

Three Years Forgotten, Why Go Crazy When I Say Goodbye? novel Chapter 111

Besides, Mr. Thorne wasn't even giving you the cold shoulder just now. You'll see what I mean once you've been here a bit longer.

As for anything else, Arthur couldn't offer much help, primarily because he couldn't read the man either.

After the meeting wrapped up, the project officially launched. Willow didn't make any personnel changes to the team Merit had assigned to her; she simply did a final review. Then, she delegated tasks according to the project's requirements.

Aside from the internal prep work, the most critical task at hand was finalizing the supplier roster.

She handed this responsibility to a manager named Clarence Vance. She had reviewed his resume; although he had just joined Merit this year, he had an extensive work history. He had spent his entire career in New York City and boasted significant experience in supplier management.

That evening, Jade finally managed to get off work on time. The two women ordered takeout and chatted over dinner.

"I didn't get a chance to ask you yesterday, but did you meet Merit's big boss? Well? Is he hot?"

Jade dropped the bombshell question right out of the gate, nearly causing Willow to choke on her food.

She quickly took a sip of water, automatically skipping over the embarrassing misunderstanding where she had previously mistaken Arthur for the boss. "I saw him. He's pretty handsome."

"I knew it!" Jade looked incredibly smug. "Got a picture? Let me see."

Willow shook her head. "No. We were in a meeting the whole time, how would I have time to sneak a picture?"

"Fair enough, just snap one when you get the chance," Jade pressed on. "By the way, what's he like? Is he really as ruthless and unapproachable as the rumors say? A real Cold King?"

Willow recalled her daytime encounter with Silas Thorne. Although he had a stoic demeanor and wasn't one for small talk, to be completely honest, it wasn't that bad. He certainly wasn't the terrifying figure the gossip made him out to be.

"He's alright, actually. He seems like a reasonable person. I doubt he'll be impossible to communicate with."

Hearing this, Jade immediately raised a red flag. "You need to stay objective. Don't let his good looks blind you into making a flawed character assessment."

"I am not," Willow protested. "I'm just calling it like I see it."

Jade went into analysis mode. "Think about it. If everyone calls him the Cold King, there has to be a reason. Maybe he just held back from going on a killing spree today because it was the first meeting and he wanted to make a good impression. You're a new hire, he probably didn't want to scare you off. Keep a close eye on him; I bet he's exactly what the rumors say."

Willow conceded the point. It was true that you could rarely read someone perfectly on the first meeting, and she was particularly bad at office politics. "I know. I'll pay closer attention."

"Oh right, what position did they give you?" Jade suddenly remembered to ask.

"VP," Willow answered frankly.

"VP?" Jade shrieked.

Willow thought her friend found it inappropriate as well. "Honestly, I think it's a bit much too. A manager title would have been perfectly fine, but a VP is just..."

Before she could finish, Jade cut her off. "A bit much? It's not too much at all! I'm officially convinced this man has incredible taste. He's at least a million times better than Julian."

Willow wanted to voice her concerns, but she couldn't get a word in edgewise. Jade was practically vibrating with excitement as she pivoted to a new conclusion. "I take back what I just said. Cancel the observation period. If a boss is that hot and gives you a position that high, who cares if he's the Reaper himself? Just take the job and run with it!"

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Willow couldn't help but laugh. "That's not what you said two minutes ago."

"Well, I didn't have all the facts then, did I?" Jade grinned. "Never judge a book without reading the whole thing. I was just being impulsive earlier. In this economy, work is work. With a platform this good and a title this high, who cares if the boss is a little strict? At least he's easy on the eyes!"

Listening to her seamlessly downgrade the man from 'Cold King' to 'strict,' Willow smiled. Honestly, Jade didn't need to convince her. Since she had made her choice, she was going to stick with it. Forget being cold; even if he were Hell's Reaper, she didn't mind.

No matter what, it could never be as agonizing as her time at Sinclair Group.

