

Unconscious 1001

Chapter 1001

“Daddy, has it been a while since you called Mommy? Why does it feel so distant between you two? On TV, parents call each other honey, daring, sweetheart, something Like that.”

Melon was incredibly perceptive. After speaking, he gazed expectantly at Ariana.

Feeling somewhat cornered by his intense stare, she reluctantly summoned the courage to awkwardly mutter, “Darling.”

After a brief pause, a soft chuckle came from the other end.

“Baby, I’m listening.”

Hearing that voice made Ariana’s heart race, even as a tinge of sadness welled up within her.

The voice bore an uncanny resemblance to Theodore’s, making her feel as though she was talking to Theodore through Melon. Shaking off her confusion with a discreet pinch, Ariana managed to regain her composure.

Seeming pleased, Melon asked his father, “Daddy, are you busy at the border? Is it dangerous there?”

Holden responded gently, “I’m busy, but it’s not too dangerous. Don’t worry about me, Melon. I usually can’t use the phone, but I managed to get some time off today.”

Clutching the phone, Melon couldn't contain his excitement. ninjanovel.com

“You've been away from us for five years, Daddy. You should get a longer break now. Can you call us every day?” His voice quivered with joy and expectation.

After a moment's hesitation, Holden said, "I'll call whenever possible." "Yay! Daddy is the best!" Melon cheered, gripping the phone tightly. His curiosity piqued, Melon asked, "What's it like at the border, Daddy? Can you describe it?"

Smiling, Holden began, "Well, it's a bit remote, and getting here can be challenging. But the scenery is beautiful." As he spoke, Holden browsed the web for some images of the border to share later.

"Do you miss Mommy and me?" Melon probed further.

"Absolutely, I miss you both all the time." Holden's voice was warm.

He could almost visualize Melon's expression at that moment.

"Then Daddy, when you come back, I'll take you out to play. Mommy and I will take you to the amusement park. It'll be so much fun!"

Melon's voice radiated excitement, as if their last trip to the amusement park hadn't been enough. Holden chuckled. "Are you taking Daddy to play, or do you just want to play?"

"I want to have fun, but I want to do it with both Mommy and Daddy,"

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Melon responded earnestly.

"Sounds like a plan. Daddy will be looking forward to it."

After a few more exchanges, Holden ended the call.

Melon gleefully leapt into Ariana's arms, his eyes alight.

"Mommy, Daddy really does love me."

Ariana looked down at him, her eyes a blend of amusement and sadness. She tenderly tousled her son's hair and encouraged him to go play.

Then, she quietly opened a messaging app and sent a two-word message to the other person. "Thank you."

A prompt reply arrived.

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"You're welcome. Melon is so adorable."

After a brief exchange, the conversation ended.

Ariana pocketed her phone, but her thoughts inevitably returned to Theodore. No matter how hard she tried, his face haunted her.

She sighed, realizing that Theodore's influence seemed inescapable.

By evening, Ariana and Melon received another package containing collectible figurines. The sender was, once again, Holden. Puzzled, Ariana frowned. Was he hooked on sending gifts?

She turned to Shawn and messaged him.

"Why is Mr. Fredrick sending a gift again?"

"hat?" Shawn appeared equally baffled. "I'm not sure. Mr. Fredrick didn't mention anything about this to me."

"We can't keep accepting these gifts." Ariana sent another message and remembered the incident from last time. Since Shawn probably wasn't aware of all the details, she added, "Please tell me Mr. Fredrick's social media account. I'll talk to him directly."

Shawn's response didn't come. Casting a glance at the clock, Ariana speculated that Shawn was probably deep in consultation with Holden about her matter. Not letting it occupy her mind, she carried on with her tasks.

After half an hour, Ariana's phone finally blinked with a message from Shawn.

"Mr. Fredrick is meditating on it."

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The situation seemed stuck in a loop, leaving Ariana somewhat frustrated. All she wanted was to return a package! There were no hidden agendas on her side. It was puzzling how Holden, who had never acted like this before, was now causing such a fuss.

Then again, Ariana mused, perhaps Sadie's influence was behind Holden's odd behavior. Since they got engaged, it looked like Sadie had a firm grip on him. It was almost as if he had mastered the art of evading any suspicion.

Given this situation, Ariana decided not to press Shawn for Holden's contact details. Yet, as she stared at the collection of figurines, unease lingered. She felt a nudge to do something about it.

