

TV Show 501

Chapter 501: No Magic Can Beat Fate

Medical Center.

VIP Ward.

"What's going on?" Adam asked.

"Mrs. Russebin just had some contractions," Liz replied quickly. "To keep the babies in a bit longer, I've lowered the bed angle—using gravity to delay things."

"Good call," Adam said, checking the vitals. Both mom and babies were stable, so he gave her a nod of approval. "I'll take it from here. Go get some rest."

"I'm still good," Liz said, her energy buzzing.

"Alright then," Adam replied, not pushing it. He stepped out, grabbed a medical textbook, and plopped onto the ward's sofa to read.

"Dr. Duncan, want some tea?" The nurse assigned to the room brought over a steaming cup.

"Thanks, Rita," Adam said with a smile.

"No problem!" Rita grinned and left.

Liz's fiery enthusiasm suddenly fizzled. A wave of exhaustion hit her hard.

"You take the tea and cover the second half of the night," she said, her tone a little sour. "I'm heading to the break room. Call me if anything comes up."

"Sounds good," Adam said, sipping his tea and flipping a page, giving her a casual nod.

Liz trudged off, feeling like the world had it out for her. It always had, ever since she was a kid.

When she started interning at the medical center, she'd tried so hard to befriend everyone—Meredith, George, Cristina, Adam, the other doctors and nurses. She poured her heart into it, but time after time, her warmth got met with cold shoulders.

Meredith, her freaking roommate, only ever confided in Cristina. Never her. George was decent, sure, but he was a guy—there was always that distance. Adam? She still remembered how he'd chewed her out early on. Even now that they were cool, he kept her at arm's length. Alex, that jerk who'd left, was ironically the closest she'd gotten to a real connection. The rest of the staff? They barely gave her the time of day.

She racked her brain and could only figure it was her looks—too pretty, too perfect. Women got jealous and stayed away. Take just now: the nurse hadn't even glanced her way. Classic.

Adam, oblivious to Liz's "lonely at the top" pity party, kept sipping tea and reading. Before he knew it, the clock ticked into the wee hours.

2:30 AM.

"Ahh!" Mrs. Russebin suddenly yelped.

"What's wrong?" Adam dropped his book and rushed over.

"My contractions—they hurt so bad," she groaned. "I think my water broke."

Adam checked the monitor, then lifted the blanket. A patch of blood stared back at him.

"Deep breaths," he said, calming her while calling for the nurse.

"Get Dr. Montgomery on the line."

"Page Dr. Stevens."

"Tell the OR to prep Operating Room 1."

"Grab the backup staff list from the nurses' station and call everyone in."

A flurry of orders spilled out of him.

"Ah! What's happening?" Mrs. Russebin cried.

"Your placenta's torn—we can't wait any longer. We're delivering tonight," Adam explained, keeping his voice steady. "But don't worry, everything's under control. Relax. Deep breaths."

"Tom!" she shouted.

"I know, I've got the nurse calling Mr. Russebin already," Adam said, letting her squeeze his hand like a vice. "He's on his way and will be with you in the OR, I promise."

"The boys!" she gasped through the pain.

"They're all set—Mr. Russebin's got it covered," Adam reassured her, ignoring the death grip on his hand.

If it were Liz or someone else, they'd probably have flinched by now. The less patient ones might've even grabbed a nearby needle and jabbed her to make it stop.

"What's going on?" Liz burst in, her clothes a mess from rushing over.

Adam gave her the quick rundown, then said, "Go help call in all the backup staff."

This wasn't just a C-section. It was three babies, three surgeries. Lead surgeons, assistants, nurses—four surgical teams and two care units. Over twenty people, easy. No way they could wing it without a solid lineup.

Beep beep.

Beep beep.

Pagers blared across the city. Whether people were snoring or... uh, busy, they had to drop everything and race to the hospital.

Dr. Montgomery, the attending, sped over from home too. Adam's call was spot-on, as always. She tossed him a quick "Nice work," confirmed the full team was ready, and started scrubbing in.

Operating Room 1.

A swarm of doctors and nurses huddled around the central table. Mrs. Russebin, under local anesthesia, locked eyes with her husband. Behind the drape, Dr. Montgomery took the lead, with Liz as first assist, starting the C-section.

Adam stood by Dr. Burke, waiting for Baby #2, Emily, to make her entrance. Meredith was next to Dr. Shepherd, her face hidden behind a mask. You couldn't see her expression, but her eyes said plenty.

She'd had zero hope of joining this high-profile surgery. After clashing with Dr. Montgomery over Dr. Shepherd—practically a screaming match—she figured the attending would freeze her out. A case like this could pad her resume big-time, but she didn't trust Montgomery to give her the shot.

Turns out, she'd underestimated the woman's grace. But that just made the whole thing feel... hollow. She almost wished Montgomery had sidelined her. At least then she'd know she was a threat. Being ignored? That stung worse.

One by one, Dr. Montgomery lifted the babies out—gentle, steady—handing them to Liz, who passed them to the assigned teams. Into incubators they went, wheeled out of the OR.

Then came #2, Emily.

Adam stepped up, taking the tiny, messy, pitiful little thing from Liz. He placed her in the incubator, listened with his stethoscope, and gave Dr. Burke a nod. Burke nodded back.

"To OR 2," Adam said. Under Mrs. Russebin's teary gaze, they rolled the incubator out.

Operating Room 2.

"No matter what the books say, I guarantee you've never seen a heart this small," Dr. Burke said to Adam as they scrubbed in.

"Mm," Adam replied with a polite smile and a nod—more courtesy than agreement.

Burke paused, then shook his head with a wry grin. He'd forgotten: most people couldn't connect textbook diagrams to a real, tiny beating heart. But Adam? He could.

After scrubbing up, they suited up with the nurses' help.

"Duncan, you take the lead," Burke said, stepping aside to assist and mentor. No surprise there.

"Thanks, Dr. Burke," Adam said, smoothly taking the main spot.

"Scalpel."

He held out his hand, and the nurse slapped the blade into his palm like clockwork.

"Damn!"

As he cut into Emily's left ventricle, Adam's eyes narrowed. He cursed under his breath and glanced up at Burke.

Burke saw it too. He sighed and shook his head.

No matter how prepared Adam was, it didn't matter now.

No magic can beat fate.

Chapter 502: A Brutal Lesson

Medical Center.

Operating Room 2.

"Call Dr. Montgomery and tell her to come over as soon as she's done over there," Dr. Burke instructed.

"Yes, Doctor," the nurse replied, hurrying off.

"The ultrasound equipment still isn't advanced enough," Adam said, shaking his head. "It can't pick this up."

"You'll never get a perfect measurement before going into surgery," Dr. Burke said gravely. "That's why we, as doctors, have to keep sharpening our skills."

Baby Emily had been born underdeveloped. Her atrial septum was split by a thin membrane, and her aorta was narrower than anyone could've imagined—just one millimeter in diameter. It couldn't carry enough blood. No matter how well Adam had prepared or how precise the Norwood procedure was, without a steady blood supply through that aorta, Emily wouldn't make it. Dr. Burke estimated she had about 24 hours left, tops.

Dr. Montgomery arrived soon after getting the message.

"Crap!" she muttered under her breath, closing her eyes. As a seasoned pro, one glance told her everything she needed to know.

"If you've got no objections, we're closing her up," Dr. Burke said.

The Norwood procedure had hit a dead end. All they could do now was stitch her up, give her a little more strength, and buy her a few extra hours.

"Yeah," Dr. Montgomery said, opening her eyes with a heavy nod.

