

TV Show 551

Chapter 551: The Gap Between People

Medical Center. One Hour Later.

"I poured all my heart and soul into that cursed book, and now it's stuck in my butt!"

Mr. Pascowitz, the patient, groaned in frustration.

"And it even poisoned you!"

His wife chimed in with a sarcastic jab.

"Alright, time for surgery. Let's get that book back to the library where it belongs."

Adam grinned.

"Audrey, if I don't make it..."

As Mr. Pascowitz was wheeled toward the operating room, he kept yammering at his wife, "Carve that last line onto my tombstone!"

"You'd better not die."

Audrey's eyes flickered with worry, though her tone stayed sharp. "Plenty of great artists were nobodies while alive, only getting famous after death because of their work. But you? You didn't even leave a rough draft! No one's gonna know what this stupid novel that killed you was about. So don't you dare die!"

"..."

Mr. Pascowitz huffed, exasperated. "Audrey, can't you say something nice for once?!"

"I'll save the nice stuff for after your surgery," she snapped back. "Until then, a fool who got himself into this mess doesn't deserve it."

Adam quietly marveled to himself.

A wife like that... she's really one of a kind.

Three years of nothing to show for it—no fame, no mention of a decent published novel from either of them. Judging by their clothes, they weren't some rich family living off financial freedom, chasing personal dreams. Most likely, she'd been the one keeping them afloat all this time.

This doesn't even feel like real life—it's more like one of those poor scholar tales from a ghost story collection.

Operating Room.

"Dr. Duncan, is being a writer really that tough?"

Richard, the chief surgeon, stood at the assistant's spot, watching Adam's flawless technique. With no need to guide him, he got bored and struck up a chat, curious since Adam was a writer too.

"It's like any other field—depends on talent," Adam replied with a smile while working. "If you suck at it, it's torture. If you're good, it's a breeze. Our Mr. Pascowitz here? Probably someone with zero talent who's convinced he's a genius."

"Dr. Duncan must be one of those super talented ones, though!"

A surgical nurse piped up with a grin.

"Heh."

Adam shook his head, chuckling. "Nah, I'm not that talented at writing either."

He'd piggybacked off a legendary author's masterpiece to score his first big win. That book was a career-defining work, polished over years. Naturally, it made Adam look like a prodigy. But the truth? If he tried writing an original now, it'd flop so hard people would suspect he'd plagiarized his earlier stuff.

Writing flair, photographic memory, and cosmic-level IQ didn't exactly go hand in hand.

Sure, with his stamina and speed now, he could churn out words at a pace leagues beyond his past self. But in the U.S., without web novels and stuck with traditional publishing, insane typing speed meant squat without quality.

So, after milking Lord of the Mysteries dry, he was done. No more books.

Emmm... cash out and retire in style! 🤑

"What?! Dr. Duncan, you're young, hit it big with one book, and you're saying you're not talented?"

Another nurse gasped, wide-eyed. 😲

"Nope. You guys just haven't seen a real writing genius."

Adam laughed. "Look, for people like me, writing a book means brainstorming, outlining, researching, fleshing out the outline—preferably into a detailed one—so you know what you're doing. Then you draft the opening, rewrite it a dozen times, tweak it 'til it's perfect. Some folks bang out tens of thousands of words, then cut and polish it over and over until they're happy. After finishing the whole thing, you repeat that grinding process again. Sounds like a hassle, right?"

"Uh-huh."

The nurse nodded eagerly.

"Good work comes from relentless refinement," Richard added, nodding wisely. "Same as us doctors. You build a solid foundation through practice to become a top doc and save more lives."

"Exactly," Adam agreed, still smiling. "But then there are the freaks of nature—the real geniuses. Outlines? Detailed plans? What's that? Rewriting openings or polishing drafts? Ha! When inspiration hits, they just open Word and go ham. No overthinking—just thousands of words in a flash. And it's not garbage either! The quality's better than what most people get after a dozen revisions. It's got soul, hooks you deep, and they crank it out ten times faster than the average joe—day after day, same pace, same brilliance. How's a normal person supposed to compete with that?" 😊

"That's insane!"

The anesthesiologist, who'd been fiddling with a crossword, looked up, skeptical. "A writing genius like that? Why haven't I read about them in the papers?"

"Trust me, the real pros are out there, just not in the spotlight," Adam said with a sly grin.

Not yet, anyway.

In his past life, he'd drooled over talents like that. He didn't even need both speed and quality—just one would've sent him soaring. Writer's block? Never heard of it! Daily updates of tens of thousands of words, no full-time grind required. Cold weather? Jet off to Sanya, rent a beachfront room—code in the morning, hit the waves in the afternoon, party at night. He'd heard the old-timers in his writing groups brag about that life, and man, was he jealous.

"Okay, found the culprit!"

Adam's voice snapped everyone back.

A nurse handed him a tray. With a pair of forceps, he pulled out a greasy, dark lump—ten centimeters long, five wide. Once a wad of eaten paper, now it was a smooth, compressed blob, almost pearl-like from being ground down inside.

"Anyone want it? Could be America's greatest novel!"

Richard quipped loudly, smirking.

Everyone stared, silent.

"If no one minds, I'd like to keep it as a memento," Adam said with a chuckle.

"..."

All eyes turned to him, stunned. Then a few lit up.

Wait, could this actually be America's greatest novel?

"You know I'm a writer too," Adam shrugged. "A cautionary tale like this? Pretty memorable stuff."

"Of course, no problem," Richard laughed.

The others who'd been tempted deflated.

Cautionary tale, my foot. We're not writers—what do we need this junk for?

Chapter 552: Good Intentions Gone Wrong

Medical Center.

The surgery wrapped up smoothly.

Noon.

Cafeteria.

"Adam, you still into collecting this gross stuff?" Liz grimaced at the glass jar on the table, which proudly displayed 'America's Greatest Novel' inside.

"Gross?" Adam glanced at her with a smirk. "You're such a rookie! There are doctors out there collecting literal poop, and they even call one of them the 'Gut Girl Poop Princess.' Loads of people think she's adorable and totally love her for it.

"No way!" Liz dropped her fork, swallowing hard, her face a mix of disgust and disbelief. "There's no way someone like that exists! And even if they did, it'd probably be some super flamboyant gay dude, not a female doctor..."

"See? Look at you!" Adam chuckled. "So narrow-minded! The Gut Girl doctor I'm talking about looks at her collection from a medical angle. Every type of poop is different, and different poop points to different diseases. Collecting it is just another way to learn and remember. But your first thought is 'gross,' and then you jump to saying it shouldn't be a woman, it's gotta be some flamboyant gay guy—that's just your dirty mind talking. Between two female doctors, who's the pro here? Feeling a bit ashamed yet?"

"..." Liz's face turned red, but she wasn't ready to back down. "Forget gender for a sec—I just don't buy that any doctor would do that. Where's this so-called female doctor even work?"

"If you don't believe me, fine." Adam shrugged, dodging the question. No way was he gonna say it was Yunhua Hospital.

"Bet you're just making it up," Liz muttered, growing more convinced he was pulling her leg since he wouldn't answer.

"Whatever makes you happy." Adam grinned and went back to his food.

Just then, chubby little George stormed over, plopping down with a huff. His round, pale face screamed 'I'm pissed.'

"Whoa! Here comes our hero!" Liz clapped for George, momentarily forgetting the Poop Princess drama.

"Heh." Adam snickered, eyeing George.

"You guys!" George snapped, fuming.

