

TV Show 681

Chapter 681: MAX: You In or Out?

Medical Center.

"Elena..."

Peter couldn't believe his luck when Elena made her choice—pure joy hit him like a lightning bolt.

Then—

Jack, fuming with rage, swung his elbow straight at Peter's face.

Peter had no chance to dodge.

But Adam? He stepped in effortlessly, blocking Jack's elbow and holding both guys back to cool them down. As the attending doctor, he had to keep things under control—especially with all the big-shot bosses watching.

It took a while, but with Adam's calm persuasion, Jack finally chilled out. He sat there, stone-faced and silent, looking every bit like one of those "30 years east, 30 years west" revenge protagonists from a breakup drama.

Elena was ushered out.

Her presence was a spark waiting to ignite more chaos.

Cristina stayed behind to monitor things while Adam joined Chief of Surgery Richard and the others in the imaging room. They pulled up Jack and Peter's CT scans and started hashing out the surgery plan.

"I'm against doing the surgery."

The challenge was separating the nerves, and Dr. Shepherd, the lead neurosurgeon, voiced his objection. "Their spines are fused below the L4 vertebra, and their blood vessels are a tangled mess. The risks are way too high."

"Your patients are demanding this surgery," Chief Richard shot back, his gaze sharp as a blade. "Derek, why are you backing off? This isn't like you! Unless you've got undeniable proof this can't be done, we're moving forward!"

Dr. Shepherd sighed, frustrated.

Sure, the surgery was insanely tough, but the real kicker? He'd have to work with Dr. Sloan, which grated on him for reasons he couldn't even say out loud.

With Chief Richard dead-set on it, though, Shepherd had no choice but to give it a shot.

This was a high-stakes, complex operation.

The team moved to the practice room, setting up a model to rehearse.

"Once we cut this artery, all sensation in the nerves will be gone in under two minutes," Shepherd explained as he worked.

"I'm confident we've got enough nerve grafts to patch any gaps. We can totally pull this off," Dr. Mark Sloan said, his eyes locked on Shepherd with a fiery intensity—like they were finally back in the trenches together.

Shepherd's irritation spiked.

"Damn it!"

His practice run ended in failure. "The nerves in a real body are way more fragile. If this were life-or-death, I'd say let's go for it. But it's not—it's not worth the risk."

He dropped the instruments in defeat.

"Dr. Shepherd, can I give it a try?" Adam asked politely.

"..."

Shepherd froze, giving Adam a complicated look.

"Yes!"

Chief Richard wasn't ready to give up. Shepherd was the neuro expert, and even Richard couldn't outright dismiss his opinion. But seeing Adam step up? He was all for it.

For one, Adam might just be an intern, but he'd earned the "miracle doctor" rep—his skills were undeniable.

For two, even if Adam couldn't do it, it might light a fire under Shepherd, snapping him back to his peak neurosurgery glory days instead of this weird hesitation.

"Guide Adam through it. Let him try," Richard said.

"Fine."

Shepherd lowered his eyes and agreed.

Adam stepped up, flashing Shepherd an apologetic smile. "Dr. Shepherd, could you walk me through the whole procedure? I'll memorize it and run a simulation."

"..."

The room collectively twitched.

Even these top-tier doctors couldn't help but envy Adam's freakish talent.

Under Chief Richard's watchful eye, Shepherd swallowed his annoyance and laid out the full procedure step-by-step.

Adam asked a few clarifying questions.

Shepherd answered.

Then—

Adam closed his eyes.

Emmm.

Not because he needed to—open eyes wouldn't mess with his mental simulation.

Nah, it was just for show.

Without it, no one would even know what he was up to. A simple eye-close made it clear: something epic's happening.

It'd even started a trend—tons of doctors now closed their eyes for a few seconds before surgery, opening them with a "steely gaze" like it gave them superpowers.

Chief Richard watched with anticipation. He'd heard the rumors too.

Adam picked up the instruments and started the simulation.

It was smooth as silk—pure perfection.

Where Shepherd had messed up, Adam breezed through like it was nothing.

Fast. Flawless.

Shepherd's face betrayed a flicker of helplessness.

"Perfect!"

Chief Richard was the first to clap and cheer when Adam finished.

Adam gave a modest smile. 😊

"Derek, with Dr. Duncan backing you up, no issues now, right?" Richard grinned.

"Nope."

What else could Shepherd say?

"Great—"

Richard was about to seal the deal.

"Chief," Adam cut in. "Could Dr. Sloan walk me through his part too? He's handling the nerve grafts. I'd like to simulate that as well, just to be fully prepped."

"..."

Mark Sloan's face darkened instantly.

This was basically Adam saying, I'm your backup, ready to step in.

Worse? Mark didn't even have the confidence to outshine Adam and put this intern in his place with some attending-level swagger.

Talk about humiliating.

He was sure Adam did it on purpose.

"I think that's a solid idea," Richard said, glancing at Mark. "This is a massive surgery—22 doctors in sync. With Dr. Duncan's talent, we can rehearse everything and nail it."

Worried Mark might balk, he doubled down. "Doctors, these are conjoined twins—adult conjoined twins! Separating conjoined infants is rare enough, but adults?"

You know how the media will eat this up and what it'll mean for the medical center. As part of this team, we've got to go all in!"

Mark suddenly understood how Shepherd felt when he'd first joined—reluctant but powerless to stop it.

The practice dragged on.

The results? Pretty darn good.

On his way to the patient room for a final check-in, Adam got a call from MAX.

"Inviting me to go horseback riding?" Adam asked, surprised. "With Caroline?"

"Yup!"

MAX groaned over the phone. "Real horseback riding, not whatever you're thinking. Caroline's got this horse pet named Chestnut. We're heading to the stables to see it. You in or out?"

"Uh..."

Adam hesitated. "When?"

"When are you free?" MAX shot back.

Caroline was still waitressing, so she could ditch work anytime. MAX mostly stayed home painting—her schedule was wide open too.

"Is it urgent?" Adam mused. "I'm swamped right now. The exam's coming up, and it's a big deal. Why don't you two go? Is she short on stable fees for Chestnut or something? Help her out if she is."

"You're really not coming?"

MAX teased. "You sure?"

"Not sure," Adam admitted, catching her tone and perking up. "MAX, you know me—exams are a breeze for me. 😊"

Now that I think about it, we haven't lived it up together yet—riding horses, chasing the good life, sharing the world's hustle and bustle.

This time, I'm making it happen. No one's stopping me!"

Chapter 682: A Mirror to Humanity

Medical Center.

Adam hung up the phone, feeling cheerful.

It wasn't just because of Max's tone.

It was more about why Max did what she did.

Going to the stables to see Caroline's pet horse, Chestnut, Max could've easily gone with Caroline alone.

So why invite Adam?

It wasn't because Max suddenly felt like keeping a promise out of childlike enthusiasm.

No, she was worried that at the stables, they might run into Caroline's old friends.

And if those friends humiliated Caroline, Max was afraid she wouldn't be able to handle it.

Of course, in normal social settings, Max—the queen of sharp wit and dirty jokes—could take down a whole group of them single-handedly.

She'd have poor Caroline's back, no problem.

But at a place like the stables, where Max, who hadn't fully experienced the life of the ultra-rich, felt a bit out of her depth, she wasn't so sure.

There are people who can navigate any situation effortlessly, even if they know nothing about it, without ever feeling intimidated.

But that's definitely not Max, who's too shy to even hand out her business card to a friendly employer.

To protect Caroline, Max naturally called in the biggest backup she knew—Adam. With Adam there, she believed no one could humiliate them.

She'd have the confidence to flip off those "bitches" she used to look up to without a second thought. 😊

And why was Adam happy?

Well, naturally, it was because Max was willing to go this far for Caroline. She's such a kind, lovable soul.

Adam felt gratified that their sisterly bond hadn't been broken by the butterfly effect of his actions.

Hmmm.

But honestly, Max was overthinking it. She didn't need Adam to go and boost her confidence.

As long as Max and Caroline teamed up, they were already unstoppable.

Still, Adam wouldn't say anything about it.

That kind of invincible team confidence takes time to build.

Clearly, they weren't there yet.

Adam looked forward to the day they'd get there. 😊

Operating Room.

"These blood vessels are more fragile than in the model. Dr. Duncan, are you sure you can handle it?"

Dr. Shepherd looked at Adam seriously.

"I can," Adam nodded.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea," Dr. Shepherd hesitated.

