

Unconscious 1101

Chapter 1101

"I found it strange too. This person messaged me out of the blue," she remarked. "When I asked who they was, they wouldn't reply. I almost thought that they was in cahoots with the kidnappers, and was trying to set us up."

Ariana glanced at the phone number. There were several Qs in it. She immediately felt that the number looked familiar. However, she couldn't really tell who it belonged to.

"I guess you didn't have anything to eat at the hospital, did you? Just wait a moment, okay? I'm almost done cooking," Sonia said suddenly as she hurriedly walked back to the kitchen. Angela's Library

After Sonia left, Ariana and Melon sat on the couch. Melon snuggled into Ariana's arms and confessed in a low voice, "Mommy, this morning I called Daddy secretly."

Ariana was taken aback. She had only recently known that her wealthy online friend was actually Holden. If Melon had indeed called the online friend, it meant he had contacted Holden!

With this realization, Ariana suddenly had an epiphany. She remembered the phone number from earlier.

She pulled out her own phone and entered her contact list. Then, she began to compare the numbers with that of the mysterious helper. She eventually discovered that it was Shawn's number that had sent Sonia the address. She had taken Shawn's phone number when they first met.

If it was Shawn who sent the address, then the one who had actually offered them assistance was undoubtedly Holden.

Ariana had unveiled the mysterious figure working in the shadows, leaving her emotions in a tangled web. She was gripped with restlessness and unease.

Holden had come to her aid on numerous occasions.

Reflecting on the sudden surge in their vote count during the online voting, Ariana had meticulously investigated potential benefactors, yet none of them were behind it.

Besides her circle of friends, only Holden possessed both the ability and financial resources to instantly pour millions into supporting her during the vote.

Though lacking concrete proof, Ariana's instincts and analysis pointed to Holden as her secret benefactor.

Frustration etched across Ariana's face as she sank into the couch.

She was acutely aware of the risk in her association with Holden.

Even the request for him to pose as Melon's father had been made in ignorance of his true identity. Had she known he was Holden, she would have opted for someone else.

After all, Holden was engaged and had a child. Ariana was aware that he was her wealthy online friend so she refrained from initiating further contact, to avoid complicating his family life.

Despite her disdain for Sadie, Ariana didn't wish to cause conflict in another person's family.

However, now that Holden was assisting her again, she felt uncomfortable. She was unsure of Holden's intentions, but these morally vague connections weighed heavily on her conscience.

The thought of texting Holden to cut all ties with him crossed her mind.

But every time she wanted to do so, an inner voice reminded her, "Melon said that Holden has a striking resemblance to Theodore. And there is an uncanny similarity in their voices. Does it suggest that Theodore might still be alive? Isn't the idea of meeting this look-alike worth considering, even if only as a substitute?"

Chapter 1102

Ariana grappled with a dual tug within her, one fueled by moral condemnation, urging her to distance herself from Holden, and the other, driven by her personal desires, tempting her to remain close to him.

Ariana had wrestled with her thoughts for a long time, but it appeared she had finally made a decision.

Although she found her own thoughts somewhat absurd, she was resolute about meeting Holden. She believed seeing him would bring her peace of mind.

In her determination, Ariana reached out to Shawn directly, asking about the partnership proposal and when she could arrange to meet Holden.

Shawn's response took a while, and it simply stated, "Mr. Fredrick says the proposal needs a few corrections. Please make the necessary changes."

Ariana didn't respond for a while and eventually replied with, "Alright."

That night, Ariana's frustration led her to burn the midnight oil, tirelessly revising the proposal. When she finally completed it, her mind was hazy from exhaustion. In her fatigued state, she accidentally sent the document to Holden instead of Shawn.

Meanwhile, in his study, Holden, who had yet to retire for the night, was taken aback when he received the proposal from Ariana. An unexplainable uneasiness gripped him.

Did Ariana now know his true identity?

Holden's grip on his phone tightened slightly. He knew all too well that Sadie was still between them. Despite having no genuine feelings for her, the public still viewed her as his fiancée.

