

## Unconscious 641

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In a fit of rage, he struck Sarah across the face. The unexpected blow took Sarah by surprise, and she tasted the iron tang of her own blood.

“Come on! Call your friend!” Jack yelled, his desperation evident. He yanked Sarah’s hair, causing her head to collide with the floor.

Through the pain, Sarah remained steadfast, refusing to utter a sound.

Ariana didn’t hear Sarah’s voice anymore, but the sound of the impact made her shiver in dread. Her eyes welled up with tears as she drew a deep breath, trying to maintain her composure.

“Who sent you here? How much did they pay you? | can pay you ten times as much.” “Ten times?” Mike smirked, “I doubt you have that much.”

“Tam married into the Anderson family. If you let us go, | can offer more than just money.” Ariana attempted to negotiate, her voice filled with a glimmer of hope.

Her hope was met with cruel laughter from outside. “The Andersons? They're nothing. You should know, we’re determined to get our job done today.”

Ariana’s hope faded almost as soon as it appeared.

She realized that regardless of what happened next, these men had no intention of letting them go.

“Boss, it’s getting late. If the woman's people start looking for her, it could get tricky.

She’s not coming out. Maybe we should back off,” Jack advised, glancing at his watch.

Clearly frustrated, Mike spat on the floor. He wasn't ready to leave empty-handed.

"We can't just waste this trip. If we can't accomplish our mission, we might as well get a taste of this starlet. Help me get her up!" He began to undress, his disgusting smile widening.

Sarah, still bound, trembled in fear. Memories of her past traumas surfaced, leaving her feeling cold and despairing.

'As Mike advanced on her, starting to undress her, the closed door abruptly swung open. Standing in the doorway, one hand hidden behind her back, Ariana's voice echoed across the room. "Let her go! Whatever you want to do, do it to me."

When Ariana finally found the courage to emerge, a sinister smile tugged at Mike's lips as he rose from the floor and approached her. However, as soon as he took a step forward, he noticed her sudden retreat. A shard of glass gleamed in her hand, pressed against her throat.

"If you dare to advance another step, | shall kill myself right before your eyes," she declared.

In order to convince Mike of her resolve, Ariana applied a touch of force, leaving a conspicuous bloodstain on her neck.

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In an instant, Mike's countenance darkened. He sneered, "You fool! | am but a common robber. Your insignificant life holds no significance to me."

Ariana locked her gaze onto him. "The individual who sent you should have never permitted you to end my life, correct?"

As expected, Mike hesitated for a moment. Nevertheless, he replied with fierce determination, "Now that we are here, your life holds little value."

How could Ariana's simple ruse scare Mike, who had been in the business for many years? On the contrary, he found himself strangely intrigued by this woman, wondering if she possessed a similar fire in the bedroom.

"If that were true, why didn't you set me ablaze when I was inside earlier? Instead, you wasted time attempting to prolong the ordeal," Ariana retorted, her eyes shifting towards the positioned surveillance camera. "They want you to torment me, not to capture my lifeless body in the DV, correct?"

Due to her anxiety, Ariana inadvertently exerted excessive force, causing the sharp glass shards to pierce through her palm, intensifying the scent of blood.

Ariana skillfully observed the flicker of doubt in Mike's eyes. She turned her attention to Sarah, her face bruised and her hands bound, which stirred a mixture of guilt and anger within Ariana. Locking eyes with Mike once again, she voiced her demand, "Release her. She has no involvement in this, and you know full well that she is a prominent star. If something truly transpires, her fans and company will not remain silent. Do you wish to escalate this into a major controversy?"

Understand that you are not the sole one who will face the repercussions should public opinion spiral out of control."

Her words resonated with Mike, as the consequences of a substantial backlash would prove detrimental to their ability to conceal their actions. Thus, Mike wavered for a few fleeting seconds, before finally signaling Jack with a discreet wink. Jack quickly understood the situation and immediately loosened Sarah's tightly bound hands.