"Let's do it," Dr. Burke signaled to Adam.

Adam nodded back, moving fast but with expert precision to close Emily's chest.

"Get her to the neonatal ICU," Dr. Burke ordered once they were done.

The surgery was over.

"Dr. Duncan, step outside for a sec. I need to talk to you," Dr. Montgomery called.

"Sure," Adam replied. He peeled off his surgical gown, gloves, and mask, then followed her out of the OR to her office.

Man, what an office.

In a hospital—or anywhere, really—a big, private office like that screamed status. It was one of the perks Chief of Surgery Richard had dangled to lure Dr. Montgomery here.

"Dr. Duncan, I don't want you to tell Dr. Stevenson about the surgery's outcome," Dr. Montgomery said once she'd settled into her chair.

"Why not?" Adam asked, caught off guard.

"Emily's not going to make it past 24 hours," Dr. Montgomery said, locking eyes with him. "I want Dr. Stevenson to handle her case from start to finish."

"You mean..." Adam trailed off, piecing it together as he studied her.

"Exactly," she nodded. "Dr. Stevenson's got real talent in pediatrics. I want to mentor her properly. Since Emily's already in this state, I'm handing her over to Liz completely."

"She's going to be scared. She's going to freak out."

"But if she pushes through it, the next time something like this comes up, she'll be able to handle the pressure."

"You can only become a better doctor by letting go of too much emotional attachment to patients. That's Dr. Stevenson's biggest weakness right now."

"I went through the same thing back in the day."

"I get it," Adam said with a nod.

In that moment, he believed Dr. Montgomery was genuine. You wouldn't put a student through something this brutal unless you truly saw potential in them. Most of the time, it's a thankless job.

"I'm asking you not just to keep quiet, but also to ignore her pages," Dr. Montgomery added. "If Emily makes it to tonight, I want you out of the hospital. Let Dr. Stevenson deal with it all on her own."

"You sure about this?" Adam asked, raising an eyebrow. "Knowing Liz, she's probably not going to thank you for it. She might even ditch pediatrics altogether because of this."

"Then that'd be a shame," Dr. Montgomery said, shaking her head. "But whether it's pediatrics or any other specialty, every great doctor has to face this hurdle."

"If she can't get past it today and gives up on pediatrics, what then? Is she going to quit every time she hits a wall?"

"Maybe she's just meant to be an average doctor," Adam pointed out.

"Maybe," Dr. Montgomery paused, considering it. "But right now, I want to give her a shot. I don't want her talent to go to waste. What she does with it later—that's up to her."

It was a rare opportunity, honestly. If they weren't absolutely sure Emily couldn't be saved, no attending would ever let an intern take the reins like this. Plus, there was the risk factor—hysterical families could easily sue the attending if they found out.

Dr. Montgomery was willing to teach this way. If it were Cristina or Adam on the receiving end, they'd be grateful after the fact.

Of course, Adam and Cristina wouldn't even need this kind of lesson. Call them cold or heartless, but they already had the mindset of top-tier doctors.

"I hope Liz can see Dr. Shepherd's good intentions," Adam said with a nod. "I know what to do."

"Here's hoping," Dr. Montgomery replied with a wry smile.

Adam got it. Beyond the selfless angle, there was a bit of self-interest in it for her too. After he'd turned her down, she had no choice but to groom her own team. Normally, it'd be a slow process, but Emily's case was a sudden golden ticket. If Liz could push through, her mindset would level up big time. Pair that with her natural talent and Dr. Montgomery's guidance, and Liz could rise fast—maybe even become her right-hand woman. So yeah, despite the risks, Dr. Montgomery was willing to roll the dice.

Adam left her office.

During the day, he deliberately avoided Liz. That night, he didn't even stick around to cook up his usual late-night meal. Not that he could've anyway—the quintuplets in the neonatal ICU, courtesy of Mrs. Lusabin, each had a dedicated doctor assigned. Liz was on Emily, naturally, while Meredith, Cristina, George, and another intern each took one of the others.

Left to his own devices, Adam could've chatted with Alice Grey. But since he'd promised Dr. Montgomery, and knowing Liz might actually track him down, he bailed on the hospital entirely. He headed to Robin's apartment instead—perfect timing to change her bandages.

Her wound was on her conscience.

She needed a little extra TLC.

Late that night, Adam's pager wouldn't stop buzzing. Liz was paging him like crazy—desperate, terrified, you name it.

"Why aren't you answering?" Robin asked, groggy from sleep but woken up by the constant beeping. She'd crashed hard after overdoing it earlier.

Adam sighed and filled her in.

"Whoa," Robin gasped, wide-eyed. "You doctors have to go through training like that?"

"Not all of us," Adam shook his head. "Only the great ones need that kind of mindset. You either have it from the start or you build it up. Tonight's a make-or-break moment."

"But isn't that just... cruel?" Robin winced.

"Tonight's cruelty might save hundreds, maybe thousands of patients down the line," Adam said with a heavy sigh.

"Liz probably won't forgive Dr. Montgomery for this. Or you," Robin muttered.

"I don't need her forgiveness," Adam said with a carefree grin. "As long as you forgive me, I'm good~"

"Whoa!" Robin sucked in a breath again—maybe shocked by Adam's sudden flirty vibe, maybe something else. The whole mood shifted in an instant.

Yeah, the harsh reality sucked, but life keeps moving forward...

Chapter 503: Stepping into Mastery

The next morning.

Medical Center.

Changing Room.

Liz had just showered, her wet hair hanging loose as she sat there, head down.

George and Cristina were perched beside her, offering quiet support.

Meredith leaned against a locker, looking at her with pity.

"My baby Emily died," Liz murmured.

"We know," they replied softly.

The quintuplets were the hot topic at the medical center right now. Everyone knew the moment they walked in. Baby Emily had held on until 4 a.m. Liz had spent the night fighting to save her, but exhaustion took over, and she'd dozed off beside the crib.

A nurse should've woken her up.

But Dr. Montgomery had arrived early, saw her sleeping, and told the nurse not to disturb her. By the time Liz woke up and realized Emily was gone, she asked the nurse—only to be hit with the devastating news.

Cue the endless self-blame.

When Dr. Montgomery finally told her the truth, it went exactly as Adam had predicted: Liz lost it. She yelled, demanded answers, then stormed off. After a shower calmed her down a bit, she was left with this overwhelming sadness and confusion.

That's when Adam walked in.

"You!" Liz's eyes snapped to him, her confusion and sorrow morphing into rage. She shot up, grabbed his collar, and shouted, "Where were you last night? Do you know how many times I paged you?! Emily's dead!"

"I know," Adam said, nodding calmly. "We did the surgery yesterday. Once we opened her chest, we all knew."

"What?!" Liz froze. "You knew too?! You were in on it with her?!"

"It's not a trick," Adam explained patiently. "You're an intern, here for residency training to learn. Last night was a lesson—one your attending deliberately set up to teach you."

"Teach me?" Liz let out a bitter laugh. "By being that cruel?"

"What's not cruel?" Adam's voice stayed gentle. "We've been interns for months now. How many tearful goodbyes have we seen? If you can't handle it, maybe you're not cut out to be a doctor. You should get out early—because this kind of 'cruelty' will happen in front of you every single day."

"Adam!" Meredith frowned. "Liz is hurting right now. Ease up."

"Am I wrong?" Adam cut in. "You know why Dr. Montgomery did this? It's because Liz's flaw is way too obvious: she's too emotional. Take Mrs. Rusabin's case, for example. As the primary doctor, Liz met a pregnant patient and immediately mocked her, saying she and her husband should've read the fine print on those fertility drugs. Why? Because she couldn't stand the patient—too emotional.

