

## **Unconscious 51**

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The sleep cleared off Ariana's eyes in a split second. She got out of bed. She checked the bathroom and ran out of the bedroom, looking for the child.

Ariana looked everywhere, but Alina was nowhere to be found. She finally stopped at the stairs leading to the fourth floor."

It was the only floor left to be checked.

All the lights were turned off here. Using her phone as a flashlight, Ariana walked to the fourth floor and called Alina's name in a low voice.

She walked down the corridor until she arrived at few meters away from the last room. Helen's words echoed in her head.

Ariana wondered who secret was hidden in the room at the end of the fourth floor.

A strange energy pushed Ariana forward. She slowly put her hand on the doorknob and twisted it.

The door opened immediately.

It was three o'clock in the morning. The rain got heavier, accompanied by thunder and lightning.

The door of the room opened slightly in front of Ariana. A force was sucking her in as two voices fought in her head. One voice told her to go in while the other told her not to. Ariana stopped, indecision clouding her mind.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated. She almost jumped out of her skin.

She closed the door and stepped backward.

She recalled how serious Judy was when she told her this room was forbidden.

“Don’t do it, girl,” said Ariana, shaking her head. She’d better not cross Theodore’s bottom line. She took a deep breath and turned around.

Before walking away, she turned to look at the doorknob in confusion. Since this room was out of bounds, why didn’t Theodore lock it up? Why was it so easy to gain entry?

Her phone vibrated again. This time, it was a call from Theodore!

What the hell! Why was he calling her at this time? Did he somehow know what she was up to? No, that couldn’t be possible!

Ariana took a deep breath and answered the phone, Theodore’s impatient voice came immediately.

“Come to my room, right now!”

He then hung up.

The call lasted no more than five seconds.

Ariana's eyebrows arched in confusion. She tiptoed away from the fourth floor and went to Theodore's room. She didn't want to keep him waiting, for fear of incurring his wrath.

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Her heart was lodged firmly in her throat as she knocked on the door. She pushed the door open after Theodore responded.

She got in and was even more confused to find him lying awake on his bed in the dimly lit room.

"What's up? Why are you awake at this time? Do you feel any discomfort?"

Instead of answering her question, Theodore lifted the quilt.

Alina, who Ariana had been looking everywhere for, was curled up right next to Theodore. She was holding his arm tightly.

"Didn't you say that she wouldn't disturb me? How come you didn't even notice when she left your room?" Theodore's eyebrows knitted, and impatience was written all over his face.

"Ermm. I, was fast asleep. It seems she's frightened by the thunder" Ariana smiled apologetically.

“Don’t be mad. I’ll take her away.”

“Be quick about it!”

Theodore didn’t move a muscle. He just stared at Ariana as if he was about to flare up.

Ariana quickly bent over to pick up the child.

Much to their surprise, Alina held on to Theodore’s sleeve and refused to let go.

“Sweetie, you can’t sleep here. Let’s go back to my room, okay?” Ariana crooned softly, trying to loosen

Alina’s grip.

Alina sobbed with her eyes closed. She grabbed Theodore’s sleeve with her other hand and struggled

with all her might.

Ariana felt sorry for her, but she had to break the girl’s grip.

Suddenly, Alina burst into tears and her face turned red. She grabbed hold of Theodore’s arm tightly

with both hands.

Theodore tried to get rid of her grip, but Alina’s cry grew louder.

“I’ll take her away right now!”

Ariana pulled the little girl away. She used so much strength that it ripped Theodore's silk robe open.

His beautiful collarbone and hard chest came into view.

Theodore froze for a second.

Ariana gasped and looked away, her face turning red.

"Damn it! She drooled on my clothes. What's all this?" Theodore angrily cursed as soon as he regained

his composure.

Ariana took a quick look at his robe, and saw that there was a damp splotch.

She coughed and tried to fasten his robe back.

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"It's no use. It's already wet. I refuse to wear it anymore. Take it away." Theodore said arrogantly.

After a short pause, she pulled open the collar of his robe again. "Then let it stay this way. It'll dry

faster."

Theodore didn't know what to say. His face fell.

Ariana took a piece of tissue from the bedside table to wipe the supposed saliva. A few seconds later,

she muttered, "This isn't saliva, but tears. It will dry in no time. Just wear it like that for the rest of the

night, okay?"

"That's not the main issue here. How can I sleep like this?" Theodore uttered in a gloomy tone and looked at the kid who was holding his arm tightly again.

