

TV Show 731

Chapter 731: A Slap Right Off the Bat

Medical Center. Emergency Room Entrance.

"Who's my sister?"

Lexie stood next to George, peering into the crowd of doctors.

"Can't you tell?" George said, looking surprised.

Just then, Dr. Bailey and the new chief resident, Callie, stepped out in their protective gear.

"Grey, get them to step aside—don't let everyone crowd here!"

Dr. Bailey took her spot like a boss and naturally started barking orders at Meredith beside her. Meredith jumped into action like a pro.

"..."

Callie, the new chief resident, stood there with her mouth slightly open, a big ol' complaint stuck in her throat, unsure what to say.

Meredith Grey was now a full-fledged resident—not Dr. Bailey's intern anymore—so she wasn't under Bailey's command. She was under Callie's supervision as the chief resident!

Ugh, so frustrating! This was the second time already!

Earlier inside, when the surgical director came in to announce the accident and told everyone to get ready, Callie had nervously asked, "As the new chief resident, what should I watch out for?"

The director shot back, "Have you assigned the other residents yet?"

She'd said she'd paged them... but not a single one had shown up yet. With the director giving her that weird look, she panicked and instinctively turned to Dr. Bailey for help.

Then Bailey dropped, "Whenever I page them, they come running!"—right in front of the surgical director, making Callie feel like her scalp was on fire from the embarrassment.

Damn it, and now it was happening again!

But did she have the guts to confront Dr. Bailey—the shining beacon of the medical center—right in front of everyone? Nope, not a chance.

In that moment, all the joy of beating out the top two candidates as a dark horse to snag the chief resident spot? Poof—gone.

Sigh. This ruthless, shameless, ridiculous life! 😞

Lexie finally locked eyes on her half-sister, Meredith, staring at her in a daze.

"You okay?"

George's bestie mode kicked in instantly.

"I'm fine. Just... don't really know what to say right now."

Lexie kept her eyes glued to her sister, giving a wry smile. "This is my first time seeing her. What's she like?"

Hmmm.

Other than vaguely hearing from Adam that her sister might be a bit of a player, Lexie knew absolutely nothing about her.

"Meredith's great..."

George launched into a full-on rant, gushing to his new bestie Lexie about all the amazing things that made Meredith his goddess.

Adam stood up front, poker-faced as ever.

Short-statured Neil Melendez trailed half a step behind, matching his vibe.

Carter snuck a glance at his two rivals behind him, a sly, amused smirk tugging at his lips.

The first ambulance screeched to a halt.

Cristina was the first to charge forward.

"Hit-and-run driver—died on the scene. Just pronounce him dead and call it!"

The paramedic swung the door open and hit Cristina with that bombshell.

"Dead?"

Cristina grumbled as she reluctantly stepped up, pulling back the cloth already covering the driver's face. "What the hell! Then why'd you blast the siren and get me all hyped up for nothing?"

She took one look, tossed the cloth aside, and turned to the four shell-shocked interns gawking at her. "Any of you wanna take a peek at this poor sucker?"

Their wide-eyed stares came from both the shock of seeing a dead body on their first day and being totally thrown off by their boss's ice-cold attitude.

Anyone watching this could tell—this wasn't some act. She was genuinely that detached! 😬

Right then, two more ambulances roared in—victims of a multi-car pileup.

One was a pregnant woman with her right arm severed.

Another was a balding middle-aged guy with a banged-up knee.

Meredith took charge, leading her interns to handle the pregnant woman with the severed arm.

Bald-headed Chris stepped up with his interns to take the guy with the injured knee.

"Everyone done gawking yet?"

Cristina glanced left and right, itching to snag a patient.

Sure, specialties were set now—patients usually went to the resident matching their department. But in a real emergency, who had time to care about that? You jumped in, pronto!

Those big-shot attending docs? They all knew a little of everything. If a specialist couldn't make it in time, they'd step up in a crisis—skills built from their resident days.

Unless an attending or the chief resident said otherwise, it was a free-for-all: whichever resident had the chops could claim the patient.

Cristina pulling this move? Total standard procedure.

But Meredith and bald Chris—now seasoned pros themselves—shut her down hard, leaving her to slink back to her dead driver and start filling out the death certificate.

"Time of death: 8:22..."

As she raised her wrist to check the time and call it, the "dead" driver suddenly gasped, his body twitching back to life.

"Not time of death! He's not dead—he's back!"

Cristina grabbed her stethoscope, thrilled as she started checking him out.

A rare case like this? Even Adam, who'd been waiting for the last hiker patient, couldn't resist strolling over to see.

"Back off!"

Cristina waved Adam away while listening to the driver's chest. "My patient died and came back—like a freaking magic zombie! But he's my magic zombie, so hands off!"

She yanked the stethoscope from her ears and barked at the four stunned interns, "What are you standing there for? Help me get him inside! Patients are resources, and a guy who dies and comes back? That's a goldmine! Surround him! Protect him! Go, go, go!"

Adam shook his head with a chuckle. Seeing another ambulance pull up, he stepped aside.

The pileup report mentioned three critical patients—all accounted for now.

This last ambulance had to be carrying that final hiker they'd been waiting for.

Emergency Room Entrance.

"Move, move!"

Meredith directed the crowd, shouting to clear a path as she rushed the severed-arm pregnant woman toward surgery—only to get blocked by a figure.

"Are you Meredith Grey?"

Lexie, spotting her half-sister up close, got so excited she stepped right in her way.

"Yes!" Meredith snapped, in a hurry.

"I'm Lexie..." Lexie started.

"Great, now move!"

Meredith hadn't caught on yet.

"Lexie Grey—I'm your sister!"

Lexie finally got it all out.

Meredith froze, locking eyes with this sudden sister for a solid few seconds before barking again, "Move!"

George, standing nearby, snapped out of it and pulled Lexie aside, letting Meredith rush the pregnant woman into the hospital.

The two stood at the ER entrance, watching Meredith's figure disappear into the distance.

George tried to comfort her. "She's got a patient, so that's why she's like that..."

"Yeah."

Lexie nodded, her mood low.

Their first meeting, under these circumstances? It was bound to leave a mark.

But that didn't fully explain the longing in her eyes—or the mix of conflict, coldness, and even a hint of disgust in her half-sister's.

Her sister really didn't like her, huh? 😊

Just then, Adam took charge of the hiker with a climbing axe lodged in his head, wheeling him inside.

"Out of the way! x2"

No need for Adam to speak—Neil Melendez and Carter, flanking him, shouted in unison to clear the path.

But while short-statured Melendez was all business, Carter's stern yell carried a touch of glee at the chaos.

"Melendez, go get Dr. Shepard for a consult. Carter, prep the patient for an X-ray."

Adam issued orders while examining the hiker.

"Dr. Duncan, what about us?" George piped up from the side.

"You two?"

Adam didn't even look up, his tone flat. "Take little Grey to find Meredith and sort out this family drama first."

"..."

George blinked, stunned. "Adam..."

"Was I not clear?"

Adam glanced up, giving him a cold stare.

"...Yes, Dr. Duncan."

George ducked his head and led a dazed Lexie away.

If Adam's earlier talk about strict rules hadn't sunk in for George before, it sure did now.

Chapter 732: Dr. Carter's Heartbreak

Medical Center

Dr. Shepter hurried over for a consultation. After a quick chat with Adam, he said, "There's another patient over there with their posterior cranial cavity and spine completely severed. Adam, I'm handing this surgery off to you."

"Got it," Adam nodded, then added with a hint of surprise, "Wait, seriously? The posterior skull and spine were completely cut from the inside?"

"Yep," Dr. Shepter replied with a grin. "It's a medical miracle, and I need to do everything I can to keep this miracle going!"

"If you need any help, don't hesitate to grab me," Adam said eagerly. "I'll wrap this surgery up as fast as I can."

A case this rare? He was super intrigued! 😊

"Cool," Dr. Shepter said with a knowing smile before heading off.

"Skull and spine totally severed... can someone actually survive that?" Carter muttered, rubbing his neck in disbelief.

