

Unconscious 991

Chapter 991

Tyler's arrival further enlivened the atmosphere. The group began reminiscing as they moved into the private dining room. Soon after, food and drinks were served, and the conversation naturally shifted to discussions about future plans.

"So, Sarah, when are you resuming your concert tour?" Ariana inquired.

Sarah leaned back in her chair with a drawn-out sigh, seemingly unbothered about her posture.

"The tour can wait. I'll be in Eleymond for a while, so I'm going to take some time off before making any decisions."

Tyler chimed in, "I'm on the same page. I don't plan on taking any new roles for a bit. I've been shuttling between film sets non-stop and barely had time to rest. I need a break."

Sarah then turned to Ariana, her eyes full of curiosity. ninjanovel.com "What about you? What are your plans?"

"Guess what? I've recently thrown my hat into the ring for a variety show, stepping onto the stage as a representative of the management company, scouting amateur artists. I'll stay in Eleymond at least until the curtains fall on this show."

"I know the show. It's BRD Group-organized, right? The winning management business goes to BRD's yearly big IP production," Betsy exclaimed.

"As luck would have it, I happen to be acquainted with a couple of pals who've got their fingers in the pie of organizing this very show. I'll be sure to take a look and get back to you," one of the newfound comrades pledged.

Sarah chimed in, "That's right, Ariana. Let Alena give you a hand in delving into the details. And if there's a chance for me to pitch in, don't hesitate to give a shout."

“Truly, your kind offers warm my heart,” Ariana responded with genuine gratitude. “But worry not, I’ve got this well in hand.”

“You sure you do not need our help? We're all ears, no need to stand on ceremony,” Sarah pressed.

Ariana shook her head, her smile unwavering.

“It's not a matter of politeness, believe me. If I find myself navigating turbulent waters, you'll be the first I turn to.” “Well, fair enough.”

Their banter continued, mingling seamlessly with the flavors of their shared meal.

As the evening wore on and drinks flowed, Ariana hailed a taxi to take her home after the gathering. However, the villa complex’s regulations posed an obstacle, barring the entry of taxis inside.

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Undaunted, she hoisted Melon upon her back and walked the short distance, a mere hundred meters or so. As Melon nestled against her shoulder, he spoke with innocence,

“Mommy, oh Mommy, why do the stars seem so few tonight? Could it be cloudy tomorrow? Mommy, can we whip up my all-time favorite strawberry pie tomorrow? And how about we continue the saga of the little raccoon tonight?”

An unbroken chain of whys tumbled from Melon's lips, and Ariana answered each with unwavering patience.

Amidst this, Melon threw a curveball, “Mommy, how many days have gone by? When will Daddy call us? It’s been an eternity!” Ariana lapsed into silence briefly, conjuring up a reassuring smile as she responded, “In a tick, baby.”

But appeasing Melon was no mean feat, and he pressed on, “What in the world does in a tick mean, Mommy?”

“Give him a few more days,” Ariana’s tone revealed a tinge of helplessness.

“Just a bit longer, and Daddy will be giving you a call.”

Angela’s Library

Saying this, she ruminated over finding a fresh and permanent approach to tackle this situation.

Melon’s next question threw her for a loop, “What's Daddy's digits?

| want to memorize them to recognize them when they flash on the screen.”

Ariana hesitated for a moment, mulling over the pros and cons. Not telling him could raise suspicion, and it wouldn’t hurt for him to have the number. With that, she recited the phone number Theodore used.

Stride by stride, parent and child repeated the sequence of numbers on their way home.

Soon, they reached the house, and Melon scampered off to freshen up on his own.

Fatigued, Ariana took a shower before attending to a few professional errands.

With most of the tasks squared away, Ariana realized Melon hadn't come out yet.

He’d typically be done washing up and glued to her side by now. But an eerie stillness prevailed instead. Ariana ventured into Melon’s room and peeked in, only to find him softly weeping under the covers.

