

## Kissed AOM 2301

### Chapter 2301

Beatrice had prepared so much delicious food to welcome Melody home, which delighted Melody very much. Lucas went to sit beside Melody, while Cedric and Beatrice took the main seats. Thalia somehow decided to sit next to Lucas.

Everyone else simply pretended not to notice when she did that. Lucas found it a bit odd, but he did not seem aware that she had a scheming expression.

Melody relished the meal, as did everyone else. Thalia was the only one who did not eat much. After dinner, Lucas brought Melody up to the second floor. Thalia glared fiercely at them, all while failing to notice Beatrice standing beside her.

"Are you busy right now, Miss Thalia?"

Thalia snapped out abruptly from her trance and exchanged the malicious expression on her face for a more innocent one. "What's the matter, Grandma Beatrice? Weren't you going to rest? I'm not busy right now..."

Beatrice no longer feigned a smile in front of her. "Perfect. Then come with me. I have something I'd like to discuss with you."

Beatrice led her to the greenhouse where a warm haven promised at least some blooming flowers throughout the year. Thalia knew that Beatrice always had ulterior motives whenever she requested to speak privately, and she was not in the mood to appreciate the flowers as a result.

"May I ask what this is about? If it's not urgent, I'll have to continue practicing my musical notation," she acted as if she were occupied with certain important tasks in the hopes that the old lady would keep the conversation brief or not bother her at all.

"Why don't you return to Molomia if you want to focus on your studies? You have no reason to be staying so long here," Beatrice got straight to the point and was prepared to play the role of the bad person to evict Thalia from their house. No matter how accommodating Melody was, seeing another woman try to get close to Lucas was never going to sit well with her.

Thalia, however, feigned ignorance. "What do you mean by that? I returned to the country to find an internship with a local orchestra. I've already applied for leave with the school. Are you saying that you don't want me to stay here? I can leave right now if that's what you want!"

Her large eyes flooded with tears, projecting an aggrieved look, but Beatrice was not swayed by her act.

"Lucas isn't around, so you don't need to keep up the act. You and I both know why I'm telling you to return to Molomia. I'm sure you know that it would be in everyone's best interest if you returned abroad too. "You're only going to suffer if you continue staying in the country. Can't you see the relationship Lucas has with Melody? You shouldn't try to butt in. Frankly speaking, if I were you, I'd choose to leave right now and part on good terms.

"Do you genuinely think that things will work out in your favor if you insist on staying with Lucas? Your biggest hurdle will be to get my approval and that of my husband's, but I can tell you right now that we'll never agree to that."

Beatrice had made their stance abundantly clear. All Thalia needed to do was use her intelligence to make a sensible choice, but Thalia continued to play dumb.

## Chapter 2302

"But Grandma Beatrice, I have no idea what you're talking about! I didn't return to the country just to spend more time with Lucas. I'm doing it for my future too. I've been abroad for many years now, and I know that Molomia isn't home for me.

"Here is where I feel a sense of belonging. Are you going to deny me this too?" Thalia spoke with tears streaming down her face. She portrayed a pitiable image, but Beatrice frowned when Thalia hinted at having no family.

"The Riveras are grateful to your sister for what happened in the past, but my stance has been clear from the beginning. You can repay our family in any way you want, but you can't do so by marrying Lucas. "You agreed to that, so I'm wondering why you'd have a change of heart now. Lucas flew to Molomia every year, and I turned a blind eye to avoid making too big of a fuss over things. Your sister may be his benefactor, but you're not. Don't exploit her kindness. I don't appreciate it, and neither would Lucas."

Thalia's expression faded. She did not expect Beatrice to construe her actions as an attempt to repay a favor.

"What kind of person do you think I am, Grandma Beatrice? Lucas isn't a kid. He knows what kind of person I am! The way I see it, if Lucas didn't have feelings for me, he wouldn't have willingly flown to see me. Besides, I met Lucas first. We've had a connection for many years. We just didn't have the time to sit down and talk about it."

Beatrice was fast losing patience at Thalia's delusions.

