

## TV Show 691

Chapter 691: Not Expensive, We Got a Group Deal!

Medical Center

Operating Room 2

Adam was leading the surgery, with Dr. Burke as his first assistant. No nurses, no anesthesiologist—just the two of them working on a patient whose blood was infected with some unknown neurological virus.

Upstairs, in the observation room...

The Chief of Surgery, Richard, who'd just woken up, shuffled in slowly, lugging an oxygen tank and taking deep breaths from it.

"Preston, Adam, how're you guys holding up?"

Richard eyed them closely and added, "The isolation OR is being prepped, and protective gear's on its way from storage. If you can't finish this surgery, just stabilize her, wrap her up, and send her to isolation."

"Dr. Duncan?"

Burke glanced at Adam. This time, he was just the assistant—and honestly, he had no clue how long Adam's flashy protective suit could last.

"We've got this, Chief," Adam said with a grin. "Before Burke's suit battery runs out, he can step out, and we'll swap in someone else to assist me. Easy peasy."

"You sure about that?" Richard asked, worry creasing his face. "This surgery's way more complicated than we thought. Could hit all kinds of snags—not something you wrap up in an hour or two. How long can that... thing of yours hold out?"

"I'm sure," Adam replied, still focused on the surgery. "This suit? It's built to spacesuit standards but customized for me—my body, my job. Tailored to fit like a glove.

Take regular spacesuits: their life-support packs have two oxygen tanks, good for 6.5 to 8 hours.

That's designed with stuff like spacecraft weight limits, spacewalk durations, and how much an astronaut can carry in mind.

But my suit? It doesn't need to go to space, and I'm pretty strong myself. 🤖

So when I had it made, I maxed out the life-support system.

The oxygen tanks are bigger—doubled up, actually.

In theory, it's got 72 hours of oxygen.

Plus, the drink pouch and fruit bars inside? Enough energy for 72 hours too.

So unless this surgery drags on for three days straight, I'm golden."

"..."

Everyone went quiet after Adam dropped that explanation.

After a long pause...

Richard sucked on his oxygen a few times before muttering, "Dr. Duncan, if I'm remembering right, a spacesuit weighs at least 120 kilos—minimum.

We're on Earth here, no microgravity to lighten the load. That's a solid 120 kilos-plus. And you doubled it? You sure you can handle that weight for so long?"

"Chief, it's not as wild as you're thinking," Adam said with a laugh, still operating. "Normal spacesuits are bulky as heck. Mine's been slimmed down—custom-cut to be as sleek... er, as practical as possible for surgery.

The weight's already way lighter.

It just needs to block viruses, keep me sealed off—not handle extreme heat, cold, radiation, wear-and-tear, or all that jazz real spacesuits deal with.

Even with the beefed-up oxygen tanks, it's only about 150 kilos. I can rock this for 72 hours, no sweat."

"..."

The observation room upstairs was now packed with doctors who'd rushed over to watch. When they heard this, the whole place went dead silent again. They just stared at each other, totally lost for words.

It's not that they were clueless.

They just didn't know where to start with the roasting.

"Only" 150 kilos?

"No sweat" for 72 hours?

Is this guy even human?

Everyone instantly thought of Adam's legendary stamina.

Cue the men going quiet with envy and the women tearing up, thinking, "If I had that strength—forget the looks or money—I'd be unstoppable too!"

A bunch of eyes flicked to Cristina.

So that insane giant tumor surgery from before? Adam really did hold up a mountain solo, breezing through hours of grunt work—while she just coasted along, barely lifting a finger!

Cristina didn't flinch. She kept her cool, staring down at the surgery like nothing was up.

"I'm not embarrassed—you're the ones making it weird." 😊

"Dr. Duncan, that suit must've cost a fortune, right?" a young doctor piped up, unable to hold back.

"It's alright," Adam said with a chuckle. "The custom job's what jacks up the price."

"A spacesuit's gotta be a few million bucks at least, yeah?" the young doc pressed.

"Heh," Adam just laughed, not denying it.

The other doctors shot the kid some serious side-eye.

Bro, are you for real?

A few million's a fortune to regular folks—even most doctors.

But to a billionaire? It's pocket change for a toy. Why make a fuss?

And are you trying to rub it in and crush our fragile souls?

"Yup, figures," the young doc mumbled, oblivious to the glares. "You say 'it's alright,' but the custom fee's the big hit? So this thing's probably, what, ten million? Just for some random emergency someday? That's..."

Adam didn't bite this time—just smiled and kept working.

He couldn't exactly keep chatting about it.

Truth is, the custom design did cost a few million bucks.

And he didn't stop at one suit.

The tight-fit, surgery-ready Duncan Special? Check.

But regular space-grade protective gear? No way Adam was skipping that.

A few million's nothing to him—he grabbed backups too.

This is a mashup world of dangerous TV dramas, after all. Who knows when you'll need it?

And it's not just him.

Juno's a doctor, Karen's a nurse—both stuck in the hospital all the time.

If a contagious virus crisis like today's hits and they don't have proper gear, what then?

Adam's dead sure this won't be a one-off.

So when he ordered, he went big—group deal style.

Custom surgery suits for Juno and Karen too, tailored to fit them perfectly.

Total cost? Twenty million bucks.

But obviously, it's worth every penny.

Even if they sit unused most days, in a clutch moment like this—facing an unknown neurological virus—it keeps Adam safe, lets him save lives, and racks up those lifespan points.

Take Mark Sloan, for instance. Selfish jerk, sure, but he's not wrong.

Without this prepped gear, even Adam—with his top-tier immune system—would've had to think twice about risking it.

And honestly?

Why gamble when money can fix it?

Chapter 692: The Clown Turns Out to Be You

Medical Center.

Operating Room 2.

Everyone fell silent, overwhelmed by the sheer dominance of Adam's money-powered gear.

"Alright, as long as the suit works, let's get our focus back on the surgery," Chief of Surgery Richard cut in, clearly not a fan of the awkward vibe. "We're doctors, not astronauts, after all!"

Everyone nodded in agreement.

But deep down, they couldn't help but think, "Even astronauts probably couldn't afford a custom piece like that." 😊

Richard could tell what was on their minds—he was itching to say it himself. But they all shifted their attention back to the surgery, not daring (or wanting) to bring up the topic dripping with Versailles-level flexing again.

"Dr. Burke, you've been in here for 28 minutes. Time to head out," Adam said during a critical moment in the surgery, pausing to remind Burke, who'd lost track of time in the zone.

"Already?" Burke blinked, surprised.

"Yup," Adam nodded. "I've been keeping track."

"Preston, come on out," Richard directed, snapping into action. "Derek, get ready to step in."

"Got it!" Dr. Shepherd, already half-suited up in the bulky ortho hazmat gear, nodded to the nurse helping him. "Let's finish suiting up."

These ortho suits only had 30 minutes of oxygen once fully sealed. Go over that, and you'd suffocate and pass out. So they couldn't fully suit up until the last second before going in.

Burke didn't argue. As soon as he stepped out of work mode, he noticed his breathing getting labored—a telltale sign of low oxygen.

"Let's keep going," Adam said with a smile as Burke exited and Shepherd took his place as first assistant. "The patient's intestines are completely swollen. We've gotta squeeze out the excess fluid, or we won't be able to reposition them properly."

"Got it," Shepherd replied.

As the head of neurosurgery, he was no stranger to cardiothoracic procedures. In a pinch, he could even take the lead on a surgery like this. But unlike Adam—who seemed hell-bent on mastering every specialty—Shepherd usually stuck to his lane outside of neurosurgery.

Of course, if the situation called for it, he wasn't above showing off his skills a bit. 🤖

In less than 30 minutes, Adam reminded Shepherd to step out, and Burke—now with a fresh battery in his suit—came back in to assist.

And so it went: Adam leading the surgery, with Burke and Shepherd rotating as first assistants. Eight grueling hours later, they finally wrapped it up.

"Great job!" Richard clapped, beaming with approval.

