

TV Show 621

Chapter 621: Poor, Wronged Sheldon

Outside the operating room.

Missy, Emilia, Mary, and Sheldon's grandma were all waiting.

Mary was chatting with Emilia, asking how she usually celebrated her birthdays in the past, hoping to throw a party that would make Emilia super happy. After all, if Emilia was happy, Beattie would be too.

Meanwhile, Missy was whining to Grandma about how awful Sheldon was. Grandma listened with a big grin, even tossing in a few jabs at Sheldon herself. But when Missy pushed her to "serve justice" and call Sheldon to chew him out, Grandma just laughed it off.

Missy totally saw that coming.

Ever since she was little, she'd loved doing this kind of pointless complaining. It was her way of saying, "Hey, I'm here!" Grandma knew Missy knew it was pointless, so she just chuckled and let her ramble. And Missy knew Grandma knew she knew.

In the end, everyone loved Sheldon.

So no one actually held it against him.

It's like those funny or embarrassing family stories—year after year, they come up at every gathering, everyone laughs, the tension melts away, and the warm, cozy vibes kick in instantly.

"They're out!"

Even though Missy was griping to Grandma about Sheldon, she'd been sneaking glances at the operating room the whole time. The second she spotted Adam, she shouted to let everyone know.

"Adam, how'd it go?"

Mary grabbed Emilia and hurried over.

"The surgery went great," Adam said with a smile. "You'll be able to see her soon."

"Thank God!"

Mary, the devout believer, immediately thanked the big boss upstairs, then threw her arms around Adam. "Thank you, Adam!"

"No problem," Adam replied with a grin.

Emilia reached out, wanting a hug from Adam too. But somehow, Missy swooped in between them like it was nothing and stole Emilia's hug for herself.

Adam's lip twitched as he watched.

Mary gave her own mom a quick hug—classic American TV family stuff. In moments like this, everyone's gotta hug it out to show how excited they are.

Missy clung to Emilia way too long, until it was almost awkward—Mary and Grandma had already finished their hugs. Only then did she let go.

Then she spun around and hugged Adam instead.

"..."

Adam gave a half-laugh, half-sigh and muttered, "Really?"

"Yep, really," Missy said with a cheeky grin. "What, am I worse than Emilia or something?"

Adam didn't answer, just gave her a quick hug back.

"Ahem."

Sheldon's grandma hugged Emilia too, and Mary—now free—finally noticed something was up. She cleared her throat and said, "Adam, could you help us get a room? We'd like to stay overnight with Beattie."

"Of course," Adam said, smiling. "I've already moved Beattie to a VIP room. It's big enough—you can just add a couple of beds next to hers."

"That's awesome!" Mary beamed.

"There's one more thing I need to tell you guys," Adam said, choosing his words carefully.

"Bad news?" Missy asked, her voice tinged with worry.

"Yeah."

Adam glanced at everyone, his eyes settling on Emilia. "The surgery was a success—we removed the tumor from her bronchus, so Beattie can breathe easily now. But the cancer's spread too much and done too much damage. She's only got about a month left."

"Wahhh!"

Emilia burst into tears on the spot.

Missy and Mary flanked her, one on each side, hugging her and whispering comfort.

"Sigh."

Sheldon's grandma let out a soft breath.

The news wasn't a shock. Beattie hadn't expected to make it out of the operating room alive anyway—she'd already said her goodbyes. Getting to spend her daughter's birthday with her, plus an extra month, was a bonus.

Soon, with Missy and Mary's help, Emilia calmed down. Still sniffing, she started talking with them about how to make the most of that month.

First up, Mary decided to extend her leave from church so she could stay with Emilia the whole time, accompanying her cousin through this final stretch of life.

Emilia wasn't an adult yet, so Mary would handle the funeral arrangements and take over raising her. Luckily, ever since Adam invested in little George's business, it'd been booming. The Cooper family wasn't short on cash anymore, so they could do whatever felt right without worrying about costs.

Missy was still in college, so she had to head back that night. She'd come back in two days for Emilia's birthday, then spend every weekend after that with her mom and cousin.

As for Sheldon's grandma?

She waved it off, saying, "Don't worry about me. I've got places to go. I'll show up when you need me."

Hmm... Atlantic City in Jersey, the Vegas of the East Coast, anyone? 😊

In the VIP room:

Beattie woke up from anesthesia and was wheeled in. Seeing her, everyone got emotional again—lots of tears and hugs.

Leaving Emilia with Beattie, Mary led the others out.

"Missy, come early the day after tomorrow, and don't forget to get your cousin a birthday gift—put some thought into it!" Mary instructed.

"Relax, Mom," Missy said, rolling her eyes. "Just make sure you remind Grandma."

"Your grandma... Wait, where'd she go?"

Mary turned around and realized her mom was gone.

"She ditched ages ago," Missy teased. "Her life's way more exciting than yours."

"Don't you dare turn into your grandma," Mary said, rolling her big eyes dramatically.

"Grandma's my hero!" Missy shot back with a grin, then waved. "Gotta run—paper to write. See ya!"

"Be safe!" Mary called after her.

"Got it!" Missy waved back coolly as she walked off.

That night:

Before grabbing dinner at Alice Gray's little spot, Adam swung by the VIP room. He checked on Beattie's condition and asked Mary if they needed anything.

"I'll be staying at the hospital tonight. If you need me, just come find me or have a nurse page me," Adam said before heading out.

As he stepped into the hallway, Mary chased after him.

"Adam, the nurses say you've got some pull around here. For Emilia's birthday party, could we make it a bit bigger? Invite more people, make it lively?" Mary asked, her big eyes full of hope.

"Uh..." Adam blinked. "Mrs. Cooper, who else were you thinking of inviting?"

"I want little George and Sheldon to come see their sister," Mary said. "Plus Beattie's friends, Emilia's classmates and buddies. After this, Emilia's moving to Texas with me for school. I want it to be a big deal—her birthday party, a goodbye to her friends, and an early coming-of-age bash so Beattie can see her 'grow up' and 'graduate.'"

"No problem," Adam said after a moment, nodding. "I'll talk to the director."

He had enough sway for that. Besides, it wasn't like he'd be breaking new ground—last time the director's niece had cancer and wanted a party, the guy made the whole surgical team show up and help her classmates set up their quirky little event. Compared to that hospital-wide blowout, Mary's request was a piece of cake.

"Thank you, Adam!" Mary said, overjoyed.

"No worries," Adam replied with a smile. "But... will Sheldon actually show up?"

"He better!" Mary's eyes narrowed. "I'm calling him right now."

Adam wasn't in a rush to leave anymore. He stood there grinning as Mary dialed Sheldon.

"Mom, I'm busy. I'm not going," Sheldon's voice came through, predictably stubborn.

"Excuse me?" Mary snapped, all boss-mode. "Did I ask? This is an order—you're coming, and you're getting Emilia a thoughtful gift."

"But Mom—" Sheldon tried to protest.

"No buts! You're coming!" Mary barked. "Got it?"

"Yes, madam," Sheldon mumbled, sounding totally defeated.

Adam chuckled and walked off.

Poor Sheldon—always getting roped into family stuff!

Chapter 622: Adam, You Can't Be Romeo!

That night, Adam finished tutoring Alice Grey's private lesson, and it was already pretty late. 😊

He swung by the VIP ward for a quick check. Beatrix and Mary were still chatting away, showing no signs of sleepiness. Meanwhile, Emilia, being the teenager she is, was totally wiped out from the day's chaos and was fast asleep on the extra bed nearby. 😊

"Mrs. Cooper, you should get some rest," Adam said with a smile after checking Beatrix's stats and seeing everything was stable. "Beatrix needs her rest too."

"I don't want to sleep," Beatrix replied with a self-deprecating chuckle. "I'm scared that if I close my eyes, I won't open them again."

"You won't," Mary quickly reassured her.

"Go ahead and sleep," Adam added. "The day after tomorrow is Emilia's birthday party—you'll need the energy to join in!"

"Mary told me about it," Beatrix said, perking up a bit. She looked at Adam gratefully. "I haven't even thanked you for your help yet. Thank you, Adam."