With her hands finally freed, Sarah instinctively took a step back, her eyes filled with worry as she glanced at Ariana.

She was about to voice her concerns when Ariana gave her a comforting look, subtly shaking her head.

"Get out of here. Don't wait for us to change our mind." Feeling impatient, Jack pushed Sarah forward, urging her to leave. Sarah clenched her teeth, stealing one last glance at Ariana before reluctantly turning around and walking away.

"Is that okay now?" Mike squinted at Ariana, tugging at his waistband with a sly smile playing on his lips.

Ariana's hand trembled involuntarily as she slowly released the bloodstained glass fragment she had been clutching.

Finally, she had made a compromise, and it was evident from the increasingly sinister grin on Mike's face. He approached her with an obscene smile, casually removing his trousers. "If you had been obedient earlier, your friend wouldn't have had to suffer so much."

Mike sneered, his eyes trailing up and down Ariana's body. He licked his lips, relishing the moment. "I can finally have some fun after holding myself back for so long."

Ariana held her breath, her eyes fixed on his advancing figure. Suddenly, she grabbed the hidden stick from behind the door and swung it with all her might, striking him hard on the head.

Almost simultaneously, Sarah turned around and seized the DV camera, swinging it forcefully at the back of Jack's skull, creating a resounding impact.

Both Mike and Jack were struck by a powerful blow. Jack lost his balance and stumbled to the floor after a few shaky steps. Mike, however, remained standing, momentarily shocked by Ariana's attack.

Touching his head where he'd been hit, Mike rushed towards Ariana in anger, swinging his fist at her. "You! How dare you hit me!"

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In her panicked state, Ariana successfully dodged his assault, but tripped on the debris scattered across the floor, sending her crashing to the floor.

Mike managed to pin her down, raising his fist to strike. While struggling, Ariana's hand brushed against some shards of glass. In a desperate move, she grabbed the shards and plunged them into Mike's face without a second thought.

Mike howled in pain, hands immediately flying to his injured eyes. Taking advantage of his momentary vulnerability, Ariana shoved him off and sprang to her feet. Mike writhed on the floor, clutching his face.

Seeing Mike accidentally rolling into the room, Ariana quickly pivoted to face Jack, pushing him into the small room. Sarah was quick to react, grabbing Jack's collar and helping Ariana shove him into the room before he could react.

They hurriedly shut the door behind them, only to realize that the door could only be locked from the inside. Outside the room was a mess, with nothing they could use to barricade the door. Their only choice was to hold it tightly, doing their best to keep the men from bursting out.

Locked inside, it didn't take long for the two men to regain their senses and make a beeline for the door, trying to force it open.

They hammered on the door relentlessly, their combined strength challenging Ariana and Sarah's resistance. The two women knew it was a losing battle — it was just a matter of time before the door gave way.

When those men managed to break out, Ariana and Sarah knew they would be in deep trouble.

The sound of a muffled moan nearby added to Ariana's worry. The man she'd struck earlier with her crutch was regaining consciousness. If he woke up fully, they'd be outnumbered and outmatched.

Sarah was petrified, clinging desperately to the door, her mind refusing to contemplate what would happen if the men got out.

"Sarah," Ariana voiced suddenly, her tone decisive. "I'm going to count to three, and then we both bolt. Don't look back, don't stop, just run."

Terrified, but seeing no other choice, Sarah nodded. She held her breath, mentally preparing for Ariana's countdown. "One, two, three— run!"

With her heart hammering in her chest, Sarah sprinted towards the stairwell. But as she neared the stairs, a horrifying thought struck her, Ariana couldn't run.

Frantically, Sarah spun around to see Ariana struggling to hold the door back all by herself.

Her first impulse was to rush back, but Ariana saw her hesitation and yelled at her, "Keep going!"

With that, Ariana let go of the door, and started hobbling away in the direction opposite to the stairs.