Then, when it's something she finds touching, she flips to moral blackmail—acting like anyone who doesn't follow her script is a villain. Sure, it looks like she's giving her all for the patient. But can an emotional doctor like that really stay rational and calm about a patient's condition?

In critical moments, let's not even get into the scary possibility of her letting a patient she dislikes slip away, intentionally or not. What about the ones she's overly attached to? If they're beyond saving but she gets worked up and insists on saving them anyway—like in a transplant case—doesn't that steal a chance from someone who could survive? Isn't that indirectly killing someone?"

Adam shifted his gaze from a stunned Meredith back to Liz, who stood there, dazed. "So when Dr. Montgomery asked me to keep quiet and take a risk to teach you this brutal lesson, I agreed. If it happened again, I'd still say yes. If you can't accept it—or think we've done something unforgivable—then I'm telling you, don't be a doctor. With emotions like yours, you'll end up truly harming a patient one day. That's when you'll feel what real cruelty is."

He pried Liz's now-limp hands off his collar, walked to his locker, and started changing.

The room fell dead silent.

When Adam finished dressing, he glanced around: Cristina gave him a helpless smile, George looked pained, Meredith glared daggers, and Liz stood there, tears streaming down her face. He sighed.

"Which great doctor doesn't have a patient's death on their hands due to a mistake? Go ask Dr. Green, Dr. Shepherd, Dr. Burke, or even the Chief of Surgery. They've all lost patients they could've saved because of their own errors. That torment? That's real cruelty.

Compared to that, you getting this chance? You're lucky. Dr. Montgomery took a risk for this lesson—she genuinely wants to help you. If you cool off and figure that out, go thank her. Learn from her. Save as many patients as you can down the road."

He stopped there, not bothering to say what'd happen if she didn't get it. He met Meredith's glare with a cold smirk and left.

Meredith was totally unhinged now—not because she disagreed with him, but because he'd sided with her rival, Dr. Montgomery. Another emotional mess, just less extreme than Liz. No wonder, despite her talent, her mom, Ellis Grey, never gave her the time of day.

A legend like Ellis Grey could go 18 years without a single personal chat with her dedicated scrub nurse—despite secretly admiring her. Only when Alzheimer's hit, and she couldn't even recognize her own daughter, did she let slip a smile, saying how great that nurse was.

That ice-cold, steady mindset? That's the foundation of a legend.

Morning.

"Thanks."

In the hallway, Dr. Montgomery stopped Adam, her gratitude sincere. Clearly, word of his changing-room speech had reached her.

Adam wasn't surprised. It was a big room—shared by all the surgical interns. Sure, it'd seemed like just Cristina and the gang were there, but others were in the back, listening. One morning was all it took for the story to spread.

Emmm.

This definitely wasn't Adam showboating to score points with the medical center's current star, Neonatal Chief Dr. Montgomery. Nope, his words came straight from the heart.

Yup.

Totally!

"No problem," Adam said. "Did Liz come around?"

"With that wake-up call you gave her, she probably will," Dr. Montgomery replied with a smile.

She'd just run into Liz. A quick look in her eyes told the seasoned doctor everything: less anger, more complexity. A solid start. No need to find a new protégé. Adam's favor? She'd remember it.

"Heh." Adam flashed a grin, his teeth catching the light like a cheesy movie sparkle.

Chapter 504: Hot Take

Medical Center.

After brushing past Dr. Montgomery, Adam was on his way to the ER when someone stopped him again.

"Adam!" Cristina called out, blocking his path. "How about I trade you a surgery for that favor I owe you?"

"What surgery?" Adam asked with a noncommittal grin.

"Foreign object removal from the intestines," Cristina pitched. "She swallowed four razor blades. Could lead to a perforated bowel and all sorts of infections. It's a solid case—not super rare, but good enough to cancel out that favor, right?"

"Nope," Adam said, shaking his head with a laugh. "But I'll do it for you for free. No extra favors owed."

"What?!" Cristina yelled.

"Come on," Adam shrugged. "You didn't think I'd miss the news about that female inmate who just got rushed in, did you? She's a triple murderer, locked up in solitary in some tiny dark cell."

"This isn't her first time swallowing blades to get a breather outside. It's totally normal to be freaked out by a patient that hardcore. I'll help you out."

"Damn it! So close!" Cristina clenched her fist in frustration before griping, "How do you know everything?"

"That's why you can't pull one over on me," Adam teased. "So, what do you say? I'll handle it for free—deal?"

"No way," Cristina shot back, rolling her eyes as she turned to leave. "She said she doesn't kill doctors... at least no doctor's died by her hands yet."

"Keep your distance," Adam called after her.

A psycho who'd killed three people could snap and attack a doctor at any moment. What's one more murder? Another few hundred years tacked onto her sentence? She didn't care—her attitude was cocky as hell.

Adam had heard from a nurse that when the inmate arrived, she was practically giddy, yelling and calling everyone "baby" with this wild, unhinged energy that freaked people out. The nurses assigned to her

were the unlucky ones who'd lost a draw. Even with her hands cuffed, they stayed as far away as possible while changing her dressings, terrified she'd lash out.

The inmate picked up on their fear and started bossing them around like they were her servants. The nurses just took it—too scared to push back.

Even Cristina, with her natural surgeon's calm and logic, couldn't pretend she wasn't rattled by this patient. Coming to Adam was the smart move. In the whole medical center, he was probably the only one who could handle her without blinking. But flipping it so he'd owe her a favor? Fat chance.

Noon.

Cafeteria.

"That guy you had with the pet rattlesnake was already nuts," George said, still amazed. "But I've got one that tops it—he keeps leeches as pets."

"What's the deal?" Adam asked, caught off guard.

"My patient's got multiple skin melanomas," George explained. "He's on biotherapy."

"With leeches," Adam realized.

"Yup," George groaned. "He says they helped him, so he wants to keep them and release them back into the wild someday."

"That's pretty tame, actually," Adam chuckled. "Could've been for some weird, creepy reason."

Just then, Cristina walked over, frowning.

"What are you staring at?" she snapped as Adam gave her a once-over.

"No missing parts—looks like you got lucky today," Adam quipped.

"She's fearless," Cristina complained. "We told her the surgery risks, and all she did was yell for mint chocolate chip ice cream."

"And the crazier she acts, the more freaked out you guys get, right?" Adam hit the nail on the head.

"No kidding," Cristina said, exasperated. "You didn't see the nurse taking care of her—legs shaking so bad she's been to the bathroom like five times already."

"Here's a thought," Adam said with a grin. "If every prisoner pulled stunts like her, wouldn't that tank our healthcare system in no time?"

"Obviously," Cristina nodded after a pause. "With that many inmates doing this, we'd never keep up."

"Do you know how much taxpayer money a single prisoner burns through every year?" Adam asked.

"How much?" George piped up, curious.

"Sixty grand per head," Adam said, smirking. "They can casually call up a pricey ambulance, roll into the hospital, boss us around—and in some ways, they're living better than us interns."

"Pfft!" George nearly spat out his drink. "Sixty grand?! That's, what, two of us to support one of them?"

"Wrong," Cristina corrected. "You make, what, thirty-something grand a year? Your taxes are only a few thousand. It takes over a dozen of you, working your butts off, to fund one of them—and that's not even counting when they pull stuff like this and hog rare medical resources."

"No way," George said, jaw dropping.

"Why not?" Cristina pressed. "If one prisoner costs sixty grand in public funds, build a few more prisons, lock up more people, and suddenly thousands of middle-class elites are slaving away for them."