Anxiety gripped Holden as he feared that Ariana had uncovered his true identity and might sever their ties because of it. ninjanovel.com He pressed his lips tightly together. It was an unexpected dilemma for him.

Throughout his life, Holden had confronted internal power struggles within the Fredrick family and the loss of Aldus, who had protected him in troubled times, without a hint of fear. Even formidable adversaries hadn't shaken him. Yet, the mere possibility of Ariana dismissing him left him apprehensive.

He scolded himself for his irrational behavior. Even Shawn had noticed his inability to maintain composure when it came to Ariana.

Holden struggled to comprehend his own actions.

His relationship with Ariana was a complex web which required him to be discreet in his interactions with her. He would need a plausible excuse to even get any close to her.

Adding to the complication was Sadie's presence in his life. Despite his lack of emotional attachment or memories tied to their past together, she was Adele's birth mother and it was impossible for him to just cut ties with her.

But he understood that letting these unresolved tensions linger wouldn't be fair to Ariana. He wondered how it would affect her. Holden's mind was in disarray, and after a brief pause, he opted not to directly inquire whether she had discovered anything. Instead, he responded with just a question mark.

When Ariana noticed Holden's message pop up, she suddenly realized she'd messaged the wrong person. She felt embarrassed and rushed to come up with the right response.

She had stayed up revising the partnership proposal, and her tired mind had failed her after a long day of being trapped at a warehouse.

Annoyed, she tried to unsend the message but couldn't. After some inner struggle, she reluctantly replied, "Haha, my bad! It wasn't meant for you."

Holden raised an eyebrow when he read her response. Was Ariana testing him, or did she genuinely not know his identity?

Chapter 1103

Not one to wait, he opted to give her a call.

Ariana picked up immediately, but an uneasy silence followed as neither knew how to break it.

Eventually, Holden broke the ice. His voice was tinged with concern.

“Working late again? Don’t push yourself too hard.”

Feigning ignorance, Ariana saw her chance to express herself.

“I really don’t want to work overtime, but this client seems impossible to please! I’m stuck having to keep refining this proposal.” Holden let out an awkward cough.

“I happened to take a look at your proposal, and I know a bit about the energy industry. Let me help you make it better.”

Ariana responded with feigned enthusiasm, “That would be fantastic!”

Holden pointed out several issues that needed fixing, and Ariana listened attentively. She found his real-time feedback much more valuable than endless back-and-forth document exchanges.

During the call, Holden walked Ariana through the entire proposal revision. ninjanovel.com

As Ariana reviewed the greatly improved document, she let out a sigh of relief. Experienced professionals like Holden had a different perspective, and with just a few pointers, her understanding had grown significantly.

She showered him with compliments.

"It's obvious that you're an expert, not just 'someone who knows a bit!' You must work in this industry, right?" She subtly probed, hoping he would reveal his identity so she could end their contact if she eventually met him and felt let down.

But Holden chose to keep things ambiguous. "I manage a small business and dabble in various areas, learning along the way."

Ariana, though unimpressed with his lack of detail, continued to flatter him, "You must be incredibly bright. It can't be just a small business. With your sharp mind, you must have expanded the company significantly by now!"

Holden was amused by her compliments.

"Success in business requires more than just intelligence."

Their conversation flowed casually, and neither of them wanted to end it. Ariana gradually succumbed to exhaustion. The day took a toll on her.

Listening to Holden's voice brought her comfort, reminiscent of being close to Theodore. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she unconsciously drifted into sleep.

Holden, listening to her gentle breathing, felt an unusual sense of warmth and a feeling of contentment washed over him.

He brought out the engraved pendant she had left on the cruise and stared at the two sets of initials. One set belonged to her. Who could the other belong to?

A sudden realization hit him. It was likely for her late husband, Theodore.

Chapter 1104

As he recalled how she had repeatedly mistaken him for Theodore, Holden's expression turned sour with resentment, almost a hint of jealousy towards this man.

But then he paused and scolded himself for feeling jealous of a man who was no longer alive. Still, his curiosity lingered. An idea crossed his mind, and he reached into a drawer, retrieving a bracelet he had stumbled upon years ago at the hospital.

