

Unconscious 571

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Typically, Sarah's space was a bit disheveled when she was preoccupied—melody drafts scattered across the floor, unwashed clothes haphazardly strewn about.

However, Aziel meticulously gathered each sheet of paper beside the piano, placing them neatly on the shelf. None of them were discarded.

He returned all the instruments to their rightful places. Sarah wanted to assist in cleaning, but Aziel insisted otherwise. With gentle insistence, he urged her back onto the sofa. Then, he disappeared into the kitchen, returning with a small cake and ice- cold drinks.

"It's been such a long time since you've seen each other. I'm sure you have plenty to talk about. I'll take care of these tasks alone. You don't need to worry about me,"

Aziel said, placing a fork on the table for Sarah. He played the role of a gracious host, acknowledging Ariana with a friendly greeting.

Afterwards, Aziel made his way to the balcony to wash Sarah's clothes. "What a wonderful partner!" Ariana exclaimed. "Clearly, Aziel adores you so much. He's treating you like his own daughter," she added, smiling at Sarah.

"Don't tease me," Sarah replied, feeling a bit bashful. But her expression suddenly shifted, and she leaped off the sofa, hurrying towards Aziel. "I'll wash them myself."

You don't have to do it."

Sarah took the bra from Aziel, her face turning red.

Aziel didn't think it was a big deal. He spoke gently. "It's alright, I'll finish it quickly. If you want to wash it yourself, you'll have to toss it into the washing machine. Since it's your underwear, you'd better wash it by hand."

"I'll wash it by hand," Sarah insisted, not allowing him to take over. She playfully smacked his arm and nudged him away from the sink.

Sarah and Aziel engaged in their usual banter, a hint of jealousy lingering in the air.

Aziel stood by, watching as Sarah tackled the task of washing the clothes.

Afterwards, he assisted her in drying them and carefully applied hand cream, a gesture that held more significance to him than tending to his own hands.

Meanwhile, Ariana, forced to witness their public display of affection, sat in the living room, leisurely sipping her tea. Envy seeped into her veins as she longed for a partner like Aziel.

Unfortunately, she had Theodore, a partner who wouldn't lift a finger to help with any household chores. Thoughts of Theodore weighed on Ariana, leaving her feeling downcast and annoyed.

"Ariana, I'm going to prepare dinner. What would you like to eat?" Aziel approached, rolling up his sleeves and holding a floral apron.

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Ariana pondered for a moment, about to speak, but Sarah beat her to it. "Today is Ariana's birthday, and someone should have prepared a feast. It's not our turn to celebrate her birthday."

Ariana found herself grappling with the daunting task of explaining her lack of recent communication with Theodore to Sarah. The sight of Sarah and Aziel getting along so well cast a shadow over her intentions to say her story today.

The scene of the two made her think that she couldn't voice her concerns without jeopardizing the pleasant atmosphere or revealing her innermost thoughts too much.

“Actually, I won't be able to stay for dinner tonight. I have other pressing matters to attend to,” Ariana said, pretending to be taken aback as she glanced at her watch.

“Can you believe it? It's nearly five o'clock already! I must dash. Else, traffic will catch up with me!” With her bag hastily slung over her shoulder, Ariana hurriedly left, escorted by Sarah to the door.

Just as they were about to bid farewell, Sarah's playful demeanor dissolved into seriousness as she asked, “What's happened between you and Theodore?”

Ariana, in the midst of changing her shoes, raised her head in surprise upon hearing the question.

Sarah let out a sigh and guided her to sit on the porch chair. “When I was teasing you earlier, I couldn't help but notice a flicker of unease in your eyes. Have you two had a fight? Have you divulged the news of your pregnancy to him?”

“You certainly have a keen eye for matters of the heart,” Ariana replied softly, feeling a twinge of embarrassment. “It's not a monumental issue per se. Theodore and I still have unresolved matters between us, which have been weighing heavily on me.”

“I understand,” Sarah empathized, removing a lollipop from her pocket and offering it to Ariana. “Indulging in some sweetness might bring you a modicum of solace.”