"We need to make a decision now," Chief of Surgery Richard, acting as the assistant, said solemnly.

"Derek, you're the lead surgeon. It's your call!"

Although the most delicate and dangerous part of the surgery was about to be handed over to Adam,

And Chief Richard had already acknowledged Adam's skill,

Adam was, after all, just an intern in name. He didn't have the authority to take on that responsibility.

At this point, it all came down to Dr. Shepherd, the lead surgeon, to decide.

If Dr. Shepherd trusted Adam, he'd take the pressure and let Adam proceed.

If he didn't trust Adam and wasn't confident in doing it himself, they'd have to stop the surgery.

That's the basic protocol.

Even as the chief, even though he really wanted this surgery to succeed, he had to follow the rules.

Dr. Shepherd looked at Adam.

Adam smiled back.

The air in the operating room grew quiet.

Everyone's eyes were on the two of them.

"Give Dr. Duncan the No. 10 scalpel," Dr. Shepherd instructed.

"Phew."

Hearing this, Chief Richard's face, hidden behind his mask, broke into a grin like a black lotus blooming under the heavens. His exposed eyes were full of joy as he smiled at the nurse. "You heard him. Give Dr. Duncan the No. 10 scalpel. We're officially starting."

Adam took the No. 10 scalpel from the nurse's hand and said with a smile, "Please suction here, thank you."

The nurse responded immediately.

In the observation room, the watching doctors leaned forward, eyes glued to the surgery below, not daring to blink.

Under everyone's watchful gaze, Adam closed his eyes for a few seconds. When he opened them again, he was calm and moved the scalpel with practiced ease, making everyone's eyelids twitch.

Do you have to be so smooth?

Can't you go a bit slower, a bit steadier? 😊

Adam's heart was steady, and his hands were rock-solid.

But most of the onlookers could hardly handle it.

Of course, some were enjoying the show.

Like Cristina.

She stared at Adam's movements, practically wishing she could take his place.

As it turned out, when Adam said he could do it, he really could.

The blood vessels were indeed more fragile than in the model.

But under Adam's masterful, almost surgical artistry, everything went smoothly—no waves, no surprises, just a perfectly executed surgery.

"Dr. Shepherd?"

Adam stepped back, having completed his part, and looked at Dr. Shepherd.

"Is the saphenous vein graft in place?"

Dr. Shepherd nodded at Adam and turned to Mark Sloan.

"I'm ready," Mark Sloan said, glancing at Adam.

"Dr. Bailey?"

"Ready."

"Chief?"

"Anytime."

"..."

Dr. Shepherd took charge again, checking in with each doctor responsible for their area. Everything was going smoothly. He took a deep breath. "Alright, it's time. Remove the clamps! Dr. Bailey, check the nerve stimulator."

"Somatosensory evoked potentials are dropping," Dr. Bailey reported, stepping away from the table to monitor the equipment.

"Raise the blood pressure. We need to maximize blood flow," Dr. Shepherd instructed.

"Twin A's hamstrings are trembling."

"Twin B's calf muscles are twitching."

"Congratulations, ladies and gentlemen—four legs, all functioning normally!"

Dr. Shepherd made the final announcement.

Clap, clap, clap!

Everyone burst into applause.

Dr. Shepherd was beaming too. After all, this was a surgery he could proudly add to his career highlights.

The only slight disappointment was that the most critical part was done by Adam.

"Great job, Dr. Duncan," Dr. Shepherd said, a bit regretful but gracious enough to acknowledge Adam's contribution.

Everyone was happy.

Surgery Over.

As the attending physician, Adam was responsible for wrapping things up.

To prevent the newly separated twins from getting into a fight and reopening their wounds, Adam made sure to keep them apart.

That woman, Elena, could finally be by the side of Peter, the emotional confidant she'd chosen.

"We can finally be alone together," Elena said, reaching out to hold Peter's hand.

"Mm," Peter responded flatly, not even looking at her.

"Peter?" Elena's heart sank, a shadow creeping in.

"It's been a long day," Peter finally turned his head, offering a brief explanation.

"Alright, then. I'll come back tomorrow. Rest well," Elena forced a smile, gave him a stiff, awkward kiss, and left, carrying a heavy sense of unease.

"Doctor."

After Elena left, Peter called out to Adam.

"Need anything?" Adam looked at him.

"How's Jack?" Peter asked. "Can you move me to his side? Don't worry, we won't fight anymore."

"I'll check," Adam said, not agreeing right away.

A little while later, Adam helped move Peter over.

In the Ward.

When Peter arrived, Jack turned his head slightly, a faintly mocking expression on his face. "Couldn't handle it already?"

Peter didn't say anything. He just raised his hand halfway between them, looking at Jack with hopeful eyes.

Jack turned his head away, refusing to look at Peter, but his hand had already reached out to grasp Peter's.

Adam and a few nurses watched the whole scene.

While the nurses were visibly touched, Adam's expression was a bit odd.

But he didn't say anything.

And he'd learned something from this experience.

As Lu Xun said: "Learn from history, and use others as a mirror."

After this twin separation surgery, Adam couldn't help but shift his perspective to Elena.

It made him think of Max and Caroline.

And so, he quietly reminded himself: Stay steady, don't get carried away!

Chapter 683: Late-Night Chat with MAX About Caroline

Nighttime.

MAX's Apartment.

"Wait a sec!"

MAX threw out a hand to stop Adam. "We haven't even gotten to the real stuff yet."

"What real stuff?"

Adam blinked at her, genuinely confused.

"What do you think?"

MAX grabbed his head, forcing him to lock eyes with her.

"Oh, you mean going to the stables to see Caroline's pet horse?"

Adam cracked a grin. "Got it. How about the day after tomorrow? You two head over first, and I'll swing by after morning rounds."

"You're not coming with us?"

MAX frowned, a little worried. "Caroline says those places are members-only. Regular people can't just waltz in."

"What, you think Caroline's gonna get humiliated at the gate?"

Adam laughed. "Relax, it's all good. I've got it covered."

"You've got it covered?"

MAX still looked skeptical.

"I swear!"

Adam raised his right hand like he was taking an oath. "In the name of NAXAM!"

"Wow, you're really giving me the VIP treatment," MAX said, rolling her eyes dramatically. "On behalf of NAXAM, thanks a bunch!"

"That's it?"

Adam teased. "That thank-you's got zero heart. I'm not expecting grand gestures or anything, but at least make it sound sincere and touching, you know?"

"Nah, forget it."

MAX flopped back on the bed, totally done. "I'm not speaking for NAXAM anymore. Go bug whoever you want!"

"Alright, you sleep then."

Adam didn't push her any further, chuckling as he got up. "I'm gonna read for a bit."

He headed to the study and grabbed a thick math textbook.

"Get over here!"

MAX called from the bedroom.

Adam walked in with a grin, book in hand, and slid onto the bed beside her. He lay on his side, letting MAX snuggle up and wrap her arms around him while he started reading.

This was their routine now.

At first, Adam didn't want to disturb MAX's sleep and planned to read in the living room. But MAX wasn't having it—she insisted he stay in the bedroom, lights on and all.

She didn't care if the light kept her awake.

For someone who'd usually pass out after a barrage of sarcastic quips and dirty jokes, refusing to back down, lights were the least of her problems.

No amount of brightness could rouse a soul drifting off to another dimension.

Even now, as she'd softened up a bit—reining in her sharp tongue, trading barbs with Adam just enough without going overboard—she still wouldn't let him read elsewhere. She'd rather use him as her personal pillow.

Double the cuddling, triple the comfort.

MAX hugged him tight, her face pure bliss.

Most people couldn't handle this level of clinginess.

A normal body would buckle under that kind of prolonged embrace.

Take Ross and Rachel, for example.

Ross even invented the "hug-and-roll" technique: wait for Rachel to fall asleep, hug her from the side, gently roll her over to free his trapped arm, then carefully slide out the rest of the way.

After that, he'd sleep solo—perfectly detached.

To keep up the sweet illusion, he'd hug her again in the morning, pretending they'd cuddled all night.

Ross—an honest guy who'd only had one ex-wife (and a complicated one at that)—had been forced to master this trick. That's how tough it could get.

In his past life, Adam knew plenty of buddies who'd suffered the same fate. Their arms couldn't take the "gentle" demands of their girlfriends.

They'd vent from the heart: TV lies! Screw cuddling all night! Sleeping solo afterward is the real dream. Give me some space—back off, please!