"You straight-up told off Dr. Montgomery, didn't even wait for him to kick you out—just dropped a 'So I don't need to handle this case anymore, right? Got it!' and walked out like a boss." Liz giggled. "That's the most badass thing we've ever seen you do!"

"What's that supposed to mean?" George's face darkened. "You saying I'm not usually a man?!"

"Oh, you're always a man, totally a man," Liz teased, barely holding in her laughter. "Just... this time you were extra manly!"

"Alright, enough," Adam cut in. "So, what'd the family of that two-hearted patient decide?"

Yup, that's right! The guy they thought might be pregnant, suspected to have a teratoma and be a two-hearted patient, turned out not to be. But now, the hospital did have a real two-hearted patient.

She looked like a teenage girl.

Her name was Beth.

She was admitted for enlarged pelvic lymph nodes and underwent an ultrasound-guided biopsy.

The results were jaw-dropping.

The tissue wasn't ovarian—it was testicular.

Compared to that bombshell, the actual diagnosis—a benign lymph node tumor—felt like small potatoes.

"They want us to keep it from Beth," George said, voice dripping with anger. "They wanna sneak in during the lymph node surgery and remove the testicular tissue too—basically do a gender reassignment surgery without her knowing. What kind of parents do that?! Making a life-changing decision for their kid without even telling her! Beth's always felt like something's off about her. She's super insecure, thinks she's a freak. Even at her age, her chest is still flat as a board... To try and be like other girls, she's been secretly taking birth control pills—five at a time! She heard it'd help her develop, but that's dangerous! It could kill her! Now, with this situation, Beth could choose to live as a boy, and having a flat chest wouldn't be something to hide. But her parents wanna just snip that option away without even a heads-up. I can't accept that!"

"Chill, man," Adam said, surprised. "George, what's got you so worked up? I've never seen you this emotional before. Something hit close to home?"

"Yeah," Liz chimed in, squinting at him. "George, don't tell me..."

"I'm not!" George's chubby face turned beet red as he caught their meaning. "I haven't had any gender reassignment surgery!"

"Relax, we believe you," Adam said with a laugh. "It's just rare to see you so empathetic. Kinda threw us off."

"I'm really not!" George insisted, still red-faced. "I just... I see my old self in Beth. Not like that, but... back in middle school, I was lonely and insecure too. Beth's got almost no friends, gets picked on all the time, and just draws comics to cope. I was the same. To make friends, I even joined the Dungeons & Dragons club—ended up as the secretary and treasurer."

"What?!" Liz burst out laughing. "George, you were such a nerd in middle school!"

"Dungeons & Dragons again, huh?" Adam groaned. "Seriously, George, you getting paid by them or something?"

"Huh?" George blinked, totally lost.

"I swear, every lonely, awkward kid ends up playing Dungeons & Dragons together," Adam said with an eye roll. "Even my buddy's obsessed with it—been playing since we were kids. I'm starting to think D&D's dropping big bucks on marketing to make this happen."

Adam couldn't help but think of Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*, always going on about D&D. There were even episodes where the whole crew played it. With how huge that show was, Adam wouldn't be surprised if D&D shelled out some serious cash for product placement.

"So what're you gonna do?" Liz asked, curious. "You gonna tell Beth?"

"No way," Adam warned. "Going against a minor's parents' wishes could land you in a lawsuit real quick."

"Don't worry, I'm not that dumb," George said, thinking it over. "I won't tell her outright, but I can drop some hints to make her ask her parents herself..."

"I'd think twice about that," Adam said seriously. "Her parents aren't completely wrong here. They've raised a daughter for over a decade—suddenly turning her into a son is a massive shock for most people. Imagine the gossip and judgment their family would face. Beth's still a kid. Right now, she might think being a boy sounds cool, but what if she can't handle the stares and whispers later and regrets it? Who's she gonna blame—you? Or sue? You might feel better saying something, but it's her family that'll have to live with the fallout."

Chapter 553: Adam's Reputation Crisis

Medical Center. Self-Service Cafeteria.

Adam's words left George speechless for a moment.

"She might not regret it..." George said with a bitter tone.

"Maybe," Adam nodded. "But you can't deny there's a chance she could. She's still young, barely past being a kid—her mind's not set yet. One day she's obsessed with something, the next she might totally hate it. Can you guarantee she won't look back and regret this?"

People's hearts change, and that's no joke.

"So, what, we just do nothing?" Liz asked, her voice tinged with frustration.

"We're just doctors," Adam shook his head. "We handle the professional stuff, the medical side—we're tools, that's it. Decisions about life choices and their consequences? That's for the patient and their family to figure out. We don't get to meddle. Without that line, things will blow up eventually.

Take Beth's case, for example. Talk to her parents properly, remove the real problem—the lymph node tumor—first. As for the heart transplant? Let her decide when she's an adult. What's the rush?"

"..." George froze. "But Beth's so confused right now..."

"Oh, come on!" Adam laughed. "Teenagers are confused about a million things. Guide her, let time do its thing. Half the stuff they freak out about now will look hilarious when they're older, trust me. 😊"

"George, listen to Adam," Liz chimed in, convinced. "He's right. There's no need to rush into a decision about the heart surgery. Beth can make that call herself when she's grown up."

"...Fine," George said with a wry smile.

He'd finally stepped up, even clashed with Dr. Montgomery over it, thinking he was doing right by Beth. But now? It felt like a pointless impulse—like he'd gotten worked up over nothing.

"Heh," Adam couldn't hold back a chuckle.

"What's so funny?" Liz asked, puzzled.

"You guys," Adam shook his head, grinning. "Most interns focus on sharpening their skills during residency training. But you, George, and Meredith? It's like you're all working on your emotions instead. I don't even know what to say."

"..." Liz and George's faces darkened—they were not happy about that comment. But when they met Adam's gaze, they couldn't argue back.

Because, yeah, the three of them did have their issues—none of which were really about skill. It was all mindset stuff. Other interns? They rarely messed up like this. Cristina? Almost never. And Adam? He was basically flawless.

"Though, I get it," Adam added with a smile. "You three have real talent for medicine. People with talent tend to have tempers and stick to their guns—it's what makes you stand out."

"And what about you and Cristina?" Liz shot back, a little sarcastic. "No talent there, huh?"

Adam just smirked, saying nothing. To him, Liz and the others were like half-filled buckets sloshing around. The less talented interns kept their heads down, followed the rules, and stayed quiet. Meanwhile, he and Cristina? Their talent was off the charts—they already had the steady mindset of top-tier doctors. Naturally, they didn't break rules either.

But Liz, George, and Meredith? Stuck in the middle, wobbly and always stirring up trouble.

"Adam!" Meredith suddenly dashed over, out of breath. "Do you speak Islandese?"

"Yup," Adam nodded.

"Awesome, come with me!" She grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the wards. "There's an Islandese patient we can't communicate with—her translator's kinda sketchy."

"The translator's off?" Adam asked, surprised.

"Yeah," Meredith explained as they hurried along. "Her name's Yumi Miyazaki, 22, keeps hiccupping nonstop. We gave her 50ml of sedative—it stopped for a bit, but then started again. Dr. Bailey had me order an esophageal X-ray, and turns out there's a tear in her esophagus. She needs surgery ASAP to fix it.

But her translator—who's also her coach—says she's got this big 'Taste of New York' eating contest this afternoon. He doesn't seem to want to tell her the truth so she can still compete."

