps back—old-school snake fear kicking in.

"Yup!" Harold beamed, lifting the bag. "Snakes are cold-blooded, so I kept it under a heat lamp. Huh, it was just here a second ago—where'd it go?"

"How big is it?" Adam asked, scanning the room like a hawk.

"Three feet," Harold replied casually.

Holy—! That's a meter-long beast!

"Carol, call animal control now," Adam barked, cursing under his breath. "Tell all staff to stay alert, and get Mr. Harold some antivenom, stat."

"Yes, Dr. Duncan," Nurse Carol said, already dialing.

"Hang tight," Adam told Harold, forcing a tight smile before ducking out of the room. That goofy grin was not helping.

"Monica, Chandler, take Ross and get outta here," Adam said, tracking down his friends and spilling the news about a loose venomous snake slithering around the hospital.

"OMG!" Ross and the gang were ready to bolt, but Phoebe lingered, looking worried. "What are you gonna do with the pet snake?" she asked, genuinely concerned for the critter.

"Don't worry," Adam said with a laugh, used to her soft spot by now. "Animal control's on it—they'll handle it properly."

"Good," Phoebe nodded, finally letting Monica drag her off.

After seeing them out, Adam returned to chaos—hospital staff were already hunting for the snake. With so many people in the ER, including kids, waiting for animal control could be a disaster.

Chapter 472: Dark Humor

Medical Center. Emergency Room.

Adam was about to head off to find Matthew and the others when another ambulance screeched in.

Well, so much for that plan.

He figured Matthew, Lilly, and the crew had probably already left anyway.

"Dr. Duncan!"

A nurse called out from across the room.

"What's the situation?"

Adam hurried over, all business.

"12-year-old male, multiple gunshot wounds to the legs and abdomen. We rushed him here—IV drip's at max flow."

The paramedics wheeled the stretcher in, rattling off details as they went.

"Two liters of fluid in, but we can't get a pulse."

"Move fast—get him to Trauma Room 1!"

Adam jogged alongside, eyeing the kid's condition while barking orders.

"Prep O-negative blood! Hang the IV line!"

"Run a hemoglobin and hematocrit check!"

"Oh my God!"

A nurse darted into action, but when her peripheral vision caught the boy on the table, she couldn't hold back a gasp.

"Drive-by shooting?" another nurse muttered, half to herself.

"No!"

One of the paramedics, catching his breath after handing off the patient, shook his head. "Drug deal gone bad. Blacklist-style mess."

"But he's only 12?"

The nurse's voice cracked with disbelief.

"They found him with a 9mm submachine gun in one hand and a Ruger in the other."

The paramedic shrugged, then bolted off. In their line of work, every second counted—volume was the name of the game.

Adam overheard it all. Glancing at the boy's dark skin, he let out a quiet sigh in his head.

The welfare system here in the States? It's a wild ride.

You've seen it laid bare in shows like *Shameless*. Got some quirky condition—like agoraphobia or whatever—that keeps you from leaving the house? Get a doctor's note, and boom, you're on the dole. Live off that check without lifting a finger, no problem.

Then there's the kid thing. Have a baby, adopt a kid—doesn't matter—you get a monthly stipend. A real *Shameless* type could rack up enough kids to live pretty cushy off their welfare checks alone. Homeless folks? Charities keep them fed and clothed. Might not be gourmet, but they won't starve.

Those deadbeat parents? They just cash the welfare checks and barely glance at the kids. If the kids hustle and earn a buck young, guess who swoops in to snatch it for a night of fun? Dear old Dad.

Now, that's usually the old white guy playbook. But when it's a Black family? That's where the weirdness kicks in.

A normal Black family, even with a bunch of kids, doesn't qualify for squat. Unless it's a single-parent setup—and it's gotta be the mom raising them. Dad can't even fake leaving; there's folks who'll pop by unannounced to check. If they spot him, the checks dry up.

Emmm.

It's almost like the system's nudging Black guys to hit the streets and stay gone. "Don't worry, bro, we'll take care of your wife and kids."

But a single mom, even with welfare, still has to hustle a job to give her kids a decent shot. Meanwhile, those kids—left to fend for themselves—grow up running the streets. They might not bump into their dad, but they sure as hell meet his buddies: the uncles and cousins.

And what do those guys do? The kids follow suit. What's there to do on the streets, anyway?

It's a vicious cycle, locked tight. Rare as hell for a Black kid to break free from it.

The one Adam was trying to save right now? Clearly didn't make it out.

Twelve years old, packing a submachine gun and a Ruger. When's there room for a pencil and a book? Even if they wanted to hit the books, where's the cash for that?

Hard work takes years to pay off. Falling into the streets? That's just one gun away.

Most adults can't stick it out that long—let alone a kid.

All this churned in Adam's head, but his hands didn't stop. He was in full-on rescue mode. Stabilize the kid, then rush him to the OR. Sure, they could operate here, but the sterile setup and equipment? Nowhere near what the operating room offered. Still, for an ER, it made sense.

Outside the Trauma Room.

The ER had a new visitor.

"Hey, you got something going on?"

John Carter had just changed out of his scrubs, ready to head home and tackle some serious business: braised pig trotters! While signing out at the nurse's station, he noticed the newcomer and couldn't help but ask.

Not that he was nosy—he just wanted to lend a hand.

The visitor? A Black kid, maybe ten or so, rocking a red cap and a ratty, oversized sports jacket—probably scavenged from some adult. The thing was so bulky it practically dragged on the floor.

The kid was wandering around, peeking here and there, like he was looking for someone.

Carter saw him and figured he'd help out.

But the kid didn't seem to hear him, just kept scanning the place.

"You looking for your parents?"

Carter raised his voice a bit.

Still no answer. The kid tugged open a curtain between the main ward's beds, glanced in, then moved on.

"Hey!"

Carter jogged over and tapped the kid's shoulder.

Big mistake.

He froze.

Instead of a smile or a confused look, he was staring down the barrel of a gun.

The kid had whipped out a pistol from that ridiculous jacket, aiming it right at him.

Worse? The blank, emotionless stare on the boy's face. Pure, chilling indifference to life.

Carter didn't dare twitch.

He had zero doubt this kid would pull the trigger.

"Oh, God!"

"Move it, punk... ah!"

The kid dropped the act, waving the gun as he marched forward.

Anyone in his path? One flash of the barrel, and they either clammed up or flinched hard. Same deal either way—no one moved, no one even yelled.

The kid strutted through, checking trauma room after trauma room.

Finally, he hit Adam's.

"Who let you in—"

An ER nurse started to snap, then stopped dead.

The second the kid barged in, Adam's instincts kicked into overdrive—bullet time, courtesy of his reflexes.

One glance, and he clocked it: the kid was ready to shoot.

The gun was aimed at the patient on the table, sure, but Adam wasn't taking chances.

In that split second, he hurled the forceps in his hand with everything he had.

Under bullet time, the armed kid's finger was just brushing the trigger.

But Adam's amped-up throw? The forceps rocketed like a cannonball, smashing into the kid's gun arm.

"Ngh!"

A grunt slipped from the boy's mouth.

For a ten-year-old, the pain tolerance was unreal—his blank face barely flinched, just a slight brow twitch.

Didn't matter. The gun slipped from his grip, clattering to the floor as his hand spasmed. That arm? Smacked so hard it twisted—definitely broken.