“What's the matter, sweetheart?” Ariana hastened over, lifting the blanket and uncovering a teary-eyed Melon clutching the Landline phone.

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The moment Ariana saw the landline phone in Melon's hand, her heart skipped a beat. Realization washed over her. Her son had discovered something amiss, leaving her momentarily at a loss for words.

As she had feared, Melon broke into tears upon seeing her. "Mommy, you lied to me. You gave me a fake number," he accused.

Ariana found herself unable to speak. She opened her mouth, but her throat felt parched and constricted. An unspoken bitterness lingered there.

The number wasn't fake; it had simply been disconnected.

And the man who once owned that number, Melon's father, had indeed been real. Tears streaming down his face, Melon gasped for breath, looking utterly heartbroken. ANGELA'S LIBRARY

From the moment the call failed to connect, he'd sensed that something was wrong. Choking back sobs, he questioned Ariana, "Does Daddy not want me? Did you lie to protect me from the truth?"

Ariana was devastated. Melon had always been mature for his age and had never broken down like this before. Pulling him into a comforting embrace, she took a moment to compose herself. Finally, her voice quivering, she assured him, "Daddy does want you, Melon."

Still clinging to Ariana, Melon managed to ask through hiccups, "Then why hasn't he come back? Why doesn't he call me?"

Ariana felt at a loss for words. Thoughts of Theodore weighed her down like a massive boulder, making it difficult even to breathe.

Her eyes reddened as tears began to well up, and she fought to suppress a torrent of emotions that threatened to overwhelm her.

"Mommy promises you, Daddy does want you. He'll call you very soon, alright?" Ariana managed to say, her voice tinged with tenderness.

Despite her reassurances, Melon's tears flowed unabated. Finally, exhaustion won out, and he fell asleep in her arms, his cheeks still wet.

After putting Melon to bed, Ariana found herself alone in the dark living room.

Sitting in a daze on the couch, she felt the emotions she'd worked so hard to suppress come flooding back with even greater intensity.

Her emotional defenses crumbled. She covered her mouth to stifle her sobs as her body shook uncontrollably. Sliding off the couch onto the floor, she gave in to her tears.

Memories of her time with Theodore morphed into sharp thorns, each thought pricking at her heart and causing such agony that even breathing became a struggle.

Ariana cried for an extended period before finally regaining her composure. She wiped away her tears and slowly rose to her feet.

The phone issue still needed to be addressed.

After some thought, she realized that her male friends, already familiar to Melon, wouldn't serve as convincing substitutes for a call from his father.

Picking up her phone, Ariana had an idea. She would hire a male voice actor from a gig platform that offered same-day payment to make the call.

She quickly found a reputable platform online and posted her request.

To maintain her privacy, she offered only a basic description of the task at hand and specified that the actor needed to be available for work immediately the next day.

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After making her post, Ariana kept an eye on her phone, awaiting a response. However, no one seemed to accept the task for some time.

Then, suddenly, a notification popped up on her phone. Upon closer inspection, she saw it was a video call request from the affluent online friend who had recently developed an interest in making food for his daughter.

Ariana was slightly taken aback. Receiving a video call at such a late hour was unexpected. She was about to decline the call when it ended from the other side.

Moments later, a text message arrived.

“Sorry, I pressed the wrong button.”

Ariana responded, “It’s fine.”

Feeling restless and somewhat curious due to her own emotional turmoil, she inquired, “Why are you awake at this hour?” Soon enough, another message popped up.

“Insomnia. I’m researching baby food.”

This was followed by a photo showing a pile of ingredients. Another message quickly appeared.

“How do you make osmanthus milk jelly?”

Ariana paused to think before starting to type out the recipe.

But as she did so, she realized that mere words might not accurately convey the nuances of the dish. The proportions of the ingredients were key, and it was difficult to get them right based solely on a written recipe.