The men barreled out of the room, and Sarah knew getting captured again wasn't an option. So, ignoring the screaming fear in her, she dashed down the stairs.

Upon getting out, an irate Mike scanned around briefly, dismissed Sarah, and set his sights on Ariana. His eyes seethed with rage as he charged after her, bellowing like a madman. "Get that woman! She's not escaping today!"

The sound of the closing footsteps confirmed Ariana's belief. They would focus their pursuit on her, and if she ran with Sarah, she would only slow her down. So, it seemed best to stake it all on one last gamble.

She remembered the balcony she and Theodore had escaped through earlier. To assist in their previous rescue, the team had ripped off the burnt fencing, leaving behind just a flat platform. The balcony wasn't visible in the dark, which gave her an edge.

So, Ariana sprinted towards the balcony with all her might. The bare platform quickly came into view.

Chapter: 644 The men chasing her were so focused that they didn't notice the upcoming hazard.

Right when they were about to grab her, she increased her pace, ignoring the pain in her foot. She dashed to the edge of the balcony and, without any hesitation, took the plunge!

Jack, who was close behind, couldn't react in time. He fell straight over the edge. A heavy thud broke the silence of the night. Jack didn't even have time to scream. It wasn't clear if he was dead or unconscious.

Ariana, on the other hand, managed to cling onto the edge of the balcony, her body dangling over the small platform. There was no time to catch her breath, let alone feel relieved. Sweating profusely, she looked up to find Mike standing at the edge of the platform. His quick reflexes had saved him from falling. Ariana felt a sinking feeling in her heart. The danger wasn't over yet.

Mike managed to steady himself at the edge of the platform, watching Jack's fall with wide-eyed shock. A cold sweat broke out as he considered how narrowly he'd avoided the same fate. His fear quickly turned to fury as he locked eyes with Ariana, who was clinging onto the balcony's edge.

Ariana found herself hanging outside the balcony, her heart sinking as she saw Mike glaring down at her. She cursed inwardly, her mind racing.

Unsure of what Mike would do next, Ariana clenched her eyes shut, bracing herself.

In that brief moment of darkness, she saw flashes of a familiar face.

"Theodore—" she murmured, her voice shaking. A single tear trickled down her cheek as she whispered his name. Suddenly, a voice called out. "Ariana!"

She opened her eyes, her heart fluttering. It couldn't be— but then, the sound of approaching footsteps confirmed her hopes. It was Theodore!

Too tired to respond, Ariana focused all her energy on holding onto the balcony edge. Her hand, already wounded, ached with the strain.

Mike, hearing the commotion, knew that Ariana's rescue was near. A murderous rage filled his eyes as he drew a knife, intending to take Ariana down with him as a twisted act of revenge.

This woman was a great pain in the ass. He couldn't let go of her so easily! Even if he had to die, he would make sure that she'll go with him to hell.

Bang! But then, a gunshot rang out. The bullet found its mark in Mike's shoulder, making him wince in pain. His knife missed Ariana, skimming past her.

Theodore sprinted towards them. As he took in the sight of Ariana's hand sliding from the edge of the balcony, a sharp pang of fear pierced his heart. He needed to get to her, fast.

Racing to the scene, Theodore made a desperate leap, just managing to grab Ariana as her hand slipped from the balcony. It was a narrow escape from tragedy.

Horace and the others, trailing behind, sprung into action to assist, finally managing to pull Ariana to safety. At the sight of Theodore, exhaustion took hold of Ariana, both physically and emotionally.

Catching sight of the panic on Theodore's face, she opened her mouth to speak but was enveloped in his arms before she could utter a word.

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Theodore held her tightly, his embrace so firm it was as though he sought to meld her into his very being. He was trembling uncontrollably, a fear he had never before experienced threatening to overcome him.

What if he had been a moment too late? Would he have lost her forever?

The thought was too unbearable to contemplate. His ragged breaths grazed Ariana's neck, communicating the depth of his panic.

