

## TV Show 571

Chapter 571: A Leg-Breaking Tribute

Medical Center.

Adam's office.

"So why didn't you just ask the patient's wife about the bomb?"

Agent Jessie Paige was already sold on the idea that doctors here had some freaky sixth sense for danger—especially the ones at this medical center—but she still pressed him.

"Are bomb attacks really that rare in the U.S.?" Adam shot back. "When a patient's got a gaping hole in their chest, someone's hand is inside, and you're hit with this overwhelming sense of dread, I don't know what you'd think of first, but for me? Bomb. Only thing that fits."

"..."

Jessie paused, racking her brain for a comeback. Nothing. His logic was annoyingly airtight.

Back in 1995, the U.S. had a massive terrorist attack. Three guys—ex-soldiers—used a huge bomb to level a federal building in Oklahoma City. The reason? Pretty messed up.

The ringleader had a rough childhood—divorced parents, the works—and grew up obsessed with epic heroes. As an adult, that obsession shifted to real-life American soldiers. So, chasing that hero vibe, he joined the military in college.

He was damn good at it too. Protecting the weak, fighting for the people—that was his creed. But over time, the bigwigs in D.C. kept meddling with the military, chipping away at the sacred image he'd built up in his head. Then came the real battlefield: innocent people in other countries dying under U.S. fire, cities reduced to rubble, women and kids left with nothing.

Guilt hit him hard. Anger too.

Ehh, Adam figured the real kicker was probably coming home as a "war god" and not getting the hero's welcome—or paycheck—he thought he deserved. That's when the revenge kicked in.

He planned the explosion that shook the nation. Countless dead and injured, flames swallowing nearby buildings, debris raining down on innocent bystanders—it was brutal. And it wasn't a one-off.

Guns and bullets can kill, sure, but compared to bombs? Child's play. How could any American not be terrified of explosions?

In daily life, joking about guns or bombs isn't just taboo—it's a no-go. People take it seriously. Next thing you know, the FBI's at your door with the classic: "FBI, open up!" 😊

Firecrackers go off? Americans either hit the deck or sprint like their life depends on it. Habits like that don't form overnight—it's years in the making. Heck, it's even rubbed off on their allies abroad. Adam remembered a video from his past life: some African dignitary visiting an Eastern country, and when firecrackers popped, the guy's retreat was smoother than silk.

So yeah, in that moment earlier? Jessie thought it over and realized she might've jumped to "human bomb" too.

"Fine," she said, snapping her notebook shut and standing up. "I'll go talk to the others one by one."

Adam's explanation checked out, and she knew who he was. Before coming here, her boss had made it clear: soft touch only. A bestselling author and the youngest self-made billionaire? Not someone the FBI could just poke at without a good reason. This was routine anyway—Adam's early bomb hunch was a little weird, but everything else? Clean as a whistle.

Her boss sent her, the rookie, to keep it low-key—and, let's be real, her looks didn't hurt. A pretty face asking questions, even pushing a bit too far, wouldn't ruffle a guy like Adam. Classic move.

"Know what?" Adam stood too, leaning on his desk. He reached to take off glasses he wasn't even wearing, then just waved his hands instead, smirking at her. "You're doing great."

"Uh, okay?" Jessie stopped, giving him a puzzled look.

"I mean it," he said, straightening up and strutting over with a swagger that screamed I own this place. He leaned one hand on the desk, pointed at her with the other, and dropped his voice to a cheesy, flirty tone. "You're gorgeous, you know that?"

Jessie crossed her arms, staring him down silently.

"You're young, wild, full of life!" Adam was on a roll now, channeling Leonard's over-the-top flirting from another timeline. "How about I pick you up at eight? I'll give you a night you'll never forget~" 😊

He was curious—same words, same vibe, same target. Would Leonard's playbook actually work with someone else behind the wheel?

"Sounds tempting," Jessie said, flashing those killer dimples.

"But...?" Adam wasn't as clueless as Leonard would've been. He could already tell from her eyes this was going nowhere, so he dialed back the cheesiness and grinned normally.

"No 'but,'" she teased, her smile turning sly. "If you don't mind me bringing my bestie along, I'd love for you to give me—or, well, us—a night we'll never forget~"

"..."

Adam's mouth twitched. If this were Leonard, he'd blurt out, "Wait, really?!" all starry-eyed. But Adam? He wasn't that gullible. He smelled a trap instantly.

Her "bestie"? Eight-to-one odds he knew her...

"Just kidding!" he laughed, brushing it off. "You actually bought that? It's a dumb line my friend loves to use. I just wanted to see if it'd work. Guess I was right—it's a total flop."

"Oh, really?" Jessie's eyes screamed bullshit. "Which friend?"

"You wouldn't know him," Adam said, dodging. No way he was naming Leonard.

"Heh." Jessie smirked, like she'd just caught him making up a fake buddy. "Kate was right—you're a jerk."

With that, she spun around, yanked the door open, and stormed out.

"Kate..." Adam muttered, grimacing.

NYPD's finest flower knowing the FBI's rookie beauty? Not surprising. But Kate talking smack about him behind his back to Jessie? Yeah, that wasn't cool.

Ugh. Whatever she said, it definitely wasn't flattering.

He shouldn't have messed around with that tribute act. Now, thanks to this little stunt, whatever Kate made up about him was gospel in Jessie's eyes.

His rep was toast!

No way he was letting this slide.

Tonight, he'd confront Kate. No—she'd explain why she was badmouthing him behind his back.

Nobody screws with him and walks away unscathed.

Nobody!

Chapter 572: Evil Dragon Adam

At the medical center, nightfall.

In the locker room.

"Heading to Old Friends Bar tonight?"

Adam strolled in, changing out of his scrubs while tossing out the invite with a grin.

"Did I hear that right?"

Izzie let out an exaggerated gasp. "Is this Adam Duncan actually inviting us out?"

"You must've misheard."

Meredith chimed in. "No way that's happening!"

"Yep."

George nodded. "Looks like that bomb blasted us all into some hallucination."

Cristina, mid-change, just snickered off to the side.

"Drinks are on me tonight, all you can handle."

Adam shot a cheeky smile at Meredith.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Meredith huffed. "In your eyes, am I just some booze hound?"

"Heh."

It wasn't just Adam laughing now—everyone cracked up.

"Okay, fine, maybe I enjoy a little drink now and then."

Meredith's defense was weak under the chorus of laughter. "But do you think I'm after your measly bar tab? Can't I afford my own?"

"Of course you can. That's not the point."

Adam grinned. "The point is we all dodged death today. We have to celebrate. You can chip in if you want."

"Why should I?"

Meredith shot back, indignant.

"Hahaha!"

Another round of laughter erupted.

Meredith inherited Alice Grey's fortune, so she's got some cash—no surprise there.

As an intern, she pours most of her time and energy into work. That time she nicked a patient's heart with her fingernail was a brutal wake-up call, so she's been laying off the heavy drinking.

Otherwise, with her boozy habits, if she really let loose, her inheritance might not even cover it.

"Today was way too close."

George sighed once the laughter died down.

"Adam, how are you so good at this?"

Izzie turned to him, wide-eyed.

"Not as good as Meredith."

Adam smirked modestly. "I only sense danger when it's right in my face. But Meredith? She felt it hours before it even happened. What's that about? It's like she's got some next-level instinct—'the cicada senses the autumn breeze before it blows.' Pure, top-tier foresight!"

Hmm.

Okay, more accurately: the plot gods tipped off the main character...

After today, Adam's 100% sure—Meredith's the star of the show.

Cristina might get the Mary Sue treatment, but in terms of spotlight, she's no match for center-stage Meredith.

Why?

Simple. Cristina's got zero crisis radar.

"I'd rather have your knack."

Meredith grumbled. "Mine's all fuzzy—I couldn't even be sure. Otherwise, Cristina and the gang wouldn't have dragged me out of bed to the hospital. You? You just had a hunch, no clue what was up, and still stopped a critical patient from coming in."