Given his previous, less-than-stellar attempt at making a cupcake, ninjanovel.com

Ariana suspected that he might not be an experienced cook. Following the recipe to the letter could lead to a disappointing result.

So she deleted her original message and typed anew. “Can we video chat? I'll show you how to make it.”

Almost immediately, a new video call request appeared on her screen.

When Ariana accepted the call, she felt a bit awkward. It was her first time interacting with an online friend via video, and she wasn't sure what to say initially.

Even though the camera on the other side only showed the view from the rear lens, Ariana still felt self-conscious. After a brief moment of silence, she started explaining the recipe step-by-step.

The other person remained quiet, simply following her instructions.

Ariana noticed that the camera angle shifted occasionally, and she found herself momentarily distracted by the man's attractive hand.

But the camera quickly returned its focus to the ingredients.

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Caught in this momentary distraction, she was startled when a voice from the other end of the call suddenly asked, “What's next?”

Ariana was momentarily frozen.

The man's voice was deep. Oddly, it was accompanied by a background noise, almost like static or some form of electrical interference.

The resemblance was striking.

Ariana stood still, taken aback by the uncanny similarity. For a moment, she was at a loss for words.

The voice was so reminiscent of Theodore's that she almost believed he was the one speaking on the other end of the Line. "Are you still there? Is the call breaking up due to poor internet?"

The voice sounded slightly confused.

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It was only then that Ariana shook off her reverie, scolding herself for letting her imagination run wild, just as Sonia had warned her.

She softly patted her face, reminding herself that many people have similar voices. On closer listening, she detected a slight nasal quality in the voice on the other end that made it sound even gentler.

A fleeting emotion tugged at Ariana's senses. She mentally scoffed at herself for even sparing a thought for Theodore, who had always been so aloof in his speech.

Pulling herself together, Ariana continued to provide cooking instructions.

The man on the other end was laconic, offering only brief acknowledgments here and there.

Despite her efforts to convince herself that the voice could not be Theodore's, hearing it continually disrupted her focus. Her attention wandered several times, to the extent that the man on the other end sensed something was off.

Setting down the ingredients he was handling, he directly asked, "Is everything alright? You seem distracted."

Ariana paused before softly saying, "It's nothing, it's just. Your voice sounds very similar to that of my late husband."

After speaking those words, Ariana sensed they might not have been the most appropriate. Realizing her comment could make the situation awkward, she quickly added, "I didn't mean anything by it; there are subtle differences between your voice and his."

The person on the other end didn't say much, seemingly unbothered by her remark. He continued to follow her cooking instructions and casually said, "Maybe it's because I have a cold and my voice hasn't fully recovered. It could be a coincidence."

Shortly afterward, the camera angle changed, indicating that he had moved to the living room and sat down on a sofa. Following some intermittent noise, silence fell once more.

The rear-facing camera remained active, leaving Ariana clueless about his actions. Soon, she heard him ask, "How long has it been since your husband passed away?"

With a wistful smile, Ariana answered slowly, "He died in a car accident five years ago."

The simple sentence weighed heavily on her heart. Considering recent events, her emotional state was fragile. Unable to hold back, her voice tinged with emotion, she confessed, "I can't move on. I miss him every day."

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After a pause to regain her composure, she continued, "I apologize for losing my cool when I heard a voice similar to his. I must seem quite foolish."

"It's okay," the man responded gently. "We all have things that are hard to let go of. I do too." The conversation took a turn, becoming more casual.

Ariana found herself surprisingly at ease talking to him. Perhaps the resemblance of their voices eased her into an effortless flow of dialogue.

On the other end, Holden savored every word Ariana spoke. Regardless of the topic, her voice seemed to wash away his fatigue.

As Ariana carried on her conversation while also checking her app for any responses to her request, she noticed that no one had replied yet, likely due to the short notice.

