

Departure with a Belly Chapter 511

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Chapter 511 I Want a Hug, Mommy

Regain my memories? The abrupt question caught Victoria off-guard and she didn't know what to say. Instead, she became lost in her thoughts.

She did want them back. After all, who wouldn't want to regain what they lost?

However, after everything that happened, she started getting the feeling that it wasn't quite so important for her to regain her memories. Even if she didn't, the people who cared about her would remain caring about her—like Alaric, for example. Despite his serious injuries, the first thing he did once he woke up was to rush over and save her.

Her memories were indeed of great importance to her, but at the same time, they were not all that essential either.

With that thought in mind, Victoria answered, "I'll just leave it up to fate to see whether I regain them or not. Trying too hard might backfire on me instead."

Alaric was a little startled. He didn't expect her to take this attitude with the situation as he thought she would give a definite answer, be it yes or no.

After musing in thought for a while, Alaric's lips curled up. "My Snowball will always be my Snowball. It's good that you see it this way. You won't stress yourself out with inner conflict."

Victoria chuckled at his words. "Why would I be conflicted and stress myself out? That's tiring."

She had been rescued, and the people who cared about her were beside her. She was also going to see her two adorable children soon. What was there for her to feel stressed and conflicted about?

It's not like this is something I can get back just because I want to anyway. There's no point getting stressed out over it. I might as well just take things as they come. Maybe my memories will naturally come back to me someday.

Alaric ruffled the back of her head with a smile. "That's a good way of thinking about it."

Soon, they arrived at the entrance.

It was closed and Alaric moved to ring the doorbell, but the woman beside him caught his hand.

"W- Wait. Wait a minute."

Alaric looked at Victoria. "What's the matter?"

As soon as he asked that question, he realized that Victoria's hand was trembling. He was taken aback. "Are you afraid?"

Victoria didn't know what to say. She pursed her lips for a moment before muttering, "I- I'm not afraid. I'm just a little nervous."

If no one told her about it, she never would have known that she had two children. During the time leading up to this, she had been so anxious to see them that she couldn't wait to get over here.

However, now that she was mere seconds away from seeing them, she started tensing up.

"Nervous?"

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Alaric looked down at her hand which was clutching his tightly. It didn't look like she was here to see her children. It felt as if she came to see her enemy.

That being said, he understood what she was going through.

He had been a lot more anxious when he wanted to spend time with the children after finding out they were his.

“Don’t be nervous. You’re their mother. You gave birth to them. What’s there for you to be nervous about?” Alaric teased as he gripped her hand in reassurance.

Victoria was still nervous anyway. “That’s right. Why am I nervous? They’re my children. I gave birth to them. What’s there for me to be nervous about?”

She repeated the words to herself several times as if she wanted to brainwash herself, but that didn’t help. She was still nervous.

“Why don’t I give you a bit more time to adjust? I’ll wait a while before I ring the doorbell, okay?” Alaric suggested.

Victoria immediately nodded in agreement.

“T–That’s a good idea.”

For some reason, Alaric was secretly pleased and amused to see her being this nervous. She’s acting exactly the way I did when I was being timid and clumsy with the two children back then.

Victoria took quite a few deep breaths. Once she calmed down and mentally prepared herself, she walked over to Alaric. “I’m ready now. You can ring the doorbell.”

There was no reason to delay the inevitable. She would only get more nervous with each passing minute.

“Are you sure? I’ll ring it now, okay?” Alaric checked.

“Yeah... Go ahead.”

As she spoke, she shrank behind him until she was basically hidden from view.

Alaric became even more amused. “Why are you hiding behind me if you’re ready?”

Victoria was irked by his teasing tone. "Do you enjoy seeing me like this? Are you teasing me on purpose?"

Alaric's eyes were full of mirth, but he refuted it anyway. "Not at all."

"I heard it."

"What did you hear?"

"I heard you laughing at me."

"Is that so? Did I laugh just now?"

"You're laughing on the inside."

You can hear me when I laugh on the inside?"

Victoria was speechless.

"Alaric!"

"Yes? Why did you call me, my dear?"

He asked when he already knew the answer, and that only made Victoria pinch him in the back. She simply wanted to teach him a lesson, but his entire body stiffened in response.

Victoria didn't notice anything. After giving him a hard pinch, she withdrew her hand and walked

away.

