

Unconscious 181

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Ariana took a moment to reflect and sent a heartfelt message. "I am grateful to you, not just for returning my mother's necklace, but also for coming to my rescue twice before. You have a kind heart, and I believe that goodness will always be rewarded. The universe is just, and even if you have lost something, you will surely gain something else in return."

As Ariana typed away, she felt confident in the wisdom of her words. She believed that the universe was indeed just and that even though Holden had suffered a great loss in his physical appearance, he had been blessed with immense wealth.

With that in mind, she added, "Perhaps by being surrounded by more beautiful things, your perspective will change and you'll even be able to make some friends."

Although Ariana longed to express that Holden should not feel inferior and that appearance was not everything, she thought that being too straightforward might make him feel uncomfortable.

Holden took a moment to read her message, and then replied, "I will try. I'm feeling much more relaxed now, and I could even say I'm happy because you didn't blacklist me."

Reading this response, Ariana couldn't help but feel sorry for Holden.

It seemed that what Jennifer had said was accurate: he was a lonely man who was devoid of friends and love.

Theodore gazed at the phone waiting for a response. The absence of a reply left him wondering. Had he said something wrong?

He waited for a few minutes and finally received a cat emoji from Ariana. The cat emoji meant to offer some comfort.

Theodore rubbed his chin, as he pondered over the reason for her sending this emoji, speculating that she might feel guilty for blocking him earlier.

His mood brightened and a smile graced his face. He eagerly tapped the screen and asked, "Does this mean we're friends now?"

However, Ariana did not reply to his message.

Theodore set aside the phone momentarily and took out another one from his pocket to call Adrian.

As soon as the call was connected, Theodore was greeted by the sounds of heavy machinery.

He pulled the phone away with a grimace and quickly spoke into the microphone "You're lucky to have

a good fiancée. You can head back home tomorrow.”

He hung up the call and checked the phone on the desk to see if Ariana had responded, but there was no reply.

He sent another text asking if she was busy.

Just then, there was a knock at the door, and Horace entered with a grave expression, saying, “Boss, we have a problem.”

A throng of reporters swarmed the exit of the Ivebridge airport, where Molly and Alina were trapped in the center of the crowd.

The flashing lights from the cameras left Alina feeling intimidated and she clung to Molly for protection.

Despite Molly’s protests, the reporters continued to hurl questions at them, one after the other.

“Is the baby in your arms Sarah’s daughter? There’s a photo of her circulating online and it looks like she has a facial deformity. What’s the deal?” one reporter asked.

Molly shot back, “That’s utter nonsense! She’s perfectly fine! You, paparazzi, will say anything just to get attention and drive up your web traffic!” Though she was furious, Molly was unable to stand up

against the horde of reporters on her own.

The reporter continued to press on, "If the child isn't disfigured, why not show her face?"

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Another reporter chimed in, "It's rumored that the child's father is the man Sarah had an affair with. Can

you comment on this?"

"There's a paternity test report online linking the child to Lynch, but it proves that Lynch is not the

father. As Sarah's mother, you must know something about this, right?"

Faced with so many questions, Molly had no escape and the situation grew more chaotic.

The entire incident was captured on camera and the video quickly went viral online.

Ariana watched the video with a grave expression before turning it off.

Betsy, who was reading the comments online, grew increasingly distressed. She asked Ariana, "What

should we do? The public has changed their tune and is now cursing Sarah for her infidelity.

There's even a group of Internet trolls trying to exonerate Lynch."

Ariana grabbed the phone and read through the comments, which were all negative toward Sarah.

People were saying things like, "It's no wonder Lynch messed around with other women. It turns out his

wife cheated on him and even had a baby with another man.”

“He is too miserable. No man can stand this.”

“Sarah deserves to have been banned from the entertainment industry for five years. Her private life is in shambles. She doesn’t deserve the love of fans and audience.”

“This is karma. She cheated on Lynch, so she gave birth to a child with a facial deformity.”

“It seems like people online are accepting every rumor without questioning it. Can’t they think for themselves? Don’t forget, even though Sarah was unfaithful, Lynch is not without fault either.”

“Where are Sarah’s fans? Why don’t they stand up for her? Are they all dumb?”