Adam lunged from the table, grabbing the kid's other hand as he still tried to snatch the gun back.

His grip locked the boy down, strength overwhelming.

But those defiant, icy eyes stared back. Adam didn't hesitate— a precise chop to the neck, just enough force to knock him out cold.

"Call security."

Adam kicked the gun under the table and hustled back to the patient.

"Let's keep going."

Chapter 473: This Scene Hits Hard

Medical Center.

Emergency Room.

The scene was straight-up unreal—like something out of a fever dream.

Even the action movies these days wouldn't dare pull off a stunt like this.

No wonder half the room was still processing what just went down.

Adam yanked off his contaminated gloves and waved at the nurse to grab him a fresh pair.

But she just stood there, frozen like a deer in headlights.

Oh well.

Adam shrugged it off, grabbed some new latex gloves himself, and swapped them on in record time before diving back into the rescue.

This was a life on the line, after all!

Saving it would net Adam an extra 0.01 years of lifespan—that's 3.65 days. A little more than the three days Helen Keller once wished for, by a cool 0.65-day margin.

"Clamps!"

That tiny breather snapped the nurses—seasoned pros who'd seen it all—back to reality. They kicked into gear, jumping on Adam's orders like a well-oiled machine.

Not long after, hospital security rolled up, armed to the teeth.

Word had obviously gotten around. Those staffers in the hallway, held at gunpoint by that African-American kid, must've tipped them off. They'd been too scared to even scream.

"It's safe now! Come in and clean up—er, I mean, take him away!"

The nurse shot a glance at the security guards peeking in like nervous cats, clearly prioritizing their own hides. She couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Huh?"

The guards finally dared to sneak a few more looks inside and spotted the knocked-out hitman sprawled on the floor. "What the heck happened here?" one blurted, jaw practically on the ground.

"Dr. Duncan took care of the hitman, no biggie," the nurse said with a proud grin. "Now hurry up and haul him off—don't mess with Dr. Duncan saving this patient!"

"WTF?!"

The guards all froze, then shouted the classic American exclamation in perfect sync, like a choir of disbelief.

"Where's the gun?"

The security captain snapped out of it first, zeroing in on the important stuff.

"Dr. Duncan kicked it under the table," the nurse said, pointing. "Wait till the surgery's done, then send someone to grab it."

"After you tie him up, get someone to check his arm," Adam added without even looking up from his work.

"Right!" the nurse chimed in. "This guy's a total psycho! Dr. Duncan smashed his arm with the clamps, and he barely grunted—just went for the gun with his other hand. Be careful with him!"

The guards exchanged looks, half-convinced they were hearing a tall tale.

"Look, just keep him under control. I'll handle the treatment stuff once I'm done here," Adam said, catching their skepticism. He glanced up at the captain. "Don't let any other staff near him—he's the type who'd kill with his teeth if he had to. Don't underestimate how ruthless he is!"

Hiss!

The captain locked eyes with Adam, saw the dead-serious look in them, and realized this was no joke. He sucked in a sharp breath.

"Everyone, stay sharp!"

The guards nodded, cranking their usual caution from 95% to a solid 99%. They moved like they were handling a live bomb—slow and steady. Even Tai Bai Jin Xing or Han Pao Pao would've tipped their hats at that level of care. No sneak attacks here—just a quick retreat if things got dicey.

No choice, really!

Being a security guard in the U.S. meant mastering self-preservation like it was an art form. Otherwise, you'd have cash in your pocket but no life to spend it with.

Once the guards cleared out, the team kept at it. After a tense stretch, they finally stabilized the vitals of the 12-year-old African-American boy who'd been chased into the hospital by that hitman.

"Is the operating room ready?"

"OR 3's all set," a nurse replied quick. "Dr. Green's there too."

"Good. Hand the gun off to him," Adam told one of the nurses, nodding at the lone guard sticking around. He started wheeling the patient toward the OR. "We're heading to OR 3."

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OR 3. Prep Time.

Adam and Leonard were scrubbing up, disinfecting like their lives depended on it.

"Damn it, another shooting!" Leonard grumbled. "Heard Ross and the crew were here earlier too. Good thing my Rachel didn't show up!"

"Ross got..." Adam smirked, spilling the tea on Ross's latest blunder.

"Hahaha!"

Leonard—aka "the old father-in-law"—lit up like a Christmas tree hearing his "cheap son-in-law" took a beating. Couldn't have been happier if he tried.

"Serves him right! Knocking up my Rachel and still refusing to tie the knot? Beat that jerk to death, and I'd call it justice!"

"But not too dead," Adam teased. "Emma still needs her dad. I've got a hunch this mess might finally push Ross and Rachel to sort things out. Your granddaughter Emma might not end up a 'you-know-what' after all."

"For real?"

Leonard's hands sped up, scrubbing with that disinfectant soap like he was racing the clock. Ten passes per spot? More like twenty now.

Don't get him wrong—he wasn't Ross's biggest fan. But that was only because he compared him to Adam. In the eyes of old-school Americans, Ross wasn't half bad. Middle-class roots, young PhD, university professor? Solid creds.

Rachel wasn't getting any younger, and finding a guy with that kind of resume—plus real history and feelings—was no small feat. Especially with granddaughter Emma already on the way.

Oh, and here's a little plug: —give it a peek if you're into it! 😊

As a dad and granddad, Leonard just wanted Emma to dodge the "illegitimate" label. That's all he asked.

Ross couldn't hold a candle to Adam, sure. But compared to the string of losers his other daughters dated? Ross was a catch. If Leonard dwelt on it too much, he'd have keeled over from stress years ago.

"Hmm."

Adam nodded, wiping down with the soap. "Just my guess, though. No telling if they'll actually go for it."

"I trust your gut!" Leonard beamed. "When the time comes, you'll have to help Rachel jump the line for a venue, yeah?"

"Heh, don't worry," Adam chuckled. "I'll make sure Rachel's thrilled with it."

The two bantered their way through the scrub-down, then half-raised their hands and bumped the OR doors open with their bodies.

Surgical nurses swooped in, slipping gowns over them, tying them up in the back, and sliding on latex gloves—standard stuff to keep everything sterile.

Leonard took the assistant spot with a grin, giving Adam a nod.

Adam shot him a grateful look and stepped up to the lead surgeon position without hesitation.

Everyone was used to it by now. The old debates from Adam's intern days? Long gone.

"Let's get started."

"Scalpel!"

Adam called the shots, and the OR sprang to life.

The surgery cruised along smoothly, hitting the halfway mark. Naturally, the team slipped into chit-chat mode.

The topic? That insane hitman chase that'd rocked the hospital.

Everyone was still shaken by how cold and brutal that African-American kid had been. Then came the group vent session.

"The hospital's security is a joke! We had a shooting last time, and now a bunch of us get held at gunpoint? What's next—someone just shoots us dead?"

"They've got all this budget for patients every year, but if it were up to me, I'd slap a metal detector at the entrance first thing. How are we supposed to save lives if we're not even safe?"

"Right? Totally!"

"Don't worry, it's coming soon!"

Adam piped up with a small smile.

"Dr. Duncan, you're gonna talk to the dean?" a nurse asked, eyes sparkling.

