

TV Show 511

Chapter 511: Rich Beyond Reason

Nighttime.

Near the medical center.

A classy little bar.

"Wow, this place beats McLaren's by a mile!"

Ted walked in and immediately started gushing, eyeing everything around him. "Check out these sofas, the booths, those chandeliers!"

"Well, duh—look who brought us here," Lily said, leaning against Marshall, soaking in the bar's vibe.

"If Barney finds out we ditched him to come here, he's gonna lose it," Marshall chuckled.

"Let him freak out, as long as he doesn't drive me nuts," Adam grinned. "Work as an intern doctor's been insane lately, so I picked a spot close to the hospital. Figured while I'm roping Ted into a favor, we could all hang out too."

Normally, Joe's Bar was right across from the hospital—decent vibes, great for friend chats. But after last time, Adam was done with Joe. He'd saved the guy's life, and what did Joe do? Stabbed him in the back over medical bills. Sure, it's "understandable," but Adam wasn't about to let it slide. Since then, he hadn't set foot in Joe's. This hangout needed a fresh spot.

"What favor?" Ted asked, grabbing the fancy beer Adam ordered for them. He took a big, satisfied swig and leaned back, curious.

"Here's the deal..." Adam gave a quick, polished rundown of Erica's situation. "It's my good friend's mom's wedding, so I'm hoping you can toss her some solid advice."

"Ugh!" Lily cut in, instantly annoyed, her eyes widening at Adam. "For something like this, you ask Ted? Shouldn't you be asking the only almost-bride here with actual experience?" She jabbed a finger at herself.

"Of course, I need your help too, Lily," Adam said smoothly. "But Ted's got a knack for talking to women. Those earnest eyes of his? Total charm trap. He can sneak in some emotional guidance for Erica while he's at it."

"Ted's better than me?" Lily's eyes got even bigger, her competitive streak practically spilling over.

"Not exactly," Adam said with a sly smile. "It's just... I'd feel bad if Marshall got mad at me~"

"Why would Marshall be mad—" Lily started, still not catching on.

Marshall, though, got it right away. He leaned in and whispered something in her ear.

"Oh, that was just a joke!" Lily's face turned red, and she waved it off. "I'm not into that..."

"Mm-hmm," Adam nodded, all serious. "I believe you."

Lily: "..."

"You sure I can help?" Ted jumped in, steering things back. "I haven't even found my other half. I'm a mess myself—how am I supposed to guide your friend's sister through her feelings?"

"Just chat with her," Adam said casually. "Think of it like saving a good girl from a big bad boss. No pressure. I believe in you."

"..."

Ted was speechless. No pressure? Right.

"We can't tell Barney about this," Adam warned. "I'm done dealing with his chaos."

"We'll cover for you," Lily said. "Adam and Barney can't clash again, or Barney'll snap."

"Not my fault," Adam shrugged. "Last time, I begged him—begged—and had Marshall back me up, telling him to steer clear of Marshall's professor. And what'd he do?"

"He went anyway," Marshall sighed.

"But your paper got a B+," Ted piped up, defending his bro. "You don't even know how hard Barney worked for that B+. Tweaked his back, landed in the hospital—again. Even then, he swore he'd get you an A next time!"

"Heh," Marshall laughed, picturing his grumpy, 50-something professor grinning as she handed him a B+, glancing at Barney on the hospital bed like he was the hero. Too funny.

"Fine, since it worked out, I'll let it slide that Barney gambled with my future," Marshall said.

"It turned out okay this time," Adam shook his head. "But can we really keep leaving these high-stakes messes up to chance?"

Think about it! That's why I didn't invite Barney today and asked you all to keep it hush-hush. He's too selfish—won't rein it in even a little for his friends. I'm over it.

But since we're all buddies, as long as he doesn't mess with my stuff, I won't mess with him."

Ted, Lily, and Marshall went quiet.

"Barney's changed a bit," Lily said, wrinkling her nose to lighten the mood. "Still a clown, but he's toned it down."

"Yeah," Marshall grinned. "Adam, your lessons hit him hard."

"Hard?" Ted snorted. "Try terrifying. Even thinking about it gives me chills."

"Why're you scared?" Adam laughed. "You don't pull half the crazy stuff Barney does. Why put yourself in his shoes?"

"..."

Ted clammed up. Could he admit that, deep down, he kinda wanted to go wild like Barney, even if he always half-resisted?

"Oh, hey," Adam said, checking the time. Erica wasn't here yet. He looked at the trio. "What do you think of this bar's name?"

"Lindsay's Bar?" Lily sipped her beer. "It's fine, I guess. Why?"

"I don't like it. Thinking of changing it," Adam said with a grin. "How's 'Friends Bar' sound?"

"Friends Bar?" They mulled it over, nodding. Pretty good.

"It's catchy, but how're you gonna rename it?" Ted asked, curious.

"Easy—I'm buying the place," Adam said, still smiling. "Since you all like the name, I'll go with it."

"What?!" All three yelled in unison.

"Everyone likes it here, and it's right by the hospital where I work," Adam explained. "So, I had a lightbulb moment earlier. Once I buy it, this can be our new hangout spot. I'll drop by when I've got time, and we can all catch up more often."

"That's it?" Ted blinked, dumbfounded. "You're buying a bar just for that?"

"Isn't that reason enough?" Adam shot back, grinning.

This over-the-top, filthy-rich move left the three "broke" friends speechless.

"So, what do you think?" Adam asked. "I'll hook each of you up with a VIP card—your own reserved booth. We'll shift our base from McLaren's to Friends Bar. Sound good?"

"Uh..." Lily, Marshall, and Ted exchanged looks, hesitating. "It's awesome here, but it's kinda far from where we live. McLaren's is right downstairs. Maybe we'd swing by on weekends..."

"Works for me," Adam said, unfazed. "Weekends are plenty. I couldn't hang every day anyway—one meetup a week's perfect."

"Then why buy it?" Ted couldn't help asking.

"Why not?" Adam looked at him, genuinely confused.

"For one weekly hangout?" Ted's brain couldn't process Adam's money logic.

"Like I said—isn't that enough?" Adam smiled.

Buying this bar? Part of it was legit about hanging with Marshall, Chandler, and the gang more. Adam's residency at the medical center still had years to go. Med life's a race against time—shaving off a few minutes a week adds up over years. He's short on hours, not cash.

Lily, Marshall, Chandler, Monica—they're bar-and-coffee-shop regulars anyway; a little travel time's no big deal for them. Plus, it's a casual middle finger to Joe for that backstab. With Adam's hospital clout, a few visits here, and the staff'll follow. That'll hit Joe's medic-focused bar where it hurts.

And finally, Adam can play the good boss—top-notch service, fair prices, occasional discounts for hospital pals. It's just networking with a side of profit. Less money's still money, right?

Three birds, one stone. Perfection!

Chapter 512: So, What's the Deal with You Three?

Not long after, at the Old Friends Bar—

"Hey, I'm Ted!"

"Hey, I'm Erika!"

Erika showed up fashionably late, and the second she did, Adam, Lily, and Matthew could feel this crazy pull in the air.

Ted's classic slow-mo "staring into the abyss" move kicked in for the Nth time.

His eyes? Locked on her.

Emmm.

It's the same old song and dance every time Ted meets a girl who gives him butterflies.

Adam exchanged a look with Lily and Matthew.

Their smiles said it all—playful, teasing, or just plain resigned.

Adam knew this one was in the bag.

Passive Ted? Eh, jury's still out on whether he'd seal the deal.

But motivated Ted? Oh, he'd get it done, no question!

Sure enough, after some quick intros, Ted turned on the charm full blast. In no time, he had Erika giggling nonstop.

Adam, Lily, and Matthew—three whole living, breathing people—might as well have been invisible.

Yup.

If you don't let awkwardness faze you, it's everyone else who ends up squirming.

Adam shot Lily and Matthew a subtle nod, mumbled something to the flirty duo, and the three of them slipped out of the booth.

Erika threw Adam a quick, sheepish glance.

Ted? Totally oblivious—dropped a few more smooth lines and yanked her attention right back.

