

Unconscious 611

Chapter: 611 Caught off guard, Ariana momentarily drifted into a daze before responding. "I'm an agent." Debora chuckled, saying, "That must be exciting! Everyone loves watching handsome men and beautiful women."

Although Debora worked in the laboratory every day, she remained well-informed about the latest trends, enabling her to engage in conversations with Ariana about the celebrities they had admired during their school days and the current happenings in the entertainment industry.

"By the way, Miss Edwards," Debora shifted her gaze toward Mitchel, who was standing nearby, chatting casually with others, his hands tucked comfortably in his pockets. Leaning closer, she whispered, "Are you currently single?"

In an instant, Ariana comprehended Debora's intent and realized her earlier misunderstanding. Hastily, she clarified, "I am actually married."

"Why do you get married so soon?" Debora lamented with a tinge of regret.

Realizing that Ariana and Mitchel's romantic connection was an unattainable dream, Debora ceased conversing with Ariana and redirected her focus to discussing professional matters with Mitchel.

Perplexed by their discussion, Ariana wheeled her wheelchair to the side and sought solace in the delectable dessert placed on the small table. She happily shared the good news with Sarah through her mobile phone.

As expected, Sarah responded with immense joy. She bombarded Ariana with three exclamation marks and a declaration. "I love you! If only | were a man, | would marry you instantly."

Ariana, feeling helpless, said, "Stop joking. When will you find time to take Alina to see Debora?"

Sarah replied, "I'll visit her as soon as | adjust my schedule."

Following their conversation, Ariana felt content with the food she had consumed.

She reclined back and attentively listened to the dialogue unfolding between Mitchel and Debora.

“It appears that Mr. Fredrick, the esteemed founder of BRD Group, who supports Mercy Hospital, will be joining us today.” “Really? Why didn’t I see him?”

“He should be arriving soon. Wasn’t the summit organized by BRD Group?” Mitchel clarified.

“I don’t think Mr. Fredrick will personally attend. Usually, he sends Adrian as his representative for such events,” Debora interjected.

Intrigued, Ariana asked curiously, “Are you referring to Holden?”

Debora was taken aback. “Do you know him, Miss Edwards?”

After a brief pause, Ariana responded, “Coincidentally, we happen to be acquainted.

We are friends.”

Impressed, Debora praised, “No wonder you’re an agent with an extensive network.

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I have some business connections with Holden. I’ve met him once.”

Considering Holden’s disfigurement, and knowing that Debora’s husband was an experienced doctor in the dermatology department, Ariana casually inquired, “Is there any treatment for the injury on his face?”

Baffled, Debora asked, “There’s no wound on Holden’s face.”

Ariana stood there, stunned by the revelation. “Didn’t Holden suffer a disfigurement since childhood? So he has been wearing a mask all this time,” she muttered.

Debora, too, found herself perplexed. “Are we talking about the same person? I’ve seen Holden on several occasions, and he never wore a mask. In fact, he’s quite handsome, even more so than the movie stars.”

Ariana was left speechless, unable to respond.

“Could you have mistaken him for someone else?” Debora questioned gently, devoid of malice. After all, there were many individuals with the same name. However, the rarity of Holden’s surname made the confusion unlikely.

Feeling embarrassed, Ariana decided not to press the matter further. “Perhaps I made a mistake,” she conceded quietly.

The conversation shifted to other medical matters, filling the room with enthusiastic discussions. Ariana, absentmindedly nibbling on her juice straw, couldn’t shake off her sense of bewilderment.

She was certain that she had met Adrian during the interview at BRD Group. There was no doubt about that.

Furthermore, she had encountered Holden on several occasions, often in the presence of Adrian. It seemed inconceivable that she could have gotten it wrong.

Yet, upon reflection, it was Jennifer who had informed her about Holden’s disfigurement. Holden himself had never admitted to it. Why would Jennifer lie to her? And why did Holden consistently wear a mask whenever they met?

Was it possible that his face couldn’t be seen? Or was it because Holden himself didn’t want her to see his face?

But it didn’t make sense. Debora said that Holden was not ugly.

“Mr. Fredrick is here!”