Alaric stood there

with his gaze a little dark. He pursed his lips. For the first time, he felt as if he had shot himself in the foot.

Just that tiniest act of hers made his body heat up. Perhaps it was because they had been separated for a very long time.

Thankfully for him, it was winter and his clothes were thick enough.

Alaric cleared his throat to hide his awkwardness. He was about to speak when he heard excited cries ringing out behind them.

“Mommy!”

“Mommy!”

It was the thrilled squeals of two little children. Alaric immediately recognized Nicole and Nathan’s voices.

However, his immediate response was to check Victoria’s reaction.

True enough, as soon as Victoria heard the cries, she froze up and stood rooted on the spot.

Alaric looked over and saw the little children scampering over at what seemed like the speed of lightning, though they weren’t quite that fast. Nevertheless, they scrambled over to Victoria and hugged one of her legs each.

“Mommy!”

The two of them chirped like little birds as they kept calling out to Victoria.

Alaric noticed that Victoria had become even stiffer now.

It was a while before she seemed to finally regain her senses. She looked down at the two children hugging her legs.

She saw their adorable faces and froze up as she stared at them in a daze.

They look... exactly like the children I saw in my dreams. Am I clairvoyant? Or... does this mean I still have my memories locked up in my head somewhere, even though I can’t remember them? Maybe that’s why I dreamed of their faces.

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“You’re back at last, Mommy! I missed you so much.”

Nicole tugged on Victoria’s clothes and stretched her arms out for a hug. The little boy beside her was a lot more reserved. He looked extremely happy as well, but he didn’t tug on Victoria’s clothes.

A few moments went by and Victoria still hadn’t picked Nicole up, so the little girl became impatient and cried out, “I want a hug, Mommy!”

At Nicole’s urging, Victoria slowly crouched down and opened her arms.

The moment her arms were open wide enough, the children threw themselves at her. She nearly stumbled backward from the force, but thankfully, Alaric could already guess what would happen and had crouched down to support her.

Chapter 512 The More You Know, the More You’ll Worry

It had been far too long since the children last saw Victoria. Although they had their grandmother and great-grandparents to keep them company, a ton of good food to eat, and even made many wonderful friends nearby, their mother was still the most important person to them.

They missed Victoria dearly, and now that they finally got to see her, they nestled in her arms and tried to stick as close to her as possible. They didn’t want to separate from her.

Mary and Casey who were right behind the children were both sporting looks of surprise too. They didn’t expect Victoria and Alaric to show up here out of the blue.

“Victoria? Al? Why did you come over so suddenly? You didn’t say anything beforehand.”

Victoria heard the voice and looked up at the two people in front of her. One of them had a head full of gray hair but seemed rather sprightly still. She was wearing a vintage dress and had a white shawl around her shoulders, making her look like a wealthy woman from old Hollywood movies.

The woman beside her was a lot younger. She looked like a middle-aged woman and was fashionably dressed too. Both women gave off different auras, but they shared a resemblance.

Because Victoria had lost her memories, Alaric gave her a summary of the family. There fore, after noting that the two women came with the children, she immediately guessed who they were.

“Hi, Mom. Hi, Grandma.”

Victoria was still a little stiff but was able to go along with the flow and greet the women.

Casey quickly came over to help her up.

“It has been so many years since I last saw you, my dear girl. I never thought you would have become a mother by the time I see you again, and a mother to two adorable little children, no less. Come. Crouching down for so long is not good for your knees.”

As Casey helped Victoria up, the latter ended up stumbling a little because she was still rather weak. Alaric quickly supported her back to prevent her from falling.

Mary noticed everything and narrowed her eyes.

“What happened? Why did you lose so much weight?” Casey, who was holding Victoria by the wrist, noticed how thin and frail it was.

Victoria’s heart warmed at the kindness and concern the older woman showed her.

“I’ve been on a diet recently, Grandma. That’s why I lost a lot of weight.”

“A diet?” Casey sighed. “Why did you go on a diet? Look at how skinny you are. Since you’re here now, you’re not to stick to any weight loss diet anymore. I’ll make you a hearty bowl of chicken soup later. You can’t be too skinny, you know, or you’ll fall sick easily.”

No matter what Casey said, Victoria simply smiled and nodded.

“Okay.”

“Come. Let’s get into the house.”

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Casey opened the door and led Victoria in.