Alina was no longer weeping. She only sobbed and sniffed from time to time.

Ariana suddenly sneezed, and her head began to ache.

Although the heating was on in this room, she was freezing because she was wearing only a silk nightdress. She sneezed over and over again.

This irritated Theodore greatly. He stared at his wife, who was trembling and pursed his lips.

"Sorry about..." Just as Ariana sniffed and began to say something, he scooted to the side to make room for her.

"Get under the quilt and make her sleep before you take her away. I can't handle any more of her sobbing." Theodore said flatly.

Ariana zoned out with her eyes fixed on his handsome face.

"Hurry up! If you keep dawdling. I'll throw you two out together." Theodore frowned. His patience was running thin.

Ariana came back to her senses. She lifted the quilt and lay down carefully. A comforting warmth enveloped her as soon as she was tucked in.

The sudden warmth made Ariana sleepy. She pressed her head into the pillow, breathing deeply. A pleasant scent filled her nostrils.

Ariana wondered if her bed felt cold to Alina, so the little girl looked for something warmer and accidentally came to Theodore's room.

Ariana was silent for a while. Theodore glanced over to her to see her eyes were drooping. "If you dare fall asleep first, I'll throw you out," he said coldly.

Ariana grumbled into the pillow, "I know what I am doing. Why are you so angry?"

He was being difficult and cold-hearted for no apparent reason.

She adjusted herself and started patting Alina's back, trying to comfort her to sleep.

Alina's sobs gradually subsided, and she held Theodore's arm tightly. It was as if she was stubbornly holding onto a beloved toy.

"Alina, do you want to hear a story? Have you heard the story of Little Red Riding Hood?" Ariana asked

gently.

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When Alina didn't respond, Theodore sneered, "Would that really help? That's a horrible story. It could traumatize her."

At this, Ariana raised her eyebrows in challenge. "Okay, how about you tell her a story?"

He snorted at this, his face turned away. "I would never do such a childish thing."

"Yes, you're right, I'm being childish." Ariana knew there was no point in arguing. After Theodore's comments, she opted for singing a lullaby instead of telling the stories.

A soft melody soon filled the room. Her voice was sweet and warm, like a spring breeze. Slowly but surely, it dispelled the chill of the winter night.

The rain had stopped pattering on the windows and it was pitch dark outside.

Ariana's features were lit by the warm yellow lamp light. Seeing this, Theodore could feel his body gradually relax.

Her presence here late at night seemed to bring some warmth into his cold heart.

The soft hum of her voice in his ears gently pulled him into a trance. He couldn't tell whether he was

dreaming or not.

As a child, his mother had also sung a lullaby like this to send him to sleep when he fell sick. It was one of the only nice memories he had.

Little by little the humming became quieter before it faded away completely.

He turned to Ariana to see she was fast asleep. Alina cradled in her arms.

Theodore frowned and wanted to shake Ariana awake, but for some reason, he didn't make a move.

He stared at her sleeping face for a while. She was too trusting. How could she let her guard down and fall asleep next to a man?

But Theodore decided to let her sleep in peace.

He then closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep himself.

The next morning, Ariana woke up in a daze.

Staring at the chandelier above, she wracked her brain for what had happened and where she was.

She had no such chandelier in her room.

Then, all of a sudden, her memory flooded back to her. She hit her forehead with the palm of her hand.

She had fallen asleep while trying to put Alina to bed.

Sitting up, she pulled the quilt up to cover her body. But Theodore was nowhere to be seen.

She was surprised. Why hadn't he thrown her out last night?

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Next to her, Alina was still fast asleep. She stroked her head lovingly and her mind wandered to the possible baby she was carrying.

"I need to go for an examination in two weeks," she muttered to herself.

This thought brought with it mixed feelings, Now she wasn't sure whether she wanted a baby or not.

It seemed that neither Theodore nor Helen wanted her to have the baby.

With a sigh, her mind focused back on the present. She leaned over Alina and tucked her in before getting out of the bed herself. She needed to go to her room and freshen up.

As she opened the door, she spied Judy passing by in the corridor. When they locked eyes, Judy's expression went from surprise to joy before landing on worry.

Judy looked down at Ariana's stomach. "Mrs. Anderson, you might be pregnant. You better be careful," she warned her, earnestly.

"Judy, it's not what it looks like. We didn't..." Ariana hurriedly explained, her cheeks flushed.

“I know, I know. Just be careful.” Judy interrupted her with a knowing look. “It’s a good thing Mr.

Anderson is willing to be close to you now. It’s progress. Keep it up.”