“Want to see a clear picture of Sarah’s daughter? Send me a private message and I’ll share it with you, but don’t put it up on public.”

“It’s unfortunate for Lynch to have married someone like Sarah, resulting in the ruin of his career. Some people say that Sarah brings bad luck to her husband.”

Ariana was overcome with distress and anger after reading the comments. The sudden turn of events couldn’t have happened without someone behind it all.

Betsy cautiously approached Ariana. “Is it true? Is Alina really not Lynch’s child?”

With a deep inhale, Ariana attempted to steady herself as she gazed at Betsy.

“I don’t know if it’s true,” she said to Betsy. “All I know is that we need to act fast to minimize the damage.”

With a determined look on her face, Ariana made a decision.

“I’LL contact the PR team to handle the crisis,” she said firmly. “Betsy, you reach out to Molly and bring them here. They should’ve gotten rid of the reporters by now.”

The news broadcast was always a few steps behind, so what they saw on the video now should’ve happened about an hour earlier.

As Ariana grappled with uncertainty, she told Betsy to do her best to reach out to Molly.

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Nervousness starting to take hold, Betsy nodded quickly and replied, “I’ll make a call to the airport and see what’s going on.

Ariana gently placed a hand on Betsy’s shoulder and warned, “Proceed with caution. Keep Sarah in the dark for now. The final is fast approaching, and she needs to stay focused on rehearsing. This is a live broadcast. We can’t afford to make any mistakes. I don’t want to see her banned again.”

Just as Ariana finished speaking, the door burst open, and Sarah walked in with determination.

“There’s no need to keep it from me,” she declared. “I already know.”

Ariana was taken aback as Sarah entered the room. “Sarah, what brings you here? I thought you were recording for the show?”

Her concern grew as she noticed the distress in Sarah’s eyes and the paleness of her Lips.

“Take a deep breath, Sarah. Let me handle this,” Ariana comforted, leading her to a seat.

With a desperate grip, Sarah clung to Ariana’s hands and cried, “I’m terrified, Ariana. Alina is gone.”

The news hit Ariana hard. “What do you mean, gone? Wasn’t she with your mother?”

Sarah’s sobs echoed through the room as she struggled to find the words to explain the situation. Her

hands shook as she clutched tightly onto Ariana’s arms. “The reporters at the airport were evaded, and

they were on their way to the hotel.

But they were ambushed once again and the reporters demanded Alina reveal her face. She was

frightened and in the chaos, she managed to escape from my mother’s sight. We’ve searched

everywhere but she’s nowhere to be found. How could the reporters be so heartless? Alina is just a

little girl,” Sarah cried out in distress.

She crumpled onto the couch, filled with anger and frustration.

“Why do they do this to me? I haven’t done anything wrong. If they hate me, just come at me. Why do they have to hurt Alina?”

she cried out in a bitter voice.

“Let’s try to stay calm, Sarah. I’ll do everything I can to find Alina,” Ariana comforted, struggling to keep her own emotions in check. In this moment of crisis, she had to remain level-headed, or the situation could easily spiral out of control.

Betsy handed Sarah a tissue, saying, “The first step should be calling the police.”

Sarah sat with her eyes blank, tears streaming down her face, as she whispered, “That’s already been done. My mother is currently reviewing surveillance footage at the police station.”

Ariana asked, “Has she found any leads?”

With a broken voice, Sarah let out a cry of despair and said, “Ariana, I’m so afraid. Alina is out there somewhere, and she’s just a little girl. She’s vulnerable, and with all these traffickers on the loose, anything could happen to her. The place she went missing is close to a park, and there’s no

surveillance. The area is filled with twists and turns, and it's almost impossible to find her quickly. If

she's taken, it's over. I can't bear the thought of losing her."

With a look of worry, Ariana walked back and forth, searching for an answer.

Then, Sarah clung onto Ariana's arm and implored, "Don't you know anyone powerful who can help

us? We need their assistance."

Sarah's make-up was smudged and she was no longer the glamorous star, but a desperate mother

who was longing to find her daughter.

Ariana let out a sigh and gently tried to soothe Sarah. "Just take it easy. I'll find a solution, don't worry."

Tearfully, Sarah thanked Ariana.

Betsy embraced Sarah, offering comfort through silent pats on the shoulder.