"I know you've known each other for years, but you said it yourself that Lucas isn't a child. He can make his own choices, so why would he delay if he truly had feelings for you, why would he put off confessing to you? Why would he do it only after he married Melody? Don't delude yourself."

Beatrice might be old, but she exuded an aura that seemed to tower over Thalia. Despite Thalia's claims of having a deep relationship with Lucas, she felt a twinge of guilt because of how difficult it seemed to explain things to Beatrice.

"With all due respect, Grandma Beatrice, I don't think Lucas would have chosen any random woman if you and Grandpa Cedric hadn't pressured Lucas into marriage. Melody's background isn't even on par with Lucas, don't you think?" Thalia remarked with a hint of resentment and anger.

Beatrice, however, smiled faintly and said, "I'm his grandmother, and we don't mind Melody's background at all. Why does it matter that much to an outsider like you, then? As long as Melody has a good character and Lucas is happy with her, then that's enough for us. I suggest that you leave as soon as possible, or I won't show you any more courtesy."

Thalia, hearing the urgency in Beatrice's tone to drive her away, felt a surge of determination.

"Grandma Beatrice, if you truly believe Lucas has no feelings for me, why are you so keen on driving me away? Don't you see the contradiction in your actions?"

Chapter 2303

Beatrice frowned at Thalia's remark. Lucas had probably never seen her act that petulantly before.

"Did you think I was worried that you'd come between them? I'm not. I just don't want their life as a young couple to be ruined by someone with ulterior motives. Have you ever considered that one day I might tell Lucas what you just told me?"

Thalia's excuse was to repay her sister's kindness, and while the Riveras did owe her sister—who was a genuinely good person—for saving Lucas, Thalia was not like her sister at all! Their characters were polar opposites!

To make things worse, Thalia had talked back against Beatrice, who simply found the situation rather amusing.

Thalia wiped away her tears, feeling aggrieved. "You can go ahead and tell Lucas everything. I don't care. But I won't leave until Lucas tells me to." She was confident that Lucas would not chase her away even if Beatrice conveyed everything to him. After all, she had no one else to rely on in the country and Lucas was the only person she knew well.

She was aware that Lucas was someone with a strong sense of responsibility and would not abandon her because he had already promised her sister to take good care of her. "You're very sly," Beatrice remarked.

Thalia's eyes widened when she heard that and feigned innocence.

"What is that supposed to mean? I just want to stay with you and Grandpa Cedric a bit longer and prove myself to the two of you. This is a duty I am obliged to fulfill for Lucas, too."

Beatrice scoffed. "Duty? What right do you have to say such a thing? Melody is the only person that we'll ever recognize as our granddaughter-in-law. Do you think Lucas will choose you over us?"

Thalia pursed her lips. "Why do you have to make things difficult for Lucas? It doesn't matter if you and Grandpa Cedric don't accept me. I'm content as long as Lucas accepts me."

"You..." The conversation ended in a stalemate, and Beatrice did not expect Thalia to be that shameless. Nothing that Beatrice said could persuade Thalia to leave, and it seemed like other ideas needed to be considered once all the avenues of courtesy were exhausted.

As soon as they left the greenhouse, Thalia sought out Lucas and changed her demeanor.

Lucas was surprised, and he could not comprehend why Thalia would suddenly propose to move out when everything seemed fine.

Thalia forced a smile, saying, "I am an outsider, after all. I don't think it's appropriate for me to stay at your place for too long. Melody is back too, and I feel that staying here will make her feel a little uncomfortable. I wouldn't want to be the cause of any misunderstanding."

Lucas frowned. "She never said anything of the sort, so don't think too much into it."

Thalia's smile seemed empty. "I know your relationship with her is very good, but I always feel as though I'm not welcome here. If I leave now, then I'll be able to avoid any misunderstandings. I wouldn't want anyone to call me ignorant."

#### Chapter 2304

Lucas noticed Thalia's certainty and it seemed as though she had overheard someone criticizing her.

"It'll be fine. If anyone talks behind your back, just let me know. I won't let anyone make you feel uncomfortable," Lucas assured her.