The sudden eruption of noise from the crowd swiftly seized Ariana’s attention, diverting her from her pensive musings. She shifted her gaze toward the bustling entrance, where the throng sought eagerly to catch a glimpse of Holden, rendering the doorway densely packed. Regrettably, confined to her wheelchair, Ariana found herself unable to behold his presence.

Unnoticed amidst the commotion, she endeavored to rise onto one foot, hoping for a better vantage point. Alas, her short height hindered her view.

Mitchel, astutely observing her curiosity, questioned, “Why are you so intrigued?”

“I wish to ascertain if he is the same person Debora mentioned,” Ariana responded, her gaze fixed ahead.

Mitchel was about to take her to the doorway when he was abruptly pulled away by a hurrying companion who told him that there were pressing matters to attend to.

Sighing, Mitchel said to Ariana, “Stay here. I shall be back shortly.”

Chapter: 613 “Go ahead.” She waved at him.

Still separated by a considerable distance from the gate, Ariana could discern nothing from her present position. Nevertheless, she stubbornly maneuvered her wheelchair toward the gate.

From afar, she spotted a retinue of bodyguards ushering a tall and distinguished gentleman into the hall. Why did he strike her as so familiar? Had she encountered him somewhere before?

Ariana rubbed her eyes in an attempt to perceive more distinctly, yet the crowd’s sheer density and the man’s rapid disappearance thwarted her efforts.

Navigating her wheelchair, Ariana endeavored to obtain an unobstructed view of his countenance. However, with Holden's arrival, the crowd grew even more congested.

The throng surged toward her, impeding her line of sight. Struggling to forge a path, she remained oblivious to the obstacle ahead. Inadvertently, her wheelchair tipped over, colliding with a long table and causing the tall glasses arrayed upon it to topple and fall perilously in her direction.

Trapped by the weight of the wheelchair upon her legs, Ariana was unable to promptly rise. She could only raise her hand to protect her face. Just as she feared making a public spectacle of herself, a man positioned himself before her.

When chaos erupted, Theodore immediately recognized the familiar figure lying on the floor. A surge of anxiety coursed through him as he realized he was too late to shield her from the falling wine glasses.

In the nick of time, someone swooped in and fulfilled his duty, swiftly shielding Ariana from the glasses.

'Theodore's eyes locked on the man, a doctor by the name of Mitchel.

What was he doing here with Ariana?

Their apparent familiarity with each other raised eyebrows in Theodore's mind. Had they been secretly in touch recently?

Cautioning himself against overthinking, Theodore's instinctual desire to hold Ariana in his arms was swiftly intercepted by Adrian's intervention.

"Take a breath, my friend. Now is not the opportune moment. I believe revealing your true identity would overwhelm her," Adrian cautioned, shaking his head to drive home the point.

Theodore regained control of his faculties, compelling himself to restrain his emotions, and slipped away before Ariana caught sight of him.

Ariana, still in a state of shock, sought refuge behind a broad shoulder. As she gradually regained her composure, her gaze fell on Mitchel, whose coat and shirt bore the stains of red wine, leaving him disheveled and unkempt.

“Dr. Chadwick, are you alright?” Ariana was anxious to check on his well-being.

The shattered glasses and splattered wine had hit Mitchel mercilessly, leaving his hands and face grazed by sharp fragments.

Ariana attempted to rise from the floor, only to be pricked by the debris scattered across the floor, eliciting a wince of pain and sending her back down.

“Hold still. The floor is strewn with broken glasses,” Mitchel calmly advised, as he helped Ariana back onto her feet and settled her in her wheelchair which he just overturned.

“Dr. Chadwick, there’s no need for you to take care of me. Let’s attend to the wound on your face first.” Ariana expressed a mix of guilt and gratitude. Today, she had chosen to don silk attire, and if it had been stained by wine, it would have turned embarrassingly transparent. Despite Mitchel’s gallant efforts to shield her throughout the incident, her dress had already fallen victim to the spilled drink!

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Seeing her dampened dress, Mitchel motioned to a waiter, requesting a blanket, which he gently wrapped around her. Ariana regarded him with concern, her voice filled with sincerity. “Dr. Chadwick, what about the wound on your face?” Mitchel lightly touched his cheek, his voice calm and composed. “No need to worry.