"Heh."

Adam just smiled, saying nothing.

"Let's go! Old Friends Bar, here we come!"

Izzie finished changing and waved everyone on.

The group got up and headed out together.

Old Friends Bar is right next to the medical center—just a few steps, no car needed. They walked over.

"Joe really shouldn't have crossed you."

Outside the hospital, Cristina glanced across the street at Joe's bar, looking pretty dead, and drawled a comment.

Everyone followed her gaze.

"Adam, your grudge game's no joke."

Izzie sighed.

"Grudge? What grudge?"

Adam shook his head. "If I didn't want a spot super close to the hospital to hang with friends and save time, I wouldn't even think about it. This was just a side move."

"Your 'side move' tanked Joe's business."

Izzie winced. "I heard he's shutting down the bar he's run for over a decade, subleasing it, and starting over somewhere else. Who knows what he'll do next."

"Joe's a decent guy."

Meredith couldn't help but pipe up.

"So?"

Adam shrugged. "You save someone's life, and they stab you in the back. Not retaliating is already generous—am I supposed to buddy up and boost his business too?"

No one had a comeback.

They're Adam's colleagues; they know the whole story. Put themselves in his shoes—even if they hadn't saved Joe from that oncoming car way back when, as his attending, they'd still be pissed.

Joe handed off a spot in that famous "stillness surgery" to someone else when it should've been theirs. They wouldn't stomach it either.

At the very least, they'd stop hitting up his bar.

No matter how friendly Joe's chubby face was, it'd probably just tick them off.

Bars are for drinking, unwinding, and de-stressing—why go somewhere that'd stress you out?

"Why overthink it?"

Adam laughed. "I didn't target him. It's just business—market economy, fair competition. If he's got the skills, he can win his old customers back."

"..."

Everyone's lips twitched.

Fair competition? Seriously?

A loaded guy like you "competing" with a small-timer like Joe? That's laughable!

Even if Joe's a business genius with years of experience and killer new ideas, he's no match for your deep pockets. You'd either buy him out or copy his vibe, undercut his prices, and crush him.

And since Joe ticked you off, he's not even getting the "join me" offer. No chance to work for you.

The second you made your move, Joe's bar was toast.

"With Joe's place gone, Old Friends Bar will own this area's bar scene."

Cristina side-eyed Adam. "You're not gonna sneakily jack up prices later, are you?"

"Gasp!"

Izzie sucked in a breath, dramatic as ever. "She's right! The brave dragon-slaying kid always turns into the evil dragon in the end. Monopoly's the poison that corrupts the hero!"

"Then I'm drinking big tonight."

Meredith jumped in. "Gotta get my money's worth before Adam turns into that dragon and starts bleeding us bar-goers dry without us noticing."

"Without us noticing?"

Cristina drawled. "Even if he sucked your blood right out in the open, what could you do? We're fine—we can skip drinking. But you? Booze is your lifeline."

"What do you mean, my lifeline?"

Meredith's protest was half-hearted. "Okay, fine, I like a drink. But I can just buy my own and sip at home!"

"Come on, solo?"

Izzie cut straight to the chase.

"..."

Meredith had nothing to say.

Same drink, triple the price at a bar compared to a store nearby—and people still line up, bribe the bouncer, just to get in. Is it really about the booze?

Nope.

It's about the vibe—hanging out, having a blast with friends!

Like that old saying: without limits, the flashiest stuff always boils down to sex, gambling, and drugs.

Booze? It's the wingman for fun! 😊

"Of course I won't."

Adam cut in with a laugh. "That's how typical capitalists play. I'm not some money-grubber. The bar's just a casual side thing—uh, I mean, a spot for friends to chill. Do I look like I need the cash?"

Hmm.

Almost slipped up there.

Sure, Adam won't hike prices.

But once Old Friends Bar becomes the only decent joint near the medical center, the foot traffic's gonna skyrocket.

For someone like him, looking to network in the medical world, traffic's gold!

If everyone shows up, vibes with the place, and sees Adam the owner as a pal, his path in the medical field? Wide open, baby.

Chapter 573: The Versailles Life of the Rich

Old Friends Bar.

"Dr. Duncan!"

"Dr. Duncan!"

"Dr. Duncan!"

As soon as Adam stepped inside, everyone who saw him greeted him warmly. 😊

This morning's explosion incident was, of course, the hot topic of gossip.

If it weren't for Adam, the consequences could've been disastrous. Thanks to the little nurses—his loyal fans—who analyzed everything step-by-step, the story had spread like wildfire.

Naturally, his colleagues at the medical center, still shaken up, were extra friendly toward him. Totally understandable!

"Let's raise a glass to Dr. Duncan!"

"To Dr. Duncan!"

Someone started the cheer, and the crowd eagerly joined in.

"To good drinks and good times, everyone!"

Adam wasn't about to say no. He clinked glasses with them, took a sip, said a quick word, and headed over to his friends' spot.

There were two tables:

Chandler, Monica, Rachel, Ross, Phoebe, and Joey were at one, joined by an extra—Ant-Man.

Emmm.

This was Phoebe's new boyfriend. He looked a lot like the guy from the Ant-Man movie, just a younger, greener version.

At the other table sat Matthew, Lily, Ted, Barney, and Robin, plus a teenage girl.

She seemed to be Ted's little sister.

Then there was Cristina's crew, who Adam had seated at a separate table on the other side.

Three tables, three main friend groups in Adam's New York life.

After some awkward past gatherings where everyone was crammed together, Adam had wisely spread them out across different corners this time—no chaos, no embarrassment.

Cristina's group hung out together every day anyway, so after setting them up, Adam didn't linger. He headed straight for Chandler and Monica's table.

"Chandler, hang out for a bit, then take Monica home," Adam said. "The first three months of pregnancy are super important, you know."

"I know," Chandler nodded.

"Don't worry," Monica chimed in with a grin. "I'm not that fragile. Besides, you have no idea how obsessed Chandler is with this kid already. Now that he's the boss, he's ordering me around all the time!"

"And do you actually listen?" Adam teased, cutting right to the chase.

"Of course I do!" Monica exclaimed. "Ask Chandler if you don't believe me!"

"When we agree, she listens to me," Chandler deadpanned. "When we don't, I listen to her."

"Hahaha!"

The whole table burst into laughter. 😄

"Phoebe, who's this?" Adam asked, nodding toward the young Ant-Man sitting next to her.

"This is my boyfriend, Mike!" Phoebe beamed, introducing them. "Mike, this is Adam, the one I've been telling you about."

"Hey."

"Hey."

Adam and Mike exchanged a quick greeting. "Mike, you into Marvel comics?" Adam asked with a smile.

"Uh..." Mike paused. "I've seen a little."

"You should check them out," Adam said. "There's this superhero called Ant-Man who controls tons of ants, flies around, digs underground, saves humanity—the works. Phoebe once said that decades from now, ants will rule the Earth. Maybe you could be that Ant-Man!"

"Wow!" Phoebe clapped dramatically, as always. "Great idea! Mike, next Halloween, let's do it—you be superhero Ant-Man, and I'll be your flying ant sidekick!"

"..."

Adam's lip twitched.

Really, Phoebe?

Does she even know how Ant-Man controls the ants?

Classic Phoebe, showing off her love life in front of everyone. 😊

"Sounds good," Mike said, gazing at his gorgeous, quirky older girlfriend with pure adoration. "I'll check out Ant-Man's story. Next year, our Halloween combo's gonna crush everyone!"

"Yeah!" Phoebe cheered, laughing her head off.

Adam exchanged a look with Monica and the others. They could all see it—relief and happiness in each other's eyes.

Phoebe, the wildest, weirdest, and most troubled of the group, might've finally found her happy ending.

No one knew Mike's exact age, and it'd be rude to ask who was older between him and Phoebe. But Adam had a hunch it was Phoebe.