Thinking of that place reminded Willow of the two messages Julian had sent her recently.

One was demanding to know how long she planned on throwing this tantrum.

The other was a condescending olive branch, informing her that if she crawled back and apologized properly, he might consider finding a position for her at the firm.

Upon reading those messages, Willow hadn't hesitated for a second. She blocked and deleted him from her contacts immediately.

Back when she was still at Sinclair Group, she had kept his contact info for work purposes, terrified that Julian would use a communication breakdown against her at a critical moment.

Now that she had completely severed her employment with the firm, there were zero professional ties left between them. She was finally free from those considerations and cut him out of her life entirely.

Meanwhile, at Emerald Heights.

Julian had waited days for Willow's reply, scoffing to himself about her utter lack of appreciation.

His temper flaring, he drafted a final ultimatum, only to find that his third message was blocked.

Staring at the glaring red exclamation mark indicating a failed delivery, Julian froze for a second before the reality sank in. His expression turned instantly somber.

Just then, Vivienne walked in and asked about Willow's situation. Julian quickly locked his phone screen. "Ignore her," he said coldly. "Let her cool off for a few more days. She'll come crawling back and begging me eventually."

Vivienne nodded, deciding not to press the issue. She hated that Willow was always the topic of conversation between them anyway. She smoothly shifted gears. "I heard Merit's

new project has officially launched, and they'll be opening the supplier evaluation process soon."

Julian was well aware. Merit's new venture was the biggest news in New York City right now. Every major corporation was scrambling for insider information, desperate to hitch a ride on that massive ship.

But Sinclair Group didn't need to scramble. They had the experience and the capital. Securing a spot on that supplier list was an absolute certainty for them.

"I'm leaving this in your hands," Julian instructed casually.

Vivienne jumped at the chance. "Don't worry, Julian. I'll execute this flawlessly."

It was the perfect opportunity to prove she was vastly superior to Willow.

Stepping out of the study, Vivienne immediately dialed Clarence Vance. She and Clarence were old friends. Over the years, he had been her go-to guy for all sorts of under-the-table maneuvering.

The background noise on the line was chaotic, with thumping music indicating he was at some noisy club.

Vivienne frowned in displeasure, cutting straight to the chase. "How are things progressing?"

Clarence was already a bit drunk, his words slurring. "Relax, everything's handled. I'm completely in charge of the supplier side now. Nothing's going to go wrong."

Vivienne still felt a twinge of unease. "I heard a new VP was brought in to oversee this project. Can you handle her?"

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At the mention of the VP, a surge of resentment bubbled up in Clarence's chest. He had seen the new executive earlier today. She was just a green, inexperienced girl, and she dared to boss him around? She was pretty enough, though—she probably slept her way to the top.

"She's just a little girl. Nothing to worry about."

A little girl?

Hearing this, Vivienne's chest tightened, a sudden spike of anxiety hitting her. "What's her name?"

The alcohol was really hitting Clarence now, making him dizzy. He racked his brain but came up empty. He hadn't paid a lick of attention during the daytime meeting; he completely disregarded the woman.

"Think her last name started with an M or something. I forget."

Instantly, Vivienne's anxiety evaporated. She realized she was overreacting. Why on earth would she assume it was Willow?

For one, Willow didn't have the competence for such a role. And given her pathetic devotion to Julian, she'd never willingly abandon Sinclair Group. Right now, she was probably racking her brain trying to figure out a way to crawl back.

The thumping bass over the phone was giving Vivienne a headache. Unable to stand it any longer, she prepared to hang up. Right before she disconnected, she gave Clarence one last order. "Take this seriously. Once it's done, you'll be well compensated."

Clarence quickly groveled, "Don't you worry. I guarantee it's a sure thing."

The next morning, Willow arrived at the office early.

When she got to the lobby, the elevator had just gone up, so she waited for the next one. Just then, the doors to the adjacent elevator chimed open.