It's merely a minor cut.”

Something hit Ariana as she took a deep breath. Her gaze shifted in the direction where Holden had stood, but all she saw was his retreating back, accompanied by

Adrian.

Deep within her, she harbored certainty that the man Debora had mentioned was indeed the same person she knew. Adrian served as irrefutable evidence. As the vice president of BRD Group, his identity couldn't be counterfeited by just anyone.

Yet, Ariana couldn't help but feel a tinge of disappointment. Had Holden failed to recognize her? Had he chosen to ignore her presence? Or had he departed because she was there?

She could not comprehend why he hid his true face from her.

"Mitchel, would you like to change your clothes first?" Debora stepped forward, her concern evident as she spoke. "We should also tend to the cut on your face to prevent any infection, no matter how minor."

"Indeed, Dr. Chadwick. Allow me to escort you to the lounge. We have prepared clothing for our esteemed guests," a waiter chimed in respectfully, having hurried over upon hearing the commotion.

Mitchel nodded, his gaze sweeping the surroundings. Then, looking down at Ariana, he calmly suggested, "Join me."

As soon as Mitchel finished speaking, all eyes turned towards Ariana. People were either watching her or gossiping. Debora, in particular, stood next to Mitchel and winked meaningfully at Ariana, as if saying, "And you were saying you're just friends?"

Ariana didn't know how to respond. It would be embarrassing if she refused him, but why did she go with him? Why did he change his clothes and take her there?

The waiter, with his sharp eyes, noticed Ariana's embarrassment and tried to smooth things over. "Miss, your dress is also stained by the wine. There are spare new lady's clothes in the lounge. You can get changed there, by the way. Our hotel's lounge has two separate dressing rooms, which are quite convenient."

"Okay, lead the way," she replied.

Once Mitchel and Ariana left, the onlookers could no longer contain their curiosity. Despite being engrossed in academic research all day, they were also adept at indulging in gossip.

“Mr. Chadwick has never had a romantic involvement with women. What could have happened this time? Why is he bringing a female companion with him?”

“Who knows? Is he perhaps planning to get married soon? Who is the girl in the wheelchair? Are you familiar with her?” “I don’t know her personally, but she must have a significant background to capture Mr. Chadwick’s attention.”

Unable to reach a consensus, they turned to Debora, who had been enjoying the spectacle. “I noticed you were engaged in a lively conversation with that girl just now. Did you discover anything?”

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“Stop speculating. I spoke with her, and she is married,” Debora replied. She waved her hand, attempting to quell the growing excitement of the crowd.

Unexpectedly, the revelation of Ariana’s marital status only heightened everyone’s interest. “She’s married?!” they exclaimed. The atmosphere was growing more entertaining by the minute.

“If Mr. Chadwick’s grandfather knew that his grandson had fallen in love with a married woman, he would undoubtedly be astounded!” remarked one of the intrigued onlookers.

Debora was speechless. “Let’s not jump to conclusions,” she urged, trying to curb the speculative chatter.

“Oh, did you hear that he asked that girl to exchange clothes with him? Who can honestly claim there’s no underlying meaning?” chimed in another voice, fueling the gossip.

“You’re missing the point,” interjected a well-informed observer. “Mr. Chadwick has never brought a female companion to events before. But this time, he arrived with a girl in a wheelchair. What does that imply? It means he deeply loves her.”

Debora, feeling helpless in the face of relentless gossip, pleaded, "Alright, alright. Let's refrain from further speculation about these young people. It's simply not appropriate."

"You're right," agreed another, attempting to redirect the conversation. "Let's cease discussing that and focus on our project for the next six months."

Meanwhile, Theodore, unsettled by Ariana's sudden appearance, dared not remain in the vicinity any longer. He swiftly devised an excuse and made his way to the private lounge.

The BRD Group, a prominent shareholder of the hotel, had ensured the provision of a special lounge exclusively for Theodore's use.

Slouched on the sofa, Theodore indulged in puffs from his cigarette, his mind consumed by distress. Memories of the moment when Mitchel had shielded Ariana flooded his thoughts, prompting an overwhelming urge to keep her by his side at all times.