A handsome rich-kid boyfriend who doted on her endlessly? That's the dream ending so many single women fantasize about!

From now on, when Phoebe tried pulling her old sob stories for sympathy, Adam and the gang could finally tease her without holding back—no more worrying about hurting her feelings.

Emmm.

Her routine used to be equal parts annoying and heartbreaking.

Take Rachel's baby shower, for example.

Monica and Phoebe were in charge, with Phoebe handling the guest list.

But she forgot to invite Rachel's mom—the most important person!

When Rachel flipped out, Phoebe just whimpered, "I don't have a mom, so I forget sometimes..."

Stuff like that happened a lot.

Adam and the others got it—Phoebe craved attention, and this was her way of getting it.

But after a while, it got old.

Now, though? Things were different.

Next time Phoebe tried that line, she'd get hit with a "Oh, come on," "Give it a rest," or "Save it"—no mercy!

If she got upset, no biggie—she could cry it out in the arms of her superhero Ant-Man boyfriend.

Worst case, she'd drag Mike into some villain arc, plotting to take over the world with him.

Hey, when people have a purpose and direction, they stop overthinking random nonsense, right?

"So, who's watching Emma?" Adam asked, turning to Rachel.

"My mom," Rachel replied, lounging back comfortably.

It'd been over a month since she gave birth to Emma.

She'd thought labor was the hardest part, but nope—taking care of a baby was just as brutal.

It felt like Emma's crying was always echoing in her ears.

No wonder so many new moms get postpartum depression!

Rachel had figured she'd try parenting solo for a bit, but that plan crumbled in days.

Thank goodness for her mom.

Moms really are the best. ❤️👍

Emmm.

Mrs. Green had hired a top-notch nanny for her.

Here's how it usually went:

"I miss Emma! Bring her over for a cuddle," Mrs. Green would say, all dolled up and elegant, clapping her hands.

The nanny would deliver a clean, happy Emma for some grandma bonding time—pure joy.

Once Mrs. Green had her fill, or if Emma got hungry, spit up, or started fussing, she'd hand her back to the waiting nanny like, "Take her to the bedroom, clean her up, and keep it quiet."

Sometimes, Mrs. Green would even "thoughtfully" leave the house to shop or stroll, letting Emma wail to her heart's content—out of sight, out of mind.

After her divorce from Leonard, Mrs. Green had walked away with half his life's work—nearly even chopping his beloved sailboat in two just to spite him.

Now she was truly living the dream: financially free, chilling, and doting on her granddaughter.

People were jealous—and honestly, who wouldn't be?

Rachel used to judge this rich-person parenting style, thinking it weakened the bond between parent and child.

I mean, raising a kid through all the messy stuff versus this hands-off "cloud parenting"—how could they compare?

But...

It's kinda nice

Chapter 574: Chasing Dreams in Showbiz

At the Old Friends Bar.

I chatted with Rachel and the gang about Emma for a bit. 😊

Then the conversation shifted to buying houses.

"Adam, we're planning to buy a place in the suburbs," Monica said, rubbing her belly with a smile.

"Sounds awesome!" I grinned back. "Need any help?"

"Nah," Chandler chimed in. "We've still got months before the baby arrives. Plenty of time to find a house we love."

"You gonna save a loft for Joey?" I teased.

"Yep!" Chandler nodded with a laugh.

"Joey?" I turned to him, noticing how touched he looked. "How've you been lately? Found anyone special yet? If you don't hurry up, you'll end up as the weird, lonely uncle in Emma's eyes!"

"Come on!" Joey protested loudly. "I'm Joey Tribbiani—Emma's godfather, TV star, and easily the coolest uncle ever. No way I'm some creepy loner!"

"Coolest, huh?" Monica raised an eyebrow. "You sure about that?"

I caught Joey's glance and gave him a smug little smile—yep, totally saying, "That's right, it's me!" He couldn't even argue back. 😊

"Rachel, what about you and Ross?" I asked, turning to her. "Why not buy near Monica and Chandler? That way, your kids can play together outside—front yard, backyard, the whole happy life vibe."

"Totally!" Monica jumped in eagerly. "Rachel, doesn't that sound great?"

"I don't know..." Rachel hesitated. "I kinda like the city life—tall buildings, convenience. Commuting from the suburbs every day sounds exhausting."

"But the city's no place for kids," Monica countered. "Cars everywhere, strangers all over—would you really feel safe letting them run around?"

"I think the suburbs are nice," Ross added. "We grew up there, didn't we?"

"Let's see," Rachel said, brushing it off.

Her job pretty much tied her to the cutting edge of fashion, and the big city was non-negotiable. If she could, she'd probably move straight to Paris!

"Here's my take," I said with a grin. "Everyone should buy in the same suburb neighborhood. Phoebe, Joey—you could join in too! I'd even grab a house there myself and pop by when I've got time. It'd be so lively! Otherwise, if we all drift apart with our own busy lives, we'll barely see each other. That'd be such a shame."

"Nah, I'm good," Joey said, throwing an arm around Chandler. "Chandler's saving me a loft to crash in forever, so I don't need to buy anything."

"Huh?" I blinked at him, surprised. "What's on your mind?"

With Joey's cash, snagging a suburban house would be a breeze. And his job didn't chain him to the city. If he wasn't planning to buy, it probably meant he wouldn't live there even if he did—why let it sit empty and rack up property taxes?

Everyone else gave him a curious look too.

"Just had a random thought," Joey said, clapping his hands and licking his lips. "Rachel and Ross got married and had a kid. Chandler and Monica are married with a baby on the way. Phoebe's all lovey-dovey with Mike. And here I am... kinda on my own."

"Joey..." Rachel, Monica, and Phoebe said softly, their voices full of sympathy.

"I've been thinking lately," Joey continued with a small smile. "Doesn't seem like I'll find my other half anytime soon—not like you guys, building your happy little families. So what happens when you all move on? What do I do then? Felt a bit lost, you know? But I've figured it out now. Chandler and Monica have that loft for me—it's my safety net. So why not use this moment to chase my dreams?"

"Your dreams?" Chandler asked, wide-eyed. "You mean..."

"Yep!" Joey grinned. "You all know I'm an actor. Dropped out of high school to start acting, and all this time, I've wanted to be like Al Pacino..."

"You're not doing too bad," I teased. "That goal? You could've half-nailed it years ago!"

Everyone burst out laughing. 😊

"What?" Mike, the Ant-Man guy, looked confused.

Phoebe quickly filled him in—how Joey almost became Al Pacino's butt double back in the day. Mike cracked up too.

"Stop laughing!" Joey chuckled along but waved us off. "I mean real Al Pacino—not his stand-in rear! I've been grinding for years, but I'm just spinning my wheels in New York's TV scene. Forget being a top movie star like Pacino—I'm barely a blip among TV actors. Without *Days of Our Lives*, I'd go from lead to nobody overnight. I've tried switching things up, but this isn't Hollywood. Opportunities here are slim, and they don't come my way."

New York and LA—America's East and West cultural hubs. New York's got Broadway, LA's got Hollywood. Broadway might sound fancier, but Hollywood's the one taking over the world. The resources and chances they offer? Night and day.

"Back then, I had you guys," Joey said, looking at us sincerely. "Couldn't bear to leave. Plus, I didn't have the guts to ditch everything and start over in Hollywood. But now... I want to give it a shot."

"Joey..." Rachel and the girls sounded reluctant.

"You sure about this?" I warned. "Sticking to TV's not a bad gig—decent fame, less cutthroat drama. Land a hit show, ride it out, save up, and boom, financial freedom. After that, you could quit acting and do whatever! As for a partner, take your time. Maybe tomorrow you'll meet someone, fall hard, and buy a house across from Chandler's. 'Best friends across the street, love of your life by your side'—dream life, right? You've built up your network here in New York's scene. Ditching it all for Hollywood on a whim? Two outcomes: either you blow up, skyrocket to fame, but get too busy to stay close to Chandler and the gang... or you crash and burn, can't hack it in LA, come back to nothing, and end up middle-aged and alone in that loft. Two paths, three possibilities. Think it over."