"No problem!" Adam grinned. "I've got a pretty tight bond with the Cooper family. It's the least I could do."

"Exactly!" Mary chimed in. "I've always seen Adam as one of my own—like family."

"Really?" Beatrix raised an eyebrow, a little surprised by Mary's words.

"Yup!" Adam nodded with a laugh. "Sheldon's my best buddy, and I get along great with Little George and Missy too. Back in high school, I was always hanging out at the Cooper house."

"Adam's a real catch," Mary said with a knowing tone. "If he weren't already with someone even more amazing like Paige, I'd have snatched him up as a son-in-law myself. Such a shame!"

"..." Adam's smile twitched into something awkward. Oh, he definitely caught the hint in Mary's words.

His pristine reputation—ruined! 😏

"Who's this Paige?" Beatrix asked, glancing between them curiously. "Better than Missy?"

In her eyes, her niece Missy was already the pinnacle of perfection, so hearing about someone even more impressive piqued her interest. Of course, being Mary's cousin and a seasoned woman herself, she also picked up on the subtle warning in Mary's tone.

But she wasn't shocked. A charming guy like Adam? Naturally, he'd attract attention left and right.

Hmm, I'll have to tell Emilia to steer clear of him later, she thought. Emilia grew up without a dad, and Beatrix's biggest fear was her daughter falling for some older guy like Adam. With his good looks and easygoing charm, he'd be way too tempting for a girl like Emilia. No sane mom would want her precious

daughter anywhere near a guy who seems to effortlessly draw in admirers—he's a heartbreak waiting to happen!

"Let me tell you..." Mary launched into a full-on spiel about Paige, and even her brief rundown left Beatrix wide-eyed, barely believing such a girl existed.

"Oh, and at the birthday party the day after tomorrow, you'll get to meet her," Mary said to Beatrix before turning to Adam. "Paige is just over in New Jersey, right? She'll be at the party too?"

"Of course," Adam said, his lips quirking up. "Sheldon's coming, so she'll definitely be there. Those two are inseparable—best friends and all."

From the wary looks both moms shot his way, Adam felt a little insulted. Really? Do they have to act like I'm some kind of predator? He's a good guy, honest! Otherwise, with his looks and charm, no amount of their watchful eyes would stop him from winning over any girl he wanted. 😊

Grumbling to himself, Adam left the room, feeling a bit miffed.

The next day, during morning rounds:

"What do you think of gardenias? Picture this—fields of gardenias all around us, strolling through the flowers... Should we watch out for bees?"

The man lying in the hospital bed looked dead serious as he asked Adam and the lineup of interns.

"That's exactly why I love him," the pretty woman on the couch said, her eyes sparkling as she gazed at her fiancé.

"What?" Dr. Burke asked, walking in and looking confused.

"Nothing, just some mushy couple talk," Christina quipped, rolling her eyes. "They're about to get married. This is Cave Paulus—admitted last night with chest pain. Tests show acute heart disease, but no family or personal history, no obvious triggers."

"He's healthy as a horse!" his fiancée added with a laugh.

"A horse that just had a heart attack and is lying in a hospital bed," the patient teased back.

"Give it a minute, and the doctor will tell us it's all a false alarm," his fiancée said, exchanging flirty looks with him. "Then we'll head home and get back to business."

"..." The interns' reactions varied. Christina looked annoyed, Meredith zoned out, George was visibly jealous, and Adam just smiled calmly. He'd heard way cheesier lines than this—please, this was tame!

"Mr. Paulus," Dr. Burke said, his tone serious as he reviewed the chart, "your scans show a mass around your heart. A very large mass."

"A mass? Like a tumor?" the patient blinked, stunned.

"That's ridiculous!" his fiancée shot up, walking over. "He can't have a tumor—he's way too healthy!"

"We can't be sure until we observe it further," Dr. Burke said cautiously. "So today, we're scheduling you for an angiogram."

"Okay..." The couple's smiles vanished.

"Christina, you're in charge," Dr. Burke said, glancing at the group before settling on her.

"Yes, Dr. Burke!" Christina stood tall, ready to roll.

The team filed out to continue rounds.

At noon, in the cafeteria:

"What's up?" Adam asked, tray in hand. He'd been chatting with Emilia by the door for a bit and noticed Christina and the others staring at him when he walked over.

"You do know dating a minor is illegal, right?" Christina said with a smirk.

"And you don't qualify for the Romeo and Juliet law either," George piped up. "You're 24—you can't pull off Romeo anymore!"

"I know this stuff better than you guys," Adam shot back, exasperated. "What's going on in your heads all day? Just hormones?"

For context, in the U.S., the Romeo and Juliet law exists to keep consensual relationships between teens from being harshly labeled as crimes. Basically, if someone over 14 but under 17 hooks up with someone else, as long as the age gap isn't more than three years and neither's a registered offender, it's legally fine.

"We're just looking out for you," Christina said with a sly grin. "Maybe you don't have any intentions, but what if the girl comes onto you? Everyone knows guys have zero resistance to temptation—especially with a pretty one like her!"

"She's right," Meredith laughed. "You have no idea how appealing you are to high school girls. If I were her, I'd totally fall for you."

"Trust me, I'm aware," Adam teased. "But Emilia's not you. Actually, I'd say most high school girls aren't you."

"..." Meredith's smile froze, clearly offended.

"You really don't have any ulterior motives?" Christina asked, genuinely surprised. "Then why throw her a birthday party?"

"It's not for her," Adam shrugged. "It's for my dying friend's aunt. It's just a small favor, no big deal."

"..." The group fell silent. If they remembered right, the last time someone wanted to throw a party in the hospital—for the director's niece with cancer—his wife had to threaten divorce to make it happen.

Chapter 623: Love in the Mirror

Medical Center. Self-Service Cafeteria.

"Adam, what you're doing is just wrong."

George couldn't wrap his head around it, frowning as he went on, "This is totally messing up the hospital's order and stepping on other people's freedom... What? Am I wrong or something?"

He trailed off, noticing Adam staring at him with a weird look, and hesitated.

"You don't know the first thing about freedom, huh?"

Adam chuckled, shaking his head.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

George blinked, confused.

"Where are we right now?"

Adam glanced around at everyone. "This is the medical center—a private business. All the rights and freedoms here belong to the hospital board! As long as they're cool with it, throwing a party that mildly annoys some patients is no big deal. Even if the President showed up for treatment and wanted to complain, it wouldn't matter! They'd just kick him out. That's real freedom!"

"Bullshit!"

Meredith snorted, laughing. "No way that's true!"

"Exactly!"

George jumped in. "What about the law? Where's the justice in that?"

"You're not serious, right?"

Christina, munching on some melon, glanced at Adam—who was grinning silently—and her jaw dropped.

"Looks like you guys really don't get it."

Adam shook his head with a laugh. "If you get the chance, check out U.S. law. Personal freedoms like speech? That's for public spaces—think random squares with no owner. But if a place has an owner, every right there belongs to them. Sacred and untouchable!"

"Wait, for real?"

Christina's eyes widened. "So you're saying if someone's rich enough to buy up the whole country, they could do whatever they want?"

"Theoretically, yeah."

Adam nodded, humming a little tune. "On my turf, you follow my rules. Reap freedom, chase happiness with power, and carve out my own vibe..."

"Money really lets you do anything, huh?"

Christina murmured, still processing.

"No way that's true!"

George shook his head hard. "Adam, you're full of it. I don't buy it!"

"Believe what you want."

Adam shrugged, switching gears. "Christina, how'd the angiogram go for that patient with the heart mass this morning? Tumor or what?"

"It's a coronary aneurysm."

Christina was way more level-headed than George and the others. Sure, she was stunned by this new take on American freedom, but she quickly adjusted, shoving down the worldview-shaking vibes.

"A coronary aneurysm?"

Adam raised an eyebrow. "Lucky you!"

"You bet!"

Christina grinned, then huffed. "But the patient hasn't decided on surgery yet. They're about to get married, and according to his fiancée, they're not young anymore. They've sunk way too much into this wedding, so they're thinking of tying the knot first, then dealing with the surgery later."

