

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 101

Sure enough, when Jade Yates opened the gift, it was the highly coveted hidden-edition figurine she had been trying to pull for ages. Staring at the collectible in her hands, she was absolutely obsessed. "Willow, I love you to death! This is incredibly rare! It must have taken you forever to get it, right?"

"Not too long." Willow Horgan had decent luck, and by applying a bit of calculation and observation, it hadn't taken too many tries—though she had definitely run all over town to track it down.

"You got me such an expensive gift, I don't even know how to thank you," Jade said, so excited she was practically rambling.

"It's nothing. Compared to everything you've given me, it doesn't even come close. You bought me a gym membership and a designer bag, let me crash at your place, and even helped me navigate my divorce with Julian. Any one of those things is worth far more than this little figurine."

Truthfully, Willow owed Jade a massive debt of gratitude. She had originally planned to use her salary or bonus to buy something even nicer, but Julian Sinclair had maliciously withheld her pay. She couldn't touch the funds Arthur Vance had provided, so after racking her brain, this was the best way she could think of to show her appreciation.

"Money is tight right now, so I couldn't afford anything too extravagant," Willow continued. "This is just a placeholder. Once I start my new job and get my first paycheck, I'll make it up to you properly."

"Don't be ridiculous, I'm obsessed with this," Jade shot back immediately. "Besides, we're way past keeping score with things like this."

"I'm glad you like it."

With the gift exchange over, Willow brought out the candlelit dinner she had prepared in advance. Jade teased her about setting up a romantic date, and Willow just smiled without denying it. The details didn't matter as long as they were having a good time.

That night, riding high on the celebratory mood, they both had a few drinks. Willow was a lightweight, so she took a quick shower and went straight to bed. Jade, however, was wide awake. She lay in bed after her shower, buzzing with energy.

She loved everything Willow had set up tonight and had taken a ton of pictures. After carefully selecting two from her camera roll—one of the romantic dinner spread and another cute selfie of the two of them—she posted them on her social media feed.

Jade usually posted just to document her life, rarely caring about the likes or comments. Typically, she would close the app right after posting and never look back.

But tonight was different. Maybe it was the alcohol, or maybe she was just restless, but she opened the app and started scrolling through the notifications one by one.

Suddenly, amid the standard likes, a specific profile picture caught her eye. Jade's heart skipped a beat.

It was Hugo Harrington.

She had been connected with him online for years, but this was the very first time he had ever engaged with her posts.

Back in the day, Jade had practically conned her way into getting his contact info. Because her methods hadn't exactly been above board, she hadn't dared to send him a single message all these years. She was terrified that if she did, she'd discover he had blocked or deleted her long ago. It was better to just sit quietly on his friends list. At least that way, she could keep living the fantasy.

Staring at his name in her notifications, Jade's pulse raced. Willow had been spot on—she really did have feelings for him.

She tapped on Hugo's profile and opened their empty chat log. She typed out a message, thought better of it, deleted it, and retyped something else. In the end, she couldn't figure out a single natural thing to say.

She was just too anxious.

Ultimately, she locked her phone without sending a word, convincing herself that his finger had probably just slipped.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 102

Hugo Harrington hadn't slipped. He had intentionally hit like after seeing Willow in the photo.

He honestly couldn't remember when he had added this girl named 'Jade' to his contacts, but seeing her pictures tonight sparked a faint memory. Back in college, Willow was always hanging around a girl with a sharp bob.

So, the girl from back then was her?

In the photo, her style was completely different from Willow's, but her eyes were bright and her features were striking. She seemed like a vibrant, straightforward girl.

Hugo locked his phone and didn't give it another thought. Meanwhile, Jade had spent ages agonizing over whether to send a message before finally forcing herself to go to sleep.

Under the hazy moonlight, some drifted off with heavy hearts, while others were still buried in the relentless grind of work.

In Seattle, at an upscale waterfront estate.