But that was the VIP elevator, so Willow stayed put. It was standard corporate practice to reserve a dedicated car for the top executives to ensure a premium experience. They had the same setup at Sinclair Group, so she didn't think much of it.

She was about to wait for a regular car when Arthur's voice called out from the VIP elevator. "Ms. Horgan, over here."

Arthur was an impeccably professional assistant. He had switched to her formal title the moment she onboarded. Though Willow was still getting used to the change, she knew it was necessary for the workplace and adapted quickly.

What she wasn't quite adapted to was stepping closer and realizing there was someone else in the car—Silas Thorne.

He was wearing a slightly lighter suit today, paired with a matching tie and cufflinks. His hair was slicked back slightly, and gold-rimmed glasses rested on the bridge of his nose. He exuded an air of absolute wealth and indifferent detachment.

Caught off guard by his sudden appearance, Willow fumbled for words. She defaulted to the formal address and greeted them. 'Mr. Thorne. Mr. Vance.'

Arthur warmly invited her in. "Step inside, we're heading up anyway."

Willow stayed out; she had only walked over to be polite. "No, thank you. I don't want to intrude. I'll just take the regular elevator."

She was wearing a light-colored puffer jacket over a blue knit dress today, her hair half-tied up. She looked elegantly understated and refined.

Arthur was just about to say it was no trouble when a low, magnetic voice resonated from behind him. "It's not an intrusion."

It was Silas.

Both Willow and Arthur froze, neither expecting him to actually speak up.

At that point, Willow had no excuse to refuse. She stepped inside, murmured a thank you, and deliberately tucked herself into the farthest corner.

Even so, the moment she entered, Silas caught a drift of her subtle perfume. It was delicate and refined, just like the woman herself.

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The elevator ascended in complete silence, the atmosphere inside the cabin incredibly still.

Willow simply had no idea what to say, while Arthur was debating whether he should speak at all.

Finally, Arthur broke the ice. "Ms. Horgan, how are you settling in these past couple of days?"

"Very well, actually," Willow replied. "The environment and the team are great."

"Glad to hear it."

With the silence broken, the tension eased slightly. Willow and Arthur exchanged a few more pleasantries. The elevator soon dinged at the twenty-fifth floor, and Willow gave a polite nod before stepping out.

The moment she was gone, Silas looked at Arthur with genuine confusion. "Was she... afraid of me just now?"

"Huh?" Arthur was completely thrown off. He had no idea his boss cared about such things.

Within the company, Silas was notoriously aloof. Board members and top executives routinely trembled in his presence, yet he had never once asked this question. Why the sudden interest today?

Arthur tested the waters. "What makes you say that, sir?"

Hearing this, Silas's expression darkened. What made him say that? It was glaringly obvious—how could anyone miss it?

She had pressed herself into the corner the second she walked in, avoided speaking to him the entire ride, and didn't even look his way when she left. What more proof did he need?

A spike of irritation hit him. "Just answer the question."

The elevator chimed at the twenty-sixth floor. Silas strode out with long legs, and Arthur scrambled to keep up. "Maybe she isn't afraid of you, Mr. Thorne. She's just... not familiar with you yet."

Arthur thought this answer would smooth things over, but Silas's face only grew more stormy. "So you're saying she's familiar with you?" he snapped.

Arthur gasped, terrified. "Sir, that's not what I meant at all."

"Then what did you mean?" Silas looked him up and down, feeling entirely displeased. Why was she perfectly relaxed around Arthur, even chatting with him?

Granted, listening to her voice from the sidelines had been pleasant enough. Willow had a beautiful voice—sweet but not cloying, soft but not weak. He could listen to it all day. But it would be infinitely better if she were directing it at him.

"I honestly didn't mean anything by it." Arthur was sweating now. He couldn't fathom how his boss went from perfectly fine before getting on the elevator to a total ice storm upon getting off.

