

Unconscious 1051

Chapter 1051

Holden extended his hand towards the ethereal figure shimmering before him, but as he drew near, it shattered like a delicate soap bubble and vanished without a trace. No matter how he tried, the flickering face remained obscured.

With a puzzled expression, Holden ran his fingers over the intricate beadwork adorning the wedding gown he was holding.

Questions swirled in his mind. Where had this dress come from? Who would send it to him? And why did it stir a sense of eerie familiarity? Could it be a dress he had commissioned?

Holden sank into the sofa, mulling over the silk-and-lace confection.

It must have been his own order, but the details eluded him.

When did he make this request? Why had it arrived only now? The gaps in his memory taunted him. And a strange frustration welled up inside him. For the first time, Holden felt totally clueless. Footsteps echoed on the staircase.

"Holden, is that you?" Sadie called out. Her eyes widened at the sight of the dress draping across his lap, and she rushed down with excitement bubbling in her.

"Is this for me?" she asked, gathering the gown in her hands, her fingers admiring the delicate seed pearls and intricate beadwork.

"I know you still care about me!"

To her, this gesture meant everything. The wedding was back on, a testament to her unwavering determination. Not even Ariana could come between them anymore!

Holding the dress against her slender frame, Sadie twirled around joyfully. The man she loved had chosen this gown specifically for her.

Their wedding day was drawing near, and she envisioned herself by his side as his wife, cementing her place in his life. A coy smile graced her lips as she gazed at Holden.

“Why didn’t you let me know you were having a dress made? I would have gladly gone for fittings.” She caressed the skirt almost reverently.

“But I absolutely love your selection. I can’t resist trying it on immediately!” Before Holden could react, she took the dress with her to change.

His instinct made him want to reach out and stop her, but he hesitated as she rushed into the bedroom.

Maybe she had a point. They had once been in love. It occurred to him that this dress might have been intended for her all along. The thought weighed heavily on his mind for reasons he couldn’t quite comprehend. A few moments later, Sadie emerged, draped in ivory silk.

The dress engulfed her delicate frame, with the long skirt pooling on the floor, making her seem even smaller. She almost tripped over the hem as she walked.

“Who on earth tailored this? The sizing is completely off!” She huffed in frustration, tugging at the bodice, which hung open across her narrow shoulders.

Holden’s expression turned dark.

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“Take it off,” he said flatly.

A single glance confirmed the undeniable truth. This dress was never meant for Sadie. It must have been created for someone else, someone with a significantly different body shape.

But who was it? His mind wandered back to the vague figure that haunted his thoughts, although he couldn't quite place a face to the memory.

Sadie had mentioned that they had been engaged long ago. Then why would he have requested a dress so ill-suited to her? Even the length was totally incorrect.

While Sadie went to change, Holden reviewed the package details again.

The contact information was a virtual phone number, but there was a delivery location provided.

He tapped the address and instructed Shawn, "Go there. Find out who sent this."

Ariana had been released from the hospital, having undergone simple treatment for her minor injuries from the accident. Mitchel, coincidentally nearby at the same hospital, rushed to pick her up upon hearing the news.

When Mitchel entered the hospital room, his gaze immediately fixated on the clumsily wrapped bandage around Ariana's forehead.

"That bandage looks rather rough," he observed in a straightforward manner. Suppressing a chuckle, Ariana retorted, "Is your perfectionism acting up again?"

"That's right," Mitchel nodded with candor and requested fresh bandages from a nurse. With gloves from his bag, he declared, "Allow me to redo your bandage properly."

"No need, it works fine," Ariana protested, pointing at her head.

Mitchel glanced at her bandage indifferently, remarking in a flat tone, "But its sloppiness offends my senses."

Unable to craft a rebuttal, Ariana conceded and remained still as Mitchel carefully removed her bandage.

After examining the wound and confirming no stitches were necessary, he breathed a sigh of relief.

Later, when little Melon opened the door and saw the bandage on Ariana's head, he froze in alarm, tears welling up in his bright eyes. His tiny lips quivered, and tears cascaded down his rosy cheeks.