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"I'll be making a call outside. Betsy, keep an eye on her," Ariana said, locking eyes with Betsy before

departing.

She found a quiet corner where she could be alone and, after a brief moment of hesitation, Ariana

dialed the number she had memorized by heart.

The phone was finally answered after a few rings.

Theodore's voice came through, a little low and tired. "what's going on?"

Ariana hesitated for a moment before speaking softly. "I'm sorry, am I disturbing you?"

There was a brief silence on the other end before Theodore asked in a patient tone, "No, what happened?"

"It's about Sarah, her daughter..." Ariana started to explain but was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a vague female voice from Theodore's side.

"Oh, you're still busy. I thought your assistant would have informed you..." the woman said on the other end, with a hint of surprise in her voice.

Ariana couldn't hear the rest of the sentence clearly, but she was able to distinguish who the woman was speaking.

The distinct, raspy tone could only belong to Jennifer.

Ariana remembered their conversation from earlier in the day Jennifer, who never smoked, had a naturally hoarse voice that was often mistaken for that of a heavy smoker. As a child, Jennifer was

teased for her deep voice, but she fought back and eventually became the most powerful student in her school.

With a note of surprise in her voice, Ariana asked Theodore, "Do you know Miss Austin?"

In the BRD Group office, Theodore held the phone in his hand and glared at Jennifer. She covered her mouth, and blinked with fear in her eyes, showing him she wouldn't make a sound.

Without saying anything to her, he turned and spoke into the phone. "Yes. I've come to Ivebridge this time for business cooperation with the Austin Group."

There was silence at the other end of the phone, as Ariana wasn't sure what to say.

Theodore waited for her to ask for help but she didn't say anything. He wondered if he should mention

Sarah's matter first and tell her that he was willing to help them.

But his pride wouldn't let him.

"If there's nothing else, I'll hang up now. I have something to do..."

He was trying to act cool to make Ariana talk. However, before he could finish speaking, there was a beeping sound from his phone.

He looked down and saw that she had hung up on him.

And this was not the first time she had done this.

Theodore's face darkened. He stared at the black screen as if he was trying to burn a hole in it with his intense glare.

"Well... Are you... finished with work?" Apprehensive, Jennifer looked at Theodore's angry face and had the urge to run away.

He glanced back at her coldly. "What's the matter?"

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His cold tone made her shiver, and she said in a low voice, "I just wanted to report to you that I will change Adrian's flight to tonight."

"I wouldn't care even if you asked him to never come back," he replied with a sneer.

Not daring to retort, Jennifer smiled awkwardly. "If there's nothing else, I'll head off."

She then promptly left and the huge office fell silent.

Theodore tapped his chin thoughtfully, looking at the two phones on the desk.

He looked to be deep in thought as if contemplating an investment worth millions.

As soon as Ariana hung up the phone, she began to regret it. In a trance, she stood in the corner.

Her mind was racing, and she was contemplating calling him back.

But she flinched at the thought of Theodore's cold voice. He was busy, and she shouldn't disturb him anymore. Besides, he might not be willing to help her.

It was getting dark and the bitter wind made Ariana feel even colder.

After flipping through her contact list, she found that no one could help her except for Theodore.

She was at a loss. Just then, a message popped up on her screen.

It was a question mark.

Only then did she realize she hadn't replied to Holden's message yet.

She clicked on the message, and replied hastily, "Sorry, I have something to deal with. Talk to you later."

Within a second, Holden replied, "Is it about Sarah? I just saw the news."

Ariana wasn't surprised that Holden would pay attention to it.

The news was all over the Internet.

Without thinking too much, she quickly typed her reply. "Yes, Sarah's child is missing."

“Let me help you,” came his reply.

She sent three question marks in reply. She was so surprised.

Ariana had never thought of asking Holden for help. Being friends was one thing, but she didn’t want

there to be any misunderstanding.

She had to avoid any suspicion.

“Are you serious? Is there anything you want in return for helping me?”

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There was no reply for several minutes.

She rubbed her nose which was red and frozen and thought Holden must be busy with something else.

Those must have just been casual words. He didn’t really mean it

Then, she was about to call the company’s public relations department to see if there was any other

way.

At that moment, Betsy called from the room, “Ariana, come here!”

Ariana came running in, thinking something bad had happened.