"But a coronary aneurysm could rupture any second!"

Adam pointed out. "That's a recipe for turning a happy day into a funeral. 🙄"

"I told them that too."

Christina sighed. "Now we can only hope they come around, or I might not even get to do the surgery."

"Earlier, I saw the fiancée in the lounge, staring at receipts for their wedding dress, band, and venue rentals," George chimed in. "She said she regretted not listening to her mom—should've tossed those receipts instead of keeping them 'just in case.' She thought it'd bring bad luck, and now look, it's like it came true."

"That's just survivor bias talking."

Adam shook his head.

"Ugh, they were such a happy engaged couple. Who knows what'll happen now?"

Meredith sighed.

"What'd Dr. Burke say?"

Adam glanced at Christina. "Is the surgery tough?"

"Nah, it's fine."

Christina shrugged. "Burke's the best. If he's doing it, the risk's as low as it gets."

By then, everyone had finished eating. After a quick chat, they got up and headed toward the wards. Everyone had their own stuff to handle.

As they walked down the hallway, Christina reached the patient's room first. She waved at the group and was about to check on their decision when she bumped into the fiancée coming out.

"Can you tell Dr. Burke that Kev's ready for the surgery?" the fiancée asked Christina.

"Of course! That's awesome—you guys figured it out!"

Christina beamed. 😊

"Where are you off to?"

Adam, though, noticed her bag and her off vibe, piecing it together.

"Uh..."

The fiancée stammered. "I... I can't face this. I'm not strong enough."

"Amy, I get that it's tough, but your fiancé's about to have surgery," Meredith said, stepping forward to comfort her. "When he wakes up, you're the one he'll want to see. You should stay."

"No."

Amy's face stiffened. "He won't see me. He's not my fiancé anymore."

"You're leaving him?"

George's jaw dropped. 😱

"I'm not strong enough..."

Amy repeated, sticking to her excuse.

"What about 'in sickness and in health'?"

Christina couldn't hold back. "You're just gonna ditch that vow?"

"Please, try to understand. I hate that I'm not strong enough."

Amy's face screamed self-loathing, but her tone was firm. "But I know I'm not."

Adam watched this absurd yet painfully real scene unfold in silence.

That morning, this couple had been all over each other in front of everyone—flirting shamelessly, cracking dirty jokes, totally lovey-dovey. But in a blink, it turned into "birds of a feather fly apart when disaster strikes."

Love in the mirror—fragile as a dream of glory.

Then he caught something in the room.

Beep beep beep!

The alarm blared.

"Patient's heart stopped!"

Adam bolted inside, Christina right behind him.

"Call Dr. Burke fast—his aneurysm might've ruptured!"

Adam shouted.

As they scrambled to save him, Adam's peripheral vision caught Amy outside, glancing in once before turning and walking away.

When Dr. Burke arrived and headed to the OR with Christina, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"Where's Amy? Did she really leave?"

"What else could she do after that?"

"Do you think the patient crashed because of her?"

George fumed. 😞

"Could be," Adam said with a nod. "A coronary aneurysm plus a big emotional hit—like getting dumped by your fiancée right after a diagnosis—could easily make it rupture. Lucky it happened here and not out there, or..."

"She basically tried to kill him!"

George was livid.

"It's fake, all fake..."

Meredith muttered, dazed.

That morning, she'd been swept up watching this flirty couple, daydreaming about her and Dr. Shepherd in their place, feeling all warm and fuzzy. But now? This twist left her doubting if love even existed.

Of course, in this mess, she didn't see herself as backstabbing Amy—she was the patient, hit over and over until his aneurysm burst from the shock.

Chapter 624: Sheldon's Meet-and-Greet Gift

Nighttime.

Medical Center.

"Emilia, what are you doing here?"

Adam strolled down the hallway and spotted Emilia standing outside a patient's room. Curiosity got the better of him, so he wandered over.

"He's crying," Emilia said, pointing into the room.

Adam peeked inside and saw the patient whose fiancée had dumped him. The guy was lying there, silently letting tears roll down his face.

"Alright, let's go," Adam said, gently tugging Emilia's arm to get her moving.

"You're not gonna go in and cheer him up?" Emilia hesitated. "He looks so pitiful."

"Some pain, for a guy, is better faced alone," Adam sighed. "Outsiders getting involved doesn't always help."

"What happened to him, anyway?" Emilia asked, her curiosity piqued.

Adam filled her in. "He's actually pretty lucky. Things turned around for him—surgery went great."

"What?!" Emilia gasped. "That's awful! He's so可怜 (poor thing)! This kind of 'luck' is the last thing he'd want."

"Nah," Adam shook his head. "Think of it this way: he didn't just survive, he also saw his ex-fiancée's true colors early. Sure, it's tough for him to accept right now, but once he gets through it, he'll be glad."

"..."

Emilia fell silent for a moment, then murmured, "Yeah, I guess as long as you keep living, that's the biggest win."

"Don't overthink it," Adam said with a grin. "Tomorrow's your birthday party! You excited?"

"I just want Mom to be happy," Emilia said, managing a small smile.

"She'll only be happy if you are," Adam reminded her. "Tomorrow, Missy's two brothers—your brothers too—Little George and Sheldon—are coming. Trust me, you won't be able to stop laughing."

"Why's that?" Emilia asked, puzzled.

"Because Sheldon's hilarious," Adam chuckled.

"Missy says he's a pro at ticking people off," Emilia said, a little worried.

She already knew her future. After her mom passed, Aunt Mary would take her in, and she'd have to deal with Mary's kids—her cousins. She'd met Missy already and got along great with her, which she loved. But her two cousins? She hadn't met either of them. From what Missy said, Big Bro Little George sounded fine, but this second brother, Sheldon, had her a bit nervous.

"Oh, he's definitely good at getting under your skin," Adam laughed. "But he's not mean-spirited. If you keep that in mind and don't take his bluntness or rudeness personally, everything he does starts to feel like a comedy show.

Hmm... if he does get on your nerves, just go to Missy. She'll teach you how to handle Sheldon like a pro. Trust me, once you figure him out, he's easy to deal with."

"I hope so," Emilia said, her voice a mix of nerves and excitement.

The next day.

Emilia's birthday.

The party was set for the evening. To avoid bothering the hospital patients as much as possible, they didn't start setting up until the afternoon. Even though Mary and the others insisted they didn't need help, Adam called in some pros to handle the decorations anyway.

"Adam!"

Peggy showed up too. It was her first time at the medical center, and her stunning looks and vibe instantly turned heads.

"Boss, we've got the dresses and everything here," Lisa, the assistant, reported.

It was a party, after all—everyone had to dress up fancy!

"Cool," Adam nodded.

"Sheldon's flight's landing soon. I'm heading to pick him up," Peggy said.

"Go for it," Adam grinned. "Take Lisa to drive."

Peggy nodded and headed off to the airport with Lisa.

"OMG!"

The second they left, Christina and the gang swarmed Adam, freaking out. "She's your girlfriend too?! She's gorgeous!"

"Adam, you're ridiculous!" Meredith shot him a look full of disdain. "You've got a girlfriend that pretty and you're still not satisfied?"

"Who is she?" George asked, his tone dripping with envy and a hint of jealousy. "Is she even legal?"

"Hold up," Christina said, wide-eyed. "Don't tell me she's the Adler from the Duncan-Adler formula?!"

"Yup, that's her," Adam said, smirking proudly.

"No way!" Christina stared after Peggy's retreating figure. "A person that talented and that gorgeous actually exists? Are regular people even allowed to live anymore?"

"She's the mathematician Dr. Adler?!" George gaped. "She doesn't even look old enough to be an adult! This is nuts!"

"She's an adult, relax," Adam said, smacking George on the head. "She just looks young."

"So how old is she, really?" Meredith couldn't help but ask. That flawless, collagen-packed face was breaking her heart.

"Almost 19," Adam said seriously.

Everyone: "..."

"You're the real expert on the Romeo and Juliet law, huh?" Christina said, piecing it together.

"Ohhh, I get it now!" George and Meredith chimed in. "You timed it perfectly, didn't you?"