The two children were quick to follow her in. They were still clutching her clothes.

Mary didn’t move, and when she saw that Alaric was about to head inside, she called out to him.

“Wait a second, Al.”

Alaric was preoccupied with Victoria, but since his mother stopped him, he had no choice but to remain outside.

“Yes, Mom?”

Mary didn't answer. She waited until the others had gone further into the house before she dragged Alaric over to her.

“What's going on?” Mary noticed that her son was a little pale. Although he was trying his best to make it seem like everything was normal, both he and Victoria looked as if they had been injured recently. Though they weren't necessarily sickly pale, they certainly didn't look as if they had fully recovered.

She also noticed the way Victoria wobbled as she stood up and the amount of weight she had lost.

Previously, Mary had a feeling that the situation was rather troubling, so she brought the children to the countryside to stay out of the picture and stop herself from spending her time worrying about all sorts of things.

However, upon seeing the two of them now, she realized that the situation had to have been a lot more serious than she thought.

Alaric kept quiet for a while, but in the end, he said quietly, “It's all over now, Mom. It's best if you don't ask for details.”

Mary didn't

agree

with him.

“Why can't I ask for details? Since it's all over now, there's nothing to worry about anymore, so what's the problem with telling me what happened?”

“The more you know, the more worried you'll be,” Alaric replied.

“Didn't you say everything's fine now?” Mary asked.

Alaric pressed his lips together and said nothing.

A thought occurred to Mary and she asked with a frown, “Where's your father?”

“He's not back yet. There's something he has to deal with first.”

Since Adrian had gotten in touch with Old Mr. Morison, the whole situation was blowing up.

Mary's gaze changed. "Is your father alright?"

"You've been with him for so many years, Mom. I'm sure you know what he's like."

"That's true. We'll let him deal with things then. Why do you look unwell? Did you get injured?"

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Alaric didn't answer, which meant that he didn't deny it.

"What about Victoria? What happened to her? Why did she lose so much weight?"

They weren't gone for very long but she's become so skinny! That's not good for her, Mary thought to herself.

Again, Alaric didn't answer. In his heart, he recalled the way she seemed to take tiny bites when she ate in the morning, and she ate very little too.

He thought of something and said to Mary, "Grandma says she wants to make some chicken soup for Victoria. Try and see if you can talk her out of it.",

"Well..."

Mary was dying to know what was going on. She sorely wanted to ask why, but the firm look on her son's face stopped her.

Oh, well. Forget it. They're here now and whatever it is, it's all in the past now. Adrian can deal with the loose ends. Al just doesn't want me to worry about them.

She wasn't going to force the issue and ruin their good intentions.

Mary processed everything and changed her stance.

"Fine. I'll talk to your grandma and tell her to make something light for lunch."

"Thanks, Mom."

"No need. Hurry up and go in. I can tell that your heart's with her instead of me right now."

Although Mary stopped Alaric from heading in, his eyes had been fixed on Victoria's silhouette the whole time. Once she was gone from his sight, he kept staring at the spot where she was last seen. He had been distracted the whole time.

Sure enough, as soon as Mary gave the word, Alaric strode off into the house.

Mary was left standing there feeling somewhat exasperated. She felt as if all the love and attention she showered on her son had been for nothing.

Nevertheless, she recalled the way she and her husband always stuck together when they first got married. She never thought about how his mother felt about that.

History was repeating itself now.

She didn't want to dwell on this anymore, so after letting out a small sigh, she walked into the house

too.

Once Victoria entered the house, Casey went to the kitchen to get some food for her while Victoria sat on the couch with the two children sticking to her like glue.

She had been stiff and nervous at first, but she was slowly adjusting to the situation now

The children were soft and cuddly. They were in a good mood too. It was obvious that the two children had been well cared for while Victoria was away.

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It Does Taste Pretty Good

While Casey was busy scrounging up food, Nicole whispered, "What have you been doing, Mommy? Why did it take you so long to come back? We missed you! Nicky missed Mommy so much."

Victoria stroked Nicole's head before murmuring, "Nicky?"

Nicole nodded at once.

Then, Victoria looked at the little boy beside Nicole.

Nathan blinked and seemed to read her mind. "Nate missed Mommy a lot too."

Initially, Victoria had been wondering how she was going to find out what nickname she usually used with Nathan, now that she knew Nicole's. It would be a bad idea for her to ask outright."