Comparing the pendant and the bracelet, he was taken aback to discover that the engraved initials on them were exactly the same.

Holden held both objects in his palm, still somewhat amazed at how strangely they matched.

Many years ago, acting upon Devin's advice, Holden had left the bracelet at the lost and found desk in the hospital, hoping its owner would reclaim it. Surprisingly, even after his own discharge three months later, the bracelet hadn't been claimed.

Just as Holden was about to leave the hospital, he saw a nurse about to discard the bracelet into the trash, alongside other unclaimed items that had been laying around for over three months.

Angela's Library

Driven by an inexplicable urge, Holden saved the bracelet from its imminent disposal. He discreetly tucked it away and had kept it safe all these years.

As Holden looked at the two objects resting in his hand, he recalled that Ariana's husband had tragically lost his life in a car accident five years earlier.

Though reluctant to accept such a coincidence, Holden couldn't help but wonder if Ariana's late husband had been involved in the very same fateful incident.

After contemplating for a while, Holden carefully stowed away the bracelet, planning to broach the subject with Ariana at the appropriate time.

If his conjecture were correct, it seemed likely that this special bracelet had once belonged to her late husband. If that were the case, then Holden felt he should return it to its rightful owner.

Ariana woke up the next morning, feeling rejuvenated and renewed. The TV show's producers had decided to delay the recording for a day following the traumatic events of their kidnapping and Rollingrock Media's abrupt withdrawal from the competition.

With this unexpected break, Ariana took the chance to send her son, Melon, off to a summer camp she had previously enrolled him in.

As he prepared to leave, Melon gave his mother some careful instructions. He stood with his hands on his hips, imitating a grown-up's authority.

"You must eat properly while I'm away and not skip meals because you're busy," he advised.

"And be careful not to get your wounded arm wet, or it'll hurt a lot. When I come back, I'll examine you closely and weigh you on the scale to make sure you haven't lost a lot of weight."

Seeing her son take on such a serious demeanor as the little man of the house moved Ariana deeply.

"Right, right, I'll allow you to examine me thoroughly when you get back, my dear," Ariana reassured and squatted down to ruffle Melon's silky hair affectionately. With arms wide open, Melon embraced her tightly and promised, "I'll be well-behaved at summer camp, so you must take good care of yourself, Mommy."

"I will, my darling." Ariana planted a kiss on his chubby cheek and sent him off to board the waiting camp bus.

She watched as Melon boarded the bus with his little backpack, feeling her heart grow heavier with each step he took away from her.

Melon kept turning to eagerly wave through the bus window until a cheerful camp counselor directed him to his seat. He pressed his small face against the glass, offering a final goodbye to Ariana.

With a brave smile, Ariana waved back until the bus rumbled down the street and vanished from sight. Only then did she get into her car, determined to check on preparations for the upcoming show rehearsals.

The third episode was scheduled to be filmed live the next day in the evening, with a full rehearsal set for this afternoon. She needed to make sure everything went as planned.

Upon arriving at the studio, she saw it was Tom's turn to rehearse on stage. Ariana observed from below and was confident that Tom wouldn't encounter any issues.

Chapter 1105

As the lively melody started to play, Tom found himself standing still for what felt like an eternity before finally singing. His timing was off, and he stumbled over the lyrics, far from his usual flawless performances.

Ariana's smile faded into concern, and she stopped the rehearsal and called Tom off the stage. "What's the issue? Are you alright?" she asked. Tom shook his head lightly.

"I don't know, but ever since I was hit by that stick yesterday, my ears have been ringing nonstop. I thought a good night's sleep would help, but it hasn't."

Ariana grew even more worried, recalling the force of that hit, and how Tom had skipped a hospital visit and went straight to rehearsals after dealing with the police.

Seeing his pale face, Ariana insisted, "Your health is the top priority. If the discomfort continues, you must go to the hospital. I'll explain your absence to the producers, so don't worry."

Tom, however, remained adamant and stubbornly insisted, "No! It wasn't easy for us to come this far. If I can't get on stage, our team would be missing a voting opportunity. Plus, at this point in the competition, we can't replace anyone. I can't back out!"