"..." Joey froze.

Dreams are grand.

Reality bites.

The fire he'd just lit for chasing his acting dreams? My words doused it cold.

"I'll think about it... yeah, I'll think some more..." he mumbled.

Chapter 575: Short Is the Original Sin

Old Friends Bar.

Adam's words hit Joey hard, making him second-guess himself again.

The risks involved? Yeah, those had always been Joey's biggest worry.

He couldn't shake the memory of playing a cool doctor who suddenly got killed off. After that, he couldn't find work for ages, forced to drop his "status" and claw his way back up from nameless side roles. Brutal times.

Back then, his acting career tanked so bad he lost his health insurance.

He ended up with a hernia—pain so bad he could barely stand it—but surgery out-of-pocket? Way too pricey. He toughed it out until he landed another gig, got insurance again, and finally went under the knife.

That kind of misery sticks with you. 😞

"Joey, when you dream of being Al Pacino, is it for the fame or the fortune?"

Adam decided to check in on the last single guy in their friend group.

Emmm.

Sure, Chandler and the gang considered Adam part of the crew, and he was single too, but when they talked about "single dogs," Joey never lumped Adam in with him.

"I don't even know," Joey said, scratching his head. "Maybe both?"

"Hmm." Adam nodded. "Honest answer. If you're chasing fame and fortune in this acting game, I don't think the Al Pacino route's for you."

"What? Why not?" Joey blinked, shocked. "You might not know this, but Al Pacino's, like, the idol in our circle. Tons of people dream of being the next him!"

"That's just rigid thinking," Adam pointed out. "You're Joey, not Al Pacino, right? And if everyone's trying to do the same thing, why follow the crowd? You're Joey Tribbiani—you should find the path that fits you best."

"The path that fits me?" Joey looked totally lost. "What path?"

"TV shows, dude. American TV," Adam said with a grin. "I get it—in your world, movie actors look down on TV actors, and TV actors are jealous of movie stars, feeling like they're less-than."

But is that really true?

Movies do have bigger budgets and production value, no doubt. In the short term, they bring actors more fame and cash than TV.

But here's what you're missing:

A hit TV show can keep going forever. It digs into the characters' personalities and growth from every angle—it's like a living, legendary biography.

Can a movie's runtime do that?

Ten, twenty years later, new viewers watch those old, fancy films and go, 'The effects suck, and who's that actor?'

They might look him up, see he was huge back in the day, say 'Oh,' and move on.

Half the time, they don't even bother checking.

No matter how great a movie actor's skills are, the story and runtime limit how much they can show.

Sometimes, short is the original sin.

But a mega-long, iconic TV show?

Every inch longer makes it stronger!

With enough time and rich, real stories—pulled from the hot topics of the day—it stays appealing for decades, even generations.

It's like a history lesson, a snapshot of that era's vibe, preserved in video form.

The next generation watches and pictures these vivid, three-dimensional characters—some might even feel like they really lived.

People get curious about their stories.

That kind of fame? It blows movie stars out of the water, doesn't it?"

"Whoa, he's got a point!" Phoebe piped up. "I didn't know filming TV shows had perks like that!"

"But it's gotta be an iconic show," Joey said, shaking his head.

"Nope," Adam countered with a smile. "An iconic show's not enough. It's gotta be an iconic sitcom. Humor and laughs don't fade as fast.

Plus, classic sitcoms are all about the characters' everyday lives—perfect for fleshing them out from every angle, making them feel real.

That's character-driven storytelling.

Other plot-driven iconic shows don't have that edge.

I've only talked about how, over time, a hit TV show can bring you fame way beyond movies.

But what about the money?"

"Money?" Joey froze. "You're not saying a classic TV show could out-earn movies, are you? No way!"

"Why not?" Adam shot back. "In showbiz, fame and fortune go hand in hand. If a classic show gives you bigger, longer-lasting fame, why wouldn't it bring bigger profits too?"

"But..." Joey stammered, still stuck on old-school thinking.

"How do you make your income?" Adam asked.

"Paychecks, ads, live gigs—mostly those three," Joey listed.

"Nah, you're forgetting something: merchandise," Adam said. "Everything we're talking about—fame, fortune—it all revolves around a classic TV show. That's the key.

Paychecks, ads, and gigs are short-term. But royalties from a show's merchandise? That's a steady goldmine."

"Merch? Come on, that's a joke," Joey laughed. "That's the juiciest cut—the studios never share that with actors!"

"Why not?" Adam grinned. "Picture this: a classic sitcom airs, and everyone falls in love with the main cast. A few seasons in, swap out one actor, and fans riot—ratings tank. Swap two, and the show's toast. But if the whole cast teams up and pushes the studio for a merch cut, what then?"

"Hiss!" Joey sucked in a breath. "It'd be a standoff—either the show dies, or the studio caves. Probably the latter, 'cause no one's dumb enough to ditch a cash cow. If the cast walks, the show's done, and all that future merch money's gone too."

"But only if the cast can stick together," Chandler cut in, shaking his head. "Studios love to divide and conquer. Convince one to break, and the rest fall apart. People are selfish—it's tough!"

"That's where someone's gotta step up and see the big picture," Adam said, smirking. "Joey could lay it all out for everyone, even take a pay cut to rally the team. Trust me, a little less now for years of merch royalties? It's a no-brainer."

The yearly merch haul from a classic sitcom is beyond what you can imagine.

Joey, you dreamed of being Al Pacino 'cause you heard he raked in tens of millions per movie, right?

But if you lock in with a classic sitcom this way, you could kick back, not work a day, and still pull in more each year than those movie bigshots you envy—and they're busting their butts for it!

You'd be crushing them yearly, just chilling.

That's the real winner's life!"

"No way, really?"

Everyone turned to stare, jaws dropping. 😳

"Trust me, it's legit," Adam said with a calm smile.

In the future—twenty years from now—the Friends crew would still be pocketing \$20 million each per year from royalties. Can you even imagine?

By then, how's Al Pacino supposed to compete with Joey?

Who's envying who?

Chapter 576: I'm Not Picking on Anyone

At the Old Friends Bar.

"Wow, you're making me wanna jump on board!" Phoebe exclaimed. 😊

"Who wouldn't?" Joey said with a wry smile. "It sounds great and all, but there's one big problem—where's a show like that even at? I've been acting for years and never heard of anything like it."

"Ha! Lucky you!" I grinned. "Did you forget who I am?"

"Cut it out," Joey said, shaking his head. "I know you're a big-shot writer, but writing novels and scripting a show? Totally different beasts. And to pull off what you're talking about, even the best screenwriter needs a ton of luck."

Writing a novel just takes imagination and decent wordsmithing. But scripting? Every line's gotta be filmable. Two different worlds, man.

Fancy descriptions sound cool on paper, but how do you shoot them? A "devilish grin" ends up as some goofy smirk on screen—more awkward than charming. Unless you slap a voiceover calling it "devilishly charming," but that's a whole other vibe.

"You'll see soon enough," I said with a sly smirk.

Emmm. Note: This one's the real deal—proper devilish charm. 😊

This world's already a mashup of TV universes, so naturally, there's no Friends—no iconic show like that exists here. Same goes for classics like *How I Met Your Mother* or *The Big Bang Theory*. Nada.

Back in the day, I couldn't be bothered to mess with that stuff. Didn't need the cash. Once money hits a certain level, it's just numbers. I legit don't care about it anymore—don't even know how much I've got and don't bother checking. This ain't some fake "I'm above money" flex while secretly wanting to rake it in. Nah, after you've got enough, it's peanuts compared to boosting stats like endurance or wisdom through the system.

Can money buy you more years? Stamina? Smarts? Nope. But the reverse? Oh yeah, totally works. Easy choice.