"Nope," Adam waved them off. "Anyway, you're all coming to the party tonight, right? The more, the merrier!"

"This is a young people's party. What are we supposed to do there?" Meredith grumbled.

"Yeah, I'm not feeling it either," Christina agreed.

They were genuinely shaken up. Adam didn't push them.

Before the party kicked off, Little George and his wife Veronica arrived first. Peggy came back with Sheldon shortly after.

In the VIP ward, Little George and Sheldon, as big brothers, met their legendary little cousin for the first time.

"Emilia, I'm George. If you ever need anything, just let your big bro know!" Little George gave her a warm hug, then patted his chest confidently. "This is a gift from me and Veronica."

"Thanks!"

Emilia felt their warmth, and her jittery heart settled a bit. She took the gift, beaming happily.

"You siblings should get close from now on," Mary said with a smile. "Emilia, this is Sheldon. Sheldon, come say hi to your cousin!"

"Hello," Sheldon said, giving Emilia a curt nod.

"Hi," Emilia replied, her smile faltering as she sensed his standoffishness.

"Sheldon!" Mary scolded. "She's your sister—this is your idea of manners?"

"Called it," Sheldon muttered with a helpless look. He stepped forward, stuck out his hand, and said, "Hello, cousin."

"Hi, cousin," Emilia said, a little thrown off.

They shook hands briefly. The second it was over, Sheldon yanked his hand back, turned sideways, and sneakily pulled hand sanitizer from his pocket. He squirted some out and started scrubbing his hands, darting sneaky glances at everyone like he didn't want them to notice.

But with moves that obvious, everyone saw the whole show.

Adam and Peggy's lips twitched upward in unison.

"Sheldon!" Mary snapped, fuming.

"What?" Sheldon shrugged. "I did what you said and brought a gift."

"What'd you get her?" Adam asked, stepping in with a grin to smooth things over.

"Here!"

Sheldon grabbed a gift box from the side and handed it to Emilia. "To get you this, I went to Radio Shack first, then hit up a comic store. Couldn't find anything good for a girl.

Oh, boy!

It was so hard! But then it hit me—I got you this Wonder Woman comic set."

With everyone staring in stunned silence, he held up a finger proudly. "And listen, this is the most classic full-series collection.

Wonder Woman's just like you—no dad growing up, raised by her mom.

And get this—later, her mom dies too..."

"SHELDON LEE COOPER!!!"

Mary's roar practically shook the ceiling.

Chapter 625: Sheldon: I'm Not Crazy!

In the world of American TV shows, shouting someone's full name is no joke—it's serious business. You'd better pay attention when it happens!

"What's wrong?"

Sheldon threw his hands up, totally clueless. "I was giving a compliment!"

"Emilia, don't be mad."

Missy jumped in, wrapping an arm around Emilia, who looked confused, hurt, and on the verge of tears. "Sheldon's just saying he hopes you turn into Wonder Woman!"

Then she glanced at Beatrix, whose face wasn't exactly thrilled. "Aunt Beatrix, you might not know this, but Sheldon's obsessed with comics. All those superheroes? They're his idols. And Wonder Woman? She's the toughest female superhero in comic land. She's been through pain and setbacks but worked her butt off to become the most badass woman in that world—a role model for all girls. That's Sheldon's big blessing for Emilia!"

She shot a glare at Sheldon, leaning forward a bit with her long legs, oozing threat vibes. "Right, Sheldon?"

"Of course! What else could I mean?"

Sheldon instinctively hunched over, hands guarding his front, then tilted his head, confused. He raised a finger. "But, uh, I gotta correct one thing. Whether Wonder Woman's the strongest female superhero in comics? That's still up for debate. Captain Marvel from the Marvel side has some thoughts on that..."

"Shut it!"

Mary snapped.

"Sheldon's just too honest for his own good. He sucks at talking."

Emilia gave Adam a skeptical look, so he stepped in with a grin. "Yeah, but he's not crazy!"

"I'm not crazy!"

Sheldon's eyes bugged out as he glared at Adam. "My mom had me tested!"

"That was some half-assed test from way back."

Mary knew Sheldon didn't mean any harm, but what he'd said earlier was way too harsh—especially for her dying cousin Beatrix and Emilia, who'd just lost her mom. So now, she had to chew out her precious son a bit to smooth things over for them.

"I regret cheaping out on a random doctor for that diagnosis," she added.

"Mommy~"

Sheldon whined, looking at Mary all pitiful-like.

"No pouting!"

Mary barked. "Apologize to your Aunt Beatrix and cousin Emilia now."

"But, Mom..."

Sheldon was so wronged. 😞

"I'm not saying it twice!"

Mary's big eyes glared, scary as heck.

"No need, I get it."

Beatrix, lying in the hospital bed, finally caught on. Her nephew Sheldon might look tall and lanky like an adult, but he was basically a giant baby—less mature than her own daughter. Kids say dumb stuff, right? Plus, she bought Missy's explanation: this was just Sheldon's childish way of giving Emilia his biggest blessing.

"Thanks, Sheldon. I hope Emilia can grow into an amazing woman like you wished, with all your love and support."

"We hope so too."

Sheldon stared at the woman on the bed who looked exactly like his mom. "Are you really gonna die?"

"Sheldon Cooper!"

Mary shouted again.

"It's fine, Mary."

Beatrix waved off the scolding, smiling at her big-baby nephew. "Yeah, Sheldon, I'm gonna die soon."

Sheldon glanced between Beatrix and his mom—two identical faces. It threw him off. He looked at Beatrix, all serious and kid-like. "Can you not die?"

"Everyone dies eventually."

Beatrix picked up on Sheldon's shifting emotions. Now that she really got who he was, she smiled warmly. "But with you all here, our lives weren't wasted. We've been happy, and your happiness will keep ours going. So promise me you'll all be happy, okay?"

"Mommy~"

Sheldon's eyes darted between Beatrix and Mary. His big brain kicked into overdrive, imagining his mom on that bed. His face twitched, and he burst into tears. "Hngh... hngh... hngh..."

Little cousin Emilia stared, dumbfounded. "..."

George Jr. and Missy turned away, cringing with secondhand embarrassment.

Adam and Paige's lips curved up, smirking at the scene.

"Oh, Shelly-bean~"

Mary saw her son crying for real and forgot all about his rude comments. She rushed over, hugging him as he sobbed into her chest, comforting him. "Don't cry, sweetie, don't cry."

"Mommy, I love you."

Sheldon buried his face in her arms, bawling. "Please don't ever die."

"Mommy's right here. I'm not going anywhere."

Mary patted his back, kissing his head.

Sniffle!

Emilia, who'd been gaping, got hit right in the feels. She threw herself onto her mom's bed, sobbing.

Sheldon's mom wasn't dying—but hers was.

"Waaahhh..."

Sheldon, who'd started calming down, heard his little cousin's wails and went from quiet sniffles to full-on crying again.

Crying's contagious, like puking—especially with two emotional kids involved.

Two identical moms kicked into gear, consoling their breaking-down kids.

"Whoa, whoa, what's going on? Did I miss something?"

Sheldon's grandma strutted in, decked out in a fresh, trendy outfit. She peeked over her sunglasses, joking, "Don't blame me—blame Atlantic City!"

"Mom!"

Mary shot her mom an annoyed look.

"Meemaw~!"

Sheldon, somewhat soothed by now, perked up at seeing another of his favorite people, calling out with a teary voice.

"What's wrong, Moonpie?"

His grandma looked at him, all doting and soft.

Every family loves their own kid best, right? Sheldon adored his mom and grandma because they adored him back.

"Enough already!"

George Jr. couldn't take it anymore, raising his voice. "This is supposed to be Emilia's birthday party! It's supposed to be fun! Sheldon, suck up those tears—how old are you, crying like that? Embarrassing much?"

"George Jr.~!"

Mary and Sheldon's grandma both glared at him.

"God help me, this is my family."

Missy facepalmed nearby.

Paige nudged Adam.

"Ahem."

Adam coughed lightly, stepping in to play peacemaker. He smoothed over the double-cry-fest, handed out imaginary awards to Best Actor Sheldon and Best Actress Emilia, calmed everyone down, and suggested they head out for the party.

