

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

Chapter 41

These were words she had never spoken to Julian before. Spitting them out today was the sheer result of being pushed past her breaking point. Between her marriage and her career, he was hell-bent on crushing her completely.

But as her words faded into the tense air, Julian only offered a cold, disgusted glare. He looked at her as if she were completely out of her mind.

Willow let out a bitter laugh.

It was true what they said—some people would push you to the brink of insanity, only to stand back and judge you for losing your mind.

This time, she didn't wait for him to kick her out. She turned on her heel and walked out of his office.

Stepping into the hallway, she saw her phone lighting up with a call from Leo Yardley. Swallowing down her lingering despair, she quickly composed herself and answered. "What's up, Leo?"

"Chief, are you okay?" Leo's voice was laced with concern. "We all saw the email. The team was worried sick, so they asked me to call and check on you."

"I'm fine. I'm doing great, actually," Willow replied, making no mention of her confrontation with Julian. "How is everyone out in Seattle? Is the project moving along? Any issues coordinating with Merit Biotech?"

"Everything is great. The project is running smoothly. We're just worried about you," Leo said, his anxiety bleeding through the line. "You rushed back to New York City so suddenly. You didn't say anything, but we know something major must have happened. If you need any help, just say the word. We might not have a lot of power, but together we can still make a difference."

"Relax, I'm fine," Willow said, genuinely touched. Remembering Julian's cruel threats, she took a steadying breath. "About the project bonuses—you all saw the email. I won't lie to you. I'm going to fight for it one more time. But there's no guarantee I'll win. The worst-case scenario is that we end up with absolutely nothing. Are you guys okay with that risk?"

There wasn't a second of hesitation on the other end. "Yes. Whatever you decide, we have your back. Forget the bonuses—we'd back you even if our base salaries were on the line! You brought us onto this team, you taught us everything we know. We've all seen how much you've sacrificed for us and for this project over the years."

"Thank you. That puts my mind at ease." A lump formed in Willow's throat.

"Chief, just do what you have to do. The worst that happens is we walk away empty-handed, but we refuse to let them disrespect you like this!"

"I understand."

Ending the call, Willow felt a profound sense of calm wash over her.

If her team wasn't afraid of the fallout, then she had no reason to cower. When it came to her own well-being, she might have hesitated. But now that the livelihoods of the people she truly cared about were on the line, there was no room for second-guessing.

A few minutes later, she pushed open the door to Julian's office once again.

Seeing her march right back in, Julian's expression darkened further. "I believe I made myself perfectly clear. Have you returned because you're ready to accept that their project bonuses will be zero?"

He reached for his desk phone to make the call. But before he could lift the receiver, Willow slammed her hand down on it, meeting his predatory gaze head-on. "Their bonuses won't be zero. They will get every single dollar they earned."

Julian scoffed. "In your dreams."

Willow ignored his mockery. She held his gaze unblinkingly. After a heavy silence, she finally dropped the bomb. "What if I told you that I know the truth about Toby's parentage?"

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"What did you just say?"

"I said I know the truth about Toby," Willow Horgan repeated, holding his gaze steadily. "He's your child with Vivienne. He's not some random kid you adopted."

It had taken every ounce of her courage to lay it out like that. While she hoped to use the secret as leverage against Julian Sinclair, she knew the confession offered her little protection—it was like bearing her neck to a blade.

A heavy silence settled over the room. Willow braced herself for his reaction.

Before walking in, she had imagined every possible response. Shock? Guilt? Furious, defensive rage? It was a massive, scandalous secret, after all. Surely, he'd react somehow.

But as she met Julian's eyes, she found absolutely nothing. Just a cold, bottomless apathy.

It shouldn't be like this.

Julian stared at her indifferently, then let out a low, mocking scoff. "So, is this what you've been throwing a tantrum over all these days?"

There was no panic. No remorse. Instead, he looked incredibly smug, as if he had just seen right through a pathetic, desperate ploy, gazing down at her from his untouchable pedestal.

"A tantrum?"

"Running off to New York, laying a hand on Toby, throwing a fit in front of Nana," Julian listed off, his tone dripping with condescension. "All over this?"

It was about this—but it wasn't just about this.

Willow had zero desire to argue the nuances with him. "And what if it is?"

"What if it is?" Julian chuckled softly. "I actually thought you'd be grateful. After all, you're the one who benefits the most here, aren't you?"