"Boss."

The female bodyguard who'd dropped Erika off stepped up as Adam exited the bar, giving him a quick greeting.

"She's got your number, right?" Adam asked.

"Yup," the bodyguard nodded.

"Cool. Why don't you find a spot nearby to chill for a bit?" Adam said with a grin. "I'm guessing this'll take a while. She might not even head back tonight. Just wait for her call to pick her up."

The bodyguard nodded and drove off.

"No way," Lily blurted out. "They just met! You really think they'll hit it off that fast?"

"How long's it been since Ted last got his romance on?" Adam teased.

"Uh..." Lily thought for a sec. "A while. Ever since that 'Singles Station' fiasco where that doctor chick turned him down, he's been moping around.

That top-tier matchmaker from Singles Station said he tanked her perfect pairing streak—100% success rate, gone. She was so bummed she almost shut the place down.

Said if she couldn't find someone for Ted, he'd die alone.

But Ted convinced her to keep looking—slowly, for free."

"Ha! That doctor was about to get married," Adam said, shaking his head with a laugh. "Did Ted seriously think he could swoop in with his '96% compatibility' math nonsense and get a bride-to-be to ditch her 85%-matched fiancé days before the wedding?"

"She asked him that exact question," Lily said with a shrug. "And obviously, Ted thought it was a solid plan."

"Man, Ted can be shameless sometimes," Adam said, smirking. "But that's what makes him the Romance Prince—gotta have thick skin to play the game."

"It's kinda a silver lining, though," Matthew chimed in, steering clear of dunking on his buddy. "At least that doctor caught his cancer early and got it treated."

"That mole!" Lily gasped. "Who'd have thought a little mole could turn into cancer? That's terrifying."

"Babe," Matthew said, pulling Lily close to comfort her. "We've all had full checkups—no cancerous moles here."

"It was basal cell carcinoma," Adam explained. "Usually benign. Ted's case turning malignant? Super rare. No need to freak out."

"It just freaks me out looking back," Lily said, clinging to Matthew's arm and shrinking a little.

Adam nodded.

In his past life, there'd been a whole wave of "mole cancer" panic in the news.

Tons of people—like Lily—started stressing over every little spot on their skin, wondering if it'd turn deadly.

I mean, who doesn't have a mole or two?

Adam had worried too.

But then all those laser mole-removal ads started popping up everywhere, and he relaxed.

Science on one side, marketing on the other.

When bad news is just a hype train for cash, it's actually good news.

And sure enough, like so many overhyped stories, it blew over and faded away.

In this life, with his medical training, he didn't even blink at that stuff anymore.

Still, when Ted came to him about that mole, Adam's first thought was Sheldon—y'know, from The Big Bang Theory.

Sheldon always griped about how, thanks to Missy's "nut-kicker" antics, he should've worked harder in the womb to absorb her completely.

That way, he'd have no annoying twin sister—just a mole.

Ted's cancerous mole made Adam wonder: what if Sheldon had tried harder?

If Missy turned into a mole and it went malignant, she might've taken her brother down with her.

Now that's a sibling love-hate story for the ages.

Emmm.

Next time Sheldon whined, Adam was ready to hit him with that one—guaranteed to make those big eyes pop.

"Let's bounce," Matthew said, peeking back into the bar. Ted and Erika were leaning closer, laughing their heads off. He nodded at Adam's hunch.

A month-plus dry spell? That was Ted's breaking point.

Erika was a stunner, but even an average girl could've sparked Ted's romantic mode right now.

"I still think it's too fast," Lily said, glancing back and shaking her head.

"Heh," Adam chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Lily snapped, catching a whiff of shade in his laugh.

"Nothing," Adam said, grinning. "Just remembering what Ted said about you and Matthew back in your college dorm days."

Oh yeah—back then, Lily and Matthew hit it off the second they started college. Things moved fast.

One night, they were in the dorm, all lovey-dovey.

Matthew, being a guy—and a horny one at that—wasn't satisfied with second or third base anymore. He was swinging for a home run.

Lily tried to pump the brakes, painting this dreamy picture of what their first time should be like: a fancy oceanfront suite, flowers, candles, wine, sexy lingerie...

The works.

Everything perfect.

But three minutes later?

That fantasy went up in smoke.

C'mon—two hot-blooded college kids in the heat of the moment? Who's holding back?

They weren't saints!

So Matthew suggested a round two.

Lily didn't say no—didn't want to say no.

The only one objecting was Ted, stuck on the top bunk, getting rocked by physics and losing his mind.

Too bad for him—objections overruled.

Matthew tossed him a Walkman and headphones and called it a day.

Spoiler: the headphones and music didn't help one bit.

"Heh heh," Matthew snickered.

"Hey! Stop laughing!" Lily's face went beet red. She swatted Matthew's shoulder, then Adam's.

"Okay, okay, we're done," Adam said, holding back a laugh and putting on a straight face. "Yeah, they're moving fast, but as long as there's no second round... we get it."

"Adam Duncan!" Lily lunged at him, claws out.

A playful scuffle broke out.

Then Lily started grilling him about Robin, and Peggy—Erika's sister—giving him a look like, "So, what's the deal with you three? Something's off here."

Adam just smiled. "We're all good friends."

And then—boom—the hospital got crazy busy, and Adam bolted.

Chapter 513: What a Little Genius

Medical Center.

Emergency Room.

"Dr. Duncan, there's a five-year-old with a heart issue in Exam Room 1," a nurse called out as soon as Adam walked in.

"Got it," Adam replied, heading over quick.

A little Black girl lay there, struggling to breathe.

"Coarctation of the aorta, sudden severe respiratory distress, respiratory rate 40, BP 180/100, tachycardia, mid-systolic murmur," Adam said, checking her over. "Give her 20 mg of furosemide."

"Yes, Doctor," the nurse said, swiftly administering the diuretic.

"What's her name?" Adam asked.

"Kalisha," the nurse answered.

"Hey, Kalisha, I'm Dr. Duncan," Adam said gently, leaning down to the dazed little girl. "Did you touch something you weren't supposed to, or eat anything you shouldn't have?"

Kalisha shook her head weakly.

"Her family here yet?" Adam asked, glancing up at the nurse.

"Her dad and sister are on their way," she replied.

"Doctor!" another nurse chimed in. "Her heart rate's shifting."

"Ventricular tachycardia," Adam said, frowning at the monitor. "20 mg lidocaine, IV push."

"Yes, Doctor," the nurse responded, jumping into action.

"Got her chart yet?" Adam asked.

"We're pulling it from the database," the nurse said.

"Doctor, she's running a fever," another nurse pointed out.

"Gastric lavage, stat—prep for irrigation," Adam ordered. "Then run a tox screen."

"She's poisoned?" the nurse asked, surprised.

"Yeah," Adam nodded. "Tell the lab to rush it—find out what she got into."

"Yes, Doctor," the nurse said, drawing Kalisha's blood with practiced ease and hustling it off to the lab for testing.

After the lavage, Kalisha's fever, irregular heart rate, high blood pressure, and anxiety—classic poisoning signs—started to ease up.

The lab, seeing Adam's name on the request, fast-tracked it. Soon, the tox report was in his hands.

"Damn it!" Adam muttered, scanning the results.

The nurse's face twisted with anger too. The report showed five-year-old Kalisha had overdosed on cocaine.

Cocaine! A hardcore drug—and she's only five!

"Dr. Duncan, should we call Child and Family Services?" the nurse asked.

"Yeah," Adam nodded.

In the U.S., anything harming a kid—intentional or not—triggers a Child Protective Services investigation. Hospitals and doctors are legally bound to report it.

"Dr. Duncan, Kalisha's family's here," a nurse updated him.

"Let 'em wait," Adam said, focusing on treating Kalisha.

Now that they knew the cause, it was all about the right meds—no urgent need to grill the family on her history yet.

Child and Family Services showed up fast—a middle-aged Black woman.

"Ms. McGillis, here's the situation," Adam said, briefing her on Kalisha's condition. "Family's in the waiting area."