"An eating contest pro?" Adam's mouth twitched. "Her esophagus is already torn, and she still wants to stuff her face? Talk about choosing cash over life! 😊 Those kinds of gigs waste food, ruin health—they should just ban them."

"She's a pro, apparently," Meredith said with a laugh. "Back in her country, she's practically a TV star—super popular."

Outside the Ward.

"Where are you two headed?" Meredith stepped in front of an Islandese man and woman.

"We've got some stuff to handle..." the male coach said vaguely.

"Does Ms. Miyazaki know about her condition?" Meredith pressed.

"She does," the coach said firmly, then muttered a few words in Islandese to Yumi.

Yumi nodded at Meredith.

"See?" the coach said, starting to guide Yumi away.

"That's not what you told her," Adam cut in, blocking their path. He flashed a smile and started chatting with Yumi directly in Islandese.

"Nani?!" Yumi blurted out, totally shocked.

"Yumi, listen," the coach said, keeping his cool despite being caught. "This afternoon's contest is make-or-break for your career. We have to go."

"Sure," Adam said, still in Islandese with a grin. "But your esophagus is torn. If you skip surgery and do this contest instead, there's a huge chance it'll rip wide open from the food. That's not just life-threatening—it'll mess up eating normally forever, let alone competing. Is that what you want?"

"YAMETE!" Yumi practically shouted.

"..." Adam's mouth twitched again.

Meredith, who didn't speak Islandese, gave him a weird look. So did a bunch of doctors and nurses in the hallway. They might not know the language, but that phrase? Way too famous.

An Islandese woman yelling it at the legendary Dr. Duncan in public? Uh... their minds instantly jumped to a dozen action-art flick scenarios.

The male staff shuffled awkwardly, coughing and glancing around. The female staff? Blushing hard.

Thanks, Islandese exports—you're too powerful. 😊

"So, Ms. Miyazaki's skipping the contest for surgery?" Adam asked, forcing down his internal facepalm and keeping a professional smile.

"Yes," Yumi nodded.

"You heard her, Coach," Adam said in English, turning to the now grim-faced man. "Ms. Miyazaki's choosing surgery."

"Got it. I'll contact the contest organizers," the coach replied. He locked eyes with Yumi for a moment, sighed, and walked off.

People love to roll the dice. The coach and Yumi usually saw eye-to-eye on profit, but now? For Yumi, skipping the contest meant no second chances—competing could ruin her life. For the coach? Losing a star player was a bummer, but he could just bow, apologize, and train the next one.

Perspective's everything, huh?

Chapter 554: The Nurses' Strike

Medical Center. Emergency Room. Nurses' Station.

"Dr. Duncan!"

The sharpest little nurse, who'd been whispering with her colleagues, spotted Adam approaching and hurried over with a grin.

"Hey, Violet, what's the hot gossip today?" Adam asked casually.

"The nurses are gearing up for a group strike," she whispered, dropping the bombshell like it was no big deal.

"A nurses' strike?" Adam's eyes widened. "For real? They're actually doing it? When?"

The rumor had been floating around the medical center for a while now. It all started because the nurses were burned out—each one was pulling an extra 40 hours a week on top of their regular 40,

totaling a brutal 80 hours. Forget about weekends; six days a week meant over 13 hours a day. Insane workload, right? 😊

Unlike Adam and the other interns, who could grind through this phase for a fat paycheck later, the nurses had almost no room to climb the ladder. Overtime pay? Barely worth mentioning. It was like working extra for crumbs. The real kicker? The hospital refused to hire enough nurses or schedule them fairly—pure exploitation.

The head nurses had tried passing the complaints up the chain, but according to the nurses, the big-shot doctors at the top were too arrogant to care. They genuinely didn't think nurses were irreplaceable. So, the issue just kept dragging on.

One nurse alone couldn't do much. But here's the thing: in the U.S., every industry has a secret weapon—unions! When the frustration hits a boiling point, the union steps in, rallies its members, and boom—collective strike time. It's how they force the bigwigs to budge.

Nurses have their own union too, and pretty much every nurse joins it. Once the union kicks into gear, even the ones who'd rather not strike—worried about their patients—can't say no. Peer pressure's a beast. It's all or nothing! 🦊

"So, the union's official paperwork is ready. The head nurse handed it to the dean," Violet said. "It's set for ten days from now."

A strike can't just happen out of the blue—no heads-up would leave the hospital crippled and cause a total disaster. They've got to give some warning.

"What's the goal here?" Adam asked, rubbing his temples.

Hospitals can't function without nurses. Otherwise, doctors like him would be stuck with all the grunt work—pure nightmare fuel. And for Adam, a nurse strike would mess with his top priority: treating patients to extend his lifespan.

"The union ran the numbers," Violet explained. "For 'fair hours and fair pay,' the hospital needs to hire 40 more nurses. That's about two million bucks a year."

Adam sighed. "Oof."

Two million for 40 nurses? Pocket change for a huge medical center like this. They could scrape that cash from anywhere. But Adam knew it wouldn't be that easy. Capitalists pinch every penny, and giving in too quick might embolden the union to keep pushing. A tug-of-war was coming, no doubt about it.

Adam could cough up the money himself, but no way was he doing that. There's an old saying: "A small favor earns thanks; a big one breeds resentment." This wasn't like donating lab equipment or security scanners. If he stepped in, the nurses might be grateful at first, but greed grows. And behind them? The union—a monster waiting to pounce.

Union staff live off the members' dues. Sure, they start out protecting workers, but once they get big, they can flip the script—pressuring members into fights with management for their own gain. The nurses might know it could tank the hospital or even the industry, hurting their own futures, but they'd still follow the union into the abyss. Refuse? Good luck—threats and attacks aren't off the table.

Unions in the U.S. have a rep for turning into semi-open mafias or industry cancers. It's no joke. If they found out Adam, the billionaire doctor, was willing to pay, they'd be back in no time demanding raises again. Give once, then stop, and the nurses wouldn't be thanking him—they'd turn on him. People are selfish like that.

He was here to work, to save lives and extend his own—not to bankroll the hospital and get zero gratitude for it. 🙄

"Dr. Duncan, they're planning to block the hospital entrance and call on the doctors to join them," Violet warned. "If the doctors ignore them and head inside, they might start throwing stuff. Oh, and at the Old Friends Bar—nurses will strike by day and drink there at night. Booze plus tension? Fights with doctors could happen. Watch out!"

Yikes. With a crowd that big, you get all types. Some of those tough, burly nurses? They've got tempers hotter than most guys. Drunken brawls during a strike? Totally predictable.

"What a mess," Adam muttered. "I'm a doctor—I support your fight for fair treatment, but I'm not stopping work over this."

No way was he pausing his lifespan mission for this chaos.

"I get it," Violet said with an apologetic smile. "I can promise the younger nurses won't chuck stuff at you, but the older ones—or some of the guys? Can't vouch for them."

"No worries," Adam chuckled. "Worst case, I'll camp out in the hospital those days. I barely go home anyway—just a few hours of sleep."

Work all day, side projects at night—Adam usually stumbled home at dawn and was back by 5 a.m. Sleep? What's that? 😊

"But the conditions here?" Violet frowned. "It's not like your place."

"It's fine," Adam grinned. "Ten days is doable. I'll rent a room next to Dr. Alice Gray's, fix it up nice—it won't be much different."

"Nothing fazes you, huh, Dr. Duncan?" Violet's eyes sparkled with admiration.