"Eating slop, no days off, raking in billions."

"Why do you think private prisons are popping up everywhere? They wouldn't be booming if there wasn't cash in it."

"Heh, now you get it," Adam laughed. "They say doctors and lawyers are the ultimate middle-class jobs. But four years of undergrad, four years of med school, six or seven years as a resident—it takes fourteen or fifteen years to hit that middle-class life."

"Only then does our 'income and spending power' start catching up to the convicts. Pretty hilarious when you think about it."

Interns and residents don't make much. It's only when you hit attending that the real money kicks in—and even then, it depends on your skills or how well you play the game.

"That's not how it works..." George muttered, shaking his head, unwilling to buy this wild take. "We've got freedom—they don't..."

"What freedom do you have as an intern?" Cristina cut in. "Prisoners get yard time every day. When we're slammed, we don't even have time to eat or pee."

"..." George went silent, totally deflated.

This hit him hard. He'd worked his tail off to become a doctor and was damn proud of it—usually looking down a bit on his brothers, a mailman and a mechanic. But after Adam and Cristina broke it down like this, that pride took a dent.

Sure, the comparison wasn't perfect. Survive the grind, and his life would keep getting better while the prisoners' got worse. But for some reason, he just felt... bummed out.

"I hear some surgery junkies get so into it they wear diapers to the OR," Cristina said, veering off-topic with a dreamy look. "I hope one day I'm that hardcore—living in the operating room..."

Leave it to her to take it to extremes just to save time.

"Adam, when that day comes, it'll be way easier for me than you," she teased.

"No way," Adam said, twitching. "I've got my bladder under control. No matter how busy surgery gets, I'm good."

Chapter 505: Peggy the Boxer

Medical Center.

Cafeteria.

Cristina was animatedly recounting a wild story about a surgery-obsessed doc wearing adult diapers into the OR, and Adam couldn't help but crack a smile. But when she started speculating about who'd be more comfy in them—her or Adam—he felt a little offended.

Okay, sure, Cristina might technically have the edge as a woman. But Adam wasn't some bladder-control disaster like Sheldon, nor was he Howard, inventing a "warming gadget" for movie lines and subtly adjusting his pants with a smug grin. When Adam said he could hold it, he meant it. Just ask his "more than friends, less than lovers" buddies—same principle, right?

Ding-a-ling!

His phone rang, cutting through the moment.

"Lisa?" Adam's brow furrowed. He grabbed his tray, answered, and headed out. "What's up?"

Lisa, his assistant, was fully in charge of looking after Peggy. A call at this hour made his stomach twist. Then she dropped a bombshell that left him torn between laughing and groaning.

"What? Peggy hit someone? What happened?"

"Boss," Lisa said over the line, "today Peggy's sister showed up with her boyfriend. They were chatting, and the guy started getting flirty..."

"Hm?" Adam's tone chilled. "With Peggy?"

"Yeah," Lisa hurried to clarify, "but just flirty talk. Peggy's sister called him out right away."

"And then?" Adam pressed, voice still icy. "Peggy wouldn't deck him for no reason."

"This guy's some artsy type," Lisa explained. "Bad temper. When Peggy's sister chewed him out, he hauled off and hit her. She just took it. I called security, but before they got there, Peggy stepped in and clocked him—right in the left eye socket."

"Heh." Adam couldn't hold back a chuckle. "And then?"

"The jerk's a big guy but totally useless," Lisa said, her tone lightening as she sensed Adam's mood lift. "Peggy's punch dazed him. He started to lose it, but she landed another one square on his face. By then, security swooped in and took control."

"Is Peggy's hand okay?" Adam asked, genuinely concerned.

"Don't worry, boss, she's fine," Lisa laughed. "The guy's locked up in the security room downstairs now. Only question is, what do we do with him? Peggy's sister keeps begging us to let him go, says she needs to get him to a hospital."

"What's his attitude like now?" Adam asked.

"Scared, probably," Lisa replied. "In the U.S., you don't mess with rich folks and walk away clean."

Fair point. Down in the security room, surrounded by pro gear and trained guards, anyone with half a brain would realize they'd ticked off someone with money—or power.

"Keep him there for now," Adam mused. "I'll send someone to deal with him later."

"Deal with him?" Lisa sounded startled. "Boss, don't do anything rash—he's the one Peggy hit!"

"What, you think I'm some movie gangster?" Adam shot back, half-laughing. "I'm not gonna go full mob boss over this!"

"Right, right," Lisa exhaled. "So, what's 'deal with him' mean?"

"Let's keep Peggy out of this mess," Adam said. "I'll get a pro to teach this clown some manners so he doesn't try anything stupid. Old cop I know—hand him over, he'll handle it."

"What's the plan, boss?" Lisa asked, curiosity piqued.

"Nothing crazy," Adam sighed. "Can't go overboard. Just straighten him out, patch him up, make sure there's no evidence tying him to Peggy, and dig into his background. Artists, y'know, they've got their quirks. Plus, a guy who hits his girlfriend on a whim and flirts with her little sister in front of her? Total dirtbag. He's got a fitting destination waiting."

"..." Lisa was speechless.

Not a big deal? This was barely a step down from wiping the guy out! Her boss sure held grudges. Note to self: never cross him.

"Don't worry," Adam added. "I'll have them toss in a wrist-strapped soap pouch—keep him from dropping the bar in the shower."

Lisa had no clue what that meant, but she knew it was some twisted joke of his.

"What about Peggy's sister, though?" she asked. "She seems really into him."

"Leave that to me," Adam said with a grin. "I'll head over early tonight. Prep dinner—I'll talk to her."

He knew Peggy's sister well enough. Back in high school, when Peggy's parents were splitting up, Peggy only dabbled in rebellion. Her sister, though? Full-on trainwreck. She ran off with some punk in a beat-up van he'd turned into a "camper"—no bathroom, just a bed. People called it a "mobile bang shack."

Sheldon's brother, Little George, had snagged one too, claiming it was to "drive Sheldon around." But Big George, their dad, saw through it in a heartbeat. He'd been young once—scored his wife with a slick motorcycle back in the day. That van? His dream ride. Motorbikes were cool, but impractical for the real action.

To avoid early grandkids, Big George put his foot down: sell it or get out. Little George, all bravado, refused, decked it out with twinkle lights, and drove it to his girlfriend's place, promising her dad he'd have her home by 11.

Her dad, also a former young hotshot, wasn't fooled. One look inside that van, and it was game over. Curfews mean squat when you've got a rolling hookup pad. Little George got sent packing and learned the hard way: no parent's that dumb. A van's only handy if the girl still agrees to get in it. He cut his losses and sold it.

Little George flopped, but Peggy's sister's loser boyfriend pulled it off. With her parents distracted by the divorce—and Peggy as the spark—no one noticed the "invisible" older sister slipping away.

If that punk could sweet-talk her, Adam was damn sure he could too.

Chapter 506: You Know Too Much

After hanging up the phone, Adam headed to the VIP ward. Today, he was in charge of a patient with a Rathke's cleft cyst.

"Mr. Martin! Mr. Martin!" Nurse Violet—the sharpest of the bunch—was anxiously knocking on the bathroom door inside the ward.

"Dr. Duncan, Mr. Martin's locked himself in there and won't open the door," she said, turning to Adam.

"Mr. Martin, please open the door. I know you're feeling awful, but you need our help," Adam called, giving the door a few firm knocks.

"I don't need help! I don't need anyone!" Mr. Martin yelled from inside. "I'm an island—a beautiful little island, surrounded by water!"