The other doctors chimed in with their praise.

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After the Surgery

As soon as it was over, Cristina and the others swarmed Adam.

"Holy crap, Adam, when did you even get this thing made?!" They gathered around the freshly sanitized hazmat suit, poking and prodding at it, their mouths dropping with every new detail.

"Had it custom-made on my first day as an intern," Adam said with a grin. "Back then, I didn't think about renting an office here at the hospital, so I kept it at my apartment. Now that I've got an office, I just store it here. Way more convenient."

"How much did this even cost?" Cristina pressed, clearly intrigued.

She could see the perks of a suit like this. But she didn't need anything as over-the-top as Adam's 72-hour model—just something with the standard 8 hours like a typical spacesuit would do. She wouldn't last much longer than that anyway.

Adam casually tossed out a number.

"..."

Even Cristina, who came from a pretty well-off family, immediately gave up on the idea.

Medicine was her passion and all, but there was still a cost-benefit ratio to think about. Sure, she didn't care how much she made as a doctor, but she wasn't about to spend her entire career's earnings on a single hazmat suit—especially one she'd probably only use for a handful of surgeries.

"Damn, this thing's heavy!" Cristina grunted, trying to lift the suit. After a lot of effort, she barely managed to budge it an inch.

"Well, that's one way to make sure no one steals it," Meredith quipped.

Adam just smiled, keeping quiet.

Even if someone wanted to steal it, they'd have a tough time. But he wasn't taking any chances—the suit was stored in a specialized safe, locked up tight. Because while stealing it might be tough, damaging it wasn't.

If something got broken, the suit would be half-useless until it was repaired. The repair costs? Not a big deal. What worried him was the timing.

He'd had this suit custom-made for moments exactly like this. If it broke down at a critical time, it'd be as good as trash—and that'd be 20 million bucks down the drain. Even for someone with money to burn, that wasn't how you played the game.

So, no opportunities for theft or sabotage. Period.

Thankfully, it all boiled down to the same simple truth: as long as you had cash, these kinds of problems sorted themselves out. And if money couldn't fix it? Just throw more at it! 🎲

After seeing Cristina and the others off, Adam locked the suit back in its safe and left his office to check on the patient in the ICU.

The patient was undergoing continuous renal replacement therapy—basically dialysis—to flush out the unknown neurotoxin from her blood.

George O'Malley had only drawn the patient's blood, and Olivia had just handled the sample, yet both of them had gone down hard. Richard and his entire surgical team had been taken out during the surgery when they opened the patient's chest, exposing large amounts of blood and spiking the concentration of the neurovirus in the OR to insane levels.

As the saying goes: talking about toxicity without mentioning dosage is just nonsense! Same deal here.

Once the dialysis was done, the patient would be relatively safe for others to be around. After all, her boyfriend—who'd brought her in—had been fine since there hadn't been any major bleeding exposure at the time.

Figuring out what this unknown neurovirus actually was? That'd be a job for the researchers and their lab rats.

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Later That Night

Adam got a call from Lily, telling him to meet at the Old Friends Bar—said she had some big news to share.

"What kinda big news?" Adam asked as he arrived, chatting with Matthew and the gang. But before they could spill the beans, a waitress brought over the beers they'd ordered, then handed Ted a bottle of water with a playful, teasing grin.

"Free water for you, Ted Mosby~ Don't wanna risk you getting dehydrated," she said with a wink.

"Hahaha!" Matthew and Lily burst out laughing.

Even Anna cracked a small smile.

Ted shot an embarrassed glance at his wife, then sighed and turned to the waitress. "Real funny, Wendy, but the clown's actually you—'cause now we all know you've been watching action flicks!"

"Huh?" Adam raised an eyebrow. "What's going on?"

"Oh, you don't know yet," Lily said, barely holding back her giggles. "There's a breakout star in the action movie scene right now. Only been in the biz for three months, but already starred in 125 films—rave reviews too! Guess who it is?"

"Ted Mosby," Adam said with a knowing grin.

"Exactly!" Matthew roared with laughter. "Straight outta Shaker Heights, Ohio, it's Ted Mosby—an action movie legend who hit the ground running!"

"I'm gonna find this guy!" Ted groaned, clearly losing it. "Not only did he steal my name, but he also jacked my hometown. It's honestly kinda creepy."

In the States, having someone know your full real name, address, and other personal info could spell all kinds of trouble.

"Need a hand?" Adam offered with a chuckle.

"Nah," Ted shook his head. "There's an action movie expo in Manhattan tomorrow night—he's doing a signing there. I'm gonna go see who this joker is myself!"

"I can't believe there's actually an expo for that..." Lily's eyes sparkled with mischief.

"It's New York," Adam shrugged, unfazed. "Anything's possible."

"Matthew, why don't we go with Ted?" Lily suggested, practically bouncing with excitement.

"Sure, why not?" Matthew nodded.

"So, what's the deal?" Adam asked, grinning at Ted.

With a pained look on his face—and a lot of filling in from Matthew and Lily—Ted reluctantly shared the most embarrassing story ever.

Chapter 693: Your Energy's Beyond Your Imagination

Old Friends Bar

"So here's the deal—things have been feeling super weird lately," Ted began, diving into the whole backstory. "A few days ago, I went to my dentist. While he's checking my mouth, he randomly goes, 'Bet you're more used to saying this than hearing it, huh, Ted Mosby?'"

Then today, Wendy out of nowhere insists on getting me water, like she's worried I'm dehydrated.

Oh, and some energy drink company called asking if I'd endorse their stuff..."

"Was it Red Bull?" Adam cut in, barely holding back a laugh. "If it was, that'd make total sense. I mean, 'Your energy's beyond your imagination,' right? Fits you to a T!" 😊

"Hahaha!"

Matthew and the gang burst out laughing.

Red Bull was already a global energy drink titan by now.

The name itself screams vitality and unstoppable vibes.

"No way!" Ted shot back. "What legit company hires an action movie star for that? Only you'd come up with something so ridiculous!"

"Shame, though," Adam said, grinning. "A legendary action star who peaked right out the gate? That could've been a genius move.

Imagine the cred he'd bring—sales would explode!

Sure, people might sneakily buy it and trash-talk it in public, but behind closed doors? They'd be hauling it home by the truckload.

Emmm.

Just a bunch of shy, silent fans." 😊

"Anyway," Ted went on, "at first, I just thought it was odd, but I had no clue what was up. I asked around, and nobody would spill..."

"Until Barney showed up with a box of DVDs," Lily chimed in, smirking. "Title? Welcome Aboard the Boeing (Bow-ying) Plane, starring Ted Mosby as the pilot!"

"What the hell?!" Ted yelled. "That's when it hit me—someone's been jacking my name!"

"And it gets way more embarrassing!" Lily said, practically cackling.

"Spill it already!" Adam urged, laughing too.

"So this 'Ted Mosby' even did an interview with Action Movie Weekly—A-to-W," Matthew said, barely keeping it together. "Guess who they actually interviewed?"

"Obviously Ted," Adam said, cracking up.

The action star just borrowed Ted's name—he wouldn't slap his real name or number on the credits.

So how'd the interviewers track him down?

Simple: they looked up "Ted Mosby" in the phone book and called him.

Like the Terminator zapping back in time, flipping through the directory, and taking out every "Sarah Connor" one by one.

No misses, no mercy.

And "Ted Mosby" isn't exactly a common name.

So Action Movie Weekly dialed up, and boom—straight to our Ted.

"Yup, him!" Matthew confirmed, and the whole crew lost it again.

"They just said 'A-to-W'!" Ted groaned, flailing. "I thought it was Architectural Vision Weekly—same initials! It's a huge deal in my field, and I'm working on this big project, so I figured they wanted to interview me about that!"

"And then?" Adam asked, leaning in eagerly.

"Then he took the interview," Lily jumped in, barely containing herself. "Here's how it went down..."

She launched into a dramatic reenactment.