His earlier hesitation in inviting Thalia seemed justified, as he felt that it was more difficult to keep an eye on her if she stayed elsewhere. He simply needed to care for her as long as she was there, and all of that would be over once she returned to Molomia in a few days.

Thalia's eyes turned red, and she seemed reluctant to stay there. "I know I've already caused you a lot of trouble, and it wouldn't be good to continue putting this burden on you. I'm willing to stay on my own outside! I'll be fine, I promise!"

"No. Your health isn't exactly good, and it wouldn't be ideal for you to live alone outside!" Lucas frowned, realizing the severity of the situation.

Beatrice and Melody came in while chatting happily with each other, and they were startled by Lucas and Thalia's serious expressions.

Thalia instinctively sought refuge behind Lucas.

Beatrice felt a headache coming on when she saw that. Thalia's claim that she had no other intention toward Lucas stood in stark contrast to her actions. Melody sensed the tension but decided not to dwell on it, as she had already chosen to win Lucas over on her own terms.

Melody took the initiative to show concern and asked, "You seem a bit upset. Did something happen?"

Thalia then grabbed Lucas's clothes and raised her tearful eyes while shaking her head, as if to say, 'I don't want to talk about it.'

Lucas realized that it was either his grandmother or Melody who was the reason that Thalia did not want to stay there any longer. Lucas then clarified, "It's fine. You guys stay home. I'll bring her out for a stroll." Beatrice seemed to disapprove. Melody had just returned from the hospital, yet Lucas was taking Thalia out. Seeing them alone would undoubtedly elicit certain feelings of doubt from Melody.

"If you're going out, then you should bring Melody with you. The three of you are young, and I'm sure you have a lot in common. Melody just came back from the hospital, so don't leave her alone at home," Beatrice advised.

The slight warning tone made Lucas realize that reasoning was very sound. If Melody was the one bothered by Thalia's presence, having them chat during an outing might help them resolve things. Before Thalia could respond, Lucas agreed. Thalia watched as Melody approached them with a smile, which-though seemingly innocent-felt like a provocation in Thalia's eyes. She had a feeling that Melody could be more cunning than at first glance.

"I'm sure you don't mind if I join you two," Melody remarked.

Thalia forced a smile, saying, "Of course not, but are you healthy enough to come with us? Don't you think it'll be better for you to rest at home?"

The old lady intervened, "Melody has spent a few days recovering in the hospital. It'll do her good to move about instead of staying sedentary. There are plenty of exciting places for youngsters to explore. Go out and enjoy yourselves! Don't coop up at home with me and Gramps."

Chapter 2305

Melody glanced at Beatrice and waved.

"Have fun," said Beatrice.

Thalia could not refuse when Beatrice had made things so clear. Each of them was absorbed in their own thoughts as they walked toward the car.

When they reached the car, Thalia promptly took the passenger seat to stop Melody from sitting there. She opened the car door and smiled at Melody. "I get motion sickness, so do you mind if I sit here? I've always sat here, so I've gotten super used to it already." She sported a slightly apologetic expression as if sitting anywhere else would be the end of her.

"Fine by me. It's the same anyway," Melody replied.

Lucas glanced at the rearview mirror and said, "Buckle up. We're going to check out some other places for Thalia."

Melody was taken aback. "Isn't she supposed to stay with us? Why are we going to view other houses?"

On the bright side, Melody would be spared the unease of having to see or interact with Thalia if the latter moved out, but doing so would require Lucas to meet Thalia alone. Work alone was taxing enough, and having to divide his time between taking care of another person at another place would be an even bigger burden on him.

Melody felt that it would be much easier to just let Thalia stay there, despite the awkwardness it would bring.

Melody's confusion was genuine, but Thalia seemed to be ungrateful. "Won't you be happy if I move out?"

Melody frowned, puzzled by the sudden aggression. "I don't understand. Why would I be happy if you moved out? What does it have to do with me?"

She glanced at Lucas as if to ask about Thalia's odd insinuation.

Lucas said, "Why are you bringing Melody into this? Are you suggesting she doesn't want you around?"