It was like the patient's brain and body were only hanging on by skin and muscle!

"90% die on the spot, 10% don't make it past the ambulance," little Melendez piped up, his eyes practically sparkling with excitement. "There's never been a case that survived long enough to reach the hospital. This really is a medical miracle!" ✨

"So we'd better hustle—maybe we can still catch this surgery!" Adam chimed in with a nudge.

Operating Room 3: Sterile Prep Area

"Dr. Melendez, have you ever been in an OR before?" Carter asked casually as he expertly unwrapped a sterile scrub brush pack. He nudged the faucet on with his knee, wet his hands, and started scrubbing—10 times from the nails, then the front, sides, back, and between the fingers. Next, he hit the palms 10 times, followed by the backs of his hands, forearms—front, sides, back—all the way up to his elbows. Then he rinsed off with water.

While other med interns couldn't even dream of getting near an operating room, Carter—thanks to shadowing Adam—had these OR protocols down smooth as silk.

Why'd he ask? Oh, it was pure Versailles vibes—humblebragging for all to see! 😊

Little Melendez, a top grad from Johns Hopkins, had to have had better resources during his internship than your average med student. He'd probably been in and out of ORs a few times and knew the scrub-down drill. But no way had he done it this much—or this flawlessly.

Carter's real goal? Get Melendez to ask him why he was so slick at this... then casually drop how he'd been assisting Adam in surgeries for over half a year. He could already picture Melendez's jaw dropping, totally floored!

The thought of that smug, cool-kid face from a top-tier school morphing into shock? Carter was living for it. Too satisfying! 😊

"Ahem..." Carter nearly let a laugh slip but barely held it in. He turned, ready to flash his perfectly timed "oh, it's nothing" smile at his biggest rival—only to see Melendez, hands half-raised, already heading into the OR.

"What are you doing?!" Carter blurted, stunned. "Did you even finish scrubbing?!"

Melendez didn't say a word—just shot him a "What do you think?" look, then pushed through the door with his body and stepped into the operating room.

Carter's face froze.

All that smug satisfaction he'd imagined? Yeah, it just deflated like a sad balloon. 😞

"Alright, let's get started," Adam announced once everyone was in place. He glanced at Melendez, standing at attention, and Carter, still reeling. "Melendez, first assist. Carter, second assist!"

"..." Carter stood there, dumbfounded. The look he gave Adam was pure puppy-level grievance.

"Dr. Carter, something wrong?" Adam asked, raising an eyebrow.

Violet, the sharpest nurse by Adam's side, had her mask on, but her eyes—glaring at Carter—screamed "Get it together!" 🙄

"N-No problem!" Carter snapped out of it, jolted by the memory of George O'Malley and Lexie Grey getting kicked out earlier. He shoved down his pouty feelings real quick.

Sure, he might roll his eyes at George and secretly gloat over Lexie's rookie fumbles—but George was Adam's old coworker and buddy, and Lexie? She was a stunner and the sister of Adam's colleague, Dr. Grey. Carter had been with Adam for half a year, but did he really think he had more pull than those two?

Emmm... Maybe he'd fantasized about it before, but one look at Violet's no-nonsense eyes crushed that daydream for good.

They didn't call her "Sharpest Nurse" for nothing. Without her nudging him along early on, he'd never have gotten close to Adam—or scored all those envy-inducing intern adventures. Her glare was the ultimate wake-up call.

So, no matter how confused or bummed he felt, Carter didn't dare say a peep—or even sneak another glance.

What's authority? It's when people trust and follow your rules. Fair, consistent standards win hearts and loyalty.

Watching Carter clam up, Adam smirked to himself. "Taking George under my wing wasn't such a bad move after all..."

Emmm... George was the fat chicken in this "kill one, warn the rest" game. Last year, Dr. Burke had used him the same way. Gotta admit, the old-timers knew how to set a precedent!

It was pretty darn satisfying! 😊

And why pick Melendez as first assist over Carter? Simple.

One: Carter had gotten way too cocky since becoming "Dr. Carter"—a total no-go in a life-or-death OR.

Two: Melendez's basics were rock-solid. While Carter was still gawking about "magic zombie patients," Melendez casually rattled off survival stats for this exact case.

The choice was obvious.

But Adam wasn't about to explain himself. First, that'd be way too uncool. Second, sometimes letting others figure it out—or overthink it—works better than spelling it out.

If Carter couldn't wrap his head around it? No sweat off Adam's back. The only one who'd suffer would be Carter himself.

The surgery sped along smoothly. Melendez, at first assist, showed off a steady foundation and some slick teamwork that left Adam impressed.

His hunch was right—out of the four interns, this little guy was the top contender for "future star doctor."

"Melendez, got any questions?" Adam asked mid-surgery, catching a flicker of doubt on the intern's face.

"Dr. Duncan," Melendez ventured, "this doesn't look like what those three climbers said—you know, swinging an axe to grab a rock and accidentally dropping it on the patient?"

"You heard their story?" Adam asked, intrigued, instead of answering right away.

"Yeah, I got here early this morning and overheard them while checking out the hospital," Melendez said, cool as ever.

"Heh," Adam chuckled. "I bet you didn't just hear their story—you've probably scoped out every patient's case here, haven't you?"

"No way!" Carter, who'd been quietly playing second assist with zero presence, snapped his head up, incredulous.

"Isn't that, like, the bare minimum for an intern? Getting to know the hospital's patients?" Melendez replied matter-of-factly.

Violet's eyes darted between Adam and Melendez, practically sparkling with amusement.

Carter, catching her look: "..."

Chapter 733: Not One Can Be Missed—Stunned Shorty

Medical Center. Operating Room 3.

"Yep, that's the basic requirement."

Adam gave the short guy an appreciative glance.

"You're not photographic-memory-level too, are you?"

Carter eyed Melendez, who was giving off some serious Adam vibes, and practically oozed jealousy.

"Nope."

Short-statured Melendez shook his head. "Why would this need a photographic memory?"

"..."

Carter had no comeback for that.

A photographic memory was a skill, sure, but pulling off something like this? That was more about attitude.

Damn it!

Melendez's low-key flex was exactly the kind of thing Carter had been trying—and failing—to copy from Dr. Duncan all along.

And thinking back to how he got outdone in the scrub room earlier, plus how the sharpest little nurse now seemed to think Melendez had more "Adam flair" than him? Carter's heart was shattering.

"Violet, what's up?"

Adam caught the sharpest nurse glancing at the monitors out of the corner of his eye and casually asked.

"Nothing much."

She grinned. "I heard a crack just now and thought it was the patient's heart acting up, but everything's stable now."

"Heh."

That obvious jab instantly filled the OR with laughter.

Whose heart broke so loud no one could miss it? Just check whose face was the most awkward and red!

Carter was on the verge of tears.

I was here first!

I was supposed to be your best buddy, sharpest nurse! 🙄

"Alright, enough."

Adam reined in his smile and turned to Melendez. "Those stories they told? I didn't buy them from the start."

The four hikers' tale was pretty standard.

They'd bonded over their love for extreme sports, forming a tight-knit crew that often teamed up for wild challenges. This time, it was cliff-climbing.

According to the three of them, they were halfway up when a storm hit. A ledge loomed a few hundred feet above, so they planned to pitch a tent and wait it out.

But then came Ronnie—the last hiker they found. He freaked out and insisted on heading down.

The other three weren't having it.

Their safety ropes were all tied together, so when Ronnie started descending, it threw everyone off balance.

That's when the guy above him swung his climbing axe, trying to wedge it into the rock to steady himself—only to accidentally drop it right onto Ronnie's forehead.

Hmmm.

What a "coincidence."

How likely was that, really?

Way more likely was that, in a life-or-death moment, survival instincts kicked in, and someone did something predictably shady—morals be damned.

Think about Sun Wukong in *Journey to the West* versus Hua Tiegan in *Liancheng Jue*. Both wielded weapons, but the vibes? Totally different. Why? Because Hua Tiegan's moral compass shattered when push came to shove.