"Thanks for the heads-up, Violet," Adam said warmly. "I'd be clueless without you."

"It's nothing!" she beamed.

"Hey," Adam paused, thoughtful. "Violet, ever thought about being a surgical nurse? It's tough, but you'd avoid patients and families—less drama. You'd learn a ton, be harder to replace, and the pay's solid."

"Yes!" Her face lit up. "I'm not afraid of hard work. I'd love to learn more—maybe even join you in the OR someday!"

"Looking forward to it," Adam laughed. He loved her quick wit—she caught on fast.

Chapter 555: The National Curse Strikes Again

Ten days flew by in a flash. Medical Center. Entrance.

"Fair hours, fair pay!"

"Fair hours, fair pay!"

"Fair hours, fair pay!"

The hospital nurses were on strike, gathered on both sides of the entrance, holding up protest signs and chanting in rhythm under the nurse union organizer's lead. Their signs varied—besides the "Fair hours, fair pay" they kept shouting, there were ones like "Support nurses," "Nurses are essential," and "Don't cross the picket line."

This "picket line" was a bunch of red lines the striking nurses had drawn, kinda like the "38th parallel" Adam remembered drawing with his desk buddy back in grade school to mark territory. Except, unlike that single line, these picket lines were everywhere—covering nearly every hospital entrance. No dodging them!

Support the nurses? Don't cross the red line—basically, join the strike. Cross it? You're against them. An enemy.

It's an old-school American protest tradition. Who's with us? Who's against us? Oh, you're just a bystander who doesn't care either way? How dare you! No support = opposition. Opposition = enemy. No middle ground allowed. That's just how it rolls—deal with it! 🙄

Security guards stood by, ready to step in if things got messy.

"Damn it!"

"Adam was right," Cristina and Liz muttered, brushing off whatever got thrown at them as they walked into the hospital.

"Told you so," Adam said, strolling up with a grin. "You didn't take it seriously."

"We're on their side!" Liz snapped, fuming. "And they still treat us like this?!"

"They don't see it that way," Adam chuckled. "Sure, doctors and nurses are partners, but our interests clash. The hospital's budget pie is pretty much fixed each year. Doctors get a bigger slice? Nurses get less. And that gap? It's huge."

"You say you support them, but what have you done about it? If you were a nurse, what would you think?"

"..." Liz had no comeback. She grumbled, "It's the hospital's call, not ours as doctors."

"People are selfish—it's human nature," Adam shook his head. "How many stay rational when it's about money? You say doctors can't decide? Really?"

"If all the doctors backed the nurses and joined the strike, the hospital would grind to a halt. The strike would win faster and harder. Or, doctors could take a pay cut—use that cash to hire more nurses to cut hours or boost overtime pay for the ones here."

"No way!" Liz blurted out.

"Exactly," Adam laughed. "Why should you give up your own slice to help someone else? So, it's not crazy they don't buy your 'verbal support.'"

Taking a pay cut? Never gonna happen. People slog through med school and bust their butts to become doctors—mostly for the fat paycheck and prestige. Join the strike? Top docs might get away with it, but disposable interns like Liz? Pull that stunt, piss off the higher-ups, and they'd kick you out in a heartbeat, leaving a nasty mark on your record. Good luck getting a job in medicine after that.

With student loans piling up, you'd default, tank your credit, and in a credit-obsessed place like the U.S., no credit = no job. No job = broke. Broke = more debt. It's a vicious cycle that lands way too many people on the streets, just giving up.

All those homeless folks? Not everyone's just mooching off welfare. Plenty get trapped in a spiral after a crash or bankruptcy—no way out, no second chance. It's brutal out there. 😞

"Then why don't you support them?" Liz shot back, sarcastic.

"I'm like you—just talk," Adam grinned. "But I don't expect them to buy it. See, I'm crashing at the hospital till the strike's over. No showing my face out there, no drama. Easy!"

"I'm not going home either," Cristina nodded. "What's the big deal? Stay at the hospital—suits me fine. I didn't want to go back anyway..."

"Rough times living with Dr. Burke?" Adam teased.

Cristina rolled her eyes, not even bothering to respond.

Dr. Burke moved fast. Barely into their thing, he'd already pushed to move in together, pulling this "If you say no, you're breaking my heart" sad-puppy act. Cristina figured she'd scare him off by showing him her place—her literal doghouse.

Yup, a total mess! She never washes clothes—just tosses the dirty ones around her apartment and buys new ones. Why not hire a maid with all that cash? Oh, she tried. Multiple times. Every maid she hired ended up crying and quitting.

Cristina's a career-obsessed ice queen with a temper and a sharp tongue. She burned through staff till she just gave up. Her place? A trash heap—piles of junk everywhere. You'd think she was sabotaging her landlord on purpose.

She laid it all out, expecting Burke to bolt. But nope! Mr. "Idol Drama Lead" Burke—low-key fancy and spotless—stared in shock at first, then rolled with it. Now he's moved in, handling her food, clothes, everything. The guy's basically a overbearing CEO at this point.

And yet, Cristina still gripes and dodges going home.

Emmm. If she had even a shred of leading-lady looks, Adam might've pegged her as the real heroine here. Compared to Cristina's Burke, Meredith's dreamy Dr. Shepherd gets smoked in every category. 😊

"Who cares about them?" Cristina glanced around. "We're doctors—our job's surgery. The rest? Not our problem. They've got temp nurses to empty bedpans. That's enough."

"Wow, you're back at it—forgetting the pain once the scar heals," Adam warned. "Say that loud enough for it to get back to the nurses when they're on duty again, and you're toast. Plus, even with temps, our workload's about to spike these next few days."

"Why?" Cristina frowned.

"Because the temp nurses don't know this hospital," Adam sighed. "Newbies screw up—it's a given. Worse, half of them are still in nursing school, not even graduated. They barely know a thing. You gonna toss out orders and just trust they'll handle it?"

Cristina blinked, then let out the classic American gem:

"Son of a bitch!"

Chapter 556: Chaos and Emergency

Medical Center.

"No way, that's nuts, right?"

Liz stared, jaw dropped. "They're coming in before they've even graduated?"

"What'd you expect?" Adam chuckled. "Nurses who've already graduated and started working are almost all in the union. When the union calls a strike, no member's gonna drag their feet. And the ones with jobs? They're too busy to help out anyway. Only the non-union stragglers or nursing students who haven't graduated have the time to pitch in."

"This is a total mess," Christina groaned. "Those students—can they even understand our orders?"

"Up to you if you trust 'em," Adam teased, glancing at her. "What, you think carrying a bedpan takes a PhD or something?" 😊

"..." Christina froze, speechless.

Sure, nurses can't compare to doctors who grind through four years of school plus more, but their skills still come from real training. It's not a job just anyone can do—people could die!

"Damn it!" Liz rubbed her temples. "So we're stuck babysitting temp nurses now?"

"Pretty much," Adam sighed. "And even then, there aren't enough of them. A lot of stuff's gonna fall on us. Remember when Dr. Bailey made you do rectal exams as punishment and you thought she was torturing you? Well, today's gonna be dirtier and more exhausting than that. Here, take these."

"Masks?" Liz grabbed one.

"Better safe than sorry," Adam grinned. "Blocks sprays and smells—trust me, you'll thank me later. Oh, where's George?"

"He's still outside, hovering by the picket line, too scared to cross," Christina snorted. "Wimp!"

