

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

Chapter 261

Willow had heard long ago that wealthy families were particularly superstitious about feng shui and traditions. The Sinclair family had been exactly like that, so it stood to reason that a top-tier dynasty like the Thorne family would have their own rigid customs. She understood and respected their beliefs.

But giving a gift this expensive seemed unnecessary.

"Still, giving a bangle like this is too much. It's incredibly valuable."

Silas continued his persuasion. "The bangle carries good meaning. It represents peace and smooth sailing, making it the perfect New Year's blessing. Besides, your last name is engraved inside. That means profound fortune and lifelong luck."

He practically exhausted every blessing-related vocabulary word he had ever learned in his life, feeling quite drained by the effort.

Willow thought his explanation made sense, but she had no way to offer a gift of equal value in return. "I still think it's too much. If I accept it, I can't give you anything nearly as expensive back. It just doesn't feel right."

"You don't need to worry about that," Silas said, instantly improvising a new excuse the moment he sensed her wavering. "This rule only applies to the men. It has nothing to do with women."

"What?" Willow was utterly shocked. She had never heard of such a rule in her life. "You're not just making this up, are you?"

"Of course not," Silas said, feigning utter seriousness. "Why would I joke about something like this? This tradition affects both of us. It dictates our happiness and safety for the entire year. I wouldn't lie to you."

"So, just accept it. Do it for me," Silas pressed.

Willow remained torn, but after a moment of intense internal debate, she decided to take it—not as a permanent gift, but just to hold onto it for him temporarily.

They chatted for a few more minutes before Silas had to leave. It was the last day of the holidays, and work resumed tomorrow. He needed to get a head start on planning his schedule.

Back in the hospital room, Willow received a call from Martha Mercer, who was still in the sterile isolation ward. Her mother immediately asked what Silas had been talking to her about.

Willow didn't want to overshare, afraid it would lead to misunderstandings. She brushed it off with a casual excuse about work.

But even that didn't curb Martha's curiosity. "Willow," she asked over the phone, "how old is this Mr. Thorne? Is he married?"

At first, Willow didn't catch the underlying implication and answered honestly. "He's thirty-four, and he's single."

The moment the words left her mouth, Martha launched into a monologue about how "a ten-year age gap is perfectly fine" and how "older men know how to take care of a woman." The realization hit Willow instantly.

She felt a wave of awkwardness. "Mom, what are you thinking?"

Martha didn't beat around the bush. "I'm thinking about whether there's a chance for the two of you. I think he's wonderful. He's handsome, successful, and a true gentleman. He seems like someone you could trust with your life."

Willow knew he was wonderful, but reality wasn't that simple. She gave Martha a direct answer. "Please don't bring this up again. There is absolutely no chance between us."

"Why?" Martha sounded genuinely confused. "Is it because of Julian? You're about to divorce him anyway. You don't need to factor him into this at all."

"Of course not." Julian meant absolutely nothing to her anymore.

"Then what is it?" Martha refused to let it go. "I can tell he really cares about you. Why wouldn't it be possible?"

Willow let out a heavy sigh. "He already has someone he loves."

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

Chapter 262

At those words, Martha finally fell silent.

On this point, mother and daughter were in complete agreement. Everything else could be negotiated, but being the other woman was where they drew the line. Destroying someone else's relationship or interfering with their happiness was absolutely out of the question.

Martha couldn't help but sigh. "What a shame. I really thought the two of you were a perfect match."

Willow didn't engage with the comment, smoothly changing the subject. "I'm going back to work tomorrow, so I won't be able to visit as often. Take good care of yourself, and let me know immediately if you feel unwell."

"Don't worry," Martha replied. "Focus on your job. I'm doing fine. The doctor even said my recovery is going exceptionally well."

"I know, but you still need to be careful."

"I will. Don't worry."

The next day.

Since it was the first day back after the holidays, Willow gathered her team for a morning meeting to review project timelines and hash out the details.

The meeting had been scheduled well in advance for ten o'clock—a very reasonable time that allowed everyone to settle in. Yet, even with the late start, someone still managed to be late.

When ten o'clock rolled past with no sign of Clarence Vance, Willow asked a colleague to track him down. The first few calls went straight to voicemail. When someone finally picked up, Clarence's voice slurred with the undeniable heavy weight of a hangover.

He was practically incoherent, immediately barking curses into the receiver. "Who the hell is this? Calling me first thing in the morning to ruin my sleep! Don't you know how late I was up last night?"

The colleague on the line was startled by his aggressive, drunken rant. They quickly cut in, trying to keep it brief. "Mr. Vance, we're about to start the project meeting. Everyone is here waiting for you."

"Meeting? What meeting? Nobody told me about a meeting," Clarence snapped, his tone laced with venom.

The colleague tried to explain. "Director Horgan sent out the invite before the break, and you accepted it. You should really head to the office now. Everyone is waiting."

They had deliberately mentioned Willow's name, hoping it would sober him up and get him moving. Instead, the name acted like a detonator. Clarence exploded.

"Don't you ever mention that bitch's name to me! Just hearing it makes me sick! She's nothing but a cheap piece of trash who slept her way to the top, and she thinks she can parade around in front of me? I'll—"

His words turned so foul that the terrified colleague slammed the phone down before he could finish. They looked at Willow, practically on the verge of tears.

"Director Horgan, I... I don't know what's going on. I don't know why Mr. Vance is acting like this."

The colleague didn't know, but Willow understood perfectly.

Ever since she joined Merit Biotech, Clarence had despised her. He had thrown countless obstacles in her path, both openly and in the shadows. Now, he wasn't even trying to hide it, screaming insults over the phone. She could only imagine the horrific things he was saying behind her back.

"It's fine. It's not your fault," Willow said, soothing her distressed team member before seamlessly shifting gears. "Let's start the meeting."

Afterward, a few of Willow's closer subordinates, furious on her behalf over Clarence's phone outburst, offered to report him to the People & Culture Department.

Willow stopped them. Clarence had definitely crossed a line today, but it wasn't a fatal blow. Even if P&C intervened, the worst he'd get was a formal warning—nothing that would actually threaten his position.