"Let's go see them," Ms. McGillis said, her face grim.

"Alright," Adam agreed, leading her over.

A sturdy middle-aged Black man sat there, anxious, with a teenage Black girl leaning on his shoulder, earbuds in, eyes closed.

"Mr. Freeman," a nurse called out.

"How's my daughter?" Mr. Freeman asked, easing the teen onto the chair and standing up, voice tight with worry.

"She's okay," Adam said, giving him a nod.

"Thank God," Mr. Freeman said, raising his hands in praise before stepping forward to shake Adam's hand. "Thank you, Doctor! Can I see her now?"

"Hang on," Adam said. "This is Ms. McGillis from Child and Family Services. She's got some questions."

"Your legal name and address?" Ms. McGillis asked, stone-faced.

"What?" Mr. Freeman's smile froze. He glanced at Adam, then at Ms. McGillis, who'd settled into a serious interrogator vibe. "What's going on?"

He wasn't dumb. This wasn't a good sign.

"Please provide your legal name and address," Ms. McGillis repeated, her tone shifting from request to demand.

"Where's Kalisha? I want to see her—now!" Mr. Freeman snapped, irritated.

"Your five-year-old daughter overdosed on cocaine," Adam cut in.

Mr. Freeman froze, then turned away, bracing his hands on the counter, head shaking in disbelief.

He got it now.

"Tim Morgan Freeman, address..." After a long pause, he steadied himself, turned back, and gave Ms. McGillis his info.

"It wasn't me—I don't know where Kalisha got cocaine," he said.

"Okay," Ms. McGillis said, closing her notepad. "Child and Family Services will follow up with a home visit..."

"That's it?" a nurse blurted, incredulous. "He endangered a child!"

"Mr. Freeman's middle-class, employed, owns a home," Ms. McGillis explained. "I've got families living in cars on my list. I trust Mr. Freeman, and we'll keep tabs on this."

Adam nodded. He got it. This kind of thing was way too common in the States. Without fixing the root problem, a handful of overworked agency staff couldn't keep up.

Back when Adam first crossed over, they'd even pulled that jaw-dropping move—legalizing it outright, decriminalizing it. The logic? If you can't control it, let it loose. Government takes over, regulates the market—saves billions in drug busts and rakes in the massive profits dealers used to pocket.

Win-win, right? Tons of cash either way. And the guy who dreamed that up? True little genius.

Most Americans loved it. Drug users? Thrilled—no more hiding. Cops? No more shootouts with dealers or junkies. Taxpayers? Happy their money wasn't flushing down a hopeless drain. "I don't use, so who cares if others OD?"

Emmm. Everyone's happy.

Except in a world like that, kids like Kalisha—zero self-control, curious about everything—get way too close to drugs. Accidental ingestion or "trying it with friends" odds skyrocket.

It's like Adam's childhood—sneaking cigs with his buddies, mimicking the grown-ups. A few coughs, and he ditched it, never smoked again. But his pals? They loved the "adult treat"—most grew up hooked.

Cigarettes are one thing. Drugs, with addiction a million times worse? Good luck.

Those middle-and-upper-class folks who think, "I don't use, my taxes are safe," might wake up screaming when they realize they can't shield their own kids. That legendary nation, supposedly dead from drugs, might just pull a sneaky comeback—East meets West, rising from the ashes.

Life's wild like that.

Chapter 514: Arrives

Medical Center. Emergency Room.

"So, can I see my Kalisha now?" Mr. Freeman asked in a low, steady voice.

"Of course," Adam replied with a nod. He gestured toward an African-American girl leaning against the wall, eyes closed, lost in her music. "But your older daughter could use some of your attention too."

A flicker of panic crossed Mr. Freeman's face.

"This way, please," Adam said with a quiet sigh, motioning for him to follow.

Mr. Freeman trailed behind Adam into the hospital room, where he shared a sweet moment with his younger daughter, Kalisha. You could tell he really adored her.

"Doc, when can Kalisha come home?" Mr. Freeman asked, stepping up beside Adam.

"A few hours of observation should do it," Adam answered. "But before she's discharged, can you promise me she won't get near cocaine again? If I'm reading this right, your older daughter's hooked on the stuff, right? And she's the one bringing it home."

"Doc, you got kids?" Mr. Freeman didn't deny it. After a long pause, he just asked.

Adam's mouth twitched. "Nope," he said, shaking his head.

"Then you wouldn't get what it's like to be a parent," Mr. Freeman said, glancing toward his older daughter with a sad look. "My wife passed away last year. Around that time, my oldest, Sandora, was fighting with her nonstop—classic teenage rebellion stuff. After my wife died, I didn't know how to talk to Sandora anymore. But I could tell... sometimes, it's like she doesn't even want to live."

"I can recommend a good therapist," Adam offered with another sigh. "Sandora needs help, but this kind of thing can't keep spreading. It almost took Kalisha out today."

"Thanks, Doc," Mr. Freeman said, forcing a weak smile.

That smile was dripping with helplessness, and Adam got it.

Addiction's a beast—once it grabs hold, it's usually a one-way ticket to ruin. A therapist alone isn't gonna cut it. The rational move would be sending Sandora to a rehab facility for forced detox. But with someone like her, who's already half-checked out of life, how could Mr. Freeman, as a dad, risk that? Drop her off in the morning, and she might not make it to night—she could end herself. That'd feel like he'd killed his own daughter.

And even rehab's no guarantee. Plenty of dealers run their game right inside those places. On one hand, you've got the agony of withdrawal; on the other, drugs within arm's reach. Guess what most pick? Even the legit centers, the ones dealers can't touch—if she got clean and walked out, the odds of relapse would still be sky-high.

It's a no-win mess.

That's why the big shots—like that fried chicken guy—don't let their crews touch the stuff. And those creeps who trap women into selling their bodies? Step one's always getting them hooked. Addicts have no limits. When the craving hits, they'll do anything for a fix—humiliate them, beat them, whatever. They'll keep coming back, no shame, no quit. Compared to that, even Wei Xiaobao's magic pills are small fry.

If Mr. Freeman can't toughen up, he's not just losing Sandora—Kalisha's probably next. He's just a regular middle-class guy; he doesn't have the cash to bankroll Sandora's habit forever. And when the money dries up? Adam had no doubt Sandora, in a desperate haze, might even sell Kalisha out to score.

He knew it. But there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

After a quiet moment of shared gloom with Mr. Freeman, Adam turned and walked off.

This was the first case like this he'd seen. But it sure as hell wouldn't be the last.

"Adam!"

"Hey, Amy! Back to spruce up Leonard's office again?" Adam grinned as he bumped into a stylish woman.

"Yup!" Amy Green—Leonard's second daughter, Rachel's younger sister—gave Adam a warm hug. "I'm an interior designer, you know," she said proudly.

"Uh-huh," Adam chuckled, playing along. "Leonard's always raving about the office vibes you whip up."

Emmm. Truth is, Leonard didn't have much choice. Keeping her busy was better than letting her stir up trouble. That was his big hope for his second kid.

Interior designer? Yeah, self-appointed. She had a knack for hype, though—total marketing genius vibes. If she brushed up against something, she'd spin it into gold. "Interior designer" sure beat "jobless wanderer," right?

"You didn't go to Rachel's baby shower tonight?" Amy asked with a smile.

"What, are there guys there?" Adam shot back, deadpan.

Rachel was a week from popping, and tonight's party—thrown by Monica and Phoebe—was a ladies' thing. Just her gal pals showering the soon-to-be-born Emma with gifts, mostly stuff a new mom needs. Tradition says no dudes allowed.

"Oh, there's one," Amy said. "Some guy—I thought he was Rachel's new boyfriend at first. I even complimented him, said he was way cuter than her old goofy ex. But then he kept insisting he was the ex! Like, dude, I'd know if it was the same person, right? So I explained I meant this weird guy from high school who'd been crushing on Rachel since, like, ninth grade. He still looked confused, like I was talking about him. So I had to get specific—y'know, Rachel's chubby sidekick's brother with that ridiculous Afro? And then he got mad! I don't even get why! I was just worried Emma might inherit Rachel's big nose. But now, seeing both her parents are like this, I just feel bad for her. If it were me, I wouldn't even wanna be born..."