Although Nathan was young and clueless about a lot of things, he was also a sensitive child. The children did not know that she had lost her memories so they would surely find it strange if she, their mother, asked them about her nickname for them.

Perhaps they wouldn't think she had lost her memory. Instead, they would wonder if she no longer loved them. What other reason could there be that would explain why she couldn't even remember their names?

However, she didn't expect Nathan to be such an intuitive child who immediately said exactly what she needed to hear.

Victoria couldn't resist kissing Nathan.

"What a good little boy you are,

Nate."

Nicole was immediately displeased by the fact that Nathan had gotten a kiss when she had only gotten a hug.

"You kissed Nate so you have to kiss Nicky too, Mommy."

Victoria chuckled and pulled Nicole over, then kissed the little girl on the forehead.

Once she finished kissing Nicole, she realized that her daughter's personality was exactly what she seemed like based on first impressions.

Nicole looked like an adorable little girl and acted like one too.

Nathan's personality was also similar to her first impression of him. He seemed quieter, well-behaved, and more reserved.

Nathan sensed that there was something different about his mother, but no matter how clever he was, he was still a child. Since Victoria was trying to keep the truth from him, he wasn't able to pinpoint exactly what had changed about her.

The only thing he knew for certain was that she was a lot skinnier now.

Nathan's heart ached for his mother. He took her hand and said softly, "You must eat all your meals properly, Mommy."

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Victoria was startled for a moment, but she nodded.

"Of course. I have to take good care of myself so that I can raise my babies."

Victoria's eyes grew a little misty.

It had indeed been a good idea to have the children with her. Her heart finally settled down.

Victoria pulled her children into her arms, and with them on either side of her, she closed her eyes. In peace.

That was the sight that greeted Alaric when he came into the house.

He stopped and stared at the three of them.

Click. He heard the sound of a camera shutter behind him.

Alaric turned around and saw Mary smiling with her phone in hand.

"That was such a lovely photo."

Since she was facing the same direction as Alaric earlier, he assumed she had taken a photo of Victoria and the children, so he scooted over.

"How does it look?"

Alaric was taken aback when he saw the photo.

He thought Mary had taken a photo of the heartwarming scene he saw earlier—Victoria and the children all wrapped up in a hug together.

He wanted to keep a record of that too, but he had been staring in a daze.

While Mary did take a photo of that scene, he was also included in the photo.

The photo was positioned somewhat from Alaric's perspective. His gaze was visible. He was staring at the trio's group hug.

"What do you think? I did a good job taking this photo of the four of you, right?"

Alaric didn't reply. After staring at the photo in silence for quite some time, he said, "Send it to me."

Once he received the photo, he immediately made it his phone background and continued staring

at it.

Mary shook her head helplessly.

The strongest of the Cadogan genetics seemed to affect the way they viewed love. Throughout the generations, the Cadogan men were all romantic and wholeheartedly dedicated to their wives. Not only did they treat their spouses well, but they also remained loyal. Once they fell in love with someone, their feelings would last forever.

Some women grew jealous when their sons took such good care of their wives and showed them less attention, and that undoubtedly had something to do with their own husbands. Why else would they need to seek out their son's affection?

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As for Mary, she would never feel jealous no matter how well Alaric treated Victoria. She would not think that she had lost her son.

It was because her husband had always been so good to her that she could put herself in the shoes of the younger couple and understand what they were feeling.

“Okay, here we go.”

Casey’s voice rang out from the kitchen, and she soon appeared bearing a large tray of food. Alaric saw her and quickly went over to help.

Victoria was about to get up and lend a hand too, but since Alaric had gone over, she didn’t move from the couch.

The table was filled with all sorts of food and snacks. Many of them had been bought from the market not too long ago, including freshly-plucked fruits. There were also a few pastries and cookies that Casey made herself.

“Eat up. You’re too skinny.”

Casey picked out a few things and served them to Victoria.

Victoria accepted the plate with a smile. She was glad that it wasn’t meat or anything heavy like that. Otherwise, there was a chance she might vomit on the spot.

She took a bite of the cake and looked up to find Casey’s expectant eyes on her.

“How is it? Does it taste alright?”

“It tastes great,” Victoria replied. “Did you make it yourself, Grandma?”