“Thank you.” Ariana accepted the lollipop, placing it in her mouth before speaking slowly. “I haven't revealed my pregnancy to him yet. I'm grappling with how to broach the subject.”

“While I may not comprehend your reasons for withholding such news from Theodore, I've always stood by your side as a friend,” Sarah reassured, wearing a warm smile as she draped an arm around Ariana's shoulder. “But as someone several years your senior, I feel compelled to advise you to confront this head-on.”

Evading problems only begets more complications. Regardless of the outcome, at least you won't be plagued by regret. I once hesitated and turned away from Aziel due to our age disparity and the scars of past relationships. However, his unwavering persistence touched me deeply. And now, I find myself in a relationship that embodies my long-held dreams!”

Sarah's joy was palpable as she continued, "It's the first time I've experienced a sense of contentment and stability. He has brought me immense happiness. Often, the power to choose resides within our own hands, Ariana. I hope you can grant yourself a chance. I can see how much you care for Theodore. In that case, don't shy away from tackling the problems head-on."

Ariana found Sarah's words to be remarkably insightful. Upon leaving Sarah's residence, Ariana headed downtown. Throughout her journey, she couldn't help but keep looking at her phone, hoping for a message from Theodore. However, only a notification from the restaurant she was called by yesterday

greeted her eyes every time. The message contained the detailed address and appointment time: six o'clock in the evening. But alas, it was already half past six!

She had made it explicitly clear last night that she wouldn't go there. Now that the scheduled time had passed, Theodore, being the proud man he was, might have already left. Or maybe he hadn't shown up at all!

Awash with sadness washed over Ariana, yet Sarah's words echoed in her mind, reminding her of the futility of avoidance. Should she go to the restaurant?

As the clock struck seven in the evening, Eleymond buzzed with vibrant energy. The entrance to Blue Night Manor welcomed a continuous stream of luxury cars.

Ariana stood hesitantly at the gate of the manor. It had been an hour past their agreed meeting time. Even if Theodore had shown up, he surely would have left by now.

Chapter: 573 Even if he hadn't arrived, the restaurant would automatically cancel the reservation if it exceeded the allotted time.

Ariana despised her own indecision. Just as Sarah had pointed out, she always evaded confronting problems head-on. This small matter had spiraled into irreparable consequences.

She knew she needed to gather the courage to seek answers.

The restaurant resided on the manor's second floor. After lingering at the gate for what felt like an eternity, Ariana caught the attention of an enthusiastic waiter who approached her. "Miss, how may I assist you?"

"I'd like to go to the restaurant on the second floor," she replied, her voice trembling slightly. Determined to put an end to her hesitation, she nervously disclosed her name to the waiter. "I had a reservation for a private room at half-past six, but it seems I've exceeded the time."

"No, Miss Edwards. Mr. Anderson has been patiently awaiting your arrival," the waiter responded, offering a bright smile and guiding her forward.

Ariana felt a tinge of surprise. Theodore hadn't departed yet?

With the thought of seeing him soon, her heart quickened its pace, a nervous flutter taking hold.

Ascending to the second floor, she entered a lavishly decorated French restaurant.

The patrons were dressed impeccably, and a grand piano graced the center of the room, its melodies filling the air.

Following the waiter, Ariana entered the designated private room and laid her eyes on Theodore, sitting with an air of poise in his chair.

"you're here." Theodore spoke calmly, as if unsurprised by Ariana's arrival. Ariana's discontent manifested as a dismissive snort, serving as her greeting.

The waiter courteously pulled out a chair for her, and she took her seat. With only Ariana and Theodore remaining in the room, her temper began to flare, her gaze icy as she stared at him. "Are you so certain that I would show up?"

"I can't be certain, but I'll wait for you until midnight," he responded earnestly, meeting her cold gaze. "Happy birthday, Ariana."

He looked at her with sincerity and handed her a delicate velvet box.