Deeply inhaling from his cigarette, Theodore's face portrayed a distant, uncaring look. Witnessing Mitchel's behavior towards Ariana at the hospital had triggered a sense of suspicion within him. There was something amiss about Mitchel. His indifference towards everyone except for Ariana was quite suspicious. After all, men knew men best. Theodore refused to believe that Mitchel held no other feelings for Ariana.

This medical summit was no ordinary event; access was almost impossible without accomplishments in the medical field. Yet, not only had Mitchel managed to attend, but it seemed that certain individuals were attempting to curry favor with him.

Mitchel was undoubtedly no ordinary doctor.

Just as Theodore was lost in his thoughts, a knock on the door interrupted his contemplation. Adrian entered, holding a stack of documents in his hand.

Observing the pile of cigarette butts in the ashtray, he let out a sigh before taking a seat. Placing the documents on the table, he said, "Take a look. It turns out that Mitchel happens to be the youngest son of the prestigious Jovanni family."

Theodore maintained a composed expression as he picked up the document, examining it carefully. Mitchel, the young master of the Jovanni family, possessed an undeniable allure, explaining the eagerness of everyone else to seek his favor at the summit. In the past, the Jovanni family, along with the Fredrick, Truman, and Chadwick families, had reigned as the top four families.

Unlike the other three families, the Jovanni family held a strong focus on the medical field. In fact, they maintained connections to approximately 80% of the country's medical-related businesses.

"since he is the youngest son of the Jovanni family, why does he bear the surname Chadwick?" Theodore inquired, raising his gaze to Adrian.

With a casual tone, Adrian responded, "TSK, TSK, isn't it common among affluent and influential families? You yourself possess two names, Theodore and Holden, correct?" Adrian nonchalantly crossed his legs and hummed.

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Theodore found himself momentarily speechless, astonished by Adrian's words.

"Oh, you see, Wilfred, the third son of the Jovanni family, married Catalina, the daughter of the Chadwick family. Interestingly, Catalina's brother, Amiri, and his family met a tragic end while they were out, and their only daughter has been missing ever since. It has been many years, and it is likely that she might have passed away," Adrian explained.

Observing Theodore's intent to light another cigarette, Adrian swiftly intercepted it, cautioning, "Please refrain from excessive smoking. Lately, you have been looking increasingly unhealthy."

Theodore no longer smoked. He crossed his long legs and leaned back against the sofa chair. Weary, he pinched his nose and urged Adrian, "Continue. Why doesn't Mitchel bear the Jovanni surname?"

"It's rather straightforward, really. At that time, Catalina was pregnant and gave birth to a child. To ensure the continuation of the Chadwick family lineage, they made a decision. Their firstborn son would bear his mother's surname and be adopted by his deceased brother.

Due to the Jovani family having numerous boys, his grandfather didn't think much of this and agreed to the arrangement. The other relatives did not object either.

They even chuckled in secret, knowing that Mitchel did not possess the privilege of inheritance. This implies that Catalina and Mitchel willingly withdrew from the competition for the family's inheritance."

Adrian chuckled, pausing for effect. "Now, care to guess what happened next?" Theodore arched an eyebrow, a hint of curiosity in his gaze. "Then Mitchel became a medical genius?" "you, my friend, possess a sharp intellect indeed." A playful smile tugged at

Adrian's lips as he assumed the role of a masterful storyteller. Patting his thigh lightly, he spoke in a whimsical tone. "Mitchel, with a surname distinct from his grandfather's extensive lineage, emerged as the most exceptional talent in the realm of medicine. Mitchel's grandfather, filled with regret, yearned for his grandson to reclaim the family name. Naturally, the Chadwick family vehemently opposed this proposition, as Mitchel had been adopted into their family. So these two families have recently found themselves at odds, their relationship teetering on the precipice of rupture."

Theodore scoffed in disdain, his disdain evident. "How absurd to engage in such trivial quarrels." With a touch of derision, he mused upon the increasingly foolish behavior of the old and wealthy clans.