"Mommy's okay," Ariana quickly reassured, picking him up.

Sniffing, Melon blew gentle air on her injury.

"Mommy, let me kiss your pain away."

"Mm-hmm, Melon's soothing breath makes Mommy feel much better," she reassured, cradling him until his tears subsided.

Ariana had hoped the commotion surrounding her accident would quickly fade after the production team publicly addressed what had occurred.

However, as she scrolled through her phoni that night, a startling headline emerged: "Hidden Rules in Showbiz."

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Before Ariana could even furrow her brows, an alert from Sonia popped up. "See the trends? That audacious jerk, Carl, is at it again."

Indeed, Carl had released a scathing diatribe accusing the show of mistreatment. In addition to berating the producers, he shamelessly smeared Ariana as an adulteress gold-digger, insinuating that she must have a wealthy benefactor supporting her. Otherwise, he argued, her modest agency wouldn't have qualified for the show.

Ariana seethed that someone would still employ such outdated smear tactics.

It was clear that the “sugar daddy” Carl alleged was none other than Holden. Merely because he had seen Shawn visiting her, the fool had spun wild speculations.

Online debates grew increasingly heated over the identity of her mysterious benefactor.

“No way a small agency got her on the show without assistance. | bet she’s got a wealthy guy funding her.”

“Meh, just because she’s attractive doesn’t mean she has a sugar daddy. Not everything is about looks.”

“| wonder who she knows that hooked her up with Julio..”

Most comments were harsh attacks, but a few did mention Ariana’s looks in a different aspect.

“She looks strangely familiar; | feel like I've seen her around before.”

“Same here! Her face gives me major déjà vu.”

Just as the thread erupted with speculation, Jayson, the general director of the show, posted an intriguing update. Ariana, with intrigue, clicked on Jayson’s latest post, eager to uncover its contents.

In a substantial message, Jayson conveyed with clarity that he had personally extended an invitation to Ariana to participate in the show. Jayson continued to meticulously counter Carl’s public allegations, systematically dismantling each one and emphasizing that Ariana had rightfully earned her spot through sheer talent. He vehemently disavowed Carl's assertions regarding a “sugar daddy” benefactor, declaring them baseless.

To substantiate his claims, Jayson presented surveillance footage of the practice room. The video, crisp and undeniable, captured Carl and his entourage forcefully entering Ariana’s team’s practice room, brazenly ejecting contestants including Woodrow. The shocking audio recordings exposed Carl hurling taunting insults, and the altercation escalated when he threw the initial punch, deliberately shoving Ariana to the side and causing her injury.

In his capacity as the show's director, Jayson revealed that the producers had initially discreetly disqualified Carl in an effort to protect the contestants' reputations. However, Carl's distortion of events compelled Jayson to unveil the unvarnished truth.

The post swiftly went viral online, and Ariana scrolled through her feed as the clarifying video gained rapid traction. Social media was inundated with hashtags chronicling Carl's downfall, and his former fans turned against him en masse, causing a sharp decline in his follower count.

Carl, consumed by impotent rage, smashed his phone upon seeing the post. He turned abruptly to Calvert, his face mottled with anger.

"You were entrusted to delete that footage! How in the world did Jayson obtain that video?" With an unruffled demeanor, Calvert gazed back placidly. "I warned you not to post claims. This unfortunate situation could have been avoided if you'd only heeded my advice."

In response, Carl shouted, "Fix this immediately! When I return, my father will surely demote you to the role of a janitor due to your incompetence!"

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Calvert, unperturbed and accustomed to Carl's frequent outbursts, didn't flinch. He calmly responded, "Are you absolutely certain your father won't take his frustration out on you instead, once he's informed of the whole situation? He explicitly forbade you from joining the show, and now, you've created quite a significant scandal."

Standing unfazed as Carl raged, Calvert regarded the spoiled heir with an impassive gaze.

He had spent years handling the wayward youth and was well-acquainted with these fits of temper. Since childhood, Carl had careened out of control, with no one capable of reining in his whims. Joining the show was just his latest act of rebellion.