Ariana could already guess its contents. She averted her gaze, refusing to accept it, and queried, "What is it? | don't want it." He disregarded her inquiry, avoided any discussion she sought, and acted as if nothing had happened. It was truly exasperating. Ariana attempted to maintain a facade of aloofness, unaware that her emotions were seeping through.

Observing her childish demeanor, Theodore sighed helplessly. He didn't insist she take the box but instead opened it before her eyes.

Within rested a resplendent diamond ring, glistening in the light.

Ariana couldn't help but be captivated by its allure. She stole a quick glance and inquired, "What does this mean?"

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Theodore spoke patiently, his eyes filled with depth, capturing her gaze and refusing to release it. "Although we were married, you mentioned feeling a lack of reality.

During our wedding, you were the sole participant, as | had no part in it. So, | wish to make amends and start anew with a proposal."

His heartfelt words held her captive, rendering her unable to avert her eyes.

"Ariana, will you marry me?"

Ariana found herself momentarily entranced. Never in her wildest dreams did she imagine hearing those words from him. Noticing Ariana's prolonged silence, Theodore tenderly took her hand and slowly slipped the ring onto her slender finger.

Before he could finish placing it, she snapped out of her daze, clenching her fists and rejecting the ring. She sneered, "Is this the birthday gift you've prepared for me?"

Theodore was momentarily stunned before replying, "No, had planned a proposal, but it was canceled." Ariana regarded him with indifference. "I think we both know why it was canceled." Theodore quietly gazed at her, offering no explanation.

Ariana repeated to herself to remain calm and speak kindly. It was her birthday, and with so many people around, quarreling wouldn't be appropriate.

Yet, she couldn't shake off her disappointment. Why didn't he tell her the truth?

His nonchalant demeanor frustrated her. If Theodore didn't provide a clear explanation about what had transpired between him and Marley, she couldn't find it in herself to get along with him.

"and where is your gift for me? Or do you have something else to say?"

Theodore remained silent for a moment, disregarding her anger. He retrieved a larger velvet box and gently pushed it toward her.

"Open it. I believe you'll like it."

Ariana opened the box to reveal a bracelet adorned with numerous sparkling small diamonds and a large purple diamond fashioned in the shape of vines. At the edge of the clasp, there was a nameplate intricately designed in the form of a small key.

"I designed it myself and have been preparing it since last month. Your name is engraved on the nameplate." Theodore spoke softly, his gaze filled with tenderness.

"Allow me to put it on for you."

This time, Ariana didn't refuse. She simply let Theodore fasten the bracelet around her wrist. She couldn't bring herself to reject the gift. After all, it was his own design.

She pursed her lips, her fondness for the gift evident in her expression, even without uttering a word.

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After securing the bracelet around her wrist, Theodore didn't immediately release her hand. Instead, he cradled it within his own palm, gently caressing the back of her hand with his fingertips, as if reluctant to let go.

They hadn't shared any intimate contact in days. Ariana longed to embrace him and seek solace in his arms, behaving like a vulnerable child. But she couldn't. Her anger towards him still lingered, and she couldn't compromise on her principles.

Retracting her hand, she feigned indifference. "Are you so certain that I would come tonight? What would you do with this gift if I didn't show up?"

"I'm not certain whether you'll come or not," Theodore responded, a bitter smile playing on his lips. "But I'll wait until eleven o'clock. If you don't arrive, I'll have someone send this gift to your apartment."

"Can't you deliver it to my home yourself?" Ariana couldn't help but ask, a tinge of anger in her voice. When did he start keeping a distance from her?

He remained silent for a moment before finally speaking. "If you don't come, it means that you don't want to see me." The air grew heavy with a suffocating gloom, casting a pall over the room.

Beneath the table, Ariana's hands grazed the engraved nameplate. Etched upon it were not just her initials, but Theodore's as well, entwined as if forever bound.

She had no idea whether Theodore was trying to reassure her or if he just wasn't ready to give her the truth. Didn't she merit his trust?