Beatrix, stuck in bed with her condition, would get wheeled out later to watch Emilia dance in her party dress for a bit. The rest of the time, she'd stay in the ward with Mary keeping her company.

"Wait!"

Just as everyone nodded at Adam's plan and started following him out, Sheldon—tears wiped, head popping out of Mary's hug—raised a hand to stop them.

"What now?"

Everyone turned to him.

"I didn't finish my detailed analysis on who's stronger: Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel," Sheldon said, dead serious. "We need to start with their origins..."

Everyone: "..."

Chapter 626: Sheldon: "Adam, Control Your Woman!"

Medical Center.

VIP Ward.

"Alright, Sheldon, enough already. Why don't you write a paper about it?" Adam cut off Sheldon's endless rambling. "That way, we can all read your brilliant analysis over and over again."

"Great idea!" Sheldon paused, then pointed a finger at Adam before turning to the group. "I'll email it to you all when it's done. Make sure you read it, okay?"

"Of course," Adam said, shooting everyone a quick wink.

The group caught on fast and chimed in with enthusiastic agreement.

"Satisfied now?" Adam grinned.

"Hmph." Sheldon shook his head, wagging a finger with a smug, I-see-through-you look. "Nice try, but you're not fooling me. I've got all your email addresses, but I still don't have Cousin Emilia's or Aunt Beattie's!"

"Oh my God, just give it to him already!" Missy groaned, slapping her forehead.

"Just say it out loud," Adam said to Emilia, who was about to grab a pen and paper. "Sheldon'll remember it."

"Obviously," Sheldon said, tapping his temple confidently. "This brain never forgets."

"I can vouch for that!" Sheldon's grandma said with a self-deprecating chuckle. "This brain of his is so powerful, you'd never believe it."

Adam smirked knowingly.

Sheldon's grandma was still salty about how he'd used that genius brain of his to memorize her secret smoked brisket recipe—and then handed it over to her son-in-law. That recipe? Her son-in-law had begged her for it for over a decade, and she'd never budged. She couldn't stand the little punk who'd won over her precious daughter with nothing but a beat-up motorcycle.

In sitcom world, recipes like that get passed down through generations. It should've gone to her daughter, Mary. But out of spite for her son-in-law, she'd refused to share it.

Sheldon's dad, who was obsessed with that mouthwatering brisket, even stooped to sneaking into his mother-in-law's house to steal the recipe. Total bust, though—it only existed in her head.

When she found out about the break-in, Sheldon's grandma got her revenge. She sat him down for a "heartfelt" chat, pretending to bury the hatchet, and gave him a fake recipe. The ingredients were a nightmare to track down—hundreds of miles away—and the cooking process was pure torture. But that brisket was so good, Sheldon's dad swallowed his doubts, drove all over creation for the spices, stayed up all night brushing oil on the meat, just for one glorious meal.

Spoiler: it was a disaster. He was furious. He kicked her out of the house, banned her from eating there, and basically declared war.

But Sheldon's grandma? She wasn't scared of anyone. Bring it on! Poor Mary, stuck between her mom and her husband, was in a total bind. The Cooper family vibes were tense.

Sheldon, who hated the drama, suddenly remembered something from when he was a baby. His grandma, feeding him that famous brisket, had bragged about the recipe, teasing, "Don't you dare tell anyone! Oh wait, you're not even two—you can't tell anyone!"

Big mistake.

You can lock the doors, but you can't stop a genius-level house thief. Baby Sheldon, with his photographic memory, had it all locked in crystal clear. He just didn't think about it much—until he did. One little spark, and boom, the recipe was out.

At first, Sheldon's dad claimed he didn't care anymore. He even used Missy as an example, saying he got why his mother-in-law hated him—he was a dad to a daughter now too. Grandma forgave him for knocking up Mary with that junky motorcycle. They hugged it out. He said her forgiveness meant more than any recipe.

That night, though? He strong-armed Sheldon into spilling the real one.

Years later, after Sheldon's dad passed, his grandma muttered, "Well, now the recipe's mine again," earning some major side-eye from Mary.

Emilia rattled off her email.

"Anything else?" Little George said, dripping with sarcasm.

Sheldon shook his head.

"Wait!"

Just as everyone started to head out, he piped up again.

"What now?!" Little George glared at his troublemaker little brother.

"Mom," Sheldon turned to Mary. "I've met Cousin Emilia, I've given her the gift. Can I go home now?"

"No way," Mary frowned. "Go have fun at the party! Look, your good friends Peggy and Adam are here. Why're you in such a rush to leave?"

"What's fun about a party?" Sheldon scoffed. "It's not even a costume party. And Peggy and Adam? They've changed."

"Changed how?" Missy asked, throwing some fuel on the fire as she eyed Peggy and Adam, who'd been glued together the whole time.

"Ahem," Adam jumped in before Sheldon could say something mortifying. "Sheldon, it's not a costume party, but there's an award ceremony!"

"An award for what?" Sheldon perked up instantly.

"Best Smile," Adam said, totally serious. "First prize is the latest Thomas the Tank Engine."

"The latest Thomas the Tank Engine?" Sheldon's hands clasped together in front of him, his eyes wide with nervous excitement.

"Yup. Wanna compete?" Adam grinned.

"Yeah~!" Sheldon leapt up, flashing his brightest smile.

"Keep that smile going," Adam pointed at him. "I think it's got championship potential."

"Like this?" Sheldon's grin froze, terrified of messing it up. It went from natural to stiff, from dazzling to downright creepy.

"Relax a little—you've got this," Adam said with a chuckle, glancing at Mary's darkening face. He grabbed Sheldon and steered him outside.

At the party, Adam danced with Peggy first, then got dragged onto the floor by Missy. After that, Emilia shyly asked him for a dance to say thanks.

But Adam wasn't the only star of the show. Someone else, not even in the center of the dance floor, kept stealing everyone's attention.

Sheldon. With that terrifying smile plastered on his face.

Finally, Missy couldn't take it anymore and begged Adam to hand out the nonexistent award early. Good thing Adam had already sent Lisa to buy the prize.

The second Sheldon got his hands on it, the creepy grin vanished. He swapped it for a genuine, happy smile, playing with his Thomas engine while chatting with Peggy.

The party was buzzing—tons of medical staff showed up thanks to Adam, and one by one, they lined up to dance with him. After another spin on the floor, Adam noticed Sheldon and Peggy bickering. He apologized to a nurse mid-invite and hurried over.

"What's up?"

"Control your woman!" Sheldon barked, eyes bulging. "You know what she said? I kindly invited her to ditch this place and hit up a comic store with me—way more fun—and she told me going to a comic store is a total waste of my intellect!"

Adam glanced at Peggy.

She shrugged.

"Adam, you tell me," Sheldon huffed. "But before you do, know this: I'm really mad about this. So every word you say, if it's not 100% heartfelt support for me, our friendship's gonna have issues. The blacklist's watching you. Keep an open mind. Go!"

"Oh, wow... I'm with Peggy on this one," Adam said, laughing.

"Watch it, Adam!" Sheldon warned. "My enemies' friends are my enemies too!"

"For real?" Adam grinned.

"Absolutely," Sheldon said, dead serious. "You're either with me or against me!"

"You know, as the party organizer, I do have the power to revoke the Best Smile award—and the prize," Adam said, smirking at the Thomas engine Sheldon was clutching like his life depended on it.

"..."

Sheldon froze, hugging the train tighter. After a few stunned seconds, he muttered, "Maybe there's a third option."

Chapter 627: Sheldon: NO!!!

Medical Center.

The birthday party was a total hit.

Everyone was having a blast—including Sheldon, who'd fully embraced the "ooh, this is actually awesome" vibe.

A shiny Thomas the Tank Engine worth treasuring? Yeah, that was enough to keep him hooked and happy.

Sheldon always acted like everyone else was beneath him—like ants, basically. By that logic, he'd be some superior, non-human being.

But nope, he was dead wrong. Like, way off.

The "Law of True Enjoyment"—one of humanity's core traits? He's got it in spades.

So, yeah, still human after all.