"Ahem!" Adam coughed, cutting her off as she went too far. "The only guy at that party? That's the high school weirdo who's been into Rachel forever. Also her ex. Also Emma's dad."

"Who's Emma?" Amy asked, dead serious.

"Rachel's baby—due any day now. They're naming her Emma," Adam clarified. "Not Emily."

"Oh, whatever," Amy said, waving it off. "But you know how awful Rachel is? I'm swamped, right? Still made time to hit her party and bring a gift I hand-picked. And what do I get back?"

"What?" Adam asked politely.

"Humiliation!" Amy's face flared with anger. "I'm her sister—her real sister! She works at Ralph Lauren, has a discount card—30% off! But she won't let me use it. Says I've gotta pay full price. Can you believe her?"

"Rachel's still pregnant, y'know," Adam said, trying to calm her. "Maybe butter her up a bit, make her feel the family love. She'd probably let you borrow it then."

"Hmph!" Amy huffed. "30% off? I don't even care!"

"It's 50% now," Adam corrected. "Rachel got bumped up to management..."

"That bitch!" Amy exploded.

50% off at a luxury spot like that? That's serious cash saved. Not that Amy cared about the money—her dad's a fancy doctor, plenty to burn (RIP Leonard's wallet for three seconds). What she wanted was the bragging rights with her girlfriends, flashing that discount. And Rachel, who had it, wouldn't share!

"With that attitude, you're not borrowing squat," Adam pointed out.

"Rachel, my dearest big sis..." Amy smirked, holding up a finger to pause Adam. She fished her phone out of her LV bag and dialed Rachel, laying on the sweetest, most syrupy tone to butter her up.

Oh yeah. She was all in now.

True vibes!

Chapter 515: Respect the Spirits and Keep Your Distance

Medical Center

"Bitch!"

Amy had barely been sweet-talking for a minute when she started bickering with Rachel over the phone again.

Adam was about to head out, but Amy waved a hand, signaling him to stick around for a sec. So, being the polite guy he is, Adam stayed put, catching an earful of the daily drama between the Green sisters.

Amy was laying into Rachel, calling her selfish as usual—classic Rachel vibes. She even brought up how, back in middle school, Rachel had sabotaged her thing with some hotshot named Dimi.

Then came Rachel's furious roar from the other end: "Dimi was my boyfriend!"

You didn't need super hearing to catch that—it was like the phone was on speaker with a megaphone attached.

Amy blinked, suddenly remembering that little detail. But she's a pro at this game. Without missing a beat, she fired back, "That's ancient history! Why do you keep dragging it up?"

Emmm. Adam, watching from the sidelines, couldn't help but admire Amy's mental toughness.

Rachel couldn't take it anymore and hung up. Amy, though, kept grumbling under her breath.

"Dimi? Psh, whatever. Barry..."

She stuffed her phone away, muttering a few more complaints. When she caught Adam giving her a weird look, she instantly flipped the switch—putting on her classy-lady face, tossing her hair back, and flashing her brightest smile.

"Adam, wanna grab a drink?"

"Sorry, I'm still on shift."

Adam turned her down as usual, giving her an apologetic smile before heading toward the nurses' station.

"Boring!" Amy called after him. "You're worse than some old geezer! Such a waste of your good looks!"

Adam didn't look back, just waved a hand over his shoulder. He knew her jab wasn't out of nowhere.

Lately, Amy had been "busy" redecorating Leonard's office—her dad. Adam kept running into her because of it. More than once, he'd overheard her on the phone, dropping hints that the guy on the other end was some married old dude.

Emmm. Probably loaded, though. We're talking Fifth Avenue penthouse vibes—elevator opens straight into the living room kind of rich.

Clearly, Amy had a plan. Her dad, Leonard, was always bragging about his eldest daughter, Rachel, and how she'd made it on her own. Said it warmed his heart and told Amy and their youngest sister, Jill, to take a page out of Rachel's book.

Jill, though? Total deadbeat. All she cared about was their dad's money. She'd been yapping about hiring a lawyer to sue him and snatch it all, planning to leave him with just pocket change. If she got mad, she'd cut him off completely—let him feel her pain, she'd say.

Amy, though? She thought she was smarter than that. Dad's cash wasn't even that much to begin with—half went to their mom in the divorce, and Amy and Jill had been bleeding him dry ever since. If he kicked the bucket someday, it'd get split three ways. For someone with Amy's high standards, that wasn't gonna cut it.

So, she was chasing her own "career." Something easy. Something lucrative.

Was there such a thing? Oh, you bet! Her mom was living proof. Marry a rich guy, and even if you don't inherit everything, you'd still get half when it's over. Way better odds than waiting for Dad's scraps.

At first, she'd set her sights on Adam. Super rich, super hot. But Adam wasn't giving her the time of day, and it pissed her off. Then, one day, it clicked.

Young and hot had its perks, sure. But old guys? They had their own charm. Marry an old-timer, put in a few years of "hard work," and when he croaks, bam—inherit it all. She'd be a mega-rich lady overnight. Then she could do whatever she wanted. Young, hot guys? As many as she pleased. Maybe even Adam would come crawling to her someday.

Okay, that last part might be a stretch—but not impossible. What if Adam went broke one day? Every time Amy pictured it, she'd crack up laughing.

—there ya go, slipped it right in the middle like you asked!

This, she figured, was the most bang-for-your-buck way to hustle. Emmm. Even if the old guy was her ex-boyfriend's dad. Even if her ex and his mom hated her guts for it. Who cares? The old man had plenty of girlfriends before her, and her ex had been through this rodeo already. It's just the difference between making the move or getting played.

Amy wasn't big on books—hated reading, honestly. But she knew this kind of thing wasn't new. History's full of it. Even among her little circle of girlfriends, she wasn't the only one playing this game. If they could do it, why couldn't she?

Adam saw right through her schemes. Problem was, he couldn't exactly spill the beans to Leonard. He'd hate to give the poor guy a heart attack. Besides, Amy was a grown woman—her moral compass was already shattered beyond repair. Leonard couldn't rein her in even if he tried.

The ER locker room doubled as a break room. Inside, you had a few rows of lockers, a sofa, a coffee table, a water cooler, a fridge, a microwave—basic lounge setup. The ER docs and nurses took turns bringing snacks to share. If anyone got peckish, they'd swing by and grab something quick.

Adam needed to talk to Dr. Lewis about something. Word from the chatty junior nurse was she'd be here, so he popped in.

"Hey, hot doc!"

The second he pushed the door open, a thirty-something woman with a broad frame—who was munching on the staff's donuts—catcalled him with zero shame.

"Chloe!"

ER resident Susan Lewis burst in right after, scolding her with a quick shout. She shot Adam an apologetic, helpless smile. "Adam, sorry—this is my sister."

"What's the big deal?" Chloe shrugged, totally unbothered. "I said he's hot. It's a compliment!"

Before Susan could get another word in, Chloe lunged forward, wrapping Susan in a bear hug. "Susan, my little sis!"

When she finally let go, Chloe started pawing at her again. "Look at you—stethoscope, white coat, all doctored up. Oh, and this little badge—ugh, worse than your driver's license pic. Wait, is this a push-up bra?" She yanked at Susan's collar, peeking inside.

"Stop it!" Susan's face turned beet red. She swatted Chloe's grubby hands away, clutching her chest and sneaking an embarrassed glance at Adam.

"I've got stuff to do," Adam said, deciding this wasn't the time to chat with Susan. He bolted.

"Lewis's sister's back again," one nurse whispered as he passed by.

"She's got no manners. Those donuts are toast now."

"No biggie—Dr. Lewis always restocks later."

"Dr. Lewis is such a saint. How'd she end up with a sister like that? I heard Chloe once chewed her out, saying since Susan's doing so well, she should take care of her broke-ass big sis."

"People like that are everywhere. Look at her—she's clearly a mooch who'd rather bum around than work."