The sheer audacity of his words left Willow reeling. He had decimated someone else's life, and yet he expected gratitude?

She couldn't fathom how anyone could be this twisted.

"Julian, you really are heartless."

"Heartless?" Julian maintained that same icy composure, though a flicker of cruelty sharpened his gaze. "Need a reminder? Who was the one crying, begging to be with me? Who was the one stuck in a mess, and who is the one incapable of having children? No matter how you spin it, I'm the one taking the loss here."

A suffocating wave of despair crashed over Willow, her entire body trembling with the weight of it.

So this is what it means to be with someone who doesn't love you. Every vulnerability she had ever shared, every wound she bore, was now just ammunition for him to weaponize against her.

And he delivered the killing blows with such casual detachment, completely devoid of emotion. In his mind, he wasn't doing anything wrong; he was merely stating the facts.

"I'll expose you," Willow said, her voice hard.

"Oh?" Julian looked at her with mild amusement, not even bothering to ask what exactly she planned to leak. "Go ahead. Be my guest. I'd love to see if there's a single news outlet in New York that I can't silence."

Willow pivoted. "Even if you aren't afraid, what about Vivienne? Won't she care?"

At the mention of Vivienne's name, his expression shifted. The icy detachment cracked, replaced by a very clear, undeniable flicker of concern.

Willow glared at him. "The Sinclair family's precious ward having a child with her own brother. How do you think that headline will play?"

Julian's face darkened into a stormy scowl.

Unintimidated, Willow pressed her advantage. "Even if you manage to kill the story, what about the whispers? Do you really think Vivienne could handle the social ruin? Even if she could, would you let her suffer through it?"

"Besides, wasn't that the whole reason you came to me in the first place? To cover this up? You don't want all that effort to go to waste, do you?"

Julian fell silent for a long moment. When he finally spoke, his features had smoothed over. "People will find out eventually."

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"Eventually, sure. But not today."

"Spill it. What are your terms?" Julian finally relented.

"Reinstate the project bonuses for the entire team," Willow demanded.

"That's it?" Julian scoffed. "You stirred up all this drama, and it wasn't even for yourself?"

"They're my subordinates. Fighting for them is the same as fighting for myself."

Julian sneered, clearly thinking her altruism was utterly fake. "Are we done here? Or are you going to stand there all day?"

Taking that as a yes, Willow ignored his toxic attitude and walked out.

Sure enough, an email hit the company servers shortly after. True to their deal, the project bonuses for the rest of the team had been adjusted back to normal. But as Willow scrolled down to her own name, her expression hardened.

It wasn't that her bonus had been cut again. Surprisingly, Julian had actually increased it. But the amount itself was a blatant, humiliating slap in the face.

A hundred dollars.

And right next to that pathetic figure was a note: Approved and authorized personally by the CEO.

Willow knew exactly what he was doing. He was degrading her, reminding her of her place.

He was making sure she understood that he was God in this building. With a single word, he could elevate her, or he could crush her into the dirt.

If this had been the old Willow, she would have marched right back into his office and demanded an explanation. But now? She was just days away from walking out of the Sinclair Group forever. She had secured her team's money, and she had no energy left to waste on his childish power trips.

But office gossips never missed a beat.

Before long, the snide remarks began floating across the bullpen.

"If I knew throwing a tantrum was all it took to get a bonus adjusted, I would've rioted too! Just cry and make a scene. Clearly, if someone like her can get results, we'd have it in the bag."

"Are you kidding? Would you want a measly hundred bucks? Making all that noise just to get tossed a Benjamin like a beggar. I couldn't handle that kind of humiliation."

"You guys don't even know the half of it. I heard her little stunt over the bonuses is what got Caleb fired. She's so selfish! I swear, I'm never collaborating with her on a project again. I won't hold back if she tries anything with me."

"Seriously. Caleb was with the company for six years. Spotless record, worked his ass off, and was always so nice to everyone. It breaks my heart to see him go out like this!"

Right on cue, a figure walked past the office doorway. It was Caleb.

Though he was a few feet away, it was obvious he had been crying. His usually sharp posture was gone, replaced by a defeated slouch as he carried a heavy cardboard box of his belongings.

The whispers immediately grew more vicious.

"The person who should leave stays, and the nice guy gets the boot. Unbelievable."