Ariana could see the determined look on Tom's face, and all her attempts to persuade him were in vain. Additionally, the reality show had reached an extremely competitive stage. At this stage of the competition, missing even a single vote could create a considerable gap between the teams.

The Chamberlain brothers, especially Woodrow, were by Tom's side, bombarding him with motivational quotes they found online. They whispered and chattered in Tom's ear non-stop, and strangely, it made his tinnitus less bothersome.

The next day, as Ariana and the others waited backstage, the livestream continued. Unexpectedly, just an hour before the show began, Tom's condition deteriorated rapidly. Not only did the tinnitus persist, but he also felt dizzy and nauseous.

Ariana was deeply concerned. These were symptoms of a concussion! She approached Tom and said seriously, "You can't continue like this. You need to go to the hospital for a check-up. Don't put your health at risk."

"No, I've made it this far and I don't plan on giving up now. The show is about to start. The tinnitus and dizziness come and go in waves. Who knows, I might be okay when I get on stage."

Tom stubbornly refused to go to the hospital and there was nothing Ariana could say that would make him change his mind. He gazed calmly at Ariana and after a short pause, he added in a pleading tone, "I can't leave. I don't want to miss any chance to perform on stage."

"Tom, your health is more important than the competition. Don't be so stubborn!" The other team members came over and tried to persuade Tom. They were all concerned for his well-being.

The live stream showed what was going on backstage too. When the viewers saw the scene, they expressed their concerns in the chat section.

"From what I heard, he might have been injured during the kidnapping. I feel so sorry for him," someone commented. "Their team seems to share a genuine bond. They are not like the other teams who are only concerned about public attention."

"But is he really okay? He looks terrible. It's heartbreaking to see him, like this."

Chapter 1106

“Why is he so stubborn? Is he so desperate about being famous?” “Such a comment is ridiculous! Everyone joins the show for fame.”

“Well, in his present condition, it's highly unlikely he can perform well on stage. Besides, it's unnecessary for him to push himself too hard.”

“Precisely, he doesn't seem to be able to perform well in this state. He could even drag the team down.”

The live chat was flooded with comments and varied opinions, but Ariana didn't have the mood to engage in the comments as well. She just read them helplessly. ALL her attempts to persuade Tom had failed and now she was growing more and more worried about him.

ninjanovel.com

Soon, it was Tom's turn to go on stage. The truth was that Tom wasn't that confident either. He knew very well that his body was weak at the moment, and for that reason, he felt extremely nervous, with his heart pounding in his chest.

He carried his electric guitar on stage and his hand holding the pick was sweaty.

The accompanying band was ready and waiting for Tom's signal to start playing. However, Tom made no signals and remained motionless on stage.

The entire studio fell into a heavy silence, and the audience exchanged puzzled looks. “What's going on?”

“Is this part of the show?”

“If he can't perform, why can't he just step down?”

The live audience whispered amongst themselves. Suddenly, a fan of another contestant stood up and shouted, "If he can't perform, let him step down. We want to see the next performance!"

"Yeah, step down!"

More and more people started yelling at Tom to get off the stage.

Someone even threw a plastic bottle at Tom. The atmosphere in the studio became chaotic as the comments online intensified. Worried, Ariana was about to contact the show's production team for them to maintain order in the studio when suddenly, a clear and loud female voice rang out from the audience. The voice was louder than anyone else's.

"Tom! You're the best! Come on!"

A girl in the crowd held up a light sign for Tom. Her face was red with shyness, but she bravely shouted the slogan of support she'd prepared for Tom.

Tom turned to the source of the sound and spotted the young girl they'd met at the police station the other day. She stood at the forefront, her voice ringing out with conviction as she rallied the crowd with her passionate slogan. In a ripple effect, rows of people behind her hoisted their placards and joined in the chorus of support.

The girl's demeanor revealed a flicker of anxiety, her neck and cheeks flushed crimson. Despite her nervousness, her gaze remained unwavering as she nodded to Tom.

Tom felt a rush of warmth surge through him, as though a dormant energy had been awakened. The anxiety that had plagued him moments ago began to ebb away.