Stuff like this happens way too often on a stranded boat drifting at sea—no surprise, no shock, just business as usual.

"But we're doctors, not cops. That's not our job to figure out."

Adam looked at Melendez. "We just treat 'em. If the patient wakes up, the truth comes out. If not, we pass what we find to the right people."

He glanced at the dainty climbing axe stuck in the patient's head and chuckled. "Melendez, Carter—either of you good at math? Wanna estimate how deep a falling axe could sink into a skull, then compare it to how deep we pulled this one out? Get it right, and you score extra points!"

"..."

This time, it wasn't just Carter who went speechless.

Even the usually cool-and-collected Melendez looked stunned for the first time.

Math's the backbone of all science—medicine included.

Med students obviously study it. Whether it's clinical work or research, anyone with ambition takes medical statistics seriously.

But like that old joke goes:

Med student: "Why do we need math to be doctors?"

Professor: "To save lives!"

Med student: "How does math save lives?"

Professor: "By keeping idiots like you from graduating and becoming doctors."

Math has real uses in medicine—it's not just for weeding out the clueless. But most doctors only skim the surface.

Even the ambitious ones study it hard but don't get to the level where they can casually nail a random mashup of medicine, math, and physics on the spot.

"Too bad."

Adam shook his head. "Free points up for grabs, and neither of you went for it."

Carter and Melendez: "..."

"Let's get started."

Adam called out a number, then gripped the axe handle, steadily pulling the blade from the patient's skull.

Hiss.

The sharpest nurse and the others gasped in unison.

None of them were extreme sports buffs, so they had no clue what a climbing axe really looked like.

They'd assumed it was just a mini axe. But once Adam yanked it out, they saw the front end was way longer than expected.

AKA, it had sunk deep into the guy's head.

"Either gravity went into overdrive right there, adding some wild mystery to nature..."

Adam set the axe on the tray with a grin. "Or someone in a life-or-death pinch really put some muscle into it."

"That's awful! It's murder!"

The sharpest nurse fumed.

"Hold off on jumping to conclusions."

Adam cautioned her. "Let's hear what they say later. They chose to do this extreme climb together, all roped up as a team."

If this guy really bailed halfway up, dangling on a cliff, and put everyone at risk, who's right or wrong isn't so clear-cut.

Violet, report the findings and notify the police."

"Yes, Dr. Duncan."

The sharpest nurse nodded quickly, grabbing the OR phone to pass it along.

The cops would take it from there, chatting with the three hikers.

Hmmm.

More likely, though, they'd face three tight-lipped climbers and a fancy lawyer rushing in to handle everything.

People with the cash and free time for extreme thrills like this? Probably not from average families.

Adam didn't care about that mess, though.

His job was to nail this surgery fast and save the guy.

What happened after—how the patient and his three "besties" hashed out the truth—that was their problem.

Adam still had that "magic zombie" case to check out next.

Yep!

A surgery this rare? No way was he passing up a chance to get in on it.

And when Cristina saw Adam stroll in with Melendez and Carter to spectate, her face went dark. 😞

Chapter 734: Adam's Surgical VIP Treatment

Medical Center

Observation OR

"Oh, great!" Cristina rolled her eyes with a sarcastic little huff. 😏

"Adam, you're done with the surgery already?" Dr. Shepter, the lead surgeon, glanced at the clock in surprise.

"Yup," Adam replied, stepping over to the second assist spot with a modest smile.

Little Melendez and Carter, along with Cristina's nameless crew—#1, #2, #3, and #4—lined up on the sidelines, craning their necks to watch.

Yup, you heard that right! Cristina's four interns didn't even get names. Too lazy to bother, she just slapped numbers on them and called it a day.

Adam had a sneaking suspicion she'd swiped the idea from Dr. House next door. That guy loved nicknaming his team—sometimes with numbers too. And Cristina, being the authority junkie she was, probably thought, "Hey, if it works for him..."

Straight to the point. Efficient.

Insulting? Oh, totally. But #1 through #4 weren't exactly the type to push back. With a boss as icy as Cristina, they just memorized their digits and rolled with it.

Plus, landing an internship gig like this—witnessing a super rare surgery while others were stuck outside doing grunt work—was a golden ticket! They could overlook the number thing for a chance to "participate" in the OR with their boss. What a win! 🤩

Well... it would've been perfect if Melendez and Carter hadn't barged in. Especially when they heard those two had just finished one killer surgery and were now hopping over for round two. Suddenly, #1–#4's thrill took a nosedive into awkward-town.

Ugh. Comparing yourself to others? Instant mood killer. 😞

"How's the climber's injury?" Dr. Shepter asked casually mid-surgery. "Any tears after pulling out the axe?"

"Nope," Adam said with a grin. "The wound's clean and crazy deep."

"Figures," Dr. Shepter said, flicking his eyes up to meet Adam's.

Adam nodded back.

"Man, those three guys really went for it, huh?" Cristina piped up, clearly shocked.

The climbers' story? Yeah, it was amateur hour—full of holes. Anyone who heard it and thought for two seconds could spot the issues.

Medically speaking, if their tale about an axe accidentally dropping and hitting their buddy's head were true, the wound would've been shallow with jagged tears. But one look during surgery told the real story.

The three surgeons chatted away while everyone else just held their breath and watched.

"Alright, here's the big moment," Dr. Shepter said, taking a deep breath as he looked at Adam and Cristina. "I'm starting the fusion..."

"He's moving!" Adam suddenly jumped in, pinning the patient's body down. "Anesthesia's too light!"

"Anesthesiologist!" Dr. Shepter barked, trusting Adam's call even without seeing movement himself. "He cannot move right now!"

"Melendez, Carter—each of you grab a leg!" Adam ordered, holding the patient's torso and neck steady to lock down the surgical field. "Cristina, talk to him—tell him to hold still!"

Little Melendez darted over first, pinning both legs until Carter caught up and took one. Together, they held tight.

"You can't move, got it?!" Cristina snapped into action at Adam's shout. She braced her hands on the patient's shoulders, helping Adam keep him steady, then crouched down to yell at the facedown patient's ear.

"This isn't optional! If you move, everything goes south! You can't abandon the people you love—they need you, their husband, their dad—not just memories of how much you loved them! So don't you dare move!"

Adam could feel the patient's struggling ease up.

The anesthesiologist swooped in, topping up the dose fast. Most folks couldn't tell if it was the drugs kicking in or Cristina's words holding back the patient's instincts.

But Adam knew. Cristina's pep talk worked.

All that mushy "power of love" stuff? Not just fluff—it's real! 💕

"Phew!" Dr. Shepter exhaled as the patient slipped back under. "Thanks, Adam, you saved us there."

A severed spine and posterior skull, still alive? That's already a medical miracle. He couldn't even imagine the patient pulling through if they'd thrashed around at this critical point.

Miracles are miracles because they don't happen twice.

Only Adam could've caught that in time and handled it like a pro. If Adam hadn't been tied up with another urgent surgery earlier—and this one couldn't wait—Dr. Shepter would've insisted on having him for this one too.

Everyone at the medical center knew by now: big surgeries with Adam assisting? Success rate through the roof!

Too bad there weren't multiple high-stakes cases needing help right now, or Dr. Shepter could already picture the staff fighting over "Team Duncan" privileges.

Emmm... Regular surgeries? No one dared ask Adam to assist anymore. He was on par with senior residents like Dr. Bailey—running his own shows.

Meredith and the newer residents still had to trail attendings for scraps of OR time. But Bailey? She'd stroll up to the surgery board, spot something she hadn't done or something juicy, slap her name on it, and boom—she's in.

Adam? Next level. He didn't even need to pre-book. He just showed up.

"No biggie," Adam said with a smile, then teased Cristina as she stood back up. "Gotta thank Cristina's heartfelt pep talk too—the patient listened and fought his instincts!"

"Nice work, Yang!" Dr. Shepter added, not shy about praising his ex's bestie.