The sound of a wheelchair approaching came from behind her as she spoke.

Theodore appeared by the elevator, his handsome face expressionless. He was wearing a matching shirt and sweater, a pile of documents resting on his thighs. He was clearly busy with work.

Judy stopped talking as soon as she saw him. She greeted Theodore respectfully, before hurrying downstairs.

Ariana hadn’t yet recovered from her embarrassment and couldn’t face Theodore at the moment. She just said hello quickly and ran back to her room.”

When Alina finally awoke, it was almost ten o’clock. Ariana helped the little girl put on the hat and scarf

Judy had prepared upon her request. Then she took Alina to meet Molly Flynn, Sarah’s mother.

Molly had been waiting for quite some time. She thanked Ariana and then she and Alina got into a taxi.

Ariana watched as it drove away, feeling a little sentimental.

Just then, her phone beeped. It was a message from Sonia.

She read it before hailing a taxi.

With red curly hair, Sonia sat at a corner table of a coffee shop in the south of the city.

Her face, which was sweet and delicate, was focused on her laptop screen. She was furiously typing, fighting against internet trolls.

The chimes on the cafe door sounded. She raised her head to see who it was, and her eyes lit up. She clapped her hands together. "I'm over here, Ariana!"

Ariana turned her head, dimples appearing in her cheeks. "Sonia, you look on edge."

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"I'm so excited to see you!" Sonia exclaimed before running toward Ariana. The two sat down and

Sonia said, "You're so bad! We haven't seen each other for so long. Did you not miss me at all?"

"Why do you say that? Of course I missed you," Ariana said affectionately as she leaned over and pinched Sonia's cheek playfully.

Sonia snorted at this, and took out the flash drive from her bag. "This is what you came for. Lynch is going to attend the fashion banquet in three days' time. No media is allowed; it's very private. You can't get in without an invitation."

Taking the flash drive, Ariana asked, "How am I going to get an invitation?"

"It's an exclusive banquet. It's not easy to get one Sonia scratched her head, lost in thought. And then something crossed her mind. She knocked on the table excitedly. "You know what? I have the guest list. It took some work getting it. You can take a look and see if you know anyone on there. There must be plus ones at an event like this. If there's anyone you know, they could take you with them."

Ariana nodded, her hopes rising again. "Let me see the list."

Sonia opened the document on her laptop and turned the screen to face Ariana. "This isn't the full version, but it was the best I could get."

"It'll be enough." Ariana scanned quickly through the list and noticed some familiar names. Adrian, the vice president of the BRD Group and Ivan, the Italian designer she had met the day before.

After considering the options, she pulled out Ivan's business card from her purse and dialed his number.

The phone connected and she said her name.

On the other side of the phone, Ivan sounded very enthusiastic. "I'm glad to hear from you so soon after our meeting How can I help you, Ms. Edwards?"

Ariana smiled. After some small talk, she revealed the reason for calling.

Ivan sounded surprised. "Do you know what the purpose of the banquet is?"

Ariana hesitated before asking, now feeling uncertain, "Isn't it a banquet for people from the fashion field?"

Ivan chuckled at this. "I can get you in, under one condition."

Three days later, Ariana was seated at the dressing table in a private dressing room close to the banquet hall.

She had on a beautiful black dress that was specially made for her.

On her face was delicate makeup. The mascara she had on made her eyes smoky. A faint smile played on her lips at this moment. To say the least, Ariana was looking like a queen who would attract the attention of anyone that set eyes on her.

Ivan, who was standing beside her, said as he looked at her face in the mirror, "God really took extra time creating you. I always know a beauty when I see one. My design sits well on you. Can't you consider modeling for the commercial? I'd really love for you to be the one to do that."

With a smile, Ariana declined again. “Modeling is really not my thing. All I’m interested in now is being a good agent.”

A gloom fell on Ivan’s face immediately. The next second, he snapped his fingers. “Wait a minute. I’ll go get the star of tonight.”

“Okay,” Ariana nodded. She rubbed her palms together with enthusiasm. The star Ivan referred to was a set of jewelry he had worked on for years. It was also the focus of the banquet.

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Before Ariana called him, she had no idea that the banquet was a jewelry auction. Such auctions were usually headlined by designers like Ivan or luxurious brands who showed their works through models on the runway.

The potential customers for this auction were businessmen like Adrian and their dates. They would all bid for the items, and each piece would go to the highest bidder.

Ariana was Ivan’s model for tonight. All she had to do was to walk the runway like a pro so his design would be sold at a high price..