Tears welled in Ariana's eyes, unbeknownst until Theodore's gentle touch graced her cheek.

Shame coursed through her as tears streamed down her face, but her sorrow refused to be contained. In a quivering voice, she asked, "Theodore, what mysteries are you hiding from me? Who is Marley, and what connection do you share with Helen?"

What secrets of the past do you guard? What am I to you? And why, oh why, do you withhold the truth from me?"

Theodore's countenance turned somber, a fleeting glimpse of dreadful cruelty flickering in his eyes before vanishing. He struggled to soften his voice, to soothe Ariana's weeping form. His heart ached as he looked at her tears. "You cannot embrace the true essence of who I am."

Ariana, bewildered, and with tears blurring her vision, peered at him through her teary eyes. "In my eyes, you were never perfect. Your nature encompasses both darkness and chill, dominance and self-righteousness. Yet, I love you still. At times, I despise myself for succumbing to your influence, and your words. I yearn for freedom; to be unburdened!"

Theodore's attempt to wipe away her tears was thwarted by her hand.

"So, I fail to comprehend." Ariana's emotions surged, her sobs still breaking through. "I have professed countless times that since falling in love with you, I shall embrace every facet, including your flaws. Why then do you show a desire to be with me, yet doubt me and deny me the truth? What am I to you? A mere substitute? An ornament? A damn plaything? Even Helen, it seems, holds a higher place in your heart than I do!"

"No, you hold great significance in my life. None can replace you," Theodore interrupted her.

"Important enough to go without a call for two days? Weren't you afraid that I would leave if I was totally disappointed in you and decided to let go?"

"No, you can't leave me. Not when I still breathe!" Suddenly, Theodore changed his demeanor. His expression hardened, and his eyes locked on hers. "Remember that you committed to being my partner for life!"

Ariana wiped away her tears with the back of her palm, took a long breath, and asked him, “Do you love me?”

They exchanged mute glances once she finished speaking. Theodore seemed to be trying to utter something as his lips twitched, but nothing more.

“Well, you don’t need to answer me.” Ariana was heartbroken. She looked down and replied mockingly, “Your answer is not that important. I don’t want to know, and I won’t bother you about it again!”

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When the air grew heavy with tension, a knock on the door of the private room broke the stalemate. A waiter dressed in a black uniform entered, pushing a dining cart adorned with a birthday cake and an array of delicious food.

Ariana averted her gaze, attempting to calm herself. Her eyes were red, adding to her pitiful appearance under the warm glow of the candlelight.

Theodore lowered his head, toying with a lighter, his eyes fixed on something. No one could discern his thoughts.

The waiter poured a glass of red wine for Theodore and placed fresh roses in front of Ariana. As the waiter tidied up the tableware, Theodore’s gaze fell upon the calluses on the waiter’s hand and a scar on the back of his hand.

Sensing Theodore’s scrutiny, the waiter discreetly covered his left hand with a towel.

Theodore remained silent, his composure intact. He calmly picked up the glass and took a sip before directing his gaze back to Ariana.

Silently, the waiter served the dishes—each one carefully chosen to be Ariana’s favorite. It was evident that Theodore had put genuine effort into celebrating her birthday.

Yet, the more considerate he was, the unhappier Ariana felt. She couldn't vent her anger. If only he had treated her poorly, she would have had a valid reason to engage in a heated argument.

Perhaps due to the intensity of her emotions earlier, her stomach suddenly churned, causing her to frown in discomfort. Casting a glance at the food on the table, she felt a wave of nausea wash over her.

"Are you feeling unwell?" Theodore immediately noticed her pallid complexion. He set down his glass, his expression filled with concern.

Ariana lowered her hand, which had been covering her belly, and shook her head.

"I'm fine. I'm just too hungry, so my stomach is acting up."

"Mr. Anderson, the dishes are ready. Call me if you need anything," the waiter informed before preparing to leave.

As the waiter was about to leave, Ariana stood up and turned to Theodore. "I need to use the bathroom."