"Should I... go ask Ms. Horgan?"

"Ask her what?" Silas knew exactly what his assistant meant, but deliberately played dumb. He inherently knew this wasn't something you could just ask.

If she wasn't terrified before, interrogating her about it would certainly do the trick.

"Mind your own business."

"Yes, sir. Understood," Arthur immediately replied. He didn't understand the logic, but at least he had dodged a bullet for now.

Upon entering her office, Willow prioritized her daily tasks, tackling the most urgent ones first. Then, she prepared to host a status meeting with the project team to discuss their progress and any roadblocks.

The meeting was scheduled for ten o'clock, but fifteen minutes went by and Clarence was still a no-show. Willow asked a colleague to call him, but the line was hung up after just two rings.

Another ten minutes passed before Clarence strolled leisurely into the conference room. The moment he sat down, he began complaining. "Couldn't this have been an email? Do you have any idea how busy we are? We aren't all just sitting around sipping coffee and holding useless meetings. Some people just love flaunting their title and throwing their weight around."

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His words were pointed and aimed squarely at Willow. Instantly, a heavy silence fell over the conference room. No one dared to breathe a word.

Willow obviously caught the insult. She was the new hire, and stepping straight into such a senior role had clearly ruffled feathers. Clarence probably wasn't the only one in the room harboring these resentments; he was just the only one vocalizing them.

She deflected the jab with a cool, measured tone. "The work needs to get done, and meetings are necessary to ensure it's actually happening. If the timing is such an issue, Clarence, perhaps you should schedule our next one. That way, we won't be wasting everyone's time waiting for you to show up."

Arthur opened his mouth to retort, but a colleague beside him quickly stopped him, stepping in to smooth things over. "Since everyone's here, let's just get started."

During the meeting, Willow checked in on everyone's individual progress. The team was highly cooperative and had prepared their materials in advance, so the meeting flowed smoothly. However, when it was Arthur's turn, things derailed again.

He hadn't prepped any materials and gave dismissive answers to all of Willow's questions. His response to everything was a repetitive, "I have it handled, everything is on track."

Willow ignored his attitude and pressed for details. "Do you have the preliminary supplier list yet?"

Clarence remained indifferent. "Not yet."

"When will it be ready?"

"It's the same few companies every time. What's the rush? You'll get it when it's done."

"And the specific evaluation process?"

"I'm working on it. We have to evaluate them on commercial, technical, and a dozen other metrics. It takes time. Do you think this is like shopping for clothes or makeup where you just take a quick glance?"

"A timeline. I need an exact timeline." Willow's voice suddenly turned icy. While she was generally amiable and preferred a flat, egalitarian dynamic with her subordinates, that required mutual respect. Dealing with this kind of blatant insubordination was a waste of her patience.

Clarence was slightly taken aback. He had assumed the woman sitting across from him was just a brainless figurehead, someone he could easily walk all over. He hadn't expected her to have this kind of bite.

"I can't give you an exact time. There's too much to do, it won't be that fast."

Willow didn't coddle him. "If there's too much to do, delegate it. If you can't handle it, I'll find someone who can. I want to see the detailed roster and the evaluation process by the end of the day."

Clarence froze. After a long moment, he let out a cold laugh. "Playing the tough new boss, huh? I get it. Don't worry, I'll get it done before the day is out."

Once the meeting adjourned, the team trickled out. Clarence hung back, deliberately waiting for Willow. When the room cleared out, he sauntered over. "You targeting me, or what?"

His eyes were bloodshot, and he let out a subtle burp as he spoke. He was clearly nursing a massive hangover. Willow frowned, taking a step back. "I target the work, not the person."

"The work, not the person. Right," Clarence chuckled. "Little girl, how long have you even been here to start throwing your weight around like this? Do you understand Merit? Do you understand us? Do you even know how things operate around here?"

"I don't need to understand any of that. I only need to understand the project."