But in this life? With his system-boosted stats, Adam could handle the sweetness and tenderness like a champ.

Emmm.

He genuinely loved it. 😊

"Caroline's seriously amazing," MAX murmured, eyes closed, savoring the moment as she hugged him.

"How so?"

Adam asked casually, flipping a page.

"The other day, I went with her to her old mansion to grab some stuff," MAX said, opening her eyes and tilting her head up at him. "That place is a real mansion. Her walk-in closet's bigger than my whole apartment..."

"Big deal," Adam teased. "Even if it were twice as big, it still couldn't hold your wardrobe."

"Don't tempt me!"

MAX giggled, nudging him before getting serious. "We're talking real stuff here—no flirty nonsense!"

"Alright, alright," Adam said with a shrug, playing along.

"She's got this rotating shoe rack she calls the 'Shoe Ferris Wheel!'" MAX gushed. "One press of a remote, and it spins—rows of shoes just keep popping up. It's insane! She designed it herself, apparently."

"That's a simple setup," Adam said, grinning. "You could have one too if you wanted."

"And her bathtub!"

MAX's face lit up with awe. "It's got massage buttons built in..."

"That's even easier," Adam replied with a soft smile.

"Caroline and I live in totally different worlds, but we still connect on some things," MAX mused. "I grew up without a dad; she grew up without a mom. We love the same songs—heck, we even danced together in her mansion until we tripped the alarm. Ended up running out wearing a pile of her clothes!"

"Next time, don't pull that kinda stunt," Adam said, setting his book down to look at her. "You're not that broke girl from back in the day anymore. Helping Caroline out when you can is fine, but steer clear of anything illegal."

"I get it," MAX said, meeting his gaze and nodding.

Back then, she wouldn't have cared.

But now? Even if she didn't, she knew Adam would step in if things went south.

She didn't want to drag him into her mess.

"That's my girl," Adam said, ruffling her hair. "Caroline's not as helpless as you think, though. A skinny camel's still bigger than a horse."

"What's that mean?"

MAX tilted her head, curious. "You saying Caroline's secretly loaded?"

"No idea," Adam said with a sly smile. "But a crafty rabbit's got three burrows—imagine what Martin Channing, the guy who conned half of New York, might've stashed away. He's gotta have hidden assets that didn't get seized.

They can't help Caroline right now, though.

People are watching the Channing family's finances like hawks. If she pulls out anything that doesn't match her paycheck, it'll get snatched up to pay debts faster than you can blink.

So yeah, she's stuck scraping by for a few years—a real broke girl.

But her kind of broke? Way different from yours back then.

If push comes to shove, I bet she's got something up her sleeve to tide her over. She's not as pitiful as you imagine."

If he remembered right, Caroline still had a stash of diamonds.

When they snuck into the mansion the other day, beyond grabbing clothes, they probably pocketed some unregistered "spare" gems—tiny ones she used to scoff at for accessories. Even a small bag of those would be worth a fortune.

And that's just the diamonds.

Who knows what other secret treasures she's got squirreled away?

Adam was pretty sure there was more.

"Maybe," MAX said, shaking her head. "But going from a princess life to this? That kind of drop—I can't even imagine it.

If it were me, or anyone else, we'd probably lose it.

But Caroline? She adjusted fast, stays upbeat, doesn't even hold a grudge.

That kind of attitude? It's rare as hell."

Chapter 684: Max: "Get in the Car, Quick!"

Max's Apartment.

Faced with Max's murmurs, Adam just smiled without saying anything.

It was only natural that Max appreciated Caroline.

Adam didn't feel the need to comment much.

Everything should just unfold naturally.

And clearly, Max wasn't expecting Adam to say anything either. Mid-murmur, her eyelids grew heavy, and she drifted off to sleep.

Two Days Later. Morning.

"Should I call Adam again?"

Max and Caroline were getting ready to head out, but there was no sign of Adam. Seeing Caroline looking a bit disappointed and nervous, Max picked up her phone, ready to give Adam another call to hurry him up.

"No need," Caroline stopped her. "Adam's a doctor. He's busy. Let's not bother him. I'm just going to check on Chestnut this time... I'm already looking for a place. Once I find one, I'll bring Chestnut home. It's just that affordable houses with yards are hard to find."

Chestnut, Caroline's horse, was being boarded at a professional stable with dedicated caretakers, living the good life.

But that was before.

Now, Caroline could no longer afford such private horse care services.

Luckily, she'd paid for a full year of service upfront, so Chestnut should be safe from neglect until it expired... probably...

But the renewal date was fast approaching.

Caroline had to find Chestnut an affordable new home before then.

Max's apartment was nice, but it didn't have a yard, so Chestnut couldn't settle there.

"Damn it!" Max cursed. "When I bought this apartment, I had my eye on one with a yard, but Adam said first-floor units have bad surroundings—too much foot traffic and the risk of stuff falling from above. He told me not to buy it. Otherwise, Chestnut wouldn't have to worry about being homeless now."

"..."

Hearing this, Caroline was on the verge of tears.

If she rented, she'd probably end up with a place like that too. Just thinking about Chestnut stuck in a cramped backyard already broke her heart, and now there was the added risk of getting hit by something falling from above, potentially dying at any moment.

As Lu Xun said: Poverty limits imagination.

But he also said: Why not eat meat porridge? Wealth limits imagination too.

Chestnut was a thoroughbred Caroline's dad bought for her when she officially entered puberty. It held deep significance, and after raising it for nine years, she'd grown deeply attached.

In American TV terms, Chestnut was family.

And right now, it was the only family Caroline had left to keep her company.

Naturally, she couldn't bear to see Chestnut living in such a dangerous environment.

"Don't worry. We'll find Chestnut a good home," Max reassured her. "Worst case, I'll sell my current apartment and buy a standalone house in the suburbs."

American standalone houses usually have front and back yards. Settling Chestnut in the backyard might mean a smaller space, but it'd still work. It'd definitely be bigger than the backyard of a first-floor apartment in the city, and most importantly, there'd be no risk of things falling from above.

"Can we really do that?" Caroline looked at Max, touched that she'd so casually offer to sell her place and buy a new one for her.

"Why not?" Max waved it off grandly. "It's just a place to live. The suburbs actually have a better environment, more suited for my creative work. I only bought this apartment to be closer to Adam, making it easier for him to come and go."

"And now?" Caroline asked, feeling guilty.

"Now, it's not necessary anymore," Max said, smiling brightly at her. "Trust me, even if we moved thousands of miles away to Hollywood on the West Coast, Adam would still find time to come over."

"Max!" Caroline clearly understood what she meant. She brushed back her flowing blonde hair, lowering her head shyly. "You're embarrassing me."

"Alright, alright, I'll stop," Max shrugged. "Let's just not let him get too smug. As long as you're not into it, it's all good."

"..."

Caroline caught Max's nonchalant expression out of the corner of her eye, and her mind suddenly flashed with countless blush-inducing audio clips, sending her thoughts into a whirlwind.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Max noticed Caroline zoning out, her face flushed, and stepped forward to pinch her cheeks, snapping her out of it. "Stop daydreaming about sandwiches. We need to get going."

"Max!" This time, Caroline really couldn't handle Max's sharp-tongued, dirty humor. Her face turned beet red. 😳

"What?" Max spread her hands innocently. "Don't tell me you rich girls have never tried that kind of wild, thrilling state."

"...Oh, oh!" Caroline blinked, finally realizing what Max meant, and said awkwardly, "You mean those sandwiches we ate in college?"

Hmmm.

You know, the classic American college tradition—the kind Matthew and Ted ate together on their first day, the kind that makes you giggle uncontrollably because it's laced with something extra.

Rumor has it, this tradition's popularity has been growing year by year, surpassing 50% and racing toward 100%.

Those who get it, get it. 😊

Back when Max was scraping by at the bottom, she'd tried it too.

But after meeting Adam, and with his repeated reminders, she'd completely said goodbye to that kind of nonsense.

Besides, that stuff wasn't even as addictive as Adam.

If she had to quit anything, it'd be Adam.

"What else?" Max grinned mischievously. "You were zoning out, blushing, looking all blissed out, just like someone who'd eaten a special sandwich. If you weren't reminiscing about that, what else could it be?"

"Max!" Caroline's face turned crimson, and she covered it, running off.

Though she was no stranger to such topics, she still had to maintain her princess vibe. She needed to keep some level of decorum—how could she compare to Max, who spouted sharp-tongued, dirty jokes without a care?