But now, with Chandler and Monica expecting a kid and moving out of New York—and me being the godfather—I figured I'd whip up a little gift. What's better than setting them up for financial freedom from day one?

That's right! I'm bringing Friends to the Friends world. 🤖

Of course, Rachel and the crew are past the age to play themselves. They've kept up appearances pretty well, but you can tell they've lost that fresh glow from a few years back. Over 30 now—Westerners bloom early and fade fast. Like Rachel's sister Amy once bluntly put it about Joey: "Oh, you're that guy from *Days of Our Lives*! Geez, they really cake the powder on you, huh?" Youth slips away—no amount of makeup, lighting, or filters can fully hide it.

They can't act in it anymore, but it's their story. They'll get a cut of the adaptation fees. As their buddy, I'm not about to shortchange them. Not some crazy \$20 million-a-year deal, but a few mil each annually for doing zilch—no filming, no fuss. Who wouldn't love that? For me, it's pocket change.

Handing out cash straight-up feels weird, though. This way, it's smooth and makes sense.

Plan's simple: hire a top-tier writing team as my ghostwriters, hand them the character breakdowns and story outline, oversee a few episodes 'til it's rolling, then step back and let it run. The profits? Way beyond any investment. Ten small fortunes a year, easy-peasy. A legit cash cow.

But honestly, I don't care about the money. Too much of it doesn't guarantee happiness. Chandler and Monica were happiest when they were middle-of-the-road—comfortable, in love, no worries. If Joey wasn't itching to hit Hollywood with his future up in the air, and if the gang didn't have kids on the way (gotta protect that daughter from sleazy sugar daddies!), I wouldn't even bother. Being a godfather's tough work, man. 😊

Oh, and in my Friends version, that Rachel-Joey fling? Gone. I'll crunch the last three seasons into one—eight seasons total, nice and tight. Joey knows this story inside out—he could slide into co-producer, assistant director, or assistant writer. Boom, instant upgrade from actor to big-shot creative. If he still wants to act, those shiny titles and connections will land him roles way easier than starting from scratch in Hollywood. A million times better.

We chatted a bit more, then I walked Chandler and Monica out. Monica's in her first trimester—gotta be extra careful. She'd already been hanging with the crew for a while before I showed up.

"Hey, you guys should link up with Matthew and Lily more," I suggested. "Once they're hitched, they'll move to the suburbs too. I bet you'd hit it off—tons to talk about."

I'm always playing matchmaker for my favorite couples. If Rachel's not keen, and Phoebe and Joey aren't heading out soon, Chandler and Monica might feel lonely out there by themselves. I remember Matthew and Lily snagging a suburban place after their wedding—total newbies, got scammed by a shady realtor into buying some dump with a slanted floor. Houses are a big deal here; you can't just swap 'em out. They made the best of it, though—Matthew used the tilt to skateboard with the kids.

But now? No need for that mess. I'll hook Matthew and Lily up with a spot near Chandler's neighborhood. Anyone tries to rip them off, they'll have to answer to me—a billionaire buddy's no joke! They used to run in different circles, barely crossed paths. But once they're married, raising kids next door, with me as the glue? Two awesome couples like that are bound to become tight.

"It's kinda my wishful thinking," I added with a grin.

"You mean them?" Monica asked, her face twisting weirdly as she pointed.

"Huh?" I followed her gaze and winced.

Over at Matthew's table, there was a giant glass of beer plopped in the center. The crew was gathered around, watching Lily hoist it up. Matthew, her fiancé, checked his watch like a pro timer.

"Go!" he shouted.

Lily chugged—straight down the hatch.

"Drink! Drink!"

"Chug it!"

Ted and the gang cheered her on.

Gulp, gulp. No breaks—she drained it in one go.

"Ten seconds!" Matthew roared, laughing.

Burp! Lily slammed the glass down like a champ, grinning wide. "See that, you losers? That's how you drink!"

Ted and the others pointed at her, hyping up the crowd—behold, the Beer Goddess!

"They're not married yet," I said, pivoting fast. "It'll settle down after the wedding... or once they're house-hunting and planning kids..."

"Lily's still so young and wild," Monica said with a sigh.

"I'm sure we'll find stuff to bond over," Chandler chuckled. "Just hope they tie the knot and move out soon—keep us company."

"Won't be long," I said, smiling. "Few months 'til their wedding. And with how clingy they are, once they let their guard down post-honeymoon? Kid's coming quick. Trust me, that pre-pregnancy checkup phase you're in? That's just their daily routine."

Ted's endless apartment rules—like "no messing around on the kitchen floor"—exist for a reason. Matthew and Lily get in the mood and start going at it right in front of him. Total dog-food factory. 🐕

"Hear that?" Monica shot Chandler a side-eye as he clicked his tongue. "That's their baseline. Stop acting like I'm the one pushing you."

"I didn't say anything," Chandler mumbled, rubbing his shaky legs with a weak laugh.

I saw Monica and Chandler off, then swung by Lily the Beer Goddess's table.

Chapter 577: Never Be a Guarantor, Ever

Old Friends Bar.

"Adam!"

As soon as he walked over, Lily and the gang greeted him with big smiles. 😊

"Wine god, huh, Lily?" Adam teased.

"Oh, this is nothing," Lily shot back, smirking proudly.

"Ted, gonna introduce us?" Adam nodded toward the extra woman at the table.

"How'd you know Heather's my sister..." Ted started, then glared at Lily. "Wait, never mind. Lily totally spilled it, didn't she?"

Lily's a total blabbermouth—no sense of secrecy whatsoever.

Tell her a secret, and the whole world knows it a second later.

Tell her to keep quiet, and she might just explode from holding it in.

It's a talent, really.

Emmm.

Her little auntie vibe must've rubbed off perfectly.

"Not this time!" Lily protested, sounding wronged.

"She's right—it wasn't Lily who told me," Adam said with a chuckle. "You two look a lot alike."

"Really?" Ted's face lit up. "Okay, Adam, meet my sister Heather. Heather, this is Adam."

"Hey, Heather," Adam said, flashing a friendly grin.

"Hey, Adam," Heather replied, then turned to whine at her brother. "Ted, you've got all these cool friends—how come you never told me about them?"

"You know why," Ted quipped, but when Heather glared, he threw up his hands in surrender. "Okay, okay! I get it—you're grown up, mature now. I won't nag anymore. See? I'm introducing you now. Adam's a doctor, though, so he's got nothing to do with your finance gig."

"Who says?" Heather shot back. "Doctors are prime clients. Meeting one's like adding a solid connection. And Adam's clearly not your average doctor, right?"

"How do you know that?" Ted couldn't help himself.

"Oh, please!" Heather rolled her eyes at her brother. "Does a regular doctor walk in and get swarmed with cheers like that?"

"Uh..." Ted gaped at his so-called "useless" little sister.

Was this the same girl who used to swipe stuff, fail at everything, party like it was her job, and couldn't even figure out if a door was push or pull?

Since when did she get so sharp?

My little sis is finally growing up, Ted thought, eyes full of pride. 😊

"Looks like I made the right call after all," he said.

"Oh?" Adam slid into a seat next to Robin, curious. "What'd you do?"

"Heather's moving to New York to hustle," Lily jumped in, finally getting a word in. "She needed someone to co-sign her lease here."

"And Ted wasn't on board at first?" Adam guessed, piecing it together.

Ted's sister probably wasn't the reliable type.

Co-signing? That's just a fancy way of saying "guarantor."

In his past life, Adam had seen this play out too many times. He totally got why even family asking for a guarantee was a hard no.

If the other person bails or flakes out, you're stuck with their debt.

And that happens way more often than you'd think.

Adam had this classmate—super stand-up guy, always there to help a friend, no questions asked.

A few years after graduation, one of his best buds hit him up: "Hey, I need some cash to tide over my business—just temporary."

It was a big chunk of change.