Silas Thorne stood by the floor-to-ceiling window, phone pressed to his ear. Dressed in a crisp black button-down and tailored slacks, his posture was rigid, his presence commanding. The light from the crystal chandelier cast sharp shadows across his profile, highlighting his god-like features.

On the other end of the line, Arthur Vance was completely baffled. He couldn't fathom why his boss had suddenly decided, on a whim, to relocate his entire operation to New York City. And the timeline was insanely aggressive—he demanded to leave first thing in the morning.

Arranging the flight and packing personal items was the easy part. Merit Biotech had its own fleet of private jets; Silas only had to say the word and they would be in the air. The logistical nightmare was rearranging his grueling schedule.

"Mr. Thorne, it's nearing the end of the year, and many of our regional directors are scheduled to meet with you," Arthur cautioned. "If I recall correctly, Mr. Lowery from the Southern branch is flying in tomorrow."

"Reschedule the time, and move the location to New York," Silas ordered without missing a beat.

"But you also have several high-profile public appearances, including government partnerships. Those are incredibly difficult to move."

"Cancel whatever can be canceled. If it's absolutely mandatory, I'll fly back for it."

"And what about the family dinner with your parents?"

Arthur wasn't just an executive assistant; he managed the intricate details of Silas's private life as well. Having worked for the Thorne family for over a decade, he handled almost everything. The Thornes were deeply traditional and valued family unity. No matter how demanding their schedules were, a mandatory family dinner was held every single week.

Silas was unyielding. "Don't worry about it. I'll handle them."

Arthur nodded to himself. It seemed his boss was dead set on this move to New York.

It wasn't that Arthur wanted to argue, he was just thoroughly confused. In his experience, Mr. Thorne was famously low-profile, adhering to a strict, rhythmic routine for both his business and personal life. He never deviated, which was exactly why people found him so cold and unapproachable.

Uprooting his entire base of operations for a single project was completely unheard of.

Suddenly, a wild theory sparked in Arthur's mind. Could this massive disruption have something to do with Ms. Horgan?

Testing the waters, Arthur asked, "Mr. Thorne, should I inform the relevant executives to travel to New York for next Monday's board meeting?"

"Cancel everything for next Monday," Silas commanded instantly. "If it can't be canceled, push it back."

If Arthur had only harbored suspicions before, he was now one hundred percent certain. His boss was rushing to relocate to New York just to be there for Willow's first day on the job.

But her onboarding wasn't until next Monday. That was days away. Did they really need to scramble like this?

"If I remember correctly, next Monday is Ms. Horgan's first day," Arthur noted carefully.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 103

"What, do you have a problem with that?" At the mention of her name, Silas finally acknowledged him. Despite answering every one of Arthur's logistical questions moments

ago, his tone had been completely detached. It wasn't until Willow's name dropped that his focus sharpened.

Arthur didn't dare push his luck. "No, no problem at all. I was just wondering if you wanted me to make any special arrangements. It's a brand new environment for Ms. Horgan, and I want to make sure she feels comfortable. We should probably roll out the red carpet."

"Mm." Silas surprisingly agreed. "Handle the details. But keep one thing in mind—don't overwhelm her."

Hearing that soft, fiercely protective tone, Arthur practically froze. Was this really the same ruthless, ice-cold billionaire the entire corporate world feared?

"Are you going to get it done, or just stand there?" Silas prompted.

"I'll handle it immediately."

Stepping out of the office, Arthur couldn't help but marvel. Thanks to Ms. Horgan, he had witnessed a rare, tender side of Mr. Thorne. Still, he was far more accustomed to the freezing indifference. This new version felt surreal.

When Monday arrived, Willow specifically chose a sharp, tailored professional suit.

She had lost a significant amount of weight, and the new clothes draped perfectly over her stunning curves. Paired with her luminous skin and natural beauty, she looked less like a corporate hire walking into Merit Biotech and more like an A-list celebrity arriving for a magazine cover shoot.