"Alright, you've got some spine," Clarence laughed again. "But let me tell you something. The water here is a lot deeper than you think, and things are infinitely more complicated. I've been in this industry for years. I've forgotten more than you'll ever know."

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"So? Are you going to give me the materials I asked for before the end of the day or not?" Willow interrupted, refusing to entertain his rambling.

"Oh, I'll give them to you. Of course I will." Clarence was smiling, but it didn't reach his eyes. His expression was downright menacing.

Before walking out, he threw one last remark over his shoulder. "You could have just sat there looking pretty like a good little mascot, but you had to go and punch above your weight class. Let's see how this plays out for you."

After Clarence left, Willow gathered her things and returned to her office. Honestly, her mood wasn't deeply affected. She had dealt with his type far too many times in the past. Bullying the weak, fearing the strong, and weaponizing seniority were their standard playbook. She had tried playing nice with these types before, but retreating only ever encouraged them to push further.

Besides, she had a stubborn streak in her. Once she set her mind to something, she would see it through to the end.

Willow waited the entire day, but Clarence's documents never arrived. As the end of the workday approached, she gave him a call, but it went straight to voicemail. She tried his desk phone next, only to find out he had left the office half an hour ago.

She had a coworker relay a message to Clarence: she would be waiting in her office until she received his materials. She wasn't leaving until he delivered.

When Clarence got the message, he was just arriving at a club to blow off some steam. Over the phone, he couldn't help but curse. "That crazy bitch. Doesn't know what's good for her. I gave her face in the meeting today and she actually bought it? Who the hell does she think she is?"

His colleague tried to reason with him. "Maybe you should just let it go. She seems serious about the work. Just go back, send her the files, and be done with it. You don't want this blowing up and reaching Mr. Thorne's ears. You know how he is."

"Let it reach him, you think I'm scared of her? I've been at Merit longer than she has, and my projects have a flawless track record. You think the boss is going to side with her over me? You might be scared of her, but I'm sure as hell not. They drag some little girl in off the street and she thinks she can walk all over me? I'm not taking this lying down."

"Just come back," his coworker urged again. "She's our boss now. Completely humiliating her like this is crossing a line. It's just a few slides. Put them together and email them over."

Clarence was getting annoyed. "Alright, alright, I hear you. Just get off work and go home, stop nagging me."

Eventually, Clarence did return to the office, though only after killing an hour at the club. It was eight o'clock by the time he walked through the doors.

He was fuming, but he knew he was in the wrong, so he couldn't just explode at Willow. Instead, he opted for passive aggression. "Was this really necessary? It's just a few slides. What's the difference between sending them today and sending them tomorrow? Did you really have to make this miserable for everyone?"

"I'm not miserable at all," Willow stated blankly. "Where are the files?"

Clarence scoffed. "If you want the evaluation process, I can send it now. But the roster isn't ready. I can get it to you by the end of the week, tops."

There was actually another reason he was so reluctant to hand over the data: Vivienne hadn't sent him Sinclair Group's submission yet. Every other company had already submitted their paperwork, and now they were just waiting on them. Clarence had no idea what was taking them so long. It was just an initial pitch deck—it was incredibly uncharacteristic for a massive corporation like Sinclair Group to drag their feet like this.

"The end of the week doesn't work. Tomorrow is the absolute latest I'll accept," Willow shot back.

Clarence gritted his teeth. "Fine. Tomorrow."

With that, he turned to leave, but Willow reminded him, "The evaluation process."

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Clarence was practically tearing his hair out. "I'm sending it right now."

Soon after, Clarence's email landed in her inbox. It was indeed the evaluation process, but Willow could tell at a glance that it was just an old template.

Everything from the project name to the dates, and even the core scoring metrics, had been copy-pasted from a previous project without a single edit.

She tried calling him, but he had already left his desk. Willow hung up and didn't bother trying again. She hit Reply All, CC'd the entire project team, and mercilessly highlighted every single flaw and error in the document.