Drawing in a deep breath, he focused all his attention on the forthcoming performance. It was a culmination of countless hours spent in relentless training and the memory of over a hundred past shows. Wasn't this what it had all been leading to? He couldn't afford to falter now.

With unyielding resolve, Tom raised his hand, a signal to the accompanying band that the moment had arrived.

As the first notes filled the air, a hushed silence descended upon the entire audience. Tom's voice, slightly hoarse but bearing the raw vitality of youth and rebellion, seized the crowd's attention in an instant.

His rock and roll vocals resonated with power, setting ablaze an atmosphere that engulfed both the live audience and the online viewers, drawing forth cheers and applause in a fiery display.

Following the electrifying performance, the time came for the critical judging phase. To Tom's astonishment, he received exceptionally high scores from both the judges and the live audience.

As the scores lit up the screen, Ariana's relief was tempered by lingering concern for Tom's health.

Yet, on stage, Tom betrayed no signs of discomfort. It was only when he stepped off the stage, his eyes meeting Ariana's, that he turned pale and uttered, "Ariana, I feel dizzy and nauseous."

Without hesitation, Ariana rushed to his side, supporting him toward the dressing room.

"Rest for a moment; I'll call a doctor for you," she insisted, reaching for her phone. But Tom, though weak, shook his head.

"It's alright, I can hold on. I'll head to the hospital after Franklin and the others perform, once the group scores are announced." Ariana needed to stay around for the show, so she arranged for someone else to take care of Tom. ANGELA'S LIBRARY

It was nearly time for the Chamberlain brothers to step onto the stage. Woodrow, his pallor betraying his anxiety, confided in Ariana, "Ariana, I'm feeling dizzy too, and incredibly nervous."

Unable to contain a smile, Ariana playfully patted him on the back and teased, "Dizzy, huh? Come on, you've got to remember to stand up straight."

In the live chat room, the audience couldn't help but react with laughter as they witnessed this endearing scene. Comments poured in, likening Ariana to a protective big sister, diligently caring for her younger siblings.

However, among the viewers, curiosity was piqued regarding what the two brothers would deliver on stage, considering their relatively weak foundation in previous performances.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, two voices seamlessly harmonized, captivating the entire audience. "They're actually performing in an a cappella style?" "This is incredibly challenging."

Franklin and Woodrow took on all vocal ranges themselves, with the choir providing backup vocals. Their entire stage performance was nothing short of outstanding, and they chose to sing classic songs that further showcased their exceptional talents.

The audience watched in amazement, for a cappella was a highly demanding singing style that required impeccable coordination. No one had expected the Chamberlain brothers to tackle such a vocal challenge on stage.

In their previous performance in the second episode, Sarah's involvement had overshadowed the brothers' contributions, despite their commendable skills.

This time, though, they genuinely left everyone stunned. Even Ariana, with a nod to their undeniable talent, had to acknowledge their transformation into shining stars under her guidance during the performances. It was a remarkable journey that had taken them from the shadows to the spotlight.

Soon, the Chamberlain brothers effortlessly concluded their performance. After the captivating display of talents had come to an end, it was time for the judging phase to commence.

With Rollingrock Media no longer vying for tickets, Ariana's team's scores soared high above the competition, firmly clinching the coveted first place.

Chapter 1108

In an instant, their miraculous success set social media ablaze, and fervent fan discussion groups sprouted like wildfire. The group's fan base experienced a substantial surge in numbers.

Following the performances, Ariana's paramount concern was to swiftly escort Tom to the hospital.

On the way there, Ariana's phone incessantly chimed with incoming calls. Finally, she managed to steal a moment to check her notifications, revealing several intriguing business invitations, and even some olive branches extended by film and television production teams.

Following a preliminary screening, Ariana promptly responded to a handful of them, intending to arrange suitable opportunities for the group once the program concluded.

Just as she concluded her responses, a call from Sarah came in. Ariana answered, her ear filled with the solemn timbre of Sarah's voice. "Do you have a moment? We need to meet."

"What's going on?" Ariana inquired, curiosity piqued by the unusual gravity in Sarah's tone. Such a demeanor was a rarity in their conversations.