Suddenly, an idea struck her, and she quickly said, "By the way, could I ask you for a favor?" "What kind of favor?" Holden inquired. ANGELA'S LIBRARY

Ariana took a deep breath before explaining, "You see, I haven't mustered the courage to tell my son about his father's death. He's been longing for a call from his dad. Could you pretend to be him and call my son tomorrow? I'll make sure to pay you for it once it's done."

Hearing the word "pay," Holden chuckled softly.

The sound of his chuckle made Ariana's heart quiver.

It was eerily reminiscent of how Theodore used to laugh.

She pinched her hand tightly, reminding herself to stay composed.

The man on the other end was just an online friend; there was no way he could be Theodore. Then she heard him ask, "Regarding the payment you mentioned, how much do you plan to offer?" Given that he didn't seem to be in financial need, Ariana lightened the mood with a joke.

"I won't be so predictable as to transfer money the moment we agree."

Catching the nuance in her words, he cleared his throat and redirected the conversation.

"Alright, what should I be aware of?"

Fill me in."

Taking a moment to think, Ariana briefed him on her son's birthday, his likes and dislikes, and the questions Melon might pose. After listening carefully, the man spoke up, "I understand what you've shared. However, you've left out the most crucial detail."

Puzzled, Ariana wondered what she could have missed.

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With a hint of a smile in his voice, he enlightened her. "You haven't told me your son's name yet."

Ariana hit her palm on her forehead in a resounding slap. How in the world had she not given him his name? "Sorry, it completely slipped my mind. His name's Max," she quickly told Holden.

"Got it, Max, it is. I'll make sure to keep that in my memory," Holden quipped with a light chuckle. "Send me your number. I'll give him a ring tomorrow."

"Thank you so much." A sigh of relief escaped Ariana's lips. She could finally release the tension that had been furrowing her brow.

A moment of acknowledgment passed between them before the line went off.

Lowering her phone, Ariana found herself entranced, caught between the eerie resemblance of that voice to Theodore's and the warmth of Holden's tenor. The haunting similarity left her in a daze. It wasn't until after she had dispatched her contact details to him that her tumultuous thoughts started to dissipate.

ANGELA'S LIBRARY

Perched at the edge of the couch, Ariana couldn't help but unlock her phone again, her compulsion driving her to pore over the man's sparse social media presence time and time again. She hunted fruitlessly for any breadcrumbs of information.

His online presence yielded nothing but an outline of a life shrouded in ambiguity. She exhaled disappointedly, her hand falling limp in her lap, her thoughts drifting to the brief encounter with the Theodore doppelganger from earlier that day.

Awake of defeat washed over her, a feeling that had hollowed out her very core. Was she so desperate and delusional that she now saw his apparitions wherever she turned? The very thought left her feeling hollow.

Sinking into the plush cushions of the couch, Ariana took a slow, deep breath in an attempt to calm her tumultuous mind. She scrolled through the man's profile once more, but it revealed nothing about her lost love, Theodore.

Of course not, she reprimanded herself. What had she expected to unearth about Theodore from this enigmatic man she had never even met?

With a rueful shake of her head, Ariana locked her phone and shuffled off to bed, the images of those vacant social media pages trailing behind her like a specter.

Melon was uncharacteristically silent the following morning and seemed more like a shadow of his typically effervescent, chatty self.

Ariana's fingers ran tenderly through his hair as she coaxed, "I'm certain Daddy will be calling very soon, my sweet. Perhaps even today!"

Melon regarded her skeptically, his lips puckered with doubt, silently musing, "Are you truly expecting me to believe that?" Without a word, he returned to listlessly turning the pages of his picture book. Ariana's sigh carried a weight of guilt as she gazed at her sad son.

Her anxious gaze was constantly drawn back to her silent phone. She had been anxiously anticipating the stranger's call since she woke up.