Something sparked in her mind. Didn't Jessie provide Holden's number the last time? Maybe she could use that to get in touch.

She attempted to trace the contact linked to the phone number, but the system retorted that the number wasn't linked to any account.

Her frustration grew, and she contemplated dialing the number directly but hesitated before pressing the call button.

But then again, if Holden wasn't open to adding her, it was a clear sign he didn't desire much interaction. There was no need to look bothersome.

Furthermore, calling at this hour could lead to misunderstandings with Sadie.

Asigh escaped Ariana's lips as she pushed the phone aside, abandoning the idea.

She glanced at the figurines, pausing for a moment before sighing again.

Discarding them wasn't an option. Well, if Holden enjoyed sending gifts, why not? Especially given his wealth.

With her decision made, Ariana gathered the figurines.

Meanwhile, the variety show she had signed up for was on the brink of commencing its filming.

Early morning saw Ariana dropping off Melon at Sonia's place, then she set out to the studio where the show was set to unfold. Upon her arrival, a flurry of activity filled the scene, a queue snaking outside the premises.

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Since this first episode was essentially a live audition, more of a prelude than an official program, it was a warm-up of sorts. Ariana fastened her work badge and followed the guidance of the staff to navigate her way to the studio.

Seven talent agencies were in the mix for the show, most being household names in the country, known for their record labels or launching renowned actors. These were companies whose names instantly resonated with anyone.

The onsite assistants were familiar with the representatives of these agencies. Spotting Ariana's new face, one of them approached.

“Hello, participants must present their assigned number cards at the entrance. It’s over there,” the assistant gestured toward the Lengthy line.

Ariana pointed at her work badge and presented her invitation letter with a smile.

“I’m here representing Landon Media.”

“Landon Media?” The assistant’s brow furrowed, unfamiliar with the name.

After scrutinizing Ariana’s invitation letter and cross-referencing it with the registration list, the assistant conceded that she had enrolled.

Seemed like Landon Media was a smaller, relatively lesser-known entity. The assistant contemplated for a moment, gauging Ariana, then nodded, directing her to a corner. With her situated, the assistant moved on to other tasks.

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In no time, all the players in the game had assembled for the grand audition, and the process of cherry-picking commenced. The stage saw contestants making their entrances, one after the other.

The program itself hadn’t set any specific performance category, leaving the door open for talents of all hues, from comedy to balletic feats, to take center stage.

As each contender unveiled their unique flair, the talent agencies had the green light to give a nod of interest by pressing a button.

In cases of mutual interest, marked by both the agency and the artist, a light above the table would illuminate.

After a series of audition rounds, Ariana had identified a few potential gems, but they either got snapped up by other agencies or were already betrothed to their preferred patrons.

An hour swept by, and Ariana's table hadn't pressed on a Light. She remained unruffled as she awaited the next contender despite that.

Being a live broadcast, eagle-eyed viewers in the online chat room couldn't help but notice the lights emanating from other tables, while Ariana's hadn't. They could only sympathize through comments.

"This is a bitter pill to swallow. Was she dragged here as mere fill -up?"

"Even as a fill-up, there usually should be people with her. She's standing solo in this ordeal." In addition to the sympathy, some viewers directed their criticism her way.

"Which bigwig would let a minnow enterprise like hers join them?"

Everyone else here is a major-league player. How dare she, a nobody in the business, even think of contending? It's sheer folly for her to join the race. She's practically asking for the gallows!"

"Absolutely, which of these industry giants doesn't flaunt a noteworthy figure? Why would they need an insignificant person to pad the numbers?"

Some viewers went a step further, embarking on an expedition to delve into Ariana's corporate roots, using that information as ammunition to taunt her in the chat.

"Her company seems freshly minted, likely conjured just for this show, right?"

"She's probably got money on her mind, but I'm dying to know where she snagged that golden invitation from."

"What a squandered slot. Letting her company jostle in this contest was a total frittering away. It's bordering on deceit, and who in their right mind would step onto her ship?"

"The contestants aren't greenhorns. Outfits without skin in the game will be weeded out in the opening round, anyhow!"

Yet, some observant viewers zeroed in on Ariana's tranquil disposition and posted praises in her recognition.

"But this lady exudes a certain aura, like a potential star in her own right."

"True, her poise is impeccable. Throughout, she's been cool as a cucumber, never showing the whites of her eyes. She looks remarkably cultured and sophisticated."

"I've got a hunch that I've seen her in the headlines somewhere."