Ted got the call, covered the receiver, and whispered to Lily and the gang, "It's Architectural Vision Weekly!"

Then he did a little happy lean-back and told the reporter, "Wow! I've been a huge fan since I was a kid!"

The guy on the other end paused, thrown off. "Whoa, that's... intense. Anyway, I'm calling to talk about your latest work."

"Oh, that?" Ted said, playing modest. "It's not just me—I mean, I've got at least three partners on this."

"Whoa, a multi-player scene? Love that!" the reporter said, clearly pleased.

"Yeah, I'm pumped for it," Ted rambled on, oblivious to the double meanings flying everywhere. "They're gonna wear me out—those guys are top-tier!"

"Guys? Oh, this just got juicy!" The reporter's excitement shot through the roof.

"That interview went on for, like, twenty minutes!" Ted wailed.

The reporter, a stickler for authenticity who wanted to give the public the "real" celebrity scoop, published every word of their gloriously awkward exchange.

Here's a snippet from the article:

Action movie legend and rising star Ted Mosby sets sky-high standards for his latest work. In his own words, "I've lost count of how many nights I've spent slumped over the desk..."

Adam was already dying laughing.

Emmm.

That reporter really stuck to his guns.

No need for wild embellishments—Ted handed him pure gold.

He didn't just lock the car doors; he welded shut every door to the brain-cave.

Subtle chaos is the real chaos! 😊

The gang kept chatting about Ted's wild "misadventure" for a bit, clutching their stomachs until they had to drop it.

Any more, and Adam would've had to haul Lily and the rest to the hospital from laughing too hard.

"Matthew, what's this 'serious stuff' you mentioned?" Adam asked, shifting gears.

"Oh, right!" Matthew said, his face lighting up with genuine joy. "We're planning to buy a house!"

"No way, really?" Adam glanced at Lily, who was smiling awkwardly but politely. "Congrats! Have you already bought it?"

"Not yet," Lily said, shaking her head. "Matthew fell in love with this apartment. We were supposed to play it cool, haggle a bit, you know? But he got so excited, he hugged me and yelled, 'Babe, I love this place—let's buy it!' Totally blew our leverage."

"And then?" Adam asked, narrowing his eyes.

He remembered how Matthew and Lily got scammed on a house deal once.

Originally, he'd planned to nudge them toward buying next to Chandler and Monica's place—perfect happy neighbors.

But with their jobs and personalities, they weren't into suburban houses. They wanted a downtown apartment—closer to work and the bar scene they loved.

Suburbs were too quiet for their vibe.

Adam mentioned it a couple times but let it go.

It's their house—they should pick what they want.

Still, even if he wasn't meddling in their choice, no way was he letting them get conned.

"So you've bought it already?"

"Nah," Matthew said. "I was ready to jump, but Lily wanted to run it by you guys first. Before I could even call, our real estate agent heard your name, asked if we knew you, and told us to hold off. She said she'd show us a few more places before we decide."

"She knows you, I think," Lily added.

"What's her name?" Adam asked, intrigued.

"Janice Litman," Matthew and Lily said in unison.

"O-M-G!" Adam couldn't help letting out the classic Janice shriek.

"Exactly!" Matthew and Lily's eyes lit up. "That's her!"

Her vibe was that unmistakable—one iconic squeal, and the whole world knew it was Janice.

What a wild coincidence.

Like the saying goes: No coincidence, no story.

And here it was, right on cue.

Chapter 694: Happy Year of the Ox!

Old Friends Bar.

"You actually know her?!"

"Is it the kind of 'knowing' we're thinking of?"

Matthew and Lily both cracked up.

Though Matthew's laugh was the normal, friendly kind—everyone knowing each other as pals.

Lily's, on the other hand, had a mischievous, probing edge to it. 😊

"Yes and no!" Adam nodded at Matthew first, then turned to Lily with a playful shrug. "Lily, come on. Janice? Are you serious?"

"What's wrong with that?"

Lily caught his drift and thought about the kind of people Adam usually hung out with—real lookers, most of them. Realizing it wasn't likely, she doubled down with a sheepish grin. "Janice is pretty cute, though..."

"To you, maybe!" Adam teased. "Alright, just give her a call and see if she's free. If she is, tell her to come over. We can all chat—buying a house is a big deal. Gotta talk it over properly."

"I'll call her now," Matthew said, pulling out his phone. After a quick chat, he hung up. "She's on her way."

"Matthew, you're acting a little off," Adam said with a chuckle, giving him a heads-up. "Buying a house is a huge deal—don't just jump in on a whim. At the very least, do your homework and look around a bit more."

"Yeah, exactly!" Lily nodded eagerly, though she was secretly sweating bullets.

Truth be told, she was the one who'd first suggested moving out of Ted's apartment. For one, Ted and Anna, plus her and Matthew, were all married now—it felt weird still living together like they did back in their single days.

On top of that, she wasn't exactly a fan of Ted's place. And with Anna's situation, they needed to cut costs. Finding a new apartment as nice as the current one would definitely cost way more than their rent now.

So, Lily had suggested they move out and find a new place together. But she meant renting—not buying a house on a whim!

She was still drowning in debt, and Matthew was still in school with student loans to pay off. How could they afford to buy? But she didn't have the guts to tell Matthew that outright.

Caught up in her messy feelings, she did what she always did—she went shopping.

Yup!

For Lily, shopping was the answer to everything, just like how some folks think everything's a good reason to buy more booze! 😊

Feeling great? Treat yourself with a shopping spree!

Feeling down? Cheer yourself up with some retail therapy!

Feeling meh? Spice things up with a little shopping!

Even after maxing out a bunch of credit cards and racking up a mountain of debt?

Well, that just made her feel worse—and super nervous about what Matthew would think!

So... more shopping to calm the nerves!

Consumerism hit its peak with Lily, no question.

Emmm.

Penny had the same habit, by the way.

Not a coincidence, of course—it's a subtle message to the audience: go ahead and spend! Doesn't matter how many credit cards you max out; you'll still end up happy in the end!

As for how to actually pay off those cards?

Talking about that in a moment of "happiness" just feels too tacky! If your partner truly loves you, won't they help you pay it off anyway?

The "real happy ending" here is: lovers finally get together... and then work themselves to the bone paying off debt together.

Pretty savage cultural jab, huh? ☹️

Maybe take a page out of Leonard's book—relentlessly chase the goddess of your dreams, then secretly stash away a little piggy bank so her terrible spending habits don't drag you down to broke-town.

But let's be real—that's just small-time stuff. When push comes to shove, a piggy bank built from grandma's spare change isn't gonna save you. Broke is still broke!

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The gang kept joking around for a bit until Janice showed up.

"Adam Duncan, we really are meant to be, huh?" Janice said with her signature cackle. "Hehehe..."

"So, Janice, how'd you end up as a real estate agent?" Adam asked, brushing off her flirty vibe with a laugh. "Didn't you inherit a fortune from your furniture-sales-king ex-husband?"

"Ugh, don't even bring it up!"

Janice's face fell as soon as she sat down.

"Something go wrong?" Adam asked, a thought striking him. "Wait... you didn't invest in the Channing Foundation, did you?"

"What else could've turned me from a millionaire to broke in just two years?!" Janice grumbled bitterly. "Damn that Martin Channing!"

"You got off easy, honestly," Adam said, trying not to laugh as he comforted her. "The night that news broke, you know how many people ended up on rooftops? Or had heart attacks?"

He said that, but Janice wasn't finding any humor in it.

She'd finally married her furniture tycoon, gotten divorced, and walked away a millionaire—strutting around with confidence, ready to take on the world.

Everyone who saw her couldn't help but say, "Now there's a steel-wool Valkyrie!"

Of course, she wasn't the type to save the world or chase after young guys. Instead, she settled down with a nice, dependable guy, had a kid, and was ready to live the good life.

But just six months after her kid was born—while she was basking in the joys of financial freedom and a cozy family life—she'd thrown the bulk of her money into the "exclusive millionaire's treasure trove" called the Channing Foundation, thinking she'd just sit back and watch the cash roll in.