"Wait for me! We're going together!" Max laughed, chasing after her.

"Get in the car, quick!" Max caught up to Caroline, who was walking ahead, honked the horn, and invited her in.

Though Caroline was mortified by Max's teasing, she still got into Max's car, and they headed toward the suburbs.

Caroline was a Manhattan girl, and her family's estate was naturally in Manhattan. Technically, she could've kept Chestnut at home.

But that's not how the rich play.

Their estates and mansions are for living in—keeping horses there just isn't appropriate.

And the solution is simple: buy another specialized stable estate in the suburbs.

Whenever you feel like riding, you go stay there for a few days. The rest of the time, a dedicated team of stable hands takes care of your prized horse.

These stable estates, since they're not in the city, are much more affordable for the same price, ensuring enough space for your horse to gallop and roam freely.

And the rich tend to cluster together.

Everyone's into horses, everyone buys stable estates in the suburbs, and soon, it forms a stable town.

Then, professional stables are established, managed by specialized staff, organizing professional riding competitions to enrich the leisure lives of the wealthy.

Hmmm.

It also provides better "quality education" conditions for those rich second-generation kids.

With all that time spent hanging out there, how could they not get good at riding?

Anyone with those conditions would probably do well.

It's simple!

Practice makes perfect!

The Channing family, of course, had an estate in New York's suburban stable town, but like their Manhattan mansion, it had been seized and auctioned off to pay debts.

Caroline only had time to transfer Chestnut's private care from their family's stable estate to a slightly less upscale public stable for boarding.

That's right!

The truly wealthy, in these already private places, still opt for even more private services, hiring dedicated teams to manage their prized horses.

Public stables, on the other hand, are for slightly less wealthy folks, giving them a chance to participate.

Even among the rich, there are levels, you know.

If everything followed the top-tier standards, far fewer people could join in on the game.

And if the scale shrinks, the fun shrinks too.

It's like in games—if there are no free-to-play players, what sense of achievement do the pay-to-win players have?

Chapter 685: It Finally Happened

Suburbs of New York.

Horse Farm Town.

MAX floored the gas pedal, weaving through the roads with Caroline pointing the way, until they screeched into town.

"This is my family's horse estate," Caroline said, guiding MAX to circle the massive property. She gazed out at it, her face full of nostalgia.

"Holy crap!"

MAX gawked. "I thought your Manhattan villa was huge, but compared to this? It's nothing! You rich folks buy places this big just to keep a horse?"

She couldn't even see inside—it was that enormous.

But driving around the perimeter took so long, she could feel just how ridiculously vast it was.

"Land's cheap out here," Caroline said casually. "One day, I'll take you to see our island and yacht. Now that's big and fancy."

"No way!"

MAX groaned. "Compared to you guys, we're total peasants—even Adam!"

"Adam's not," Caroline corrected. "His wealth might not match my family's peak, but he's up there among the elite. He built it from scratch and just isn't into the flashy lifestyle.

Lots of self-made millionaires are frugal—it's normal.

How could you call them peasants?

Compared to us second- or nth-generation rich kids riding our parents' coattails, when Adam decides to splurge, it's on a whole other level. We'd just be staring up in awe."

"Really?"

MAX wasn't totally convinced.

Adam was generous with her, sure, but day-to-day, he didn't flaunt the kind of extravagance that blew her mind.

Meanwhile, Caroline—just a few words and a quick tour—hit her with a tidal wave of luxury.

She wasn't sure if Caroline was exaggerating.

"Totally," Caroline said, her eyes glinting with envy as she looked at MAX. "Adam's different. Completely different..."

Guys with Adam's kind of money were either old-timers who'd hustled their whole lives or trust-fund kids with limitless inheritances.

But Adam? He had what both types envied: youth, looks, and endless energy!

Back in the day, her old gal pals drooled over him, even pushing her to invite him out as a "fan of his books."

He'd politely turned them all down.

The guy who once needed a fan-idol connection just to catch her eye had quietly grown into someone on her dad's level.

Even at her peak, landing a meeting with him—or pitching a multi-billion-dollar deal—would've been tough.

Her former friends? They didn't even qualify for a rejection.

Their families' entire fortunes topped out at a few billion, max.

The most they could touch was millions, maybe tens of millions—nowhere near Adam's league.

Who'd dare call him a peasant?

"Let's go see Chestnut," MAX said, noticing Caroline's mood shift to something sadder and quickly changing the subject.

"Sure."

Caroline pulled herself together and directed MAX toward the stables.

The manager, David, spotted Caroline and greeted her with a professional smile—no funny business.

"Not bad," MAX whispered to Caroline. "I was braced for some snobby smackdown. Guess I worried for nothing!"

"David's a pro. I wasn't worried about him," Caroline said, glancing around nervously. "It's the others I'm scared of. MAX, cover me—don't let them spot me."

"Unless you duck down and hide, how am I supposed to block you?"

MAX tilted her head up at Caroline, then smirked down at "Adam's favorite asset," letting out a classic snarky jab.

Caroline's long legs towered over MAX—there was no hiding her.

"Well, well, if it isn't Caroline Channing!"

A loud, exaggerated voice cut through the air.

MAX turned to see a gaggle of girls strutting over, dripping with malice.

The leader, a smug rich girl, zeroed in on Caroline with glee.

"The Channings conned everyone, and you've still got the nerve to show your face here? If you ask me, daughter pays for father's sins—they should auction you off too. Might scrape together a few extra bucks!"

"Hahaha! Spot on!"

"I'd bid just to watch!"

The posse cackled, egging on their ringleader.

"What, are you all into girls now?"

MAX stepped in front of Caroline, chin up, staring them down. "Licked her boots back then, and now you're dying to know what it's like to be on the other end?"

"Who the hell are you?"

The head rich girl glared at MAX, unimpressed.

"I'm Caroline's friend!"

MAX jutted her chin out. "Got a problem?"

"MAX..."

Caroline, touched, lifted her head from its slump. "Thanks, but don't fight them over me."

"These bitches were your friends?"

MAX looked at Caroline with pity.

"No," Caroline shook her head. "I don't even know them. Probably wannabes who never made it into my circle."

"Oh, I get it!"

MAX sneered at the group. "I thought they were some hotshot heiresses desperate for a new thrill. Turns out they're just nobodies who couldn't even get close enough to kiss Caroline's feet!"

"You!"

The girls exploded with rage.

No comeback!

That hit their sore spot dead-on.

Especially the leader.

The others didn't even qualify to dream about Caroline's world, so they could shrug it off.

But her? She came from the best family in the group—why else would she be in charge?

Back then, she'd eagerly tried to join Caroline's clique but didn't even make it past the first cut.

Her family just wasn't on that level.

It was the biggest blow of her princess life, a grudge she'd nursed ever since.

So when the Channing scam blew up, she was over the moon.

Running into a fallen Caroline here? It was pure, soul-deep joy.

But before she could savor breaking Caroline, this random, lowlife friend of hers flipped the script and broke her.

"Where's David? Get David over here! How do they let just anyone in?"

The leader shrieked.

"I'm on it!"

The lowest-ranking girl in the posse scurried off to fetch the manager.

"David, kick them out!"

The leader jabbed a finger at MAX and Caroline when he arrived. "This place is for people with status—not every stray cat and dog!"

"Sorry, we'll check on Chestnut and leave," Caroline said, her face paling.

"No way!"

The leader smirked coldly. "How many people here got screwed by the Channing scam? Why haven't you booted this Channing out already?"

"Who'd even wanna stick around?"

MAX scoffed. "With you lot here, this place isn't exactly screaming 'high class'!"

"Sorry, Miss Brie!"

David jumped in. "They're all valued members here. We can't kick anyone out!"

"What?!"

Brie, the leader, yelped. "Caroline Channing's still a 'valued member'?"

"No, it's Miss Black!"

David turned to MAX. "She owns the Channing estate—sorry, the Black estate now. She's our top-tier member!"

Everyone: "..."

MAX: "..."

Chapter 686: Glory of the Tang Dynasty

New York Suburbs. Stable Town.

"What?!"

The leader of the rich girls froze, stunned. After a moment, she pointed at Max, incredulous. "Her?!"

"That's right, me!"

Max was a bit dazed too, but after Caroline whispered in her ear, "Now you know what Adam-style extravagance looks like," and remembering how Adam had confidently assured her everything would be fine, she puffed out her chest and fired back, "Yes, me!"