"As for why Mitchel finds himself toiling away as a doctor in the obscure confines of Eleymond's small hospital, I cannot say," Adrian pondered aloud. "Perhaps he sought an experiential journey through life. Nevertheless, there is no denying Mitchel's brilliance in the field of medicine, particularly in the realm of neuroscience." He smacked his lips appreciatively, raising his pinky finger as he sipped his coffee with elegance.

Theodore paid little attention to this display and inquired, "And why is Ariana here, by Mitchel's side?"

"I chanced upon Tyler's new crew assembling on the top floor," Adrian replied. "Your wife seems to be accompanying him. Beyond that, I am unaware of any further details." He shrugged nonchalantly, secretly reveling in Ariana's knack for provoking Theodore's ire.

A shadow fell over Theodore's countenance as he realized that Ariana could not have obtained the invitation on her own. It had to be Mitchel who had brought her into this circle. When had they grown so intimate?

Theodore seethed with annoyance, a tempest brewing within him. Finally, he grasped the root of his animosity towards Mitchel. Like two hungry wolves eyeing a prime piece of meat, both Mitchel and Tyler coveted Ariana's affection. While Tyler was a mere puppy and posed no threat to him, Mitchel stood as formidable as Theodore himself, making him a

challenging predicament to handle.

"Cease your ruminations, for Ariana is your lawfully wedded wife. You entered into matrimony lawfully, it is true. Even if there were any connection between her and Mitchel, they..."

"How dare she!" Adrian's words were rudely interrupted by Theodore, his eyes brimming with a raw intensity he struggled to contain. Memories of Ariana's involvement with Mitchel flooded his mind, stoking the fires of anger within him.

Adrian recoiled, realizing his misstep, and hastened to amend his words. "That was me bluffing. Ariana possesses principles and integrity. She would not deceive you behind your back, as long as you both remain wedded."

Theodore remained silent, his countenance gloomy and troubled.

Chapter: 617 Adrian mentally berated himself, regretting his provocation of Theodore once more. Adopting a more submissive tone, he refilled Theodore's cup with steaming tea.

"Perhaps they are just friends, you see. Doctor and patient. Let not your thoughts run wild. As for Ariana's presence at the summit, perchance Mitchel brought her along to alleviate her boredom."

"And is Mitchel so benevolent to all his patients?" Theodore retorted with a sneer, the bitterness seeping into his words.

"Well, are doctors not known for their compassion?" Adrian puffed on his cigarette, inhaling deeply. "I believe it would be wise for us to depart from here swiftly, lest Ariana chance upon our exit. There remain many unresolved matters between the two of you. If your true identity as Holden were to be exposed, I fear Ariana may not forgive you."

Theodore's annoyance escalated. He longed to leave with Ariana, disregarding all else. The thought of his beloved in the company of another man was unbearable to him!

"When does the summit conclude?"

Adrian glanced at his watch and replied, "It shall endure for a while longer. It is not too late to leave now. And, I shall assign someone to keep a vigilant eye on them. Should they venture astray, they shall be stopped without delay."

Theodore's annoyance grew even more fervent. "What do you mean should they venture astray? I cannot bear to let them be together alone!"

"How about I procure an invitation for you as Theodore? You may then take her without alerting anyone," Adrian pondered, trying to keep things under wraps.

Theodore fell into a momentary silence, deliberating on the potential efficacy of the suggestion. Just then, one of his subordinates burst into the room, visibly flustered.

"Sorry, something is amiss. Madam has entered Doctor Chadwick's private lounge. And it's just the two of them!" Theodore rose swiftly from the sofa and bolted out of the room.

On the other side, Ariana was escorted to a private chamber within the lounge by a waiter. Closing the door behind her, she let out a sigh of relief, preparing to change her clothes.

In the hotel room, only pants were available. As Ariana endeavored to remove her dress and don the pants, she found herself struggling to maintain balance on a single leg. In her attempt to steady herself, she reached for the wheelchair, neglecting to secure its wheels. Consequently, the wheelchair commenced its motion, causing Ariana to lurch forward suddenly.

With a resounding sound, Ariana hit the floor!

In a room within the lounge, Mitchel shrugged off his jacket. As he wiped his neck and hands with a damp towel, traces of red wine were erased from his skin. There was a small scrape on his cheek, a minor injury that he chose to ignore, the dried blood rendering it harmless.