Thalia stayed silent, apparently in tacit agreement.

Melody was aghast. She wondered what she had done to make Thalia think she was the one saying bad things about her, especially as she had just returned from the hospital less than a day ago.

"You must have misunderstood. Melody doesn't gossip about other people, and she's not a petty person either. She just got back from the hospital too. If you have an issue with her, it's best for us to discuss it openly so we can resolve this right here and now," Lucas stated, frowning at Thalia.

Melody found comfort in Lucas's trust, for he did not lash out recklessly at her unlike back at her home. Her parents frequently took her sister's side-even when her sister was in the wrong and Melody was always made the scapegoat. When she tried to explain, her parents would accuse her of talking back. She had endured all that in the past, and she did not want to have to face it again.

"I never said it's because of Melody... You're misunderstanding me again, Lucas! I just thought I might not be welcome here. It's not necessarily Melody's fault." Melody was left irked by that remark. Thalia was accusing her of something she did not do, even when she was sitting right there! Such behavior was intolerable.



"Don't beat around the bush. I won't admit to doing something I haven't done, but if I was in the wrong, then I won't shirk away from taking responsibility," Melody declared.

## Chapter 2306

Lucas was afraid that Beatrice and Cedric would worry if they overheard them arguing at the door, so he drove the car to a quiet spot under the trees.

"There's no need to argue about this. Melody and I have been staying in the hospital all this while, and you've just returned. You're basically not with us most of the time, so how could there be any misunderstandings?"

Lucas's attitude was already very clear, which made Thalia both angry and resentful.

Thalia did not expect that after so many years of knowing each other, Lucas would unhesitatingly take Melody's side. Her eyes turned red, and tears welled up as if they were about to fall at any moment. She told him that she heard the kitchen staff gossiping about her in the kitchen.

Melody still did not believe Thalia's words. The kitchen staff were all very kind. How could they badmouth others behind their backs?

Even Lucas could not believe it. At least two or three of the kitchen staff had been part of the household since he was young. He had grown up eating the food they had cooked. After so many years of getting to know each other, he had a good understanding of the kind of people they were.

On most days, only Beatrice and Cedric were at home. Lucas would never allow someone who likes to gossip to stay with the elderly couple in their home.

"Why don't any of you believe me? I really heard them talking bad about me!" Thalia covered her face and burst into tears, feeling a bit panicked herself.

She was not aware that the kitchen staff had been with the Riveras for so many years. Otherwise, she would have framed someone else to avoid being caught in a difficult situation.

"How about this? Since our home isn't far from here, Lucas, you drive the car back. We'll confront the kitchen staff one by one. They'll have to apologize to Miss Thalia if

they really did the things she accused them of. But if they hadn't done anything, Miss Thalia will have to apologize to them."

Lucas approved of Melody's suggestion. However, Thalia was unwilling. After all, she had lied. She thought that Lucas would sympathize with her and take her side, but her plan backfired when he chose to believe the kitchen staff than her.

Suddenly, she lifted her head, wiped away a tear, and chuckled bitterly. "I knew I'd end up like this. I shouldn't have come back to the country all alone! Let's just forget it since Lucas doesn't even believe me!" After that, she forcefully opened the car door and ran off toward the depths of the forest.

Both Lucas and Melody were taken aback by her unexpected actions. Melody reacted first, shouting at Lucas to quickly find her.

"The forest is so big, and she's not familiar with the paths. What if she gets lost in there? Hurry and go!" Melody urged anxiously.

After seeing Lucas chasing after Thalia, she immediately called Beatrice with the intention of asking her to send the other servants to join the search for Thalia.

Beatrice frowned deeply when she received the call. She had not expected Thalia to be so shameless. Otherwise, she would have been firmer in her stance of getting Lucas to send her away. Then they would not have to deal with so much trouble.

Cedric inquired about what had happened when he saw the displeasure on Beatrice's face.

Beatrice waved her hand. "I'll tell you on the way. First, send someone to the forest to find Thalia." Cedric was also somewhat surprised.