He and Meredith weren't officially back together, but the flirty glances around the hospital? Oh, they were plenty. Reconciliation was basically a done deal. Gotta keep the girlfriend's BFF in your corner, right? 😊

"I'm not Izzie..." Cristina grumbled, bristling at Adam's "heartfelt" jab. "You sure it wasn't just the anesthesia?"

"Trust me, your words hit before the drugs did," Adam said with a grin. "Looks like Dr. Yang's not as cold as she pretends!"

"I'm not cold," Cristina shot back with a smirk. "If every patient were as rare as this magic zombie, I'd love 'em all."

"..."

The room went quiet. #1–#4 shrank back, suddenly rethinking their boss's version of "love."

Yeah, no thanks—they couldn't handle that kind of affection! 😊

Adam just chuckled without a word.

Cristina? Cold as ice, sure. But this time, it wasn't just about the patient being a "magic zombie." Something about this case—or maybe the patient's family—had actually gotten under her skin.

Chapter 735

Adam: "George, this is strike one!" 🙄

In the observation room for the surgery.

Adam and two others are performing the operation.

Shorty and Carter earned some brownie points by holding the leg steady earlier. After re-administering anesthesia and letting go, they naturally stayed by the operating table. They're closer than Cristina's lackeys—numbers 1 through 4—getting a prime view of this rare surgery.

Carter's grin is practically uncontrollable. 😊

Shorty's trying to play it cool, but when he glances at the spine being reattached, his eyes are burning with excitement. 🔥

If you cropped this moment and turned it into a GIF, it'd totally be a classic meme.

Up in the second-floor observation room:

Chubby George O'Malley's plump face twists a little.

He's been an intern for a whole year and barely seen a handful of these ultra-rare surgeries.

And don't get him started—his very first shift, Dr. Burke made an example out of him. A simple appendectomy somehow got slapped with the ominous "007" code name.

Now look at his newbie colleagues! Less than 12 hours in, and they're already part of two high-level surgeries. Meanwhile, he's stuck out here with Meredith's sister, punished by Adam, twiddling his thumbs.

Sure, Lexie blocking Meredith—who was being rushed in—at the ER entrance was a bad move.

But come on, the sisters had never met before!

A little excitement is understandable, right? 😊

And what did he do to deserve this?

All he did was fill Lexie in on her sister's situation and didn't yank her away fast enough.

Adam's not cutting him any slack.

After grumbling to himself, George has a moment of clarity—and a sigh.

He used to think Dr. Bailey was tough as nails, but compared to Adam? Bailey's basically a sweet mom. 🤔

"George, I'm sorry," Lexie says.

After cooling off for a while, she's finally pieced together what happened. She glances at the two smug colleagues in the OR, then at George—who's stuck in this mess because of her—and her face fills with guilt. 😞

"It's my fault you got punished by Dr. Duncan too."

"...It's fine," George replies.

Meeting Lexie's sincere eyes, his warm-guy mode kicks in automatically. He gives a helpless, bitter smile.
苦笑

"It's on me. 'Don't block the ER entrance'—that's basic stuff. I should've warned you sooner."

"No, it's my fault," Lexie insists.

"I dragged you into asking about my sister while we were waiting for the ambulance. That's why Dr. Duncan's got a problem with you now."

"...Uh."

George doesn't know what to say.

Because, honestly, he hadn't even thought of that part.

"George, what do we do now?" Lexie asks, her tone urgent.

She feels a bit better seeing George quietly accept her apology. But then she glances at Adam in the OR—coolly operating and chatting away—and panics.

Adam's her idol. ★

She even ditched Mass General's residency program to join the Medical Center for him.

Sure, she'll say the Medical Center's catching up to Mass General, but even with Adam's rising-star status, it's still not topping the teaching hospital rankings.

This was a huge career-and-life decision for her.

Her admiration for Adam runs deep.

She made it as an intern under him, getting closer to her idol. But then she got hit with the "no close relationships with superiors" rule—and now, thanks to her unprofessional slip-up, her idol's punishing her.

The thought of her image in Adam's mind being tarnished forever? It's killing her. 😞

"Don't worry," George says, slipping back into nice-guy mode to comfort her.

"Once this surgery's over, we'll apologize to Adam and..."

He almost says they could ask Meredith and Cristina to put in a good word, but then he remembers Adam joking once, "You telling me how to do my job?" So he switches gears mid-sentence.

"...we'll just own up to it. Be sincere, promise not to mess up like this again, and that should do it."

Emmm.

One, Meredith might not even want to vouch for Lexie.

Two, Cristina probably wouldn't stick her neck out for him.

Three, even if they did, the punishment might not just stick—it could get worse.

Better to just take the L, admit fault, and roll with the punches.

Adam's strict, sure, but he's not a savage like Cristina with her sharp tongue.

"Got it, got it!" Lexie nods eagerly.

Her admiration for Adam isn't about chasing some fling like her carnivorous, seasoned-pro sister.

Since Adam's set the rules, she's quietly vowing to follow them to the letter, stick by his side, master her skills, and make him see her in a new light.

As for the future?

The rule's just "no close relationships with superiors," right?

After her internship ends in a year, she'll be a resident like Adam—equals!

Of course, she doesn't know Adam's already gunning for Chief Resident.

Otherwise, she'd stretch that timeline to seven years—since that's how long surgical residency takes.

Only then, as an attending, could she stand on equal footing with him.

Emmm.

Assuming Adam isn't the surgical chief or dean by then.

Anyway, as the saying goes:

"Young Lexie Grey, you know nothing~" 😊

Two hours later:

The surgery wraps up smoothly.

The OR erupts with cheers and applause—miracles of life always hit different. 🙌👏

"Dr... Duncan!"

George and Lexie scramble out of the observation room, racing to meet Adam outside the OR. They blurt out in unison: "I messed up!" x2

"Hm," Adam doesn't even break stride. "Where'd you go wrong?"

They jog to keep up, launching into serious self-reflection.

"Heh," Carter chuckles smugly.

Fresh off his high, he watches them grovel and can't help but laugh.

"Carter!" Adam stops and turns to him.

"Yes, Dr. Duncan!"

Carter wipes the smirk off his face, looking at Adam expectantly, awaiting orders.

"ER needs a surgeon to cover a shift. You're up."

"Huh?"

Carter's jaw drops. He didn't see that coming.

"Problem?" Adam raises an eyebrow.

"N-no problem..." Carter forces a grin. "I'll head over now..."

"Melendez, you too," Adam says, glancing at Shorty.

"Got it!" Shorty replies calmly, no hesitation.

Carter trudges behind Shorty toward the ER—the place he hates most.

To him, it's dirty, chaotic, exhausting—not work for a real doctor.

Surgeons are the real deal.

That's why he applied for surgical residency!

But now Adam's tossing him back into the ER pit.

"Melendez, you know where the ER is, right?" Carter says at the corner, unable to hold it in.

"You go ahead. I've got something to do—be there in a sec."

With that, he bolts toward the nurses' station.

He's gotta grill the flirtiest nurse he knows—what the heck just happened?!

"George, this is strike one!"

Adam holds up a finger at George.

"You're not a clueless newbie like Lexie. After a full year as an intern, you should know what to do and what not to do.

Since you're my friend, outside of the five unbreakable rules, you get three chances. Three strikes, and you're out. Got it?"

George: "..."

Chapter 736: 37 Degrees and 45 Degrees

Medical Center. Corridor.

Adam borrowed Sheldon's "three strikes" theory to give George a heads-up.

It was his first time using it, but honestly, it worked so well that not only George got it—even Lexie understood right away.

Why? Because the "three strikes" thing comes straight from baseball rules.

And baseball? In the U.S., it's the second-biggest sport after football.

Pretty much everyone's watched a game at some point and knows the basics—rules, famous players, you name it. Girls included!

Take Sheldon's twin sister, Missy, for example. Back in the day, she joined a baseball team and became the first girl to play locally.

Okay, fine—she kinda got a boost from her super-charming grandma.

The coach of that team started off scoffing, "Girls playing baseball? Yeah, right."