The moment she stepped into the lobby, she commanded the attention of the room. Heads turned, and eyes stayed glued to her.

"Holy hell, did a literal goddess just walk past me? I've never seen anyone that gorgeous in real life. That figure, that presence—she outshines actual movie stars!"

"You're telling me. I couldn't look away. And she smelled incredible. Just walking past her made my head spin. If I didn't have a massive deadline, I'd have chased her down for an autograph."

"I heard she's the new director for the flagship project. An external powerhouse hire. Today's her first day."

"Seriously? It's bad enough she's drop-dead gorgeous, but she's brilliant too? How is that fair? Standing next to her, I feel like a troll."

"That's because you are a troll," a coworker teased.

The person scoffed. "Fine, I admit it. But we're all trolls compared to her."

It was Willow's first time at Merit's headquarters. She had been nervous about navigating the massive building, but the moment the elevator doors parted, Arthur Vance was waiting for her, holding a massive bouquet of fresh flowers.

Seeing her, he immediately stepped forward and handed them over. "Ms. Horgan, welcome to Merit Biotech."

Willow was incredibly flattered. She had never been greeted like this before. She took the flowers, feeling a bit overwhelmed. "What's this for?"

"Just a small welcome gift for your first day."

"You're too kind." She downplayed it, but a warm sense of joy bloomed in her chest.

What woman didn't appreciate beautiful flowers? Having Arthur personally deliver them instantly melted away her first-day jitters.

"It's the least we could do. Like I said before, we are absolutely thrilled to have you."

Willow smiled. "It's a mutual choice. I'm just as thrilled that Merit gave me this opportunity."

Arthur escorted her through the onboarding process. Walking side by side like old friends, he casually remarked, "You look phenomenal."

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 104

Willow knew he was referring to her recent physical transformation and answered naturally, "Thank you. I've lost some weight."

While Arthur thought she was beautiful before, he had to admit that shedding the weight had refined her posture and given her an effortlessly elegant aura. She moved like water—calm, quiet, and gentle.

"You look radiant, and your presence is incredible."

Though it was a compliment, coming from Arthur, it lacked any creepy or lingering male gaze. Willow could sense his genuine, professional appreciation.

"Thank you."

They chatted easily as they finished the paperwork. Afterward, Arthur offered to escort her to her new office.

Willow immediately tried to decline. He was a high-level executive; he shouldn't be wasting his morning playing tour guide. Handling her onboarding was generous enough. She couldn't justify taking up any more of his valuable time.

"Please, don't worry about me. I can find my way. You should get back to your work."

But Arthur wouldn't hear of it. "Not at all. My most important task today is making sure you're settled."

Before she could protest again, he stepped into the elevator with her.

Willow's office was on the twenty-fifth floor, a sprawling private suite surrounded by the project's core team. While the foundational team was in place, the final executive decisions were entirely in her hands.

Stepping inside, a subtle, elegant fragrance filled the air. The space was tastefully decorated with lush green plants and fresh floral arrangements, clearly designed with meticulous care.

It felt instantly welcoming—a stark contrast to the cold, isolating environment she had endured for years at the Sinclair Group.

She turned to Arthur and thanked him profusely once again.

Arthur waved it off, politely noting that the arrangements were actually handled by someone else.

Willow didn't quite catch the implication, assuming he was just being modest. But when her eyes landed on the brass nameplate outside her door, she gasped. It clearly read: "VP."

Vice President. It was the highest executive tier just below the CEO.

She had never expected them to hand her such a prestigious title. She assumed she'd be brought on as a Project Director, or maybe a Senior Manager. After all, she had broken her back at Sinclair for three years just to hit the manager level.

It was unfathomable that Merit would offer her a Vice President role right out of the gate.