"I doubt it; my memory's drawing blanks. Maybe it's just that her aesthetics are easy on the eye, hence the resonance."

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Amid the tumultuous sea of judgments, Ariana maintained her seat with composed detachment. Even as her marked choices drifted away into other people's arms, she donned a smile, keeping an eagle eye on the candidates in the room.

At that juncture, two young men sauntered to the stage. They stood tall, bearing strapping physiques, but their faces were a canvas of heavy makeup, and their hair cascaded in natural curls. With a striking resemblance, it was evident they were twins.

After exchanging pleasantries with the assembly, the duo unfurled their act. But a blanket of silence filled the atmosphere after their performance.

Their act melded song, dance, and rap, but the execution bore a lackluster aura. Both the singing and the dance were, at best, pathetic. Their performance inadvertently injected a strain of mediocrity into the otherwise elegant stage.

The online chat room transformed into a cauldron of mirth and remarks.

"Are these two jesters in disguise? The critics' corner must be relishing this new fodder!"

“Unbelievable. Let’s hope no one rushes to claim them. On to the next contestant, please.”

As anticipated, silence dominated the room, with no talent agency eager to make a mark with them.

Just as the curtain seemed ready to descend on these brothers, a bell chimed from a distant corner of the room! Everyone in the room looked stunned as they turned their attention toward the source of the ringing bell.

Who could possibly be interested in such a painfully embarrassing performance?

When they realized it was the consistently overlooked agency in the corner, their amusement was hardly surprising. A wave of whispers and muffled laughter swept through the room.

Mocking glances were directed at Ariana, as if to say, “So desperate, huh? Your insignificant company couldn’t find anyone, so you’ve resorted to this?”

Online viewers also joined in the derision, expecting to have a good laugh at Ariana’s expense. Even if these performers were signed, the consensus was that they wouldn’t survive the first round of the competition.

Beside Ariana, a representative from a rival entertainment agency leaned in and quipped, “What are you even competing for? Your small agency has no takers, and now you act this recklessly? Aren’t you worried about backlash from your boss? You’ll be the laughingstock if you’re eliminated in the first round.”

Ariana offered a polite smile and calmly responded, “That’s not a concern. I am the boss.”

Her response momentarily stunned the man, and he fell silent. He stole covert glances at Ariana, musing to himself that a company with no takers and contestants no one wanted seemed like a match made in heaven.

Onstage, the two brothers appeared not to have registered what just happened. Yet Ariana remained unfazed. She smiled warmly at the duo and nodded, saying, "Both of you performed admirably. Please come down to collect your registration forms." The brothers were ecstatic, their faces glowing with newfound hope.

They had thought their chances were lost, but now an agency was genuinely interested in them. Overflowing with gratitude, they bowed to Ariana and thanked her before stepping off the stage to collect their registration forms.

The online chat room erupted with activity, comments pouring in at a rapid pace. "Is she out of her mind? Signing talent like that? Even if they survive the first round, they're bound to get booted later."

"Agreed. This agency clearly lacks judgment."

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"What kind of taste is that? She's just setting herself up for failure."

"Y'all are missing the point. She's just gathering material for a comedy sketch."

"A small-time company like that is bound to collapse sooner or later."

Yet, among the flood of disparaging comments, a few outliers floated by.

"Am I the only one who thinks these comedic guys look familiar?"

"Well, I'm afraid you're alone in that."

"Yeah, they do remind me of someone. I can't put my finger on it, but they seem like they've been around." The live chat buzzed with speculation and chatter about the unexpected turn of events.

Soon enough, it was time for the mid-show break. Ariana stretched and stepped outside to get some fresh air. When she checked her phone, a flurry of messages from Sonia appeared on the screen.

“Wow, did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?”

“If you're having that much trouble, do you want me to sneak in a couple of people for you?”

“But really, why did you pick those guys? Their performance is trending everywhere now.”

Ariana smiled and replied, “Well, isn’t that great? They've certainly created a buzz.”

“You're brilliant!” Sonia promptly responded with a thumbs-up emoji, acknowledging Ariana’s strategic move. As the break concluded, Ariana made her way back to the broadcast studio to commence the second half of the show.

The talent in this segment was notably strong, and Ariana made several selections. Interestingly, most of her choices were contestants who had been overlooked by other teams.

By the time the live broadcast wrapped up, only one spot remained unfilled on Ariana’s roster.

To maintain a fair process, Ariana consulted with the production team. They agreed that she would pick her final team member from among the contestants who had been previously eliminated.