Before Carl could retort, his phone rang, and the caller ID caused his bluster to evaporate.

"I'm sorry!" Carl scrambled to answer, holding out the phone deferentially.

"It's my father. Please, can you talk to him?"

Without uttering a word, Calvert accepted the phone and switched on the speaker.

Enraged yelling instantly reverberated through the room.

"You worthless punk! Why did BRD withdraw funding? Get back here immediately!"

After the incident within the practice room, Ariana's team was catapulted to fame, becoming a sensation online. "I sense there's more to Ariana's identity," one fan commented with suspicion.

"She brought Julio in the show and received support from the head director. What kind of powerful background does she possess?"

"If she truly doesn't have a sponsor as they claim, could she be a wealthy heiress?" Others wildly gossiped about Ariana's enigmatic origins.

Nonetheless, most fans eagerly anticipated the next round of competition. "Sadie rated their team too low last time, creating a substantial gap in points between the groups," one fan critiqued. "It'll be a tough challenge for Ariana's team to advance to the next round unless a miracle happens," another predicted somberly.

"With singing next, and their team seeming weak in that area compared to the others, it's going to be challenging," a fan observed.

"Can't wait to see what unfolds!" Many wrote with excitement.

Soon, it was time to film the much-anticipated second episode.

In contrast to the modest viewership of the premiere, Ariana's team now drew record-breaking numbers to their livestream, emerging as the most viewed team by far. As soon as the stream began, millions of eager fans tuned in.

Off-camera, the team members were also aware of the explosive growth in viewership. Woodrow stood in the shadows, where even the Light makeup he wore couldn't conceal his nervous, pallid complexion.

Noticing his unease, Ariana asked gently, "What's wrong? Are you not feeling well?" Woodrow shook his head, stammering, "Just. just nervous. I'm worried my singing will drag everyone down."

Singing was never his strong suit. Painfully tone-deaf, he'd been criticized for it since childhood. The song's high range felt impossible for him to conquer.

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"But you sang so exquisitely in rehearsals," Ariana reassured warmly. "Have faith in yourself. We have a top-tier backing vocal supporting you. There's nothing to fear."

Ariana's uplifting encouragement lifted Woodrow's spirits, and his tense expression melted away. He profusely thanked her for the kind words, gratitude filling the air.

In response, Ariana nodded in unwavering support. Under her guidance, the Chamberlain brothers had undergone a remarkable transformation.

Initially, coaxing them into singing and dancing seemed an insurmountable challenge, but persistent rehearsals had finely honed their skills and boosted their stage presence significantly.

Ariana had always believed in their raw potential and hidden talent. All they needed was someone to nurture it, and she had done just that. After her heartening exchange with Woodrow, Ariana turned her attention to counsel Tom.

"You can't impulsively walk off stage again like last time, understand? The audience may excuse it once, but repeatedly doing so comes off as rude and arrogant, leaving a lasting negative impression."

"I won't. Don't worry," Tom replied, his demeanor unusually obedient. His fiery temper had mellowed significantly since Ariana was injured. ninjanovel.com

She felt relieved to see the positive change in him.

As the final preparations drew near completion, the livestream chat burst into life once more, buzzing with questions and anticipation.

“Where is their backing vocal?” one fan inquired anxiously.

“It's just Ariana's team so far.”

“They're starting any minute,” someone else added impatiently.

“The other teams' backing vocals are already on stage. Where are theirs?”

Some speculated critically, “Could Ariana's tiny company not book anyone?”

At that moment, the backstage door swung open dramatically, and a familiar figure strode onto the camera, instantly electrifying the livestream with astonishment and excitement.

It was none other than the global pop diva herself, Sarah!

After Sarah's unexpected entrance onto the live-streaming stage, her presence rapidly ascended to the summit of trending searches. A tidal wave of her devoted fans surged forth, bestowing a meteoric rise to Ariana's team's live-streaming channel. For a brief, spellbinding moment, the deluge of real-time comments became suspended in midair, and backstage technicians found themselves summoned to urgently attend to the backend infrastructure.