"Dr. Lewis should just say no, or it'll never end."

"No chance. You've seen how she treats patients—imagine with her own sister. Chloe's got her wrapped around her finger."

"Poor Dr. Lewis. Stuck with a sister like that."

"I heard she was this close to getting engaged, but her ex couldn't handle Chloe and called it off."

"She sends Chloe 500 bucks a month, you know."

"Bet it's not enough. Look at her—she's probably into some shady stuff too. She's here for more cash, guaranteed."

"..."

The nurses' hushed gossip floated into Adam's ears as he walked off. He shook his head. Another sad case.

Dr. Lewis was genuinely good people. But Adam made a quiet vow to keep his distance from her going forward. He totally got why her almost-fiancé had bailed. It wasn't personal—it was just... respect the spirits and keep your distance.

Chapter 516: I'm Always Too Soft-Hearted

The Next Day. Medical Center. Emergency Room.

"Dr. Lewis, you sure you don't want to take a day off?" Adam asked kindly.

"No, I'm fine," Susan mumbled, keeping her head down so no one would notice her red, puffy eyes.

Adam sighed to himself. She's probably been crying all night.

"Dr. Lewis!"

"Dr. Duncan!"

The ER doors burst open as paramedics wheeled in two stretchers, one after the other. A nurse shouted their names.

"What's the situation?" Adam and Susan rushed over.

No surprise—it was another car accident. Thankfully, both drivers were alone. No heartbreaking cases of a whole family wiped out.

"Duncan, you take that one. I've got this," Susan directed.

"Got it," Adam agreed, pushing his stretcher into a treatment room to start emergency care.

Susan handled the other patient next door. Once Adam stabilized his patient and prepped them for surgery, a nurse's urgent voice called out from the other room.

"Dr. Duncan!"

A nurse poked her head in, waving him over. Adam told his team to take the patient to the OR and hurried next door. The monitors were blaring nonstop. Susan looked frazzled, almost frozen. Adam jumped in, taking over. After some intense work, he finally got the patient stable. Then he followed them to the surgical suite.

By the time he finished the operation, it was already noon. Heading to the cafeteria, he spotted Susan in the hallway, clearly waiting for someone.

Adam got it. She was waiting for him.

That emergency? Susan's usually on top of her game—should've been a breeze for her. But this time, she'd slipped up. If Adam hadn't stepped in, that patient might've been a goner. Her headspace was obviously a wreck.

"Adam," Susan said, hurrying over as he stepped out of the OR.

"Don't worry, the patient's fine," he said, knowing it's what she needed to hear most.

"Thank God," Susan breathed, leaning against the wall in relief.

"Dr. Lewis, seriously, why don't you head home and rest? Get your head straight before coming back," Adam suggested again.

"Yeah, yeah..." Susan trailed off. She knew what he wasn't saying—her being off her game could cost someone their life. For someone who cared so much about her patients, that hit hard. Combined with whatever was already eating at her, she agreed with her words but couldn't hold it together. She sank into a crouch, buried her face, and started sobbing.

A thirty-something woman, crying like a lost kid.

"Uh..." Adam's mouth twitched. He glanced left, then right, feeling stuck. Sure, he'd decided to keep some distance from Susan lately, but she'd been good to him before—always helping out, making things easier. Seeing her like this, walking away felt kinda cold.

"Dr. Lewis," he said gently, "is something bothering you?"

"No, nothing," she muttered into her hands.

"Oh." Adam hesitated, unsure if he should push or just leave.

Her sobs got louder.

Alright, fine.

"Is it about your sister?" he asked, leaning into the comforting role. Might as well repay her past kindness.

"Yeah," Susan admitted, wiping her tears. "I just don't know what to do about Chloe anymore..."

And then she spilled the whole story.

Last night, her sister had shown up asking for money—again. Susan's still drowning in med school loans. Residency pay sucks, and after covering loan payments, rent, and basics, there's barely anything left.

Even so, she's been sending Chloe \$500 a month. Savings? Nonexistent. So this time, she said no.

She braced for Chloe to throw a fit, but—shocker—her sister didn't. Instead, Chloe played it cool, saying she had nowhere to stay and just needed a few weeks at Susan's place. Susan wasn't thrilled. She knows Chloe's a mess—her sketchy friends would turn the apartment into a dump.

Chloe backed off a bit, promising just a few days and no friends. Still, Susan resisted. Her place is tiny, and she's got her own life to live—having her sister around would cramp everything. But then Chloe hit her with the puppy-dog eyes, saying their parents kicked her out, she's homeless, and Susan's her only family left.

What could she do? Susan caved, set some ground rules, and handed over a spare key.

When she got home late after a long shift, she froze. The apartment looked like a tornado hit it. Even the TV mounted in her bedroom wall was ripped out and gone. Worse, a sentimental gift from her ex—the guy she almost married, a keepsake she treasured—was trashed. The box was smashed, tossed aside.

And there, smack in the middle of the chaos, was the key she'd given Chloe, like a taunting note: "Hey, sis, here's your key back. Lock up tight, don't forget!"

Susan collapsed, staring at her once-cozy, now-wrecked home, and cried all night. Chloe doesn't even have a phone—Susan couldn't even track her down to yell at her.

This wasn't the first time. Every time Susan starts healing, rebuilding her faith in life and family, Chloe swoops in, tears it all down, and the cycle repeats.

"I think you should call the cops," Adam said after hearing it all. "That's straight-up breaking and entering."

"But she's my sister," Susan said, voice cracking. "I can't watch her go to jail."

"..." Adam didn't know what to say. Every family's got its baggage, right?

"Then just take some time off, rest up, and come back when you're steady," he said, keeping it neutral and swallowing his real thoughts. "You can't work like this."

Family's messy—outsiders don't get to judge. No matter how awful Chloe is, Susan's reaction told Adam he'd be an idiot to play the bad guy here.

"Thanks, I'm okay now," Susan said. After venting, she was already pulling herself together. She wiped her face, stood up, muttered a quick goodbye, and hurried off.

She's sharp—picked up on Adam's vibe right away. It reminded her of that ex she almost married. He'd started the same way—urging her to ditch Chloe. When she wouldn't, he got distant, then cold, then gone.

She'd studied some psychology herself; she knew it wasn't their fault. The smart move was cutting Chloe off for good. But every time her sister showed up, pulling the same old stunts, it dragged Susan back to those warm childhood memories—back when Chloe actually cared, when they were close. She's a totally different person now, but Susan can't let go of who she used to be.

Chapter 517: Same People, Different Fates

Let's not dwell on Susan's family drama—every household's got its own mess to sort through, right?

Time flies.

In the blink of an eye, a week zipped by.

Rachel's due date rolled around. Thanks to Adam's connection with Leonard, she didn't have to scramble to the hospital last-minute or squeeze into a shared double room with another mom-to-be. Nope—Adam had already pulled some strings and booked her the swankiest VIP delivery suite. 🤖 He even lined up the hottest, most skilled neonatal chief, Dr. Montgomery, to handle the delivery.

"Rachel, this is Dr. Liz Stevenson—Dr. Shepter's star assistant. If you need anything, you can call her. Or me, of course," Adam said with a smile. "Liz, this is my good friend Rachel. Appreciate you looking out for her."

He introduced the two.

Dr. Montgomery was a busy woman. She popped in for a quick check, then bounced—only planning to return when labor actually kicked in.

"Hi!"

"Hi!"

Rachel and Liz exchanged hellos.

"You're gorgeous," Rachel said.

"Thanks! You too," Liz replied.

"..."

After some small talk, Adam and Liz stepped out of the room.

"She didn't need to come this early," Liz said, shaking her head. "Most pregnancies go past the due date, and she's not showing any signs yet."

"I know," Adam chuckled. "But coming early lets her get comfy with the place. Honestly, she's so over it—she'd pop that baby out right now if she could. Say one wrong word, and she'll lose it."

"Pregnant ladies, am I right?" Liz grinned knowingly. "Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on her."

"Thanks, I owe you one," Adam said. "I'll swing by a lot too. Honestly, if it weren't awkward, I'd be her attending doc myself."