"Some people just have no shame. Anyone else would have packed their bags by now, but she's just sitting there like she owns the place. I guess self-awareness isn't for everyone."

Seeing that Willow was ignoring them, they directed their venom straight at her. "Isn't that right, Willow?"

Willow honestly couldn't care less about their petty insults. She'd heard worse over the years. The only thing tearing at her conscience was Caleb.

He really had lost his job because of her.

Willow stood up, intending to go see if there was any way to fix things for him. But just as she took a step toward the door, another figure appeared.

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It was Vivienne.

She gently stopped Caleb, asking him what had happened with a sweet, patient tone.

Before the fired assistant could even get a word out, the office gossips swarmed them, eagerly recounting the entire saga.

Willow knew they wouldn't paint her in a good light. The venomous glares cast her way made it obvious that their story was laced with righteous anger and disgust.

Listening intently, Vivienne offered Caleb a comforting smile. "Don't panic just yet. Let me go talk to Julian and figure out what's going on. He's a reasonable man. I'm sure this is just a terrible misunderstanding."

Hearing Vivienne step up, the crowd immediately began reassuring him. "Yeah, dry your eyes! Ms. Sinclair is going to talk to him. You're golden now. Everyone knows how close she is to Mr. Sinclair. If she vouches for you, it's a done deal."

"Really?" Caleb perked up, wiping his face. Having worked as Mr. Sinclair's assistant for years, he knew exactly how far Julian would bend backwards for his precious sister. If she asked for a favor, it was granted. No questions asked.

He grabbed Vivienne's sleeve, looking ready to drop to his knees in gratitude. "If you really do this for me, I will owe you my life."

"It's really not that serious," Vivienne laughed softly, radiating elegant grace. "I'm just going to ask. Whatever Julian decides is still up to him."

"Just the fact that you're trying is more than enough."

To Caleb, she was a literal saint.

And to everyone else in the room, the contrast was glaring.

"Man, you really can't compare the two. Ms. Sinclair is gorgeous, sure, but she's got a heart of gold too. Unlike someone else who throws innocent people under the bus for a quick buck. Karma's going to get her."

"Right? They say your face reflects your soul. No wonder she's such a plain Jane, waddling around like she owns the place. If I were her, I'd hide at home and spare everyone the sight."

"Let's just wait and watch the show."

—

Vivienne glided into Julian's office. He was in the middle of a meeting, but the second he saw her, he cut it short and stood up to greet her.

"What brings you here?"

"Am I interrupting?"

"Never. We were just wrapping up. Did something happen?" Julian pulled her into his arms, settling her comfortably onto his lap.

Vivienne wrapped her arms around his neck, pouting playfully. "Nothing. I just missed you."

Julian was fiercely protective of her moods. He pressed a kiss to her lips. "Did someone mess with you? Name names. I'll handle it."

"I'm fine," Vivienne giggled against his chest. "It's your assistant. I just saw him crying on his way out."

"Oh. Him." Julian's demeanor instantly shifted back to ruthless corporate shark. "He crossed a line. He got punished."

"Was it about the Willow situation? I overheard some people talking about it." Vivienne leaned against him, her voice sickeningly sweet. "It wasn't a huge deal, and he meant well. Just give him one more chance."

"If you're asking, how can I say no?" Julian looked down at her. "But you have to do something for me first."

"What?"

"Kiss me."

Vivienne laughed and obliged.

They lingered in the office a while longer before Vivienne finally made a move to leave. Pausing by the door, she looked back. "Julian, actually, I have one more favor to ask."

"Name it."

"About the project bonuses... I want to give my share to Willow."

Julian's face darkened instantly. "Absolutely not. She doesn't deserve a dime."

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"Just hear me out," Vivienne coaxed softly. "I have your love, and I have Toby. I have everything I could ever want. She, on the other hand... well, she probably needs the money a lot more than I do."

Julian sighed, his expression softening. "You're too kind for your own good. But it's really not necessary."

"Okay, if you say so." Vivienne had only brought it up to play the martyr anyway. She couldn't care less about the actual outcome.

Thanks to Vivienne's intervention, Caleb got his job back, leaving him practically weeping with gratitude. In the eyes of the entire office, she was an angel walking among mortals—beautiful, kind, and a champion of the people.