The classmate didn't have that kind of money, but his friend begged. The guy was legit—ran a solid business, always thriving.

For him, the amount was pocket change, just a quick turnover. Made sense.

So, under pressure, the classmate borrowed from relatives, friends, even local lenders in their village and handed it over.

Emmm.

The loan was in his friend's name, with proper IOUs signed and everything—but since he'd vouched for it, he was the guarantor, no question.

No one knew his buddy otherwise.

Then the nightmare kicked in.

His friend took the cash and—poof—blew it all gambling, or so the rumors went. Business tanked, and the guy bolted out of town, claiming he'd "work to pay it back."

One year, two years, three years—nothing. Couldn't even find him. Every phone call? "I'm trying."

Adam's classmate? Screwed.

He could stall the family and friends with apologies, but the lenders? They demanded repayment, fast, or the interest would snowball 'til he was buried for life.

Years of savings? Gone to his buddy's bets. Broke and desperate, he worked his butt off—but regular jobs can't outpace debt like that.

Three years in, he'd barely covered the interest.

His fiancée? Dumped him, no surprise.

Relatives and friends wouldn't stop griping.

He was under thirty, once a fit, sunny guy—three years later, he'd dropped dozens of pounds, face weathered and hollow. Not quite "ruined for the rest of his days" dramatic, but close.

The guy just went numb.

By the time Adam crossed over, he'd heard the classmate had given up. He flat-out told the lenders, "I'll pay the principal, but interest? Nope. No money, just my life—take it."

They were locals, knew him well. Seeing him pushed to the edge, they shrugged—three years of high interest was plenty, and pushing more would just be a write-off. They settled for the principal.

But even that? At his earning pace, no food, no sleep—ten years minimum.

This was a good dude—great personality, talented, landed a solid job right out of school, dated a gorgeous girl from college they were about to marry. Everyone envied him.

Now? One act of kindness, and he's in the gutter.

That's the danger of being a guarantor.

You never know what wild, uncontrollable mess the other person might pull.

Back to Ted's sister, Heather, needing a co-signer for her New York lease.

In the States, it's not just a signature—they want someone with a salary dozens of times the monthly rent and five years of spotless credit as backup.

If it were just unpaid rent, Ted could handle it.

But what if Heather trashed the place or caused some disaster? That's not something Ted could easily fix.

Judging by his vibe, she's probably a walking red flag.

Him hesitating? Totally fair.

"Oh, come on!" Ted groaned. "Can you blame me? She took six years to bounce between three colleges, wrecked two cars, had a five-day marriage, and spent nine weeks living in a tree.

Last time she said she'd transfer to NYU, she sold my TV and couch on interview day—TV alone was worth two grand—then jetted off to Spain for some concert with the cash!"

"Hey!" Heather yelled. "I thought they were gonna chop that tree down—I was saving the planet!"

"No one was chopping that tree," Ted said, exasperated.

"..."

Adam bit back a laugh, struggling to keep it together.

Heather and Phoebe were kinda alike—both eco-warriors pulling the most ridiculous stunts.

Nine weeks in a tree?

Emmm.

She might just outdo Phoebe.

Yeah, definitely not reliable.

Chapter 578: Cutting Ties

At the Old Friends Bar.

"But I didn't know!" Heather's face was red with anger.

"Okay, okay," Ted said, realizing he shouldn't keep pushing this in front of me and the gang. His little sis deserved some dignity, after all. "My bad. That was back then. You and Barney taught me a lesson, proved you're mature enough. Didn't I even make you a co-signer?"

"This has to do with Barney?" I asked, my expression turning weird.

If it were me, forget letting my little sis Teddy near Barney—I'd beat him to a pulp the second he stepped into her line of sight, send him straight to the hospital, no questions asked.

"It's not what you think!" Ted rushed to explain. "At first, I was super strict about keeping Barney away. Whenever Heather visited, I wouldn't even tell him, just to make sure he didn't try anything..."

He trailed off, his face scrunching up in disgust. Probably remembering how every Christmas, when the family sent him cards, Barney would hover behind him, serenading Heather's photo:

"Take off her pants, yank down mine, under the mistletoe, make her lose her mind. Hot Heather, Hot Heather, I'll give her the full-service ride!"

And that wasn't all—Barney had a whole playlist of self-made hits. Stuff like: "I wanna see her fresh from the womb, kneeling, waiting for me," or "Ted's got a little sis, getting spicier by the day, I wanna meet her and..." Ted would roll his eyes, elbow him when it got unbearable, but his pushback was weak at best.

"You should've trusted me," Barney finally spoke up, breaking his silence. "I just talk big, but if I promise you something, I won't do it."

"Ha!" I couldn't help but laugh.

"What's so funny?" Barney snapped, annoyed.

"Everyone who gets it, gets it," I said, giving him a look.

"This place sucks. McLaren's is way better," Barney stalled, switching to complaints.

"That's 'cause everyone here knows you," I shot back, cutting to the chase.

Barney—my so-called friend—had landed in the hospital with some nasty STD before, and it spread like wildfire around the medical center. Most folks at Old Friends Bar were doctors and nurses from there. Even if a newbie didn't recognize him, a quick whisper about his history sent them running. Sure, precautions meant it wasn't a huge deal, but it was gross—and risky. Barney wasn't hot enough to make anyone overlook that. No wonder he kept striking out here and wanted to bolt.

"Barney and Heather did teach me something," Ted said, trying to smooth things over. "I should've trusted them."

"Oh? What happened?" I asked with a grin.

"So here's the deal..." Ted started, but Lily jumped in, spilling the whole story in one breathless rush before grabbing Matthew's beer and chugging it.

Turns out, when Heather came to town this time, Ted tried to keep it from Barney. But he blabbed to loose-lipped Lily. Naturally, Barney showed up at the apartment and met Heather. At dinner, she mentioned wanting to break into New York's finance scene. Barney whipped out his fancy Goliath Bank exec card. Ted freaked, trying to stop it—he knew Barney's MO. But Heather insisted, so Ted sent Lily to babysit. Big mistake. Lily's surprise check at Barney's office found them disheveled, looking like they'd just thrown their clothes back on.

Ted flipped out, chewed Heather out hardcore. But—plot twist—it was a setup. Barney and Heather knew Lily would come and blab, so they staged it to teach Ted a lesson.

"Ha!" I laughed again after hearing it all. "Guess Barney's got some limits. With that STD still lingering, if he'd gone too far, that'd be next-level messed up."

"What?!" Heather jolted. "Barney's got an STD?!"

"You didn't know?" I feigned shock. "He had it before—hasn't hit six months yet, so it's not confirmed clear. But no worries, you didn't do anything, right?"

"You've got an STD?!" Heather shot up, roaring at Barney.

"Chill," I said, 'comforting' her. "It's not contagious through casual contact. Look, we're all sitting here with him, no problem."

Heather's face went from green to white, glaring daggers at Barney, who kept winking at her desperately.

"Heather, what's up?" Ted asked. If he couldn't see something was off by now, he'd be a total idiot.

"Oh no," Lily gasped, catching on instantly.

"Barney Stinson!!!" Ted growled, teeth clenched, glaring at him. "You lied to me!!!"

"Alright, alright," Barney threw up his hands, giving up the act. "We didn't lie—story's just not over. What Lily saw was fake; we didn't do anything then, just messing with you. What happened after doesn't count, so it's not a lie."

"After doesn't count?!" Ted exploded. "You're unbelievable!"

"Yeah, Barney, that's too far!" Lily and Matthew piled on.

"Told you," I sighed. "I wasn't wrong—everyone gets it. Barney's got no principles when temptation's involved. He swore to Matthew he wouldn't mess with his career, too. Trusting him not to go after your sister is like trusting a cat not to eat fish or a dog to skip meat."

"You're right!" Robin said, shuddering with disgust. Good thing she'd kept Barney away from her little sis, Katie, last time—who knows what could've happened.