But to win over Missy's grandma, he ended up eating his words, taking Missy on despite the confusion, mockery, and jealousy from everyone else. True love, huh? 😊

Emmm.

Those old guys who'd seen Missy's grandma in her prime were so jealous.

Baseball's influence doesn't stop there, though.

Take the ER staff at the medical center, for instance.

Before the hospital cracked down with that 80-hour weekly work cap and the nurses went on strike, they were all running on fumes—working back-to-back shifts like absolute champs.

Even then, the ER crew still found time to form their own baseball team. They'd squeeze in a few games every month!

The team had it all: male doctors, female doctors, male nurses, female nurses.

The women—doctors and nurses alike—were always the most hyped about it.

Newbies would show up, guys and girls alike, practically begging to join.

Getting in meant you'd earned everyone's respect—you were part of the crew, one of the family.

It's like a little peek into the bigger picture, you know?

So, under that vibe, when Adam dropped the "three strikes and you're out" line, George and Lexie caught on instantly.

"Come with me," Adam said.

Noticing a bunch of people glancing their way, he didn't want George to feel too embarrassed. He motioned for them to follow him to his office.

Jumping straight to punishment without explaining? Not cool—especially with friends. Plus, this was a teaching hospital, after all.

The "three strikes" theory was something he'd just tailored for George, so he had to lay it out clearly first.

Adam's Office.

"George, you've got a ton of question marks floating around, don't you?" Adam said with a grin. "Think I'm being too harsh?"

"N-No..."

George shook his head, but it was weak. He couldn't even finish the denial.

Because, yeah, Adam was kinda harsh—harsher than Dr. Bailey, even!

"George, our relationship's different now," Adam said, getting real. "To keep our friendship from taking a hit, we need to talk this out. So, let me ask you: what's your goal in your career?"

"Uh..."

George just blinked, totally thrown off.

"Look," Adam said patiently, breaking it down. "Take me and Christina—we're straightforward. Actions match words. We've always wanted to be top-tier surgeons.

Meredith? She's got a bit of that drive too, but it's more about proving herself to her legendary doctor mom—that she's just as good.

Ever since her mom got Alzheimer's and started forgetting everything, though, that spark's faded.

It's tough to keep pushing when the person you're trying to impress can't even remember how they dissed you in the first place.

So now, she's just coasting—more like she's here to star in some drama about dating hotshot doctors.

Still, she's got talent, and with us nudging her along, her skills are solid. But that's about it."

Lexie's face twisted a little hearing this.

She really hadn't expected her big sis to come off like that in her idol's eyes.

"So, what, I'm just the sidekick in her show?" George blurted out, half-joking, half-miserable. "Who's the leading man—Dr. Shepherd or you?"

"Nah, I'm not in Meredith's little drama," Adam laughed. "I turned down her drinks invite from day one. But you? Yeah, you're her number-one supporting guy."

"Why?" Lexie cut in, surprised. Then it hit her, and her eyes went wide. "Wait—did George take my sister up on drinks too? George and my sister...?"

"Heh." Adam chuckled. "Remember what I told you last night? Now you see why I stressed rule number one, right?"

Lexie shivered.

Without Adam around, a sweet guy like George might've been her type.

But holy crap—she never would've guessed...! Talk about a close call.

She was not about to end up in some weird sister-rivalry mess with her half-sister!

"Adam!" George squirmed under Lexie's stare, totally mortified.

"Alright, alright—let's get to the point," Adam said, steering things back.

"So, Izzie? She figured out what she wanted after meeting Denny. Threw her career—something she used to care about—out the window to chase it. Now she's off being the wife or girlfriend of some rich, handsome second-gen dude.

Alex? He shouldn't have even been here. Flunked his exams, didn't even get his medical degree at first. His performance matched his grades—awful, and he dragged others down with him.

Now he's back where he belongs.

That's our batch.

Now, your new crew:

Melendez? No question—Johns Hopkins star, came here to build a legacy.

Lexie, Harvard Med grad, partly here because of her sister, sure—but I'd bet her real goal is to hit the top of the medical world and make something of herself."

Lexie's eyes lit up, nodding like crazy at Adam.

That was her biggest dream.

To her, Adam was the peak of medicine.

"Then there's Carter," Adam went on, smiling at Lexie before turning back to George. "His school's the weakest, and his talent's average, but he's got grit and a good eye. He's aiming to be a legendary doc too.

So here's the question, George O'Malley: what's your goal?

To be a famous doctor?

Doesn't seem like it—you don't put in the work, and you don't have the mindset.

You barely scraped by on your medical boards.

And that certification exam a few days ago? You had a decent year of residency under your belt—shouldn't have been near the bottom. Yet you landed third-to-last and got cut.

At this point, it's not even about being a famous doctor—it's about whether you even want to be a doctor!

If that's not your goal, what, you're just here to coast and kill time?

Then why stick with me?

The name I crossed off that list—the intern the chief handpicked, the one you replaced? I'd bet they were gunning to be a legendary doc."

"I..."

George's chubby face went red. He mumbled, "I want to be a famous doctor too."

"Alright," Adam nodded, not arguing. "You're my friend. You say that, so sure, you've got the right to take that crossed-off intern's spot.

But you can't say you want to be a legend and then keep screwing up like an amateur.

Words and actions gotta match, right?

Now do you get why, on top of my five unbreakable rules, I made a special 'three strikes' rule just for you?"

"Yeah..." George muttered, ashamed.

He'd already done a year of residency—he knew the ropes.

If he hadn't bombed that exam, he'd be leading interns by now.

But his performance? Worse than some of the newbies.

No excuse for that.

Now Adam was giving him three more shots. If he struck out again, it'd be his own fault—wasting Adam's time and that poor crossed-off intern's chance.

Adam, as a boss and a friend, had done more than enough.

"George, I know you're a nice guy," Adam teased. "But in the hospital—or anywhere, really—'nice' doesn't get you far. You're always the friend-zone guy or the backup good dude.

People are warm-blooded, sure—you're a cozy 37 degrees. But you'll never hit 45 degrees! 😊

Even in a choir, men's and women's voices are only eight notes apart.

Eight degrees? That's a whole gender gap right there."

George: "..."

Chapter 737: The Beautiful Woman, George

Medical Center. Adam's Private Office.

When Adam dropped the "37 degrees and 45 degrees" line, George just stood there, totally clueless, not catching on at all.

Still, that didn't stop him from picking up the gist of what Adam was saying. And honestly, it hit home—right at the biggest realization he'd had lately. Being the "guy best friend" was easy enough, but it never got him what he really wanted. Instead, he always ended up as the scapegoat, the warning sign, the sacrificial chicken—whatever you want to call it.

Unlike George, Lexie had always been known as the "Lexie Encyclopedia" back at Harvard Med School. Basically, she had a killer memory, loved reading, and knew a ton about everything. So, the second Adam brought up the 37-and-45-degree thing, her brain started spinning like crazy.

37 degrees? Easy—normal body temperature. But 45 degrees? She racked her brain, digging through her mental encyclopedia until she finally found it. Her cheeks turned bright red, and she couldn't even look Adam in the eye. Inside, she was all tingly, thinking to herself:

"Everyone's sensitivity to temperature is different, but after professional testing, 45 degrees is generally the point where most people start feeling that heat... Dr. Duncan's got a way with words, doesn't he? He called George a 'warm guy,' so 37 degrees—normal body temp—fits that vibe perfectly. And if a warm guy's always stuck being the nice-guy backup, then the opposite would be the bad-boy troublemaker... Huh, Dr. Duncan's kind of a bad boy himself..."

As the saying goes: "Good guys finish last, bad boys win hearts."

Once Lexie pieced together Adam's little wordplay, she couldn't help but think he was just too clever. All the anxiety and frustration from messing up earlier and getting scolded by him? Gone in a flash.

Dropping her residency at Mass General to come to New York Medical Center was hands-down the right call. Forget chasing some medical peak in the future—right now, working under Dr. Duncan was a

dream. The guy was drop-dead gorgeous, insanely talented, and had a way of talking that she absolutely adored. She was loving it here!