Sarah graced the audience with a radiant smile, setting the live-stream ablaze as online fans showered her with extravagant gifts. In the blink of an eye, Ariana's live-streaming channel catapulted up the search rankings, emerging as a scorching topic of discussion.

Meanwhile, in another studio, Tyler vigilantly observed Ariana's team's live stream.

Although Ariana seldom graced the camera, Tyler remained ever watchful, reserving his keenest attention for the moments when her image did grace the screen.

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“Hey, Mr. Brewer, I didn’t know people like you also watch live streaming!” a mischievous voice chimed in, followed by an inquisitive head. It was none other than Cole, who, despite the passage of five years, had scarcely changed at all. He remained as bothersome as ever.

Tyler furrowed his brow, shifted to the side, and cast Cole a chilly glare. “Don’t you have more pressing matters to attend to? Go and mind your own affairs, alright?”

Yet, Cole tenaciously refused to depart and instead inched closer, quipping, “I too wish to partake. What manner of Live- streaming could be so captivating?”

He spoke and leaned over to peer directly at Tyler’s phone screen.

Annoyed, Tyler promptly reclaimed his phone, his expression contorted with irritation.

“Do you not possess a phone of your own?”

Cole seemed impervious to the impatient tone in Tyler’s voice, his gaze riveted with curiosity upon Tyler’s phone screen.

Tyler clicked his tongue, contemplating stowing away his phone to seek solace elsewhere. However, just as he intended to do so, Ariana’s visage graced the camera, halting his movements.

ninjanovel.com When Cole caught sight of Ariana, his eyes expanded with astonishment.

He had not anticipated Ariana’s return to Eleymond, elucidating the reason behind Tyler’s unwavering engagement with the live stream.

Cole cast an appraising glance at Tyler, who had already shifted to another seat, and chose not to follow. A sense of discontent brewed within him.

He had just returned from filming a travel show in Africa that day, rendering him oblivious to Ariana's return to Eylemond and her participation in a variety show.

On the production team's side, it was time for the live performance.

This time, Ariana's team had the good fortune of drawing the second- to-last performance slot. This allotted them ample time for preparation, fine-tuning, and the opportunity to gauge the judges' reactions.

Yet, Ariana still grappled with a trace of nervousness, unable to dispel the suspicion that Sadie wouldn't allow this chance to slip through her fingers so easily.

The first team swiftly completed their performance, garnering an overwhelmingly positive audience response.

Following this, it was the judges' turn to provide their evaluations.

Among the four judges, two were newcomers compared to the previous episode. Soon, it was time for the last judge to unveil their identity.

ALL the six members in Ariana's team harbored a palpable nervousness, their minds still haunted by the prior incident involving Sadie.

As the camera swept across their anxious faces, tension hung thick in the air. Then, a sudden camera cut surprised everyone: Sadie was conspicuously absent from the judges' panel.

Witnessing her absence, the six-member group collectively exhaled in relief, particularly the Chamberlain brothers, who visibly relaxed instantaneously.

Ariana, however, remained vigilant, refusing to lower her guard completely.

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With the show's surging popularity, it seemed implausible that Sadie would easily overlook an opportunity that not only commanded public interest but also was squarely aimed at her.

Ariana didn't dwell on her thoughts. As long as Sadie remained absent, a sense of serenity enveloped her. For now, she patiently awaited her own group's turn in the spotlight.

The previous performance gracefully drew to a close, and it was soon Ariana's team's moment to shine.

Upon discovering that Sarah would make a guest appearance with Ariana's team, waves of excitement swept through the audience, one by one.

In that instant, both the live audience and online viewers united, chanting Sarah's name with unwavering enthusiasm. But in the very next moment, an unwelcome presence emerged to taunt them.

"What's all the fuss about finding a diva? Even if Sarah has joined them, does it really matter?"

"Yeah, remember how their contestants sounded during the auditions?"

"I heard their rehearsals weren't all that great either."

"Their lack of skill is impossible to conceal, no matter how talented Sarah may be."