"That'd be awesome! If Dr. Duncan says it, the dean's gotta listen," another cheered.

"Maybe," an older nurse said, shaking her head. "But this year's budget's already toast. Next year's got that backup generator eating up funds. Even if the dean says yes, we're probably looking at the year after."

"No need to wait that long—I'm donating one," Adam said with a grin.

"..."

The room went dead quiet. Everyone stared at Adam like he'd just strolled in wearing shades, a gold chain, a cigar, and a crooked smirk.

Chapter 474: The Lady Detective Strikes

Medical Center. Operating Room 3.

The moment Adam announced his donation, everyone in the room could practically picture it—like a scene straight out of a movie, complete with background music swelling in their ears.

"From now on, security's probably gonna look at Dr. Duncan the same way those lab folks do," a nurse piped up after a long pause, breaking the silence.

"Heh," everyone chuckled knowingly.

Before Adam even started his internship here, he'd donated a whole lab to the hospital. And with a new lab at the medical center came the need for more staff. That's the real reason why every time a nurse

mentioned Adam's name, he got to skip the line. Sure, being good-looking might speed up the check-in process a bit, but it's cold, hard cash that lets you cut in without a second thought. 🗡️

It's honestly pretty standard. Think about Leonard—remember that time he helped raise funds for a million-dollar centrifuge for Caltech's physics department? He ended up "keeping the professor's wife company" and stumbled back at dawn, barely able to stand, looking like he'd been through the wringer. That's the power of money for you. And afterward, when he showed up at the college, the dean publicly praised him for "sacrificing himself for the greater good" while everyone clapped like crazy. Then the dean leaned in and whispered, "Trust me, I get it." Can you imagine the heartbreaking stories that poor guy must've lived through to land sponsorships for a top-tier university like that?

Adam, being the loaded guy he is, didn't just toss some pocket change at the hospital. His real money boosted the place's actual capabilities. It wasn't just about creating a few extra jobs—it was a legit upgrade for everyone working there. The better the medical center does, the more the staff can hope for raises and better perks. At the very least, they don't have to sweat layoffs as much.

Now, at a smaller hospital, if Adam dropped a hundred million bucks, he could probably snag the chairman's seat. Even at a big medical center like this, that kind of cash could land him a key spot on the board. But Adam's not about that life. Hospitals have their own rules, and even a chairman's power isn't as absolute as you'd think. Without the majority of the board backing you, you can't even fire a single doctor. Sure, a chairman could threaten to pull their hundred-million-dollar investment to twist some arms, but that still hinges on most of the board caving.

Adam's here to learn medicine, not to star in some hospital workplace drama. Donating enough for a lab? That's just the right touch—shows he cares without overdoing it. Splash a billion bucks around, and all the cred he's worked for would take a hit before he even starts. People in the industry would just roll their eyes and mark him down as "that rich guy." Adam's playing it smart and steady. Rules are rules—money can't fast-track you from intern to attending physician overnight. It's just not worth it.

Today's situation, though? Perfect chance to step up. He casually donates a security scanner, making everyone—himself included—a little safer. Plus, he earns a round of gratitude from the staff. That's the sweet spot.

The surgery went off without a hitch. Afterward, Adam glanced at the system prompt flashing a +0.01 and grinned to himself, feeling pretty good.

"Dr. Duncan, there's a lady detective named Beckett looking for you," a nurse said, giving him a playful smirk. "She's gorgeous, by the way~"

"Where's she at?" Adam asked with a smile.

"Room 7, with that killer kid," the nurse replied.

"Got it." Adam nodded and headed toward Room 7. The hospital security guard at the door swung it open for him without a word—like he was VIP or something. (Oh, and here's a quick plug: —just tossing it in the middle like that!)

"Kate, what brings you here?" Adam stepped inside, flashing a grin at the tall, short-haired beauty.

"It's a murder case this time, and it's under my jurisdiction, isn't it?" Kate walked over, pulling him into a warm hug with a teasing tone. "What, you're not happy to see me?"

"Normal people don't exactly jump for joy when cops show up," Adam quipped, breathing in her familiar scent. "Same way folks don't usually cheer when they see us doctors."

"Fair point," Kate said, holding the hug a little longer before letting go, a smirk tugging at her lips. "But once you get more famous, who knows? You might end up with some crazy fans hurting themselves just to get a glimpse of you. I mean, come on—a guy like you who could coast on looks and talent, but insists on slogging it out as a doctor? That's asking for trouble."

"Let's hope not," Adam said with a helpless chuckle. "Saving lives is what matters. I just want to be a good doctor."

Kate's words hit him, though, and he took it as a wake-up call. Maybe he'd need to keep a lower profile outside the medical world. That idea of editing his public lectures into a movie-style release? Probably best to scrap it. If he attracted obsessive fans pulling stunts like self-harm just to meet him, the fallout would be a nightmare.

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Kate, being a homicide detective, had a sharp nose for this kind of thing. She must've spotted some early signs and was half-joking, half-warning him. Catching on, Adam shot her a grateful look.

"You sure you just want to be a good doctor?" Kate met his gaze, thrilled he'd picked up on her hint. She grinned wider, teasing, "Because I heard you basically did our job for us. Knocking a gun out of a killer's hand with a clipboard, dodging around to stop him from grabbing it again, then finishing him off with a single chop to the neck? You call that doctor stuff?"

"I didn't have a choice!" Adam said with a wry smile. "He was about to shoot—I couldn't just sit there and let my patient get plugged."

"So you 'had no choice' but to steal police work?" Kate giggled. "If word gets around, half the precinct's gonna want to 'chat' with you."

"No need to spread the story," Adam laughed. "You dropping by a few more times will probably do the trick anyway."

"Scared?" Kate raised an eyebrow.

"What do you think?" Adam smirked back.

"Heh," Kate snickered, covering her mouth. "I bet even if the whole squad took you on, they'd lose. You're too ridiculous."

"They don't know that," Adam said, giving her a sly "but you do" look.

Kate's cool broke for a second, her cheeks flushing red.

"Anyway, let me check him out," Adam said, dialing it back and heading toward the killer kid on the bed, who'd been silently watching their flirty banter with a blank stare.

"Oh, by the way—did that guy they brought in make it?" Kate asked.

"Yeah," Adam nodded, starting to examine the kid's arm. "Lost a lot of people this time, huh?"

Small-time cases didn't usually drag Kate in.

"Eight," Kate sighed. "This kid took out four of them."

Adam glanced at the boy, still eerily calm and detached, and shook his head to himself. Eight dead, and this one little punk accounted for half. It wasn't even that he was some genius—he was just a kid, the kind nobody takes seriously until it's too late. If he's ruthless enough to catch you off guard, he's deadly.

Picture this: a kid wobbling around on a bike, circling aimlessly. Totally normal scene, right? Then he rolls by, pulls a gun, and—bang, bang, bang—you're done. Unless you're Adam or some freakishly lucky outlier, there's no dodging that.

Chapter 475: Super Unlucky Guy

At the medical center, in Treatment Room 7...

After Adam patched up the killer kid's injuries, he flirted with Kate for a bit—classic banter—before heading out. It's not that he didn't want to hang out longer, but honestly, there just wasn't time. Kate was swamped with her case, and Adam? He was juggling surgeries and sneaking in some extra study sessions to level up his skills.