Then—boom—it all went bust overnight.

Her millions vanished in a puff of smoke.

With losses that heavy, if she wanted to keep her big house and cover the costs of raising her kid, she had no choice but to get back to work—and work harder than ever.

"There's no such thing as a free lunch," Adam said, shaking his head. "More people get crushed by stuff falling from the sky than hit the jackpot. Anyway, Janice, I heard you were really pushing Matthew on a house at first, but when you found out he was my friend, you told him to look around more. Something wrong with that place?"

"Uh... well..." Janice hesitated, looking embarrassed. "I didn't know Matthew and Lily were your friends at first... It's just how we real estate agents roll..."

"Alright, just spill it," Adam said with a half-smirk. "You backed off anyway, so we're not mad."

"Heh..." Janice let out an awkward laugh, relieved.

She could tell he'd seen through her and felt lucky she'd dodged a bullet.

Even after learning Matthew and Lily were Adam's friends, she'd briefly considered selling them a dud property anyway—mostly because it'd been a tough sell, the commission was huge, and it'd make her look good.

But back when she dated Chandler, she'd heard whispers that Adam could be pretty petty—and super protective of his friends.

A billionaire isn't scary on its own, but cross a petty billionaire who's got your friends' backs? That's a nightmare waiting to happen.

After wrestling with the temptation to make the sale, Janice had ultimately decided against it and stopped Matthew from jumping the gun.

Now, she knew she'd made the right call.

"That place seemed so perfect! What's wrong with it?" Matthew asked, confused.

"Well... it's not terrible..." Janice admitted with a sheepish grin. "It's just... the floors aren't level. The whole house kinda tilts..."

Matthew: "..."

Chapter 695: The House-Buying Horror Night

Old Friends Bar

"What?!"

Lily's jaw dropped, totally forgetting her plan to use this as an excuse to nix Matthew's house-buying idea.

"So, that apartment had some issues during construction—caused the whole floor to tilt," Janice said, looking sheepish. "You can't really tell with the naked eye, but the slant's pretty significant. Anyone who buys it is in for a ton of headaches down the road."

"No way..." Matthew muttered, looking like his entire world just crumbled.

This was the apartment he'd been obsessed with!

"Trust the pros," Adam said with a grin. "You're a law school guy—what do you know about building structures? And you only saw it once!"

"But I really liked that place..." Matthew whined, torn.

"No biggie," Adam reassured him. "You just like nice apartments, right? Doesn't mean it has to be that one. Let Janice show you a few more—I bet you'll find another you love just as much."

"Exactly!" Janice chimed in, smiling. "I'll take you around to see more. And if it's the decor you're into, there are other places with the same vibe."

"Alright, fine," Matthew relented. He wasn't dead-set on that one apartment anyway, and now that he knew it had structural issues, no amount of love could save it.

"Janice, you're the real estate expert here," Adam said, glancing her way. "Give us the rundown on what to watch out for when buying a place. We're totally clueless about this stuff!" 😊

Matthew scratched his head with a goofy grin.

He knew Adam said "we," but really meant him—the guy who'd jumped in headfirst without a clue.

"Of course, happy to!" Janice said. She knew cozying up to a billionaire like Adam could only mean good things for her career, so she didn't hesitate to spill all her house-buying wisdom.

"First rule of buying a place? Location, location, location! If you can swing it financially, go for the best spot you can get.

A good location pretty much guarantees you won't run into major issues—as long as you can afford it."

She shot a quick look at Adam.

"And then?" Matthew asked, picking up on the vibe and steering away from that topic with a wry smile. "What if we can't afford the fancy spots?"

He'd been to Adam's place, obviously. Loved it way more than the apartment he'd been ready to snap up.

But loving it was one thing—affording it was a whole different ballgame.

No way was he signing up for another massive loan, slaving away half his life to pay it off just for, what, a bathroom?

Sure, he and Lily loved leaving their "love marks" in their own bathroom, other people's bathrooms, even public ones—but living in just a bathroom forever? Hard pass! 😊

"Then you've gotta be extra careful," Janice said, chuckling. She knew not everyone could buy wherever they pleased like Adam. "Before you jump in, figure out a general area based on your work and lifestyle.

Don't rush it—check out a bunch of places, visit them in person.

Safety's the top priority here.

So the big question to ask is: How many Black residents are in this neighborhood?

If it's a lot, skip it.

If it's few, add it to your maybe list..."

"Uh..." Matthew's face twisted up, conflicted.

"Janice, that's kinda racist," Lily said, picking up on Matthew's unease and frowning.

"I swear it's not about racism!" Janice protested, throwing a pleading glance at Adam.

"Go ahead, keep going," Adam said, giving her a reassuring nod.

He knew this was the real deal—raw advice you wouldn't get just anywhere.

"Alright then," Janice perked up, grinning. "If we weren't all Adam's buddies, I'd never say this out loud.

Outside, I'd be all, 'Oh, everywhere's the same—happy, equal American vibes!'

But the truth? Everyone knows it: once a neighborhood gets a lot of Black residents, the safety risks shoot way up.

You cannot buy in a place like that.

If something goes wrong, you'll regret it 'til you die—either because you're six feet under or because you're stuck hating yourself forever for letting your family down."

"That's a bit much, isn't it?" Lily said, skeptical. "It's not like we're buying in Brooklyn."

"You just said Brooklyn yourself," Janice pointed out with a laugh. "If a neighborhood gets too many Black folks, what's the difference? It's just a mini-Brooklyn!"

"..."

Lily didn't have a comeback.

They weren't racist—or at least they didn't want to be—but some things were just baked into their subconscious, whether they liked it or not.

"Safety first," Adam cut in. "What's a home supposed to be? A happy haven! If you can't even feel safe, how's that gonna work? Matthew, Lily—keep this in mind, seriously."

"Got it," Matthew and Lily said, exchanging a look and nodding.

It felt a little off, sure, but they appreciated Adam looking out for them.

"Heh, go on, Janice," Adam said with a small smile.

"After safety, it's all about the details," Janice continued. "Like, if you're buying a used place, don't just go for the cheapest deal. Check its history.

Was there a murder there?

Or is it a big 'M' house?

Those are huge red flags."

"What's wrong with a big 'M' house?" Matthew, Lily, and Ted exchanged glances, smirking with nostalgia.

Back in college, they'd partied hard in apartments like that.

Even in the original timeline, decades later, they'd snuck off for one last hurrah together—without their kids knowing.

They had zero issues with it! 😊

"Not that kind of 'M'—I mean growing it, not smoking it," Janice clarified.

"Growing?" Matthew's eyes widened as it clicked. "What's the big deal?"

"Let me take this one," Adam jumped in. "This is medical territory.

Growing weed needs heat and humidity—lots of it. That kind of dampness in a house breeds mold.

Breathing that stuff in long-term can mess you up—upper respiratory infections, allergic laryngitis, you name it.

Think bronchitis, tonsillitis, rheumatic fever, asthma...

In bad cases, it can even kill you."

"Whoa, that serious?" Matthew and the gang couldn't believe it.

"There are real cases," Adam said, dead serious. "Trust me on this."

"Of course we trust you!" Lily said quickly.

Matthew and the others nodded like bobbleheads.

"And that's not all," Adam added with a grin. "Houses tied to shady stuff like that? You never know if you'll get dragged into some nasty crime mess.

What if the old owner stashed something in there?

A wall full of cash?

Or a wall full of bodies?

They might come back for it someday."

"Stop it!" Lily shrieked, freaking out.

That was way too creepy!

Sadly, it wasn't just hypotheticals—there were real stories like that.

They'd heard them before as wild news bits, but now it felt way too close for comfort.

Terrifying!

Chapter 696: Shout Out Your Name!

Old Friends Bar.

With Janice walking them through the details and Adam chiming in, Matthew and Lily started to get a better grip on the whole home-buying thing.