Instead, she instructed them to quietly document his unauthorized absence. They weren't going to strike yet. She just needed them to keep a very close eye on him and report any further erratic behavior directly to her.

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

Chapter 263

Meanwhile, Clarence slept straight through to the afternoon. Having received no angry calls from P&C, his arrogance swelled. In his mind, he tore Willow down all over again. She was just a pretty face who slept her way to the top—she didn't deserve to go toe-to-toe with him.

He had deliberately unleashed that rant on the phone just to humiliate her, showing complete and utter contempt for her authority. And what was the result? She hadn't done a damn thing. She hadn't dared to retaliate. At least she was smart enough to know who really ran the department.

After freshening up, Clarence didn't even bother going to the office. He caught a cab straight to a nearby café. Pushing open the door, he spotted Vivienne Sinclair already waiting inside.

The moment he saw her, all his previous bravado evaporated. He instantly transformed into a submissive lackey, shrinking into himself. After all, a single kickback from her was worth more than his entire annual salary.

"Ms. Sinclair, I didn't expect you to arrive so early. I hit some traffic on the way, my apologies."

Vivienne sat with a wide-brimmed hat and oversized sunglasses, completely hiding her face. She didn't bother taking them off, nor did she even look at him. Her voice dripped with disgust. "Be earlier next time. I hate waiting."

"Yes, of course. I promise I'll be early next time."

"Do you have the items?" Vivienne demanded, skipping the pleasantries.

"Yes, right here." Clarence quickly fished a flash drive from his pocket and slid it across the table. "Everything you asked for is on here."

Vivienne had her laptop ready. She plugged in the drive and quickly skimmed the contents.

It was exactly what she had ordered. The files contained detailed, methodical records of several critical errors allegedly made by Willow. Times, dates, intricate details, and supporting evidence were all laid out perfectly. It was a flawless, airtight case.

Of course, every single word of it had been fabricated by Clarence.

"Not bad work. You'll be well compensated for this." She pocketed the drive, offering him a condescending word of praise.

"I'm glad you find it useful." Clarence eagerly seized the opening. "As long as it helps you, the time I spent putting it all together was well worth it."

"Don't start begging for credit just yet," Vivienne cut him off, having zero patience for his groveling. "When can this plan go live? When am I going to see results?"

She already hated Willow with a burning passion, and the humiliation at the family dinner had pushed her over the edge. She couldn't stand it for another second. Willow had insulted her and Toby in front of everyone, and worse, Julian hadn't done a damn thing to punish her. Vivienne was consumed by a toxic mix of hatred and bitter resentment.

If no one else was going to destroy Willow, she would do it herself. Willow thought she was so high and mighty now, riding Merit Biotech's coattails? Vivienne was going to burn it all down and see how smug she looked in the ashes.

But across the table, Clarence looked hesitant. Faking the documents was the easy part—he had the clearance to download actual company files and tweak the numbers. Framing her, however, required finesse.

"It might take a little time. I need to wait for the right opportunity."

"I don't have time to wait," Vivienne snapped, shooting down the idea instantly. "What's the absolute earliest you can do this?"

"Well, that's..."

"Pull this off, and I'll increase your payout by fifty percent."

At the mention of money, Clarence's eyes lit up with renewed vigor. "Consider it done. I'll head back and figure it out right now. I guarantee I'll have her fired as fast as humanly possible!"

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

Chapter 264

Clarence was a man entirely devoid of morals—cunning, treacherous, and driven by base greed. The only thing that truly motivated him was the allure of cold, hard cash.

So, the moment Vivienne promised him a fifty percent bonus, he threw himself into the investigation at breakneck speed. Of course, it wasn't a real investigation. He had started with a predetermined conclusion: Willow had slept her way to her position.

From there, it was just a matter of scraping together circumstantial evidence and making massive leaps in logic. Finally, he arrived at the exact result he wanted. It was true—she

had relied on a man to get ahead. And that man was none other than Silas Thorne's own executive assistant, Arthur Vance.

When he delivered the news to Vivienne, she was ecstatic. The outcome was far better than anything she could have hoped for.

Not only had Willow made massive professional blunders, but she had also slept her way into the job. Vivienne was practically vibrating with anticipation, desperate to see the look on Willow's face when the truth was dragged out into the light.

"Excellent work," Vivienne said, sliding a sleek bank card across the table. She was still fully disguised behind her hat and sunglasses. "Here's the thirty percent advance we agreed on. The rest will be wired the moment the job is done."

"Thank you, Ms. S—"

Clarence grinned greedily, reaching for the card, but Vivienne slammed her hand down, pinning it to the table. "When does this happen?"

"Very soon. I just need the right moment."

Vivienne had zero patience left. "Give me a concrete date."

Clarence thought frantically, then grit his teeth. "This Friday. There's a Strategic Planning Session on Friday. Every key player involved in the project will be there, including your people. It's the perfect stage to drop the bomb."

Vivienne finally released the card. "Don't disappoint me."

Clarence pocketed the card with a slimy smile. "I won't. All the pieces are in place; I'm just waiting for the curtain to rise. Just sit back, relax, and watch her entire life fall apart."

Watching her life fall apart. It was music to Vivienne's ears.

That evening, as soon as Julian walked through the door, Vivienne casually brought up the subject, asking if he was free on Friday to attend the Merit Biotech session.

Julian's brow furrowed immediately. "I'm not going. My schedule is booked on Friday."

The fallout from the family dinner had infuriated him, and the anger still simmered beneath the surface. He had no desire to see Willow anytime soon. He figured a little cold shoulder would force her to realize her place.

In New York City, he was absolutely certain no one could outplay him.

Sensing his resistance, Vivienne quickly shifted gears. "But you specifically told me that I needed to keep you informed on everything regarding the Merit project."

"Just CC me on the emails. I don't have the time to micromanage every detail." Julian's hostility toward Willow was bleeding into his attitude toward the entire project.

"But this is different. It's the first major strategy meeting of the year. They're setting the entire direction of the project. If you aren't there, I'm just going to feel completely anxious."

Julian didn't immediately reject the idea this time, though he remained silent.

Vivienne pressed her advantage. "Julian, please just come with me. Think of it as giving me moral support, okay? If you really don't want to talk, you can sit there and not say a single word. Is that fair?"