"Shit!" Adam's face darkened.

"Dr. Duncan, I'll get security," Nurse Violet said instinctively.

"No need," Adam replied. With a hard twist, he forced the lock open.

Nurse Violet froze on the spot. There was Mr. Martin—a successful guy who could afford a VIP ward—sprawled by the toilet, his face plunged into the water. When he saw them barge in, he lifted his head for a second, then dunked it right back in, chugging desperately.

Adam marched over, grabbed him by the collar with one hand, and hauled him out.

"No!" Mr. Martin thrashed wildly. "Let me go! I need water!"

"Violet, get the restraints," Adam ordered.

"Yes, sir!" She bolted out of the room.

"Don't look at me! I don't want anyone seeing me like this—so pathetic!" Mr. Martin roared as he struggled.

"This isn't you, Mr. Martin," Adam said, pinning him to the bed and trying to calm him. "You're sick. There's a Rathke's cleft cyst in your pituitary gland causing hyponatremia—low blood sodium. That's why you're so thirsty.

"But we can't let you guzzle water. It has to be an IV drip. Drinking too much will mess with your sodium levels even more and drive you into delirium.

"That 'beautiful island surrounded by water' you saw? It was just a toilet. And I'm not your in-flight attendant on some vacation—I'm your doctor."

"No! I don't believe you!" Mr. Martin screamed, completely unhinged.

Adam had seen him in his normal state before: a reclusive, proud businessman with a male assistant always at his side. According to the assistant, Mr. Martin had no friends—well, except maybe the assistant himself, who'd been with him for three years.

Though, honestly, that was probably just the assistant's wishful thinking. When he followed Adam's orders and restricted Mr. Martin's water intake, the guy's desperate thirst got the better of him—and he fired the assistant on the spot.

Adam had tried to talk him out of it.

"You're just a doctor—what do you know?" Mr. Martin had snapped back. "Come talk to me about this when you have an assistant." His words dripped with disdain and arrogance.

Adam didn't bother arguing further. But Nurse Violet couldn't hold back—she shut him down in a few sharp sentences. Sure, there are plenty of successful businessmen, but not one in a hundred is a billionaire. Mr. Martin had to eat his words.

This doctor might actually understand the dynamic between a boss and an assistant. Still, he didn't take Adam's advice and call the guy back. In his mind, the assistant had seen him at his lowest, and that respect was gone forever. No way he'd keep someone like that around.

Adam got it. It was like the old days—knowing too many royal secrets could get you in hot water.

You know too much.

The king doesn't want to see you.

You've got to disappear...

"Dr. Duncan," Nurse Violet called, snapping him back. She'd returned with the restraints in record time.

"Tie him down," Adam instructed.

She expertly secured Mr. Martin's wrists and ankles to the bed.

"Start him on a 3% hypertonic saline IV drip—500 milliliters over four hours," Adam ordered. "Repeat that back."

"3% hypertonic saline IV drip, 500 milliliters over four hours," she echoed.

"Good," Adam said, then added, "Be careful with this. Too much saline can permanently damage his brain. Make sure it's 500 milliliters total over four hours—no more."

Nurses are great for routine stuff—they can handle it without a doctor hovering. But for rare, tricky cases like this, their experience falls short. If she'd misheard and thought it was 500 milliliters per hour for four hours, Mr. Martin's brain would be toast. Not dead, but paralyzed for life.

Adam had just told Liz that "every great doctor has lost a patient they shouldn't have due to a mistake." What he didn't say was that applied to average great doctors. For a cheat-code genius like him, a patient dying from his error might never happen. And the longer he went—skills and expertise piling up—the less likely it'd ever be.

He wasn't about to let his first screw-up be something this basic. Even if it did happen, it wouldn't tank his career. Seasoned doctors could still rattle off every detail of their own slip-ups years later—it haunts them forever. Adam's brain had an encrypted folder for that kind of thing, but a mistake he could avoid with one extra word? No chance he'd let it slide.

"Got it, Dr. Duncan," Nurse Violet nodded seriously.

"Dr. Shepherd," Adam said later, tracking her down after settling Mr. Martin. He filled her in.

"Alright," Dr. Shepherd replied, glancing at her watch. It was past 2 p.m. The IV drip would take four hours, pushing them past regular hours. "Keep a close eye on him tonight. We'll operate tomorrow."

That's a big difference between attendings and residents: attendings have set schedules. Aside from rotating hospital duty or emergencies, they work seven-to-five with weekends off—normal life stuff. It's why residents grind so hard to make attending. It's not just the money—it's the free time. Money and leisure? That's the dream.

"Cristina, your favor's cashed in," Adam said, finding her later and handing off Mr. Martin's overnight watch.

The nurses could handle it, technically, but since he was Adam's patient, he didn't feel right without a dedicated doctor on it. Might as well burn Cristina's favor now—otherwise, she'd keep obsessing over it. Plus, if they bet again later and the favors stacked up, she might just give up and ghost the debt entirely. Better to keep it clean: owe, pay, owe again.

As expected, Cristina was thrilled to agree. Owing someone a favor weighed on a proud, principled person like her. Adam hadn't given her a chance to clear it before, but now? Just a night shift and some extra patient duty to wipe the slate clean. Way better than handing over a surgery.

He trusted Cristina enough but still drilled the instructions into her three times before clocking out, changing, and driving off to New Jersey.

Chapter 507: The Peggy Sisters

New Jersey.

Princeton University.

Outside Peggy's apartment building.

Lisa was already there, waiting. The second Adam's car rolled up, she scurried over with a big grin, opening his door like he was royalty or something.

"Boss, dinner's all set, and that jerk's been hauled off by the pro you sent," she chirped.

"Cool," Adam said with a nod, strolling toward the apartment.

No need to meet the guy face-to-face. Distance keeps the fear factor alive, right? Leave the pros to handle the dirty work. Kate had hooked him up with a seasoned cop—loaded with experience and connections. Adam trusted him to sort it out his way.

All he had to do was convince Peggy's sister to ditch the loser and clear out the drama around Peggy. Easy enough.

"Didn't peg Peggy for such a badass," Lisa said, trotting alongside him. Sensing his good mood, she grinned. "A pretty little scientist girl, throwing punches like that? Too cool!"

"Heh," Adam slowed his step, chuckling. "It's not her first rodeo."

"What?!" Lisa gasped, playing along. "For real?"

"Yup. First victim was our buddy Sheldon," Adam said, laughing. "Back in high school. They were both, like, eleven."

"Wait, if they're friends, why'd she hit him?" Lisa asked, wide-eyed.

"He had it coming," Adam said, shaking his head as the memory hit him.

It was during Peggy's parents' messy divorce. Peggy was testing the rebel waters, and her mom, still hovering, pushed her to hang out with "similar" kids like Sheldon while signing her up for Bible choir—hoping some divine vibes would straighten her out.

One Sunday, Sheldon showed up all hyped for a stamp-collecting club meetup, only to find out it was canceled. Apparently, he was the only one who'd RSVP'd. He couldn't believe it—stats said stamp collecting was trending with the 70-plus crowd, and they've got all the time in the world, right?

But little Sheldon was used to disappointment by then. His mom and sister dragged him to the choir instead. That's where he ran into Peggy, also strong-armed into it by her mom. Both being hardcore atheists, they thought the Bible trivia contest was dumb as hell.

Still, ever since Peggy crushed him at chess and flipped the board, Sheldon was obsessed with beating her—even at something as lame as Bible facts. They started bickering, and when the pastor tossed out a question that left Missy and the others clueless, Peggy and Sheldon shot their hands up, ready to duke it out.