There was a pause before Sarah said slowly, "Alina and I were strolling through the mall when we spotted a man who bears an uncanny resemblance to Theodore."

Ariana blinked in confusion, initially thinking she had misheard. Without hesitation, she exclaimed, "What?"

"I said that Alina and I spotted a man who bears a striking resemblance to Theodore at the mall near Central Building. If you're available, please come over now," Sarah repeated with utmost seriousness.

Upon receiving this news, Ariana wasted no time. She promptly instructed the driver to halt, and with the Chamberlain brothers and the others accompanying Tom to the hospital, she flagged down a taxi and rushed to the mall as per Sarah's urgent request.

Angela's Library Arriving at the mall, she found Sarah and Alina seated in a corner of the ground-floor coffee shop. Alina, who had shown significant improvement after years of treatment, greeted Ariana politely upon her arrival.

Simultaneously, Sonia rushed in, clearly having hurried over from work, carrying various photography equipment, and panting as she inquired, "What's so urgent?"

Sarah had them both take their seats, her expression unwaveringly serious throughout. She addressed them with a solemn tone, "You need to be mentally prepared."

Throughout the journey to the meeting, Ariana's mind had been a whirlwind of thoughts. Now, her nervousness and anxiety were evident as she nodded, awaiting Sarah's further explanation.

Sonia had responded to Sarah's request to meet without hesitation, arriving promptly without asking for details. Perplexed, she gazed at Sarah and asked, "What's going on? Is there some surprising news?"

Sarah chose not to answer verbally, instead retrieving her phone and displaying a photo to the two of them.

Sonia and Ariana leaned in to examine the image — a blurry side profile. It was apparent that the photo had been taken from a considerable distance, resulting in slightly pixelated quality.

Nonetheless, Ariana immediately recognized the person in the photo; he looked exactly like Theodore. "I mean, this is unbelievable, a ghost sighting in broad daylight,"

Sonia exclaimed the moment her eyes fell upon the photo. She widened her gaze, repeatedly examining the picture, and whispered incredulously, "It can't be, it just can't be."

Chapter 1109

Sarah's expression remained grave as she explained, "I felt the same way when I saw it; it's uncanny. But by the time I realized it, I hastily took this photo."

"It's merely an illusion. How could he be Theodore?" Sonia's emotions ran high, her hand pointing decisively at the image. "Theodore is dead. How can he possibly return to life? I witnessed his cremation myself."

At that time, there were no surviving members of the Anderson family, and Ariana had been in a coma in the hospital. Sonia had been instrumental in settling matters related to Theodore's passing. She had

seen his lifeless body, witnessing him being sent into the crematory. So how could he suddenly reappear here? Were they seeing a ghost?

Sonia, on the edge of shock and agitation, was about to say more when Sarah signaled her to be silent with a look. It was then that she remembered Ariana was still present and swiftly composed herself, shifting her gaze towards Ariana.

ninjanovel.com Ariana, however, stared blankly at the photo, trembling all over, struggling to find her voice.

Sonia gently patted her for reassurance and said, "It's probably just a coincidence. There are plenty of people who look alike, right?"

Yet, in this moment, Ariana kept her gaze fixed on the photo, muttering, "No, that's nobody but Theodore. I'd recognize him anywhere."

Her eyes were red, and she held Sonia's sleeve with unwavering determination. "The two occasions I saw him before weren't illusions.

They were real. It was him."

Sonia remained deeply skeptical.

After all, she had borne witness to the heart-wrenching sight of Theodore's departure into the unforgiving crematory flames. If this person before her were indeed Theodore, then who had she glimpsed during the cremation, and why? Furthermore, the hospital had confirmed the identity of the deceased as Theodore.

Her concern for Ariana weighed heavy on her heart. She couldn't bear to see her friend lost in a bewildering haze, haunted by a phantom.

Sonia gazed into Ariana's eyes and spoke softly.

“If this truly is Theodore, why hasn’t he sought you out? Why hasn’t he plastered the city with missing person posters? When you suffered in that hospital, fought through foreign lands, and battled heartbreaks, where was he?”