A pleased smile broke out on Casey’s face.

“That’s right. I try my hand at baking when I have the time, and since the children came over, I decided to make a couple more things. If you like it, I’ll whip up a fresh batch for you to take home with you.”

“That would be wonderful. Thank you,

Grandma.”

She nibbled at the cake a couple more times, and just as she couldn't bring herself to take another bite, Alaric came over and sat down beside her.

"I want to know what it tastes like."

His voice was low as it rumbled beside Victoria's ear, and before she even had the time to react, he grabbed her fair hand and brought it up to his mouth before taking a bite of the cake she was holding.

Victoria was speechless.

She felt his tongue and lips scraping across her fingers and her cheeks instantly flamed as she instinctively tried to pull her hand back.

It would've been better if she hadn't done that. The moment she tried to move, Alaric took her hand and held onto it.

hand and held onto it.

Victoria didn't know what to do.

What is he doing? Mom and Grandma are in the room with us.

"You turned red, Mommy!" Nicole exclaimed.

Alaric glanced at Victoria and smirked. "It does taste pretty good."

Chapter 514 Seemed to Have Enjoyed Yourself

Alaric's behavior, including that last sentence of his, made even Mary and Casey feel a little awkward, let alone Victoria.

They never thought he would be this open with his flirting, especially in front of them.

However, Mary soon picked up on something.

Alaric had gone over to Victoria to finish that piece of cake for her. Mary had seen the way Victoria's bites grew progressively smaller. She figured that Victoria couldn't eat the rest of the cake, which was why Alaric had done that.

Mary cleared her throat and suggested to Casey, “Mom, since the young ones are busy being all lovey–dovey with each other, let’s not disturb them. Why don’t we sit outside for a while?”

Casey didn’t notice anything. She simply thought that her grandson and his wife had a splendid relationship and readily agreed to her daughter’s suggestion. The two of them left the couple and brought the children with them too.

Nicole didn’t want to leave, but Casey moved in to carry her. Seeing this, Nicole agreed to leave with them as she didn’t want Casey to overexert herself.

Once they were gone, all that was left were two people sitting extremely close on the couch, as well as a table full of snacks.

All was quiet, and Victoria could feel her cheeks turning normal again.

She exhaled in relief and tried to pull her hand away from Alaric.

However, he tightened his grip.

Victoria glared at him. She could tell he didn’t plan on letting go.

Alaric cocked his eyebrows. “Feeling shy?”

Victoria’s cheeks turned scarlet again.

“D–Did you used to... act like this in front of the family too?”

She lost her memories and didn’t know how they used to act with each other.

However, it was clear that Alaric’s earlier stunt was not something she expected.

She knew that when two people were in love, they would naturally engage in intimate behavior, just like the way they nearly kissed in the room last time. She didn’t feel averse to it then. In fact, she wouldn’t mind if they did kiss.

But... just now, he did it in front of his mother and grandmother, and even the two children.

He looked perfectly natural doing it too, as if it happened many times before.

Therefore, Victoria began to wonder if the two of them had behaved this way in front of the family elders in the past. Why do I feel so awkward? Am I really the type of person who would do that?

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At first, Alaric only wanted to help her finish off the cake. He didn't think she would be clueless as to what his real motives were and even go so far as to assume they used to act this way in public.

Amused, he decided to tease her.

"What do you mean?"

As he asked, he brought her hand up and pressed it gently against his lips.

"You mean doing things like this?"

"Or..."

His voice trailed off as he bit down on her finger.

Victoria could feel the warm wetness on her finger. It sent bolts of electricity through her body. She tried to yank her hand away but he kept a firm grip on it as he looked up and stared at her seductively.

"You mean this, huh? Not used to it?" he mused with a smirk.

Upon noticing that she kept trying to pull her hand away, Alaric held it even tighter. While he was injured, he was still a lot stronger than Victoria.

He brought her hand back up to his lips and pressed them together. When he spoke, his heated breath washed over her hand and she turned crimson, which only amused him even further.

"Don't be shy. We did far more intimate things in the past."

Victoria was speechless.

She stared at him suspiciously. "Really? Why do I get the feeling that I'm not that kind of person?"

Just as she was talking, Alaric pulled her onto his lap before clutching her chin. His warm breath washed over her once more as his lips crashed into hers.

"Mmph."