Arthur noticed her shock and, assuming she might be concerned about corporate politics, quickly clarified. "Merit values elite talent above all else, but our HR protocols do have

some strict caps. Policy dictates that new external hires cannot exceed the VP title upon entry. However, please rest assured that within this new initiative, you have absolute authority. You are the ultimate decision-maker. Once the project shows its initial metrics, promoting you higher will easily bypass the standard policy."

But that wasn't what Willow was worried about at all. "Are you really comfortable handing a project of this magnitude to me alone?"

"Absolutely," Arthur replied with total conviction. He had an excellent eye for talent, and more importantly, he knew Mr. Thorne was pulling the strings. "We trust you unconditionally."

Being handed that level of blind faith left Willow momentarily speechless.

It wasn't the scope of the project that intimidated her. She had spent the last week obsessively researching the technology and the research parameters. While it was cutting-edge and unprecedented in the domestic market, she knew it wasn't an impossible feat.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 105

All it required was experience, immense patience, and time.

What truly threw Willow off balance was the sheer weight of being trusted. Back at Sinclair Group, she only ever felt that kind of solidarity from her immediate team. From everyone else, she faced relentless exclusion, sabotage, and mockery.

So this was what it felt like to have real backing. To have a safety net. The hollow anxiety in her chest vanished, replaced by a fierce determination. Even the fear of failure receded, leaving her ready to charge forward without constantly looking over her shoulder.

Since they believed in her this much, words were useless. She would let her results prove they had made the right choice.

Once Willow was settled, Arthur headed straight to the twenty-sixth floor to report to Silas. His office was directly above Willow's, and the architectural layout was completely identical. Even the angle of the sunlight hitting the desk was exactly the same.

Silas had mandated it personally. Arthur didn't understand the reasoning, but he executed it flawlessly.

Pushing open the heavy oak doors, Arthur found Silas standing by the floor-to-ceiling windows. Hearing the door, Silas glanced back. "Is she settled?"

"Everything is handled," Arthur confirmed. From this angle, he caught the sharp, predatory lines of his boss's profile. He couldn't help but think that with those genetics, Mr. Thorne could have dominated any industry he stepped into.

"And? Did she like it?"

"She loved it. The flowers, the plants, the office layout—it was a hit. She was a bit hesitant about the VP title being too high, but once I explained it exactly as you instructed, she accepted it without issue." Arthur delivered the report with military precision.

"Good." Silas nodded. He had anticipated her hesitation, which was why he had prepped Arthur with the exact counter-argument.

"There is... one other thing. I'm not sure if I should mention it."

"Is it about her?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you hesitating?"

Arthur cleared his throat awkwardly. Since this pertained to her personal life and had zero bearing on her professional capabilities, he hadn't been sure if it crossed a line. Clearly, when it came to Willow Horgan, no detail was too small.

"Ms. Horgan has lost a significant amount of weight."

"Weight?" Silas frowned, a shadow crossing his eyes. Why would she suddenly drop so much weight? "Is she sick?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. Women generally like to look their best, so it was likely just a strict diet to slim down."

Look her best? Wasn't she beautiful enough already? Silas couldn't wrap his head around it.

"How much weight did she lose? Do you have a picture?"

"No, sir. Would you like me to go take one?"

Silas considered it for a second. "Forget it." He would just go look for himself.

"Send the project files to my tablet. I'm going down to the twenty-fifth floor."

"If you need anything specific handled, just give me the word and I'll take care of it."

"I don't need you to," Silas dismissed. He didn't have any actual business down there; it was purely an excuse to see her.

Still trying to be helpful, Arthur suggested, "Should I call the department heads and have them come up here?"

"No," Silas repeated, his tone sharpening with irritation. "Just do what I told you to do."

Arthur snapped his mouth shut, terrified to push his luck, and hurried out to send the files.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 106

When Silas reached the twenty-fifth floor, he only caught a fleeting glimpse of Willow's back as she was whisked away by the HR directors for her executive orientation.

Arthur had been right. She had lost weight, and her entire silhouette and aura had shifted. But Silas didn't think it made her more beautiful—in his eyes, she had always been striking. She was still just her.