Alice Grey was like this massive XP boost just waiting to be unlocked. And Adam? He was basically a robot—crystal-clear photographic memory and a brain that could crunch numbers like it was mapping the cosmos. Once he fully "downloaded" Alice Grey's giant experience pack, paired with his robotic precision and stamina, he'd be cranking out surgeries like a pro. He'd be on the fast track to legendary doctor status—a level of talent no amount of cramming could match for anyone else. Unreal, right?

Kate walked Adam out.

"So, what's the plan for him?" Adam asked, nodding back toward the kid.

"Depends," Kate said. "We'll try to get him to cooperate first."

"And if he doesn't?" Adam pressed.

"Then he's probably looking at prison—fifteen years, minimum," Kate replied, frowning.

Here's the thing: Americans mature fast, so juvenile crime's a recurring headache. It's pushed states to keep lowering the age of criminal responsibility—down to 12, even 10 in some places. A few states don't even have an age limit. Commit a crime? You're off to jail. Tons of people have juvie records, including some who later make it big. That's why in cop shows, they always hit the criminal database first—match a suspect with a record, and boom, they're suspect numero uno.

It's a zero-or-one game with crime. Having a record makes it way easier to track someone—fingerprints, past offenses, the works. But if they've got no record? They can just say, "Nah, I'm not cooperating," and judges usually won't force it. Too much risk of stirring up "human rights" or "freedom" debates. So sometimes, you've got a killer right in front of you, practically taunting you, and the cops still can't do squat. Frustrating as hell!

Luckily, those cases are rare, and the U.S. crime database is massive. If there's a match, it's usually a slam dunk—assuming the cop's sharp. Like, main character energy sharp. Otherwise, even the best database won't save you. It's wild how reality can feel so... surreal sometimes.

"Hey, Kate," Adam said, switching gears, "you know any retired cops? Someone solid—trustworthy, detail-oriented, well-connected, and looking for work?"

Kate raised an eyebrow. "What're you up to?"

"My company's about to hire someone like that," Adam said with a grin. "They'd keep tabs on stuff like that killer kid's backstory—where he's from, when he goes to jail, when he gets out, his mindset, whether he pulls any shady tricks to cut his sentence. Easy gig, great pay. Figured I'd toss it to one of your people."

"You're seriously creating a whole job just for James (the killer kid)?" Kate said, half-laughing, half-exasperated.

"Better safe than sorry, right?" Adam chuckled. "Us doctors don't have it easy. This kinda thing's happened before, and it won't be the last time. Hiring someone to watch the people I've crossed paths with—who might hold a grudge—just makes sense for safety. Plus, it's not like I'm strapped for cash. It's a job, it boosts the economy—win-win. If you don't have anyone in mind, I'll just call a headhunter."

"No, no, I've got someone!" Kate jumped in quick.

No kidding—this was a dream gig. Didn't even need a retiree—just someone with connections who could get things done with a phone call. It's a huge favor to hand out, so of course she'd keep it in her circle.

"Heh," Adam smirked.

"Damn capitalist!" Kate shot back, laughing despite herself. She didn't know the "true fragrance" meme, but she knew her flip-flop was a little embarrassing. "Never pegged you for this, back when you were just a writer and a doctor. Guess money really does change people."

—slipping that in here like a pro.

Adam just smiled, saying nothing. Why a retired cop with connections? Simple: they've got the network. What's a nightmare for outsiders is just a quick chat for them. It's like how regulators in the West retire and snag cushy "consultant" gigs at the companies they used to oversee—pulling in millions a year. Or how CEOs quit, then slide into roles regulating their old firms. Everyone's in on it, watching their own backs.

Emmm... how's that for messed up? Adam might scoff at it, but that didn't stop him from playing the game. Business is business, after all! And really, he wasn't after power or greed—just basic survival. Totally fair. No shame in that!

Kate thought it over and tossed out a name—one of her own.

"Cool, I trust you," Adam said with a nod. "But tell him to start ASAP. I want eyes on this whole thing, every step."

"Relax," Kate grinned. "This mess has blown up so much that James's crew is gonna be under our microscope. They won't have the time or guts to mess with you."

"Still, better to be cautious," Adam said, shaking his head.

"Got it," Kate said, serious now. "He'll start tomorrow."

They hugged it out, then went their separate ways. Adam figured with all the chaos lately—"Python Disaster" this, "Black Humor" that—he wasn't sure if Matthew and Lily had really left. So, he swung by Barney's VIP room to check.

Inside the VIP ward...

"James, you see it, right? This place is a danger zone. We gotta bounce—worst case, I'll hit up another hospital. Anywhere but here. This spot's got it out for me," Barney pleaded, trying to convince James to let him leave.

"You swear you'll get checked out somewhere else if you ditch?" James asked, hesitant. After all the craziness, he was starting to wonder too.

"Cross my heart," Barney said, raising a hand.

"Fine, I'll handle the discharge papers," James agreed.

"Yes!" Barney whooped, breaking into a goofy dance.

And James? The guy could sing and dance like it was nothing. Seeing his buddy so hyped, he joined in. Two carefree bros, busting moves in a celebration dance.

But all that wiggling stirred something up—a flash of gold.

"Ahh!"

Adam got to the room just in time to hear Barney's scream. He bolted in—and almost lost it laughing.

There was Barney, a "tail" sprouting from his backside. At first glance, you'd swear he'd gone Super Saiyan. But nope—it was that missing golden eyelash rattlesnake, latched on tight.

Super Saiyan? More like Super Unlucky Guy!

Emmm... think Ouyang Feng running into Hong Qigong in *The East is Red, The West is Just*. Total chaos.

Chapter 476: Late-Night Case Chat

Medical Center. VIP Ward.

"Adam, save me quick!"

Barney let out a pitiful scream for help.

"Stop flailing around!"

Adam warned, trying to stop Barney from thrashing like a wild dragon.

But Barney, gripped by fear, couldn't stop wiggling, desperately trying to shake off the tail stuck to his backside.

Adam had no choice. Timing it just right, he shot his hand out like lightning, grabbing the golden eyelash rattlesnake by its weak spot—seven inches from the head. With a firm tug, he pried its jaws off Barney's butt and yanked it free.

"Get the antivenom!"

Adam, still pinching the snake, barked at the nurse who'd just rushed in. "And call someone from Animal Control while you're at it!"

"Yes, Dr. Duncan!"

The nurse nodded and bolted off.

"I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die!"

Barney caught a glimpse of the whole snake that bit him and wailed in terror.

"Adam?"

James piped up, his voice tight with worry.

"Don't sweat it," Adam said with a grin. "This snake already bit its owner earlier, so the venom's mostly spent. A shot of antivenom, and he'll be fine."

James let out a relieved breath.

"You're still laughing?!"

Barney jabbed a finger at Adam. "James, get me outta here quick! If I stay any longer, I'm seriously toast!"

"I'm not laughing at you," Adam said, still smiling. "This is just my professional doctor-smile—y'know, to calm patients down. It's not personal."

"Yeah, right!"

Barney, a seasoned guy who'd seen it all, wasn't buying Adam's smooth talk for a second. He knew Adam was cracking up at him.

"Alright, Barney, chill," Adam said, dropping the act and chuckling openly. "We're buddies, right? Seeing you like this is hilarious—can't I laugh a little? Don't tell me you've never cracked up when a friend's made a fool of himself!"