"Heather, don't worry..." Ted finished yelling at Barney and turned to his pale sister. "It might be fine..." He looked at me pleadingly. "Adam?"

"Come with me," I said, shaking my head as I stood. "Let's get you checked at the hospital."

"Yes, yes!" Ted jumped up, supporting a wobbly Heather.

Lily, Matthew, and even Barney stood too.

"Stay back! Keep away from my sister!" Ted barked.

"Barney, you crossed a line this time," Matthew said, dead serious. "That's Ted's little sister!"

"Seriously," Lily snapped, glaring. "Do you have any boundaries?"

Robin didn't even bother speaking to him.

We all hustled Heather over to the medical center next door for a blood test. With my pull, results came fast.

"Adam, how is it?" Ted asked, eyes wide with hope.

"Negative," I said, glancing at the report.

"Thank God!" Ted shouted.

"Wahhhh!" Heather, overwhelmed with relief, burst into tears.

"Now you're crying? What were you thinking earlier?!" Ted scolded, exasperated.

"Is it all her fault?" I cut in. "You didn't mess up too?"

"I warned her from the start..." Ted grumbled.

"And Barney?" I shot back with a cold laugh. "If you'd put your foot down from the beginning, not let him push every limit, would this have happened? Honestly, Matthew and Lily share some blame too!"

"Yeah," Matthew said grimly. "We all should've held the line. I'm partly responsible—should've cut Barney off after that professor stunt."

"Who'd think he'd have zero morals?" Lily muttered.

"I messed up too," I sighed. "If we'd all stuck to our guns—either he follows basic decency or he's out—we wouldn't be here. After this, I don't care what you all decide, but unless Barney's got a daughter of his own and genuinely changes his sleazy ways, I'm done with him. Keep that in mind for future hangouts."

Everyone: "..."

Chapter 579: Sparkly and Stabby

January 1, 1999.

The first day of bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new.

And then this happened.

Adam's subtle way of cutting ties with Barney cast a gray shadow over everyone's hearts.

They were mad at Barney too, sure.

But not that mad.

So Adam's decision still caught them off guard.

And what's with the weird condition that they'd only patch things up if Barney had a daughter? What even is that?

Does Adam seriously think that if Barney had a kid, he'd turn into a doting dad, freaking out about his daughter dating a guy like him and finally cleaning up his act?

Hmm...

Okay, that kinda makes sense. 😊

But Barney? He won't even date, let alone get married and have kids.

Looks like future hangouts are gonna need some ground rules—no bringing Barney if Adam's around.

Adam didn't say much more about it.

As for Barney, any fondness from watching him on TV in a past life? Gone. Wiped out after dealing with his nonsense in person.

Imagine this: a friend who keeps spewing the most vulgar garbage about your little sister right to your face—over and over, even making up songs about it.

Oh, and he doesn't stop there—he throws your mom into the mix too.

Yup.

Barney claims he hooked up with Ted's mom, Mrs. Mosby, in the car on the way to the airport...

Any normal person would've smashed his face in. If you didn't at least rough him up, you'd look spineless.

But Ted? He just gave a weak laugh and maybe a playful elbow nudge at most.

Now that it's all out in the open and Barney's filthy words turned out to be true, Ted's reaction was to scold his "immature" little sister first, toss a few words at Barney, and then... nothing. Done.

Gotta admit, Ted's got some serious love for Barney. True bromance right there. ❤️👍

Saying goodbye to Lily and the others—who were all tangled up in their feelings—Adam left with Robin.

"Heard there was an explosion at your hospital today?"

Robin, riding shotgun, brought up the hot news buzzing around New York. "Ugh, when do I get to cover a story like that?!"

"Chill out," Adam said, trying to calm her down. "All this groundwork you're laying now? It's setting you up to blow up big later. I know you'll be an amazing reporter."

"Really?"

Robin cracked a smile.

"Totally," Adam grinned back. "Your first instinct was to report the story, not geek out over how the bomb was made or think, 'Wow, so cool, I wanna build one too.' That's how I know."

"..."

Robin caught the teasing in his tone and shot back, "Okay, I'm into weapons, but not that into them."

"Oh, yeah?" Adam raised an eyebrow. "I was gonna tell you more since I was there in person. Afterward, they told me all about the rocket's specs and how the guy pulled it off."

"How'd he make an M9A1 anti-tank rocket?"

Robin blurted out without thinking.

Adam just smirked, saying nothing.

Robin realized she'd walked right into it. 😬

"You enthusiasts, man," Adam said, shaking his head.

"What's wrong with that?" Robin shrugged it off. "This was just a freak accident. We just like this stuff—we're not out here hurting anyone."

"He's dead," Adam said quietly. "His wife almost had a heart attack, and he left behind three kids. He test-fired it in his backyard. Imagine if it wasn't a dud and went off—or if it blew up while he was tinkering in the garage. You think his wife and kids would've made it out?"

He paused. "There's a line between what's okay to mess with and what's not. Dangerous stuff like that? Even if you love it, it's not a toy or a hobby."

Robin didn't have a comeback, but her expression said she wasn't fully convinced.

Her gun-nut vibes weren't about to budge from a few words from Adam.

Good thing he wasn't trying to change her—just tossing out a thought.

If he really wanted to flip her personality, he could've gone all out and probably pulled it off. Actions speak louder than words, right? 😊

"Where are we going?"

Robin finally noticed something was up, glancing out the window and then at Adam. "This isn't the way to your place."

"Not heading to my apartment tonight," Adam said with a mysterious little smile.

"Then where?" Robin asked, suspicious. "It's freezing out here, and I'm not as cold-proof as you. Remember that time in the fall? Too long outside, and I ended up sick afterward. No way I'm doing that again—I've got work later!"

"Where's your mind at?" Adam teased. "It's not what you're thinking. I just wanna hit the streets with you and buy you something."

"For real?"

Robin couldn't believe it.

Up until now, her thing with Adam was either fighting or heading somewhere to fight.

What's he up to now?

Taking things to the next level?

"Adam, uh..." Robin hesitated.

"No 'uh' about it—it's legit," Adam said, sensing she was overthinking it and jumping in before it got messy. "I'm taking you shopping at the mall."

"The mall?"

Robin snapped to attention, staring at him.

"Yup, the mall! Let's go shopping together—just today~"

Adam winked playfully.

"No way!"

Robin finally clocked it and wasn't having it.

"Oh, yes~"

Adam nodded, confirming her fears, then flipped on the car's TV.

"Please, Mr. Johnson, I know I messed up—don't put me in detention! Want me to make it up to you somehow?~"

On the screen, a younger Robin popped up—white shirt, plaid skirt, in a classroom, pleading with a teacher, winking and biting her lip like she's offering something...

Emmm.

Totally the opening vibe of a cheesy romance flick.

"Oh, no!"

Robin lunged to turn it off, but Adam blocked her with one hand.

"You think turning it off now changes anything?" Adam laughed. "Robin Sparkly?"

"Was it Katie?!"

Robin gave up, letting the MV play, mortified.

"How about I sing you a song?"

The plot swerved—no steamy romance, just a music video.

"Let's all go to the mall! Just today!"

Robin danced and sang, oozing 'charm.'

Emmm.

This was an MV made to hype up mall shopping, literally called Let's All Go to the Mall. It was Robin's first hit back when she was a teen idol singer.

"I'm gonna kill Katie!"

Adam didn't say it, just grinned at the video, but Robin knew—only Katie, fresh from Christmas in Canada, would dig up this old relic for Adam to see.

"It's not so bad," Adam chuckled. "Robin Sparkly's adorable. I've already ordered you the original silicone bracelet and graffiti jacket. I'll be your robot buddy, and we'll blast off to space together, dancing and singing among the stars..."

Robin's face darkened, silent.

"What, not happy?" Adam said, apologetic. "My bad~"

He reached for the car TV as he spoke.