"Hey, don't rag on George like that," Liz shot back, defending her bestie. "His dad's a truck driver, and his mom's a teacher. If someone snapped a pic of him crossing the line, they'd be so pissed they'd pee on his grave after he's gone."

"Pfft!" Adam nearly choked laughing.

In the U.S., truck drivers and teachers have massive unions—serious heavyweights. The teachers' union? They've got enough clout to stare down presidents and sway elections. Truck drivers aren't far behind either. That job's one of the six most dangerous gigs in the country—right up there with firefighters and cops—so their union's tight as hell.

Like in *Fast and Furious*, when Vin Diesel's crew kept jacking fuel from truckers? They pissed off the union, and next thing you know, every driver's locked and loaded. When Diesel tried again, they opened fire—nearly blew his whole squad away.

Oh, and George? Irish kid. The Irish trucker union? Straight-up mafia vibes. No wonder his dad's all-in on that loyalty!

"He's overthinking it," Adam laughed. "What, his parents are gonna outlive him and curse his tombstone? That's just tempting fate!"

"Exactly!" Liz nodded. She'd stick up for her buddy, but that didn't mean she agreed with his antics. "I got pelted coming in, and he's still out there acting like—oh, crap!"

Right then, George strolled in, holding a sign that read, "I'm a Nurse and I'm Proud!"

"What the hell, George?!" Liz yelled at him.

"My mom held the picket line for 48 days during the 1990 teachers' strike!" George marched over, half-explaining to them, half-psychoing himself up. "I'm a union guy!"

"Then why are you inside?" Adam asked, curious. "If you're backing the nurses' protest, you're supposed to stay out there, not mess with hospital ops."

"My soul's not really here," George mumbled, covering his ears like that made it okay. "Olivia and the others have patients who need special care. They hate leaving them hanging, even if they have to strike."

"Olivia! I knew it—she put you up to this!" Liz exploded. "She threw a donut at me and yelled at me to carry my own bedpan. George, how can you be pals with someone who treats me like that?!"

"You called her out too—told her to enjoy her 'sweet poison,'" George countered, trying to calm her. "And she didn't push me into this. I wanted to."

"You're not scared of getting fired?" Adam warned. "You're the only doctor sticking your neck out—and an intern at that. Watch out, they might make an example of you."

George's face twitched. Yeah, he was scared.

"Eva Jenkins in Pediatric Room 4114 needs her meds changed. She freaks out easy, but singing the alphabet song or a lullaby calms her down. O'Brien in 2412—if you don't check on her every hour, she panics. And the patient in 2923—"

"Stop!" Adam cut him off. "What are you doing?"

"I can't stay. These are patients the nurses have to specially look after—I'm handing them off to you guys..." George rushed out. "Wait, where are you going?"

"Catch you later!"

"Got stuff to do!"

Adam and Christina bolted, tossing out excuses.

No way in hell were they taking on that list—boring, time-sucking grunt work? Nope! 😊

"Liz?" George turned to his last hope with a sheepish grin. "You're my real friend, right? Can you help with these patients?"

"You want me to help?" Liz smirked.

"Yes!" George nodded eagerly, glancing around nervously for the surgical chief.

"Dream on!" Liz snapped. "I told you to come in with me, but no—you teamed up with Olivia. Now you want me to finish her jobs? Go to hell!"

Adam passed a room.

"Langley, Langley, is that you?"

An old woman with gray hair lay in bed, staring at the open door, calling out weakly.

"You okay, ma'am?" Adam glanced down the empty, nurse-less hall and stepped inside.

"Langley, Langley..." Her breathing sped up, repeating the name.

Something was off. Adam reached for her chart—nothing. The strike had screwed up handoffs; no one knew this dying woman was even here.

"OMG! Is she dying?!"

A super-young temp nurse burst in, saw the scene, and froze in panic.

"Get me a 7.5 tube—I need to intubate her!" Adam barked. The kid just stood there, dazed. Muttering a curse, he dashed out, grabbed the gear himself, and raced back to intubate the old woman who'd stopped breathing.

Chapter 557: Acting High and Mighty

At the medical center, inside a hospital room:

Adam was busy intubating an elderly woman who'd stopped breathing, working fast to save her life. A temp nurse stood off to the side, looking a bit lost.

"You haven't graduated yet?" Adam asked, glancing at the young nurse once he'd successfully revived the old lady.

"Uh, no," the temp nurse admitted sheepishly. "So... she's saved?"

"Yep," Adam nodded with a small smile.

"Awesome!" the nurse cheered, practically bouncing with excitement—until she caught Adam's steady gaze and awkwardly stopped. She suddenly remembered she hadn't helped at all when she probably should've. 😊

"Could you do me a favor?" Adam asked, not sounding annoyed at all, just friendly.

A student who hadn't even graduated yet, thrown into a life-or-death rescue? Getting flustered or freezing up was totally normal.

"Sure, sure!" the temp nurse agreed eagerly, nodding like a bobblehead without even asking what he needed.

"Keep an eye on her for me," Adam said with a grin, pointing at the now steadily breathing woman. "If anything comes up, just call me. I'm Adam Duncan."

"Got it!" she replied instantly. As Adam stepped out of the room, she mustered up the courage to softly call after his retreating back, "I'm Zoe, by the way."

An hour later:

"Zoe, what's up?" Adam asked as he rushed back in after getting her call. He noticed the surgical director's secretary was there too. "Jessie, you're here too?"

Zoe, the temp nurse, was thrilled Adam remembered her name but felt guilty for causing him trouble. She'd tracked down the old woman's medical records after a long search.

"Dr. Duncan, you intubated her?" Jessie, the secretary, asked with a helpless look.

"Yeah," Adam confirmed. "She stopped breathing—I had to act fast. Is there a problem?"

"Dr. Duncan," Zoe piped up, looking apologetic, "you asked me to watch her, and I couldn't find her records here, so I went looking. It took forever to dig them up."

Jessie sighed. "Mrs. Beckham was diagnosed with late-stage chronic lung disease. She's from a hospice care facility—end-of-life stuff. No resuscitation, no CPR."

"Oh," Adam said, realization dawning.

"You intubated Grace?"

"He intubated Grace?"

"He intubated Grace!"

Three elderly women burst into the room just then, overhearing the news and getting more worked up by the second.

"You idiot! You should've let her die!" one of them—a tall, imposing woman—yelled, swinging her purse at Adam from behind while cursing up a storm.

"Ma'am, calm down," Adam said smoothly, dodging the sneak attack with ease. He faced the trio, frowning. "Her records weren't here. I didn't know—"

"You didn't know?!" the tall woman snapped, nearly throwing out her back from the missed swing. She'd clearly put some muscle into it. "And you dodged me?!"

"Let's talk this out," Adam said calmly. "I saw a patient dying and didn't know her situation. As a doctor, I acted to save her. What's the issue?"

"She said no ventilator!" one of the other women chimed in.

"You were supposed to let her go peacefully," another added.

"Who told you to save her?!" the tall one barked. "Mind your own business!"

"Jessie?" Adam said, ignoring them and turning to the secretary.

"Ladies, please, Dr. Duncan didn't know," Jessie said, rubbing her temples like she had a headache coming on. "You should've seen when you came in—our nurses are on strike. The records got messed up in the handover..."

"I don't care!" the tall woman snapped, her temper flaring. "He intubated Grace against her wishes—he needs to apologize!"

"Dr. Duncan?" Jessie glanced at Adam, her eyes pleading for him to just let it go.

"Who are you to the patient?" Adam asked the three women, his face blank, ignoring Jessie's hint.