Finally, Janice added, "It's the same deal if you ever wanna rent the place out later. Don't rent to certain folks—you might not get your rent, even if they sweet-talk you up front. Plus, you never know who else might end up crashing there!"

Adam glanced at Janice when she said that.

Having crossed over from 2020, he couldn't help but nod internally. Sure, her words were a bit too blanket-statement-y. But honestly, the odds were high enough that most regular folks wouldn't dare take the risk.

"Ever wonder why more and more rich people are moving out to the suburbs?" Adam pointed out. "Meanwhile, the poorest folks end up clustering in the city centers. Is it really 'cause the city's got better vibes or is more livable? Nah.

It's 'cause cities keep setting up more soup kitchens and food banks. Homeless folks naturally flock to those spots—wake up, grab a bite, live the 'good life.' But when the homeless population spikes and poorer folks start gathering in droves, the rich get uneasy.

They don't say much—don't need to. They just act. On one hand, they quietly jack up the cost of living in certain areas to levels most can't afford, keeping people out. A lot of buildings have unwritten rules—no selling or renting to certain groups or anyone they don't approve of.

On the other hand, the rich—who've got endless options—just up and move to the suburbs, building their own fancy little towns. It creates this weird phenomenon called 'urban hollowing.'

The city centers, which should be the heart of everything, just decay more and more. Meanwhile, these suburban rich enclaves form a new outer ring that becomes the real core of the metro area. Give it enough time, and boom—you've got another Detroit on your hands. Pretty interesting, right?"

"..."

Matthew and the others just stared, dumbfounded.

Interesting?

More like straight-up suffocating cyberpunk dystopia! 😬

They kept chatting for a while longer before Adam and Janice headed out.

Adam wanted to swing by the hospital ER to see if he could save a few more lives. Janice, meanwhile, was still kind of an outsider to the group.

"Janice, I'm counting on you to help Matthew and Lily with their house hunt," Adam said outside the bar before they parted ways.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure they find a place they're happy with!" Janice patted her chest confidently.

"Cool, thanks then." Adam handed her a business card with a smile. "If anything comes up, just call this number."

"Got it, got it!" Janice's eyes lit up—she'd gotten exactly what she wanted. She couldn't help but let out her signature laugh. "Hehehe..."

"See ya!" Adam bolted before that infectious cackle could rope him in any longer. 😊

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The Next Day

New York.

The action movie expo kicked off as planned, and Ted showed up to track down whoever was using his name and dragging his rep through the mud.

"Good Lord, there's this many people?!" Ted gawked at the packed crowd, disbelief written all over his face.

"Of course!" Barney, who'd naturally tagged along for an event like this, scanned the scene with a grin. "This is New York, man! Who doesn't love a good, steamy romance flick?"

"Yeah..." Ted awkwardly waved at someone in the distance, chuckling self-deprecatingly. "Guess I just found out the deputy manager from our HR department is into this stuff too..."

Emmm.

Running into someone you know at a place like this? That's a whole new level of awkward you can't quite put into words.

But it did clear up one thing for Ted. Now he knew why that guy at work always gave him those greasy, weird smiles.

At first, Ted didn't get it. Then he figured the guy was smirking 'cause he'd seen some spicy movies.

But now? Oh, he got it on a whole deeper level.

Heck, if he spotted that greasy coworker popping up in one of these flicks someday, he wouldn't even blink.

All 'cause of passion, right?

Doing it for the love of the game.

Maybe even a little friendly cameo action.

Totally reasonable! 🤖

"Let's find this guy already!" Ted snapped out of his waving, dropping the polite-but-awkward smile and losing it a bit.

If they didn't wrap this up quick, who knew what other familiar faces he'd bump into?

"Over there!" Barney, after a quick scan, zeroed in on their target like a hawk.

The two of them marched over.

"Barney Stinson!" Barney said with a playful smirk, eyeing the guy who felt both unfamiliar and oddly familiar at the same time. "Big fan. That flick, Welcome Aboard the Silver Bullet Express? Absolute genius."

"Heh, thanks! Where do you guys want the signatures?" The action movie newbie seemed friendly, ready to sign whatever they handed him.

"No rush. Let me introduce myself first—I'm Ted Mosby~" Ted said, staring the guy down pointedly.

"Where do I sign?" The newbie didn't quite catch on at first.

"I said, I'm Ted Mosby~" Ted repeated, gritting his teeth for emphasis.

"Ohhh! It's you!" The newbie finally got it, but instead of looking embarrassed at being caught red-handed, he just beamed.

"Why the heck are you using my name?!" Ted demanded, finally losing his cool.

"To pay tribute to you, of course!" The newbie said cheerfully. "Don't you remember helping out a little kid on the school playground back in middle school? A bunch of bigger kids were ganging up on him, trying to snatch his lollipop."

"That kid... was you?" Ted blinked, taken aback. Seeing how genuinely happy the guy seemed, he figured there might be more to the story. His anger fizzled out a bit.

"Yup, that was me!" The newbie nodded eagerly. "You stepped in and saved the day. Sure, the lollipop ended up falling and breaking on the ground, but I pieced it back together and kept it as a keepsake. Heck, I even got it tattooed on me—you guys probably noticed, right?"

As he spoke, he started tugging at his pants.

"Whoa, whoa, we get it!" Ted cut him off, a little touched at first—until the pants-dropping move killed the vibe real quick. 😊

"See, I told you that lollipop tattoo meant something..." Barney pointed at the newbie with a sly grin. "Nice~"

Barney was eating this up. Another epic tale to add to his playbook for the ladies!

Ted, standing off to the side, felt his face twist in horror—especially when he caught Barney's muttered comment. Realizing he was tangled up in this story too? Yeah, he was not okay.

"So this is how you pay tribute to me?" Ted asked, half-laughing, half-crying.

"Exactly!" The newbie grinned wide. "I'll never forget how you stormed in, yelling at those bullies to 'let go of that kid!' You were so badass!

You were my superhero!

I couldn't think of any better way to repay you than to make sure everyone hears the goddesses in their eyes shouting your name loud and proud!

Make every guy out there jealous of Ted Mosby!

It's the least I could do for you!"

"Ted Mosby!"

"Ted Mosby!"

"Ted Mosby!"

Barney raised his hands dramatically, mimicking the breathy tone of a classic action movie starlet, hyping it up with a teasing shout.

"See?!" The newbie pointed at Barney, thrilled someone got it. "That's exactly what I'm talking about! That's my tribute!"

Ted: "..."

Chapter 697: I Thought I Was the Only One With This Problem

New York

Action Movie Expo

Barney was hyped, whooping and waving his arms like a lunatic.

But the action newbie's "tribute" was more than Ted could handle.

"Listen, Ted..."

Ted awkwardly called out to the action newbie—using his own name. "You can't keep using my name, man. I'm busting my butt to make it big in architecture!"

"Architect, huh?"

The action newbie blinked, clearly lost.

Back in middle school, Ted had saved him once, and he'd sworn that if he ever made it big, he'd pay tribute to his superhero, Ted Mosby.

Problem was, he barely scraped through high school—college was a pipe dream.

Normally, he'd have been stuck in some nowhere town, a total nobody, with zero chance to repay his hero.

But lucky for him, he was gifted.

Emmm.

Like, really gifted.

How else could he debut and instantly dominate the action movie world, skyrocketing to king status?

He'd even blown up outside the niche!

The endless stream of fans swarming him for autographs today was proof—mostly steel-wool Valkyrie types, sure, but still!

Emmm.

With no looks or physique to speak of, being the darling of those battle-hardened Valkyries made perfect sense.

They'd seen it all—didn't care about shallow stuff. Inner beauty was their jam.

If this guy had a stat sheet, he'd dumped every point into one attribute.

Brains? Nonexistent.

How else could he genuinely think this was a tribute to Ted?

"You mean Beloved Architect?"

The action newbie's god-tier comprehension kicked in.

Three months, 125 films—he'd gone from actor to director to writer, starring in his own stuff now.

Everything he saw, his brain just screamed "action movie plot!"