She returned his embrace, seeking to comfort him with her words despite her hoarse voice. "Theodore, I'm fine. You're here. You made it in time. You saved me again."

Her soft voice seemed to soothe Theodore's shaking soul. Gradually, he relaxed his grip on Ariana. Looking up at him, she marshaled the last vestiges of her strength and asked, "Did you see Sarah?"



“She’s okay. I had someone escort her away,” Theodore replied, his breath still uneven, and his gaze on Ariana tender as if handling a delicate treasure.

Hearing that Sarah was safe, Ariana managed a comforting smile for Theodore before her strength gave out and she fainted. “T contacted a private doctor on the way here. He’s waiting for us on the first floor,”

Horace announced immediately, stepping forward.

Theodore nodded, preparing to lift Ariana into his arms. As he did, a sharp pain shot through his right hand.

His body shook in response, but he stubbornly held on to Ariana, refusing to let her go.

In the midst of his emotional turmoil, Theodore hadn't noticed any physical discomfort.

Only now did he realize that his forceful pull to save Ariana had resulted in a dislocated right hand.

Horace, noticing Theodore’s struggle, quickly stepped forward, offering, “Boss, let me help?”

“No, I’ve got this,” Theodore insisted without a moment's hesitation. Cradling

Ariana in his arms, he carefully made his way out of the ruins.

Outside, the doctor, who had been waiting anxiously, had already conducted a preliminary examination on Sarah. Hearing footsteps behind her, she whirled around to see Theodore holding Ariana.

Rushing forward anxiously, she demanded, “What's happened to her?”

Horace explained, “She’s probably fainted from pushing herself to her limits for too long.”

Sarah let out a sigh of relief upon hearing this.

Theodore carefully set Ariana down for the doctor to examine and administer basic first aid. When he saw the bandages on her neck and hands, he found himself instinctively reaching out to touch her cheek. Only by feeling her steady breathing could he quell his own panic.

Chapter: 646 Pulling his hand back, he turned to face Sarah, his voice uncharacteristically soft as he apologized, “I’m sorry.” Sarah, taken aback by Theodore’s unexpected apology, was momentarily speechless.

Immediately following his apology, Theodore added, “This incident was my fault. I will make it up to you. Any future requests will be taken into account.”

Sarah waved him off. “Come on, Ariana and I are friends. No need to thank me.”

“No, I don’t like being indebted to anyone,” Theodore retorted, his tone brooking no argument. Sarah understood his unyielding nature and, not wanting to provoke him further, simply nodded in acceptance.

After providing Ariana with initial emergency treatment, they hurriedly made their way to the hospital.

Upon reaching the hospital, the doctor conducted a thorough examination of Ariana. Apart from her injured foot, it was determined that there were no other major injuries—just some minor cuts and scrapes from the altercation and escape, primarily on her hands and neck. However, the fracture in her foot had worsened, potentially requiring surgery.

“We will assess her further and devise an operation plan once she regains consciousness. It is crucial that we contact her previous attending doctor to obtain more information about her foot injury. Mr. Anderson, do you happen to know who her previous attending doctor is?” the doctor inquired, while jotting down notes for the report.

Theodore, who had just had his arm set, looked towards the doctor with a darkened expression. "Mitchel Chadwick, JN Hospital." Despite his dislike for Mitchel, Theodore reluctantly gave the doctor the information he needed. "Very well. I will contact him immediately." The doctor acknowledged with a nod and left the room.

Theodore stood by the hospital bed, observing Ariana's peaceful slumber, finally finding solace in the release of his worries. He took a seat, gently grasping her hand and pressing a tender kiss against it. Fatigue etched across his face.

"Excuse me, Mr. Anderson. It's time to apply medication to Miss Edwards." A nurse entered the room, holding a tray of medicine. Theodore stepped aside to give her space.

The nurse displayed impressive professionalism in her technique. However, as the medicine took effect, Ariana, still asleep, instinctively furrowed her brow and let out a soft whimper. Beads of cold sweat formed on her forehead.