Ariana’s gaze froze, her mind grappling with the gravity of the question. If this person was Theodore, why had he never reached out, never come to her?

Slowly regaining her composure, Ariana turned to Sarah and inquired, “Where did you spot him? I’d like to see for myself, to get a clearer picture.”

Sarah recounted, “It was in the children’s section of this very mall.

I tried to catch up with him, but he’d already slipped into the elevator by the time I arrived. So, I’ve been waiting here, hoping he’d reemerge.”

Ariana’s eyes drifted to the photo on her phone, her thoughts a tempestuous whirlwind of uncertainty.

Sonia and Sarah shared a comforting glance, offering reassurances.

“Take your time. It’s likely just a striking resemblance. Try not to let your thoughts consume you.”

Despite their comforting words, both women knew the implausibility of Ariana not delving into this mystery. For five long years, she had been tormented by the memory of Theodore, the agony of that unrelenting yearning etched into her very soul. At times, she held onto the absurd hope that Theodore might still be alive, teetering on the edge of sanity.

They whiled away nearly an hour in the bustling coffee shop, the ebb and flow of patrons providing a steady backdrop to their anxious anticipation. But despite the sea of faces, none bore the resemblance they sought.

Then, as if summoned by fate, Ariana’s gaze fixated on two figures emerging from the elevator’s metallic embrace: Shawn and Adele.

Sonia, too, caught sight of Adele and spoke in a tone both casual and contemplative. "It seems we've been crossing paths with Holden's daughter quite frequently of late. Today, we chance upon them here.

Quite the coincidence."

Chapter 1110

Ariana took a composed breath, her gaze shifting between Shawn and Adele before she said in a measured tone, "It's quite commonplace, as the Fredricks own this mall."

Recollection washed over Ariana, carrying her back to that initial return from abroad, when she and Sonia had ventured here to select gifts for Melon. In that bustling place, a man had caught her eye, his profile bearing an uncanny resemblance to Theodore's.

And with that memory, a new revelation struck her. It was Holden.

The cadence of Holden's voice echoed Theodore's, and there was a resemblance between their features, a similarity Melon had once remarked upon. A fanciful notion danced at the edges of Ariana's thoughts.

Could Holden be Theodore?

Almost as swiftly as the thought surfaced, Ariana dismissed it, a wry twist touching her lips, dismissing the idea as preposterous. How could such a connection exist? Theodore, the heir of the esteemed Anderson family, tethered to the Fredrick lineage? It defied reason.

If Theodore held any close ties to the Fredrick family, surely Darian would have showered him with favor, not the cold indifference he had received.

Furthermore, if Theodore were truly Holden, retribution would have been well within his grasp. Why would he have had to fight against Darian for so long?

The pieces simply didn't align. How could Holden possibly be Theodore? Besides, when she was with Theodore five years ago, Holden had been also around.

Upon reflection, Ariana noted an absence — an incongruity. Theodore and Holden had never materialized together. Moreover, Theodore had seemed entwined with the BRD Group and Adrian, a connection that bore a semblance of congeniality.

Ariana's thoughts churned in turmoil. She sought to steady herself, feeling a touch of absurdity for ever entertaining the notion that Theodore and Holden were one and the same.

But she couldn't control her mind.

If, by some twist of fate, Holden truly was Theodore, how had he allowed her to endure half a decade of suffering?

Angela's Library

Agentle touch on Ariana's arm jolted her back to reality.

Adele, looking up at her, reached out her hands.

Comprehending Adele's silent request for a hug, Ariana adjusted her demeanor, offering a warm smile as she stooped down to lift Adele into her arms.

Shawn trailed behind them, his own smile bright as he remarked, "Miss Edwards, what a pleasant surprise. Adele spotted you and couldn't resist coming over."

Returning the smile, Ariana inquired, "And where might you and Adele be headed?"

"We're off to a charming dessert shop nearby," Shawn replied, "It happens to be one of Adele's favorites."

He then turned his attention to Sarah and Sonia, who sat beside Ariana.

“It's a pleasure to meet both of you. Your names are quite familiar in the entertainment industry.”

Sonia and Sarah exchanged friendly greetings with Shawn, their demeanor warm.