Can't help it—love what you do, right? Occupational hazard.

"..."

Ted was speechless.

"Dude, you actually nailed it," Barney piped up, eyes gleaming as he jumped into a brainstorming sesh with the newbie. "That'd be an epic movie title!"

He threw up a dramatic hand gesture, winking at Ted. "Ted Mosby: Beloved Architect! Trust me, it's gold."

"Barney!" Ted groaned, exasperated.

He knew what Barney was up to.

Last time Ted griped about how being an architect didn't impress the ladies, Barney overheard and took it as a personal challenge.

Using Ted's name and job, he'd launched a full-on pickup mission.

Turns out, "architect" was fresh meat for the seasoned pros out there—kinda like how old-timers love urban rebirth novels with quirky new jobs.

Didn't even matter if the writing sucked.

Novelty and moves were what counted.

"Right?!" The newbie beamed at Barney like he'd found his soulmate, pointing at him. "Actually, I'm prepping a new flick—starts shooting tomorrow night..."

"Hold up!" Ted cut in, panicking. "Hey, no offense, man, but isn't there some other way you could honor me?"

"Wait, you're not mad, are you?"

The newbie finally clocked Ted's real feelings, looking crushed.

"Oh man, my dad was right—I should've just planted a tree or something (Jewish tradition for memorials). I'm such an idiot! I thought you'd be touched!"

"...I am touched," Ted said quickly. He was too soft to hurt anyone's feelings. "Really! It's just... I feel kinda guilty. Because, uh... I wasn't actually the one who saved you that day!

It was Lance Hardwood..."

"Seriously?!"

The newbie's eyes lit up, all earnest and clueless. "You guys might not know this, but in my line of work, that name's got serious potential—no, it's practically unbeatable!"

"Oh yeah?" Ted played along, faking it.

"Totally!" The newbie started daydreaming. "Lance Hardwood: Beloved Architect!"

While Ted smirked, thinking he'd dodged a bullet, the newbie hit him with a curveball. "Starring... Ted Mosby!"

"...Can you please stop using Ted Mosby? Shouldn't you just go by Lance Hardwood?" Ted begged, rubbing his temples.

"Sorry, bro," the newbie said, genuinely apologetic. "I've already made it big as Ted Mosby—can't switch names and start over now!

Maybe in your field, you can swap names whenever, but in mine? It's all about the brand."

"...Names matter in my field too!" Ted protested.

"Really?" The newbie blinked, confused. "Your job pays that well? How come I've never heard of it?"

Ted had no comeback.

Compared to this guy who'd blown up worldwide, his salary and bonuses were peanuts.

"No hard feelings, alright?" the newbie said, sheepish. "How about I make it up to you? Oh—tomorrow night, we're kicking off the new shoot. You guys should swing by if you're curious! You could even join in.

And if you're into meeting some hot leading ladies from the biz, I can hook you up!"

"Deal!" Barney shoved a stunned Ted aside and shook the newbie's hand, locking it in.

Just like that, it was settled!

Ted got dragged off by Barney, still reeling.

"What did you just do?!" Ted snapped once they were outside, the cold air hitting him.

"Chill!" Barney shot back, annoyed. "If I hadn't jumped in, you'd have blown a once-in-a-lifetime shot! Don't tell me you've never watched an action flick.

Or that you think the actresses in those aren't drop-dead gorgeous!"

"..."

Ted choked.

He couldn't lie—those leading ladies were stunning.

Faces and figures that could blow Hollywood A-listers out of the water!

"I'm married!" Ted yelled, grasping at straws.

"I know!" Barney stared at him like he was nuts. "We're just checking it out tomorrow night—not doing anything shady. What's going through your head, man?"

Ted shut down. No words left.

The Next Night

Ted couldn't outstubborn Barney and got dragged to the set.

He'd flat-out refused Barney's idea to offer up his apartment as a filming spot, though.

"Here's the blueprint for the new International Beloved Tower," the newbie declared, decked out in a suit, hammering away at a keyboard like he knew what he was doing.

"Oh, Beloved Architect, you've done it again," a gorgeous assistant in a tight red OL outfit purred, perched on the desk, tossing out perfectly timed praise.

"Let's celebrate..."

The scene rolled on. Barney was eating it up, but Ted couldn't take it anymore—he bailed.

He was married to Anna now, after all.

Medical Center

Adam was running a private session for Alice Grey when his phone buzzed with a frantic call from Ted.

After hearing the chaos, Adam muttered "Ridiculous" under his breath but said, "Ambulances are slow—I'm on my way. Don't move her, or you'll risk worsening the injury and causing internal bleeding."

He hung up, grabbed an emergency kit from the ER, and peeled out in his car.

Sure, it was absurd, but a life was a life—worth 0.01 lifespan points!

Plus, he was kinda curious about this "Ted Mosby" action star.

He'd thought he was the only one stuck with a mess like this.

Chapter 698: Life as Cheap as Grass

New York.

Some Apartment Somewhere.

A low-budget action flick titled *Spear Hardwood Beloved Architect*, written, directed, and starring the breakout star going by the stage name Ted Mosby, was currently being filmed in full swing at this apartment.

These kinds of small productions didn't need much—just grab a few people, pick a random spot, and start shooting.

Heck, sometimes they didn't even bother finding a location. They'd just film right in one of the crew's apartments.

Take Phoebe's twin sister, Ursula, for example. She'd once shot a whole scene in her own place. When Phoebe found out and showed up, she walked in on the eye-searing chaos and noped right out.

But the director? His eyes lit up with "artistic inspiration," and he immediately tried to rope Phoebe into joining Ursula on set.

That's just how enthusiastic these folks got.

The director's gaze was practically sparkling with creative genius, and a new script idea popped into his head on the spot.

Now, this action star newbie—drawing inspiration from Ted's real-life architect gig—was bursting with ideas too.

Just last night, he'd met Ted. And tonight? Script, cast, location, props, costumes—everything was ready to roll, and they'd already started filming.

That speed? It'd put any artsy indie film to shame. 😊

With his tribute muse (the real Ted) watching from the sidelines, the newbie was beyond hyped.

He was already a naturally gifted guy, and this time he'd cast a fresh-faced beauty who'd just entered the industry.

Add all these factors together...

Trouble crept in silently.

Halfway through filming, something unspeakable went down.

Emmm.

To sum it up in one line: it was like one of those bizarre news stories Adam had seen just before he crossed over.

But thankfully, since there were other crew members around—and they were all keeping a close eye—they noticed something was off with the female lead pretty quick.

They called for emergency help right away.

Ted, who got the heads-up, rushed back to the scene and immediately called Adam.

At least this time, it didn't turn into one of those weird cases where the actress quietly died without anyone noticing.

Of course, whether the seriously injured newbie actress would actually pull through was something Adam would only know once he got there and assessed her himself.

Adam floored it to get there as fast as possible.

With his sports car's speed and his near-superhuman driving skills, he beat the ambulance to the scene.

"Adam!" Ted called out, pacing anxiously downstairs.

"Lead the way!" Adam didn't waste a second.

Ted nodded and jogged ahead, guiding him up to the apartment.

Inside, a young woman lay motionless on a desk.

A clueless dude stood nearby, looking completely lost.

"You're a doctor? Thank God!"

Adam was already fully geared up—gloves, mask, goggles, the works.

No choice.

The patient was an action actress, and the injury was in a... delicate spot. The risk of infection for any medical staff was just too high.

Adam was here to save lives, sure, but protecting himself came first.

"How's she doing?"

"Not good," Adam said after a quick check, his face turning grim. Internal bleeding was a given.

Then he got to work on emergency treatment.

By the time the ambulance arrived, he'd managed to pull the near-dead actress back from the brink and stabilize her condition.

But for proper follow-up care, she'd need to be taken to the hospital for surgery.

"That's incredible!" a guy shouted. "Ted, you're gonna blow up! Like, really blow up! We're gonna make bank!"