Adam wasn't shocked one bit.

Having seen Sheldon's life play out dozens of times, it's clear the guy's whole existence is a highlight reel of the True Enjoyment Law, plus plenty of "I'll just go with it" moments.

What he'd told Emilia earlier—that if you figure out the trick, Sheldon's "pretty easy to get along with"—wasn't just empty comfort.

Like Sheldon himself said, you either roll with him or go against him.

But here's the thing: even when he picks the second option—going against him—it's not some grand third path. It's still option two. Normally, if you push back, Sheldon's got a bag of petty tricks up his sleeve—pranks, or playing the "poor me" card with some fake self-pity.

He's mastered the art of being adorable.

If his mischief fails, he'll cut his way into making you feel bad, so you back off and slide from "against him" to "with him" without even noticing.

But against Adam—who knows him inside out and has the tools to flip the script—Sheldon's stuck in option two with no comeback.

He knows it's a bad look. If too many people catch on, it'll get harder to flip their "against him" into "with him."

Still, he's sharp enough to realize Adam's got his number—and he can't fight back.

That's why he calls it a "third option"—a special case. He's trying to distance Adam's tactics from his usual flip-the-script game, cutting his losses fast.

What a little schemer! 😊

This clever little gremlin was all smiles with his Thomas train... until Paige, fed up with his smugness, suggested a chess match. That pure joy? Poof—gone.

In a peak showdown, Sheldon lost. Again.

Good thing it's par for the course by now.

He didn't flip the table like the first time, face screaming "I'm not okay with this, let's go again!"

"You and Adam should play," Paige said with a sneaky grin. "Neither of you can beat me, so whoever wins gets a shot at me next."

"Me and Adam?"

Sheldon froze, then smirked with pure disdain. "Oh, Paige, Paige, Paige~"

He'd been losing to Paige for years—science pecking order, academic wins, you name it. She's always had the edge.

He's used to it by now.

Plus, Paige does math, he does physics—no direct clash there.

So losing to her in chess? Not a big deal.

But now Paige wanted him to play Adam—and acted like she was curious who'd win? That made him scoff at her whole idea.

"Oh, Sheldon, Sheldon, Sheldon~"

Paige grinned, teasing. "What's on your mind?"

"Do I really need to spell it out?"

Sheldon shot Adam a glance, flashing a smug, punchable smile at Paige.

"You think you've got this in the bag?"

Paige's grin widened.

"Obviously?"

Sheldon gave her a "duh" look.

"Adam?"

Paige turned to him.

"Uh, not sure about this..."

Adam smiled modestly.

Winning or losing? He didn't care much.

But Sheldon? He might not handle losing so well.

If Adam won, Sheldon could stir up some chaos.

Paige leaned in and whispered something to Adam.

"For real?"

Adam's eyes lit up, and he sat up straight, pumped.

"Beat Sheldon, and it's real," Paige said with a laugh.

"I have to win!"

Adam was all in now. "Sheldon, let's do this!"

Sheldon making a fuss if he lost? Whatever—his mom and grandma were around to coddle him. Adam wouldn't have to deal with it.

Paige's rare, 主动 offer? That was a golden ticket he never saw coming. He was hyped!

This was her loosening up after their trio reunited for the first time in years—pure joy talking. Miss this shot, and who knows when it'd come again?

Sheldon was playing this chess game whether he liked it or not!

Adam's call! 🤖

"You seriously wanna play me?"

Sheldon's eyes widened, staring at Adam.

"What? Scared?"

Adam dropped the modesty, egging him on. "You chicken?" (Chicken meaning "backing out" in English slang.)

"That's ridiculous!"

Sheldon yelped. "Chickens aren't even that cowardly! Don't you remember how I used to get chased up the big elm tree by the neighbor's chickens when I was a kid?"

"Oh, I remember! No one could forget that!"

Adam glanced at Paige, who was grinning ear to ear. His excitement spiked, and he waved off Sheldon's tangent. "Are we playing or not? Don't tell me you're actually chickening out!"

"Fine, if you're set on humiliating yourself, what can I say?"

Sheldon shrugged.

Adam slid into Paige's spot.

Sheldon even tried to let Adam take white and go first.

Adam peeked at Paige.

"Coin toss," she said, smiling. "Fair fight."

She and Sheldon always tossed for it too.

White going first has a slight edge—stats show 53% of grandmaster games end in draws, 29% with white winning, and 18% with black.

"Coin toss it is."

Adam didn't care about fairness—he just wanted the W.

But Paige's words clicked: if he didn't beat Sheldon fair and square with real skill, her offer might lose its shine. And that's not what he wanted.

So now? Full throttle. Best effort.

Back in the day, even with an IQ matching Sheldon's, beating him would've been a pipe dream. Adam wouldn't have overthought it.

But since getting closer to Paige—especially after she started teaching him math—they'd been playing chess together a ton.

It felt like doing "homework" after class—if you catch my drift. 😊

Luckily, their brains were sharp enough that they didn't need a physical board to ruin the vibe. Souls locked, a starry chessboard formed between them, black and white pieces clashing in a flicker of light.

Adam's IQ was already sky-high and still climbing. Add constant sparring with a top-tier player like Paige? His chess game had leveled up—night and day from before.

Sheldon had no clue.

Adam played it coy, lulling him into a false sense of security. One careless slip from Sheldon, and Adam pounced—major damage, game over.

"NO!!!"

"YES!"

"Hehe!"

Sheldon's shocked scream mixed with Adam's smug laugh and Paige's gleeful giggle.

Chapter 628: Adam: "I Want 666!"

Medical Center.

Adam's Office.

After ditching the party, Adam, Sheldon, and Peggy were hanging out here, playing chess and chatting. The vibe was pretty chill.

Well... mostly.

"No, this can't be real~"

Sheldon stared at the chessboard, where he'd just gotten crushed, shaking his head like he refused to accept it.

"Sorry, buddy, it's real," Adam whooped, jumping up and throwing his arms in the air. He grabbed Peggy, spun her around a few times, and whispered in her ear with a grin, "I won. Does your promise still stand?"

"Of course it does," Peggy said, beaming. "Sure, there was a sneak attack involved, but you still beat Sheldon fair and square in this brainy chess match. I'm proud of you, Adam Duncan. You've really stepped up."

"Tonight's definitely gonna be a step-up kind of night~" Adam chuckled mischievously. "I'm proud of you too."

This time, Peggy didn't brush off Adam's flirting like she usually did. Instead, she locked eyes with him, her gaze soft and starry. Clearly, in her world, Sheldon was a benchmark—beat him, and you'd officially earned a spot in her eyes and her heart.

"That game doesn't count!"

Sheldon, replaying the moves in his head, realized he'd been careless and let Adam get the drop on him. He started protesting loudly, "I wasn't even trying!"

"A win's a win, a loss's a loss!" Adam set Peggy down and grinned at Sheldon. "How could it not count?"

"Best of three!" Sheldon demanded, flustered.

He couldn't stomach losing to Adam. Back in the day, Adam was just some dumb Earthling in his eyes. If he admitted defeat now, what did that make him?

"Nah, I'm done," Adam said, shaking his head. "I already won—boring now."

With that, he threw an arm around Peggy, ready to head home.

Are you kidding? He'd just scored Peggy's approval—time to cash in that starry-eyed jackpot! No way was he sticking around to play more chess with Sheldon. What if he lost this time and those sparkly eyes dimmed? Total buzzkill.

"Play him!" Peggy nudged Adam playfully. "No penalty for losing, but a reward if you win."

"For real?" Adam perked up. "What if I win again?"

"The rewards stack," Peggy said with an encouraging smile.

Howl! Adam's ears practically rang with imaginary wolf howls.

"Sheldon!" he pointed dramatically.

"What?" Sheldon blinked, confused.

"Don't you dare leave—we're battling till dawn!" Adam flashed a dazzling grin worthy of a TV drama kingpin.

"You're up for more?" Sheldon lit up.

"Obviously!" Adam puffed out his chest. "Forget best of three—let's do nine rounds, five wins. Tonight, I'm going for 666! You in?"