Concern evident on his face, Theodore's voice turned cold as he addressed the nurse, "Handle her with care. She is afraid of pain."

"Yes, Mr. Anderson," the nurse responded, her hand trembling slightly. She felt the heaviness in the atmosphere, as if it could freeze.

Suddenly, her back stiffened, and she dared not take a deep breath. Focusing intently on her hands, she feared inflicting any further discomfort upon the unconscious woman in the bed. Despite her experience as a seasoned nurse, the scrutiny from the man beside her made her more nervous and fearful than any assessment during her own internship.

Bracing herself, the nurse prepared to tend to Ariana's wounds. Suddenly, Theodore interjected, "Allow me to take care of the rest." He grabbed the medication from the tray without waiting for the nurse's response.

The nurse hesitated, contemplating whether to say something, but ultimately decided against it. She felt a tinge of fear. It would bring relief if Theodore could handle it competently, but lingering concerns remained. After all, Theodore was not a professional, and she would be the one held accountable if anything went wrong.

Ignoring the nurse's questioning gaze, Theodore proceeded with gentle movements, following the nurse's process of administering medication and bandaging the wounds. Skillfully, he wrapped Ariana's injuries.

Observing Theodore's adeptness, the nurse felt at ease and realized there was no need to linger any longer. She turned to leave the ward.

Taking his time, Theodore meticulously bandaged Ariana's wounds, treating each step as if he were crafting a work of art. He relished the moment, his gaze shifting to Ariana, peacefully slumbering and relaxed. A sense of contentment enveloped him.

Chapter: 647 He couldn't help but muse, wishing she could maintain such obedience when she was awake.

His thoughts ran free on his mind. If she could stay by his side, truly listen to him, she wouldn't have faced the danger she encountered today. His fingertips delicately brushed over her ankle. There was a flicker of madness and obsession in his eyes.

If he could confine her to a place known only to him, a sanctuary where no one could encroach, then every part of her, every facet of her being, would belong to him alone.

The moment the crazy idea flashed through Theodore's mind, Ariana's words from their previous heated argument sprang to his mind. His heart shrank, causing him to banish the thought swiftly.

Theodore's grip tightened subtly, his lips forming a firm line, his expression betraying unusual bewilderment.

A deep-seated gut feeling told him that he couldn't act on that impulse. If he did, he would indeed lose her forever. Theodore pushed aside his thoughts and proceeded to tend to her wound, applying the medicine carefully.

"Theodore..."

The soft whisper from Ariana caused his hand to falter as he applied the medicine.

He stood up, drawing closer to the woman lying on the bed, who in her dream, clenched her teeth and spat out, "Bastard."

Hearing her unconscious reprimand, Theodore found himself strangely in a good mood. He couldn't help laughing in a low voice and continued to bandage her wound.

Ariana's eyes fluttered open in a haze on the second day.

When she regained consciousness, the scent of disinfectant filled the air in the hospital room. She gingerly shifted her stiff neck and glanced to the side, finding Judy by her side.

Confusion flickered in Ariana's mind. Hadn't Theodore been the one to bring her here? Why was Judy here? Had Theodore left after dropping her off?

The thought elicited a prickling sensation in her nose and a faint stab of disappointment in her heart.

"Mrs. Anderson, you're finally awake!" Judy was overjoyed to see Ariana conscious. She quickly fetched the lunchbox, asking, "Are you feeling hungry, Mrs. Anderson? Please eat something. It's still warm."

Judy carefully adjusted the hospital bed and opened the insulated box. The mouthwatering aroma of pork rib soup wafted in the air. "This is a special pork rib soup | prepared for you. It's important for you to regain your strength now."

As Judy served Ariana the soup, she voiced her concern, "Just look at your state, running to the hospital day after day. It must be so taxing. No one wishes to shuttle back and forth to a hospital like this. It's truly heart-wrenching to see you in such a state!"