Basking in the adoration, Vivienne approached Willow's desk. "Could we step into an office for a minute?"

Willow didn't think they had anything to discuss. "If you have something to say, say it here."

"It's regarding the project bonuses," Vivienne said, looking suitably conflicted.

Worried there was another snag with her team's payout, Willow reluctantly followed her into an empty office.

"Spill it," Willow demanded, getting straight to the point.

But the second the door clicked shut, Vivienne's gentle facade vanished. Her eyes turned predatory. "After today, I think you've figured out exactly who runs things around here."

Willow was mildly surprised by the whiplash, but having seen this Jekyll-and-Hyde routine before, she shrugged it off. "And your point is?"

"My point is, I want you out of New York. Go back to wherever you came from. Nobody wants you here."

She didn't even bother masking it anymore. Just a blunt, straightforward demand.

Willow couldn't help but marvel at the twisted synergy between Vivienne and Julian. They were truly cut from the same cloth—relentless, toxic, and obsessed with control. She was already resigning in a matter of days, yet they still couldn't resist twisting the knife while she was here.

"Take it up with Julian. If he wants me gone, he can tell me himself."

Willow refused to entertain the threat. Vivienne wasn't her boss, nor was she in her reporting line. They had zero professional overlap. And even if Julian marched in right now, Willow's answer would remain the same. She was done bowing to them.

"Julian is a busy man. He doesn't have time for pests. I call the shots on this."

"I've made myself clear." Willow turned to leave.

Vivienne suddenly grabbed her arm, blocking her path. "Why do this to yourself? You're making everyone miserable. You're pathetic and nauseating."

"Nauseating?" Willow countered smoothly. "More nauseating than stealing someone else's patents?"

A flash of panic crossed Vivienne's face, but she recovered quickly. "Watch your mouth. The corporate world is about leverage. Winner takes all."

Willow stared at her, thoroughly unimpressed. A match made in heaven.

"Save the middle school mean-girl act. I don't have time for your childish games," Willow warned.

"You—"

"And while we're on the subject," Willow cut in, "you know exactly where Toby came from. So I suggest you back off. Because if you keep pushing me, I might just accidentally leak that little family secret to the press."

That effectively shut Vivienne up. She stood frozen in silence.

Finding the whole interaction exhausting, Willow turned toward the door again. Suddenly, without warning, Vivienne threw herself backward, crashing to the floor.

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!" Vivienne cried out.

A sudden, dreadful realization washed over Willow.

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Right on cue, the office door flew open, and Julian stormed in.

"Vivienne! What happened?" He rushed to the floor, pulling Vivienne into his arms and shielding her defensively with his own body.

Vivienne didn't answer. She just buried her face in his chest, sobbing uncontrollably.

Julian's head snapped toward Willow. His gaze was murderous, his expression dark with a rage that looked ready to strike her dead on the spot. "Did you push her?"

Caught completely off guard by the sheer absurdity of the setup, Willow instinctively defended herself. "I didn't! She just—"

"Shut up!" Julian roared, cutting her off. "I saw it with my own eyes. Are you really going to stand there and lie?"

"Yeah! We all saw it! You shoved Ms. Sinclair!"

Willow finally noticed the crowd gathered in the doorway behind Julian. A dozen coworkers stood there, staring at her with burning, righteous indignation, as if she had just committed a heinous crime.

Even Caleb was standing among them.

Looking at the mob, Willow realized that defending herself was entirely pointless.

Vivienne had used the bonus excuse to lure her into the room, intentionally provoked her, and timed it perfectly so someone would fetch Julian right at the climax of her little theatrical fall.

A masterclass in manipulation.

"Believe what you want. I didn't touch her." Having said her piece, Willow pushed past the glaring onlookers and walked away.

If her words meant nothing to them, she wasn't going to waste her breath. She'd rather save her energy than look at their sickeningly self-righteous faces a second longer.

Once the crowd dispersed, Vivienne finally stopped crying. Sniffling softly against Julian's chest, she murmured, "Julian, please don't be mad at Willow. It was my own clumsiness."

Julian held her tighter, wiping a stray tear from her cheek. "How is this your fault? You're too innocent for your own good. I know how Willow operates. If she wanted to hurt you, she'd make sure it looked like an accident."

"Are you hurt?" Julian asked, his voice thick with concern.

"No," Vivienne cooed, leaning into him. "As long as you're here, nothing hurts."