What twisted his gut was the suffering that must have caused it. To drop that much weight in less than a month spoke volumes about the hell she had been enduring.

What was it Arthur had said? Girls just liked to look pretty?

Silas couldn't fathom that logic. Was this a generational gap? He was, after all, ten years older than her.

Unlike her husband, who was her age. Maybe he understood her. They probably had plenty of shared interests. In fact, she likely went through all this effort just to please him. Silas had known for a long time that she had harbored a massive crush on Julian for years before finally marrying him.

And honestly, if it hadn't been for that one catastrophic accident, their paths would have never crossed.

A hard knot formed in Silas's jaw as he turned on his heel, leaving the twenty-fifth floor and returning to his office.

When Willow finally returned from her orientation, she caught the tail end of several female employees whispering excitedly about how gorgeous their big boss was. They were swooning over his build and his aura, claiming he put A-list celebrities to shame, though they all agreed he was terrifyingly cold and unapproachable.

Willow was confused. When Arthur was down here earlier, no one had batted an eye. Why were they losing their minds now that he was gone? Was this the classic corporate dynamic—respectful to their faces, obsessing behind their backs?

And the description of him being 'cold and unapproachable' was something she had heard before, but Arthur didn't strike her that way at all. Did he have some hidden, ruthless persona?

Willow shook the thought away. Everyone had different sides to them in a corporate environment. It was nothing to dwell on.

Her first day was intentionally light—mostly touring the facility, meeting key personnel, and reviewing the high-level project specs.

After clocking out, she went straight to the hospital. Martha Mercer knew today was her first day and had prepared a small celebration. Since she was confined to the ward, she had asked the nurses to help her order some flowers and a small cake. Paired with the hospital food, it was simple, but perfect.

Jade had wanted to join them, but an emergency with a client had kept her late at the firm, so she FaceTimed in to send her love. The legal grind rarely allowed for set schedules.

As they ate, Martha asked, "What's the name of this new company you joined?"

"Merit Biotech," Willow replied.

"Merit?" Martha's eyes widened in surprise. "Is that the same Merit I've been seeing all over the financial news?"

Willow hadn't expected her mother to follow corporate news. She smiled. "That's the one. Why?"

"That's incredible! I heard that company has bottomless pockets and is ranked number one globally. Knowing you're working there takes a huge weight off my chest. It feels like the universe finally threw you a bone."

"Exactly," Willow agreed smoothly. "So you don't need to worry about me anymore. My career is on track, and everything is settling down. Once you're fully recovered and discharged, life will be perfect."

Martha nodded. "Don't worry, I'm fighting hard." She paused, as if a thought had just struck her. "You know, the parent company behind Harbor Mercy Hospital is also Merit Group, right?"

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 107

Willow was genuinely impressed. "How did you find that out?"

"It's easy," Martha said, beaming with a hint of pride. "I'm stuck in this bed all day, so I hear all the nurses gossiping. If you pay a little attention, you pick up a lot."

But that wasn't the real point of her story. She leaned in closer. "Do you remember that picture I sent you a while back? The one of the big boss who owns Harbor Mercy?"

"I remember." Willow looked at her, waiting for the punchline.

"Well, did you see him at the office today? If the hospital and the company are under the same umbrella, it has to be the same guy. So, how was it? Is he as handsome as I said? Better looking than a movie star?"

Willow hadn't realized this was an elaborate setup to gossip about her boss. She felt a mix of exhaustion and amusement. Mimicking her mother's breathless tone, she replied, "I saw him. Yes, he's incredibly handsome. Definitely better looking than a movie star."

"Is he your type?" Martha pressed, not missing a beat.

Willow nearly choked on her food. Arthur Vance? Her type? Absolutely not.

"No," she said, shaking her head honestly.

"Bummer," Martha sighed, deflating. "I've been hyped about this for weeks, hoping there might be a spark. You don't see men that striking in the real world."