Anxious, Theodore asked, "Are you leaving?"

"Don't worry. I won't leave," Ariana assured him. She offered Theodore a sincere and gentle smile. "I want to have a happy birthday. It's been many years since anyone celebrated it with me."

Ever since her mother's passing, Ariana hadn't celebrated her birthday. She intended to cherish the memory of Theodore's kind treatment, even if they couldn't ultimately be together.

"Do you want me to accompany you?" Theodore's worry for her remained persistent. He always had a lingering fear that she would leave him, causing him unnecessary insecurity.

Ariana averted her gaze from his face, fixing her eyes on the candles adorning the table. She spoke calmly. "Please trust me. Light the candles on the cake and wait for me to return."

Theodore nodded, watching her exit the room.

In the corridor, leaning against the door of the room, Ariana wore a somber expression. She pondered what would transpire between her and Theodore after the birthday celebration. Could she obediently stay with him despite knowing so little about him? Could she continue to place her trust in him?

Perhaps Helen was right—voluntarily leaving would be the better option.

Chapter: 577 Ariana's heart ached, and her stomach churned once again.

She pushed aside her troubling thoughts and hurriedly made her way to the bathroom, unaware that after she departed, the waiter who had delivered the food had quietly returned and locked the room door.

When Ariana reached the bathroom, the discomfort in her stomach had significantly eased. She glanced at her pale reflection in the mirror and retrieved a red lipstick from her bag to touch up her makeup.

Feeling relieved that her stomach was no longer causing her distress, she began to question whether she should return to the private room.

She realized she had become deeply entangled in her relationship with Theodore and found it difficult to resist him. His every action had an impact on her.

Despite being aware that he had kept many things hidden from her, she couldn't help but think in his favor and make excuses for him.

She believed he might be facing insurmountable difficulties, and she didn't want to abandon him. However, she wasn't willing to reconcile with him under these circumstances. She refused to be manipulated any longer. Until he honestly revealed everything to her, she didn't want her emotions to be controlled by him.

Ariana feared that her negative emotions would affect the baby growing inside her. Her emotions had already caused her stomach pain today.

Looking at her reflection in the mirror, she took a deep breath. She decided not to return to the private room and let this birthday be filled with regrets.

With her bag slung over her shoulder, she stealthily navigated the corridor, ensuring no one was around, and made her way to the fire exit. She avoided using the elevator, fearing that she might encounter Theodore's men.

The parking lot on the first floor served as the mansion's rear entrance. Glancing back at the direction of the second-floor restaurant, Ariana felt a pang of guilt. She had promised Theodore she would return and ask him to wait for her before leaving.

Recalling the obedient look in his eyes when he nodded, Ariana wavered.

However, she quickly reminded herself to stay rational. Theodore had lied to her multiple times, and one lie from her wouldn't be a big deal.

Ariana made up her mind, switched off her phone, and departed without looking back.

The Blue Night Manor stood in the heart of the bustling city center, prone to traffic congestion. Ariana struggled to flag down a taxi along the roadside, but after an extended period of time, she reluctantly resorted to taking a bus.

As she arrived at the bus station, a sense of unease weighed heavily on her mind.

She couldn't decipher if it was due to her guilt for deceiving Theodore.

After a prolonged wait, the bus finally arrived. Just as Ariana was about to board, a sudden exclamation caught her attention. A girl's voice echoed through the air, "Oh my god! Look! It's on fire!"

All heads turned towards the source of the commotion— a distant blaze consuming a structure. Ariana stood frozen, her heart racing uncontrollably.

“It appears that the Blue Night Manor is on fire.”

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“How unexpected! There are numerous buildings and people in proximity to the manor.”

“The fire is spreading rapidly. We should leave.”

“I happened to be passing by the Blue Night Manor when I heard a loud explosion. I wonder what caused it.” “The Blue Night Manor has a comprehensive fire safety system. How could this happen?”

The voices of concerned passersby mingled with the blaring sirens of approaching emergency vehicles. Ariana trembled, her entire body gripped by fear, and without a moment's hesitation, she sprinted toward the manor.