Adam had no clue Lexie was thinking all this. But even if he did, he'd probably just smirk and say, "That's only the first layer. I might not whip up a five-story metaphor or reach the stratosphere with one line, but I've at least got a second layer going."

Emmm.

The Bel Canto Choir, where the guys sing an octave lower than the girls, had nothing on Owen Lee—the legendary tuner and supreme conductor who founded the Eternal Spear Choir. That guy knew his stuff. Back in the day, Owen Lee was the ultimate bad boy, the public enemy of every guy in school, with a thousand fingers pointing his way.

"Adam, so what should I do?" George asked, genuinely seeking advice.

"Simple," Adam said with a grin. "You've gotta have something that makes you stand out—either talent or money. Get one of those two shining on you, and even a warm guy like you can heat things up. Honestly, you're not doing too bad as a nice guy already. Meredith, Liz, Callie, Olivia—every woman who gets close to you ends up really close, doesn't she?"

He shot a playful glance at Lexie as he said it.

Lexie instinctively took a step away from George.

"Liz and I never—" George started to protest.

"Sure, Liz just didn't break that final barrier before she left," Adam said, shaking his head. "The way you two acted like inseparable besties, no boundaries whatsoever—if you'd stayed around each other longer, something was bound to happen."

George didn't have a comeback for that.

He and Liz were the closest. Close enough that he'd be in the bathroom showering while she brushed her teeth and chatted away, or they'd end up lying on the bed together like it was nothing. With Liz's looks and figure, saying he'd never fantasized about her would be a total lie. Truth is, he had—not just her, but even Cristina got roped into those daydreams.

"Being a guy best friend and not wanting anything more? Honestly, very few pull it off as well as you do. You're top-tier at it," Adam teased. "But it's pretty clear you're not satisfied with that. You're always overthinking, putting all the energy you should be using to sharpen your skills into figuring out your gal pals instead. 'Oh, she's in a bad mood—what happened? Should I comfort her? How do I do it?'—yada yada yada."

"The result? You're good at everything but great at nothing. You're just... average. No standout qualities. When there are so many exceptional guys around, tell me, which woman's going for the average one? As long as they've still got their eyes on those top-tier dudes, you'll always just be their warm-guy bestie."

"Of course, if you're willing to stick it out for a decade or two, outlast the competition or wait until they give up, that could work too."

"So I should focus all my energy on medicine?" George muttered, half to himself.

"You don't have money, and your looks aren't gonna pay the bills," Adam said matter-of-factly. "If you want to be a guy with talent, what better option do you have than busting your ass in the field you've already spent five years studying? Work hard, grind it out, become a legendary doctor. Tell me—would Meredith be so hung up on Dr. Shepherd if he wasn't a top neurosurgeon? Would Cristina, who's all about medicine, chase after Dr. Burke so hard if he wasn't a leading cardiothoracic surgeon?"

George shook his head instinctively.

How could he forget? At the intern welcome party, he was the one who approached Meredith first. And he'd seen it with his own eyes—Dr. Burke was laughing and chatting with some gorgeous woman when Cristina, the newbie, marched right up, cut through the vibe, and kept gushing about how much she admired him. According to Meredith's gossip, Cristina and Burke got together later because she straight-up walked into the on-call room, locked the door, and woke him up.

Dr. Shepherd might have the looks to lean on, but Burke? George figured he and Burke were about on the same level there. The only thing that tamed sharp-tongued Cristina and made her—the woman he sometimes fantasized about—take the lead was Burke's status as a top-tier doctor.

"Yeah, George," Lexie chimed in from the side. "Dr. Duncan's right. Women are drawn to strong guys. You've got the potential to be one of those. You're working under Dr. Duncan, after all! As long as you focus and put in the effort, you can totally do it!"

"Uh-huh, uh-huh..." George nodded repeatedly, then paused, frowning. "But Callie seems to like me just the way I am..."

Emmm.

Up until now, he'd been fixating on Meredith as his goal, totally forgetting his current girlfriend was Callie. So, what—Callie was backup George's backup? AKA, Callie was Meredith's second-string replacement?

"It's the same as how guys like pretty women," Adam said with a laugh. "At first, everything's perfect, right? But after a while, if that pretty woman doesn't have an interesting personality, the guy gets bored fast. Right now, Callie's into your warm-guy vibe—everything's all sunshine and rainbows. But six months, a year down the line, if you're still the same old same old, do you really think she'll still feel the same? Don't test human nature like that.

"You've gotta forge yourself into something solid! If you can't keep leveling up, you'll get left behind eventually."

George went quiet.

This whole spiel was like a wake-up call. He'd taken a psych class or two—he knew Adam was spot on. When the gap between two people gets too wide, one ends up as the sidekick. And as that gap keeps growing, even that lopsided dynamic can't hold together.

Take his girlfriend Callie—she was already a chief resident, the boss's boss, treating fancy hotels like her second home. She even had her own office rented out at the hospital, just like Adam. Her family

probably had money. The gap between them was huge, and their whole relationship was hanging on the fact that Callie liked him... for now.

That was the logic, sure. But something felt off. As he walked out of Adam's office, it hit him—Adam had basically treated him like a "pretty woman" with no soul to speak of.

Chapter 738: The Buddha's Palm That Understands the Little Nurse Best

Medical Center

George only realized later what Adam had been teasing him about.

Still, he decided to take Adam's advice and start putting more effort and time into medicine. It wasn't that Adam's words had suddenly ignited some grand ambition in him. No, it was more practical than that. He was already in this situation—if he didn't buckle down and ended up getting "struck out" by Adam, it'd be way too humiliating. Plus, he was genuinely worried about "losing his charm as he aged" and being dumped.

Sure, right now it was Callie chasing after him, acting like he was her "dream guy." In this relationship, she seemed way more invested than he was—almost like she was terrified he'd break up with her. But that was an illusion. It was all because Callie was the one taking the lead. If she ever stopped wanting to, she could walk away without a second thought.

And when that happened? He'd probably be the one clinging on, all heartbroken and pathetic, turning into the "abandoned wife" of the story. From start to finish, Callie held all the power. George wasn't exactly the type who could shamelessly live off someone else's dime like a pro.

Adam watched their retreating figures, shaking his head with a little smirk.

An outsider sees things clearly.

He'd long noticed George had the makings of a "kept man." Callie was a senior resident, now promoted to chief resident, came from a wealthy family, and, well, her looks and figure? Beauty's in the eye of the beholder, but in the world of American TV dramas, plenty of people were into her type.

This fierce, older-sister type was absolutely smitten with George. She'd tossed aside her pride and authority as a senior doctor to chase him, even going so far as to cover for her rival Meredith by publicly claiming those infamous panties—pinned to the bulletin board by Dr. Montgomery—as her own, all for George's sake.

And that wasn't a one-off. She'd done stuff like that more times than he could count. Now, she was basically living with George, shacking up in a five-star hotel suite.

According to George, Callie was related to the hotel owner, so she got a huge discount. He insisted on splitting the bill, chipping in \$200 a week for food and lodging. Every time Adam heard this, he had to bite his tongue to keep from laughing.

He'd stayed at that five-star hotel before—it wasn't like he didn't know the rates. Plenty of hospital bigwigs, like the surgical chief kicked out by his wife or the new guy Mark Sloan, were regulars there. Even VIP patients often stayed there before checking into the hospital. Adam knew the costs inside out.

No way you're getting a room for less than \$300 a night. Even with a long-term discount, it wouldn't dip below \$250 a day. And ever since George started staying there, he'd fallen in love with their breakfasts, eating at the hotel almost every morning. The cheapest meal there was \$50 per person.

Rough math? To live George's current fancy lifestyle, the weekly bill would be at least \$2,500—and that's not even counting daily tips for room service. Breakfast alone wouldn't always stick to the bare minimum either. That \$2,500 could easily climb to \$3,000, or even \$4,000 if you weren't careful.

George handing over \$200 a week to "split" the cost? That's a discount so steep it might as well be a broken bone.