"..."

Barney froze. He couldn't argue—he was the king of laughing at others' expense.

"See? That's the spirit!"

Adam smirked, satisfied, then turned to James. "Me laughing just proves it's not a big deal. Would you rather I looked all grim and serious?"

"Heh."

James couldn't help but chuckle too.

Patients and their families always preferred a doctor's smile over a stony face—it was the difference between good news and bad.

By now, Animal Control had shown up. They'd been scouring the hospital with staff, and after Adam's call, they hurried over to bag the golden eyelash rattlesnake he was holding. The nurse also swooped in and gave Barney his antivenom shot.

Barney kept griping about wanting to ditch this "cursed place," but James, taking Adam's advice, figured it was smarter to stay for observation. A concussion plus a snakebite? Not exactly stuff to mess around with.

The Medical Center was top-notch and had been handling Barney from the start—switching hospitals now would've been nuts.

Adam didn't care either way. He'd said his piece; Barney could stay or go. Honestly, though, he kinda thought Barney and the Medical Center were jinxed together. Stick around much longer, and Barney might turn into a full-on comedy act—and not the normal kind, either. More like the wacky, nonsensical type.

Leaving officially? That'd be like Master Wang Chongyang emerging from retreat. Sneaking out? More like Ouyang Feng running into Hong Qigong. Who knew if Barney'd end up collecting the full set of the Five Greats—North, South, East, West, and Center?

And if things got really absurd, there was still that "Invincible East" fan, Mr./Ms. Carlton, lurking around. That high heel that nearly took Barney out? Yep, Carlton's doing.

Following the wild logic of *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes*, if James accidentally blurted something crazy later, it'd be a riot to watch—but creepy as hell to think about.

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That night.

Adam was back at it, hosting Alice Gray's little late-night study session.

It was winding down near midnight when—ring ring ring!—his phone buzzed. Before he could grab it, it rang three times and stopped.

"Alright, let's call it a night," Adam said with a smile, wrapping things up.

"Why not check who it was?" Liz asked, curious.

"No need," Adam replied, grinning. "Harassment calls like that happen all the time. Better when they hang up on their own."

"Heh!"

Meredith let out a sly, knowing laugh. As a seasoned pro, she had a sixth sense for these things. She knew something was up.

"Heh," Adam shot back, meeting her smirk with one of his own.

"Got a hot date, huh?"

Christina's sharp little eyes glinted with mischief as she teased, "Bet it's that leggy detective chick who stopped by today, right?"

"No way!"

George's face twisted with a mix of disbelief, envy, and saltiness.

"Who knows?"

Adam kept his cool, smiling casually. "Not our business anyway. Get some rest, folks—early rounds tomorrow!"

"That's what we should be telling you," Meredith quipped, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

Adam just grinned at her. Fresh off being publicly dumped as the "abandoned side chick," Meredith couldn't stand seeing anyone else happy and carefree. Adam got it. He didn't hold it against her.

Besides, he didn't have time to bicker. He had to hustle back and go over the case with Kate. This murder case must've been a real doozy—Kate wasn't letting even the tiniest lead slip by. It was the

middle of the night, and here she was, dragging a barely-involved doctor like Adam into a late-night case chat.

Man, cops and docs have it rough, Adam thought with a sigh. "Guess I'll help out where I can."

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Next day. 4:30 AM.

Sky still dark.

Adam rolled out of bed like clockwork.

"I'm heading out," he said, fiddling with the police pistol, holster, and badge for a sec. That badge especially? Super handy. Flash it one-handed at your chest, and boom—bad guys freeze. Felt pretty badass.

He chuckled, set the gear back on the nightstand, then picked up the leather jacket from the floor, the jeans by the window, and tossed them on the bed. The high heels on the bed? Back to the floor they went.

"Catch you later," he said to the lump under the covers.

"Mmm," came a lazy hum from the sheets.

When you've got everything under control, there's no rush. Last night's case chat? With Adam's genius brain picking apart the clues, all the tricky bits smoothed out. So Kate was treating herself to some rare shut-eye instead of bolting to the precinct for overtime.

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Medical Center. Locker Room.

"Don't be too eager during rounds later," Christina was whispering to Liz and Meredith.

"Why not?"

"Just trust me, okay?"

"Heh."

"Don't believe me? You'll regret it. I've got a big surprise up my sleeve."

"For real?"

"Watch my cues. Meredith, snap out of it—you too!"

Adam strolled in just in time to catch Christina's hushed scheming. "What's the gossip?" he asked, popping open his locker with a grin.

"Nothing!"

Christina's face shifted the second she saw him. She clammed up, shot Liz and Meredith a look, and zipped off.

"Heh."

Adam caught on instantly. Christina must've sniffed out a juicy surgery somewhere and was scared he'd swoop in and steal it.

Hope it's not too good, he thought. Otherwise... young lady, face the storm!

Chapter 477: The Charm of Contrast

Medical Center

Green Clinic

"Adam, you're taking on Mrs. Kimberly Griswold's case," Leonard said with a nod. "She's got a history of heart issues and has had multiple surgeries here. This time, she's in for a coronary bypass."

"Him? Isn't he a little young for that?" The old woman on the bed paused mid-lipstick application, peering at Adam through her handheld mirror. She frowned, sizing him up. "Is he actually a doctor? Or some actor? You're not filming a TV show here, are you? I mean, I love watching *Our Days*—Dr. Drake Lamoray is adorable—but I need a real doctor right now. I wouldn't trust Lamoray to treat me..."

"Kimberly, let the doctors do their job," the elderly man standing beside her cut in.

She shot her husband a glare that could've melted steel. He clammed up instantly.

"Mrs. Griswold," Leonard said with a reassuring smile, "Dr. Duncan here is our top intern—and honestly, the best in the whole country. You're in good hands with him."

"Best or not, he's still an intern," she muttered, pursing her lips.

Leonard turned to Adam. "Anything special to note about Mrs. Griswold's surgery?"

Adam nodded confidently. "Since she's had multiple heart surgeries, there's a lot of scar tissue, and her heart's too weak to restart if we stop it. So, we'll stabilize the area we're working on, use local anesthesia, and let the rest of her heart keep beating."

"Nice work," Leonard said, grinning. "Take her for a nuclear scan first. If everything checks out, we'll do the surgery this afternoon."

"Yes, Dr. Green," Adam replied with a quick nod.

"This room's kinda small," Mrs. Griswold grumbled. "And it's not as bright as last time. Allen, grab me a pillow to lean on! The water's lukewarm—add some ice. Open the curtains; it's stuffy in here. What's

this? Where's that new nightgown I bought? Hand me some tissues—no, wait, hospitals are full of germs. Get the hand sanitizer from my suitcase instead."

Once Leonard left, she started barking orders at her poor husband, Allen, like he was her personal assistant.

Watching this, Adam couldn't help but think of *The Big Bang Theory*—Amy's dad sneaking around to avoid her mom, even making that hilarious "hanging himself" face behind her back. It didn't show much, but you could feel it. And now? This was the full-on, live-action version.

Henpecked husbands are universal, huh? Adam thought with a smirk.

"Mrs. Griswold, ready for that nuclear scan?" he asked, throwing a sympathetic glance at Allen as he interrupted her tirade.