"Please. Between the project and taking care of Toby, I'm exhausted. My head has been all over the place lately. I'm terrified I'll say the wrong thing and jeopardize the whole deal. What would I do then?"

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

Chapter 265

Pushed to this point, Julian couldn't really refuse. The lingering guilt over Toby's recent injury softened his resolve, and he finally relented. "Alright. I'll clear my schedule and come with you. But let's be clear—I'm just there as an observer. Don't expect me to speak."

"That's perfectly fine. Just having you there is enough. Even if you don't say a word, I'll feel so much safer." Vivienne played the part of the reliant, vulnerable sister perfectly, though her true motives were far darker.

She had never expected him to contribute to the meeting anyway. She just needed him in the front row for the spectacular show she was about to put on. She wanted him to see, with his own two eyes, exactly what kind of woman Willow truly was.

The mere thought of it sent a thrill of anticipation coursing through Vivienne's veins.

On Willow's end, she was already receiving detailed reports on Clarence's erratic behavior. Her people were watching him like hawks, both inside and outside the office.

Internally, he was constantly logged into the company intranet, obsessively downloading project files. Externally, he was practically a ghost—skipping work constantly and barely spending any actual time in the office.

It was glaringly obvious what he was plotting, but Willow didn't confront him. She kept her cards close to her chest.

She ordered her internal team to hold off on formal reports, instructing them instead to secretly back up every single file Clarence touched, ensuring the original data remained pristine and untouched by his tampering.

Externally, she told her people to keep their distance, strictly taking photos and thoroughly documenting his movements without alerting him.

Friday arrived in the blink of an eye.

Vivienne called Clarence first thing in the morning. Once she confirmed all the traps were set, she went to Julian's study to collect him.

Julian still wore a look of profound annoyance, reminding her yet again that he was only attending to give her peace of mind and wouldn't be participating in the discussion.

Despite his grumbling, Vivienne noticed with sharp eyes that he had dressed meticulously for the occasion. He wore a dark charcoal suit with subtle textures, paired with a pristine silk dress shirt. A understated patterned tie rested perfectly at his collar, and glimpses of elegant platinum cufflinks caught the light at his wrists. His shoes were polished to a mirror shine, and his posture was rigid and commanding.

She didn't call him out on the effort. Instead, she sneered internally, eagerly imagining the look on his perfectly groomed face when Willow's true nature was exposed.

Over at Merit Biotech, the stage was set. Arthur Vance stood in Silas Thorne's office, running through the final details and waiting for orders.

"Mr. Thorne, will you be joining the session today?"

Silas wanted to attend, but he worried his presence would put unnecessary pressure on Willow. He was also mindful of the vicious corporate rumor mill. He didn't care about the gossip himself, but he had to protect her peace of mind.

He felt they were finally making progress, and he didn't want to ruin it by coming on too strong. He needed to play the long game.

"I'll sit this one out. You go ahead, and alert me the second anything happens."

"Understood. I'll head down now."

Arthur left the executive suite, collected Willow, and the two walked to the conference room together.

Watching them walk in side by side, Clarence let out a dark chuckle. His tone was laced with venom as he spoke up. "Well, isn't this a coincidence? Director Horgan and Assistant Vance arriving together. I was just about to go look for you, but I suppose there's no need now."

The hostility was impossible to miss. Willow picked up on it instantly but couldn't be bothered to engage. She ignored him completely, walking past to take her seat.

Clarence wasn't deterred; his malicious smirk only deepened as he sat down behind her. Enjoy it while it lasts, he sneered inwardly. You'll be crying by the end of the hour.

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

Chapter 266

Vivienne and her team arrived shortly after.

Vivienne was dressed to kill, practically vibrating with aggressive glamour. She wore a sharp, tailored black velvet suit paired with towering stilettos of the same color, her hair styled in cascading, voluminous waves. She radiated absolute arrogance.

But the moment her eyes landed on Willow, her composure fractured. The mask slipped, her eyes narrowing into a vicious glare. It was blatantly obvious she was out for blood.

As for Julian, his expression darkened significantly when he realized Willow hadn't spared him a single glance since he walked in. His jaw tightened, and he sat in stony silence. True to his word, he didn't utter a single syllable.

Willow, meanwhile, completely ignored their existence. Her eyes remained locked on the documents in front of her, entirely professional and devoid of any emotion.

As the meeting dragged on, Vivienne began to lose her patience, shooting pointed, frantic looks at Clarence. Feeling the pressure, Clarence finally saw his opening during one of Willow's presentations and forcefully hijacked the conversation.

"I don't think that's the correct interpretation of the data," he interrupted loudly, leaving no room for polite debate.

In a setting like this, the comment wasn't constructive criticism—it was a direct, public challenge to her authority.

"Oh?" Willow turned to look at him. Her eyes were as calm and chilling as a deep, frozen lake, her voice completely flat. "And how do you think it should be interpreted?"

Clarence sneered. "Surely Director Horgan isn't so dictatorial that she refuses to listen to dissenting opinions?"

Willow ignored the bait. "Let's hear it, then."

Clarence launched into his counter-argument, but it was incredibly weak, completely lacking any solid evidence to back it up. It was painfully obvious he was making it up on the spot.

Willow didn't sugarcoat her response. "Finished? That adds zero value to the discussion. Moving on."

She dismissed him with a single sentence and turned back to the agenda.

But Clarence wasn't about to let it go.

Her dismissal was the spark he needed. According to the plan, this was the moment he was supposed to fake a meltdown to attack her credibility.

Turns out, he didn't need to fake it. All the festering resentment and humiliation from the past few weeks boiled over. He shot to his feet, pointing a trembling finger at her. "Who the hell do you think you are? You think you can just shut people down whenever you want? I've been in this industry for years! You think you know more than me? You're just a little girl who barely got her foot in the door, and you're trying to play boss? It's pathetic!"

His sudden, explosive outburst caught the room entirely off guard. The tension spiked instantly, with everyone reacting differently.

Willow remained entirely unbothered. Julian frowned deeply. Arthur glared at Clarence with barely concealed fury. And Vivienne watched it all unfold with cold satisfaction, a dark smile curling her lips.