This event wasn’t attended by just anybody. The guests were either rich or powerful, or both. It was a

good chance for her to become acquainted with these kinds of people.

She owed Ivan a great deal for agreeing to bring her here.

At the thought of this, Ariana's mind went to Theodore. Anderson Group was a big company. As the CEO, Theodore must have received an invitation. He rarely went out since the accident, so there was a high chance that he wouldn't show up.

Suddenly, Ivan returned with a white wooden box in his hands.

"Have a look. I think it would suit you perfectly." With a face-splitting smile, Ivan opened the wooden box and revealed the gorgeous jewelry.

Ariana's eyes shot many hearts as soon as she saw the jewelry. She was stunned by its beauty even though Ivan had spoken so much about it before.

"Oh, it's so beautiful!" Ariana did a little clap as she praised it. No woman could resist the temptation of jewelry, and she was no exception.

Ivan was very pleased to see her reaction. He put on a pair of gloves, took out the jewelry, and put it on her.

"The beauty of jewelry increases by a hundred times when it's worn by the right person. And you are

the right person for this piece, Ariana.” Ivan clasped his hands, looking at her through the mirror. “Trust me, all eyes will be on you tonight.”

Ariana blushed. “Isn’t it too high-profile?”

“Not to worry, this is a private banquet. No reporters are allowed, so you can rest assured that your photos won’t go public. Also, the models will wear masks while they walk the runway.” Ivan comforted her with a smile.

The knots in Ariana’s stomach loosened up immediately. She began to look forward to modeling the jewelry.

The banquet hall was already filled with many fashion, moguls, celebrities, and businessmen.

Everywhere was decorated so beautifully that one would think the event was much more than a runway show and auction.

Even the nameplates on the table were inlaid with diamonds.

Numerous fragrant roses and designed-to-perfection lights lined the runway. It was as if the runway would lead anyone who walked on it into a rose garden.

Soft pop music began playing in the background. Soon, many tall and elegant models began catwalking down the runway one after the other.

When it was almost Ariana's turn, she put on her mask and walked forward. Ivan winked at her. "Don't forget our little arrangement. Good luck!"

Ariana nodded with a smile and walked out in her high heels.

Adrian sat with his arms folded at the VIP table very close to the runway. Fashion shows weren't his thing. After looking at a couple of models, he lowered his head and tapped away on his mobile phone.

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He was texting Theodore, asking him to drop the act. He felt that it was high time Theodore stopped pretending to be crippled and came back to BRD Group for good.

The past few weeks had been hell for Adrian. He was almost losing his mind after filling in for the CEO for too long. He didn't even have time to go on dates or turn up at different clubs like he badly wanted

to. Work was killing him!

Adrian yawned tiredly after he got no response from Theodore.

Suddenly, the music changed. The light in the banquet hall became dim. However, the runway was

brightly lit.

Adrian looked up at the model on the runway His eyebrows crinkled in utter surprise and uncertainty.

The model was dressed in a black flowing dress. Its hemline was adorned with several irregular and

small diamonds. The light reflected on the diamonds, causing shimmers on the walls of the banquet

hall and other objects. Her skin was fair, contrasting with the ruby pendant sitting on her chest.

Rubies were not rare jewels for the sophisticated people here, so this one didn't attract too much

attention.

What attracted Adrian's attention was the model who wore it. He blinked a few times. The model

seemed vaguely familiar to him. Although half of her face was covered by the mask, her lips and sharp

chin were bare.

Just as he wondered where he had seen those lips and chin before, the woman turned around.

She raised her hand lazily and the cloth on her back caught fire and blazed up. The audience

exclaimed in astonishment.

The fire went out as quickly as it started. The back of her dress changed into a sexy deep V- shape,

revealing the model's beautiful shoulder blades. The black thorny necklace sat on them.

The model catwalked to both sides of the runway, placing her hand on her hip occasionally. Her smoky eyes swept over the spell-bound audience at every turn.

Adrian brought himself back from oblivion just in time. He took a picture of the model and sent it to Theodore.

Back in the Anderson family's residence, Theodore was preoccupied with work in his study.

His phone had been vibrating for quite some time now.

He picked it up, intending to turn it off for good. However, what popped up on the screen drew his attention. He clicked on the photo immediately.

"Isn't this..."

Theodore frowned and then dialed Horace's number.

"Get the car ready, now!"

Ariana walked back to the backstage area, applause ringing in her ears.