Just then, an unfamiliar number flashed across her screen. Her heart leaped as she swiped to answer, eagerly saying, "Hello?" To her surprise, it was Sonia's exuberant voice that greeted her, bubbling over with playful teasing.

"Well, well, you sound eager!"

Waiting on a special someone's call, | presume?"

Hearing the knowing lilt in her friend's voice, Ariana couldn't help but laugh, a sound tinged with amusement and resignation.

"Why call me using an unfamiliar number?"

Sonia's voice dripped with exasperation.

"Ugh, my old number got leaked, and | was inundated with spam calls all day. | switched to this new number to escape the madness and wanted to ensure you had it."

"Oh," Ariana said with an amused smile.

After a brief catch-up conversation, they bid each other farewell.

As Ariana ended the call, the doorbell chimed. She placed her phone facedown on the couch and hurried to answer the door. It was the delivery service with a package. While she was signing for it, her phone rang once more.

Melon's gaze flicked between his mother at the door and her buzzing phone. After a moment's hesitation, curiosity got the better of him.

He reached over and pressed the green button.

"Apologies for the late call. Meetings all day," a genial male voice flowed through the speaker before Melon could utter a word.

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Melon held the phone against his ear, listening attentively, as the man on the other end spoke. When the man finally finished speaking, the boy seized his chance.

"I'm sorry, sir, but my mother can't come to the phone right now," he piped up politely in his young voice. "May I ask who's calling?"

Only silence greeted his query. Melon waited several long moments, but the man didn't say anything. Thinking that the call had been dropped, he said in a tentative tone, "Hello?"

Just as he was about to take the phone away from his ear, the man spoke again, his voice unexpectedly soft, "Is. is that you, Max?"

Melon's brows furrowed, his confusion evident.

"Who are you? Why do you know my name?" As he said that, he quickly glanced down at the phone's screen to see whether he knew the digits or not. But it offered no identifying details.

Once again, silence was the sole reply.

The boy's patience started waning, and Melon stated matter-of-factly,

"Well, sir, if there's nothing more, I'll be going. Then, bye-bye."

Hearing that, just a second before the boy ended the call, the man found his voice and said, "It is me. your father."

Melon caught the word "father" clearly and stopped his movement midway. Now, it was he who was stunned and couldn't find words to respond.

As the shock washed over him, the boy subconsciously turned away and cried out, "Mommy, some scoundrel is on the phone!"

Having heard her son's distress, Ariana swiftly closed the door and rushed over. She took the phone from his hand and asked, "What scoundrel, dear?"

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Melon looked at her blankly.

“He says he’s my father. But I won’t be fooled!” He gave a nonchalant shrug before scratching his head, clearly baffled.

“It is strange, the number of men claiming to be my father lately.”

At her son’s charming comment, Ariana couldn’t help laughing at him.

Over the years, she had met a lot of men who tried to approach her, trying to gain her affection. But she had refused all of them politely, without wavering even the slightest.

When they couldn’t win Ariana over, they often tried cozying up to Melon instead, saying, “Let me be your father!”

But her son, as intelligent as he had ever been, would politely and yet firmly decline each time. Even if the men used tricks, such as buying toys and snacks for Melon, the boy would insist on saying,

“I already have a father even though he’s not here now.” Thinking little of it, Ariana promptly redialed the mysterious number, assuming that it was her online friend.

The phone was soon connected.

Chapter 999

Melon was still around and saw his mother’s action. When the person answered, Melon realized she was calling the man just now back and looked at his mother in surprise.

“Mommy, why are you calling the scoundrel back?”

Flustered, Ariana cleared her throat and said quickly, "Oh, I was just checking on a delivery."

Gently stroking Melon's hair, she ventured, "Would you like to speak to your father, dear? I know you miss him." Melon's eyes went wide, disbelief evident on his face. Half-eager, half-doubtful, he exclaimed, "Is he truly my father?" With a warm smile, Ariana pinched his chubby cheek affectionately and set the call to speaker mode.