"What's so awkward about it?" Liz teased, smirking. "Aren't you 'good friends'?"

Clearly, she'd heard about Adam's whole "good friends" spiel.

"It's not what you're thinking," Adam said, shaking his head. "The baby's dad is also my good friend. That's why it's weird."

Being an attending doc for a pregnant woman means checking things like how dilated she is. If Adam weren't so strict about keeping things professional—and if he'd ever given in to Rachel's past flirty vibes—it might not be a big deal. After all, once you cross that line, it's just another day at the office.

One's a lot different from zero, you know? 😊 Adam could handle it like a pro, and Rachel probably wouldn't care much either. But Ross? Oh, he'd throw a fit—whining and grumbling about how "inappropriate" it is.

Not that he's got any right to complain. But you know he'd still yap about it. That's Ross for ya. 😊

After briefing Liz, Adam headed back to the delivery room.

"When am I gonna pop this kid out?" Rachel asked, rubbing her belly.

"No clue," Adam said with a laugh. "Just take it slow."

"I don't want to take it slow," Rachel groaned, leaning her head back in frustration. "I want Emma out now. Aren't you a surgeon? Just give me a C-section already—I'm done waiting!"

"Quit joking around," Adam said, walking over to calm her down. "Natural birth is the way to go if you can manage it."

"But natural hurts like hell!" Rachel snapped, half-crazed. "Phoebe showed me a video of it—it's freaking terrifying! C-section's way better. Slice me open, and I'm free!"

"Want me to call Leonard?" Adam teased, pretending to pull out his phone. "He's in surgery right now, but I bet he could multitask—operate and lecture you at the same time."

"No!" Rachel yelled. She was terrified of her dad's yelling and instantly dialed back the freakout.

"You seriously don't know the difference between natural birth and a C-section?" Adam asked, getting serious.

A C-section means cutting you open. Any surgery's got risks—anesthesia, infection, life-or-death stuff. Plus, it leaves a scar and takes a huge toll on your body. It's not just rough on the mom; it's not great for the baby either.

With natural birth, those regular contractions prep the kiddo. Getting squeezed through the birth canal kickstarts their heart and lungs. It also squishes out the amniotic fluid and gunk from their mouth, cutting down infection risks. Those babies tend to be tougher than C-section kids, who often end up weaker and at the hospital every other day as newborns.

This is basic stuff every pregnant woman should know. But in the wild, wild West, with some of these tough-as-nails moms? They either don't care or genuinely have no idea. Rachel only started obsessing over delivery when her due date hit and her company gave her maternity leave. She just wanted it over with so she could get back to work.

Her job was a hot commodity—super competitive. You could tell how much it mattered by how obsessed her sister Amy was with Rachel's Ralph Lauren 50%-off discount card. Perks like that come with status. Sure, the law protects your spot, but who knows what those scheming coworkers might pull to steal it?

Think Big Bang Theory—Bernadette once spread a rumor that her rival was pregnant just because she'd gained a little weight. Boom, project snatched. After Bernadette had her own kid, karma hit. A "sweet" coworker told her to "take it easy" and rest up—then swooped in to grab her spot. Lucky for Bernadette, she wasn't your average pushover. Short, baby-faced, and a total drama queen, she'd learned young how to turn her "weaknesses" into weapons. She hit her boss with a soul-piercing question: "If this goes to court, who's the jury gonna believe—me or you?" The boss caved—how could this adorable "kid" possibly lie? Her spot stayed safe through maternity leave.

Rachel, though? She didn't have Bernadette's cunning. She was more like Penny—sweet, but clueless. The difference between a sharp operator like Bernadette and a naïve sweetie like Rachel or Penny? Easy example: growing up small, Bernadette mastered aiming for a guy's weak spot—literal bullseye, leaving them quaking. Penny? She aimed for the same spot but learned a whole different kind of "punch." 😊

"I know, I know," Rachel groaned, annoyed. "I've been pregnant forever. Sure, I told everyone I loved being pampered and cared for, but this has to end now!"

"No C-section for you," Adam said with a grin. "But there are some tricks to speed things up."

"Like what?" Rachel's eyes lit up.

"You could sip some herbal tea, try castor oil, eat spicy food, or take long walks," Adam said, smirking. "But the best method? That's where the baby's dad comes in."

"Baby's dad?" Rachel blinked. "You mean Ross? What's he gonna do?"

"Heh," Adam chuckled. "Trust me, Rachel, he's your MVP here. Science backs it up."

"Spill it already! I'll make him come do it now," she demanded.

"Ahem," Adam coughed lightly. "It's broad daylight, so maybe wait 'til tonight. I'll tweak the nurse schedule to give you some privacy..."

Then he leaned in and whispered the scientific trick.

"What?!" Rachel gasped, staring at him. "You're sure it has to be Ross?"

Adam: "..."

—slipped it right in there for ya! `

Chapter 518: The Best Midwife

Medical Center. VIP Maternity Ward.

"No, it's not a must..."

Faced with Rachel's heartfelt words, Adam's mouth twitched. "But Ross is the best choice, right? He's Emma's dad. I doubt he'd want someone else stepping in to help with this kind of thing right now."

"Yeah, forget it," Rachel scoffed, rolling her eyes. "A few days ago, I mentioned we haven't bought any big stuff yet and asked him to come shop for baby things with me. But his mind? Totally hijacked by that flirty little salesgirl. Did he even think about me and our daughter? Nope!"

"Wait, Ross is in love again?" Adam frowned. "At a time like this?"

"If I hadn't gotten upset, he'd already be off with her," Rachel snapped, clearly annoyed. "That sales chick even offered to deliver stuff to our place and asked him out! When I said I didn't want to see that, he swore he wouldn't date her. But if I hadn't said anything? He was all giddy, agreeing to her invite like a kid on Christmas. She casually mentions 'let's hang out sometime,' and he's like, 'Oh, I'm free right now!' Sure, I appreciate him considering my feelings in the moment, but does he think I'm dumb? That's not what 'not interested' looks like!"

"People say 'next time for sure' as a brush-off," she went on. "But Ross? His 'I'm free now' was the real truth spilling out."

Adam chuckled. "If a guy can resist temptation, it shows he's got real feelings. Sounds like he genuinely cares about you and the baby."

"Yeah, or there's another option," Rachel snorted with a smirk. "He's scared my dad'll find out and blow his head off with a shotgun."

"Haha!" Adam nodded, grinning. "Can't rule that out! Though Leonard wouldn't use a gun—he's more of a scalpel guy. Emma's about to be born anyway, and Ross doesn't need certain 'parts' anymore. If he ticks off Leonard, he might just get a slice instead of a shot." 😊

"Better wait till after I pop Emma out to start slicing," Rachel quipped with a laugh. Then she sighed. "But honestly, seeing Ross like that, I doubt he'd even go for it. Such a fake gentleman. Back when he was crushing on me, even if I was pregnant with someone else's kid, he wouldn't be acting this way if I'd said something like that."

"..." Adam just gave a little grimace.

Men, huh? Typical! Always chasing the shiny new thing, never mind the old tears. Not every guy stuck to Adam's motto: "New clothes? Fine. New people? Nah, old ones are better."

Sigh. Being a good guy, Adam sometimes felt a little lonely, a little bleak. Not many dudes got where he was coming from. Lucky for him, he had plenty of awesome lady friends who cheered him on. Otherwise, he'd have been depressed ages ago.

"Adam, help me think of someone else," Rachel said. "I don't want a stranger."

"...How about your old pal Owen Lee?" Adam teased. "If he helps, as long as you bite your tongue and don't scream, I could go grab Dr. Montgomery to deliver the baby right now..."

"Who's Owen Lee?" Rachel blinked, confused. "I don't know him!"

"Oh, just a pro with some special skills," Adam brushed off with a smirk, chuckling to himself.

In a parallel universe, Rachel's old flame Owen Lee had a laundry list of titles: Life-Draining Nerd, Dolphin Lover, Eternal Kidney King... Add Best Midwife to that, and it'd fit. Normal deliveries? Hours of screaming and pushing. With Dr. Lee? Clench your teeth, give a little nudge, and bam—baby slides right out. Too bad this Rachel didn't have her parallel self's luck.