Stepping out of her office, Willow bumped right into Silas. She hadn't expected to run into him here, let alone at this hour, and was momentarily caught off guard. "Mr. Thorne."

"Yes," Silas murmured in acknowledgment. "Just heading out?"

Willow nodded. Remembering how he had just been glancing around the floor, she asked, "Are you looking for someone?"

"No."

"Well then," Willow pointed toward the elevators, "I'm going to head out."

"Let's go."

With that, he followed right behind her into the elevator.

Willow threw a quick glance at the VIP elevator next door, finding it a bit strange, but she didn't overthink it. Maybe this car just happened to arrive first and he didn't want to wait.

She pressed the button for the lobby, then turned to ask him, "Which floor?"

Silas's car was parked in the underground garage, but he calmly replied, "Lobby."

Same as her. After pressing the button, Willow took two steps back, inadvertently creating a wide gap between them.

For a moment, neither of them spoke, the silence stretching out between them.

It was the first time they were completely alone, without anyone else around.

Willow felt a bit out of her depth, racking her brain for something to say to break the awkward tension.

Silas, however, wasn't overthinking it. He just quietly watched her from behind. He observed her pale profile, her long, fluttering eyelashes, and the stray wisps of hair resting against her neck. Everything about her was soft and ethereal.

And, of course, there was that subtle perfume constantly teasing his senses.

The only thing he found displeasing was how far away she was, tucked firmly into her corner.

Silas broke the silence. "Your name is... Willow?"

Willow was utterly shocked that he actually knew her name. "Yes."

This was uncharted territory for Silas. He had never feigned ignorance before; usually, it was up to everyone else to guess what he was thinking. Because of this, his delivery was painfully clunky. "I believe you just joined Merit?"

Now Willow was even more surprised. He met hundreds of people a day, yet he remembered details like that?

"That's right, I started on Monday."

"How are you finding it? Settling in well?" Silas carefully managed his tone, trying his absolute hardest to sound like a normal boss checking in on an employee, rather than someone acting entirely out of character.

"Very well."

"Then why are you already working late?"

Willow paused. Was he... expressing dissatisfaction that she was working overtime?

Catching her expression, Silas realized he had probably spooked her again. He quickly pivoted. "I mean... is the workload too heavy?"

Was this a subtle jab at her efficiency?

Willow thought for a second before answering carefully. "I'll make sure to improve my efficiency moving forward and try to complete my tasks within regular working hours."

Silas internally cursed. He wanted to clarify, but the elevator had already reached the lobby. He had planned to keep the conversation going—ask her how she was getting home, maybe offer her a ride.

But she didn't give him a single opening. She simply bid him a polite goodbye and walked away.

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The lobby receptionist recognized Silas and immediately rushed over, asking if he needed anything or if she should arrange a driver to take him home.

Silas shot her down, turning on his heel to head down to the parking garage. By the time he pulled his car out, Willow was nowhere to be seen.

He took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose wearily. He then dialed Arthur and ordered him to look into why Willow was working late.

The next morning, the first thing Clarence saw upon arriving was the email Willow had sent the night before. He flew into a blinding rage. This little girl had absolutely zero respect for him. She actually dared to dress him down in front of the entire team? Sure, he hadn't created a new evaluation process and just threw an old template at her to get her off his back, but that was only because she was rushing him!

And if she had a problem with it, why couldn't she just message him privately? Did she have to drag it out in front of everyone so they could laugh at him?

Fuming, Clarence marched straight to Willow's office, but she refused to see him. Left with no other options, he took his grievances to Arthur. He knew he'd never get face time with the big boss, so targeting his executive assistant was the next best move.

Clarence believed his tenure at Merit, his industry knowledge, and his vast network of resources far exceeded Willow's. He was fully confident that once Arthur and Mr. Thorne heard his side of the story, they would back him up.