Arthur stepped forward to intervene, but Clarence was entirely off the rails. The more he shouted, the more unhinged he became, eventually threatening to file a formal report against Willow right then and there.

Willow stayed perfectly calm. She slipped her pen back into her shirt pocket, exposing a delicate yet firm wrist. "I see. So this was a targeted hit all along."

She stood up, closing the distance between them with slow, deliberate steps. "Alright, then. The floor is yours. Let's see exactly what you've got."

Julian moved to stand up, but Vivienne grabbed his arm. Faking a look of shock, she shook her head, whispering that this was an internal Merit Biotech dispute and it wasn't his place to interfere.

Julian hesitated, realizing she had a point, and slowly sat back down.

Arthur tried to step in again, but Willow stopped him with a single, commanding look. She silently assured him that she had everything under control.

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

Chapter 267

The arrow was nocked and the bow drawn tight; there was no turning back now. Even if Clarence wanted to back out, he had gone too far. He knew full well that if he aborted the plan now, Vivienne would destroy him. But if he pushed forward, there was a real chance he could ruin Willow and step into her freshly vacated position.

Without hesitation, he connected his laptop and threw his meticulously forged documents onto the projector screen for everyone to see. He publicly accused Willow of falsifying company data, abusing her authority, and sabotaging Merit Biotech's corporate interests.

And then, he completely lost his mind. He dragged his baseless, unhinged conspiracy theories into the light, openly accusing Willow and Arthur of having a scandalous affair. He swore up and down that they were sleeping together and that Willow had used Arthur to secure her high-ranking position.

The moment the words left his mouth, a suffocating silence descended on the conference room. The attendees were absolutely paralyzed. They had come for a strategy session, not a front-row seat to a massive corporate scandal. People exchanged terrified glances, too scared to even breathe. A few of the smarter executives, wanting absolutely no part of the fallout, quietly slipped out the door.

Within seconds, the room had practically emptied out.

Of those remaining, Julian looked the most murderous. A dark, violent storm raged in his eyes. His jaw was clenched so tight a muscle jumped in his cheek, and the air around him practically dropped below freezing.

He knew Willow had moved on and was involved with other men, but knowing it was entirely different from having it shoved in his face in a public boardroom. He was so consumed by rage he looked ready to flip the heavy conference table.

Even Vivienne could feel the waves of his fury and wisely kept her mouth shut. Deep down, however, she was thrilled. Everything was playing out exactly as she had orchestrated it. The reactions were flawless. Any second now, Willow's reputation would be reduced to ash.

On the other side of the room, Arthur looked just as horrified, though his reaction was purely out of sheer panic.

He had no idea what kind of drugs Clarence was on to make him act this suicidal. Falsifying documents was one thing, but openly accusing Willow of sleeping with him? The mere thought made Arthur want to faint from terror. If Silas Thorne heard about this, Arthur's career—and possibly his life—was over. It was obvious Clarence had no clue who Silas truly was.

"Are you out of your mind?!" Arthur shouted, stepping firmly in front of Willow to shield her. "Do you have any idea what you're saying?! Do you know what's going to happen to you when Mr. Thorne finds out about this?"

"Happens to me?" Clarence laughed maliciously. "You two are the ones who should be terrified! Abuse of power, corporate collusion, sleeping your way to the top—I can't wait to see what Mr. Thorne does when he finds out. Let's see who he sides with!"

Arthur realized arguing with a madman was pointless. He turned to Willow, his voice urgent. "Don't listen to him. You leave right now, I'll handle this."

His top priority was getting Willow as far away from this toxic disaster as possible. If she got dragged any deeper into this mess, the wrath Silas would unleash on Arthur would be apocalyptic.

Before Willow could move, Julian's icy voice cut through the tension. He locked a lethal glare onto Arthur. "You'll handle this? Who the hell are you to her? What gives you the right to handle anything?"

His sudden intervention wiped the smug smile right off Vivienne's face. She frantically tugged at his sleeve, begging him not to get involved.

Total chaos engulfed the conference room.

Willow watched the madness unfold, making a sharp, decisive move. She locked eyes with Clarence. "I only have one question for you. Regardless of how this ends today, you will never work on my team again. Do you accept those terms?"

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

Chapter 268

"Of course," Clarence replied, puffing his chest out in a pathetic display of faux martyrdom. "When I made the decision to expose you, I knew exactly what the consequences would be. But what does my personal career matter when the integrity of the entire company is at stake? If I have to sacrifice myself to cleanse Merit Biotech of your corruption, I have no regrets."

The truth was, even if Willow hadn't said it, he knew there was no going back. He had burned the bridge while standing on it.

First, he genuinely believed his forged files were bulletproof. Even though Arthur was Mr. Thorne's assistant, Clarence was convinced that any sane corporate leader presented with this level of 'evidence' would prioritize the company's bottom line over personal loyalties.

Second, Vivienne had promised him a golden parachute. She swore that as long as he pulled the trigger, she would protect him. Even if he was fired, she guaranteed him a new, high-paying executive role far better than his current one.

With those two safety nets in place, Clarence felt completely invincible.

"Good," Willow said firmly, cutting off his theatrical monologue. "Since you've made your bed, I won't waste my breath. However, I have a few files of my own that I think you should see."

Her expression remained serene, her voice steady and composed. There wasn't a trace of panic in her delivery; every word hit like a calculated strike.

Her absolute calm finally managed to crack Clarence's confidence. "What files?" he stammered, a flicker of panic bleeding into his voice.

Willow didn't bother answering. She calmly pulled up her own set of documents and projected them right next to his on the massive screen. "I'm sure you're very familiar with these."

The moment Clarence saw the data, the blood drained from his face and his knees nearly gave out. These were the original, untouched data logs from the company's secure servers—the exact files he had secretly manipulated to frame her.

But he clearly remembered wiping the servers clean. He had deleted every trace of the original data. How in the hell were they up on the screen right now?

Clarence knew his hacking had been flawless. No one could have recovered those files. The only possible explanation was that they had downloaded and secured backups before he ever made his edits. But that was impossible. There was no way they could have known what he was planning.