"Your son would like to talk," she told the man before she handed the phone in air.

On the other end of the line, the man chuckled in response.

"Why now?"

He called me a scoundrel just a moment ago!"

But Melon didn't explain himself and piped up, "If you're really my father, why did you call me Max instead of Melon? Mommy said that you chose my nickname yourself. Did you forget already?"

The silence on the other end returned once again. With a gentle tug, Melon held onto Ariana's hand, doubt etched on his face. "Mommy, what's the matter? Is the connection breaking again?"

Ariana felt embarrassed, realizing she had forgotten to mention his nickname yesterday. The man on the other side must be unaware that he had a special moniker.

"There seems to be a hiccup in the connection at the border," Ariana explained with a sheepish smile. Embracing Melon in her arms, she continued softly, "Your father hasn't actually forgotten the nickname Melon. It's just been a while, and he could be aiming for a more formal tone in addressing you."

In an attempt to bridge the awkwardness, Ariana said "hello" to the phone once more.

After a moment, it appeared that the other end had finally caught the signal. The man's voice returned, echoing Ariana's story.

“Apologies, the reception was patchy earlier. Is Melon still on the line?”

“I'm here!” Melon's eyes brightened, a mix of happiness and skepticism in his voice. His delight was palpable, but he still held back from using the word “daddy.”

This sudden appearance of a father figure had thrown him off balance, and the title felt somewhat foreign. Taking the phone confidently, Melon ventured, “Dad, can you tell me when I was born?” Sensing the challenge, the man chuckled and answered Melon's query.

After that, Melon kept asking again and over, “What's my favorite color? What's my favorite food?”

Chapter 1000

This back-and-forth continued, Melon firing off questions like rapid shots. Luckily, Ariana had shared most of Melon's details with Holden the previous night, equipping him to tackle the onslaught of Melon's queries.

Listening to their interaction, Ariana finally could breathe. After the string of inquiries, Melon couldn't contain his excitement, his voice changing as he affectionately called out, “Daddy!”

In an office across town, as Shawn entered with documents in hand, he was taken aback by the unexpected sight of his boss sporting a gentle smile.

It was a sight that startled him. Mr. Fredrick was known for his resolute demeanor, his smiles few and far between.

Holden's smile was now as warm as a cozy hearth, a stark contrast to the cold exterior he typically projected. In the past, this particular smile was exclusively reserved for Adele.

Before he could utter a word, Shawn noticed that Holden's phone was on speaker mode.

A child's voice wafted from the device, addressing Holden with a term of endearment that sent a jolt through Shawn. What in the world? Did Mr. Fredrick have a hidden family?

Shawn dared not probe or linger. He set down the documents and left.

Holden was wholly engrossed in his conversation with the boy. An unfamiliar sensation tugged at his heartstrings.

Though he was only playing a role, the heartfelt sweetness in Melon's voice as he called him "daddy" touched Holden on a deep level.

It was as though he had stumbled upon a lost treasure. Sadness would set in when he figured that it was all an illusion. Holden was surprised that the little boy was Melon.

He had never been one to believe in fate, but learning that the boy was none other than Melon felt like an alignment of stars. Ariana's voice, the same voice he had been yearning for half a year, had been right there all along!

Then, Melon's words cast another shadow.

"Yesterday, Mommy gave me a number to call, but it was disconnected. I thought you had left me."

Inexplicably, Holden's heart ached at those words. Softening his tone, he consoled, "Abandon you? Never, Melon. It was my mistake. I changed my number without informing your mommy first. That's why I'm calling you now."

At that moment, Melon questioned, "Why aren't you talking to Mommy?"

Ariana and Holden were both taken aback. Ariana mustered an awkward smile and inquired, "Have you been resting well lately?" "I'm fine," Holden replied earnestly.

They continued to navigate the conversation with a sense of unease.

Seeing this, Melon frowned.