To her surprise, she saw that three helicopters were hovering outside the window.

The force of the wind blowing in messed up Ariana's hair, her eyes full of shock.

There was a knock at the door. Betsy opened it to find a group of people in dark blue uniforms standing on the doorstep. There was a black hound in front of one of them.

"Is Ms. Ariana Edwards here? We are a professional search team managed by the BRD Group. We've divided into three teams, and are on standby in every corner of Ivebridge. As long as we get some information about the missing child from Ms. Edwards, we can begin the search."

Ariana was taken aback by the swiftness of Holden's actions. She had initially believed his words to be mere idle talk, but he had truly meant them.

She quickly regained her composure and, with a gentle tug, guided Sarah, who was still in a state of shock, toward the door, "I am Ariana," she informed the team leader, "and this is the mother of the missing child. Please let me know what information you require in order to find her."

"We'll need photos, her name, age, and a description of what she was wearing when she went missing," replied the team leader.

The search team promptly gathered the necessary information from Sarah, exchanging contact information with her.

In a matter of minutes, the entire search team in Ivebridge sprang into action.

As the helicopters took off with the search personnel, Sarah finally collected herself. She hugged

Ariana tightly and expressed her heartfelt gratitude. "Thank you, Ariana. Thank you for calling in the search team."

Ariana comforted Sarah with a pat on her back, "Don't worry. I'm confident that Alina will be found soon with the help of BRD Group."

Despite Ariana's reassurance, Sarah still had some concerns, recalling what the team leader had mentioned earlier.

Sarah was taken aback by BRD Group's generosity in sending out their search team and numerous helicopters to scour the entire city.

Sarah stammered, "Ariana, you and Adrian really..." She stumbled over her words, feeling guilty for having any improper thoughts about the relationship between Ariana and Adrian.

Despite her best efforts, Sarah couldn't help but feel shocked by the extent of their support. So, it was only reasonable for her to doubt the relationship between Ariana and Adrian.

Sarah drew in a deep breath and went on, "Jennifer is kind, but if something does go wrong, I'll stand with you."

Ariana was at a loss for words and responded, "That's not the case, don't worry too much. I'll clarify things for you later."

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Upon hearing these words from Ariana, Sarah felt comforted and ceased her inquiries.

As the ominous darkness descended upon the city, the three anxious women found themselves unable to sit still in their hotel room. The lure of the search for little Alina was too strong to ignore, so they ventured out into the bustling streets.

The nightlife of the city was in full swing, with streams of cars and hordes of people filling the streets.

Despite the lateness of the hour, the city remained teeming with activity, offering little respite for those on the search for Alina.

As the hours ticked by, no word came from the search team, and their own desperate searches around the area where Alina vanished proved fruitless. The oppressive, impenetrable night seemed to mock their efforts, making the already difficult task of finding the missing girl all the more challenging.

Sarah broke down in despair and took a seat on a park bench, shielding her face with her hands as she wept. "What are we going to do?" she asked, her voice trembling. "Has Alina really been taken by some evil person?"

As Sarah's sobs filled the air, Ariana tried to hide her own fear and put on a brave face for her friend.

She sat down beside her and spoke softly. "I'm sure Alina is safe. We just have to have faith and trust in the search team. Ivebridge is known for its strict security measures and it's highly unlikely for anything harmful to happen here."

Sarah's mind was filled with fear as she imagined the worst. She couldn't bear the thought of Alina being taken by someone with ill intentions. She struck her head in guilt and cried out in despair, "It's been so long and there's still no news. Something must have happened to Alina. It's all my fault. If I had never become a singer, Alina would not have been targeted because of her congenital defect. She's just a child. She shouldn't have to endure this."

Ariana held Sarah's hands tightly and sobbed, "This is not your fault. Pursuing your dreams and returning to the entertainment industry to provide for your child is not a mistake. The real mistake lies

with the intrusive reporters and the insensitive Internet users who spread false information for their own

enjoyment.”

Sarah felt overwhelmed with guilt, tears streaming down her face. “It’s all my fault,” she said. “I

shouldn’t have returned to the stage, shouldn’t have been so determined to prove myself. Now Alina is suffering the consequences.”

Meanwhile, Betsy, who had been quiet, was also moved to tears by Sarah’s distress.