Hmm. Callie, the orthopedic resident, pulling off an imaginary "fracture discount" out of thin air? Pretty clever. Adam suspected she couldn't get past George's pride, so she let him toss in a token amount for the sake of "going halves." That money probably went straight to the cleaning staff as a tip.

So, when Adam called George a "beauty," was he really wrong?

Over here, Adam sent "Beauty" George and Lexie off to write up patient charts.

Over there, Carter rushed over in a panic to find the one they called "The Nurse Who Gets It."

"Violet!"

"Hey, if it isn't Dr. Carter!"

The Nurse Who Gets It spotted Carter and teased, "What's the big doctor got for me today?"

"Cut it out," Carter said, flustered. "Dr. Duncan just kicked me back to the ER out of nowhere. Do you know what's going on?"

"That's big-doctor stuff. How would us little nurses know?" she shot back with a mocking edge.

"..."

If Carter couldn't pick up on the sarcasm now, he'd have to be as clueless as Sheldon. He forced a grin. "Violet, why you gotta talk like that?"

"Like what?" she said, putting on an exaggerated act. "I'm just a lowly nurse. This is how I've always talked. What, now that Dr. Carter's a big-shot doctor, even my tone sounds foreign to you?"

"Okay, I messed up!" Carter caved, throwing his hands up. "Violet, just tell me what I did—I'll fix it!"

Kidding aside, was The Nurse Who Gets It just any nurse? She was his guiding light. Without her pointers, forget being a surgical intern under Dr. Duncan—he wouldn't even have landed a gig as an ER intern, the job he used to scoff at. Plus, she was clearly one of Dr. Duncan's favorites, practically his top supporter in the medical center.

Now that she was giving him the cold shoulder, what choice did he have but to own up fast?

"Hmph!" Violet huffed. "You figure out you're wrong now? What was with all that swagger before? You barely become a doctor and suddenly start looking down on us nurses?"

"I didn't!" Carter protested, practically shouting his innocence.

"Oh, really?" she sneered. "Then who was it that bossed Carol around, demanding she bring you barbecue—chicken, but no drumsticks, beans not too sweet, plus a cabbage salad and all that nonsense? She doesn't owe you anything. Bringing you food is a favor, not her job. What gives you the right to order her around like that with a laundry list of demands? Just because you're a doctor now, Dr. Carter?"

"That was me..." Carter mumbled, embarrassed. "I mean, I wasn't bossing her around, I was just asking—"

He trailed off under Violet's withering stare, unable to finish. Because it hit him—his tone had been bossy. And Carol had even sarcastically asked, "Anything else you need, Doctor?" He hadn't caught it at the time and rattled off more requests without so much as a "thank you."

Back in the day, he'd been all "Carol this, Carol that," flashing warm, humble smiles left and right. Violet didn't need to spell it out—he hadn't noticed it himself, but ever since he'd put on that official doctor's coat with "Dr. Carter" embroidered on it, he'd gotten cocky.

"And don't get me started on the OR earlier!" Violet added, her voice icy. "When someone helped you into your surgical gown, the old you would've said 'thank you' a million times. Now? You don't even bother with a name, just strut in, head high, acting like it's owed to you. You might as well have 'I'm different, hurry up and dress me' written on your face. You're so full of yourself everyone's noticed—you think Dr. Duncan didn't?"

"I'm sorry..." Carter muttered, shame washing over him.

Some things you don't realize until they're pointed out, and then you want to crawl into a hole. Carter's arrogance was exactly that.

Chapter 739: The More You Get Beat, the More You're One of Us

Medical Center. Nurses' Station.

"Of course you're wrong," said the know-it-all nurse with a smirk. "You've obviously gotten too full of yourself. We're all worried you can't even hold a scalpel anymore."

"Even Dr. Duncan thinks so?" Carter asked anxiously.

"To be a doctor, you've got to be calm and steady," the nurse reminded him. "Otherwise, you're one of those who can't handle a knife. So, Dr. Carter, are you calm and steady enough?"

"I..." Carter wanted to say he was, but when he met her teasing gaze, the words just wouldn't come out.

"Violet, just tell me everything," he said, gritting his teeth and pleading.

Might as well face the music now—early death, late death, it's all the same. He didn't even realize he'd mastered some kind of mythical levitation kung fu, practically floating through life. Heaven knows what other flaws he had that he was blind to.

Back when he was the only one shadowing Dr. Duncan, it didn't feel like a big deal. But now? Three new competitors had popped up out of nowhere, and each one was putting serious pressure on him.

Take little Melendez—he was basically a mini Duncan starter pack, so no surprise there. Then there were Lexie and George, the ones he'd been secretly laughing at. One was a Harvard Med School star, the other a seasoned surgical intern with a year under his belt. Sure, Carter could chuckle, but deep down, he wasn't so sure he was better than them.

Sigh.

He wasn't Dr. Duncan's only little sidekick anymore. Otherwise, Duncan wouldn't have kicked him straight to the ER without a second thought.

"Carter, you're still not steady enough. Your foundation's shaky," the know-it-all nurse said, dropping the sarcastic "Dr. Carter" title now that she saw he was genuinely owning up to it. She gave him some friendly advice: "Take something as basic as placing a central line. You can't do it perfectly every time. Sometimes you nail it in one go, other times you're fumbling around, missing the spot. What's that about?"

"That's the nurses—" Carter started to argue, then slumped. "No, it's me. My foundation's weak."

"Of course it's your foundation!" she said, shaking her head. "If a doctor can't handle something that simple without a nurse holding their hand, what kind of clinician are they? What if you're stuck with a newbie nurse who doesn't know squat? You can't count on her—do you just yell for help like some helpless kid?"

Carter's face turned beet red. That scenario was straight-up nightmare fuel.

"Dr. Duncan pointed this out to you twice before, but you didn't take it seriously," she reminded him. "Back then, you were just a med student. No one knew if you'd even graduate, let alone become a doctor or end up interning here. So after those two times, Duncan stopped bothering. It's all on you to figure out.

"But things are different now. Dr. Duncan's officially training interns, and word is he's grooming them to be future star doctors. If you keep coasting like you used to, not buckling down to solidify your basics and work twice as hard, you won't even get the same treatment you had as a med student. Duncan's got plenty of resources, sure, but they're going to the interns he believes in. It's only the first rotation—don't end up as the one he doesn't bet on."

"Buckle down, solidify my basics, work twice as hard..." Carter muttered, repeating her advice like a mantra. Then he perked up. "I'm heading to the ER right now. I'll make sure I do every single thing perfectly!"

"That's the spirit!" the nurse said with a satisfied grin. "But your first stop when you get there? Apologize to all the nurses. I hear they're ready to teach 'Dr. Carter' a lesson."

Carter's face froze. He quickly said goodbye to the know-it-all nurse and bolted to the ER. The second he saw a nurse, he apologized sincerely.

Back in the day, he'd been tight with the nurses—practically one of the gang. So he knew firsthand how terrifying it was when they teamed up to "teach someone a lesson."

Damn it! He'd gotten way too cocky. How could he forget that?

Adam's Office.

"Grab some snacks—I'm starving!" Cristina and Meredith barged in, immediately raiding Adam's fridge the second they walked through the door.

Back when the row of stretchers along the corner hallway was their go-to lounge spot, it was just them. But ever since Alex, Liz, and the others left, the group had shrunk. Plus, with Adam getting his own office, their hangout chats had mostly shifted here. Even Ellis Grey's late-night tutoring sessions happened in this room now.

It'd become second nature.

Emmm.

And honestly, the setup here was just too good to pass up.

"I heard you chewed George out until he was totally dazed," Cristina said, munching on snacks while digging for gossip. "Next time, do it in front of us so we can watch the show."

She loved nothing more than seeing chubby little George squirm.

"Chewing him out is for his own growth, not to turn him into some villain," Adam said, shutting down Cristina's wicked idea without hesitation.

Sure, "pretty boy" George could go dark and power up ten times over and still not be a threat. But Adam was a straight shooter—why would he randomly pick on someone, let alone put on a public spectacle? He didn't have some goofy superpower where beating someone up made them like him more, bonding through bruises.