No surprise who won. The pastor, already dreading Sheldon's smug face from past run-ins, ignored him and picked Peggy. For two geniuses like them, it was child's play. She nailed it, got the praise and prize, and Sheldon fumed. He swore he'd take her down next time, went home, re-read the Bible, and made Missy quiz him to boost his hand-raising speed.

Next week's choir rolled around, and Sheldon was sure he had it in the bag. But Peggy? She didn't even bother competing. Drove him nuts. When he demanded why, she smirked and said she just wanted to see him squirm.

Emmm. Total "tell me your woes so we can all laugh" energy. "My joy comes from your misery" vibes.

Sheldon tried flipping the script, but he sucked at it. Even tossing out his dad's classic domestic-violence-trigger line—"Woman, get me a beer!"—didn't faze her.

Finally, he struck gold: he hit her where it hurt, bringing up her parents' divorce and how it all started with her.

Bingo. Peggy snapped. She unleashed Missy's go-to move for handling Sheldon: violence! One punch to his left eye socket, and he was down for the count—KO'd by an eleven-year-old girl.

Missy's gleeful cackle echoed through the room.

Afterward, Sheldon's mom was heartbroken but couldn't really argue. Peggy was cut from the same cloth as her son, and she felt for her. She chalked it up to "Missy beating up Sheldon" territory—nothing new. Truth is, Missy was Peggy's real mentor. Though Sheldon's mom did pull Missy aside later and ban her from teaching Peggy any more moves.

Good thing, too. Missy's signature was a brutal knee to the groin.

The memories flashed through Adam's mind as they reached the apartment door. Lisa, ever the pro, unlocked it for him.

"Hey, Erica," Adam called out, spotting a vaguely familiar woman inside. On closer look—yep, Peggy's sister.

Man, she'd changed. Back in the day, she couldn't hold a candle to Peggy. Now? The baby fat was gone, and she was stunning. Not surprising, given Peggy's looks. They were sisters, after all. Even a tenth of that DNA was a guaranteed beauty ticket.

Kinda like that dragon lady claiming she's the "ugliest" in her family—humblebrag with a grain of truth.

"Hey, Adam," Erica said, a little dazed. She'd met him before through Peggy, thought he was cute enough but nothing special. Compared to her edgy, bad-boy artist boyfriend, he'd been a yawn.

But now? Totally different vibe. Something about him—mature, doctorly, artsy, handsome. A quadruple whammy of her favorite traits.

Yup. Peggy's mom had worried Peggy's "daddy issues" from their broken home led her to Adam. Wrong kid. Peggy just needed a half-decent friend after Sheldon flopped. Erica, though? She was the one nursing a quiet crush on older, stable types thanks to that divorce mess.

Erica had planned to beg Adam to let her boyfriend go. But now? No rush. She flicked her hair, hiding a fading bruise from her cheek, and flashed him her brightest smile.

Chapter 508: Let's Go Together

Peggy's apartment.

Erika flicked her hair back and flashed Adam her brightest smile.

So, who's Adam?

He's the kind of guy who gets it right away.

And just like that—

"Does your hand still hurt?"

Adam grabbed Peggy's hand, inspecting it with a worried look, his voice dripping with concern.

"..."

Both Peggy and her sister Erika blinked, totally thrown off.

What's going on here?

For Peggy, no matter how cozy things got in the bedroom, Adam had never been this mushy in public before.

He didn't seem like the type either.

And honestly, Peggy wasn't big on this whole public-display-of-affection thing anyway.

"I'm fine," she said, pulling her hand back and shooting Adam a little frown.

"Whether you're fine or not, I'll be the judge of that."

Adam went full-on domineering CEO mode, snagging her hand again and gently toying with it like it was his personal treasure.

"..."

Peggy glanced at Erika, whose expression was starting to look off, and suddenly it clicked. She didn't say anything more, just let Adam indulge his little power trip.

Erika wasn't dumb either.

She'd been around the block—boyfriend after boyfriend—and had a sixth sense for this kind of vibe.

She caught Adam's drift immediately.

And it made her stomach twist even more.

Normal guys, like her flirty jerk of a boyfriend, would usually want both sisters, right?

Sure, she hated how her boyfriend teased Peggy, but right now, she hated Adam's lovey-dovey show-off routine even more.

If she remembered correctly, Adam was a total player back in high school.

A guy like that—shouldn't he be more intrigued by her status as the big sister?

What's with the act?

Or... was Peggy's charm really that irresistible?

Then again, thinking about Peggy's stunning looks and her untouchable achievements, Erika felt a wave of helplessness wash over her.

Other women might not have that kind of pull, but her little sister? She wasn't your average gal.

Turning a playboy into a loyal good guy? Yeah, that actually seemed plausible with Peggy.

"Erika, you must be hungry. Let's grab some food together," Adam said warmly, his peripheral vision catching Erika's shift. The flirty spark in her eyes was gone, replaced by a hint of gloom. He figured he'd pushed enough, so he let go of Peggy's hand and tossed out the invite.

It's not like he was some prudish old-fashioned type who scoffed at certain "combinations."

Nah, he just cared about Peggy more.

She'd just "given him a kid," and hitting on her sister right after? That wasn't something a pure, upright guy like Adam would do.

Plus, sure, Erika was pretty—decent enough—but in Adam's eyes, after seeing countless beauties, she was maybe a seven out of ten.

Compared to Peggy, the ultimate gorgeous scientist girl,

Carolyn's saintly aura,

Heather's commanding presence,

MAX's sharp-tongued sass,

Robin's cool heroism,

Nora's sultry queen vibes,

Kate's hot detective energy,

Jennifer's Transformers-level edge,

and Alice's "you can't handle my boyfriend, but you can't handle me either" tenacity—

not to mention the encrypted folder in Adam's mind full of other standout women—Erika's looks didn't quite measure up. And she didn't have that captivating soul to make up for it either.

Special status or not, she wasn't that big a deal.

Adam had made time to come here specifically to win Erika over and clear out any instability around Peggy. No way was he about to stir up trouble for himself.

Erika?

Nah, not worth it!

"It's been a while since we last saw each other, huh?" Adam said, trying to spark some convo since Erika seemed down.

"Yeah, it has," Erika replied, glancing at Adam and Peggy sitting together. Her tone turned snarky. "If I remember right, Peggy was, what, eleven back then? And you were... seventeen? Eighteen?"

"Time really flies," Adam said with a smile, dodging her jab. "Mrs. Watson's getting remarried soon, huh? Erika, have you met David? Solid guy, right?"

"Solid or not, who cares?" Erika shot back with a cold laugh. "How long's it gonna last anyway?"

Even though she still held a grudge against her mom for walking out, she couldn't say a single bad word about David after meeting him.

In just a short time, David had given her a taste of fatherly love she hadn't felt in forever—not since her real dad remarried and basically forgot about her.

But like Peggy, she wasn't big on believing in marriage. She just wasn't as hardcore about it as her sister.

"Has David seen the bruise on your face?" Adam asked, easing into the real topic.

"Yeah," Erika said, her hand brushing the faded mark on her cheek where her boyfriend had hit her. Her expression got complicated—part sadness over the abuse, part warmth from David stepping up for her like a dad.

But she was used to her boyfriend's hot-and-cold routine: sweet and romantic one minute, violent the next.

And David? He was too civilized to do much about it.

In the end, it all just fizzled out.

"Dick's not always like that," Erika said, finally remembering her boyfriend had been hauled off. She tried to defend him. "Don't hurt him, okay?"