After changing into fresh pants and a crisp shirt, his fingers had just brushed against the buttons when a sudden clamor erupted from the adjacent room.

Setting his attire aside, Mitchel moved to investigate, knocking on the door that separated him from the source of the sound. "Ariana, did something happen to you?"

Ariana had managed to injure her ankle once again within the confines of her room.

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The throbbing pain left her momentarily speechless, rendering a reply to Mitchel impossible. The lines of Mitchel's face deepened as he knocked again, his tone impatient.

"What's going on?"

The clamor was reminiscent of a fallen object. Mitchel's mind immediately leapt to the worst-case scenario—Ariana fainting. He dove towards a nearby drawer, rummaging for the changing room key.

Ariana, meanwhile, pushed aside the wheelchair that had assaulted her ankle and endeavored to rise. But as she made the attempt, pain flared up anew, resulting in a cold sweat breaking out on her forehead.

It had been a day filled with unexpected falls. She ruefully reflected on her decisions. If only she had not sought Holden, this chain of mishaps could have been avoided. And to top it all off, she hadn't even been able to see him.

Just as her mind circled this thought, another knock resonated from the door. Mitchel's voice, steady and calm, drifted in, "Ariana, if you don't answer, I'll have to come in." The sound of a key turning in the lock followed his warning.

Ariana, who was not yet fully dressed, mustered a weak response. "Please, wait outside. I'm alright, just not finished dressing yet."

Hearing Ariana's frail voice, Mitchel suspected her condition was far from alright. "Have you fallen?" he questioned.

"Yes," she admitted, voice strained. "I was leaning on my wheelchair when it tipped. I tumbled down with it." Annoyance flickered through her as she wrestled with the half-on pants, replacing them with her dirty skirt.

"Can you stand now?" Mitchel knocked twice on the door, concern lacing his voice.

Ariana made an attempt to rise, only to discover her other foot had suffered a twist.

As if the universe had decided to play a cruel joke on her, labor pains seized her.

She gripped her belly, focusing all her energy on calming herself. Summoning what strength she could muster, she answered Mitchel, "I can't get up. I need to rest a bit."

Mitchel's brows knitted together in concern. "Your voice doesn't sound too good. I should come in and check." He began to turn the key in the lock, only to be stopped by Ariana's outburst.

"Don't come in! I'm not dressed yet." Pain had begun to paint a sheen of sweat on Ariana's forehead. She gently stroked her belly, hoping to calm the baby.

To Mitchel, in this predicament, gender barriers were immaterial. He'd spent so many hours studying the human anatomy in the lab, and to him, bodies were merely subjects of study.

Softening his tone, he tried to reassure her. "Ariana, let me in. As a surgeon, I've seen countless bodies. To me, you're just another patient."

"I understand. Just wait," Ariana replied, knowing she couldn't continue in this state. Leaning against the wall, she took a deep breath, hoping to quiet the turbulence within her and soothe the baby in her womb.

Chapter: 619 As her emotions ebbed, Ariana questioned whether her pain was just in her mind.

The ache began to retreat, giving her the chance to grab her skirt. She covered her thighs with the skirt and quickly used other scattered clothing to cover her bare skin.

"I'm ready. You can come in now," Ariana said. As Mitchel moved to turn the key in the lock, a sudden gust of wind blew past him. Before he could react, an unseen force landed a punch, sending him sprawling.

The commotion outside, coupled with Mitchel's exclamation, made Ariana straighten up. "Dr. Chadwick, what's going on?" she called out.

Suddenly, the door swung open and in walked Theodore.

Surprise left Ariana momentarily speechless before she found her voice. "Theodore? Why are you here? No, wait—how did you even know I was here?"

She immediately suspected Theodore was tracking her, a chilling thought. But one look at Theodore's icy countenance, and she thought better of voicing her fears.

Ariana pivoted towards the doorway and yelled, "Dr. Chadwick, are you alright out there?"

Theodore's gaze darkened, her words like striking a flint deep within him. He removed the key from the lock and closed and locked the door with a resounding slam. With a stern expression, he approached the woman now lying on the floor.