Judy rambled on, her tone laced with worry and compassion. "And then there's your ankle. I've heard that you need surgery, and that's never a walk in the park. It's truly a misfortune that you've had to suffer so much."

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Tears welled up in Judy's eyes, showing her genuine concern for Ariana. "Madam, I hope you don't think me naive. I may not be versed in a lot of things, but I do realize that you've been having a hard time lately. Once you're discharged, how about we visit the church for a prayer session?"

Ariana sat on the bed, quietly taking in Judy's chatter, a gentle smile on her face all the while.

She didn't find Judy annoying or noisy. Instead, she found this kind of care incredibly comforting, reminiscent of family, of a mother.

Such motherly warmth had been absent from her life for so long that she had grown accustomed to carrying her burdens alone, hardly daring to yearn for a comforting embrace.

"Judy, thank you." Ariana smiled and pulled Judy into a hug. Caught off guard, Judy's eyes teared up more. She gently patted Ariana's back, sighing, "We're past formalities, dear..."

Ariana's smile broadened. Ever since she became a part of the Anderson family, Judy had consistently been kind to her, regardless of how others treated her.

"By the way, where's Sarah?" Ariana released Judy and asked. "Miss Flynn was also hospitalized last night, but she got up early for a follow-up check-up."

Ariana nodded, quietly observing Judy as she went about preparing her food, waiting for her to bring up Theodore in conversation.

After all, she knew that Judy genuinely wished for her and Theodore to reconcile, and hence, often praised him in her presence. However, to her surprise, Judy didn't bring up Theodore throughout the meal.

Ariana initially wanted to restrain her curiosity, but the growing sense of longing and anxiety prompted her to break her silence. "Judy, where is Theodore? Hasn't he been here?"

Judy's face shone with a knowing smile as Ariana asked her long-held question. "So you couldn't hold back any longer," she quipped, her hands busy straightening Ariana's blankets.

"Mr. Anderson, you see, has been your constant guardian since you came in last night. He treated your wounds, and applied the bandages. He stayed with you throughout the entire night and didn't call me until dawn. Perhaps he was worried you wouldn't want him around when you woke up."

Ariana fell silent after Judy's revelation. Her gaze drifted downwards, taking in her lifeless feet, her heart aching with a peculiar discomfort.

Not want to see him? How could that be possible? Even in her darkest, most vulnerable moments, her thoughts were consumed by him, a constant presence in her mind.

She was acutely aware of the depth of her feelings for him. She yearned for his company, but couldn't let go of what he kept hidden.

Observing her gloomy expression, Judy broke the silence. "Madam, Mr. Anderson can be a bit of a tough nut to crack, but that's because he's never had romantic feelings or been in a relationship before. Give him a chance, all men need a little shaping up. It's not like two people are born ready for each other, right?"

Settling down next to Ariana, Judy leaned in, her voice barely a whisper. "He genuinely cares for you. Give him a little time, he'll learn. Don't be too quick to judge. Believe me, my husband was a much more stubborn man than he is now when we first met—"

Judy's words faded into the background as Ariana got stuck on the revelation that Theodore had never been in love before. A thought popped into her mind and she cut Judy off, "You've been with Theodore for a long time, Judy. Do you know who Marley is?"

The moment Ariana mentioned 'Marley', Judy, always forthcoming, seemed taken aback. Her face morphed into an unreadable expression as she busied herself, hastily rearranging the lunchbox. "Who? | don't know," she stuttered, not meeting Ariana's eyes.

Completing her task, she announced, "Mrs. Anderson, I'll clean these up. A nurse will be here shortly to change your dressing. You should rest."

And with that, she made a beeline for the exit, disappearing within seconds.

A frown crossed Ariana's face as she watched Judy's hasty retreat.

Why such a dramatic response? It was as if 'Marley' was some forbidden topic. Judy's panicked behavior was new to Ariana, and it was decidedly odd.