Ariana nodded in agreement with the proposed approach. She carefully considered the eliminated contestants and ultimately chose a nervous boy who hadn't finished his previous performance. With that decision, their diverse group was set.

The host's voice rang out as he announced that filming would start in just five days, beginning with a grand televised showcase. Intense preparation and rehearsals were necessary for the singing and dancing competition throughout the upcoming week.

Ariana was well aware that her eclectic team of underdogs seemed weaker compared to their competition. They were labeled as “bottom feeders.” However, she chose to ignore these insults and maintain her unwavering focus on the task at hand.

After the livestream ended, she gathered her team in a conference room. The six of them stood there, each displaying their unique styles and personalities without saying a word.

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At that moment, an assistant entered with a list of program options. "The production team wants you to select your showcase performance from these choices," the assistant said. Ariana took the list and glanced over it, trying to conceal her exasperation.

It was evident that this wasn't a chance to choose but more of a notice. ALL the other options had already been taken, leaving them with the most challenging one, a staged musical production. They were left with no choice.

However, Ariana anticipated these schemes from a ruthless production keen on creating drama. Despite her inner frustration, she maintained a composed and in-control demeanor and took the huge assignment without protest.

She cleared her throat and began carefully allotting roles to her cast, observing their individual strengths and weaknesses.

When the flamboyant twin brothers realized that Ariana had assigned them with the demanding climax roles, their expressions changed beneath their heavy stage makeup. They exchanged uneasy glances before timidly questioning in unison, "Are you. really sure we're capable of handling such crucial lead roles? Maybe someone else with more experience would be a better fit."

Ariana cut them off firmly yet calmly and addressed the group, "These role assignments are temporary. We'll adjust and change them based on your performance during training and rehearsals. | selected each of you for a reason, not because some think you're not good enough."

She held eye contact with each member, exuding quiet authority.

"Every one of you possesses untapped potential. Believe in your abilities, have confidence. Trust me to provide the best vocal coaching and choreography training. But our success on that stage depends on your self-belief."

Her inspiring words lingered in the room, causing the group to be in deep thought as they absorbed her advice and their new roles.

Ariana's gaze shifted to the twins' heavy stage makeup. "No makeup during tomorrow's intensive training," she asserted.

One brother gasped dramatically and protested, "We can't go without makeup during rehearsals! Not with cameras capturing everything.."

Ariana maintained her composed authority, brushing off his theatrics. "Be in the training room at 9 am on the dot tomorrow. No excuses." Ignoring their anxious protests, she walked out, leaving no room for additional discussion or debate.

At BRD Group's Headquarters, Holden worked diligently to complete the day's tasks, eager to head home after a tiring day.

As he left his quiet, empty office wing, he was taken aback by a faint laugh echoing down the hallway.

With a puzzled expression, Holden decided to check out the source of the laughter. He soon found Shawn sitting alone at his desk. His shoulders shook with suppressed laughter as he watched something amusing on his phone.

Holden gave the table a couple of sharp knocks, making Shawn jump.

He quickly paused the video and removed his earbuds when he saw Holden. A bit flustered, Shawn straightened up, regaining his usual professional composure.

Instead of scolding him, Holden asked with a gentle tone, "What's the entertaining content keeping you here so late?"

"I apologize, sir," Shawn replied with a serious tone.

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"I came across a promotional video for our company's new reality talent competition, and it took me by surprise." He paused briefly then continued, "Miss Edwards is featured prominently in it."

"Ariana Edwards?" Holden's confusion was evident as he frowned.

"Yes sir," Shawn responded promptly.

"I thought she was deeply involved in renewable energy projects. Why would she participate in a talent show?" Holden questioned.

Shawn took a moment to think before answering, "It seems that Miss Edwards may see it as a diversified investment. This competition showcases talents seeking opportunities with talent agencies, and she recently launched her own agency."

Holden found it strange that Ariana would suddenly enter the entertainment industry, seemingly unrelated to her energy initiatives.

Feeling Holden's unspoken curiosity, Shawn suggested, "I've heard rumors that Miss Edwards has prior experience as a talent agent, although the details are unclear. Would you like me to investigate further?"

"That won't be necessary," Holden casually dismissed the idea. "Whatever she does is her business."

Although he didn't voice his curiosity, learning this new facet of Ariana had certainly sparked his interest. What did the mysterious Miss Edwards look like?

After a brief moment of hesitation, Holden asked, "Could you share the link to that video?" Shawn was surprised by the request. It was almost unbelievable.