"Fine, whatever," she said with a shrug.

Adam wheeled her toward the scan room, Allen trailing behind.

"Allen, watch where you're going—you're bumping my chair!"

"Sorry," he mumbled.

"Allen, hold my purse properly!"

"Got it."

"Don't rummage through it!"

"Okay."

When they reached the scan room, the staff took over the wheelchair.

"Phew," Allen let out a long breath, turning to Adam. "She's never heard of 'please' or 'thank you,' you know."

Adam just smiled, keeping it neutral.

But Allen wasn't done. "For years, I've tried to get her to chill out, but she just keeps yapping. Everyone thought she wouldn't make it past her first surgery. Three operations and ten years later, here she is, still kicking. Heh..." He chuckled, but it was the tired, helpless kind. Adam noticed him glance back nervously, like he was scared she'd overhear.

"They say it's a miracle she's still alive..."

"What do you think?" Adam cut in.

"Uh, well, vows say 'in sickness and in health,' right?" Allen gave a self-deprecating laugh.

"Mr. Griswold, why don't you take a break for a bit?" Adam suggested. "We'll catch up later."

"Oh, uh, sure." Allen blinked, realizing he might've overshared with his wife's doctor, and nodded quickly.

Adam gave him a friendly smile and headed off. The staff would let him know when the scan was done.

Pat-reon: belamy20

"Dr. Duncan!" A young nurse waved him over.

"Hey, Mary, what's up?" Adam asked, strolling up with a grin.

"You haven't heard?" She leaned in, eyes sparkling with gossip. "We've got a pregnant man in the hospital. Everyone's rushing over to gawk!"

"A man? Pregnant?" Adam laughed, then paused, thinking. "Unless..."

"It's real!" Mary insisted. "His belly's as big as his wife's, and the pregnancy test came back positive!"

"One of Dr. Yang's cases?" Adam guessed. Only something that weird would get Cristina so fired up.

"Nope," Mary said, shaking her head. "Get this: the intern at registration sent him straight to psych without even checking him out. Then Dr. Yang swooped in, snatched him from psych, and now psych's docs are fighting to get him back. It's a total tug-of-war!"

"Which room?" Adam's curiosity piqued.

"Room 12," Mary said instantly.

"Thanks, Mary! I owe you a treat next time," Adam said with a laugh, heading off as she beamed at him.

Click! Click!

By the time Adam got to Room 12, a crowd of doctors and nurses had already gathered outside, craning their necks to peek in. Camera shutters snapped from inside.

Adam was about to push through when Cristina stormed out, brushing past him with an eye roll and a scowl, clutching her beeping pager. Clearly, someone needed her now.

He squeezed through the crowd and stepped inside. On the bed lay a young guy, his belly swollen like a woman about to pop. Medical staff were snapping photos, while Izzie and Meredith flanked him, leaning into the lens with practiced smiles.

"Steven, run a full workup, including tumor tests," Dr. Bailey barked, then turned. "Grey, your pager's going off—move it!"

As the two scurried off, Bailey casually grabbed a ruler and measured the man's belly, all business. When the camera clicked again, she smoothly turned her head, locking into a pro-level pose—perfectly natural, perfectly framed.

Izzie and Meredith's stiff smiles didn't stand a chance against that level of skill.

Adam couldn't help but grin. These photos—thanks to the guy's bizarre "pregnancy"—were guaranteed to land in the hospital's medical journal, case reports, maybe even the annual conference. It was a golden ticket to shine in the medical world.

Seeing Bailey, the moral rock of the hospital, pull off such a slick move with that adorable contrast? Priceless.

Chapter 478: Predestination

Ward Room.

Adam strolled over, taking a close look.

"Duncan, what's your take?"

Dr. Bailey glanced up at him.

"Probably not pregnant," Adam said, examining the patient. "Not just fat either. Most likely a tumor—teratoma, to be exact!"

"A teratoma? At his age and gender?"

Dr. Bailey blinked, caught off guard.

"Yeah, it's rare," Adam said with a chuckle. "But still more likely than him being pregnant, right?"

"I'm not pregnant?"

The man with the swollen belly protested. "But the pregnancy test came back positive! I've done it at home a bunch of times too—all positive!"

To him, being pregnant beat being labeled a nutcase. Doing what others couldn't was a flex, after all.

"Pregnancy tests work by detecting hCG in a woman's urine," Adam explained. "That hormone isn't exclusive to pregnancy, though. A teratoma's a big ol' clump of growing cells—kinda like a fetus—and it can release hCG too, tricking the test into a false positive."

"A fetus? So I am pregnant?" the man yelped.

"Similar, but not quite," Adam corrected. "It's a tumor at its core. It's called a teratoma because it mimics some fetal traits."

"You sure?"

The man stared at his bulging stomach, his expression a mix of hope and dread.

"Nope," Adam said, shaking his head. "Without a detailed report, no one can be 100% sure."

"Any other possibilities?"

The man's wife, also sporting a big belly, couldn't help but ask.

"Yeah," Adam said, launching into some wild Predestination-style brainstorming.

Every head in the room swiveled toward him.

Click! Click!

This time, a bunch of the watching doctors whipped out their cameras.

Imagine this: a guy who could time-travel, forming his own closed loop. Talk about mind-blowing!

Leonard Cooper, you should thank your lucky stars your dad Sheldon didn't have a binge-eating habit. Otherwise, you'd be looking at Sheldon 2.0 instead of existing yourself!

"Mr. Herman clearly hasn't had gender reassignment surgery," Adam said, letting his imagination run wild while grinning. "So, teratoma's still the top bet."

Mrs. Herman's pregnancy might not prove much, but with so many doctors eyeballing Mr. Herman in his hospital gown, there's no way a sex-change op could slip past all these pros unnoticed.

"Dr. Bailey, the CT machine's booked. We can head over now," Liz said, hanging up the phone with a pumped-up vibe.

"Alright," Bailey nodded.

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CT Room.

"Hey, gang, I lost a bet with a colleague, so I'm stuck doing his scan. Beers tonight are on me too," a chubby girl said, laughing as she sat at the computer. "Next bet: what's in this guy's belly? Wanna play? 10 bucks a pop!"

"Teratoma!" Liz shot her hand up.

"Me too!"

"Same here!"

All the doctors who'd heard Adam's breakdown jumped on the teratoma train. They trusted his call—and who'd pass up easy money?

"..."

The chubby girl froze. What the heck? If you all bet the same thing, who's gonna take the other side?

"I'll play banker and bet against you all," Adam said with a grin. "I'm going with a fetus in Mr. Herman's belly."

Now it was everyone else's turn to look dumbfounded.

"Adam, what's that supposed to mean?" Liz asked, baffled. "You said it's not ascites, not fat—the big odds are on teratoma, like you explained. Why're you betting against us with 'fetus'?"

"'Cause I want it to be a fetus," Adam said, laughing. "If it's not, you guys win, and we all have a good laugh. But if it is a fetus? That's a medical miracle. Even if you lose, you won't care—you'll have witnessed history!"

Liz and the others got it instantly. Adam was a billionaire; he didn't give a rip about pocket change. He genuinely wanted to see a medical marvel unfold—.

"I'm in!"

"Count me too!"

"Can we up the stakes?"