"Heck yeah!" Sheldon's competitive fire flared up. "You'll never beat me!"

"Beat who? What's all this noise about?" Missy strolled in.

"Buzz off!"

"Don't bug me!"

Adam and Sheldon shot her matching glares, then plopped down at the chessboard, ready to throw down.

"..."

Missy pouted, looking at Peggy with big, sad puppy eyes.

Peggy just smiled at her and turned her attention back to the chess match.

In chess, there's a time limit. A timer sits nearby—after each move, you smack it to log your time. Each player gets a set amount of thinking time per game, so it's all about managing it smartly.

To flex their smarts, Sheldon and Adam started off blitzing through moves, barely thinking before slapping the timer.

Smack!

Smack!

Smack!

Smack!

One's a natural-born genius.

The other's a late-blooming cheat-code master.

One's glaring daggers.

The other's smirking like a zen master.

One's fighting for pride.

The other's chasing some prideful fun.

It was a full-on showdown.

Once Sheldon got serious, his 187 IQ kicked into high gear. Adam, gunning for sixfold happiness, cranked his 182 IQ to max power.

Neither wanted to lose! Both were dead-set on winning!

After the initial flurry of lightning-fast moves, things slowed down. They hunched over the board, staring intently, their supercomputer brains running at full throttle.

You predict!

I predict your prediction!

Then I predict your prediction of my prediction!

Infinite layers, all before the timer buzzed!

Peggy watched with a little smirk, totally hooked.

Missy, after a minute, got bored and looked away. She glanced at her old friend Peggy, giving a small, almost shy smile. "Peggy, long time no see, huh?"

"Mhm," Peggy replied, sparing her a quick glance.

"How's your skin that good?" Missy said, trying to reel Peggy in. "It's unreal—tender as heck. What makeup do you use?"

At first, it was just flattery, but then she took a closer look and realized she didn't even need to exaggerate. Peggy's face was flawless—rosy and so delicate you'd leave a mark with a poke.

"No makeup," Peggy shook her head.

"No way!" Missy yelled. "That's impossible!"

Okay, truth's truth, but to spark some old friendship vibes, she dialed up the drama a bit.

"I don't lie anymore," Peggy said, giving Missy another glance.

She remembered her rebellious phase—teaching Missy to lie, nearly dragging her into shoplifting. Now, in a great mood, seeing Missy like this softened her up, and she added, "One, I'm too lazy. Two, Adam doesn't like it. He's always going on about 'natural beauty'—says it's the best look."

"But your skin's insanely good," Missy said, thrilled Peggy was actually talking to her. "It's better than when you were a kid. That's nuts!"

Time's a butcher's knife. Kids have the best skin—smooth and perfect. But as you age, sun, wind, bad diets, late nights, and slowing metabolism team up to wreck it.

Western girls especially—bloom early, fade fast. Twelve or thirteen's the big turning point.

Missy remembered Peggy's face from when they were around ten—peak skin days, right? But now, almost eight years later, with Peggy turning nineteen, her skin wasn't just holding up—it was better than her childhood peak. Missy, with her normal skin, couldn't wrap her head around it.

"Better than when I was a kid?" Peggy blinked, caught off guard.

She hadn't thought about it. But now that Missy mentioned it—holy crap.

Her genius brain kicked in, projecting mental snapshots of her face over the years, analyzing frame by frame.

And yeah, Missy wasn't exaggerating. Her skin was basically reverse-aging—getting better and better. The timeline? It started after her eighteenth birthday, so... the last six months or so.

Peggy glanced at Adam, who was deep in his chess trance, and something clicked in her mind.

Chapter 629: Sheldon - I'm the First Man on Mars!

Medical Center. Adam's Office.

Round two, and both Sheldon and Adam were giving it their all. Neither of them wanted to lose.

One couldn't afford to lose.

The other didn't want to dampen his double dose of joy.

By the midgame, their mindsets couldn't have been more different.

Adam, realizing it'd be tough to beat Sheldon, quickly shifted gears. He went from "I've got this" to "Let's play it safe and hope for a win." Sure, losing wouldn't cost him anything, but tonight? He really didn't want to lose.

Sheldon, on the other hand, was teetering on the edge of a breakdown as the game got tense. Yup, you heard that right—he was losing it! 🤯 His telltale signs? Wide eyes glued to the chessboard and a slight twitch in his face. Anyone who knew him could spot it a mile away—this was Sheldon's big "I'm about to crack" signal.

As time ticked on and Sheldon's facial twitches got wilder, Adam started smirking with confidence. Chess isn't just about smarts—it's a mental game too. Adam's sneaky first-round win had already rattled Sheldon, laying the groundwork for victory in round two. The trick? Survive Sheldon's early onslaught, steady the board, and watch his "Get serious and you're toast" mindset crumble.

Once Sheldon couldn't win fast, he'd basically already lost.

"It's over. Seven moves, and I'll checkmate you," Adam said, sliding his rook forward with a grin he couldn't hold back.

"No!!!" Sheldon's eyes darted around the board, his brain racing through calculations. Adam was right—no matter what he did, checkmate was coming in seven moves max. Cue the classic Sheldon panic scream! 🤪

"Wait, don't—"

Adam was about to celebrate with Paige behind him when his super-sharp senses caught Sheldon's pre-table-flip wind-up. He almost stopped him, but at the last second... he didn't.

Beating Sheldon at chess? That's one milestone. Forcing him to flip the board? That's a whole other level! It's what happens when Sheldon's IQ feels seriously threatened—an uncontrollable meltdown.

Or, as some might say, Sheldon's official "You're smart enough to beat me" stamp of approval.

Paige had made him flip the board once before. Now Adam didn't want to miss his shot at this epic moment.

BAM!

He flipped it! He actually flipped it!

Ding!

Mission accomplished! 🏆

Click! Click!

Adam and Paige's eyes turned into cameras, snapping mental pics of this legendary scene. Last time Paige saw this, she was shocked. This time? She was giggling like crazy. 😊

"Round three?"

Adam, fresh off his "check-in" success, picked up the scattered pieces, set the board back up, and flashed a smile at Sheldon. "Eight more games to go. You've got this—come on!"

"..."

Missy's mouth twitched. She stared at Adam like he was some kind of evil genius. "Nah, forget this. Let's just head back to the party."

"What's fun about a party?" Adam waved her off. "Sheldon, we agreed—battle till dawn. You're not bailing now, are you?"

No way was he letting this go. Sheldon's mental game was toast—Adam could win every round now! And every win? Double the fun! 🎉

Sheldon just sat there, zoned out, completely checked out from reality.

"Eh, let's call it," Paige said, shaking her head. "Sheldon's got no fight left. It's no fun anymore. Night's over."

"No way!" Adam protested.

"Reward system's off," Paige shot him a look.

"Fine," Adam said, straightening up. "Beating this version of Sheldon's no thrill anyway. Let's wrap it up."

With that, he stood, grabbed Paige's hand, and started heading out.

"Where are you two going?" Missy shouted after them.

"Home to shower and crash," Adam replied like it was obvious. "It's late—you guys should hit the hay too."

"What about Sheldon?!"

Missy's eyes widened. "Look what you've done to him!"

"He's fine," Adam said, glancing at Sheldon with a chuckle. "He's just struggling to process the beatdown. Take him to Mrs. Cooper—she'll cuddle her little genius and make it all better. If he cries it out in Mommy's arms, he'll bounce back in no time."

And with that, he dragged Paige off, no hesitation.

Sure, the office was nice, but it couldn't compare to his apartment. On a night this good, he wasn't about to settle for "meh." A cramped office? No thanks!

"Adam, you jerk!" Missy flipped him off from behind.

Adam caught it out of the corner of his eye, tossed back an "OK" hand sign, and strolled off with a grin. Cool as a cucumber—good vibes and great nights were all that mattered.

VIP Ward

"What's wrong with Cousin Sheldon?"

The party was over, and Emilia had just gotten back to the ward. She saw Aunt Mary and her mom shaking their heads and frowning, and for a second, she panicked—had something gone wrong? But Missy quickly pointed her to the real issue.

Sheldon was slumped on the couch, staring into space.