"You're too sweet," Julian sighed, kissing her forehead. "Stay away from her from now on. She's unstable and vicious. I don't want you getting caught in the crossfire."

"I know, I always listen to you. But you know I only talked to her today because of work." Vivienne looked up at him with wide, teary eyes. "I just wanted to offer her my bonus, and suddenly she just snapped. She pushed me, and then she threatened to expose the truth about Toby."

"Ungrateful bitch," Julian growled, his voice turning to ice. "Don't worry about it. I'll handle her."

"I know you will." Vivienne rested her head against his shoulder. "I mean, she's so obsessed with you. She'll do whatever you say in the end. It's just..." She paused. "She's been acting so strange lately."

"Don't worry. This little rebellious phase won't last much longer." Julian was convinced he knew exactly what was fueling Willow's recent outbursts—trivial jealousy and leverage, though she was clearly benefiting from it too.

"Just ice her out for a bit. She'll come crawling back in tears. Once she breaks, I'll transfer her back to Seattle to keep making us money. It'll go right back to how it used to be."

Vivienne nodded, though a hint of worry remained. "But what if she actually quits?"

"She won't," Julian said with absolute certainty. "She has no network and zero proven experience. Every single patent she's ever worked on is registered under your name. On paper, her resume is completely blank. No firm in the country would hire her over the Sinclair Group."

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"Besides, her mother is sick. She needs the money more than ever right now. There's no way she's walking away from a paycheck."

"And even if she somehow figured all that out, she still wouldn't leave. You were there when we got married. She'd been pining after me for years, and she can't even have kids. Now that she finally has me, she'd have to be completely out of her mind to walk away."

"Okay. I trust you."

"I'll have the driver take you home. Take the rest of the day off and rest."

"Alright."

After sending Vivienne off, Julian immediately summoned Willow into his office.

The second she stepped through the door, he unleashed on her. "You are getting way too bold. Didn't I tell you to stay the hell away from Vivienne? And you actually laid hands on her?"

"And threatening her with Toby? What, do you want me to revoke everyone's bonus entirely? I really underestimated you. You're quite the backstabber."

Willow had indeed brought up Toby's parentage, but only to put Vivienne in her place. As for pushing her? She hadn't done it, and she sure as hell wasn't going to confess to something she didn't do.

Willow looked at him with dead eyes. "I didn't push her."

"I literally saw it happen, and you're still lying to my face?"

Being framed was exhausting enough, but dealing with this high school drama was infuriating. "What exactly do you want, Julian?"

"Apologize to Vivienne."

Willow felt a headache throbbing at her temples. Why was every single day a demand for an apology? First Toby, now Vivienne.

"Not going to happen. Call the cops and have me arrested."

Julian stared at her, stunned. "Excuse me?"

"Are you deaf?" Willow rolled her eyes, no longer caring about hiding her contempt. "I said, pick up the phone, dial 911, and tell them to arrest me for assault."

"Willow," Julian warned, his temper flaring. "There is a limit to this childishness."

Childishness? Willow almost laughed.

Because he didn't care about her, every boundary she set, every grievance she voiced, was just 'childishness' to him.

Thank God she finally stopped caring too.

"Are you calling the police or not? Because if you aren't, I'm leaving. I have actual work to do."

Julian glared at her, his eyes dark with suspicion. "Is this your new strategy?"

Willow had no idea what he was talking about, nor did she care to ask. But looking at his face, she knew he wouldn't call the police. An official investigation would drag Vivienne into the spotlight, and heaven forbid his precious sister had to answer a few uncomfortable questions.

Without another word, Willow turned and walked out. Julian scoffed loudly behind her, but she ignored him.

Back at her desk, her phone buzzed with a message from Martha. Fearing her mother was having a medical emergency, Willow's heart skipped a beat as she hurriedly unlocked her screen. It was just a photo.

The picture was blurry and a bit shaky. Willow squinted at it but couldn't figure out what was so special about it. She typed back: Everything okay?

Martha replied instantly with two messages.

The boss of Harbor Mercy Hospital visited today! He's so handsome! Like, movie-star handsome! He made a point to talk to every single one of us.

Half the young nurses in the hospital showed up just to get a look at him!

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Reading her mother's enthusiastic texts, Willow zoomed in on the blurry photo. Upon closer inspection, she spotted Arthur Vance in the frame.