Victoria thought he would simply tease her a little or toy with her hand a bit more. She didn't think he would actually kiss her.

She felt as if her head exploded as she subconsciously grabbed his shirt.

As Alaric kissed her, he felt the emotions that he had been reining in as they made their way over here being set loose once more.

It wasn't just during this journey. The emotions which had been locked away during this time... over the last few years...

Alaric held Victoria even closer. He squeezed her so tightly that it felt as if he wanted to become one with her.

At first, he simply wanted to tease her a little, but the moment he touched her, he felt as if her body was a magnet that was drawing him near. He couldn't bear to let go. He couldn't bear to retreat. He wanted to invade her personal space and take everything he desired.

Victoria didn't expect this from him. As he deepened the kiss, she became more and more agitated. She had only gripped his shirt at the start, but soon, she couldn't stop herself from shoving him.

It took a huge amount of strength for her to finally push him away. "D-Don't do this," she gasped. "Someone will see us."

This wasn't their house. They weren't in their room.

Alaric was a little dazed. His gaze was burning with desire.

His breathing was even more ragged than hers. "No one's going to come in. They took the children with them to give us some privacy."

At that, even Victoria's ears and neck turned red.

"T-That's even more reason why we can't."

Though the older women had taken the children away, everyone would know what the two of them were doing if they stayed here for too long.

"Can't do what?" Alaric asked hoarsely and moved in closer. "You seemed to have enjoyed the kiss. You even responded to it."

"Y-You forced me into it," Victoria stammered.

"Oh? I'm able to control your body, huh?"

Alaric's hand moved across her waist and he gave it a gentle nudge.

Victoria couldn't stop herself from gasping.

"Hey, you!"

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"Whoa. I can control your body," Alaric chuckled in amusement. "I must do it again."

Victoria turned red and growled, "Don't push it, Alaric!"

"Angry?"

Victoria was so furious that she couldn't speak. Since she wasn't strong enough to push him and didn't want to accidentally aggravate his injury by pushing too hard either, she couldn't do anything to him. All she could do was turn away and ignore him.

away

When she turned away, Alaric saw that her earlobes were alluringly pink. He knew that if he continued teasing her, she would genuinely get mad, so he murmured, "Let me kiss your ear and we'll stop here, okay?"

What? Before Victoria registered what he said, she felt a warm sensation against her ear, and her face turned as red as a tomato. Just as she wanted to protest, he pulled away and let go of her waist

as well.

Chapter 515 Messing With You

When his large hand released her, Victoria stood still for a moment, and she took a while to react. Did he really follow through with his words? Is this how it ends?

The warm touch of his lips still lingered on her earlobe. It was a sensation that made both her earlobe and heart itch. Instinctively, she wanted to reach out and touch her earlobe, but halfway through extending her hand, she restrained herself and pulled it back.

No, I can't touch it. If I do, this mean guy will surely tease me again.

As such, Victoria could only suppress the urge to touch her earlobe and sat there calmly

"Why do you look so disappointed?" Alaric unexpectedly approached her and breathed near her ear. "Are you disappointed because I didn't continue?"

"No!" She hesitantly shrieked before immediately standing up while biting her lip.

"You can sit here by yourself."

She then started to leave.

Alaric quickly held her by her wrist. "Alright, alright. Don't be mad, hmm? I was just messing with you."

"Let go." Victoria still wanted to pull her hand back.

Feeling helpless, Alaric relented. "Fine. I only came here because I noticed that you couldn't eat that piece of pastry."

At this, Victoria, who had been trying to break free from Alaric's hold, paused and turned to look at

him.

"What did you say?"

"You don't have an appetite, no? So, I ate it for you."

Victoria suddenly felt a bit flustered when she heard those words. Did Alaric notice something? Instinctively, she retorted, "Who said I couldn't eat it?"

"Oh?" Alaric raised an eyebrow. "And yet you were taking such small bites and eating so slowly, eh?"

"I like to take my time enjoying my food. You got a problem with that?" Victoria argued.

"Okay, let's say I didn't want to eat it. I only wanted to eat the piece you were holding. Is that better?"

Alaric didn't argue further. If there were things she wanted to hide and didn't want others to know, he didn't have to keep probing.

As expected, Victoria fell silent after he admitted it. It was unclear if she was thinking about something else, as she didn't speak for a long time.