The docs got hyped, some shameless ones even trying to raise the bet.

"Heh," Adam shot them a look.

A little fun betting on a miracle? Sure, call it a mini bonus for the crew. But actually trying to hustle cash off him? That's just insulting his IQ.

"Just kidding!" the bold one said, backing off with an awkward laugh.

"It's up!" Liz called out.

All eyes snapped to the screen as Mr. Herman's abdominal CT scan popped up.

"OMG!" the chubby girl gasped.

"Ew—is that teeth?" Liz grimaced.

"Lots of bilobed cystic damage, calcifications, an undeveloped jawbone," Adam said, studying the scan. "Too bad it's not fully formed—no hair, skin, or nerve tissue."

"Huh?"

A less-savvy doctor blinked, not quite following.

"Teratomas come in benign and malignant flavors," Adam explained. "Benign ones usually have a mix of tissues. Malignant ones, like this, are poorly differentiated—barely any formed structures."

"Ohhh," the doc finally clicked.

Malignant tumor? Not exactly good news.

"Alright, now that we've confirmed it's a malignant teratoma," Liz said, clapping her hands, "surgery's next. Anyone wanna watch from the gallery? 50 bucks a seat!"

"What the—?!"

The doctors bristled. The gallery's supposed to be free for all—why the steep price tag?

"This surgery's one Christina snatched from Psych," Liz said, standing her ground. "She's stuck doing grunt work as punishment now. If any of you wanna help her out with the dirty jobs, your seat's free. Otherwise, pay up—limited spots, first come, first served!"

"Fine, I'm in."

"Cash only, right?"

"You guys aren't doctors—you're hustlers! Here!"

"We're earning it fair and square—what's wrong with that?"

"..."

Adam's lip twitched as he watched Liz turn into a money-making machine, raking in cash like a pro. These folks sure know how to play the game!

He also figured out why Christina, who'd nabbed the surgery, was sidelined. Too clever for her own good—she'd outsmarted herself right into a corner.

Chapter 479: Twisted Hierarchy

Noon

Cafeteria

"...135, 155, 175... 485!"

Izzie was gleefully counting a fat stack of cash, her eyes practically sparkling.

"You guys are the worst," George grumbled, glaring at her with envy. "A pregnant man, and you didn't even tell me?"

"It's a teratoma, not a pregnancy!" Izzie corrected him, rolling her eyes. "Cristina's the one who said to keep it quiet. You were so eager during rounds—didn't you notice we all played dumb? You didn't seriously think we had no clue, did you?"

"..."

George had no comeback.

Sure, he could buy Izzie and Meredith not knowing. But Cristina? The queen of quick answers? She was the sharpest surgical intern after Adam. If he could figure something out, there's no way she'd miss it.

Still, he couldn't blame himself entirely. During rounds, he usually faded into the background. Either Cristina swooped in with the first answer, or Dr. Shepherd picked Meredith. Now, with Dr. Montgomery joining the mix and eyeing Izzie for her supposed pediatric knack, George—the lone guy in their little quartet—was left with zero dignity or spotlight.

So this morning, when all three of his female colleagues blanked out and every eye turned to him, he'd puffed up his chest, riding a rare wave of pride. Totally normal reaction, right?

Emmm. Maybe it was his last shred of testosterone kicking in. Or maybe it was to give his wild fantasies—y'know, the ones where he, Meredith, Izzie, and Cristina all got sweaty together—some kind of real-world footing.

Yup!

Even if everyone, including Meredith and the gang, treated him like their gay bestie, George O'Malley was a man's man! His fantasies of group "exercise" weren't going anywhere!

Too bad the last time he indulged in that daydream, he got hit with a dose of reality—Meredith, Izzie, and Cristina pinning him down for a shot of antivenom, laughing their heads off. Not quite the steamy scene he'd pictured.

And now? He'd eaten another loss. Strutting his stuff during rounds only to miss out on this epic case. Nothing like he'd imagined—again.

"They didn't tell me either," Adam chimed in, strolling over with his tray and a grin. "You didn't know and didn't ask. I did ask, and they guarded it like I was a thief."

"Heh heh." Izzie giggled, stroking her wad of cash smugly.

"If I were you, I'd stash that dirty money quick," Adam teased. "People are gonna get jealous."

"Dirty money? This is honest cash!" Izzie huffed, but after a quick glance at the envious stares around her, she stuffed it into her pocket anyway.

"So, who's handling Mr. Herman—you or Meredith?" Adam asked casually, digging into his food. Unlike Sheldon or Leonard, he could eat and chat without choking.

"You're passing on it?" Izzie's face lit up.

Normally, that'd be settled by now. But this case? Totally different vibe. The room was a circus—doctors everywhere, even the surgical chief hovering. Everyone wanted a front-row seat to this freakshow.

The so-called "primary intern" title was a joke. Who'd dare boss around residents, attendings, and the chief?

Well, maybe Adam. But Cristina—the obvious pick—got stuck with grunt work as punishment. Izzie and Meredith, who'd been there from the start, were just Bailey's errand girls, no official assignment yet.

If Bailey weren't so upright, Izzie bet she'd hog the whole case herself.

So, with no surgery scheduled yet, it was still up in the air who'd scrub in.

"I've got a heart surgery this afternoon," Adam said with a sigh.

If it didn't clash, he'd be all over this rare teratoma case. But Mrs. Griswold's local-anesthesia heart procedure was just as unique—and Leonard would definitely let him take the lead. Compared to trailing the chief and playing gofer, Adam was sticking with the heart.

Oh, and this teratoma extraction? The surgical chief couldn't resist jumping in himself. Good luck stealing that from him!

Bang!

Cristina stormed over, slamming her tray on the table and shoveling food into her mouth.

"What're you staring at? I'm starving!" she snapped, glaring at everyone's raised eyebrows.

"Eww, is that... rectal exam lube on your shirt?" Izzie wrinkled her nose at the greasy spot on Cristina's chest.

Cristina glanced down, then at Izzie's disgusted face. Her morning flashed before her eyes, and she snapped. Her glare turned lethal.

"Yeah, so what? Never used it? Never been used?"

"What?!" Izzie's jaw dropped, her smile freezing.

"What, too loud in Mr. Herman's room? Hearing shot already?" Cristina exploded. "Guess what I've been doing all morning? Two wound infections, one catheter, one groin abscess, four debridements, five explosive diarrheas. This lube you're grossed out by? It's nothing!"

Izzie's sass evaporated, replaced by a pitying look.

"I'm Bailey's best intern! I found Mr. Herman! I stole him from psych!" Cristina ranted, her voice rising. "Why am I the only one getting punished?!"

"Didn't Bailey secretly praise us, though?" Izzie offered weakly.

Sure, Bailey chewed them out publicly for snagging the case from psych, but behind closed doors, she'd given them props.

"I think she knows about me and Burke," Cristina muttered, deflating.

"Oh, well, that's on you then," Izzie said, perking up. "Meredith got punished by Bailey too. That's what you get for dating attendings."

"Shh!" Cristina hushed her, darting a look around. "Keep it quiet—I don't want to end up like Meredith."

"You and Burke are back together?" Adam asked, surprised.

"He found out about... y'know, from somewhere. Came crawling back," Cristina said, gauging their reactions. "Said he wants to keep going. I didn't say no."