Normally, he'd have gone with the "keep the peace" route and apologized right away. After all, he'd technically done a good deed that backfired. Plus, he'd earned a tiny +0.01 system reward for it. But this tall woman's attitude—charging in, swinging at him, cussing him out, and demanding an apology? Even chill Adam was over it. This was ridiculous!

"We're Grace's friends," one of the quieter women answered.

"So you think it's wrong I saved someone without knowing her situation?" Adam said, his voice low. "Or that when a patient's dying and I can't confirm a DNR, I should just stand there and watch?"

"Well..." The two less fiery women hesitated, starting to see his point after their initial shock.

"You should've known!" the tall one doubled down, not caring about logic. "It's your job! Grace didn't want this—you can't just save her! Apologize, or I'll sue you!"

"Guess we're done talking," Adam said, shrugging. "You're not her family. Contact her actual relatives. She's still unconscious, so if the family agrees, she can still pass peacefully.

"Sue me? Here's my private lawyer's contact. Send the letter straight to him—he'll handle it. He's been itching for something to do anyway. Anything else?"

The room went dead silent.

Even the tall, hotheaded woman froze, stunned.

In the States, personal doctors are common enough—everyone gets sick sometimes. But a private lawyer? That's not standard. Either you're a mess of a family, or you're loaded. And from Adam's vibe, it was clearly the latter—the kind you don't mess with. 🤖

The tall woman had pegged Adam as just some young doctor she could push around, leaning on her age to throw her weight. She'd figured she'd smack the "culprit" a few times to vent for her friend, and he wouldn't dare talk back. But when he dodged and nearly made her tweak her back, she got madder. Now? She was rethinking everything. Life experience kicked in: better to play nice.

"Looks like we're good here," Adam said, still stone-faced. "Zoe, let me know when her family shows up." And with that, he walked out.

"Yanis, maybe we should call Grace's daughter, Alice?" one of the quieter women whispered to the tall one.

"Yeah," the other agreed. "Let Alice decide—she's Grace's kid, even if she's, y'know, a lesbian."

"The doc didn't really do anything wrong," they added, trying to ease Yanis off her high horse. "He didn't know. Saving someone's kinda the default, right? Yanis, if it was your daughter or granddaughter, wouldn't you want a doctor to at least try?"

"Pfft!" Yanis spat. "Don't you dare jinx my girls!"

Jessie, seeing the tension drop, jumped in with a few words, subtly hinting that Adam wasn't just some newbie doctor. The vibe softened even more. Yanis started wondering if she'd gone too far—maybe she owed him an apology. The world's too nice a place to stay this mad, right?

Chapter 558: Doctor Strange Calls It Like a Pro

At the medical center.

Night had fallen.

The patient's daughter rushed in. No drama, no fuss—she just signed the papers to remove the ventilator right away.

It was her mom's wish.

She didn't think Adam saving her mom without knowing the full story was wrong either.

"I'll give her a sedative first to ease her discomfort, then we can remove the tube," Adam said, standing by the bedside. He took the signed consent form and glanced at them. "Ready?"

"Yeah," the daughter nodded, tears in her eyes.

Adam was about to inject the sedative when—

"Wait."

The daughter stopped him.

Adam paused steady as a rock.

"Goodbye, Mom."

She leaned in, kissed her mom's forehead, and said her farewell.

"Ready now?"

Adam had to ask again. After she nodded, he gave her a few seconds, then administered the sedative, turned off the monitor, and pulled the tube.

"How long will it take?" the daughter asked, voice shaky with tears.

"It'll take a little while," Adam replied gently.

They waited together. After a bit, Adam checked the patient's pulse and heartbeat, then nodded to the daughter. "Time of death: 8:23," he announced before stepping out of the room.

Down the hall at the corner—

Christina, Liz, George, and Meredith were half-leaning on a gurney, each with a complicated look on their faces.

"What's up with you guys? Someone boil you alive?" Adam teased with a grin.

"Pretty sure you're the one who almost got cooked," Christina shot back, rolling her eyes. "What's this? The great Dr. Duncan finally getting threatened with a lawsuit by a woman? Your charm's wearing off?"

"Heh," Adam chuckled, brushing it off. He switched gears. "So, you did that flesh-eating bacteria surgery today?"

He wasn't exactly the teacher's pet, and that was fine. After all, he wasn't Leonard!

"Ugh, don't get me started," Christina said, sitting up straight and glaring at Adam. "Dr. Shirland used to be your resident, right? Now that Bailey's out on maternity leave, she's stuck with us. It's a total disaster."

"Come on, it's not that bad," Adam laughed. "Shirley's great—way easier to deal with than Bailey."

"That's the problem!" Christina snapped. "We're interns. We're supposed to be learning skills from our resident, not playing 'hi, hello, everyone's happy' like it's some kiddie game. 'Love and care therapy'? Give me a break."

"Did you guys clash?" Adam asked, curious.

"Nope," Christina said, her face stone-cold. "I just didn't agree with her surgery plan. The patient had flesh-eating bacteria—leg infection spreading fast. The right move is to amputate ASAP to stop it from hitting the bloodstream and killing them. But nooo, she got all emotional, insisting on clearing out every last bit of bacteria first. She's gambling with the patient's life!"

"She even called Dr. Burke in to check it out," Meredith added quietly.

"No way," Adam said, stunned, turning to Christina. "You got your boyfriend to pull rank on Shirley? Did she lose it?"

Questioning the lead surgeon in the OR? That's a big no-no.

An intern calling in her attending boyfriend to challenge her superior? That's straight-up crossing the line. Any surgeon with a shred of pride would flip out.

"Oh, she flipped alright," Meredith chimed in again. "She tore into Burke, left him speechless, and kicked him out of the OR."

"I was just worried about the patient's life," Christina said, stubborn as ever.

"The patient's a marathon runner. If you amputate, even if they live, they'd be miserable," Meredith countered. "Dr. Shirland's plan wasn't wrong. She consulted the patient and their newlywed husband, decided to try clearing the bacteria first, and only amputate if the infection spread further."

"By then, the patient might already be dead," Christina argued back.

"The first rule for us surgeons isn't just keeping the patient alive, is it?" Adam shook his head. "It's about respecting their choice and doing our best to keep them alive within that."

"And the results proved Dr. Shirland right," Meredith said with a smile. "She stood there for eight hours straight, cleared all the bacteria, saved the patient's life and their leg. Now Burke's making Christina apologize to her."

"That was a fluke—one-in-a-million luck. What about next time?" Christina grumbled.

"The issue isn't whose plan was right or wrong," Adam pointed out. "You can have your opinion, sure, but once the lead surgeon sets the plan, you don't call in someone—especially your boyfriend—to pressure them. Shirley's chill, so you got off easy. Anyone else? They'd escalate it, make you and Burke look like fools. You should apologize."

"Fine, I'll admit I got a little impulsive," Christina said after a pause, still stubborn. "But I still think my plan was the right one."

"Nope, you're wrong," Adam said, shaking his head. "Remember that patient who got off to Liz's modeling mag, nearly got castrated, and wouldn't let her near him?"

"Yeah, what about it?" Christina blinked.

"Who was the lead surgeon? What's his nickname? Why'd he earn it? A full-on attending—why doesn't he get respect from juniors, even interns who talk back?"

Christina froze.

The lead was Dr. Victor, an old-timer nicknamed "Softie." His motto? "Young docs gamble with cancer; at my age, you learn to be efficient."