What?!

He wondered when Holden developed an interest in celebrity gossip.

Could it be because of Miss Edwards?

But Shawn quickly dismissed the notion as unlikely. Holden rarely paid attention to trending news, and he probably just wanted some lighthearted entertainment.

With this in mind, Shawn shared the link.

Almost immediately, Ariana's call came in on Holden's phone. With no hesitation, he picked up the call. "Daddy?" A young boy's voice greeted him on the other end.

Holden's expression loosened up into a warm smile.

"Where's your mommy, kiddo?" he asked gently.

"Mommy asleep. She's very tired. I called you secretly," the child admitted. "Why are you calling daddy so late instead of sleeping?" Holden gently scolded. "Mommy says you're too busy for me to call often. But I can't sleep.

"Can you share a story with me, Daddy?" the boy pleaded.

Holden readily agreed. With a warm chuckle, he made his way toward the exit and continued to chat with the boy. His face beamed with tender affection.

As Holden left, Shawn watched in stunned silence.

Unbelievable! Could it be that Mr. Fredrick actually had a hidden child? If Miss Pierre ever discovered this.. She'd be devastated.

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On the drive back, Holden chatted with Melon on the phone.

Holden noticed Melon's voice getting sleepy, and even he yawned. But just when he was about to bid goodnight and end the call, a sharp "Mommy!" came from Melon's side.

Holden hesitated. He was about to say goodnight, but now he held back. He listened intently, curious about the unexpected interruption.

A few silent beats passed before a drowsy female voice said, "Apologies, Melon borrowed my phone to ring you. Is it too late? Did we wake you?"

Hearing her voice, something inside Holden fluttered momentarily. He brushed it off and replied, "It's alright. I'm fond of Melon. If it makes him happy, that's what counts." There was a gentleness in Holden's voice that he didn't even recognize.

She replied, trying to hide her own tiredness, "I'm relieved we didn't disturb you. Melon just really misses his father." Ariana's voice had a touch of apology.

Holden merely hummed in response, secretly longing to continue the conversation. "I'm here whenever he wants to talk. Don't sweat the small stuff."

Ariana sounded apologetic.

"Thanks. I promise to keep a better eye on him."

The conversation wound down after that. Holden picked up on Ariana's struggle to keep her eyes open. He bid her goodnight and disconnected.

After parking his car, Holden found himself deep in reflection. He couldn't shake off the sound of her voice.

What was it about Ariana's voice that drew him in?

He pulled out his phone and scrolled through Ariana's online profile.

Even though they'd only recently connected, their chat history told another story.

Reminiscing about the past, Holden thought about the time Ariana tried to return the figurines. She had asked Shawn for his contact.

Holden had felt a tug of uncertainty, wondering if he should have revealed himself as, well, Holden Fredrick.

But if he had, what would've changed?

While going through the messages, Holden's finger paused on Shawn's chat. With a hint of curiosity, he clicked on the link Shawn had dropped earlier.

A humorous scene greeted him on the screen.

Most would've chuckled, but not Holden.

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His face was as serious as if he were digesting a news article on world politics.

As the video continued, it was only towards the end, amidst Ariana's commentary, that the camera briefly turned her way. A small change flickered across Holden's usually steady face.

He rewound the video, just a tad.

Because of the angle, only a portion of Ariana's profile was in view.

That short glimpse made Holden's heart do a little jump. He watched that part again and again, his forehead creased in confusion.

After several views, he sat back, a mix of surprise and disbelief swirling within. That brief profile, that fleeting second. How could she so closely resemble the woman he'd met on the cruise ship?

The next morning, Ariana was up early and made her way to the practice room. In no time, everyone had gathered, mostly punctual.

Her eyes landed on the twin brothers, Franklin and Woodrow Chamberlain. They were on time, but their faces were heavily painted with makeup, making them stand out.

Noticing they weren't going to remove it on their own, Ariana approached them. "You two, over here."

The twins glanced at each other, then followed her to a corner.

"We agreed on no makeup today. What's with the heavy look?" Ariana asked. The twins stood firm.

"There are cameras here, and we just feel weird without makeup."

"You look out of place with it now. Go take it off." Ariana's voice held a note of finality.

"But.." they said, stammering.

The twins started to protest, but Ariana cut them off.

"Now."

Realizing arguing was futile, the twins headed to the restroom.

When they emerged, their natural looks took the practice room by surprise.