Desperately trying to regain control, Clarence convinced himself she was bluffing. He forced a harsh laugh. "You're doing this on purpose! You're trying to frame me with fake data! You're the one making catastrophic mistakes, and now you're doctoring the numbers to pin the blame on me! I have to admit, Willow, you play a vicious game."

"I think you know exactly who's doctoring numbers and twisting the truth," Willow replied smoothly, her unshakable calm striking terror into Clarence's heart. "You were incredibly thorough. After you manipulated the data, you even remembered to scrub your digital footprints from the servers. But you forgot one crucial detail. If we knew you were planning a cyberattack, we had more than enough time to secure the originals before you struck."

Clarence's mind short-circuited. "Impossible!" he blurted out, pure panic taking the wheel. "You couldn't have known what I was going to do! You couldn't have backed them up!"

The words hung in the air. Every single person left in the room turned to stare at him, their expressions ranging from shock to absolute disgust.

Vivienne's reaction was the most volatile. Her face contorted with rage, her eyes burning with a hatred so intense she looked ready to murder him on the spot.

Realizing the massive confession he had just blurted out, Clarence frantically tried to backpedal. "I—I mean, stop trying to set me up! Prove it! I have hard, concrete evidence against you! What proof do you have that these files are mine?"

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

Chapter 269

Willow had anticipated this desperate pivot. She had her knockout punch ready. With a few clicks, she projected the system's backend server logs onto the screen, highlighting Clarence's exact login times and IP addresses over the past few days.

"If that's not enough to convince you, maybe you should take a look at this."

She pulled up the two high-resolution photos her team had sent her.

The images clearly showed Clarence standing in a café, eagerly accepting a bank card from a woman. They were tucked away in a corner, their body language screaming illicit corporate espionage.

The woman in the photo was heavily disguised, her face entirely obscured by a large hat and dark sunglasses, making it impossible to identify her directly from the image.

Seeing the photos, Clarence completely lost his mind. "You had me followed?!"

"Just taking basic precautions," Willow replied coolly. "Besides, I learned this tactic directly from you."

"You absolute bitch!" Clarence finally snapped. He lunged across the room, fully intending to strike Willow, but Arthur slammed him against the table before he could even get close.

A second later, the conference room doors burst open, and two heavily built security guards stormed in. They grabbed Clarence and violently hauled him out of the room. The takedown was brutal and efficient, leaving him zero chance to spew any more lies.

In truth, Arthur had wanted to end the circus much earlier. The only reason he hadn't dragged Clarence out the second he started running his mouth was because he needed Willow to publicly clear her name on her own terms.

With Clarence gone, a heavy, stunned silence settled over the room.

Willow calmly took her seat and seamlessly picked up the meeting right where it had derailed. Her unshakable dominance left the remaining executives in awe. Even Julian stared at her, genuinely shocked by her ruthlessness.

Vivienne, however, was consumed by a suffocating wave of dread.

She had instantly recognized herself in the photos. Thank god she had been paranoid enough to stay fully disguised; no one could definitively prove it was her.

Even so, she mentally cursed Clarence to the darkest depths of hell. The incompetent fool couldn't even execute a simple frame job and had nearly dragged her down with him.

She shot a frantic glance at Julian, only to find him staring intensely at Willow. The sight made her blood boil, and it took everything she had not to scream.

Eventually, Willow wrapped up the final agenda item and prepared to adjourn the session. Just then, the heavy, rhythmic sound of confident footsteps echoed from the hallway.

The massive conference doors swung open, and Silas Thorne stepped into the room.

His sudden arrival sent a jolt through the remaining attendees. Everyone froze, Willow included.

They assumed the CEO was here to address the corporate scandal, holding their breath in anticipation. Instead, Silas completely ignored the executives, walking straight past them to stop directly in front of Willow. "Are you alright?"

Willow blinked, entirely caught off guard. She had just survived a hostile boardroom coup; why was he asking if she was okay?

Arthur, however, knew exactly what was going on. He was the one who had hit the panic button and texted Silas to get down there.

Even though Willow had effortlessly dismantled the threat on her own, Arthur knew he had to report it immediately. If Silas found out about this from someone else later, Arthur would be held completely accountable for failing to protect her. He'd be fired on the spot.

"Mr. Thorne, the situation has been completely handled," Arthur quickly interjected, trying to save his own skin.

Silas ignored him. His predatory gaze swept over the room, the temperature dropping a few more degrees under his icy stare. "I was told someone was causing trouble on my floor today."

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

Chapter 270

The moment Silas spoke, the room descended into a terrifying silence. The air pressure in the room plummeted, and the remaining executives held their breath, terrified to even look in his direction.

This was the first time Willow had ever seen him like this. Suddenly, all the ruthless rumors about his brutal, cold-blooded corporate takeovers made perfect sense. The man standing before her was a force of nature—commanding ultimate authority without needing to raise his voice. One word from him, and careers ended.

It became glaringly obvious that he had been heavily holding back around her. While still reeling from the boardroom clash, Willow felt a surge of relief that she had managed to stay on his good side.

While everyone else was desperately trying to blend into the furniture, one man decided to challenge the apex predator. Julian Sinclair.

Perhaps still stinging from the humiliation Silas had handed him at their last encounter, Julian was desperate to reclaim his dominance.

"There was certainly some trouble, Mr. Thorne. But the man responsible wasn't an outsider. He was one of your own executives."

"Is that so?" Silas's voice was dangerously low, his gaze sharp enough to draw blood. "As of this exact second, he is not. Merit Biotech is terminating his employment immediately, and our legal team will be pressing full criminal charges for corporate sabotage."

The sheer brutality of the decision stunned the room. Clarence was a senior manager at Merit. Terminations at that level usually required weeks of HR reviews and board approvals, but Silas had just executed him with a single sentence.

Julian was suddenly left with nowhere to maneuver. He had planned to use the scandal to mock Silas's leadership, but Silas had neutralized the threat instantly. Left with no leverage, Julian forced a tight smile. "A very decisive move, Mr. Thorne."

Silas's expression remained dangerously flat. "People must pay the price for their actions. When you speak words you have no right to speak, and cross lines you have no right to cross, you deal with the consequences."