"Huh?" Everyone turned to look at him, including the action newbie, who just blinked in confusion.

Adam shot the guy a cold glance.

"This is the ultimate gimmick!" the man rambled, practically vibrating with excitement. "Everyone's gonna fall head over heels for your charm! This is some real-deal, hardcore acting cred!"

The others started catching on.

If this got out to the press, the newbie would be an instant sensation—there'd be no stopping his rise.

He was already making waves outside his niche; this would just catapult his name into the stratosphere.

People would hear his name and instantly have a mental image.

Emmm.

Kinda like those classic memes.

In typical American TV fashion, "Mosby" might even become a slang term down the line.

Like...

"Careful now, I'm about to give you the Mosby-style death..."

"Baby, tonight you should be calling me So-and-So Mosby."

From that angle, the newbie's whole "tribute" to Ted had pretty much hit its mark...

The guy hyping it up turned out to be the newbie's agent.

When the incident first happened, the potential upside had immediately crossed his mind.

But since it involved a person's life—and possibly a lawsuit—he'd held back. He was just a small-time agent with no big connections, so naturally, he'd been more worried than excited.

Now, though, with Adam stabilizing her condition and the likelihood of her pulling through looking good, the life-and-death pressure was off. All he felt now was pure, unbridled glee.

Everyone knew that in the States, fame equaled money.

And in their line of work? With a scandal this jaw-dropping and awkward to boost their profile, the fame would explode—and the cash would come rolling in like a tidal wave.

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Medical Center

While Adam was in the OR fighting to save the newbie actress, the action star outside was already drawing a crowd of onlookers.

No avoiding it.

In the world of American TV dramas, fame was fame—whether it was the good kind or the infamous kind.

Pretty much anyone who heard the backstory of the surgery couldn't resist coming over to gawk at the guy.

Plenty of folks who'd never seen his films were already planning to grab a few DVDs to "check out" later.

And some of the more... seasoned viewers quietly started debating some not-safe-for-kids topics.

Before long, a heated argument broke out over who was "better"—Adam or the action newbie.

Back in the day, it would've been a landslide in Adam's favor.

But now? Some folks weren't so sure.

No helping it—the impact of this whole fiasco was just too wild.

Without Adam pulling off something equally headline-worthy, there wasn't much to argue in his favor on this front.

And obviously, Adam wasn't about to get tangled up in anything like that.

Sure, he could.

But he never would.

No helping it—he was just too much of a gentle, considerate guy. 😊

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After the Surgery

"Adam, how'd it go?" Ted stepped forward to ask.

"Surgery went well," Adam nodded.

"That's awesome!" the action newbie cheered.

He was a bit of a lovable doofus—otherwise he wouldn't have gone about repaying his "debt" in such a bizarrely earnest way.

Unlike his money-hungry agent, he genuinely cared about whether the actress lived or died.

"Don't celebrate just yet," Adam warned with a frown. "This was really dangerous. If I hadn't gotten there in time, she'd be gone."

The system's little +0.01 ping had made it crystal clear—she'd been on the brink of death for real.

"Sorry," the doofus said, immediately apologizing.

Adam shook his head and turned to leave.

He'd done what he could. Whatever happened with this action newbie from here on out was out of his hands.

Sure, right now the guy seemed like a big softie, genuinely concerned for the actress's life.

But once he got a real taste of fame and fortune? Who knows if he'd still feel the same?

Maybe in the not-so-distant future, egged on by his agent, he'd consult some shady lawyer and try to recreate today's stunt—except this time, there'd be no one to swoop in and save the day.

In the world of American TV dramas...

Live free, die random.

As long as you've got money, lives are cheap as grass.

Chapter 699: 's Butterfly Dream Sheldon

Medical Center

"Adam, Tatiana's a little scared. Can we come over tonight?"

Adam was mid-shift when Heather's call came through out of the blue.

By now, it was routine: every Wednesday and Thursday, she'd fly straight to New York with Tatiana.

But today was only Monday.

So, being the extra-thoughtful person she is, Heather checked in early, clearly worried about throwing off his plans.

"Of course you can!" Adam said, feeling a twinge of guilt. He flashed a quick smile into the phone. "You and Tatiana are welcome anytime."

As a master of time management, he had that confidence locked down. 🤖

Sure, choosing to be a doctor and save lives for lifespan points had seriously cramped his free-roaming style.

But on the flip side, it gave him the perk of controlling his own schedule.

Why?

Because nothing trumps saving lives!

Emmm.

If one of his buddies broke the routine and called him up out of nowhere, who'd dare say it wasn't a life-or-death emergency?

Flawless logic, no notes!

"Alright then," Heather said, laughing lightly. "We'll be there tonight. You'll need to give Tatiana some extra TLC—she's been a little spooked."

"What's up with her?" Adam asked, instantly on alert.

"She's been having nightmares the past couple of days," Heather said, her voice tinged with worry. "In her dreams, she turns into a butterfly. Then she either gets swatted dead or trapped in a spiderweb, struggling while this spider creeps toward her with its jaws wide open... Anyway, it's not the first time she's woken up freaked out."

"Sheldon Cooper!" Adam blurted, piecing it together and laughing despite himself. "Did Sheldon tell her that butterfly story?"

"Yup," Heather sighed. "Ever since he brought it up, the nightmares started."

"Damn it!" Adam smacked his forehead, groaning. "I knew introducing Sheldon to them was a mistake."

Yup, you heard that right!

Sheldon and Tatiana were buddies now.

With her condition, Tatiana didn't make friends easily.

So last time, Adam had a lightbulb moment: the perfect pal for her would be Megan, that superpowered girl with no pain sensation.

Same background, same age, similar struggles—one's all about justice, the other's pure kindness.

Total BFF material!

Of course, Megan had to pick up Sheldon's OCD and germaphobe habits first—build that lifestyle armor to keep herself safe.

As long as they didn't live together, and Tatiana didn't pull a Howard and prank Sheldon nonstop, they'd get along just fine—no drama.

With Adam playing matchmaker, Tatiana and Megan had already met up. They usually chatted over the phone.

Every Wednesday and Thursday, Heather would bring Tatiana to New York to hang out with Megan.

As one of her few friends, Megan soon introduced Tatiana to Sheldon remotely.

Now the three of them were tight, connecting mostly on Wednesday comic nights.

That's when Tatiana and Megan would team up to read the latest issues, then hop on a video call with Sheldon to geek out over the new plots.

Tech changes everything!

It was only 1999—video calls weren't exactly standard household stuff yet.

But as Heather's adopted daughter, Tatiana having one made sense.

Adam had even hooked up Sheldon and Megan's places with the gear too.

It was a sneaky little bribe to reel Sheldon in—video calls were so cool back then.

Think about future Sheldon: never offline, breathing VR air, touching virtual flowers and butterflies, and that rare forest trip where he's glued to his phone, freaking out as the signal bars drop.

A total internet addict like him? In '99, getting a video call setup was pure bliss.

And in an era when video calls were rare, who else could he even ring up besides Tatiana and Megan's specially rigged homes?

That one trick turbocharged the "Three Musketeers" bond.

The other night, somehow, the trio got onto the topic of butterflies.

Sheldon flashed back to when he was 11, fresh in college, taking that philosophy elective with the hippie chick professor.

She'd told him the butterfly tale—dreams, reality, and all that deep existential stuff.

Then he'd shared with Tatiana and Megan this recurring dream he used to have:

He couldn't tell dream from reality, stuck in an infinite nesting doll of dreams-within-dreams.

The kicker? He'd "wake up" in the dream, only to find himself as a butterfly with his face, lying on the pillow.

Terrified, he'd beg his sister Missy on the next bed for help—only for her to grab a flyswatter, cackle like a maniac, and smash him flat.

Sisters are the worst! Even in dreams! 😞

Back then, it got so bad that when his mom called him for school, he'd just lie there, refusing to budge.

He'd "figured it out."

Dreams or waking life.

Living or dying.

Philosophers or butterflies.

It's all the same—meaningless.