Whether it was true or not, she'd fight first and figure it out later. 🙄

"That's a \$12 million estate!"

The lead rich girl scrutinized Max from head to toe, eyeing her far-from-luxurious outfit and accessories, refusing to believe Max could afford an estate even she could only dream of.

That's right!

When she found out Caroline had fallen on hard times, she'd desperately wanted to buy the top-tier estate in this stable town. She'd begged her parents countless times.

But it was no use.

It was too expensive!

Spending such an outrageous amount on a vacation home they'd only stay in a few times a year? Her rational, still-sane father would never agree.

If he could afford it so easily,

As his daughter, how could she not even qualify to be in Caroline's orbit?

"Yes," the stable manager, David, beamed at Max with genuine warmth. "Ms. Black has purchased the estate and is now our most esteemed member."

"I don't believe it!"

"No way!"

"Her? Looking so broke and tacky? How could she have that much money?"

The group of rich girls voiced their doubts.

It wasn't that Max was still wearing her old mustard-yellow waitress uniform.

Ever since meeting Adam, especially after graduating college and starting her formal job, under Adam's firm insistence, even though Max was only willing to splurge on Adam,

Her style and appearance had long since changed from the bottom-tier Max of the past.

No way around it.

Some things are expensive for a reason.

Like when Adam took Max to Caroline's coming-of-age party and ended up tearing apart countless evening gowns.

That kind of money, no matter how much it pained Max, couldn't be saved.

Over the years, Max's taste and perspective had naturally skyrocketed thanks to Adam's money-burning antics.

She couldn't compare to top-tier socialites, but she was absolutely far from "broke and tacky."

The reason these rich girls said that was partly out of hostility, but also because Max lacked that "socialite aura."

And that aura—or lack thereof—was glaringly obvious to people who lived in their circle.

The way you walk, smile, wave—every move has to have that vibe!

And clearly, Max, who grew up at the bottom, had already formed her own unique worldview. With Adam supporting her to be herself, she naturally didn't have that vibe.

Her habits, built through years of "tearing things apart," were unconventional.

But Adam loved that raw, unpretentious edge. 😊

Vroom, vroom, vroom!

The roar of a sports car echoed in the distance.

Adam arrived, fashionably late.

"Dr. Duncan!"

Stable manager David's eyes lit up as he hurried over to greet him.

"Adam!"

Max, done arguing with the rich girls, was pulled by Caroline and walked over too.

"So it's him."

"No wonder."

"Wait, how could he like such a tasteless woman? Just because she's fierce?"

"So she's just someone who climbed up by clinging to a sugar daddy, huh!"

"Both of them together!"

"Damn it! Are they worth \$12 million?"

"Yeah, no way! I thought he was some big deal, but turns out he's blind, doesn't see our value, and went for them... So tasteless."

"It's normal. It takes three generations to make a noble, you know."

"..."

The rich girls were filled with envy, jealousy, and resentment.

Adam's face was very familiar to them. He was a frequent subject of their daily gossip—no need for introductions.

They already knew everything about him from rumors.

The moment Adam arrived, they no longer doubted the authenticity of the Channing estate purchase. Instead, they were bitter that Adam had spent \$12 million on a woman they looked down on, buying her such a luxurious estate.

This was absolutely unacceptable!

They felt they were more deserving of Adam spending that money on them!

Even if Adam didn't spend on them, just based on his looks, they'd be willing to spend on him.

This stark contrast made them seethe with bitterness.

Why?

Just because you're fierce?

With \$12 million, anyone could be fiercer than you!

As fierce as you want!

The group of rich girls grumbled and left.

They weren't brainless. They knew who they could and couldn't mess with.

And Adam, who was richer than all their dads combined, was the ultimate "daddy"—absolutely not someone to confront directly.

Staying any longer would just be humiliating themselves.

A few of the less well-off rich girls, as they followed their leader away, kept sneaking glances back at Max, their eyes glinting with cunning.

Heh, men!

The stable manager chatted briefly with Adam, then tactfully left.

"Adam, you bought Caroline's family estate? And spent \$12 million?" Max asked, voicing her confusion.

"Yeah," Adam smiled. "It takes time, you know. That's why I had you wait until today."

"Are you crazy?!" Max blurted out, pained. "Just for a sandwich, you went this far? And you even renamed the estate Black Estate. I don't need you worrying about me—you just need to take care of Caroline!"

"Max!"

Caroline, who had been feeling down about her family's stable estate being renamed, turned bright red at Max's words. She didn't dare look at Adam, scolding Max in embarrassment.

"What?" Max spread her hands. "Adam's throwing money around like this, using my name, and I can't even say a word?"

Normally, when Adam bought her things, she'd try her best to stop him.

She didn't know exactly how much money Adam had.

But no matter how rich he was, this wasn't how you spend it.

Dropping \$12 million just to show off and add a side dish to a meal?

Adam might not care, but she did.

If it was just about adding a side dish to a meal, she'd have fed it to him herself.

Why waste that kind of money?

She was on a diet anyway. 🤔

"Trust me, this isn't a waste," Adam explained seriously. "Think of it as an advance on your bonus. You can pay it back later by drawing Peppa Pig. It's an investment, better than you spending it unknowingly.

And not only does Caroline's Chestnut need an estate to run free, I'm planning to keep a few horses too. We can come here to relax and have fun when we have time."

Hmmm.

Mainly, Adam felt that since Heather, Captain America Caroline, and the others all had estates, Max should have one too. It just made sense.

Duncan-style friends come with estates as standard equipment!

"Explain this clearly—are you just talking about literal horseback riding to relax?" Max asked, realizing this was an advance on her bonus. She immediately stopped feeling bad and threw out a sharp-tongued, dirty joke.

After all, it was her money being spent, not Adam's.

It let Adam show off and gave Chestnut a home.

Pretty good.

She'd just work hard to pay off the debt later.

"Heh," Adam chuckled. "Do you know what my favorite era of the Eastern Kingdom is?"

"What?" Caroline looked over, curious.

"The Tang Dynasty?"

Max, overly familiar with Adam, immediately blurted it out in her awkward Eastern Kingdom language.

"Why?"

Thanks to America's Chinatown culture, Caroline knew of the Tang Dynasty, but she didn't understand why Adam suddenly brought it up.

"Because it was a free and unrestrained era," Adam said seriously. "Alright, let's go see Chestnut first. Then I'll take you, Max, horseback riding. We'll ride to the estate together. I hear it's huge and beautiful."

Chapter 687: Roaming the (Rivers and Lakes)

Horse Farm Town.

After trading some playful banter with MAX, Adam followed Caroline's lead to the stables to meet the legendary steed, Chestnut.

"Chestnut!"

Caroline dashed over, beaming as she patted the horse's head.

This former champion horse was full of spirit, tilting its head to nuzzle her back before letting her pet it, looking totally content.

"So this is Chestnut!"

MAX fell in love at first sight.

No surprise there.

Women can't resist sparkly things—or fluffy ones.

MAX was no exception.

Back when she'd snuck into the Channing mansion with Caroline, Caroline came out in casual gear while MAX emerged draped in fur coats.

This time, though, she didn't strut into the subway with sunglasses and a "don't mess with me" vibe, smirking at onlookers with a smug, "Jealous much?"

And her soft spot for adopting stray cats and dogs? Sure, she's a big-hearted sweetheart, but it's her love for them that's the real kicker.

Adam was pretty sure she'd toss in a "So good!" if she could—her sharp tongue wasn't just for show.

"MAX, come here!"

Caroline waved her over, eager to introduce her new bestie to her "family member," Chestnut.

"Chestnut, this is MAX—my best friend. She's been there for me—no, for us—with so much warmth during these tough times. You've gotta remember her, okay?"

"Hey now," MAX waved it off like it was no big deal, but her eyes sparkled as she looked at Chestnut, itching to pet it.

"Go for it. Chestnut's super chill," Caroline encouraged, nudging them closer.

"Hi, Chestnut!"

MAX slowly reached out. When Chestnut didn't flinch, her grin grew even brighter. 😊

Adam watched from the side, smiling quietly, not wanting to interrupt their sweet little trio moment.

He'd shown up late on purpose—giving them space to bond.

He knew MAX too well. With her personality, if Caroline got picked on, MAX would jump in swinging without a second thought.

And in a place like this, with Caroline's fall from grace, she was bound to feel down—or get bullied.