His go-to move: cut it all out. Nerves? Doesn't matter—anything near the cancer zone gets sliced off. Clean and simple.

The cost? Patients who could've had some quality of life end up worse than dead.

That near-castrated patient? Liz fought hard, and even rule-stickler Bailey bent the rules, shooing Softie away. They operated themselves, saved the nerves, and let the guy keep his dignity. Sure, the recurrence risk went up, but the patient thanked them endlessly.

"Christina, the clean cut is the most effective way," Adam said earnestly. "Your scalpel could save more lives, no doubt. But their quality of life post-op? You can't ignore that. And by always going for the clean cut, aren't you just dodging the tougher surgeries that balance saving lives and quality—like you're

scared of the challenge? What's next? Only taking cases you're 100% sure of, chasing a perfect record for bragging rights?"

Christina went quiet, and the air got heavy. 😞

Chapter 559: The Prestige of a Top Doctor

Medical Center.

"This isn't the same thing," Cristina mumbled, but her little eyes had already betrayed her—she was convinced.

She didn't want to be a pushover, and she definitely didn't want to be Doctor Strange.

"Go apologize to Sydney," Adam said with a grin. "I promise she won't make it awkward for you."

Christina didn't argue back this time. She knew she'd messed up. Especially after her boyfriend, Dr. Burke, sat there looking all sad and told her, "I never understood what was wrong with dating an intern before, but now I get it. In all my years as a doctor, I've never questioned anyone in the OR. Never..."

She could hear the unspoken part loud and clear: "And I've never been treated like this either."

For a successful, top-tier doctor like him, this was a humiliation he'd never faced before. But what could he do? He was wrong. He shouldn't have let their relationship mess with his judgment at work.

Still, as the attending, he didn't have to go out of his way to apologize to a junior resident even if he screwed up. But he insisted she had to—because she was the intern.

Now that Adam and the others were saying the same thing, Cristina wasn't about to keep fighting it.

"Liz, I heard you and Dr. Montgomery did an EXIT procedure? That's so cool! 🤩" Adam said, turning to Liz, who looked like she had a lot on her mind.

"Yeah," Liz replied with a half-hearted smile.

The patient was a young Black girl, unmarried and pregnant. The fetus had a tumor on its head, causing too much amniotic fluid and blocking the airway and spinal cord.

An EXIT procedure meant a partial C-section—delivering the baby halfway, pulling out the head and arms while keeping the rest of the body inside the mom, umbilical cord still attached. The tumor stopped air from getting into the lungs, so the cord kept the baby alive during the surgery to remove it. Only after that would they cut the cord.

Imagine it: a baby half-out, tiny hands resting on the mom's belly, eyes closed like it's meditating, the lower half still tucked inside the womb, holding that pose for ages. It's kinda mystical, a little creepy, and totally amazing.

Talk about a mother's greatness, right? 🤪 That kind of surgery doesn't happen every day.

"No details?" Adam asked, not wanting to dig into why Liz was feeling all moody again—he just didn't want to miss out on the juicy surgery specifics.

"What's there to say?" Liz forced a smile. "We explained the plan and asked how it sounded to them. The patient's mom, Ms. Woods, just said it sounded complicated and expensive, like she didn't even want to bother."

"She's not wrong," Adam laughed. "The more complex and rare the surgery, the pricier it gets around here."

"But shouldn't her daughter's and grandkid's health matter more?" Liz shot back. "She kept hesitating, saying she didn't want to miss more work. I get it—life's tough—but at a time like this, shouldn't the big stuff come first?"

"Heh," Adam chuckled and shook his head. "You saying that just proves you don't really get what 'tough' means. You think you do, but you don't."

In Dream of the Red Chamber, when Granny Liu first visits the Jia family, she's there because she's flat-out broke. If she doesn't figure something out, her family's literally going to starve. She meets Fengjie, who complains about how tough things are for the Jia household despite their fancy exterior. Granny Liu just smiles and says, "Oh, we know tough too~ But even a skinny camel's bigger than a horse. One of your stray hairs is thicker than our waists!"

Fengjie ends up giving her twenty taels of silver, saying, "Take it if you don't mind it's not much—it was supposed to be for the maids' clothes." Granny Liu nearly faints from the windfall. She thought there was no hope after hearing Fengjie's sob story, but bam—twenty taels! That's enough for her family of four to live on for a whole year.

Here's the thing: one person's "tough" is not eating to survive. Another's is skipping a meal or not making the maids a new dress. Both are "tough," sure.

Fengjie wasn't lying either—she genuinely thought the Jia family was struggling, dipping into her dowry to keep things afloat.

So when Liz kept going on about "I know the mom's got it hard, she has to work," it felt to Adam like Fengjie telling Granny Liu, "Oh, I totally get it, we're all struggling!" True for both, but worlds apart.

A Black teenage girl, about to be a single mom. Her single mom worried the surgery's too complicated, too pricey, and didn't want to miss a single shift at work. Doesn't get more real than that, does it? 😊

If she doesn't earn, who's feeding her daughter and granddaughter? Who's paying the hospital bills? American hospitals aren't charities—if you can't pay, they'll "kindly" discharge you or transfer you out, no matter what's wrong. Transfer where? Back home to fend for yourself.

"I do know..." Liz said, not ready to back down.

"Whether you know or not," Adam cut in, "she ended up agreeing to the surgery for her daughter, right?"

"Yeah, because Dr. Montgomery waived the fees," Liz said, raising her voice.

"Oh, nice!" Adam grinned.

As a newly recruited top doctor, Montgomery came with primo perks—not just a fancy office, but prestige. Yup, face matters in the U.S. too! Doctors like Montgomery get a yearly quota to waive patient fees. Why? To make them look good.

Picture it: a surgery that costs a fortune, and they just smile and say, "Don't worry, it's on me." One second you're in hell, the next you're in heaven. How badass is that? 🤖 How much clout does that give you?

Patients and families look at a doctor like that and think, "Is this God?" And for a mortal doctor, doesn't that feel pretty darn satisfying? You bet it does!

"If it weren't for that, who knows if she'd have agreed," Liz muttered, pursing her lips.

"Nah," Adam said with a smile. "Even without the waiver, even if she griped about the cost, I bet she'd have said yes in the end."

"I believe that too," Meredith chimed in.

"Me too," George said, raising his hand.

"Don't look at me," Cristina said, half-leaning on a gurney, lost in thought. When Liz and the others glanced her way, she shrugged. "Mother's love is the greatest. No argument there."

"Wanna hit Joe's Bar for a drink? The strike stuff's calmed down for now," Meredith suggested.

"Nah," Adam shook his head. "I'm sticking around the hospital till this mess is over. Gotta save a few more people—the temp nurses are too shaky for my liking."

"Then we'll go!" Meredith said, dragging Cristina and the others out.

"You guys might wanna skip it too," Adam called after them. "The nurses are all over there, and things could get messy after a few drinks. Uh, George, you're fine to go, though."

"Of course, Nurse George," Cristina teased.

"What'd you say?!" George exploded, chasing after her, fuming.

Sure, he'd been waving his "I'm a nurse and proud" sign during the strike, but call him a nurse and he'd lose it. Deep down, he still looked down on them, huh?

The group laughed and bickered as they left. Adam shook his head and turned to do his rounds.

Everything's got two sides.

With the nurses on strike, saving people got trickier. But on the flip side, patients who'd normally just need a nurse's care? Under these temps, one slip-up and they could get worse—or even critical.