"All appearances are illusions."

Lying there like a salted fish or dragging himself to college? No difference.

Why bother getting up just to wake into another dream layer?

Sheldon Cooper—later self-proclaimed "Leonard's muscle bodyguard" (despite barely jogging)—wasn't about to waste energy on pointless dream loops.

Too exhausting!

Better to chill in bed.

Plus, it spared him from dealing with those annoying hippie profs and all the dumb Earthlings out there.

Emmm.

In the end, his dad George shattered that zen phase with some good old-fashioned "physical persuasion."

Guess they both believed in physics, but Dad's level was next-tier—maximum convincing power! 💪

Megan, bold and carefree as ever, just laughed off Sheldon's story.

But sensitive little Tatiana? It stuck with her.

After the call, she dreamed about it that night—and kept waking up in a panic ever since.

Heather had tried comforting her, but it wasn't cutting it.

Her first instinct was to call Adam, but she hesitated and rang Juno first instead.

She knew Adam was all-in on the save-lives mission and hated bothering him unless she had to.

Juno didn't have that hang-up—doctoring was just a fun hobby for her, not the obsessive calling it was for Adam.

On Juno's advice, Heather realized Adam was the better fix here.

Not that Juno couldn't handle it—she could crack any psych puzzle given time.

But Adam, the lone guy in their crew, had that dad-vibe aura. When it came to calming a scared kid, he'd work wonders fast.

Chapter 700: A Masterful Tai Chi Move

Medical Center.

After hanging up with Heather, Adam shook his head with a wry smile.

Sheldon really was a child of destiny, huh? Even after eight years, stories from Sheldon's childhood kept popping up around Adam almost every week, dragging him right back to those quirky little moments from Young Sheldon.

Guess that's just life for ya! 😊

Now, though, he had to figure out how to smooth things over with the sensitive Tatiana.

Earlier, Sheldon had stayed up all night reading Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy. In a dream, he'd had a chat with René Descartes himself—the mathematician-philosopher—and got a spark of inspiration. He tried to use Descartes' famous line, "I think, therefore I am," to counter the classic Zhuangzi's butterfly dream paradox.

"I think, therefore I am."

The idea being: if I'm asking a question, then I must've thought about it. And if I'm thinking, then I must exist.

But sadly...

Whenever humans start overthinking, the universe just laughs.

Even if that human's Sheldon.

"I think, therefore I am" doesn't quite debunk Zhuangzi's butterfly dream. 'Cause you can feel like you're thinking in a dream too—endless layers of dream within dream. Nobody can really say which one's the "real" you.

These deep, tangled philosophical debates? Humanity's been wrestling with 'em for thousands of years. Even the most brilliant minds could only pose the questions—no perfect answers to be found.

Even Adam, with smarts close to Sheldon's level, couldn't just whip up a response to these fundamental questions about existence on the spot—and then break it down to comfort Tatiana.

Not that he needed to.

If you can't solve the problem—or the person asking it—just redirect the whole thing!

Adam was pretty confident he could pull that off. He'd just wait for Heather and the others to show up tonight, then whip out some metaphorical tai chi: a little Great Shift of the Universe, some Grafting Flowers onto Trees, a dash of Stars Turning in the Sky—boom, problem handled! 🌀

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Time flew by, and soon it was noon.

Cafeteria.

"Meredith, you've been getting pretty chummy with your stepmom lately, huh?" Cristina said offhandedly.

"She's not my stepmom!" Meredith snapped, super touchy about it. "She's just my bio dad's current wife. Nothing to do with me!"

"Alright, alright," Cristina shrugged. "So you've been hanging out with your bio dad's wife a lot lately, then. Before, you'd avoid her like the plague—now you're not only treating her, but laughing and chatting too?"

"She's..." Meredith paused, "she's nothing like my mom. Really... maternal."

Ellis Grey, the legendary doctor, had always been cold as ice—to everyone, including her only daughter.

But the current Mrs. Grey? Just an ordinary housewife, always focused on keeping the family together, making sure her husband and daughters felt the warmth of home.

And now, that motherly vibe was even extending to her husband's daughter from his first marriage.

"Eh, hard to say," Cristina countered instinctively. "Maybe she's just bored. Didn't her daughter already get married and have a kid? I think she had the baby right here at our hospital."

"...Yeah," Meredith's expression dimmed. "They've got two daughters. The older one's married with a kid now, moved out ages ago. The younger one's studying at Harvard Med. He keeps mixing me up with his younger daughter... Maybe that's all it is."

"Don't listen to Cristina," Adam said, shooting a glance at the tactless Cristina before turning to Meredith. "Feelings like that—someone willing to give you that kind of care? As long as you're sure it's genuine, don't overthink their initial motives. Otherwise, life's gonna be pretty hard to navigate."

Meredith didn't say anything.

Deep down, though, it was clear she still had some hopes when it came to her dad's side of the family.

She was just stuck in that awkward phase: one step forward, three steps back—wanting to connect but scared of getting hurt.

Cristina's bluntness had just yanked her a few steps back again.

"She came to you for a check-up?" Adam asked, smoothly redirecting the convo like a pro.

"Yeah," Meredith replied. She hadn't planned on saying more, but since Adam brought it up—and it reminded her of work—she went on. "She's been having hiccups a lot lately, bad enough that it's messing with her sleep."

She knows I'm prepping for my intern certification exam soon—you know, the one that decides my residency specialty. If it wasn't serious, she wouldn't have come to me.

Adam, could you help me take a look?"

"Of course," Adam nodded. "I'll come with you later to check her out. What's your diagnosis so far?"

"She's got acid reflux," Meredith explained. "She's had hiccups on and off for a while, but it's gotten worse lately. I gave her some chlorpromazine, and it worked right away—but once the meds wore off, the hiccups came back. Now I'm thinking of suggesting an endoscopic fundoplication."

An endoscopic fundoplication involves sticking a tube down the patient's throat and stitching up the bottom of the esophagus to stop stomach acid from irritating it.

"Why not try non-surgical options to treat the hiccups first?" Adam frowned. "We're surgeons, so of course we jump straight to surgery—but she's your dad's wife, and she trusts you enough to come see you. You gotta take extra care here."

Surgery might seem like a quick fix—slice, dice, problem gone.

But every doctor knows: if you can avoid going under the knife, you do it.

Even if the procedure's small and routine.

'Cause nobody can predict what might go wrong. Pre-op anesthesia, mid-surgery mishaps, post-op complications—any one of those could turn a minor issue into a life-threatening disaster.

"...So what should I do?" Meredith mumbled, a little embarrassed.

She knew Adam was right—that's how a doctor should treat a family member.

Safety first.

Not just rushing for the quickest, easiest fix.

It showed she really hadn't been treating this woman—who was trying to offer her maternal warmth—like actual family.

"Start with standard non-invasive treatments," Adam said with a smile. "There's plenty of options out there. Only go for riskier surgery if those don't work."

"Exactly," Cristina chimed in. "Deep breathing, sip-and-bend water trick, holding your breath... there's a ton of methods. Something's bound to work for her. And if not, there's always massage—that can do wonders!"

"No way!" Meredith blurted out instinctively, then glared at Cristina, her face turning red. "What are you even thinking?! Suggesting I give her... a massage?!"

"What's the big deal?" Cristina shrugged innocently. "Just grab a cotton swab, stick it in the patient's mouth, and gently massage the soft palate right in the center. Usually works like magic in a minute. What's the problem?"

"Pfft," Adam couldn't help but laugh.

Cristina cracked up too.

"Shut up!" Meredith snapped, realizing she'd totally called Cristina out for the wrong thing.

The "massage" method Cristina was teasing about was the cheeky one they'd all heard Adam mention before—not the legit medical technique Cristina was playing innocent about now.

Emmm.

It was exactly because Adam had brought up that trick ages ago that it stuck in their heads so vividly.

Now, every time someone mentioned the "massage hiccup cure," they couldn't help but flip it upside down in their minds! 🤔