He was certainly well-dressed, exuding a sharp, professional elegance. But movie-star handsome? Handsome enough to draw a crowd of swooning nurses? Willow felt her mom was exaggerating just a bit.

If anyone in the picture stood out, it was the man standing slightly behind Arthur. Tall, broad-shouldered, with a commanding, untouchable aura. Even though his face was out of focus, his sheer presence was magnetic.

She had no idea who he was.

Well? Isn't he handsome? Martha texted again.

Definitely a catch, Willow replied, happy just to see her mother in good spirits.

Such a shame you weren't here today to see him in person.

Willow smiled to herself. She had actually met Arthur in person multiple times, so she didn't feel like she was missing out.

That's alright. There's always next time.

After a brief chat, Willow reminded her mother to get some rest and set her phone down.

Looking at the photo again, she realized it was the perfect opportunity to reach out. She opened her chat with Arthur.

I heard you're in New York?

At that exact moment, Arthur Vance was sitting in a VIP lounge. Seeing the message, his first instinct was to show the screen to Silas Thorne.

"Boss, how should I respond?"

Silas sat effortlessly on the leather sofa, his long legs crossed and his body leaning back slightly. The warm lighting cast sharp shadows across his striking, angular features, accentuating his intense, predatory gaze.

He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and replied smoothly, "Tell her the truth."

Arthur quickly typed back: Yes, I am.

Considering how much Arthur had done for her, Willow felt it was only right to play host while he was in her city. She replied: If you're available, I'd love to treat you to dinner to show my gratitude.

Arthur relayed the invitation to Silas. He honestly didn't expect much. His boss was famously aloof and practically never dined with outsiders, let alone women he technically had no business with.

To his absolute shock, Silas didn't even hesitate. "I'm available."

His tone was so mild and agreeable, it completely shattered his usual ruthless billionaire persona.

Arthur paused for a second, waiting for a punchline. When none came, he hurriedly texted back: I'm available. You're too kind, Ms. Horgan.

It's the least I can do. When are you free?

This time, Silas didn't wait for Arthur to ask. "Tonight."

Arthur blinked, convinced Silas had forgotten his schedule. He coughed nervously. "Boss, you have the global board meeting at seven tonight."

"Cancel it," Silas ordered without missing a beat.

Cancel it? Arthur was reeling. This was a massive, high-stakes meeting with executives flying in from all over the world. Silas Thorne had never missed a board meeting in his life, for any reason.

And he was blowing it off? For a dinner date he wasn't even technically invited to?

Stunned as he was, an order was an order.

Arthur quickly confirmed the time with Willow.

When Willow got the reply, she was a bit surprised. She hadn't expected him to agree so readily, let alone for tonight. During her time in Seattle, she had heard countless rumors about the executives at Merit Biotech—they were notoriously elusive, and rubbing shoulders with them was considered impossible.

Sounds great. I'm still at work, so I'll have to head over right after. I might be a little late.

Take your time.

Do you have any dietary restrictions or preferences?

Whatever you choose is fine.

With Silas dictating every response, Arthur successfully secured the dinner plans. The moment the phone went down, Silas reverted to his usual cold, unapproachable self, leaving Arthur seriously questioning if the man from two minutes ago had been an imposter.

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That evening, Willow headed straight to the restaurant after clocking out.

She had picked a highly-rated, historic establishment in New York, hoping to treat Arthur to an authentic and memorable local dining experience.

When she arrived, Arthur was already there. However, he wasn't sitting at the standard table she had reserved. Instead, he was seated in a lavish, private dining suite on the ground floor.

When Willow had originally called to book, she asked about this specific suite, but the hostess firmly stated it was booked months in advance with zero wiggle room. She had no idea what kind of strings Arthur had pulled to get the restaurant to clear the room for them.

As she walked in, Willow warmly greeted him.

Arthur was the picture of politeness, pulling out her chair and immediately apologizing for the sudden room change. He claimed he just preferred the better view of the street the suite offered.

"Not at all," Willow assured him with a smile. "As long as you're comfortable."

After some light conversation, the servers began bringing out the food. The dishes were elevated takes on classic New York cuisine, beautifully plated and absolutely delicious.

Over dinner, the conversation flowed easily. They talked about her mother's recovery, her life in the city, and even her current emotional state. Every topic subtly revolved entirely around her.