He was blatantly declaring absolute protection over Willow. However, to the terrified onlookers, it looked like Silas was unleashing hell to protect his fiercely loyal assistant, Arthur.

Arthur had been Silas's right-hand man for over a decade, managing both his corporate empire and his personal life. He was far more than just an assistant, so it made perfect sense to everyone that Silas would go nuclear over an attack on him.

Seeing no angle left to exploit, Julian didn't say another word. It was painfully clear he wasn't going to win any battles against Silas today.

Frustrated but powerless to change the outcome, Julian turned sharply and led Vivienne and his team out of the building.

During the silent drive back, Julian's suppressed rage simmered just beneath the surface, his face a mask of cold fury. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Vivienne's erratic behavior, which only fueled his irritation.

Ever since Clarence had launched his unhinged attack on Willow, Julian had noticed Vivienne acting strange. She had looked frantic, yet vibrating with eager anticipation, like she was waiting for a specific bomb to drop.

When Willow effortlessly flipped the script, Vivienne had instantly shut down, withdrawing into herself and clearly trying to avoid attention.

As he mentally replayed the chaotic meeting, the image of the spy photo flashed in his mind. A woman in a café, completely hidden behind a hat and sunglasses, handing a payoff to Clarence.

A deeply disturbing suspicion suddenly clicked into place. He turned his head slowly, his gaze locking onto Vivienne. "That entire disaster today... You had nothing to do with it, did you?"

Vivienne had been frantically plotting damage control in her head. Hearing Julian's accusation, she nearly jumped out of her skin. "Julian! How could you even think that?! Why would I have anything to do with this? What could I possibly gain from doing something so horrible?"

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

Chapter 271

Julian Sinclair didn't say anything else, but he still harbored his own thoughts. After all, her hatred for Willow Horgan hadn't developed overnight. That much, he understood perfectly.

Seeing his hesitation, Vivienne Sinclair knew he wasn't completely convinced. She immediately put on a righteous front. "If you doubt me, you can just take this project away. I don't even have to do it. If you still don't believe me, I can swear on it. If I'm lying, if I framed Willow and don't dare admit it, let Toby..."

"Alright, what nonsense are you spouting?" Julian immediately cut her off. "I just asked a simple question. Was there any need for such a dramatic reaction? Swearing on Toby's life?"

Though his tone was harsh, her outburst had actually convinced him. He knew how much she loved Toby; the boy was her entire world. If she was willing to swear on Toby, she was likely telling the truth.

Seeing that he believed her, Vivienne finally let out a sigh of relief. "I just didn't want you to misunderstand me. But I admit I got a little too emotional just now. I'll watch myself from now on."

As she finished speaking, her phone suddenly rang. Vivienne glanced at the screen, immediately declined the call, and, as if that wasn't enough, swiftly blocked and deleted the number.

Her movements were frantic, almost as if she was afraid of being caught. Julian looked at her in confusion. "What's wrong? Who was calling?"

"It's nothing." Vivienne simply powered off her phone. "Just a spam caller. They've called several times already and it was getting annoying, so I just blocked them."

Hearing this, Julian didn't press the issue any further.

Meanwhile, back in his office, Silas Thorne leveled a dark glare at Arthur Vance. "This needs to be resolved immediately, and I want it ripped out by the roots."

He had no idea that such scum existed within his own company. It seemed he hadn't shown Willow enough blatant favor; otherwise, how could anyone be blind enough to try and use her like this?

"Rest assured, Boss. I've already instructed the People & Culture Department to handle it. Clarence Vance will never set foot in Merit Biotech again, and all traces of his employment will be wiped clean."

"Good." Silas's mood softened just a fraction. He recalled something Arthur had mentioned earlier. "By the way, didn't you say he spread a rumor about Willow sleeping her way to the top? Who was this supposed mystery man?"

As he asked, Silas already had a certain expectation in mind.

After all, he was the one who interacted with her the most at Merit. If there was going to be a rumor, it had to be about him. If that were the case, he wouldn't even be that mad. At least someone in this building had a working pair of eyes.

"He's... no one important," Arthur murmured, his voice dropping several decibels.

"Who is it?" Silas was already growing displeased. He had a sinking feeling the answer wasn't going to be him.

"It doesn't matter who it is. None of it is true anyway, and it hasn't affected Ms. Horgan at all. She handled the whole situation flawlessly on her own today." Arthur desperately tried to change the subject. "Oh, you weren't there, so you didn't see how badass Ms. Horgan was."

Silas didn't need anyone to tell him how badass Willow was. He had seen it for himself. Back in Seattle, whenever work was involved, she flipped a switch and became a consummate professional.

But Silas was still hung up on the rumor. "Who exactly was it?"

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

Chapter 272

Arthur knew he couldn't dodge the question. He mumbled a vague, incoherent response, too terrified to speak clearly. "Me."

"Who?" The air pressure in Silas's office plummeted instantly. A storm of bone-crushing shock and fury brewed in his dark eyes.

Arthur was terrified out of his wits and immediately started backpedaling. "Please don't be mad, Mr. Thorne! They definitely got it wrong! There is absolutely nothing going on between me and Ms. Horgan. The only time we even speak is when I'm relaying your orders. You have to believe me!"

Silas didn't answer. He just stared at him with a heavy, predatory gaze.

Arthur shifted his feet in a panic, a thin layer of cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. His voice was tight and rushed. "Mr. Thorne, you have to believe me. I've been with you for years. You know exactly what kind of person I am. I would never dare cross that line with Ms. Horgan!"

"Enough." Silas cut him off, his tone impatient and icy, laced with a faint trace of indignation. Of course he knew Arthur and Willow had nothing going on. If he lacked even that basic level of judgment, he wouldn't be sitting in the CEO's chair at Merit.

What he couldn't figure out was where exactly he had gone wrong. Why would the staff rather link her with Arthur than with him?

Arthur opened his mouth to explain further, but Silas waved him off in annoyance, dismissing him from the office.

Stepping out of Silas's office, Arthur felt a massive weight lift off his shoulders. He wiped the sweat from his brow and pressed a hand over his racing heart. Thank God Mr. Thorne hadn't taken his anger out on him.