'I thought the kids were supposed to go out and have some fun? How did they end up in the forest?'

The area their residence was in was designed to be close to nature. Dense forests separated each residence from the others, making it hard to bump into any neighbors on

normal days. It was perfect for the two elderly people, as they enjoyed taking walks around the outer circle of the forest.

However, the forest was dense and deep. Even they, who were accustomed to the area, never ventured in.

#### Chapter 2307

Thalia's impulsive escape into the forest was indeed causing trouble for them. What if there were poisonous snakes or wild animals inside? There was no guarantee of her safety! Thalia was not naive either. After running into the forest, she found a relatively secluded spot and crouched down. Once she was sure that Lucas could not see her, she stayed there quietly.

Lucas, not far behind, chased after her but could not spot Thalia. His face darkened. How could a person of her size suddenly disappear from sight?

At that moment, Melody ran over with her phone in hand.

"Don't rush into the forest just yet. I've called and informed Grandpa and Grandma to send more people to help with the search. The forest is large and deep, and if we go in now, they'll likely have to scatter their search teams. Let's wait here for now," Melody suggested.

Lucas furrowed his brows grimly. "Don't stop me. I'll go look for her first. Don't you know she isn't familiar with this place at all? If we wait here, she might run farther away. Then it'll take us longer to find her! You wait here for Grandpa and Grandma while I go in and search for Thalia."

Lucas' tone was icy, leaving Melody utterly confused. She opened her mouth and stood there dazedly.

'What did Lucas mean? Is he blaming me for causing Thalia to run into the forest? I didn't say anything wrong! What did he mean by saying it wasn't I who got lost, so I didn't care? Would I have asked him to run after Thalia and call Grandma if I didn't care?'

Lucas' harsh words felt like a bucket of cold water, leaving Melody chilled to the bone in the seemingly endless forest. Melody could not help but feel a sense of injustice.

After all, she had done no wrong. Her well-intentioned advice not to scatter the search teams had somehow turned into her fault.

Unfortunately, Beatrice and Cedric had not arrived yet. Thus, Melody stomped and bit her lip in frustration. She could not leave, but if she could, she would have done so the moment Lucas scolded her. 'Why? Why am I being dragged into this situation? Why do I have to shoulder the blame? What does this have to do with me? It's not like I was the one who forced Thalia to run into the forest!' Even though Melody was thinking all that, a part of her worried about Lucas. He had run into the forest without looking back, and that was enough to show how much he cared about Thalia. Thus, it was understandable for Melody to feel bitterness in her heart.

Just before leaving home, she was brimming with confidence, saying she would get Lucas to open his heart to her.

However, it was only then that she realized how naive she was. Their relationship was not built in a day, so how was it possible that...

"Melody? Melody-"

"I'm here!" Melody wiped away her tears and waved her hand vigorously to get their attention.

Chapter 2308

'I better stop crying lest Grandpa and Grandma worry about me again,' thought Melody.

As soon as Beatrice stood in front of her, she noticed Melody's eyes were noticeably redder than usual and immediately held her hand.

"What happened? Why are you crying out of the blue?" Beatrice asked.

Melody forcibly smiled and shook her head. "It's nothing. I'm not crying. It's just that the wind here is so strong and it irritated my eyes. Grandma, please hurry and have everyone spread out to search. Lucas had also gone into the forest. I didn't dare to act recklessly, so I had no choice but to wait for her to arrive."

Beatrice and Cedric's faces turned grim upon hearing that even Lucas had rushed into the forest.

"How stupid can that boy get? Does he really think he'll be able to find Thalia when he's so poorly equipped? The most important thing to do in this kind of situation is to stay calm, yet he recklessly charged into the forest!"

Melody remained silent. She had already advised him, only to receive a scolding. Thus, she did not want to speak up for him.

"You guys go this way, and you guys go along that path. Be sure to stay in touch, and stay vigilant! Got it?" instructed Cedric to the servants.

Melody was very worried and wanted to follow one of the search teams into the forest, but Beatrice and Cedric would not let her do that.