"No worries," Adam said with a grin. "Peggy already stuck her neck out for you. Why would I bother messing with him? I just didn't want him hurting Peggy's family again, so I had a cop give him a little scare. You're not seriously worried the police would hurt him, are you?"

"..."

Erika's face twisted weirdly.

She hadn't been too concerned at first, but now that Adam mentioned "cop," she couldn't help but feel uneasy.

Still, she couldn't exactly say, "Oh yeah, American cops can be dangerous," could she?

"How's your mom doing with David lately?" Adam asked, switching gears to give Erika a breather.

"They're fine," Erika said, shoving down her worries and sarcasm. "They're getting married soon. I'm helping Mom plan the wedding. I actually came over to talk to Peggy about being a bridesmaid."

After meeting Adam, her feelings for her boyfriend suddenly didn't seem so strong anymore. The urge to defend him faded too.

"Bridesmaid?" Adam raised an eyebrow. "Peggy, for her mom?"

"Yup," Erika said. "Not just Peggy—me too. Mom doesn't have any super close girlfriends, and she wanted both of us in the wedding, so she figured Peggy and I could be bridesmaids. My boyfriend Dick was supposed to be a groomsman..."

"Peggy's not into it?" Adam cut in.

"She's waiting to see if you're free," Erika said, her voice dripping with jealousy. "She wants you as her groomsman."

"I don't like walking the red carpet with randoms," Peggy said, frowning.

Adam grinned at Peggy, then turned to Erika. "When's it happening? Where?"

"At David's hometown, some little place in Washington," Erika said. "Two weeks from now, November 18th."

Then she griped, "Thanksgiving and Christmas are right around the corner, and they only got engaged a few weeks ago. I don't get why they're rushing it so much. It's all so last-minute."

Adam chuckled to himself.

No kidding—they're not young anymore, David's busy with his startup, so of course they're cutting corners and speeding things up.

Heck, maybe it's even a shotgun wedding.

If they wait too long, the bride might not fit in her dress!

No wonder they're in a hurry.

"Peggy, I can make time that day. Wanna go together?" Adam asked. He'd had late-night heart-to-hearts with her before and knew that beneath her aloof, icy exterior, she had emotional needs too.

She didn't not want to go.

She just didn't want to go alone and end up paired with some random guy—or, well, random monkey—walking down the aisle.

Because with Erika and her boyfriend set as bridesmaid and groomsman, Peggy would have to link arms with some stranger for the ceremony.

"Okay," Peggy said, locking eyes with Adam, a tiny smile tugging at her lips.

"..."

Erika, who'd been helping plan the whole thing, suddenly felt like bailing.

Chapter 509: One Thing Tames Another

New Jersey.

Peggy's apartment.

"So, it's settled then!"

Adam could sense Erica's growing disgust with the food talk, so he wisely stopped locking eyes with Peggy and turned his attention back to Erica with a grin. "I'll be going with Peggy. Anything we can help with?"

"Do you guys even have the time?" Erica asked, skepticism dripping from her tone. "If you're already juggling whether you can even show up, how are you supposed to help plan anything?"

"Oh, don't count us out just yet," Adam said with a sly smile. "If there's anything you need, just hit up Lisa—she'll sort it out for you. Consider it Peggy and me pitching in, alright?"

"..."

Erica had no comeback for that. Money talks, and Adam's endless resources left her speechless.

"If you want to give your mom and David a romantic wedding, I've got a friend you should totally chat with," Adam continued, still smiling. "They call him the Prince of Romance. Guy's got wild ideas—plus, he's an architectural designer. I introduced him to David before; they hit it off.

Talk to him. Trust me, he'll be a huge help in pulling off that dreamy wedding for your mom and David."

"The Prince of Romance?" Erica snorted. "Please tell me he didn't come up with that himself."

"Nah, not at all," Adam said with a playful smirk. "I gave him that title. He just calls himself an architectural designer chasing his one true love. But take my word for it—he is the Prince of Romance."

"Fine, whatever," Erica replied. She was barely in her twenties, so Adam's hype naturally piqued her curiosity about this so-called romantic prince. "But I'm heading back with Dick tomorrow. There's still a ton to do for the wedding."

"Push it back a few days. I'll book you a first-class ticket," Adam said without missing a beat. "Tomorrow night, I'll have someone bring you to New York. You can meet my buddy Ted Mosby—have a good chat with him.

You can help plan the wedding from New York, no problem. And if you need anything, Lisa's got your back."

A few days would be enough for Erica's boyfriend, Dick, to heal up from the bruises on his face. Peggy might be a "boxer" of sorts, and yeah, Adam's training had made her stronger than most girls her age—but she wasn't some invincible Barbie doll. Her punches weren't that lethal. With some pro-level care, Dick's face would be back to normal soon enough.

By then, there'd be no visible evidence tying him to Peggy. A quick threat, and they could cut him loose. Adam had already tipped off an old cop buddy to keep an eye on him. Give it some time—once Dick stopped connecting the dots back to Adam and Peggy, any shady move he made would get "accidentally spotted" by a "good Samaritan" who'd call the cops.

He'd pay for his slip-ups, all above board. Adam had checked the guy's rap sheet on the way over—plenty of messy run-ins with the law, not his first rodeo. One more step over the line? Totally plausible.

As for Erica? A few days with Ted—seeing what real romance and gentleness look like—she'd ditch the "romantic but abusive" vibe in a heartbeat. It's all about one thing taming another. Ted Mosby, the sexy architectural designer, lady-killer, and Prince of Romance? His rep's well-earned.

"Alright," Erica said, nodding. With Adam laying it out like that, she had no reason to say no. She was pretty cheerful about it, actually.

Next up: chowing down on some good food while shooting the breeze.

Now, if this were little-kid Peggy, she'd be the glue holding the trio together, taking charge of the convo. Back then, she was like Sheldon and Missy rolled into one—Sheldon's genius IQ paired with Missy's killer social skills. When your brain's that sharp, everything's crystal clear. It's not about not knowing—it's about whether you care to act on it.

Emotional intelligence? Same deal. Take Sheldon: Did he really not get stuff? Nah. He just didn't give a damn—wouldn't waste a second thinking about it. High IQ chases self-obsession; high EQ cares about everyone else. Time's finite. Spend it worrying about others' needs, and your own goals take a hit. It's a clash that can't be fixed.

Wisdom's the combo of IQ and EQ—you can tweak the balance if you've got the time. Most regular folks? They're stuck griping that they don't have enough of either, no chance to even pick a ratio.

Geniuses usually go 7:3—seven parts IQ, three parts EQ. That's why they come off quirky but still approachable.

Sheldon, though? He went all-in at 9.9999:0.0001, ditching EQ almost entirely. That tiny 0.0001 was just enough for his mom and grandma, who adored him, and a survival instinct to not get pummeled. That's why he seemed so clueless—brutally honest to a fault. Later, his crew softened him up, made him more human. But like Leonard and Howard after getting girlfriends, his achievements tanked. His brain slowed down so much he started questioning his whole existence.

That Nobel Prize in Physics? Without a "happy ending" stroke of luck, he'd have been sunk. Probably would've ended up like countless other theoretical physicists—teen prodigy, bursting with talent, diving into the sea of theory, never making a splash again. His focus got muddy.

Little Peggy's high EQ back in the day? That was her making do. She knew her parents' fights stemmed from her being "different." She cared about them, so she played the part—dolls, sweetness, the whole "normal girl" act—to patch up the family cracks. With her super-genius IQ, a 9:1 split still let her shine with both smarts and charm.