Once she reached her dressing room, she collapsed onto a chair and took a deep breath.

She would be lying if she said she hadn't been nervous. Any mistake, no matter how small, would be

blown out of proportion. Ivan trusted her so much and she didn't want to let him down. She had to be perfect.

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Luckily for her, everything had gone well.

Her dressing room door opened, and Ivan entered, absolutely beaming. He approached her excitedly and gave her a big hug. "Ariana, your performance was amazing! The bidding for the jewelry has exceeded our expectations. So far we've got the highest bid out of all the items, and it's still rising as we speak!"

Ariana returned his smile. "That's great! Your design is amazing. You deserve this.

Ivan walked over to the table, shaking his head with a smile. He poured out two glasses of wine and handed one to Ariana. "You get half the credit. I told you it takes the right person to bring out its charm. You were that right person."

They clinked glasses, and she said with a wide smile, "Of course. The famous Ivan Russo has great taste.

His smile grew even bigger as he looked at her, full of admiration.

“I hope we’ll have another opportunity to work together in the future.” He checked his watch and asked her, “Would you like to come with me to the dinner party later?”

Ariana contemplated this for a while. “I’m afraid I can’t. I have something I have to deal with.”

Not wanting to pry, he simply said, “I understand. You do what you have to do.”

With that, he took the jewelry and left Ariana alone in the dressing room.

She sat on the sofa and waited. She finally left the room just as the male model show was about to finish.

The atmosphere was just as hot as in the female. model show. The audience was full of distinguished women..

After the last piece of jewelry had been displayed, the models began walking off the runway one at a time.

Lynch handed over the jewelry to a member of staff, removed his mask and went back to the lounge.

He stood by the elevator, fiddling with his cufflinks as he waited. A charming young woman walked toward him from the other end of the corridor.

Despite how far away she was, he recognized her immediately, She had been the most eye- catching

model on the runway.

There was something unique about her he could tell, even though she wore a mask. It was impossible to take one's eyes off her incredible figure.

As he stared, the elevator opened. He didn't get in. Instead, as if drawn by some invisible force, he walked toward this mysterious woman.

Then he walked straight past her, his face looking straight ahead. He looked calm even though his heart was pounding fast.

A delicious scent filled his nostrils and something soft brushed over the back of his hand as he passed her. His skin prickled with goose bumps.

Lynch turned to look at her, and she returned his gaze, giving him a flirtatious smile before walking away.

A white room card fell from her hand and hit the floor.

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Smiling, Lynch picked it up and ran after her. "Excuse me, miss, you dropped something."

Ariana twirled around and her eyes met his again. They held eye contact for a long moment. She didn't

reach for the card.

Lynch was spellbound. Over all his years of working in the entertainment industry, seeing beautiful faces day in and day out, he had never seen eyes as striking as hers.

Now he grew curious to get to know about the owner of those eyes.

He swallowed hard. "Miss, is this your room card?" he asked, after she gave him no response.

Ariana chuckled. "Thank you, Mr. Bush."

His eyebrows raised, he asked, "You know who I am?" He was unable to contain his joy.

Ariana nodded. "Of course. I'm a fan of yours."

He couldn't help but feel some satisfaction. He should've known. All women were superficial and they deserved to be treated like playthings.

He would be lying if he said he didn't think this woman was beautiful. He felt himself being seduced by her.

Lynch forced these thoughts to the back of his mind. "We've only just met but I can tell you are the most dazzling woman tonight. You are certainly doing justice to that dress.

There was a hint of levity in his words. He scanned his eyes over her body, not bothering to hide his wondering gaze.

Ariana put her hand to her mouth. "Your praise means a lot to me. I'm so happy to hear you say that."

Lynch smiled, holding up the room card that he was still holding. "So, tonight?"

Her response came as a smile.

Lynch's heart skipped a beat. He reached out to remove her mask. He had to know what the rest of her face looked like.

Ariana's expression changed as Lynch reached to touch her mask. "I didn't expect you to be so rude," she exclaimed as she shoved his hand away.

"Are you playing some sort of game with me?" Lynch laughed, but his eyes were full of anger. He gritted his teeth and was about to scold her right back. But before he could say anything more, she snatched the room card away from him and pressed a note into his hand.

"What's this?" Lynch asked, looking down at his hand.

But when he raised his head again, she had already turned and left.

He opened the folded piece of paper. It had a phone number written on it.

His anger faded immediately. He watched the woman's slender figure as she walked away and laughed to himself. It was the first time he had met such an intriguing woman.