Therefore, as soon as he entered Arthur's office, he launched into a lengthy monologue about his past achievements and tireless dedication, wanting to lay a solid foundation before making his play.

Before he could finish, Arthur cut him off. "Just get to the point."

Clarence floundered awkwardly. He hadn't expected to be shut down so quickly. But he had thick skin, and he quickly recovered, pivoting to subtly badmouthing Willow.

He was smart about it. He didn't frame it as his personal vendetta; he framed it as what everyone was saying. Within a few sentences, he had painted Willow as an incompetent

tyrant—reckless, ignorant, utterly devoid of strategic vision, and obsessed with abusing her newfound authority without understanding the basics of management or delegation.

Hearing all of this, Arthur let out a cold laugh. If he hadn't already known Willow, and if he hadn't run a full background check after Silas's phone call last night, he might have actually believed the guy.

Unfortunately for Clarence, his manipulative little games were entirely misdirected.

Arthur leveled a deadly glare at him. "She is Director Horgan. She is your boss and the head of this entire project. You would do well to think very carefully before you speak about her like that."

Clarence froze, realizing this was going completely off script.

He had walked in convinced Arthur would rally to his side, yet it was the exact opposite. Not only did Arthur not support him, but he also gave him a harsh dressing-down.

Suddenly, Clarence was out of ammo and had no idea how to spin this.

But he was a seasoned corporate veteran. Seeing the wind shifting against him, he instantly changed his tune, claiming he was just stressed about the project and worried for the VP. He spun it as a case of caring too much and begged Arthur to disregard his previous comments.

Arthur didn't bother arguing with him, merely warning him to remember his place and do his damn job.

Stepping out of Arthur's office, Clarence immediately dialed Vivienne. He told her that the project timeline had accelerated, every other vendor had already submitted their materials, and she needed to send hers in today.

On the other end of the line, Vivienne lost her temper. She unleashed a torrent of complaints. "Why are you rushing me? What's the panic? Didn't you say I could submit it whenever I wanted? Why the sudden change of heart? Are you losing control over there?"

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"No, of course I have it under control," Clarence replied submissively, having no other choice but to explain himself. "It's the new VP pushing for it. But it's not a big deal, you just need to submit it today. I'll handle the rest, I promise there won't be any issues."

That only infuriated Vivienne more. She already hated this new VP sight unseen, and now she didn't hold back her vitriol. "Who does this nobody think she is, waving a plastic badge like it's a royal decree? Does she even know who she's messing with? I'll have to pay her a little visit soon."

Clarence listened to her rant in silence. He had heard rumors that Vivienne was some stunning, elegant ice queen with pristine grace, but after dealing with her a few times, he realized that was a total load of crap. When she cursed, her mouth was filthier than his.

Clearly, rumors were just rumors.

After hanging up, the more Vivienne thought about it, the angrier she got, and she threw a massive tantrum in her office.

The main issue was that she had absolutely no idea how to produce the materials Clarence was asking for. She had pawned the work off to Leo Yardley and his team, but they were entirely uncooperative, inventing excuse after excuse to blow her off. She was sick of it.

Annoyed as she was, the work still had to be done. Julian had publicly handed this project over to her, and the entire company was watching. She couldn't drop the ball. She was banking on this project to prove her worth and trample Willow's legacy in the process.

Swallowing her rage, Vivienne dialed Leo's number. "How are the files coming along? I need them today."

Her tone was awful, and Leo wasn't about to play nice. "What files?"

"What do you mean, what files? Didn't I say I need the pitch deck for the Merit bid today?"

"Oh, that," Leo said flatly. "We've already handed over all the raw data. The rest is just organizing and synthesizing it. If you can't even handle that much, I suggest you step down from the project."

"Is that how you speak to me?" Vivienne seethed. "I am your superior. When I give an order, you execute it. What's with the attitude? Did you pull this kind of stunt when Willow was here?"