The ringing of Ariana’s phone was a ray of hope amidst their sorrows.

She answered the call quickly and listened intently. “Ms. Edwards,” the voice on the other end said.

“We’ve found the child.”

“Where is she?” Ariana asked, her eyes wide with joy and surprise.

Sarah stopped crying and looked at Ariana. “They found her?” she asked anxiously.

Still listening to the phone, Ariana nodded.

“The child was found by a young man named Aziel Carrillo. He refused to hand her over to us and wants to give her back to you in person. He is on his way to you now,” the team leader said.

Hearing Aziel's name, Ariana looked surprised. "It's him! Do you have his real-time location? We want to track him."

"Yes. Just hang on a moment. Let me find it..."

Just then, Ariana raised her eyes and saw a car parked across the street. A tall, thin man was waving at them from the driver's seat, and he was holding a little girl in his arms.

"I see him," Ariana said and hung up the phone.

She turned and was about to point him out to Sarah but found that she had already rushed out.

"Alina! Mommy's here!"

Sarah waved frantically at the girl as she crossed the street

She was so excited that she didn't pay attention to a car speeding toward her.

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"Watch out!"

Just as Sarah was about to get hit, Ariana pulled her out of the way.

Sarah paid this no attention, her eyes fixated on Alina.

Ariana paid attention to the traffic for her, and only let her cross when the lights turned green for them.

A group of reporters rushed out of nowhere and surrounded them.

Microphones were shoved into Sarah's face, and questions were being yelled at her.

"Miss Flynn, who is the father of the child?"

"Didn't you have check-ups during your pregnancy? Since the baby had a congenital defect, why did you give birth to it?"

"Miss Flynn, do you have an explanation?"

"So, was it you who cheated first, and Lynch was made the scapegoat, who was left to raise another man's child?"

This made Ariana incredibly angry. She shielded Sarah from the reporters, and reached out to push the microphones away. "Get out of the way. Otherwise, I'll call the police! We will tell you the truth ourselves. There's no need to block us and interrogate us!"

"The truth is that Sarah had an affair and gave birth to a child with a congenital defect." One of the reporters was not convinced by this, and mocked her.

Now trembling with anger, Ariana didn't say anything, but called the police.

"The child is in that car! And there's a man with her!" someone in the crowd shouted, and all the

reporters' eyes turned to the car.

Suddenly there was uproar.

"Is he Sarah's new boyfriend?"

"Maybe. Or he could be the child's biological father."

"Shit! This is big news! Come on!"

The reporters all rushed forward to try and interview this mysterious man.

Sarah desperately tried to stop them. "Please don't bother my child. She's young and doesn't know

anything. If you have anything, just come to me. I'll tell you whatever you want to know."

She started to cry as she begged them. It looked like she was on her last straw.

Ariana also tried her best to help stop the reporters but it was useless.

They were like hungry rats who had finally found a piece of fresh cake. None of them were willing to let

it go.

The crowd burst into exclamation again.

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"The child! Stop her!"

Ariana raised her head to see that Alina had somehow escaped from the car and ran across the road toward Sarah.

A large truck was driving at full speed, and seemed unable to stop in time.

“No!” Sarah screamed in alarm.

Sarah was paralyzed with fear. Her heart pounded in her chest as she watched in horror as the truck barreled toward Alina.

But in a split second, a small figure raced out, shielding the child in their arms before tumbling into the bushes along the side of the road.

Ariana, who had stepped in to protect Alina, was quick to put one hand on her belly, even as she fell.

Her thick clothing cushioned the impact, sparing the life in her belly from any harm.

Cars in the vicinity came to a halt, clearing a path for Ariana and Alina.

Ariana walked to Sarah with Alina in her arms. The child was too frightened to speak. To calm her,

Ariana gently stroked Alina’s head.

Sarah hugged Alina tightly, tears streaming down her face. She cried out to the reporters, “Stop this!

Can't you just leave us alone? I'll leave the show and the entertainment industry, is that enough?"

The ear-splitting roar was like a final plea from a trapped, desperate beast.

The reporters were momentarily hushed, glancing at one another.

Some began to waver, realizing that perhaps they had taken things too far. "We don't mean to make things difficult for you," one of them muttered. "We simply want the truth."