Ariana hurriedly rushed back, only to find the once-familiar place engulfed in flames.

The fire seemed to have started in the second-floor restaurant and quickly spread throughout the entire Blue Night Manor. The air was thick with the acrid scent of burning, accompanied by chaotic noises and terrified screams.

Police officers immediately formed a barricade, awaiting the arrival of fire trucks. Trembling, Ariana fumbled to turn on her phone, her hand slick with cold sweat. Her heart raced in her chest, anxiety consuming her.

She tried to console herself that Theodore, with his high status, could have already come out of the manor with the help of the waiters. What was more, he always had his driver and assistant with him, even though she hadn't seen them earlier. They must be waiting outside, ready to rescue him.

Ariana desperately prayed for Theodore's safety.

Regret washed over her like a tidal wave. If only she had returned to the private room earlier. She loathed herself for losing her temper with Theodore. In this moment, she realized that being angry about him keeping secrets was trivial. He would have eventually confided in her.

Amidst the frantic evacuation from the Blue Night Manor, Theodore was nowhere to be seen. Anxiety consumed Ariana as she quickly dialed his number as soon as her phone powered up.

Thankfully, after a few agonizing seconds, the call connected.

"Where are you?" she asked, panic and anxiety lacing her words. "I'm waiting for you."

His voice, hoarse and strained, came through on the other end of the line. Ariana was dumbfounded, her voice trembling as she asked, "What do you mean? Are you still in the private room?"

Then, tears streaming down her face, she implored, "Are you out of your mind? The place is on fire. Please, come out!" He tried to console her, "Don't cry. I'm making my way out now. Wait for me outside

Before she could utter another word, the line went dead. Frantically, she dialed his number again, only to be met with a busy tone.

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What was she supposed to do now? The thought of something happening to Theodore and him being unable to escape weighed heavily on her. After all, he relied on a wheelchair for mobility. It couldn't be easy for him to make his way out of the burning building.

Fear gripped Ariana, making it difficult for her to think clearly. Nevertheless, she couldn't stand idly by. Ignoring the trembling in her limbs, she hastened to the cordon and was about to enter the manor.

“Stop her!” came the urgent command. The policemen, taken aback by her audacity, swiftly pulled her back.

“Please, let me through! My husband is in the restaurant on the second floor, confined to a wheelchair. I must go up and save him!” Ariana pleaded, struggling to break free from their grasp and make another attempt to rush inside.

An elder policeman stepped forward, blocking her path. “Calm down. The fire is too fierce. We should wait for the professional team to arrive. If you go up now, you'll risk your life. The firefighters will be here soon.”

Just then, a voice erupted from the crowd, shouting, “The firefighters are here! But there are cars blocking their path at the intersection. We need help moving them!”

The chaos intensified. People cried out, shouted, and children frantically searched for their parents.

The attention of the policemen wavered, some rushing to aid in moving the obstructing vehicles while others attempted to maintain order. In that momentary distraction, nobody paid attention to Ariana. Seizing the opportunity, she rushed into the fire.

In the blink of an eye, the policeman realized what had happened but it was too late. Ariana had run past him into the burning

manor.

The manor was engulfed in roaring flames, a cloud of smoke burning through Ariana's lungs. She coughed violently, doubling over in pain. The building was basically empty as most of the people had run out in a craze.

The fire hadn't reached the first floor yet, but Ariana could barely see through the thick smoke.

She tried her best to distinguish which direction she needed to go in and stumbled her way to the front desk. She rifled through the contents that littered the desk until she found what she was looking for.

With trembling hands, she held onto a water bottle and picked up two towels. In a hurry, she removed the cap and wet the towels before covering her face with the damp towel. She immediately felt relief in her lungs as she shoved the other towel into her pocket.

It was the standard that such a luxurious manor would be equipped with fire emergency devices on every floor. Ariana looked around frantically until she found a sign that pointed to the bottom of the stairs. The fire extinguisher was nestled below the stairs and Ariana grabbed it before she rushed to the emergency access.