Getting hassled by her old crowd in a place she used to rule, only to have MAX fiercely stand up for her? Even a sunny girl like Caroline—sharp with her dad's scheming genes—would start opening her heart to MAX.

And MAX, getting that kind of loyalty back, would only treasure Caroline more.

It's a perfect loop.

Feelings grow through shared moments like these, don't they?

When everyone's happy, that's what really counts.

"Alright, let's go pick out our own horses," Adam said after a while.

"For real?"

MAX's eyes lit up—she was clearly into it.

"We bought the whole estate. How could we not have horses?" Adam laughed.

Caroline led Chestnut along as they followed Adam to the selection area.

David, the stable manager, was already waiting. He'd gotten the heads-up from Adam's assistant, Ada, and had rounded up the best horses for them to choose from.

"MAX, pick one," Adam nodded her way.

"That pure white one!"

MAX zeroed in on a stunning white horse instantly.

David gave a subtle signal, and a staff member brought the horse over for MAX to get up close.

"MAX, give her a name," Caroline prompted.

"A name, huh?"

MAX tilted her head, then glanced at Adam. "Adam, help me come up with something."

"How about 'Little Mare'?" Adam said with a sly grin.

"No way!"

MAX shot it down fast—that name was dripping with innuendo.

Don't ask how she knew.

One look at Adam's smirk, and she didn't need an explanation. She'd even bet it tied back to some obscure East Country reference.

She knew him too well—he loved that kind of vibe.

Her sharp tongue and dirty humor were shaped by her upbringing, but no way was she letting her precious horse get saddled with a name that cheeky.

"Fine, you pick then," Adam chuckled. "As long as you're happy. Mine's still gonna be Little Mare."

MAX rolled her eyes but ignored him, thinking hard. "Caroline's got Chestnut, so how about... Sugar?"

"..."

Adam stared at her, deadpan.

That name was barely a step up from Little Mare.

"What do you think?"

MAX looked at Adam and Caroline, hopeful.

"Love it!"

"Totally you!"

Caroline and Adam both gave her a thumbs-up.

"Sweet!"

MAX brushed off Adam's teasing glint and happily patted her white horse. "From now on, you're Sugar!"

After Adam picked his own, he suggested they head out.

Caroline hopped onto Chestnut with ease.

Adam mounted Little Mare, then reached down to hoist a nervous MAX up in front of him.

"I'll teach you how to ride first, then you can take Sugar out solo," he said.

"What about my Sugar?"

MAX glanced at her white horse, still standing there.

"I've got her," Caroline said, nudging Chestnut over to grab Sugar's reins. She led Sugar alongside her.

"Learn quick, and you'll be on Sugar in no time," Adam said, giving Little Mare a light tap to trot off toward the fields.

Caroline followed, riding Chestnut and towing Sugar.

Adam coached MAX as they went.

It wasn't like they were racing—just casual riding. How hard could it be?

MAX picked it up fast and soon demanded to ride Sugar herself.

Adam grinned, helping her down and onto Sugar, then rode Little Mare beside her. Caroline flanked them on Chestnut.

Three people, three horses, side by side at a leisurely pace.

Before long, they reached what used to be the Channing Estate—now the Black Estate.

"Whoa!"

MAX, atop Sugar, took in the endless green lawns. Her heart raced, and she mimicked Adam and Caroline, giving Sugar a nudge. The horse bolted forward, and she whooped with joy.

"Careful!"

Adam spurred Little Mare to keep up, ready to swoop in if she fell.

At that speed, a tumble could be nasty.

The Black Estate was ringed by woods, shielding them from prying eyes. The trio galloped freely across the sprawling grasslands, wild and carefree.

With the spring breeze in his face, Adam couldn't help belting out the theme song from the TV show *The Swordsman's Journey*—Roaming the river:

Riding through river bold,

Living free in this life I hold.

Heroes don't bow for beauty's sake,

Pride soars higher than the heavens make.

A lone, fierce spirit stands tall,

Forged by earth and sky's call.

Sword sweeps devils, gods take flight,

A true knight shines in the fight.

Gripping a blade stained with the sun's last glow,

Heart wielding a frost-moon knife aglow.

From the peak, all mountains seem small,

A man's one journey through this world's thrall.

No way was this life a waste for Adam!

This fresh, thrilling vibe was something MAX had never felt before. With Sugar as her own, she had zero plans to slow down.

They stayed the night, naturally.

After dinner and a short break, MAX was itching to ride Sugar again.

Caroline was wiped and passed.

Adam, though, hopped on Little Mare, trailing MAX to make sure she didn't crash at high speed.

Under the moonlight, the estate's lamps cast a hazy glow, blending with the night. Shadows of trees danced around, giving the place a dreamy vibe—perfect for riding.

Caroline wandered the mansion that once was hers, listening to the faint East Country song drifting in on the wind. The bold, heroic energy of it left her mesmerized.

Chapter 688: Standing Alone Under the Moon

Stable Town. Black Estate.

The moon hung high in the sky.

"Should I go get Caroline?" Max asked lazily.

"No need," Adam paused, shaking his head.

"You sure?" Max tilted her head, glancing at him.

"I'm sure," Adam smiled. "Right here, right now, just the two of us enjoying the moon is perfect."

"Fine, you said it. Don't say I didn't give you a chance," Max said, a faint smile curling on her lips.

Adam, always keeping an eye on Max, noticed that subtle grin and sighed inwardly.

As expected!

Sure, Max was the queen of sharp-tongued, dirty jokes, always ready with some wild move.

But in reality, she wasn't as open as her words suggested.

In his previous life, Adam had watched 2 Broke Girls.

He hadn't rewatched it dozens of times like The Big Bang Theory, nor had he seen it a few times like How I Met Your Mother.

He hadn't even finished Friends, though he got close to the end.

For 2 Broke Girls, Adam only watched the first two seasons and stopped.

The plot felt less cohesive and grounded compared to those classic sitcoms, like it was just chasing punchlines for the sake of punchlines.

But even so, Adam remembered the opening of 2 Broke Girls, where Max and Caroline clashed over Max's boyfriend.

When kind-hearted Max brought homeless Caroline—who could only sleep in the subway with a stun gun—back to her apartment, she let her stay while Max went to work as a nanny for socialite Peachy. They'd go to work together after.

While Caroline was washing dirty waitress uniforms at Max's place, Max's boyfriend woke up in the inner room on Max's bed. Seeing the elegantly dressed, long-legged blonde, he got bad ideas and started flirting with Caroline.

Caroline, of course, wasn't that low. She scolded Max's boyfriend and left early for her restaurant job.

When Max finished her nanny gig and got to the restaurant, she complained that Caroline didn't wait for her and mentioned hearing about Caroline's "tragic situation."

Max meant she'd heard about the Channing family's downfall from her socialite employer, Peachy.

But Caroline mistakenly thought Max's boyfriend had tattled first, letting something slip.

Max was furious, refusing to believe Caroline's explanation, and nearly ended their friendship.

If she hadn't gone back and found her boyfriend bringing another woman home to mess around while she was away, realizing Caroline wasn't lying, their legendary broke-girl partnership might have ended right there.

Adam did have some bold ideas.

But he cared more about Max's feelings.

He didn't want Max to feel uncomfortable.

Hmmm.

Of course, if the time came and Max insisted on making Adam honor a bet, that'd be a different story.

In short, Adam, being quite traditional, valued old-school etiquette.

Declining three times and yielding three times was basic protocol. 😊

"Alright, put me down," Max said, smiling.

"Nah, better not," Adam shook his head with a laugh. "I was just about to tell you—living in the estate, there are some things you need to watch out for..."

He went on to explain precautions like poison ivy rashes.

Hearing the symptoms and causes of poison ivy, Max shivered, looking at the surrounding grass uneasily. "That bad?"

"Even a famous doctor like Montgomery got caught off guard," Adam chuckled. "Just be careful. If you get it, you're the one who'll suffer."

"Damn it!" Max cursed. "Sure enough, everything has its pros and cons!"

"That's just the natural law of development," Adam reassured her. "Just pay attention, and you'll be fine."

"So that's why you've been holding me this whole time?" Max tilted her head, eyeing him skeptically.

"What else?" Adam, standing alone under the moon, shrugged.

"I thought you were just showing off your strength," Max teased.

"You're overthinking it," Adam said seriously. "I'm just protecting you from pain, making sure you're happy."

"Alright," Max laughed, accepting the explanation, then added, "Is Caroline going to keep working as a waitress?"