Adam figured he could do more here.

Chapter 560: Who Wants to Join?

Medical Center. Locker Room.

"So, you're saying you're not gonna scrub in for his surgery?" Meredith shot Adam a mocking look, catching him off guard and leaving him momentarily speechless.

"What surgery?" Adam perked up, clearly intrigued.

"A patient just came into the hospital with a severe skull structure developmental disorder," Christina chimed in.

"Lion syndrome?" Adam asked, surprised.

Lion syndrome—pretty self-explanatory, really. The face resembles a lion's.

"Yup," Christina nodded. "This rare condition is a plastic surgeon's dream. If the surgery's a success and they publish the before-and-after pics to the media, that surgeon's gonna be the talk of the town."

"Not just a plastic surgeon's dream—it's the hospital's too," Meredith pointed out. "Mark's the best plastic surgeon on the East Coast. You seriously don't wanna join in on a surgery like that?"

"Oh, I do," Adam admitted honestly.

He wasn't planning on becoming a plastic surgeon himself, but picking up a few extra skills never hurt. Especially since the guy in question was among the best of the best in the field.

Besides, Adam was already shadowing some top-tier docs: Burke, the leading cardiothoracic surgeon; Shepherd, the top neurosurgeon; Montgomery, the best in pediatrics; and then there was Alice Grey, a legendary doctor who was basically a cheat code in human form.

If he added the East Coast's top plastic surgeon to his mentor lineup? Well, Adam's team of teachers would be getting even more stacked. 🤖

"Sounds like he's got some redeeming qualities after all," Meredith said with a grin.

"I never said he didn't," Adam replied, a bit surprised. "Skill level and personal character are two totally different things. I respect his insane talent and wanna learn from him, but that doesn't mean I'm signing off on who he is as a person."

"Exactly!" George jumped in to agree.

Christina and Liz both turned to George, their eyes teasing.

"What?" George asked, clearly annoyed.

"Adam's got a point—he can look down on the guy for legit reasons. But you? Sounds more like jealousy to me," Christina said, hitting the nail on the head.

"Right?" Liz added dreamily. "I mean, with a face like that and a body to match? I'd be all over it too. No wonder Dr. Montgomery couldn't resist. Honestly, she's living the dream—married to Mr. Perfect and sneaking around with Mr. Sexy Beast. Ugh, goals!" 😊

"Meredith, don't tell me you've got a thing for this Mark guy now?" Christina turned to Meredith, asking the million-dollar question.

"No way!" Meredith shot back immediately.

But the real reason she'd been hyping Mark up so much? It was because of something he'd said to her: "I heard about you back in Boston—an intern with a wild streak, messing around with an attending. We're both just dirty little side pieces."

That hit her hard. She got it.

Okay, fine, it also didn't hurt that Mark was hot, built, and had a way of drawing people in.

"So what if I did like him a little?" Meredith snapped, noticing the skeptical looks on everyone's faces. "They went back to their happy little families, living the dream, while the two of us 'side pieces' stick together. What's so weird about that?"

"Not weird at all," Adam nodded. "But are you sure you're over Dr. Shepherd? Last time Mark and Dr. Montgomery were in bed 'discussing life and ideals,' Shepherd just quietly closed the door and left. This time, though? You and Mark were just flirting in public, and Shepherd stormed over and threw a punch. Same setup, but the reactions are worlds apart. Don't you think that's a little telling?"

"But he didn't choose me!" Meredith suddenly shouted.

"Maybe he wants both," Adam said with a shrug, cutting the convo short as he heard someone approaching.

Everyone: "..."

Adam finished changing and headed out, with Christina hot on his heels.

"You were joking just now, right?" she asked in a low voice as she walked beside him.

"Who knows?" Adam grinned, keeping it vague.

That punch versus just closing the door—it was pretty obvious what Shepherd's real feelings were.

Most people in that situation would pick the new, fiery fling over a cheating spouse they barely had feelings for anymore. But Shepherd? His choices were always a mystery. Who knew what was going through his head?

Maybe he didn't wanna lose either—keeping the friendship and family vibe with his wife while stringing Meredith along with some half-hearted romance, playing the 'best friend with benefits' card.

Men, huh? Always trying to have it all. Pretty relatable, if you ask me. 😊

Morning rounds were done.

Two former best friends, turned love rivals, were now at war again.

The patient with lion syndrome also had a malignant brain tumor. Dr. Shepherd was set to perform a tumor resection, but when Mark Sloan got wind of it, he went straight to the patient and offered to fix his face—give him something closer to normal.

No surprise there: the kid, who'd faced nothing but discrimination and humiliation because of his condition, insisted on the plastic surgery.

Outside the Chief of Surgery's office, Adam and the crew were gathered, peeking through the glass window from a distance.

"What's he saying? Can you read his lips?" Christina asked, tilting her head as she tried to follow Shepherd pacing back and forth.

"Quack doctor!" Adam translated with a laugh.

"Whoa," Liz said, wide-eyed. "Things are heating up in there!"

"He's gesturing now—is he gonna hit Sloan again?" Christina asked, clearly loving the drama.

"Nah, you're overthinking it," Adam chuckled. "For someone like Shepherd, throwing that one punch was already his limit. Getting him to swing again? Not a chance."

Well... maybe not entirely impossible.

If Shepherd came home one day and saw Mark Sloan with Meredith on one arm and Montgomery on the other, flashing him some smug grin... yeah, even someone as chill as Shepherd might snap and go for blood. 😏

Adam couldn't help but picture it—his mind flashing to some classic drama scenes. Gotta hand it to Japanese culture; they really know how to nail those messy human conflicts.

"So, Adam, what's your take this time?" Christina gave up on lip-reading and turned to him. "Just the tumor resection, or both surgeries together?"

"Theoretically, I'm on Shepherd's side," Adam said thoughtfully. "You've all seen the MRI scans of that tumor—it's dangerous. Even with Shepherd operating, the odds aren't great. Best to focus entirely on the tumor resection and save the kid's life first. The plastic surgery afterward shouldn't affect much, but it's still a delicate procedure that takes a ton of time. Doing two intricate surgeries back-to-back means the patient's under anesthesia longer, and the risks go up, even if just a bit."

"And in reality?" Liz pressed.

"Reality?" Adam smiled. "Didn't you see the look on the kid's face? The tumor? Didn't faze him at all. He was joking around, totally unbothered—not like a 15-year-old kid, more like some wise old soul who's made peace with death. But when they mentioned he could have a normal face? He lost it. His parents tried to talk him out of the plastic surgery for now, and he just kept begging them, eyes full of hope. He knows exactly what he wants. And we're doctors—it's our job to try and give patients what they need."

"Couldn't agree more," Liz nodded. "If it were me, I'd choose the same. This world's harsh enough on regular people with all the focus on looks—imagine how brutal it's been for someone with a condition like his. I can just picture all the crap he's had to deal with."

Adam and the others side-eyed her.

You—a tall, blonde, Barbie-faced bombshell—can 'imagine' that? Who're you kidding? 😊

"The Chief's saying something," Adam pointed out, switching to lip-reading again. "He's telling Sloan, 'If the kid's parents sign the consent form, you can do the plastic surgery.' And Sloan just turned to Shepherd and said, 'Round two goes to the jerk.'"

Mark Sloan stepped out of the office then, walking over to the group and scanning them with a smirk. "Any of you interested in joining this surgery? Help me convince the parents, and you're in."