Fortunately, the fire had not engulfed the entirety of the stairs. Ariana made her way up, careful not to touch the burning hot banister. When she reached the second floor, she used the fire extinguisher to lower the flames. The piano in the middle of the room was charred black beyond repair. The chandelier on the ceiling swayed ominously as if threatening to crash onto the floor.

Ariana stumbled across the burnt floor, swaying slightly on her feet. She panted through the heat as sweat dripped down her temples.

Surveying the surroundings, she found the private room at the corner of the corridor. She clutched the fire extinguisher in her hands and ran towards the room.

She slowly turned the doorknob and discovered that there was a metal lock on the door!

Murder!

The word flashed in her mind as the hair on the back of her neck stood on end. A rising suspicion entered her mind. What if the fire had been premeditated? If not, then how could only the private room with Theodore be locked? she banged her closed fist on the door repeatedly, and shouted, "Theodore, are you there?"

She pressed her ear against the hot surface of the door and heard a gruff voice answering after a few seconds, "Ariana? Who let you in? You need to leave!"

Ariana ignored his words and rather shook the wooded door roughly. "The door is locked. Step back and I'll break the lock!"

“Listen to me. Leave me alone.”

Chapter: 580 Ariana could barely hear his low voice through the thick door, but she ignored his pleas anyway.

“Have you stepped back? I’m going to smash it!” Focused solely on opening the door, she positioned the fire extinguisher over her head and aimed for the metal lock.

The wet towel that she had been using to breathe fell off her face and onto the ground. She was so frantic in her efforts to break the lock that she didn’t notice until her lungs started burning. Despite her pain and coughing, she persisted in smashing the lock until her arms began to shake.

She screamed her frustration as the lock bent out of form but still hung securely on the door. Gritting her teeth, Ariana smashed it with all her strength, using every last bit of her energy. She had to save Theodore, and if he was going to die, she would be dying right next to him.

The whistle of the fire engine finally came from downstairs. Ariana dared not slow down. Like a deranged robot, she repeated the action of smashing the lock.

“Leave quickly, Ariana. The firefighters are here now. The firemen will save me. It’s too dangerous here. Listen to me. You need to leave!” Theodore’s anxious voice rang out from inside.

Regardless of the concern in his words, Ariana didn’t stop and was drenched in sweat. “It will be broken open soon. Hold on.”

The fire had spread and was nearing her. She could feel the heat on her back but ignored it in her efforts to open the door. As the flames flickered over the backs of her ankles, she rapidly swiveled and put them out with a spray from the fire extinguisher. She didn’t have time to take a breath because as soon as she got the flames under control, she got back to work on the lock.

With a crack, the metal lock finally fell from the door.

Ariana yelled in relief when the lock thudded on the floor. She kicked the door open and rushed into the room, wrapping her shaking arms around Theodore.

“Are you okay?” Ariana nervously checked on Theodore, looking at him while clutching onto him.

“I’m fine.” Theodore hugged her tightly.

They looked at each other, and there were too many emotions in their eyes at this moment.

Ariana suddenly felt that the answer was not that important as long as he was with her.

Despite the fire department’s presence downstairs, the voracious flames raced through the building, leaving no room for Ariana and Theodore to hesitate.

The private room boasted a solitary, sealed French window. Shattering it from the outside would unleash a violent rush of air that would instantly fuel the inferno to greater heights.

“Our prospects for rescue dwindle if we remain here. This room, nestled in the corridor’s corner, presents a constricted entrance that obstructs the firemen’s access,” Theodore calmly analyzed.

“Let us abandon this room and make our way towards the escape passage.” Ariana furrowed her brow, swiftly retrieving a damp towel from her pocket to cover Theodore’s mouth and nose. She then pushed him out of the room.

The flames in the corridor raged fiercer than ever, devouring each room in their path.

Theodore seized the fire extinguisher, battling the encroaching flames to create a safe space for them.