"My child, you can't go. Stay with us outside. We've already sent two teams in, so let's just wait here. There's no need for everyone to go in," Beatrice said, holding Melody's hand tightly. Melody's hands were icy, proof of the ordeal that she was going through.

'This Thalia is too impulsive for her own good. How could she just run into the forest without thinking of the consequences? Doesn't she know how much trouble she will cause others? Even if Lucas and Melody break up after this, I'll never let Thalia marry him!' thought Beatrice.

Of course, Beatrice hoped that Lucas and Melody could be together for a long time.

Meanwhile, Lucas walked in one direction, shouting as he went. When he reached the inner forest, he stopped and carefully listened for Thalia's voice.

Having reached the depths of the forest, he speculated that Thalia could not possibly have walked so far alone.

The forest was deep and dark, with hardly any light inside. Given how timid Thalia was that she could cry even from watching a horror movie, how could she walk so far alone?

With that thought in mind, Lucas became somewhat certain of his judgment and turned back, retracing his steps slowly. He hoped to find Thalia before sunset. Otherwise, leaving her alone in the forest would definitely lead to trouble.

Thalia had not expected the Riveras to make such a big commotion just to find her. She felt a group of people passing not far from her, and she hid in the bushes, afraid to move. "Miss Thalia! Miss Thalia, are you here? Please respond if you are. Miss Thalia. Miss Thalia."

Everyone was getting anxious. It was worrying that they could not find her in the forest. After all, they would all have to reap the consequences if something bad happened to her! Meanwhile, Thalia remained silent, waiting for Lucas to find her.

All she wanted was to simply spend some time alone with Lucas. She just wanted to evoke a sense of guilt in him for her sister's death, hoping that by thinking of her deceased sister, he would treat her better. 'Sis fell ill and passed away because of him, so he should take care of me for the rest of my life! Who does that Melody think she is?'

Melody's anxiety grew as she stayed outside the forest, so she made up her mind to defy Beatrice and Cedric's advice.

"Grandpa, Grandma, you two wait here for me. I'll go in and take a look, I'll come out soon! Don't worry, I'll just search around the entrance of the forest, I won't go inside."

Before Beatrice could even shout to stop her, Melody had disappeared into the bushes.

"See what that girl Thalia has done? She's upended our family life! I'm going to have Lucas send her away once she's found. We owe their family, but we can't let this girl torment us forever. Whatever she wants, we'll give her."

Beatrice was truly frustrated. Melody had gone into the forest alone. What if something happened to her?

Chapter 2309

However, both Beatrice and Cedric were already too old to go into the forest and search for Melody. They had no choice but to wait outside.

"Miss Thalia? Miss Thalia, are you here?"

Thalia did not expect to hear Melody's voice. She frowned with annoyance.

'What's that stupid woman doing here? I don't want her to find me! She's just putting on a show for Lucas! Does she think I won't be able to see through her facade?'

However, the next moment, Melody shone her flashlight directly on Thalia's face.

Thalia immediately shut her eyes and covered her mouth, afraid to make a sound.

'Damn it!'

"Miss Thalia, are you here? If there's any misunderstanding, let's sit down and talk it through. It's dangerous to stay here in the forest!

"Miss Thalia, can you hear me? Come out!"

'Ha! There's no misunderstanding between us. Only one of us is staying by Lucas' side, and that's going to be me!'

Thalia felt disgusted as she watched on as Melody pretended to be worried about her.

'Melody is an actress, alright. She maintains her act even when no one is around. She's truly fit to be the actress of the year!'

"Miss Thalia! Miss Thalia!"

'Ugh, my name isn't for the likes of you to call!' Thalia thought bitterly.

It would be best to get out of there quickly. Lucas might be coming back soon, and she was waiting to be alone with him. What was Melody doing there anyway?

"Ah!"

Melody accidentally stumbled over a vine and fell to the ground. She gasped sharply and clutched her wrist in pain.

Thalia frowned. She had prepared to put up an act of tripping and getting hurt for Lucas later, yet Melody beat her to it!

Melody was in so much pain, but there was no one around to help her up. She had to carefully climb to her feet after the pain subsided a bit.