"Y'know" meant her ectopic pregnancy—Burke's mess that nearly killed her. Sure, he chased power like the chief, but he wasn't as cold as Richard. Hearing about it (from a certain little bird), he felt awful for dumping her back then.

George buried his face in his food.

"It was you, George!" Cristina zeroed in on him.

"It's not my fault!" George mumbled, sheepish. "Burke said I'm his right-hand man..."

"Ha!" Adam couldn't hold back a laugh.

Hospital hierarchy was brutal. Interns lived for a scrap of praise from their superiors—"You're my guy," "You're my people." Some rougher attendings even tossed out, "You're my bitch." Crude? Sure. But every intern, guy or girl, secretly craved it. Some even said it first: "I'm your bitch."

Take Chandler back in his IT days. His boss loved smacking the butts of his favorite underlings, praising their work. At first, Chandler hated it—called the guy out, risked pissing him off. But when the boss stopped, only smacking his coworkers, Chandler... missed it.

The boss, wise to it all, grinned and asked if he still wanted out. Chandler hesitated, then practically skipped over for a solid whack—back in the boss's good graces.

Chapter 480: True Fragrance from the Heart

Beep beep.

Beep beep.

While everyone was chatting, Christina's pager went off again, buzzing at her waist.

"Damn it! This never ends!"

Christina shoveled a big bite of food into her mouth, then jumped up, ready to bolt toward the ward.

"Hold up, no rush!"

Adam grinned. "Don't you want to put an end to this miserable life of yours?"

"You've got a way out?"

Christina's eyes lit up with hope.

"Heh."

Adam chuckled mysteriously, not quite answering. "If you wrap things up now, you might still make it to Mr. Herman's surgery. I mean, you did snag that one for yourself, right?"

"Obviously!"

Christina nodded, glancing at her pager. Seeing it wasn't a 911 emergency, she plopped back down, flashing her sweetest smile. "Adam, you've got a plan?"

"Mhm."

Adam hummed smugly. "Too bad someone hurt my feelings this morning."

"Sorry about that!"

Christina apologized without missing a beat.

"If I'd known about this surgery earlier, I would've picked it hands down," Adam went on.

"..."

Christina's lip twitched. She cut to the chase: "Adam, what's it gonna take for you to help me out here?"

"One rare surgery!"

Adam dropped the act, holding up a finger. "Next time you stumble across a juicy case like this that I've got my eye on, you've gotta let me have it—just once!"

"Yeah, in your dreams!"

Christina's eyes widened in disbelief. "You already swoop in and steal all the good surgeries! I finally dig up one for myself—risking a write-up, no less—and now you want me to just hand it over?"

"Think it over."

Adam smirked. "If you ditch all this petty grunt work now, you've got a solid shot at joining the first-ever adult male teratoma removal. A surgery like that—do you really think you'll get another chance at it? Trading some vague future rare case for a guaranteed first-of-its-kind right now... are you sure you're the one losing out?"

"Loss or no loss, you're the one raking it in either way!"

Christina nailed the truth without hesitation.

"It's a win-win for us."

Adam grinned shamelessly.

"Christina, the patient comes first!"

Liz snapped out of it and urged her on. Whether it was a win for both Adam and Christina or just Adam winning twice, it definitely wasn't good news for her.

"They're not dying."

Christina shot her a look, then turned back to Adam. "Fine, I'm in—but only if I actually get in on the surgery afterward."

"Deal."

Adam nodded.

"So, what's your plan?"

Christina pressed.

"Heh."

Adam couldn't hold back a laugh. "You're totally missing the point. You think you pissed off Dr. Bailey and now she's punishing you?"

"Isn't that it?"

Christina froze. "Who else could possibly punish me like this..."

Then it hit her. She gritted her teeth. "The nurses!"

"Bingo."

Adam grinned. "Think back—how'd you tick off the nurses when you nabbed Mr. Herman's case?"

"For confidentiality, I didn't tell them ahead of time that I was transferring Mr. Herman over. Are they seriously that petty?"

Christina couldn't believe it.

"That's it?"

Adam snorted. "That's not the version I heard. What are nurses to you? Not colleagues, huh? No need to explain anything to them—until you need a bedpan changed, then you'll call?"

"Whoa!"

George let out a gasp. "Christina, that's straight-up insulting!"

"What's the big deal?"

Christina got it but doubled down anyway. "Am I wrong? That's their job! If they don't want to be nurses, they can go to med school and become doctors!"

"With that attitude, I can't help you."

Adam shook his head.

"I don't need your help."

Christina smirked triumphantly. "Now that I know it's not Dr. Bailey punishing me, I don't have to bother with their pages. I'm going straight to Bailey to clear this up and join Mr. Herman's surgery! Our deal's off!"

"You're so naive."

Adam gave her a half-smile. "Looks like I'm upping the stakes now. To fix this mess for you, it's one rare surgery plus a favor."

Oh, and here's a quick plug—right in the middle of the drama!

"I think you're the naive one. What if I don't agree?"

Christina laughed.

"You think spilling the truth to Dr. Bailey will fix everything?"

Adam shook his head with a grin. "Let me break this harsh reality to you: even if you tell her, Bailey's not gonna step in to sort out your beef with the nurses. As long as they page you, you're stuck running. Believe it or not."

"No way!"

Christina was stunned.

"Nurses are the backbone of this hospital. They handle all the dirty, exhausting work."

Adam reminded her. "Only a cocky intern like you would dare piss them off this bad. Ever hear of Dr. Benton?"

"Nope."

Christina shook her head, clueless.

"Exactly."

Adam grinned. "He was your predecessor—used to be a top surgical resident here at the medical center. But one day, he was in a foul mood, couldn't keep his temper in check, and let it rip on the nurses. He chewed them out for writing orders in his place, saying he could do it himself—only he could do it! And oh boy, did he pay for it.

The nurses hit back hard. Every patient encounter, they made him write every single order himself. They flat-out refused to trust his verbal instructions—everything had to be written, crystal clear. Sloppy handwriting? They'd grill him word by word. IV issues or tricky treatments? They'd 'worry' they couldn't handle it and insist he show them how it's done. Any tough case? They'd page him first—especially when he was sneaking a nap in the on-call room. They'd buzz him relentless!"

"What happened after that?"

George asked, hooked.

"He was stubborn, just like Christina."

Adam glanced at her darkening expression and grinned. "Refused to apologize, took it all on himself, gritted his teeth through it—until he became a 'former' colleague of ours. Without the nurses' support, everything took double the time and effort. You can only hold out so long.

When the cracks showed, they were big. Exhausted, Dr. Benton slipped up—caused permanent harm to a patient that never should've happened. The review board didn't yank his license, but the medical center 'encouraged' him to resign."

"That's brutal."

George sighed. "Guess you really can't piss off the nurses."

"Wrong."

Adam corrected him. "It's not about never upsetting any nurse—it's about not screwing over the whole group. Especially the way Christina did, trash-talking them like they're just bedpan changers. That's the ultimate sin. She's offended the entire nurse squad with that one. What's happening now? It's just the appetizer."

"Ugh!"

Liz gagged, catching a glimpse of the anal exam lube on Christina's chest.

"One rare surgery, plus a favor."

Christina's face went from dark to pale. Meeting Adam's teasing gaze, she caved. "Fine, I'm in."