After what seemed like an eternity, she finally looked up at Alaric. "To be honest, my appetite hasn't been great lately. I've been trying to get better."

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"He didn't expect her to voluntarily share this with him. Hence, he glanced at her with surprise in his eyes and uttered, "I know."

He could tell she was going through an adjustment period, and since the test results didn't show any major issues, he didn't press further into the matter.

With these thoughts in mind, Alaric couldn't help but caress the back of Victoria's head. "It's not a big problem, so just take good care of yourself. You don't have to hide things about yourself from me. I can help you anytime if you let me know, alright?"

"Remember how you didn't feel like letting me know when you were injured too? You should understand how I feel."

“Then, what about I tell you everything no matter what happens from now on? And you can tell me about anything you encounter in return?”

Victoria pondered for a moment and agreed to this. “Okay.”

“Then, it’s settled.”

“Speaking of which, was it really obvious that I couldn’t bring myself to eat just now? Would Grandma think I didn’t like the pastries she made?”

“Don’t worry. Grandma will only think you are trying to lose weight. She won’t think about anything else, especially since I ate the leftovers.”

It was because they had eaten that pastry that the fragrance of lavender lingered on their breath when they kissed just moments ago.

Victoria finally relaxed upon hearing his words.

The corners of Alaric’s lips curled up. “If you don’t want to eat something next time, just stuff it all in my mouth, okay?”

“Okay... I got it.”

Victoria couldn’t tell if it was just her imagination, but even though Alaric was helping her, she always sensed a flirtatious undertone in his words.

She lingered in the room for a while, allowing that awkward feeling to subside before finally getting up to search for the other people here.

When she left the main hall, she stepped into a large courtyard.

The courtyard was filled with tall trees and an orchard and vegetable garden. The kitchen was also built beside the orchard. The two elderly people lived here, and sometimes when the weather was bad and they didn’t want to go out, they would pick fresh vegetables from the garden and cook them. They lived a green and environmentally friendly life.

Just as Victoria went out, she coincidentally came across Casey squatting in the vegetable garden with the two little ones.

Nicole was also bent over with her small behind in the air as she plucked a leafy vegetable while Nathan squatted beside her and helped the ladies out. The two children had their hands full.

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Witnessing this scene, Victoria felt so surreal. It was as if she were walking on clouds.

“Mommy!” The children called her over when they spotted her.

After Victoria walked over, she also got down to their level before asking, "What are you all up to? Let me help."

Casey glanced at her and smiled warmly. "It's alright. Just look at how thin your arms and legs are. You better go inside and rest. Have something to eat. Let me and your mother take care of this. Your grandfather will cook when he comes back. We'll just wait for him to do that before we start eating."

Without waiting for Victoria's response, Casey pushed her out of the vegetable garden. They happened to see Mary coming over just as Victoria stepped out.

Mary, too, put on a smile. "Go inside and take a rest. We'll handle the rest here."

Victoria felt a bit awkward, and she was about to reply when Mary continued, "Actually, your Grandma wants more time alone with the children. She really likes these babies. After all, she knows that the children won't be staying here for long. She can only spend this limited time with them."

Victoria finally understood after hearing those words.

"I see." She gave it a thought before smilingly suggesting, "How about we let Nicole and Nathan stay here every summer and winter break from now on?"

Mary only brought it up without giving it much thought. She hadn't expected Victoria to propose something like that.

"I did mention it to her, but she was worried that you would be unwilling to let your children stay over. It didn't feel right for us to ask you directly, either. But since you've brought it up now, it would be great if you are okay with it."

"Of course, there's no problem."

It would be nice for the children to come and stay at this quaint place during their summer and winter vacations. Besides, the air here was clean and refreshing.

"Alright, then. As long as you agree, I'll let my mother know later."

Afterward, Mary went over to talk to Casey while Victoria stood rooted to the spot.

It was a given that she would feel a little reluctant. After all, they were her children. However, they couldn't stay by her side forever; they needed to experience other things.

"If you're unwilling, you don't have to agree to it. I can be the one to play the villain."

Alaric's voice suddenly sounded from behind her.

Victoria paused for a moment before realizing that he must have overheard her conversation with Mary.

"It's fine." She shook her head. "It's only during the breaks, anyway. It's not like they won't be coming home with me when they're done."

"You can come here with them."

"I'd rather not. I have a company to manage."