Her contemplation was interrupted by the arrival of Horace, his usual professional grin plastered on his face. "Mrs. Anderson, any improvement in how you're feeling?

Anything still bothering you? Need me to fetch a doctor?" he asked. Distracted by Judy's unexpected reaction, she managed to shake her head and muttered, "No, I'm fine."

Adjusting his glasses, Horace carried on. "The doctor conducted a preliminary examination on you last night. If you're feeling well now, we'll proceed with a comprehensive check-up to assess your overall health."

Just as Ariana was about to get up from the bed and say yes, she froze. The realization hit her like a ton of bricks — a complete health check could disclose her pregnancy.

She was suddenly rooted to the spot, her heart pounding.

For a brief moment, Ariana couldn't think of what to do. She glanced at Horace, and then returned her feet, which had been half-dangling off the bed, back under the blanket. She gave a forced laugh and replied, "I'm not feeling great at the moment; | just ate a rather heavy meal. Maybe | should give it some time to settle."



Horace nodded in agreement. "Alright, Mrs. Anderson. We'll postpone your check-up for half an hour."

"Hold up. I feel like I'm in pretty good shape, don't think I need a full check-up.

Besides, who likes to be poked and prodded in a hospital all day? You get me, Horace?"

"But we can't ignore the potential harm the gangsters might've inflicted on you. A check-up would be safer." His poker face never wavered as he denied her request.

He then added, "Mrs. Anderson, rest for now. Just let me know when you're ready, I'll organize everything."

Hearing this, Ariana couldn't help but grip the blanket with more force. She knew swaying Horace was no easy task. As she was racking her brain for a way out, a doctor clad in a white coat walked in.

It was Mitchel! Taken aback by his unexpected appearance, Ariana blurted out, "Why is Dr. Chadwick here?"

"Dr. Chadwick continues to be your attending doctor," Horace clarified with the same composed demeanor.

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A wave of relief washed over Ariana at this revelation. With Mitchel as her doctor, she felt safe. Her pregnancy secret was secure.

However, Theodore's previous disposition towards Mitchel brought a new confusion to her. She looked at Horace, perplexed, "But what about Theodore—"

Horace quickly caught what she meant. Casting a glance at Mitchel, he positioned himself in front of Ariana. "What our boss means is that even though he's not too fond of this doctor, if you wish for his services, he respects your decision and will let him stay."

Ariana sat on the bed, a little taken aback, her mind traveling back to the conversation in the hotel with Theodore. So, he'd kept her words in mind after all?

Reflecting on that exchange in the hotel room, a wave of sadness swept over her.

She had said some harsh words to him and had yet to apologize.

Then, Judy's comforting words flashed through her mind. "Give him a little time, he'll change for the better." Could it be that he might genuinely transform for her?

The recent events had strengthened her resolve. She was willing to make concessions for Theodore.

If Theodore could back her choices, she could adjust to Theodore's need for control and possession, and even let go of his past intrusive behavior.

However, she had a hurdle to overcome—Marley. She had to find out who Marley was, what part she played in Theodore's life.

After spending so many years in the Edwards family, much had been stripped from her, but she held on to her steadfastness, her principles, and her boundaries.

No matter the depth of her love for Theodore, she wouldn't surrender her principles and boundaries for him.

Love wasn't a commodity, cheap and expendable.

She wouldn't shower Theodore with her love only to be a pale reflection of another in his eyes. She would not love him in such a humble way.

Recalling Judy's odd reaction, she felt convinced that Judy knew who Marley was, and the nature of the connection between her and Theodore.

She had to find the right moment to probe further.

"Unless you have something else, it's time to prepare for the physical exam. The longer you delay, the worse it will be," urged Mitchel with his usual poker face.

Ariana's thoughts were abruptly interrupted.

She snapped out of her daze and shifted her gaze towards Mitchel. A cunning wink escaped her, a subtle reminder of their agreement to keep her pregnancy under wraps. She needed him to come through for her now more than ever.