Emmm.

What worried him more was if he tried it without that power and it worked. With George being... well, George, he might actually enjoy it.

"You met her beforehand!" Meredith said, glaring at Adam accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Last night was the first time," Adam replied casually, knowing exactly who "her" was. "That's between you sisters—I'm not getting involved. Didn't Mrs. Grey mention Lexie was coming to intern here?"

"..."

Meredith didn't have a comeback.

Her dad's current wife—aka the new Mrs. Grey—had brought it up plenty of times, even inviting her over to meet Lexie. But Meredith had shot it down every time.

She could maybe stomach the woman who stole her mom's husband, the oh-so-motherly current Mrs. Grey. But Lexie? The girl who'd taken the fatherly love she'd craved her whole life? No way was she ready to deal with that.

Seeing her reaction, Adam just smiled faintly and shifted gears, chatting with Cristina about surgeries and training interns instead.

"That short guy you've got seems pretty impressive," Cristina said, fishing for more gossip.

"Johns Hopkins grad, same school as Dr. Burke—how could he not be?" Adam said with a laugh.

"My four are total logs," Cristina griped. "Meanwhile, you've got two geniuses and two seasoned pros. They don't just save you effort—they handle half your grunt work too. Wanna trade one?"

"Sure, whatever," Adam said with a shrug. "If they're cool with it, swap whoever you want. I'm fine either way."

"..."

Cristina froze, then flipped him the bird.

That was a straight-up Versailles-style humblebrag smackdown.

"Heh," Adam chuckled. "Training interns is all about you. If you don't want to put in the effort, just let them fend for themselves—how much they learn is their problem. But if you go that route, are you ready for Dr. Bailey to rip you a new one?"

Cristina grinned at first, clearly tempted, but the second he mentioned Bailey, her smile vanished.

Even though Dr. Bailey wasn't their boss anymore, they still dreaded her wrath. And if she caught them slacking on training interns? A full-on Bailey roar was guaranteed.

Cristina could already hear it in her head, complete with visuals:

"What are you doing, Cristina Yang?! Is this the attitude I taught you? How did I train you all back then?! You can't even handle a few interns—where do you get off acting so smug all the time? What's there to be smug about? Get your ass back there and teach them properly—right now! I swear, if I catch you slacking again, I'll chew you out every damn time!"

Chapter 740: First Cut Yourself a Wound

Late Night

The 18th hour of the interns' first shift.

The group of interns had moved past their initial excitement or nerves and were starting to feel the exhaustion creep in.

Adam, Cristina, and Meredith had just finished a mini-session with Ellis Grey. As they stepped out, they started joking about it.

"Watch me catch someone napping right now—I'll make them regret it," Cristina said with a wicked grin. "Back in our day, the first shift was 48 hours straight. These kids have it easy with just 36, and here I am, their boss, still not resting."

"Oh, come on," Meredith said, trying to calm her down. "We've all been interns. Don't mess with them."

"Mess with them?" Cristina replied, dead serious. "This is teaching them! Besides, I'm about to crash soon, and the last thing I want is them waking me up mid-snooze over something dumb. Better warn them now—stay sharp, don't slack off, and turn a tiny problem into a big one that drags me out of bed. Right, Adam?"

"Me?" Adam chuckled, waving it off. "Don't drag me into this. You two figure it out."

"Wait a sec," Cristina said, raising an eyebrow. "You've got something up your sleeve, don't you?"

"Not really," Adam said with a laugh. "It's their first shift, though. You know how it is—the first time always sticks with you. So I'm planning to stick with them the whole way, make it extra memorable and fulfilling."

"The whole 36 hours?" Meredith's mouth twitched.

"See?!" Cristina jabbed a finger at him. "Compared to Adam, I'm a saint! At least when I'm asleep, as long as they don't bug me and no one's dying, I don't care if they sneak a break. But with Adam? They're in for a nightmare!"

"Alright, time to check on them," Adam said, giving Cristina and Meredith a quick goodbye before heading to the ER.

Tonight's session with Ellis Grey had been deliberately short—Adam's way of giving them a breather to grab some food and recharge. But the real grind was about to kick off again.

Emergency Room

Nurses' Station

"How're they doing?" Adam asked, not going straight to his interns but checking in with the nurses first.

"They're all working hard," one nurse said, nodding toward them. "Especially that Dr. Melendez—he's been nonstop since he got here, and he's good, too.

Carter came back, apologized to us, and started focusing on the small stuff, not chasing big dreams anymore.

O'Malley's the same as always.

And little Grey? She's got a nice personality, but she might be too soft-hearted. Not sure if she'll hold up."

"Let's wait and see," Adam said with a nod.

The nurse's observations lined up with his own guesses. The three guys? He wasn't too worried. Whether they were seasoned, tough-skinned, or just rational enough, they'd be fine.

But Lexie? Sweet and kind-hearted. That's great for being a person, but tricky for being a doctor. Too much kindness means too much emotion. When that crashes into life-and-death moments, you either toughen up and push through, or it breaks you. Until it happened, no one could predict how Lexie would handle it.

Bang!

The ER doors slammed open.

"What's the situation?" Adam strode forward quickly.

Shorty, Carter, George, and Lexie all rushed over too.

"Forty-year-old speeding driver, flipped in an MVC. Lost vitals on the monitor. We couldn't intubate," the paramedic said in a hurry.

"How long's he been out?" Adam asked, already checking the patient.

"Twenty minutes to load him, fourteen to get here," the paramedic replied. "We've given two rounds of epinephrine."

"Little Grey!" Adam called out.

"Yes!" Lexie stiffened.

"Intubate him!" Adam ordered. "You know how to do it?"

"I've never done it..." Lexie said, voice shaky.

"But you've seen it!" Adam barked. "Grab the tube—move fast!"

A nurse handed the trembling Lexie the intubation kit.

"Dr. Duncan..." Lexie took it with shaky hands. "You sure I should do this?"

"Are you a doctor or not?" Adam snapped. "Stop stalling! Listen to me—picture the airway, focus on the tube, and go straight in!"

"I can't see the tube!" Lexie fumbled, half-inserting it into the patient's mouth before panicking and looking up. "Can't you do it? Or let George or someone else?"

"Melendez, take over CPR!" Adam shot a glance at the three guys, signaling Shorty to step up. Then he moved to Lexie's side, softening his tone. "This is your shot. Deep breath, follow my lead. It's simple—you've got this. Watch! Don't hit the teeth, just slide it in!"

"I did it! I got it in!" Lexie exclaimed, shakily completing the intubation under Adam's guidance. She looked up, beaming—only to freeze when she saw George, Carter, and the others looking less than thrilled.

"Good job," Adam said, nodding at her before gesturing to Shorty. "Melendez, you can stop."

Shorty eased off the CPR.

"What are you doing?!" Lexie yelled. "Why aren't we saving him?"

"No need to save him. He's already gone," Adam said, meeting her eyes. "You did great. I don't think you've ever called a time of death before, right? You can do it now."

"What?" Lexie blinked, stunned. "He's dead?"

"He was dead when he got here," George muttered.

"It's been this long, with epinephrine and everything already tried. You should've known he was gone," Shorty Melendez said, giving her a look.

Harvard Med? This is it? Johns Hopkins still reigns supreme.

"Then what were we just doing?" Lexie whispered.

"Fulfilling what the law requires," Adam said gently. "And following teaching hospital tradition—making his death mean something by using it to train you. Next time, maybe you'll save someone who still has a chance."

"That's so cruel..." Lexie murmured, staring at Adam in disbelief. She glanced at George and Carter, who nodded, confirming it was standard practice. Tears welled up as she looked back at Adam.

"We're doctors," Adam said, holding her gaze. "Every day, we face life and death. If you can't first cut a piece of your own heart—slice away some of that kindness, carve out the fear and emotion—how will you ever have the guts to cut into a patient and take responsibility for whether they live or die?"

Tears slipped silently down Lexie's cheeks.

"Time of death: 01:35..."