Willow rolled her eyes affectionately. Why was her mother so invested in this? And even if she did have a crush on Arthur, it wasn't like a top-tier billionaire would look twice at her anyway.

"Just eat your dinner," Willow laughed, placing a piece of food on her mother's plate to kill the conversation.

After dinner, Willow stayed to watch some TV with Martha. Halfway through a show, she stepped out into the hallway to take a phone call. When she walked back, she noticed a large crowd of executives leaving Martha's ward.

It was a massive entourage, packed three layers deep. Willow couldn't get through, so she waited until the crowd dispersed before slipping back into the room.

The moment she entered, Martha practically vibrated with excitement. "The boss of Merit was just here! He came down specifically to check on the VIP patients. They can't have gone far. You should go say hello!"

Willow hadn't planned on chasing after them, but since Arthur was here, and he had literally bankrolled her mother's care, going over to pay her respects was the polite thing to do.

She hurried down the hall, catching up to the retreating entourage. There were so many people crowding Arthur that she could only see his back.

Walking shoulder-to-shoulder with Arthur was another man. He was tall, with broad shoulders and an overwhelmingly dominant aura.

Suddenly, the tall man turned his head slightly. The fluorescent hallway lights caught the sharp, predatory angles of his jaw and his freezing, untouchable demeanor. A jolt of recognition hit Willow. In a flash, her mind pulled up the blurry photo Martha had sent her weeks ago.

The man standing there was identical to the man in the photo.

And in that photo, he had been standing right next to Arthur.

As the crowd thinned out slightly, Willow seized the moment and called out, "Mr. Vance!"

Both men stopped dead in their tracks.

Arthur panicked. Should he answer? He shot a desperate look at Silas, silently begging for instructions.

Silas twisted the heavy signet ring on his thumb. "You stay. Handle her."

He wasn't ready to face her just yet.

While they exchanged those brief words, Willow caught up to them. Though the tall man had been speaking to Arthur in a hushed tone she couldn't quite make out, his voice sent a strange, powerful shiver of familiarity down her spine.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 108

It was incredibly strange. Everything about this man felt intensely familiar.

His build, the timbre of his voice, the oppressive weight of his presence—she swore she had encountered him somewhere before.

"Was that gentleman a friend of yours?" Willow asked, watching Silas's retreating back with a hint of guilt. "I hope I didn't interrupt your conversation."

After all, the man had taken one look at her and bolted without a word.

"Absolutely not," Arthur replied, answering only her second question while breaking into a cold sweat over the first. He would never dare claim to be Mr. Thorne's 'friend'.

"That's good." Since he brushed it off, Willow let it drop and explained why she had chased him down. "My mother mentioned you were here doing rounds on the patients. Since I was already here, I wanted to come over and properly thank you."

Arthur let out a massive sigh of relief. He had been terrified she would start interrogating him about Silas's identity. The fact that she had professional boundaries was a lifesaver.

"Your mother is responding beautifully to the treatment. I spoke with her lead oncologist. If she keeps this up through the next few rounds of chemo, we can start prepping her for the transplant."

"It's all thanks to your intervention."

It was actually all thanks to Mr. Thorne, but Arthur was sworn to secrecy. Deflecting, he changed the subject. "By the way, how was your first day? Are you settling in all right?"

"Everything is wonderful. I'm just eager to know when we can officially launch the project."

"We were planning to give you a few more days to acclimate, but if you're ready to hit the ground running, we can accelerate the timeline. How about we hold the official kickoff meeting tomorrow morning?"

"That sounds perfect. I'm ready."

After wrapping up his conversation with Willow, Arthur returned to the executive conference room. Silas was slouched on a leather sofa. As Arthur walked in, Silas's voice cut through the air, icy and flat. "What did you talk about?"

Sensing his boss's foul mood, Arthur practically recited the entire conversation word for word.