However, contrary to the naysayers, some netizens believed in Sarah's true talent, asserting that the rookies she brought along were undeniably talented. They countered the negativity.

"Don't you know just how talented Sarah is?"

"Indeed, you're just being jealous."

"Have you forgotten their performance during the last episode?"

Everyone has witnessed their progress.”

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Suddenly, the live streaming room was flooded with diverse comments.

At this pivotal moment, the stage lights dimmed, and the performance commenced.

From the shadows emerged a haunting and distant chant, akin to the call of a sea siren.

As the lights gracefully swept across the stage, the Chamberlain brothers stood beneath the spotlight, resembling seasoned

sailors upon the vast seas. Their harmonious singing, intertwined with ethereal female vocals, painted a mesmerizing tableau before the audience's eyes.

As their voices filled the air, both the live audience and online viewers erupted in sheer amazement.

Could this truly be the same group of contestants that had delivered a dismal performance of singing and dancing during the initial auditions?

Following that, another individual gracefully took the stage, his movements perfectly synchronized with the music. At this moment, the audience recognized that the dancer was none other than Tom.

For a brief moment, the audience was in awe, as they hadn't expected this hip-hop and rock singer to dance so exquisitely.

The team's performance surpassed everyone's expectations, leaving the onlookers stunned.

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Backstage, the various teams wore solemn expressions, particularly those from Rollingrock Media, who remained conspicuously silent.

One person, involved in the practice room incident from that day, muttered quietly, "Could it be lip-syncing? The difference between this performance and that day is too significant."

The others fell into silence, but those present at the scene knew that the production team rigorously scrutinized such matters. Furthermore, judging from the sound alone, it was evident that there was no lip-syncing. Their hearts sank.

In the current scene, the progress of these contestants was strikingly evident. Coupled with the explosive popularity brought by Sarah, was it possible that they were turning the tables?

Another person quickly tried to reassure, saying, "It's alright, even if all the judges give them high scores, it won't change much. In the previous round, they were in last place. With their scores, they would need to secure first place in both voting of judges and the audience to have a chance of not being eliminated. Is that even possible?"

The person beside them added sarcastically, "Relying solely on Sarah, no matter how vast her fan base is, won't be sufficient. Besides, we also have Calvert. He has a significant fan following."

Soon, their performance concluded, and it was time for the judging segment. ninjanovel.com

The six-member group anxiously awaited the verdict, their nervousness palpable. However, each person felt content with their own performance.

As expected, all five judges awarded them high scores. They breathed a sigh of relief and clearly rejoiced.

Their happiness, though, was short-lived. The results of the audience vote were announced, and they saw that the six-person group scored the lowest among all the teams that had performed.

Seeing the ranking, Ariana swiftly rose to her feet. How could this have happened? The result clearly didn't align with the feedback they had received from the live audience! Ariana had a somber expression, refusing to believe the result of the audience vote.

This didn't align with the feedback they had received. After their act, the audience had cheered for them and even shouted for an encore, and the team had danced on for two more thrilling minutes.

So what went wrong now?

She gazed in disbelief at the shockingly low number of votes from the people sitting right there, trying to recall every step and turn of their flawless performance. What did they miss?

Ariana bit her lip. She had a nagging feeling.

The host looked just as surprised. He quickly checked with his team if the dismal number was right. Getting a nod, he tried to brush it off in front of the audience.

"Our live audience was hard to impress tonight! But chin up, contestants. We haven't looked at the online votes yet."

The six disheartened contestants acknowledged his words. But their bright faces from before were now clouded with disappointment. With heavy hearts, they walked away from the Limelight.

In a plush car heading for Mistlyn, Sadie was having the time of her life. She watched Ariana's face crumble on her phone and laughed out loud.

"Yeah that's how it feels," she said under her breath.

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She had always wanted to pull the rug out from under Ariana during the competition. When she found the perfect chance to do so, she jumped at it.

But there was a twist. Just the other day, Holden, out of the blue, offered Sadie a deal of an endorsement for a luxury brand under contract to the Fredrick Group. She had pleaded with him for this before.