Ariana fixed her gaze upon the reporters and spoke firmly. "The truth will be given to you, but I beg of you to not interfere with us in such a dangerous manner. What happened just now is warning enough of what could occur if we continue down this path."

The reporters remained silent, some of them appearing to have second thoughts about their actions.

Eventually, they began to disperse, possibly fearing that someone could get hurt.

As they left, Ariana let out a sigh of relief. However, before she could fully relax, her attention was caught by the flash of a camera.

Ariana's gaze landed on the man responsible for causing the chaos-the male reporter who had been the most aggressive and shouted that Alina was across the street.

Trying to control her anger, Ariana approached the reporter.

“Sir, can you stop taking photos?” She reached for his arm, and tried to move it away.

The reporter, however, was too strong and easily shook off Ariana’s grip and continued to snap pictures of Sarah and Alina, causing Alina to break into tears once again.

“Stop that, you’re scaring the child!” Ariana, unable to control her anger, struck the reporter’s camera out of his hand.

The camera fell to the ground and was damaged with a crack. The reporter became angry and pushed Ariana’s shoulder. He pointed at her and said harshly, “I’m doing my job of taking pictures. What can you do to stop me? Sarah is nothing special, just a woman who is available to anyone. She thinks she’s above it all? Let me tell you, I have the pictures and I will expose her. Watch and see.”

When Ariana was pushed, she stumbled and hit her forehead against a metal pole, causing her head to buzz with pain.

In response, Betsy was filled with anger and was ready to confront the male reporter. She shouted,

“Quiet! You’re a vicious liar! How dare you hit her

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But the reporter was unrepentant and instead accused Betsy of trying to extort money from him by

making false accusations. He retorted, "Where did you see me hit her? Don't make false accusations and try to get money from me!?"

When they heard the commotion, the other reporters who were departing turned back. More and more people started to gather and observe the scene.

Just then, Aziel drove the car over and asked Betsy and the others to get into the car.

Betsy, who was still fuming with anger, managed to control herself and quickly got into the car with Ariana and Sarah, who held Alina in her arms.

They swiftly left the area and the reporters finally scattered.

With disdain, the male reporter, Fitzgerald Montgomery, spat in the direction where Ariana had left, before wiping his camera.

He then retreated to a secluded area and made a phone call.

"Mr. Jasper Anderson, it's done as you instructed," he whispered into the phone. "I have all the necessary photos, and there are even some extras that could be used against Sarah's agent."

Fitzgerald cautiously looked around, ensuring that no one was nearby to overhear the conversation and

steal his opportunity.

“Good. Send the photos to me. I’ll ask someone to transfer the money to you.”

Fitzgerald smiled at the response and urged, “Please send the payment at double the agreed amount. I

will send the photos as soon as the funds are received.”

“Okay,” replied the voice on the other end of the call.

Fitzgerald beamed with joy and packed up his equipment, heading out. As he rounded a corner, he

suddenly collided with two individuals dressed in black, causing his camera to drop from his grasp.

“What the hell! Can’t you watch where you’re going?”

Fitzgerald shouted in frustration. He reached for his camera, but someone beat him to it and whisked it

away.

Fitzgerald raised his eyes and saw a sleek black luxury car parked in front of him. The man sitting in

the back seat had a menacing and chilly expression on his face as he snatched the camera from his

subordinate and waved it at Fitzgerald. ©

Theodore looked through the camera roll, which showed a group of reporters pushing and bullying

Ariana. Anger welled inside him.

Outside the car window, Fitzgerald was being held back by bodyguards and yelling, "Give me my camera back! I'll call the police!"

Theodore released his frown, and threw the camera aside casually. He raised his head and chuckled.

Bending his finger playfully at Fitzgerald, it was as if he was playing with a cat or a dog.

Fitzgerald had been brave to yell at Theodore a minute before.

But now, Theodore's smile somehow confused and frightened Fitzgerald.

Once the bodyguards let go of him, he hesitantly walked to the side of the car. He swallowed, and plucked up his courage before asking, "What do you want?"

"I want this camera. Name your price." Theodore pointed at the camera with his slender finger.

This seemed to dispel Fitzgerald's fear, and his eyes lit up with joy. "You.. you really want to buy it?"