He expected approval, but Silas's tone only grew colder. "All of that took you this long to say?"

The realization slammed into Arthur like a freight train. His boss was jealous that he had spent too long talking to Willow. But hadn't Silas explicitly ordered him to stay behind and handle her? And it had barely been three minutes!

Trembling internally but keeping a straight face, Arthur bowed his head. "Understood, sir. I'll be more concise next time."

The next morning, Willow arrived at the office and dove straight into prepping for the kickoff meeting. Scheduled for 10 AM, she had all the foundational data locked in and was just refining the final execution details.

At ten sharp, Willow walked into the glass-walled conference room. The space was packed with over thirty core project leads, plus Arthur. The sheer headcount proved just how much capital Merit was sinking into this initiative.

Seeing everyone assembled, Willow asked if they should begin, but Arthur raised a hand to stall. "Let's wait a few more minutes. We have one more critical attendee joining us."

Since Arthur gave the order, the room waited in silence. People exchanged confused glances, wondering who could possibly hold up a meeting of this scale.

At Merit, there were only a handful of executives with more authority than Arthur Vance. For him to be waiting this deferentially... the only person it could be was...

Before anyone could guess, a towering figure appeared in the doorway. Instantly, every single person in the room leaped to their feet. Willow's view was blocked, so she couldn't see the man's face, but the suffocating tension in the room confirmed he was the apex predator of the food chain.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 109

"Mr. Thorne, please, sit here."

Willow heard Arthur's voice guiding the man to the head of the table. His tone was deeply deferential, bordering on reverence.

Willow frowned. Wasn't Arthur the CEO of Merit? Who on earth did he need to bow down to?

As she tried to make sense of it, the man finally spoke. "Apologies for the delay."

The deep, magnetic resonance of his voice hit Willow like a physical blow. She instantly recognized it—it was the exact same voice from the accidental phone call! There was no way she was mistaken. A voice that distinct, that intoxicatingly deep, was impossible to forget.

Drawn by some invisible gravity, Willow's eyes locked onto him. The moment their gazes met, she sucked in a sharp breath.

He was devastatingly handsome.

He eclipsed every male celebrity she had ever seen on screen.

He carried a lethal, untouchable elegance. Broad shoulders, impossibly long legs—she guessed he was easily six-foot-two or six-foot-three.

But it was his face that demanded absolute submission. His jawline looked like it could cut glass, his features were aggressively sharp, and his nose was a perfect, aristocratic slope. He wore gold-rimmed glasses, but rather than softening him, they only amplified his cold, predatory intellect. He radiated power and ruthless indifference.

Willow was utterly stunned. He was flawless, but utterly terrifying.

In a flash, she finally understood what the girls in the office and her mother had been raving about. They hadn't been exaggerating. She was just as paralyzed as they were.

Actually, she was worse. At least they had managed to gossip about it; she was just standing there staring like an idiot.

Arthur leaned in and quietly introduced him. "Ms. Horgan, this is Mr. Thorne."

Mr. Thorne? The name meant nothing to her. She had never heard it before.

Seeing her blank expression, Arthur realized she had no idea who Silas was. He couldn't blame her; he had actively covered up Silas's existence to protect her privacy.

And all of this was exactly how Silas had orchestrated it.

Honestly, Arthur was flying blind here. Silas never attended operational meetings, yet today he had demanded a front-row seat.

Arthur lowered his voice even further. "Mr. Thorne is the ultimate owner and CEO of the Merit Group."

Willow blinked, her brain struggling to compute the information. She looked at the gorgeous, terrifying man, and then back at Arthur. "Then... what is your role?"

"I'm Mr. Thorne's executive assistant."

Assistant? Since when was Arthur the assistant? Wasn't he the billionaire backer?

She shot Arthur a desperate, questioning look, and he gave her a definitive nod.

Willow turned to stone. So, she had been dead wrong this entire time.

Arthur Vance was never the boss. The man sitting at the head of the table was.