At the same time, he mentally cursed that bastard Clarence Vance a thousand times over. It was one thing to start a rumor, but the idiot couldn't even pick the right target. If Clarence had spun the rumor about Silas instead, he probably wouldn't have met such a brutal end.

After Arthur left, Silas picked up his phone, intending to call Willow and ask her to come up. But on second thought, he set the device down, grabbed his suit jacket, and headed straight downstairs.

On the 25th floor, everyone was working at a fever pitch. When they suddenly saw the CEO appear, a wave of shock rippled through the bullpen. Silas rarely showed his face down here; any directives were usually passed down through Assistant Vance.

Such a striking, powerful executive in the flesh had everyone swarming, eager to make a good impression. "Mr. Thorne, is there something we can help you with?"

"I'm looking for Director Horgan," Silas stated bluntly, making no effort to hide his intentions. "Is she in?"

From where he stood, he had a clear view of Willow sitting in her office. But he deliberately asked the question out loud, making sure everyone on the floor knew exactly why he was there. Hopefully, these people would open their eyes and pick the right leading man for their next batch of office gossip.

"Director Horgan is in. Would you like us to show you the way?" The staff tripped over themselves to be helpful.

"No need. I'll find my own way."

Silas waved off their offers and strode across the floor.

Willow was sitting by the window. The sunlight filtered through the blinds and spilled over her, illuminating her radiant complexion like a pristine, sun-drenched painting that refused to fade.

Silas stopped in his tracks, momentarily captivated by the sight.

Finally, Willow looked up and noticed him standing in the doorway. She blinked in surprise. "Mr. Thorne, what brings you here?"

"Just checking on you." There had been too many people around earlier for him to get a proper word in.

Silas casually pushed the door shut behind him and stepped closer. "Did everything earlier scare you?"

Willow knew he was referring to the stunt Clarence had pulled. She shook her head. "I'm alright. I actually noticed he was up to something early on, so I prepped for it. When it finally went down, it wasn't that bad."

"I admire your courage, but don't ever pull a stunt like that again." Silas's tone was deadly serious.

Willow thought she had crossed a line. "Did I do something wrong? Did I violate company policy? Just tell me, and I'll make sure it doesn't happen again."

"It has nothing to do with the company." It was simply that he couldn't stand the thought of her putting herself in danger.

Even though she had come out on top and the risk hadn't been life-threatening, the mere idea of her facing that scum alone—spending sleepless nights plotting her defense while he remained completely in the dark—left Silas feeling a suffocating wave of anxiety.

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

Chapter 273

"Then what does it have to do with?" Willow pressed.

"With me." Silas didn't bother hiding it this time, choosing to be entirely upfront with her. "If something like this ever happens again, you tell me first."

He was standing incredibly close to her. As he spoke, his dark gaze locked onto hers. The usual icy detachment in his eyes was gone, replaced by an intense, simmering emotion that Willow couldn't quite decipher.

"Not just this. Before you take any kind of risk from now on, you have to let me know."

With every word, Silas leaned a fraction closer.

Willow felt a flutter of nervous energy. Glancing sideways through the blinds, she noticed several of her colleagues seemingly sneaking peeks in their direction. The awkwardness spiked, and she quickly nodded.

Seeing her yield, Silas seized the opportunity to push further. "Of course, that goes for more than just work. If you run into any trouble in your personal life, you can come to me for that, too."

Willow's heart skipped a beat as an idea suddenly sparked in her mind. "Anything at all?"

"Anything."

"Actually, there is a favor I've been wanting to ask."

"Name it." Silas was practically begging for an excuse to help her.

Willow had been considering this move for a while but hadn't found the right opening. She thought she'd have to wait a bit longer, but Clarence's spectacular implosion had unexpectedly handed her the perfect opportunity.

"About Clarence's former position... I'd like to recommend someone."

"Absolutely. It's your call." Let alone a recommendation—if she wanted to hire someone on the spot, Silas wouldn't blink an eye. He was just looking for a way to pull her closer into his orbit.

"Is this person a friend of yours?"

Willow nodded. "You might have even crossed paths with him. He was my subordinate back at Sinclair Group. He came with us to Merit when we were in Seattle. His name is Leo Yardley. He's incredibly capable, grounded, and hardworking."

Even though he knew there was nothing romantic behind her words, hearing her shower praise on another man still sparked a familiar, bitter twinge of jealousy in Silas's chest. "How long have you known each other?"

Thinking he was just conducting a standard background check, Willow answered earnestly, "Over three years. We met right after I transferred to Seattle. We worked side-by-side right up until I moved to Merit."

Silas felt irritated before he asked, and utterly depressed now that he had the answer.

Over three years. That was longer than she had known him.

"I see. So you two go way back. You must be quite close."

Missing the subtle shift in his mood, Willow nodded brightly. "We are. We've got a great rhythm, and we rarely ever clash when it comes to work."

As she spoke, Silas mentally scoffed. He felt that they had a great rhythm too, and they wouldn't clash either—he'd just do whatever she wanted.

"So, what do you think?" Willow asked.

"No problem. If you vouch for him, he doesn't even need an interview. He can start right away."

Willow hadn't expected him to be so accommodating. Her face lit up. "Are you serious?"

"Of course." Seeing her radiant smile managed to soothe his bruised ego just a bit. "When have I ever lied to you?"

"But it might not just be Leo. A few other colleagues from our team might want to come over as well."

"Whatever you want. You have the final say," Silas promised her.

"Thank you so much!" Willow was thrilled, entirely oblivious to the fact that Silas's tone was far softer and more indulgent than his usual commanding bark. "But they should still go through the standard interview process. Just having the opportunity to get their foot in the door is more than enough."

She insisted on the interviews because she had absolute faith in Leo and the rest of the team. As long as they were given a shot, she knew they wouldn't let her down.

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

Chapter 274

With that, Willow grabbed her phone to call Leo. After so much stalling, she had finally made a breakthrough and was eager to share the good news.

Standing to the side, Silas watched her immediately shift her focus away from him, and that sour twinge of jealousy flared up again. Was it really that urgent? Couldn't she call the guy later? He had come all the way down here specifically to talk to her, and after barely exchanging three sentences, she was already prioritizing someone else's business. It felt entirely unfair.