Ariana's heart sank. His presence brought back memories of their first encounter.

Theodore had just emerged from a vegetative state then. The revelation of his unexpected marital status had provoked a violent reaction. His cold indifference from back then mirrored his demeanor now. It was as if nothing mattered to him, Ariana included.

The feeling of being prey under the gaze of a predator was a stark memory that resurfaced, causing a tremor of fear. “Theodore, please—don’t,” she whispered, voice trembling.

Tears welled in her eyes as she looked up at him. Love was conspicuously absent in her gaze, replaced by pure panic and fear. Theodore halted, taken aback by her defensive posture. But he quickly regained his composure and continued towards her, finally squatting in front of her.

Ariana managed a word, “You—” Her mind was so scattered that she couldn’t form a coherent sentence. As Theodore extended his hand towards her, she reflexively shut her eyes. Expecting the worst, she was instead drawn into a comforting embrace.

A sense of stunned surprise washed over her as she studied the man’s chiseled jawline and inhaled his familiar scent—a blend of juniper and tobacco.

Theodore cast his gaze downwards, studying Ariana’s befuddled expression.

Succumbing to the pull he felt, he brushed his lips against her smooth forehead—a feather-light contact that carried the weight of his yearning.

His kiss added to her confusion. Despite the strained tension between them, Ariana found herself unable to resist Theodore’s warm embrace. The knowledge that she couldn’t defy him or fend him off, even if he overstepped, brought her sadness.

Frustrated with her own weakness, she released her hold on Theodore’s collar, her eyes downcast.

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Theodore, however, was oblivious to her emotional turmoil. He hoisted her up with ease, righted the toppled wheelchair with a foot, and carefully settled her back in it.

He removed his suit jacket, gently draping it over her bare knees.

The tenderness in his actions contrasted with his frosty demeanor.

His caring gestures tamed Ariana's anger and sent her heart pounding in her chest.

She was at war with herself—torn between the happiness she felt in his presence and the anger over his past actions and lies.

And yet, she was grateful it was Theodore who had walked through the door, not Mitchel. Despite Mitchel's medical expertise, she didn't want him, or anyone else, to witness her in such a disheveled state. But Theodore was different. He was the only person before whom she could bare her soul completely.

The confined space exuded an unbearable silence. Ariana and Theodore were in silence, neither willing to break it, each waiting for the other to speak.

Ariana, confined to a wheelchair, nervously clutched her coat, her gestures growing increasingly unnatural.

Theodore, towering over her, gazed down, creating an overwhelming weight upon Ariana's shoulders, like a mountain pressing down on her.

Avoiding prolonged eye contact with him, Ariana's gaze wandered, her mind filled with unease. She silently cursed, wondering if he had ever learned the art of conversation.

After a while, she finally sensed that something was amiss. She raised her eyes to meet Theodore's and asked, "Have you finally decided to discard the wheelchair?"

There was no ulterior motive in her question; she was simply curious. In the past, Theodore had always been the one standing while Ariana sat. The sudden reversal of roles unsettled her.

Yet, as soon as the words left her lips, Ariana detected a bitter undertone in her tone. Theodore's expression, or lack thereof, hardened. He appeared colder, devoid of any visible emotion. Embarrassed, Ariana compressed her parched lips and stumbled over her words. "I didn't mean it that way."

"I know." Theodore remained silent, dropping to one knee to examine her injured foot.

Restlessly curling her rounded toes, Ariana murmured, "Please refrain from touching my feet. They're dirty." Her feet were stained with red wine and had yet to be cleaned. Frowning, Theodore's tone brooked no refusal as he commanded, "Behave and don't move."

Ariana awkwardly sealed her lips shut and obediently stayed still. As she watched Theodore kneel beside her, meticulously inspecting her ankle, a familiar sense of security washed over her. But it also stirred something within her, igniting a rapid heartbeat akin to electric currents coursing through her body. It was an irresistible and captivating sensation.

She had once claimed that Sarah was an incurable romantic. Now she wondered if she, too, possessed that same trait.

Ariana scratched her head, her face contorting suddenly. "No, no, no. It hurts..."