Unfortunately, her foot could not touch the ground; it hurt too much when she tried. Melody gingerly touched her ankle. It would be manageable if it was just a sprain, but she feared it might be broken. That would also mean she would have to delay going back to filming.

Melody hopped to the tree nearby and leaned against it to take off some of the pressure.

Suddenly, she heard Lucas' voice coming from the forest.

"Thalia! Thalia!"

Melody's face lit up with joy as she looked toward the direction of the voice. She was about to respond when she heard a noise from the area she had just searched.

Thalia emerged from the bush and rushed straight toward Lucas.

'So she's been here all along! Why didn't she respond when I called out to her?' thought Melody with a frown. The throbbing pain in her foot prevented her from running over. She could only wait for them to come back. Lucas stopped in the spot where Melody's flashlight was shining, and Thalia threw herself into his arms.

Chapter 2310

"Hick! Lucas, what took you so long to find me? Do you know how scared I was?"

Lucas felt a huge weight lift off his chest when he saw Thalia. He did not want anything to happen to her because of him.



He did not push Thalia away but instead reached out and patted her shoulder.

"There, there. I found you. Everything's okay now."

Melody felt bitter when she saw how affectionately Lucas and Thalia embraced each other. It seemed they did not need her after all.

After comforting Thalia for a while, Lucas finally let her go. "Are you hurt?"

Thalia just said she did not know where she had run off to and then mentioned that her foot was a little sore.

"Your foot? Let me see if you sprained it."

After checking and making sure she was not seriously injured, Lucas led her back. "It might be a slight sprain. We'll have a doctor look at it when we get back."

Melody had already turned off her flashlight when they started heading out. She leaned against a tree, unsure of how to react. Should she stay hidden or make herself known to them?

She felt absurd for running into the forest out of worry for Lucas and Thalia only for her to end up spraining her ankle, while they were being all affectionate with each other.

Moreover, before searching for Thalia, Lucas had harshly scolded her, leaving her very aggrieved.

Thalia whimpered out of pain after taking just a few steps.

Lucas frowned. He had not brought any tools with him when he came in, so he could not examine her.

"Lucas, how about you carry me out? I'm afraid the injury on my ankle might worsen if I keep walking like this..."

Thalia appeared somewhat embarrassed, but the shadows in the thicket hid her expression well, so no one could see the gleam in her eyes.

After hesitating for a moment, Lucas squatted, given how she was limping and struggling.

It was rare for Thalia to be that close to him. She could not help but feel excited. Holding her breath, she carefully climbed onto Lucas' back. "It's getting dark. It's not safe to stay here any longer. Let's get out quickly!"

Lucas watched as the forest grew darker and knew they could not linger any longer. Otherwise, both he and Thalia might struggle to get out. 'Melody was still waiting outside, and she'd be scared alone...' He thought.

As they passed a tree, Thalia suddenly murmured, "Lucas, could you go a little faster? My ankle is starting to hurt even more..."

"You're the one who insisted on running into the forest alone, so the pain is a punishment for you. I hope you'll learn your lesson and not run off recklessly next time!" replied Lucas somewhat harshly. It sounded like a scolding, but to Thalia's ears, it felt oddly comforting.

'Aww, Lucas cares about me after all,' she thought. She pretended to casually glance behind the tree. 'Good, Melody had seen us. She even has the self-awareness to turn off the flashlight!'

Thalia wanted Melody to know that she and Lucas were the closest. She wanted her to know that if anything happened, Lucas would choose her first.

Thalia had indeed succeeded. Melody even covered her mouth, afraid to make a sound and be discovered by Lucas hiding behind the tree. It would be too embarrassing if that were to happen. Bitterness crept into Melody's heart, and she wondered who she was to Lucas.

'What does Thalia running off into the forest have to do with me? Why did Lucas have to scold me like that?'

Having sprained her ankle, she did not know how she was going to get out of the forest.

However, she stubbornly refused to make a sound. Even though she knew it was not the time to be stubborn, she had principles she stood by and a dignity to uphold.