"What does she say?" Adam smiled.

"Of course she doesn't want to," Max shrugged. "If it weren't for necessity, who'd want to be a waitress? Especially someone with Caroline's background."

"Mm," Adam nodded, pondering. "She's done it for a while now, experienced what she needed to. After today, going back to being a waitress isn't really necessary."

"You mean she can quit?" Max perked up, genuinely happy for Caroline.

"If it were up to me, I'd say she should keep at it for another six months, maybe three to five years, ideally," Adam laughed. "Let everyone see her struggles, vent their resentment, then forget her. But it's up to you! If you really don't want her to, she can work with you. You focus on content, she handles operations and admin, and together you make Peppa Pig the best it can be."

"I'll talk it over with her," Max said, hesitating. "See what she thinks."

"Actually, doing something like waitressing is still necessary," Adam reminded her. "But now you can compromise—half a day waitressing, the rest helping you set up the studio. I'm sure she has the drive to balance her time."

It's just less sleep, right?

I remember you used to juggle two or three part-time jobs a day, sleeping only three hours.

You did it, she can too!"

In the original timeline, they worked as waitresses together, saving up to start a big cupcake business.

Their schedule was:

6 PM to 2 AM waitressing at the restaurant.

2 AM to 4 AM selling cupcakes.

7 AM to 11 AM making cupcakes.

12 PM to 4 PM taking pastry classes to improve cupcake quality.

Only three hours of sleep a day.

Almost like Adam with his system.

In his previous life, Adam was stunned watching it.

In this life, with the system's boosts and constant stat improvements, he finally surpassed Max.

For Max's innate endurance talent, Adam could only say: Respect.

Caroline didn't have that same endurance talent, but she stuck it out later.

Why?

Caroline's talent for making money was enough to offset Max's endurance, fueling her to work overtime like she was on steroids.

They were a true 007 duo! 😊

"True," Max nodded with a smile.

She had full confidence in Caroline's abilities.

In the original timeline, when she kicked out her cheating, messy boyfriend, someone had told her she deserved better.

Her boyfriend, pulling up his pants, tried to argue, saying Max shouldn't listen to others, that they didn't know anything, and she should only listen to him.

Max fired back instantly: "She's a Wharton grad! She knows exactly what kind of crap you are! I wish I'd met her sooner!"

Later, when they started their business, Max relied on Caroline's strategies the whole time. Max just quietly made cupcakes, and when Caroline apologized for not helping, Max reassured her, telling her to rest.

They each had their roles, working perfectly together.

One handled production and technique.

One handled marketing and operations.

A classic startup duo, naturally paired, perfectly in sync!

Chapter 689: The World Has Grown Filthy Again!

The next day.

Bright and early.

"This is what life's all about, huh."

Adam was cruising in his sports car, speeding toward the medical center, and couldn't help letting out a smug little sigh. If anyone else heard it, they'd probably want to punch him in the face. 😊

Last night, he'd strolled through the estate gardens with MAX, soaking in the gorgeous moonlight together.

It didn't even feel like they were on Earth.

More like they were up in the heavens, admiring the moon from above.

That is, until the alarm he'd set snapped him out of it. Adam said goodbye to MAX and drove off.

In that moment, he truly got what people mean by "a day in heaven is a year on Earth." Time just warps like that.

He even figured out why that Journey to the West setup was seen as a jab at corrupt rulers.

It's not about some literal time glitch—one day here, one year there.

No, it's that happy moments zip by so fast you barely blink, and they're gone.

Totally the same vibe as "this is life," right? Nailed it! 🤩

Yup, Adam had fallen—hard!

If there really was a Sailor Moon out there representing the moon, last night she'd either have shown up to zap him for tainting her moonlight or stayed hidden behind it, trembling, too scared to face him.

The world has grown filthy again!

And there's even a poem to prove it:

What are its words? A dragon roams the winding pond.

What is its spirit? The moon lights up the icy river.

It shames the west gate, outshines the high rail.

New York stands unmatched, TV dramas unrivaled.

Who could this be?

Such a wild soul!

At the Medical Center

Adam parked his car and strutted over with the kind of swagger that says, "I don't even know my own family anymore."

Everyone was caught off guard but returned his overly chipper greetings with wide eyes.

Beep beep beep!

He hadn't even stepped through the door when the security scanner went off like crazy.

The guards instantly tensed up, barking at a mother-daughter duo nearby.

"Calm down, it's okay! My mom's got some mental health stuff going on—we're here to see a doctor," the woman, maybe in her thirties, said quickly, throwing her hands up to explain to the jittery security team.

"Then why'd you bring guns to a doctor's visit?"

One guard snatched the old lady's bag, rummaged through it, and pulled out a handgun. "Three of them? And spare magazines too?"

As the guns and ammo came into view, every guard either rested a hand on their holster or straight-up drew their weapons, aiming at the pair.

"It's my right to carry!" the old lady snapped. "The streets aren't safe these days—no, they've never been safe. I bring guns to protect myself!"

"Ma'am, do you have a concealed carry permit?" the security captain asked, his face dead serious.

"A what now?" The old lady blinked, genuinely confused. "I've been toting my Glock 17 for decades!"

She started reaching for her waist.

"Ma'am, don't move!" the captain shouted.

"Captain Depp, tell the team to lower their weapons—let's not have an accidental discharge here," Adam called out after watching for a sec. He didn't sense any real danger and figured this old lady wasn't here to attack anyone. He was worried the trigger-happy guards might shoot her out of panic if she didn't get what was happening.

"Guns down! No firing unless I say so!"

The captain glanced at Adam, saw him nod, and gave the order.

The other guards, trusting Adam's judgment, eased up a bit and pointed their guns at the floor.

Adam wasn't just the guy who got them better gear to keep them safer—he was also the one with those legendary gut feelings about crises. They'd all heard the stories.

"Ma'am, relax," Adam said, stepping closer with a calm vibe. "This is a hospital. I'm a doctor. You can tell me what's going on, but we've gotta hand those guns over to security first. It's the rules—for everyone's safety."

"Hey, that's a smart idea!" the old lady said, perking up as she looked at Adam. "If nobody carried guns, even a fight wouldn't get too messy, right? The streets would be way safer. That's genius!"

"You're a doctor?"

"Yup, Dr. Duncan," Adam said with a grin.

"I don't think you should be a doctor," she said, dead serious. "With ideas that good, you oughta be president! Then we'd all be safe."

"Mom!" her daughter groaned, half-laughing, half-mortified.

"What?" The old lady shot her daughter a look. "Am I wrong? You're always saying I've got mental issues, some persecution complex or whatever."

But the streets are dangerous! You can't just say 'America's the safest' and call it a day.

You never get to the real problem. Look at this doctor—young, sharp, sees the heart of it in one glance!

And he's so handsome too!

If he's not president, who should be?

I remember that one guy—got elected just 'cause he was good-looking!

This doctor's way hotter than that guy ever was.

If he ran, he'd win for sure!

I'd vote for him first!"

"Mom!" her daughter yelped again, exasperated. "Even if Dr. Duncan became president, it wouldn't fix everything. It's not all up to him!"

"Okay, ma'am," Adam said, chuckling despite himself. "If I ever get the chance, I'll run. But for now, let's handle things here at the hospital. You've still got a gun on you, right?"

"Of course!" she said like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "I told you, the streets aren't safe. Why wouldn't I carry?"

"Right," Adam said, keeping his cool. "So, tell me where it is, and I'll take it off you nice and easy. We don't want any accidents hurting innocent folks, okay?"

"No need for all that trouble..." she started, reaching for it herself.

"No, it's necessary!" Adam raised his voice just enough, stepping in to grab her hand. He smoothly pulled the gun from her waist, popped out the magazine, and cleared the chamber like a pro.

"Not bad, not bad!" she said, eyeing him with approval. "You've got skills!"

"Thanks," Adam laughed. "Ma'am, don't tell me you've got more guns stashed somewhere?"

"Nope!" She waved a hand. "Four's plenty for the basics. I've got more at home, but they're too heavy to lug around. Next time, swing by my place—we'll have a little shooting match, huh?"

"..."

Everyone just stared, speechless.

Four's "plenty for the basics"?

A Glock 17 holds 17+1 rounds. Four guns? That's 72 shots. Plus, her bag was stuffed with loaded mags—nearly 150 rounds total. She could start a small war!

What's next, she's a superhero ready to take down a crime syndicate single-handedly? 😊

Adam handed the gun to security, then led the mother-daughter duo to an exam room.