She shouldn't have brought that up. Mentioning Willow's name only ignited Leo's fury; everyone on the team knew Vivienne was the reason Willow had been forced out.

"You aren't even in her league," Leo shot back without an ounce of mercy. "Forget minor tasks like organizing and synthesizing; she used to build all our pitch decks single-handedly and never complained once."

"If that's the case, Sinclair Group has no use for people like you. Get out."

"Fine by me. Write up the termination papers and we'll walk out right now."

"You..." Vivienne shook with rage, slamming the phone down.

On Leo's end, he actually looked quite pleased.

The rest of his team had been listening in, but not a single one tried to stop him. In fact, they all felt incredibly vindicated hearing him put her in her place.

They were all on the same page. Working under Vivienne was pure torture. She knew absolutely nothing but loved to micromanage everything. If this was how things were going to be, they'd rather quit now.

After hanging up, Vivienne screamed at her assistant, but it didn't solve anything. At this point, she had run out of options. She had to go to Julian.

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

Chapter 120

In his office, Julian was reviewing project files when he stumbled upon a photo that gave him pause. Willow was in it.

It was a picture taken at a company retreat a while back. She had just joined Sinclair Group then. She looked inexperienced, her styling lacking sophistication. Yet, even in a sea of faces, she stood out effortlessly, her luminous skin and striking features commanding attention.

Julian thought back to the last time he had seen her. It had only been a glimpse of her back, but it was enough to see that she had nearly returned to the stunning version of herself in this photo.

A suffocating knot formed in his chest. It had been nearly a week since Willow left the firm, yet she hadn't come crying back to him, begging for forgiveness. Instead, she had blocked him completely.

Julian lit a cigarette and walked over to the window, scoffing at the thought that she was playing a dangerous game and was bound to get burned.

A knock sounded at the door. He crushed his cigarette out. "Come in."

Vivienne had walked in fully prepared to put on a performance. Her plan was to play the victim, turn on the tears, and act sweet—a foolproof strategy that usually brought Julian to his knees and guaranteed he'd fix her project issues instantly.

But the moment she walked in, she saw the blown-up photo on Julian's monitor. Worse, his cursor was hovering right over Willow's face. Her chest tightened, alarm bells screaming in her head.

Even she had to admit Willow looked gorgeous in that photo. And based on what she had seen recently, Willow's weight-loss journey was working; she was going to end up looking even better than she did in that picture.

"Julian," she said tentatively, pointing at the monitor. "When was this taken?"

"I don't remember," Julian brushed her off, walking back to turn off the monitor. "What do you need?"

She wasn't sure if she was just imagining things, but Julian seemed almost panicked, like he had been caught hiding something.

She pouted, playing up her hurt. "Julian, are you keeping secrets from me?"

"How could I?" Julian hated seeing her upset. He pulled her into his lap. "What could I possibly hide from you? We're together twenty-four hours a day. Work or home, we're inseparable. Don't you trust me?"

Vivienne thought about it and realized he had a point. "Then promise me you won't hide anything from me in the future."

"Relax, don't you believe me?" Julian patted her shoulder. "But what about you? Have you been in a bad mood because of all the stress? Is the Merit project too difficult?"

That was exactly why she had come to him. Since he had handed her the perfect opening, she took it. "It's stressful, sure, but not because the project is hard. You know this is my exact field of expertise. Throwing together a pitch deck is a piece of cake for me. What's really stressing me out is the team Willow left behind."

Julian frowned. "Why? Are they defying your orders?"

"Defying orders is putting it mildly. They're just..." Vivienne trailed off intentionally, letting a few calculated tears slide down her cheeks. "They have zero respect for me, and

they couldn't care less about the project. They have absolutely no discipline. I have no idea why Willow hired people like that. And worst of all, they said this company only survived because of Willow, and without her, Sinclair Group is going to collapse."

She knew exactly which buttons to push to trigger Julian's ego, deliberately hitting him where it hurt the most.