But when she spilled her real feelings to little Sheldon over chess? That was her truth. Like him, she was proud—obsessed with being the best. After her parents' divorce talks and her failed "go normal" phase—snapped out of it by Adam—she flipped the switch. She doubled down on herself, mirroring Sheldon's 9.9999:0.0001 split.

Academics? She soared—crushed Sheldon, became the youngest PhD and mathematician ever. But the trade-off? She stopped hanging with Missy. Looked down on everyone with icy indifference. Erica didn't mean much more to her than Missy did to Sheldon. Heck, if she hadn't spent so much time with Adam, nudging her EQ up a tiny bit, those punches might not have even happened.

"Erica, come on—I'll show you my place," Adam said, shooting Lisa a look. She caught the hint and jumped in to invite Erica over.

"Lisa'll help you out after this. You two can hash things out," Adam added with a grin.

"Uh, sure," Erica said, a little thrown but rolling with it. She got up and followed.

Over there, Lisa kept pushing Erica to stay the night. After a bunch of no's, she finally dropped the subtle truth bomb. So, when Erica came back for her clothes, she gave Adam this weird look—like he was some kind of creep.

Adam just smiled and waved her off. Back in the day, he'd cannonballed through a speech to win Peggy's friendship and boost his wisdom stats, accidentally tanking her EQ by a million. Now? He was putting in a million times the effort to fix it. He didn't expect her to bounce back into the quirky, double-genius bombshell she could've been. But if he could just get a little more of that punch-throwing spark out of her today? He'd call it a win.

Chapter 510: Live in the Moment

The next morning, Adam drove back to New York.

At the medical center—

"How'd last night go?" Adam asked, tracking down Christina.

"You think I can't handle things?" Christina shot back with a yawn, then added, "Oh, and that favor I owed you? Consider it paid."

"Of course." Adam grinned, nodding. He chatted with Christina a bit more before heading into Mr. Martin's VIP room.

After a quick check-up, everything looked good.

By the time daylight hit, Dr. Shepter showed up and got straight to the surgery. It was a minimally invasive procedure—using an endoscopic scalpel through Mr. Martin's nasal passage to remove a Rathke's cleft cyst from his pituitary gland.

The surgery wasn't complicated; it was all about precision. And just like that, it was over.

Stepping out of the operating room, Adam ran into George in the hallway, buzzing with energy.

"Adam, you gotta live in the moment, man!" George said, pointing at him dramatically. He grabbed a chart from the nurse's station, did a little spin-dance move, and strutted off, practically glowing.

"What's up with him?" Adam asked, half-laughing, half-confused.

"Dr. O'Malley got a blessing from the Big Guy upstairs today," the know-it-all nurse said with a smirk.

"A blessing?" Adam perked up. "What, did he score some rare surgery or something?"

"Nope," she chuckled. "He almost went to meet God this morning, but then God sent a holy pigeon to bring him back to earth. Told him to enjoy life now and check in with the man upstairs when he's old and gray. That's why he's so hyped."

Adam pressed her for more details and finally pieced it together.

So, earlier that morning, George was outside the hospital buying a donut for breakfast. Right as he was about to take a bite, a splat of bird poop dropped from the sky and landed smack on his donut.

Grossed out, George chucked the tainted treat on the ground.

Cue the pigeon swooping in to munch on it.

It was straight out of some old comedy—like that scene in *Wulin Waizhuan* where Lao Xing, fresh from begging in the capital, saw Lao Bai with a chicken leg, spat on it, and went, "You gonna eat that?"

No? Cool, then he'd take it. His spit, his rules.

Adam had a sneaking suspicion this pigeon was a crafty little mastermind, pulling a fast one for a free snack. Who else could've dropped that perfectly timed poop bomb?

George, clueless about such antics, didn't suspect a thing. Seeing the pigeon chowing down, he decided to just walk away.

But the second he stepped aside—

Bam! A figure came crashing down from above, flattening the pigeon and the donut—and covering the exact spot where George had just been standing.

In other words, if it weren't for that miraculous bird poop, George would've been the one pancaked.

Turns out, the falling figure was a window washer who'd plummeted from the fifth floor. If George had been hit, he'd be dead—or at least crippled.

But here's the kicker: the guy who fell should've had a collapsed lung, a shattered spine, and a severed artery. Instead? Just a busted leg.

A freaking miracle.

No wonder George was bouncing off the walls.

At noon, in the cafeteria—

"Look at this!" George said, rushing over to Adam and proudly waving a pigeon claw like it was a trophy.

"That's the holy pigeon that saved you?" Adam asked, eyeing it.

"Yup!" George said, twirling the claw reverently. "I pulled it off the patient's back and asked to keep it. Gonna get it made into something later—my lucky charm. God's watching over me, man."

"Pfft!" Christina snorted. "That pigeon got splattered flat on the guy's back. With all those feathers, why not collect 'em and make a hat? Call it your 'Lucky Bird Crown from God.'"

"You don't believe in God?" George shot her a glare.

"I believe in science," Christina fired back.

"Then explain what happened to me today!" George pressed.

"Dumb luck," she said with a grin. "Oh wait—bird poop luck!"

"Alright, chill," Adam said, stepping in as the two started to bicker. "George, didn't you just say to live in the moment? Arguing with Christina isn't exactly living it up."

"She's got no respect," George grumbled. "It's like the patient—such an awe-inspiring miracle, and they don't even care."

"Hm?" Adam's curiosity piqued. "The patient's not happy?"

"Yeah," George griped. "This miracle had three witnesses: the pigeon's in heaven now, so it's just me and him left on earth. We should be bonding over our second chance, thanking God for teaching us to seize the day and live a little.

But he's just sulking, won't talk to me, and keeps saying I'm too loud..."

"You don't see the problem here?" Adam hinted.

"What problem?" George blinked.

Christina leaned in, listening.

"Remember a while back when I saved that cross-dressing guy who jumped off the hospital roof?" Adam said. "If I hadn't grabbed him in time, it wouldn't have just been a high heel smacking my buddy Barney in the head. You think that was a miracle?"

"Wait—you're saying the patient didn't fall by accident? He jumped?" Christina caught on instantly.

"If it was an accident, he wouldn't be acting like this," Adam said, shaking his head. "George, you really should thank God. Otherwise, you'd have died for nothing."

"What?!" George froze, his face turning red.

He'd thought he and the patient were bonded by some divine gift. Now it hit him—the guy was almost his killer.

The twist was too much.

"I'm gonna talk to him!" George snapped, jumping up with the pigeon claw in hand and storming off toward the ward.

"These suicidal types—don't they have any decency?" Christina muttered. "If you're gonna off yourself, at least look down first. Is it that hard? Always dragging innocent bystanders down with them—what's the deal?"

If jumpers just took a quick peek below, they could avoid hitting anyone at free-fall speed.

"Ugh," Adam sighed.

It wasn't rare. Sometimes it was a two-for-one deal—one jumper, two dead bystanders.

Even sadder? Sometimes the jumper survived thanks to a "human cushion"—some happy-go-lucky pedestrian who didn't make it, while the one who wanted to die got hauled off in an ambulance and patched up by doctors.

In George's words, was that God's punishment?

After they finished eating and stepped out of the cafeteria, they ran into George again—his face flushed with anger.

"Jerk!" the usually chill little guy spat out, cussing for once.

"So, he jumped?" Adam asked, already knowing the answer.

"Yeah," George fumed. "He wouldn't admit it outright, but he didn't deny it either—just let it hang there. No wonder he didn't vibe with my excitement. Total jerk. Almost killed me and doesn't even say sorry."

"Get him a shrink," Adam suggested.

Per protocol, anyone with mental health issues like that needed counseling.