The metal detectors he'd donated were clutch. Last time, another old lady waltzed in with a gun and freaked out the staff. If this superhero granny got inside undetected, it'd be chaos.

"Got a medical history for me?" Adam asked.

"Yup." The daughter handed over the file quick.

"I'm not sick!" the old lady huffed. "They keep saying I've got paranoid schizophrenia or some fancy delusion thing. They're the ones who've read too many books and gone dumb. I'm just careful, that's all."

"When you're alone, ever hear voices?" Adam asked with a little smile.

"Nope," she said, locking eyes with him. "You think I'm crazy too?"

"Nah, just doing the routine check," Adam said, meeting her gaze. She didn't seem off, but that didn't rule out something serious. He kept the vibe chill to keep her calm.

"Fine then," she said, satisfied.

"Doctor, are you a psychiatrist?" her daughter cut in, sounding annoyed.

"Nope," Adam said, glancing at her. "I've already called for one. I'm just asking the basics so they've got a head start when they get here."

"Alright," the daughter grumbled, clearly not thrilled.

"Ma'am, why do you think your mom's got a mental illness?" Adam flipped open the chart to a fresh page and turned to her, all professional-like.

"Well..."

The daughter launched into a whole spiel.

The old lady just sat there, smirking quietly.

She liked this Dr. Duncan. He was fun—maybe the only one who saw it might not be her with the problem, but her daughter instead. She vibed with that logic.

Adam, though? He figured the old lady might have some issues.

But her daughter probably did too. Who else would be naive enough to think the TV-drama version of the world was all peace and safety, no need to protect yourself?

Was she really that clueless, or was she the crazy one?

Now that was an interesting medical puzzle.

Chapter 690: Money-Powered Adam Makes a Comeback

Medical Center.

Morning.

Adam had just stabilized the old lady and her daughter, handing them over to a psychiatrist before heading out. After all, he wasn't a professional shrink. Whether or not they actually had a mental illness, he couldn't provide a legally binding diagnosis.

As noon approached...

Adam was busy seeing patients in the ER when a nurse came rushing over.

"Dr. Duncan, you've gotta get to Operating Room 2, stat!"

"Wanda, what's going on?" Adam asked, already getting up.

"There's a huge problem with the patient in OR 2! Looks like some kind of neurotoxin infection—it's knocked out the chief and everyone else operating on her!" Nurse Wanda blurted out the bombshell, practically shouting.

"Let's go!"

Adam grabbed Wanda and headed for OR 2, asking on the way, "What's the situation now? Have they gotten the chief and the others out? Where's Dr. Burke and the rest?"

"They've all been pulled out and are on oxygen therapy," Wanda said quickly. "Dr. Burke, Dr. Shepherd, Dr. Montgomery, and Dr. Sloan are all there trying to figure out a plan. Burke specifically asked for you to come too."

"What about the patient?" Adam pressed.

"They're halfway through surgery—her organs are completely exposed. Burke and the others are worried the anesthesia's wearing off and she might wake up!" Wanda explained. "And Dr. O'Malley and Olivia, who came into contact with her blood earlier—they're both down too. This unknown neurovirus is spreading like crazy!"

"Got it!"

Adam's face turned serious. Now that he had the info he needed, he let go of Wanda and kicked it into high gear.

"Dr. Duncan, where are you going?! OR 2's this way!" Wanda shouted after him, surprised.

"I'm grabbing my gear!" Adam's voice echoed back from down the hall.

Operating Room 2

"Where's Adam?" Dr. Burke frowned when he saw Wanda show up alone.

In a crisis like this, they needed every skilled doctor they could get to tackle it together. That's why he'd sent Wanda to fetch Adam in the first place.

"Probably doesn't wanna deal with it," Mark Sloan chimed in, arms crossed and a smirk on his face. "Told ya—this unknown neurotoxin? We've got no clue what kinda long-term damage it could do. Safest

bet is to stay out here and wait for backup. Dr. Duncan clearly made the same call as me, just without my honesty."

"The patient's gonna wake up soon—she'll die in agony!" Dr. Montgomery snapped, glaring at Mark. "We're doctors. We're supposed to save her!"

"Sure, but only if we protect ourselves first," Mark shot back with a shrug. "I'm not about to risk my life for one patient and end up in some nightmare scenario."

"What a real piece of work you are!" Montgomery spat.

"A real piece of work is still a person," Mark quipped with a grin. "Dead or crippled by some horrific disease down the line? That's not a person anymore."

"Damn it!" Dr. Shepherd, who'd been keeping an eye on the patient in the OR, suddenly called out, "She's about to wake up!"

"Where are the hazmat suits? Why aren't they here yet?!" Burke barked.

"They're here!"

A couple of nurses rushed in with two bulky hazmat suits. These weren't your standard-issue ones—they were sterile suits borrowed from orthopedics, typically used for bone marrow transplants. They had self-contained air systems to completely isolate the wearer from the outside, perfect for shielding against an unknown neurovirus.

"Ugh, these things are a pain to put on! No way we'll get 'em on in under a minute," Burke grumbled as he and Shepherd started suiting up, ready to go in and save the patient.

But these suits were like something out of a sci-fi movie—basically space suits. Without help and enough time, there was no way to get them on properly.

"She doesn't have a minute!" Montgomery yelled, watching the patient starting to twitch and resist the intubation tube. She grabbed a mask, pressed it to her face, and charged into the OR.

"Addison!" Mark shouted, startled, reaching out to stop her.

Just as he'd said, this neurovirus was a total unknown. Nobody knew what kind of aftereffects it might have. If it was this aggressive, any potential side effects could be downright terrifying.

Even if Mark mostly cared about himself, he genuinely had feelings for Montgomery. He didn't want her throwing herself into the fire like this.

Too bad for him—Montgomery was way more decisive than he'd expected. She didn't even give him a chance to grab her before she was already in the OR.

"Get out of there!"

"She's awake! I need to re-anesthetize her now!" Montgomery called out, scrambling. "Damn it! I can't find her chart—I don't know her weight! I can't dose her properly!"

Anesthesia usually required a specialist to calculate the dosage based on gender, weight, and other factors. But in a pinch, any doctor could estimate based on rough numbers.

"She's probably around 60 kilos!" Mark shouted from outside.

Montgomery didn't have any other options at this point. She quickly dosed the patient based on the 60-kilo estimate. "Alright, that should do it."

After injecting the anesthetic and getting the patient back under, Montgomery was already feeling the effects of the neurovirus. She stumbled toward the exit, barely able to keep her balance.

"Hurry!"

Mark looked worried but stayed planted firmly outside, unwilling to rush in and help.

Just as Montgomery collapsed at the OR door, a figure caught her steadily.

"Adam?" Montgomery mumbled, her vision blurry.

"Don't worry, I've got this," Adam said, decked out in a sleek, high-tech hazmat suit. He carried her out of the OR, handed her off to Wanda to look after, and then—under Mark's conflicted, jealous stare—headed back into the OR.

"Burke, those ortho suits you've got only have 30 minutes of battery life. No way you'll finish this surgery in that time," Adam said as he checked the patient's condition, speaking to Burke and Shepherd outside, who were now suited up. "I'll take over the surgery. One of you come in to assist for 30 minutes, then get out immediately."

"Sounds good!"

Burke glanced at the futuristic, clearly custom-made suit Adam was rocking—practically oozing money and high-tech vibes—and didn't argue. He just nodded in agreement.

No way this surgery could wrap up in just half an hour. Hell, 30 minutes wouldn't even be enough to stabilize the patient and get her to an isolation ward so they could gear up properly for round two.

They'd been ready to risk it out of sheer duty as doctors. But now that Adam was here, clearly prepared for this, they weren't about to take unnecessary risks.

Adam's skills were undeniable—everyone knew it. Sure, they didn't love admitting it, but deep down, they knew that while they might have more experience in some rare procedures, if Adam had done it once—or even just heard them explain it in detail—he could pull it off perfectly.

That kind of talent just made you tip your hat, whether you liked it or not! In a situation like this, Adam calling the shots and asking for their support? They didn't have a single objection.

"I'll go first!" Burke said, turning to the fully suited-up Shepherd. "Get ready to step in."

"Got it!" Shepherd nodded.

Mark watched the whole scene unfold, feeling oddly annoyed.

Weren't we supposed to be the pragmatic ones here, playing it safe together? Why you gotta go and steal the show like that?!