So, he planted his feet and refused to leave her office. Since he was still lingering, Willow felt too awkward to make the call, leaving them standing in a bubble of quiet tension. After a moment, worrying that the rumor mill outside would go into overdrive, she gently broke the silence. "Mr. Thorne, was there anything else you needed?"

Silas didn't actually have anything else to say, but he wasn't about to walk out that door just yet. His gaze drifted aimlessly until it landed on a container sitting on her desk. Grasping for an excuse to stay, he asked, "What's that?"

Following his line of sight, Willow glanced over. "Homemade Fruit Medley."

"You made it yourself?"

"Yeah." She had thrown it together before leaving the house that morning. A few pieces of fruit were getting overripe, and not wanting them to go to waste, she had chopped them up to bring to work.

"Mind if I have some?"

"Oh?" Willow hadn't expected the request and was caught slightly off guard. He hardly seemed like the type of man who snacked on other people's food—let alone someone who would outright ask for it.

"What, you don't want to share?"

"Of course not," Willow quickly clarified. "It's just that the fruit isn't perfectly fresh anymore, so I feel bad offering it to you. If you want some, I can order a fresh fruit platter for you right now."

"No need. I want this one." Silas was stubborn. Store-bought fruit couldn't even compare to something she had prepared with her own hands.

Willow looked torn. "But it really is a bit mushy..."

"I told you, I don't mind," Silas insisted, standing his ground. "Besides, if it's good enough for you, why isn't it good enough for me?"

Seeing he wouldn't back down, Willow relented. "Alright. Should I open it so you can try a couple of pieces?"

"No. I'm taking the whole thing."

Willow was speechless.

Since when was the CEO of Merit Biotech so obsessed with leftover fruit?

When Silas finally strode back into his office, he was carrying a plastic container of chopped fruit.

Arthur wouldn't have even noticed it, but Silas deliberately walked past his desk, paraded the container in a slow arc, and set it down in the most conspicuous spot on his desk. At that point, Arthur couldn't have ignored it if he tried.

Taking a wild guess, Arthur asked, "Boss, are you in the mood for some fruit? Should I open that for you?"

Ignoring the offer completely, Silas announced, "Willow gave it to me."

Arthur blinked. He hadn't asked where it came from. Still, looking at his boss's smug expression, he figured Silas was in a fantastic mood.

Playing along, Arthur smiled. "Director Horgan really cares about you. She even brought you a fruit medley."

"Yeah." Silas kept his face perfectly impassive, though inside, the compliment hit exactly the right spot. "She prepped it first thing this morning. Sliced it all up herself just to bring it to the office for me."

"That was very thoughtful of her," Arthur praised. "Would you like to eat it now? I can get the lid off for you?"

"No." Silas shot down the suggestion. "Get back to work. I'll open it myself later."

It was a gift from Willow. There was no way he was going to eat it immediately; he was going to savor the moment as long as possible.

Meanwhile, down on the 25th floor, the moment Silas left, Willow called Leo and gave him a detailed rundown of her conversation with the CEO.

Listening on the other end, Leo was so overwhelmed he nearly choked on a sob. What he cherished most wasn't just the job prospect—it was the chance to finally work side-by-side with Willow again.

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

Chapter 275

His voice was choked with emotion. "Chief, to be entirely honest, even if you hadn't called with this news today, we were already planning to hand in our resignations."

Their entire team was being driven to the brink of insanity by Vivienne Sinclair. They had already worked through the Christmas and New Year break just to meet her ridiculous demands, expecting they might get a few days off afterward to recover. Instead, for some inexplicable reason, she had started terrorizing them again, leaving them without a single moment to catch their breath.

Willow didn't even need to ask to know why they were jumping ship. She didn't offer empty sympathies, knowing that what they needed right now was a concrete exit strategy.

She offered Leo a word of caution. "I've gotten your foot in the door, but passing the interviews is completely on you. Don't stress too much, though. Just show them what you're capable of. I believe in you."

Still caught up in his emotions, Leo sniffled loudly. "Don't worry, we won't let you down. We're bringing our A-game."

"I know you will."

After hanging up, Leo immediately turned around and shared the news with the rest of the team. Everyone in the bullpen had worked under Willow for years and harbored a deep, unshakeable loyalty to her. Unsurprisingly, their reactions mirrored Leo's.

A few were even more visibly hyped, jumping out of their chairs and cheering. "Finally! I can finally get the hell out of this place!"

Since they were the only ones in the office, Leo let them have their moment of celebration. But he also relayed Willow's warning, grounding them with the reality that this was just an interview—landing the job still depended on their own skills.

The team nodded in agreement. They were willing to take the gamble no matter how slim the odds. Plus, Willow was there waiting for them. And honestly? They were ready to walk out the door regardless.

"Then it's settled," Leo declared with finality. "We're marching down to the People & Culture Department right now. We'll push to have our offboarding completed within the month, and we'll prep for the Merit interviews on the side."

"Hell yeah!" The rest of the team chorused in agreement.

But then, one of the senior analysts spoke up. "If we just quietly pack up and leave, we're letting Vivienne off way too easy. She's put us through absolute hell lately. I know we can't completely ruin her, but surely we can stick it to her a little bit before we go, right?"

As their team lead, Leo normally would have stepped in to shut down any talks of sabotage and maintain professionalism. But this time, he kept his mouth shut. He knew his team was suffocating under a mountain of resentment. If they didn't get to blow off a little steam, they'd carry that bitterness with them forever.

So, he simply offered a mild warning. "Don't cross the line. Keep it professional."

"Don't worry, Boss. Everything will be strictly within legal and corporate boundaries."

Once Leo stepped out of the room, the group huddled up and quickly formulated a game plan.

Step one: They would all submit their resignations simultaneously to maximize the shock value.

Step two: They would immediately stop going above and beyond. No more catching minor errors before they snowballed, no more flagging potential risks in the pipeline, and absolutely no rushing to fix problems that had already surfaced.

A few days later, they marched down to the People & Culture Department and handed in a stack of coordinated resignation letters.

Vivienne was in the middle of a facial at an upscale medspa when she got the call. She shoved the esthetician aside and sat bolt upright. "Excuse me, what did you just say?"