Thinking back, she remembered the wedding dress he had taken home and felt smug. She believed Holden was head over heels for her and would pop the question soon.

Considering everything, she decided to give the show a miss and took a trip to Mistlyn. But that didn't mean Ariana would get a break. Sadie grinned from ear to ear. She had set up a few tricks to ensure Ariana's team would be sent packing.

She had tampered with the live voting. She paid off a big chunk of the audience to make sure they didn't vote for Ariana's team. No matter how stellar Ariana's team was on stage, the audience had made up their minds.

Those live votes? They had a big say in the final result. Even if the judges loved Ariana's team's performance, the audience's low scores would pull them down.

Sadie overheard the host talking about online votes and just Laughed.

She believed there was no way online support could undo her mischief.

Angela's Library

Other teams had their fair share of online fans. Ariana was fighting a losing battle.

Holding back her glee, Sadie looked forward to seeing Ariana's dreams shatter on live television.

At the show venue, other teams all breathed a sigh of relief as they spotted Ariana's team's low vote count. Their nerves had been on edge, fearing they'd be outperformed.

Rollingrock Media's contestants were especially pleased. They were buzzing with barely hidden glee.

One contestant laughed, and said, “Well, we might not know why their votes crashed, but it looks like they can start packing. Time for them to head home.”

“They got too cocky,” another said, lips curled in disdain.

“Should've been gone a long time ago.”

Calvert silenced them with a raised hand.

“Let's not get ahead of ourselves,” he warned, his eyes sharp as he looked over Ariana’s team’s vote count. Confidence practically dripped from him.

“Online voting is up next. Everyone, hit up the fan groups and Instagram.

Rally those votes. The real competition? Those teams neck and neck with our score.”

Considering Ariana’s team’s pitiful audience vote count, they weren't even on the radar screen.

But then, a contestant chimed in, “What if Ariana pulls a fast one with the online votes?”

Calvert just snorted.

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“A fast one? Doubtful. Their players? Hardly known. Ariana? A small-fry company, scraping the bottom of the barrel. Getting a star like Sarah on board probably broke their bank.”

His gaze swept over his team.

“Now, look at us at Rollingrock Media.

We've got the contacts. We've got the money.”

Everyone got his drift. Rumors had always swirled about their company fixing the votes. Rollingrock Media’s team members settled back, convinced they had made the right choice.

“We're banking on you,” one said.

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“Considering Ariana’s team’s current sorry state, they won't be catching up.”

Soon after, the host kicked off the online voting round.

The cameras zoomed in on the voting screen. The virtual ballot box would stay open for five nerve-racking minutes. At first, every team’s numbers ticked up steadily. Yet Ariana’s team’s numbers lagged, gradually losing ground.

It was expected. People in the know were aware that Ariana’s contestants lacked star power. The fan base they had built from just a couple of shows wasn’t enough. Betting on votes from random folks wasn’t going to conjure a fairytale ending.

Then, out of the blue, Ariana’s team’s votes took a dramatic surge, racing up the rankings and breathing down the neck of the leading Rollingrock Media team.

Ariana looked back at Sarah, who flashed a discreet but pleased thumbs up. It was evident that the pop star’s fan army had entered the game.

The sudden twist had Rollingrock Media’s team trading nervous looks, their eyes darting to Calvert for some answers.

Yet, Calvert remained cool as a cucumber.

"This is expected," he said with ease.

"We haven't seen the real firepower from the big players yet."

As if on command, votes for the other teams also shot up, their graphs taking sharp turns upward as their supporters brought out the big guns.

Everyone got the message. The company bigwigs were flexing their financial muscles in the competition.

Calvert's confident grin made a comeback. How could a fledgling like Ariana stand a chance against their deep pockets and vast network?

But his smirk quickly turned to astonishment when Ariana's team's vote count skyrocketed again, threatening to outdo even Rollingrock Media's numbers.

"How. what's happening?" Calvert stammered. "Did Ariana pour money into this?"

Before the dust could settle, a team member blurted, "Have you checked the livestream? Tyler Brewer is on air, urging all his fans to back Ariana's team!"