It was mind-bending, but suddenly, all the puzzle pieces snapped into place.

No wonder her mother and the girls in the office were losing their minds over his looks!

No wonder the industry rumors called the Merit CEO a ruthless, cold-blooded tyrant!

None of those descriptions fit Arthur, but looking at the man in the gold-rimmed glasses, they made perfect sense.

Willow wanted the floor to open up and swallow her whole. Thinking about all the assumptions she had made, she felt her face burn with humiliation.

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye?

Chapter 110

While Willow was trapped in her internal panic, the man at the head of the table extended a hand toward her. "A pleasure, Ms. Horgan."

She immediately reached out and gripped it. "An honor, Mr. Thorne."

Their fingers brushed against each other for a second before separating.

Silas could feel her apprehension. Furthermore, the way she looked at him—with total professional reverence and polite distance—was the exact way a subordinate looked at an apex boss. There was absolutely no trace of recognition or warmth.

It was obvious she didn't realize who he was, and she certainly didn't remember him.

Silas pulled his gaze away, his thumb subtly rubbing against his index finger under the table as he commanded, "Begin."

Hearing the cue, Willow instantly snapped into work mode. It was a gift she possessed; no matter how chaotic or awkward the previous second had been, the moment the job demanded it, she could flip the switch and become a powerhouse.

Her presentation was flawless, her data bulletproof, and her strategy aggressive. When she finished, the conference room erupted into thunderous applause. The executives whispered in awe—not only was their new director stunning, her intellect was terrifyingly sharp.

Arthur clapped along with the rest of them, completely unsurprised by her brilliance. Having shadowed her indirectly for three years, he knew her capabilities better than anyone. When it came to gene-editing project management, she had no equal.

What truly shocked Arthur was his boss's reaction. Historically, whenever Silas attended a meeting, the atmosphere was suffocating. He never spared anyone's ego. Brutal takedowns and razor-sharp critiques were his signature.

But today, nothing. He didn't ask a single hostile question. Instead, he spent the entire presentation watching Willow with an intensity Arthur couldn't quite decipher.

"Mr. Thorne, do you have any notes?" Arthur prompted cautiously.

Snapped out of his trance, Silas refocused. He didn't have any notes, primarily because he hadn't processed a word of the data—he had been too busy analyzing Willow.

For years, he had operated in the shadows. He had seen countless photos of her, analyzed security footage, and caught glimpses of her profile. But this was the first time they were sitting in the same room, face-to-face, with nothing between them.

"I have no notes. I trust the team to execute," Silas stated smoothly.

He picked up his laptop, his tone dismissive. "I have another call. Proceed without me."

Before walking out, he let his gaze drag over Willow one last time. Though she kept her expression tightly controlled, her cheeks were flushed and her long lashes fluttered. She was clearly thrilled with the successful pitch.

The second the door clicked shut behind him, the suffocating pressure in the room vanished. Willow exhaled a shaky breath, finally letting her guard down. She knew she was good, but delivering her first pitch to the legendary CEO was nerve-wracking.

Especially since the man was famously known as the Cold King.

"Mr. Vance, do you think Mr. Thorne was unhappy with my presentation?" she whispered to Arthur.

"Not at all. Mr. Thorne was exceptionally pleased," Arthur reassured her. "He explicitly told the team to execute. In his language, that's high praise."

Knowing Silas, if the presentation had been sub-par, he would have ripped her apart in front of everyone.

"But he barely said a word," Willow countered, still anxious. "He seemed so cold. Did I offend him somehow?"

Arthur nearly choked. Did she really think that was him being cold?

Compared to his usual boardroom massacres, his behavior today was practically sickeningly sweet.

Arthur chuckled internally, thinking that if Willow ever witnessed how Silas treated the rest of the executive board, she'd probably pass out from the shock.

"No, please don't overthink it," he comforted her. "Your competence speaks for itself. You have absolutely nothing to worry about."