"He got wrecked," Missy said with a smirk. "By a total jerk."

"Ugh... ahh..."

Right as Emilia was about to ask more, zoned-out Sheldon let out a sigh and a pitiful groan.

"Seven years. Just seven years!" Sheldon muttered. "Adam—this dumb Earthling who used to not even understand me—beat me at chess, a game that tests pure IQ! Ughhh..."

"Enough already!" Missy snapped. "Adam beat you, big deal. It's not like no one's ever done it before. Paige has been owning you since forever—what's the fuss?"

"You don't get it!" Sheldon shot her a look. "Paige is just a girl. Adam and I are guys. If Mars colonization happens someday, Paige wouldn't steal my title as the first man on Mars. But Adam? He's my direct rival! And right now, he's got the edge..."

He slumped back, looking crushed, shaking his head. "Ugh... I can't deal with this..."

"No one's moving to Mars!" his mom, Mary, finally exploded. "And no one can! That's God's territory!"

"Mom, please," Sheldon glanced at her. "If tech had kept up with my calculations, I'd have cracked reusable rockets back when I was 9. Cheaper launches would've pushed space travel forward by leaps and bounds. Nine years later, I might already be growing potatoes on Mars!"

"..."

Little cousin Emilia's jaw dropped, totally lost. She had no clue what Sheldon was rambling about.

Missy jumped in, explaining how 9-year-old Sheldon had gone to high school, chased down a NASA scientist who'd spoken there, and schooled him. Emilia stared at her quirky, kid-like cousin in awe.

My cousin's a freaking genius! 😳

Chapter 630: Only Beautiful Moments and Scenery Should Never Be Wasted

Medical Center. VIP Ward.

Sheldon was so shaken by Adam that he started questioning his entire existence. 😊

Meanwhile, his little cousin Emilia was practically bursting with admiration for her big cousin Sheldon.

"My cousin's a rocket scientist! ~" Emilia beamed with pride.

"Rocket scientist?!"

Sheldon's eyes widened as he whipped his head around. "I studied theoretical physics, and I'm going to be a theoretical physicist!"

"What's the difference?!"

Missy cut in, rolling her eyes. "Stop glaring with those big eyes you inherited from Mom—you'll scare Emilia! She's just proud of you, that's all."

"Yep, yep!" Emilia nodded eagerly. 😊

"If you're really proud of me, at least get it right!" Sheldon huffed, his eyes bulging. "Rocket scientist? How humiliating!"

Everyone: "..."

They were clearly on totally different wavelengths.

In the U.S., "rocket scientist" is slang for a genius scientist. But in Sheldon's super-literal brain, it just meant those nerds who mess around with actual rockets.

Emmm.

Take Leonard, for example—he'd worked on rocket fuel before, so he kinda qualified as a "rocket scientist." And yet, future experimental physicist Leonard got mocked for it his whole life by theoretical physicist Sheldon. That's how much Sheldon genuinely thought being called a rocket scientist was an insult. 😊

"Okay, Shelly," his mom Mary finally said, unable to watch anymore. "Are you hungry?"

"Hungry, not hungry—what's the difference? Why waste food?" Sheldon slumped back in his chair, wallowing in the misery of Adam's latest blow. "Have you all forgotten that in Texas, if a cow stops giving milk, the farmers don't keep feeding it? They take it out back and put a bullet right between its eyes—ow! Mom, what was that for?!"

Mid-rant, Mary flicked him square on the forehead.

"Didn't you say 'right between the eyes'?" she teased, her big eyes twinkling. "I'm just giving you a preview."

"Mommy~" Sheldon whined, rubbing his head.

"Enough," Mary said with a frown. "Shelly, you used to complain that no one was smart enough to keep up with you. Now you've got two friends, Adam and Paige, who are just as brilliant as you. Shouldn't that make you happy?"

"Mom, Sheldon's the type who says he wants one thing but freaks out when he actually gets it," Missy chimed in with a smirk. "He wants friends who are almost as smart as him—but not smarter. Definitely not like Adam and Paige, who totally outshine him!"

"They're not smarter than me!" Sheldon grumbled, refusing to accept it.

"Right," Mary soothed. "You're all amazing in your own fields."

Between Missy's teasing and Mary's comforting, Sheldon started to calm down.

Meanwhile, over at Adam's apartment, Paige gave him a little nudge, hinting she needed a moment to unwind.

"Missy reminded me of something," Paige said with a knowing look.

"Oh? What's that?"

Adam, ever the gentleman, started giving Paige a full-body massage to help her relax faster.

He was a doctor, after all—a genius doctor! Ever since his physical stats started skyrocketing, he'd taught himself massage techniques. Now, he was so good even professional masseuses would feel inferior.

No surprise there! He was just that kind of sweet, caring guy. 😊

"My skin!" Paige said, savoring the massage as she lazily lifted a hand. "Missy said it's even better than when I was a kid. I thought about it, and she's right."

"Starting at thirteen, my skin went downhill and stayed that way for years. But then, after I turned eighteen and ran into you again, it's like my skin's been aging backward this past six months—getting better and better. What's up with that?"

"What else could it be?" Adam's heart skipped a beat. In his mind, he instantly replayed Paige's words, pulling up mental images of her over the years. Comparing them, he realized her skin had changed dramatically.

They were together so often that he'd overlooked the gradual shift. But to an outsider? It'd be obvious.

"I wasn't lying to you!" he said with a grin.

"Heh." Paige let out a little scoff, closed her eyes, and sank into the massage, going quiet.

Adam wasn't sure if she was laughing at his old promises or calling his bluff now. Feeling a twinge of guilt, he put extra effort into the massage.

At the same time, his mind raced about what this meant.

Because in that moment, he mentally compared his other close female friends—and sure enough, Heather, who he was super tight with, showed similar changes.

The others had it too, to a lesser extent—not as noticeable, but still there.

"Holy crap," Adam cursed under his breath.

It used to just be playful bedroom talk.

Who'd have thought it'd turn into reality?! If this got out, he might be in some hot water.

But he quickly relaxed. After running through all the data in his head, he spotted a pattern.

The effect wasn't infinite. Back when he and Heather were practically living together for years, tangled up in love every night, she didn't turn into a kid again. Her skin just stayed soft and youthful—nothing crazy.

These days, with less contact, Heather's skin was still flawless, but under Adam's obsessive scrutiny, he could see faint signs of aging creeping in.

Emmm.

Though recently, it'd bounced back to peak condition again.

Adam thought it over. His physical stats were heading into superhuman territory—especially his stamina, which had already surpassed "show-off" levels and was closing in on "inhuman."

Sure, he was still human, probably only living to his thirties, but the quality of his life? Totally different.

Adam never got sick, never ran out of energy. Think of those mythical ginseng fruits shaped like babies—sniff one, live 360 years; eat one, live 47,000! Or Tang Monk's flesh with similar vibes.

Adam wasn't on that level, but this weird effect he was causing? It wasn't completely illogical.

A mythical perk! A system perk! Totally made sense! 😊

Still, it was a wake-up call. Playful bedroom talk wasn't something to throw around lightly—not unless the bond was deep. He'd have to keep some distance with others.

"Ow! What are you doing?!" Paige's yelp snapped him out of his thoughts.

"Sorry, sorry!" Adam realized he'd gotten carried away while lost in his vow-making habit and quickly apologized.

Paige took the chance to flop down, ready to sleep. They'd been out all day—she was wiped.

But Adam? Apology aside, he wasn't backing down on principle.

No way.

Tonight was all about beautiful moments and fleeting years. Why waste a perfect night and a gorgeous vibe on sleep? That'd be a crime!

So, he started telling Paige, the ice-cold beauty now softened by the mortal world, the romantic tale of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl. He rambled about the wild Eastern myth where a day in the heavens equals a year on Earth, joking that the Queen Mother must really dote on her daughter.

Paige, though, zoned in on the time difference between heaven and Earth. "It's all about gravity," she mused, diving into serious calculations about the gravitational pull of different planets.

She figured that for such an effect, "heaven" would have to be something like a neutron star or a black hole—marveling at how ancient Eastern imaginations transcended time and space...