Robin's expression softened a bit, thinking maybe Adam wasn't that awful and was about to spare her the embarrassment.

Nope. She nearly lost it.

"Since you're not feeling it today, forcing the sunny Robin Sparkly vibe won't cut it. Let's switch it up."

Adam hit 'next.'

The screen cut to Robin at a concert, stepping up to greet the crowd.

"No!"

Robin yelped in disbelief again.

"Oh, yes!"

Adam nodded with a grin. "Compared to Robin Sparkly, I'm way more into..."

On the TV, Robin Sparkly said, "Hey, everyone! I'm Robin Sparkly. Well, actually, I was Robin Sparkly. Because Robin Sparkly is dead. My new name is..."

She spun around, ditched the wig and jacket, revealing a metallic punk look—going from bright and sweet to dark and edgy in a flash.

"Robin Stabby!!!"

"You're so beautiful... no law can stop me from loving you. I'll stick to you like glue, no restraining order can scare me off..."

Robin, now Stabby, belted it out wildly on the screen.

"Yup, got that outfit ready for you too," Adam said with a smile. "This one, P.S. I Love You? Blows Let's All Go to the Mall out of the water, doesn't it? Hate to say it, but you being grumpy makes me kinda happy."

Robin: "..."

Chapter 580: Officer, Please Arrest Me

It was New Year's Day, and everyone was happy. 😊

Adam was happy.

Robin, though, wasn't thrilled at first. But by the end, she was happy too.

Things like shame and dignity? Once you lose them, they're gone for good.

So when a colleague from the TV station called to remind Robin to get ready for her broadcast, she didn't even want to go.

They say a gentle embrace is a hero's downfall.

Adam, on the other hand, preferred the song P.S. I Love You.

But after Robin sang her heart out to that song, her mood brightened up again. She felt like the sparkling, radiant Robin from her early days of fame. And Adam? He didn't mind the sparkling Robin either.

This gave Robin a feeling she'd never experienced before.

Watching the music video on the car's TV, where a special-effects robot accompanied the sparkling Robin, and then glancing at Adam beside her, Robin felt a bit dazed.

Was the director of this MV some kind of prophet who could see the future?

Oh, my teenage heart, she thought, struggling internally.

It was like Doctor Strange getting blasted out of his body by the Ancient One—her soul seemed to leave her, floating in midair. Before she could figure out what was happening, she blinked and found herself inside the music video.

She was making a gesture with her arms outstretched.

She remembered that during the original shoot, this was the only move she did.

The rocket effects that sent her soaring into space were added later. Back then, she was just a young idol singer with zero acting experience.

When the director asked her to pose with her arms open like she was flying, she couldn't connect to any emotion. After endless coaching, she finally managed an exaggerated look of infinite joy.

But now? She got it.

When humans break free from gravity and soar into the sky, it's pure, overwhelming joy.

And so, she naturally let that joy show on her face.

In that moment, though she couldn't see her own performance, she knew—the Oscars owed her a Best Actress award! 🤖

Was this some kind of superpower? A soulful singer and a soulful actress?

Thinking about it, Robin felt a bit lightheaded, like she held the soul in her hands and owned the entertainment world.

But then, her colleague called again, asking her to host the late-night dead-air slot. It was like gravity kicked back in, yanking her down from space.

She was not happy about it.

Luckily, a tiny thread of reason held her together. Realizing she was about to crash from the clouds and hit rock bottom, she snapped awake. Hearing the urgent reminders on the phone, she quickly agreed and hung up.

"Damn it!"

Robin cursed under her breath. "You almost killed me!"

"No way, really?" Adam laughed.

"I'm running late—hurry up and drive me to the station."

Robin flipped down the visor mirror and started fixing herself up, all while explaining how her soul had just plummeted from space, nearly face-planting into the ground. She'd woken up in a panic.

"That's pretty normal," Adam reassured her. "Lots of people have dreams like that. It could be stress, feeling down, or maybe you're just tired or not feeling well. I used to have those dreams all the time as a kid."

"You had those dreams a lot?"

Robin paused mid-motion, looking at him in surprise.

Once Adam said it, she believed him.

After all, whether it was stress, feeling down, physical discomfort, or exhaustion—she'd just ticked all those boxes.

But Adam having those dreams, and often? That piqued her curiosity.

"Yeah," Adam said, turning the key to start the car. It roared to life, and he gently pressed the gas, pulling out of the mall's underground parking lot and heading toward the station.

"When I grew up and studied medicine, I looked into it. Turns out, it's a subconscious symptom of anxiety or your body sending warning signals. It's pretty common. As long as you don't hit the ground in the dream, it's usually fine."

Of course, this wasn't from this life—it was from Adam's past life.

In his previous life, Adam had those dreams all the time as a kid.

For example:

He'd be running wildly across an empty field, and a plane would fly low overhead. He'd reach up, grab the bottom of the plane, and get carried into the sky. When they passed over a dark, gaping cliff, his grip would slip, and he'd fall into the void.

He'd keep falling, and just as he neared the ground, he'd scream in terror, his legs would go numb, and he'd wake up.

When he woke up, his legs were actually numb. It took a while to shake it off.

Hmm.

Back then, it wasn't anxiety for Adam—it was just his body sending signals.

In this life, after studying medicine, he learned it was pretty common.

But here in the States, it was interesting—fewer cases were about physical warnings, and more were tied to subconscious anxiety.

A land where everyone's depressed and popping pills to cope? It's no joke.

Someone even made a movie about it. The main character, "Reverse Flash" (the actor who played Reverse Flash in *The Flash*), gets injured and ends up in a hospital bed, suffering.

In his dreams, he keeps running into all sorts of frustrations: a simple surgery goes wrong, his wife cheats with a handsome doctor, and the high-and-mighty him gets humiliated by ordinary folks.

It's all stuff his subconscious is anxious about, imagined by his brain.

Of course, there's also a beautiful nurse who tries to seduce him...

When he finally wakes up and learns the truth, he goes back into the dream and jumps off a building, ending the dream world.

And in reality? He dies too.

Of course, that's just the movie.

"What if you do hit the ground in the dream?" Robin asked, startled.

"Then it's trouble," Adam said, shaking his head. "Falling from a height in a dream, whether it's anxiety or your body warning you, is your brain sending an alert. Waking up before you hit the ground is your brain protecting itself.

"You know, your brain processes signals from all over your body.

"If that self-protection fails and you die in the dream, your brain might actually believe it.

"You've heard of that prisoner experiment, right?

"They blindfolded a death row inmate, dragged a knife's dull edge across their wrist, and played the sound of dripping water..."

"He died of fright!" Robin exclaimed. "Are you saying if you die falling in a dream, you could actually die?"

"The prisoner didn't die," Adam said with a smile. "He just passed out from fear. But all the monitoring equipment showed he was in extreme terror, and his body's data suggested he was losing blood.

"That prisoner didn't die from fright.

"But that doesn't mean others wouldn't.

"People have been scared to death before—it's not unheard of.

"So, while dying in a dream doesn't guarantee you'll die, there's a chance your brain could react to the dream and cause it."

"OMG!"

Robin was stunned. It wasn't until Adam pulled up to the station and nudged her that she snapped out of it. She let out a yell, punched Adam in the chest, and shouted, "You really almost killed me earlier!"

"..."

Adam's mouth twitched, unsure of what to say.

"Hurry up, or you'll miss the recording," he said, half-laughing, half-exasperated.

"You attempted murderer!"

Robin shot him a glare, grabbed her coat from the back seat, and stormed out. She threw on the coat and hurried toward the station.

Sure, she'd almost been "killed," but no one would believe her if she told them.

Others might think she was just humble-bragging and get jealous.

So, she let it go, returned to reality, and focused on keeping her job.

Adam glanced at the time—it was only 10 p.m. After a moment's thought, he pulled out his phone and dialed a number.

"Officer, I've just been accused of murder. Please come arrest me."