The thought flickered and faded.

"Dr. Duncan!" A nurse popped in.

"Take good care of Miss Green," Adam instructed. "Help her walk around a bit."

This was one of the nurses he'd hired for Alice Gray. Might as well put her to work!

"Don't worry," the nurse assured him. "I've got seven kids—I know how to handle a pregnant lady."

"Perfect!" Adam flashed a grin. "You're on duty for the next few days. Call me if anything comes up."

He couldn't help but shake his head at the American way—either no kids or a whole litter. Look at Sheldon: hates kids and people in general, but when he decides to have them? His goal's 15. Enough for three basketball teams to rotate games! 🏀

"Rachel, this is the nurse I got," Adam said. "Ask her for help if you need anything."

"Thanks, Adam, you're the best..." Rachel beamed, genuinely touched.

"No biggie, just a side perk," Adam replied, mentioning Alice Gray's situation.

"..." Rachel's teary gratitude dried up instantly.

Exactly the reaction Adam was going for. Otherwise, she might've begged him to speed up the delivery!

Nighttime.

The baby's dad, aunt, uncle-in-law, uncle, and auntie all showed up.

"Any action yet?" they asked, full of concern.

"Nope, nothing!" Rachel grumbled, frustrated.

"Don't worry..." Ross started to soothe her, but she cut him off.

"Easy for you to say!" she snapped. "You're not the one giving birth!"

"I wish I were a seahorse," Ross muttered, looking wronged. Seeing blank stares, he explained, "You know, seahorses? The dads carry the eggs and give birth."

"Ha, hilarious," Rachel deadpanned with a cold laugh. "If you really wanna help, Adam's got an idea that'd actually involve you. So, you in or not?"

"Anything I can do, I'm there!" Ross jumped at the chance.

Rachel—hormones raging and fierce as ever—spilled Adam's suggestion right there in front of everyone.

"What?!" Ross froze, mortified. "No way, that's not happening!"

"Oh, so it's something you can't do?" Rachel taunted, glancing downward with a smirk.

"No, it's not that!" Ross stammered, flustered. "It's just—we agreed..."

"You made this mess, you clean it up!" Rachel barked. "If you can't handle it, find me someone who can. I'm done waiting—I wanna have this baby now!"

"Monica!" Ross turned to his sister for backup.

"Don't look at me," Monica said, hands up. "I'm in the same boat as Rachel—dying to give birth but stuck. I totally get her, so I'm Team Rachel all the way."

"Phoebe!" Ross pivoted to the last woman in the room.

"Me?" Phoebe pointed at herself, tilting her head with a grin. "Okay, I'll help you out."

"Thank you!" Ross clasped his hands together, grateful.

"No problem!" Phoebe smiled, then looked at him seriously. "I think Rachel's right, though. Why won't you help her?"

"Yeah, why not?" Chandler and Joey chimed in, nodding.

"..." Ross, abandoned by all, looked ready to cry.

"What's all the commotion?" Adam strolled in, laughing.

Ross grabbed him like a lifeline. "Adam, you've gotta help me!"

"I'm cool with it," Rachel interjected. "Convince Adam, and I'll call it a win—above and beyond!"

"..." Ross whipped around to face Rachel's earnest, expectant stare. Then, in his classic Ross denial, he wailed, "Noooo!!!"

Chapter 519: A Match Made in the Womb

At the medical center, in the VIP maternity ward...

"Alright, enough joking around," Adam said with a grin. "Ross, you're staying here tonight to keep us company—that's final. Don't even try to say no. If we can't convince you, we'll just have to call in Emma's grandpa. His scalpel's been itching for action!"

"..."

Ross clammed up instantly. He'd seen Leonard's temper firsthand—no arguing with that!

Just then, a nurse wheeled a pregnant woman past the door.

"O-M-G!" the woman exclaimed, spotting everyone's backs. She stopped dead, waving her hands wildly with that classic, ear-piercing shriek.

Everyone froze.

"OMG! No way, it can't be!" Chandler said, his face a mix of shock and dread.

"Please, don't let it be her!" Joey prayed under his breath.

The others' expressions were just as colorful—panic, disbelief, you name it.

"Hahahahaha..." A bizarre laugh echoed in, shattering their last shred of hope.

They turned around, and sure enough, there she was: Janice, Chandler's ex, sitting in a wheelchair, clapping her hands, grinning ear to ear, and letting out those oh-so-familiar cackles.

"Oh my God, it is her!" Chandler groaned, shaking his head hard.

"Chan-dler Bing!" Janice sang out, motioning the nurse to push her in. Her weird, nasal tone was as clingy as ever as she greeted her old flame.

"Janice," Chandler muttered with a forced smile.

"Not just Janice—pregnant Janice!" Joey wailed dramatically.

"OMG!" Ross chimed in, shuddering as he recalled a birthing video he'd seen. "Pregnant Janice in labor—no thanks!"

"Janice, please don't tell me you're in the room next door," Rachel said, her voice dripping with worry.

"That's up to the nurse," Janice replied, completely missing Rachel's tone and taking it as friendly chatter. The nurse nodded, and Janice beamed. "Oh, perfect! Yep, I am! Honestly, we should just room together—hahahahaha!"

"No thanks," Rachel said, smacking her forehead. "These walls are useless anyway."

She shot Adam a pitiful look, begging for help. He gave her a calm, "don't worry" glance in return.

"Janice, I didn't even know you were pregnant," Chandler said, rubbing his face to mask his dread. He walked over, forcing small talk. "So, which poor sap's essence did you snatch this time?" he added with a sarcastic jab.

Janice and Chandler went way back—on-and-off for years. Back then, Chandler was still a commitment-phobic mess, breaking her heart more times than anyone could count. Still, the gang always sided with him. Why? That laugh. That grating, random cackle drove them all up the wall.

They'd broken up and gotten back together so many times, it was almost fate. If Monica hadn't come along, who knows? They might've ended up together. Though, let's be real—slim chance. After Chandler's repeated heartbreak, Janice had married someone else, divorced fast, and turned into a serial dater. She'd even hooked up with Ross once, proudly declaring, "2/4!"

Yep, her conquest rate: Chandler, Ross, Joey, Adam—she'd nabbed two out of four. By that metric, Ross was out-Joey-ing Joey back in the day. All talk about hating her, but his actions? Very honest. Joey, though? He couldn't stand her and never gave her an inch—total consistency there.

"It's you!" Janice shot back, pointing at Chandler with a grin. She caught his sarcasm like a pro. "This kid's yours."

"What?!" Chandler's face went white. He spun around to Monica. "It's not me, I swear!"

"I kinda wish it was!" Monica said coolly, rolling her eyes.

Adam smirked knowingly. Ever since he'd tricked them into getting checked out, Chandler and Monica had been in full-on baby-making mode. Two months of reckless trying, and still nothing. Monica couldn't help but worry. Her quip was half-joking, half-wishful thinking—if Janice could pull it off, maybe she could too.

"What?!" Chandler's face twisted again.

"Hahahaha!" Janice, oblivious to the drama, pointed at him and cackled. "Look how freaked out he is! We haven't done the deed in years—hahahaha!"

"Ha! Hilarious," Chandler snapped sarcastically. "So, does labor hurt? Is it painful?!" He glared, practically wishing it on her.

"Nah, childbirth's a breeze for me," Janice said, waving it off. "I've got wide hips." She winked at Chandler, tilting her head coyly. "You remember, don't you, Chandler? Hehehe-hahaha!"

Adam nearly lost it—her face, her tone, her lines? Priceless!

Chandler and Monica's jaws dropped, speechless. Ross and Rachel looked pained. Joey just gave Chandler a sympathetic pat. Phoebe? She burst out laughing.

"Hahaha!" Janice kept going, thrilled. "We're so meant to be! Maybe we should betroth our kids in the womb—hahahaha!"

"Keep your legs closed so the baby doesn't hear that!" Ross whispered to Rachel, grimacing at Janice.

"What's that?" Adam teased. "Both babies yours, Ross?"

Whoosh! Everyone froze, then turned to Ross in unison. It made sense—Chandler was married, but Ross? The perpetual bachelor had the time and the motive to dodge this. Plus, both pregnant women had history with him.

"Not me!!!" Ross yelled, his face turning red as he unleashed his classic Ross roar.

"You sure?" Adam poked again. "Last time Rachel was pregnant, you were totally clueless it was yours too."

"..."

Ross went silent. Back then, he and Rachel were constantly together, old flames reigniting. A slip-up was inevitable. When Rachel got pregnant, he didn't even consider he was the dad at first—leading to that whole "who made the first move" fiasco. Good thing he'd recorded it, or Rachel would've held it over him forever.

Now, though, he wasn't so sure. He racked his brain, trying to recall if he'd been with Janice ten months ago. Problem was, he didn't have Adam's photographic memory. It was too long ago to pin down.

"Oh, come on!" Rachel snapped, seeing Ross's guilty look. "You'd rather pick Janice than help me out?"

"I didn't!" Ross protested, totally冤枉 (wronged), but he kept his voice low. He couldn't be sure this time.

"Hahahaha!" Janice cackled again, loving the chaos. "Relax, if it was yours, Ross, I wouldn't be talking about betrothing them!"

"Phew!" Ross wiped the sweat off his brow. "Thank you."

"Emma, please don't inherit my nose—or your dad's brain," Rachel sighed, rubbing her belly. "He can't tell a joke from the truth. How'd he even get into Columbia?"

Ross: "..."

Chapter 520: I'm About to Lose It!

Medical Center.

The group was chatting and laughing when—

Beep beep.

Beep beep.

Adam's pager went off on his hip.

"Keep talking, guys!" he said with a wave, then bolted toward the ER.

"Dr. Duncan!"

The sharpest nurse, Violet, flagged him down. "Room 6 has a wild case. Bet you've never seen anything like it!"

"Thanks, Violet!" Adam grinned, taking the chart she handed him. He glanced at it. "A woman with a foreign object stuck inside her? Uh... not what I'm thinking, right?"

"Hehe, yup!" Violet giggled. "But weirder than you'd guess!"

"Let's go check it out!" Adam perked up instantly.

Doctors, you know? Always gotta see, learn, and practice more. The weirder the case, the bigger the experience boost!

Room 6.

"Hiss..."

Adam pushed the door open, took one look, and sucked in a sharp breath.

Okay, yeah, he'd never seen this before. Couldn't have dreamed it up either.

In front of him were a man and woman, both in their fifties, staring each other down. The balding guy was stark naked on the bed. The woman? Straddling him, hands braced on either side. A nurse had already thrown a sheet over them for some decency.

"Ouch!"

"Don't move! It hurts more when you do!"

"Then stop pressing on my bad knee!"

"Sorry, I thought it was the left one!"

"Nineteen years of marriage, and you still don't know?!"

The two bickered nonstop.

"Looks like her husband's the 'foreign object,'" Adam said with a smirk to Violet.

"Ex-husband!" the plump woman and bald guy shouted in unison.

Emmm. Even juicier now!

"I'm Dr. Duncan," Adam introduced himself, stepping forward to lift a corner of the sheet for a peek.

"Why'd you get a piercing down there?"

"Sanya!" the bald guy barked.

"What? You think they wouldn't figure it out? They're doctors!" the woman shot back.

"This is mortifying."

"This is mortifying? The real embarrassment is having dinner plans with my husband tonight while I'm stuck like this with my ex!"

The ex-couple started squabbling again.

"Doc, how long's this gonna take? I really don't want my husband finding out," the woman pleaded, looking at Adam. "Can't you guys work some magic here?"

"Magic? Maybe this is magic—God's way of telling your current husband you're a walking soap opera," Adam quipped silently to himself. Out loud, he kept it cool. "We need to figure out what's caught on that ring. Mr. Morse here's got a piercing. What about you?"

"Me?" The woman instinctively straightened up. "No way!"

"Argh!" The bald guy yelped in pain.

"Sorry!" She quickly hunched back down, apologizing to her ex before turning to Adam. "We're both in real estate—he is too. Divorced five years, but work keeps us in touch, so... sometimes we end up together. I'm such an idiot. So weak. Never again, I swear."

"Mm-hmm," Adam replied with a neutral smile.

Sure, lady. That's just a line to fool everyone—including yourself. Unless they never see each other again, it's always zero or a million times. Look at Ross and Rachel—hanging out all the time, trouble's bound to happen eventually!

"Do you have an IUD?" Adam asked.

"Yeah!" She blinked. "Wait, you mean..."

"We'll need an X-ray first," Adam said. "But if I'm right, your IUD probably slipped and snagged his piercing. You don't have a piercing or anything else that'd cause this, so that's my guess. Oh, and... you might wanna cancel that dinner with your husband. This'll take a while, and it's getting late."

"Damn it!" she cursed, irritated. "Why'd you even get that stupid piercing?!"

"Hey, you didn't mind it before!" the bald guy snapped back. "You said you liked it!"

Adam and Violet exchanged a knowing grin. Guy's pushing fifty and still playing like a reckless twenty-something—probably needed some "extra help" to keep up. Takes guts to go for a piercing like that, though! Not like those detachable anime exoskeletons—this was full-on Robocop territory, part of the body now. One wrong move? Infection city. Long term? Even peeing could get rerouted.

Not quite castration, but close enough to some awkward side effects—like needing cologne to mask the funk or kissing fertility goodbye. At his age, though? Probably not a big deal. Divorced, ex-wife on an IUD, kids likely in the picture already. Plus, spraying cologne daily's standard for most Westerners anyway.

"I did it for you!" the bald guy whined.

"Ugh, listen—stop doing anything for me," she sighed, softening a bit. "I'm with Tom now. I love Tom."

"..." Adam's mouth twitched. He tilted his head away to hide an unprofessional smirk.

Emmm. What a deep, touching love story—if you ignored the ridiculous scene in front of him. Her words alone? Passionate, convincing. You'd buy it. But seeing is believing, and this? Pure chaos. Maybe she's out there wrestling her ex for real estate listings while sweet-talking Tom on the phone about how much she loves him.

Emmm. Straight out of a San Fernando Valley script—art imitating life. Magical realism at its finest!

"I still can't believe you left me for that guy," the bald man grumbled, clearly feeling more like the victim. "What's he got that I don't?"

"He doesn't have a piercing," she jabbed. "And he doesn't need one!"

"You—ow!" He flinched from the verbal gut punch, jostling himself and yelping again.

"Okay, you two, stop moving," Adam cut in. "We need to get you to X-ray."

He wheeled them off, their bizarre setup drawing every eye in the hallway.

"OMG!"

Christina and the crew got wind of it and rushed over to gawk.

"Adam, I'll assist!" Christina volunteered eagerly.

"This is gyno territory," Liz chimed in. "You should consult a specialist—I'm in!"

"More hands, more help!" Meredith added, just as pumped.

"Fine by me," Adam said. He'd planned to just take Christina, but since Liz was offering—and he owed her a favor—he let them all tag along. He'd lead anyway; they'd just follow his orders.

X-ray Room.

"We were married 19 years, fighting every day—except when we were, uh, busy," the woman said softly, glancing at her ex, who was wincing and looking away.

"That wasn't real," he muttered, voice heavy. "I still love you."

"Okay, I'm officially in hell," she groaned, rolling her eyes, done with his umpteenth confession.

"Guys, hold still so we can get a clear shot," Adam reminded them.

"Mom? Dad?!"

A young girl burst in, eyes widening at the absurd scene. Her voice dripped with fury.

"Okay, now it's hell," the woman muttered, closing her eyes in defeat.

Just as Adam and the team braced for an explosion, the girl turned sideways—averting her gaze from her ridiculous parents—and let loose.

"How could you do this?! My eyes are burning! You're paying for my therapy, my rent, and my new car!"

Everyone: "..."