As they were wrapping up dessert, Willow realized she hadn't formally thanked him yet. She raised her glass. "I truly want to thank you for stepping in when I needed it most. I'll have my work situation sorted out very soon."

Arthur picked up his glass but seemed distracted. His eyes kept darting nervously toward the large window facing the street.

This wasn't the first time Willow had noticed him glancing outside. Curious, she followed his gaze and spotted a sleek, black Bentley parked directly outside. From their angle in the private suite, they had a perfect view straight into the tinted rear window.

She pointed toward the vehicle. "Is that your ride?" It would explain why he kept checking on it.

"Ah?" Arthur coughed, looking incredibly awkward. "Yeah. Yes, it is."

He felt a massive bead of sweat rolling down his back because that was not his car. That was his boss's car. And Silas Thorne was currently sitting in the back seat, staring right at them. Which was exactly why Arthur couldn't stop looking out the window.

Honestly, the whole situation was baffling. Silas had personally picked this specific room so he could watch them from the car. He had enthusiastically commanded every text,

practically forced the dinner to happen, and even took the time to meticulously dress up before leaving the hotel—only to refuse to actually get out of the damn car.

Noticing Arthur's distraction, Willow gently asked, "Do you have somewhere else to be? If you're busy, I don't want to keep you any longer. I mainly just wanted to express my gratitude tonight."

"Ms. Horgan, please, you're too kind," Arthur deflected. He wasn't busy. He was just terrified. Sitting through a dinner with his boss's terrifying gaze boring a hole into the back of his head from a Bentley outside was not great for his digestion.

Sensing his discomfort, Willow took the hint. Arthur was an incredibly important executive; the fact that he carved out time for her at all was a massive favor. She shouldn't overstay her welcome.

After a few more polite exchanges, they settled the bill and prepared to leave.

As they stepped out of the restaurant, a sharp gust of wind swept down the avenue. Arthur smoothly shifted, using his body to block the chill from hitting Willow. Just then, a couple walked past them on the sidewalk, entirely unnoticed by Willow as she brushed past.

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

Chapter 50

Vivienne had been dying to try this exact restaurant and had begged Julian to take her for weeks. Since he finally had the evening free, she was ecstatic, clinging to his arm and giggling coquettishly as they walked down the avenue.

Just as they neared the entrance, she froze. A familiar silhouette was walking out the door.

By the time she fully turned her head, the figure was already walking away, disappearing into the shadows of the street.

Noticing her pause, Julian asked softly, "What is it?"

Vivienne hesitated. "I think I just saw Willow."

She pointed in the direction the woman had vanished.

Julian barely spared a glance down the block before dismissing it entirely. "Impossible."

"But it really looked like her."

"It wasn't her," Julian stated with absolute certainty. "Knowing Willow, she's either chained to her desk at the office or slaving away on her laptop at home. She doesn't go out. Besides, she can't afford a place like this."

That reassured Vivienne instantly. "You're right."

Julian tapped her nose playfully. "Come on, stop worrying. You've been talking about this place for months. Let's go see what's on the menu."

Outside, Willow had planned to walk Arthur all the way to his car, but he stopped her halfway down the block, insisting she head home.

She didn't push it. She waved as he walked off, waiting until the Bentley finally pulled away before turning to head to the subway.

Inside the car, Silas had his eyes closed, leaning against the plush leather headrest. Arthur sat stiffly on the opposite side, breaking the silence with a cautious, "Mr. Thorne."

Silas didn't reply, keeping his eyes shut.

Unsure of the mood, Arthur tried again. "Do you want me to give you a verbatim recount of everything Ms. Horgan and I discussed?"

Silas finally reacted, his deep voice carrying a faint hum of approval. "Yes."

Not daring to miss a single detail, Arthur launched into a meticulous recap of the entire dinner conversation, reciting it word for word.

As he spoke, he kept a close eye on Silas's face. It was subtle, but as Arthur recounted Willow's updates, the harsh, untouchable lines of Silas's jaw noticeably relaxed.

Seeing his boss in a better mood, Arthur finally voiced the question burning in his mind. "Sir, if I may ask... why didn't you just go inside and meet her yourself?"

Wouldn't it have been infinitely better than making him act as a proxy on a dinner date?

Silas slowly opened his eyes, his dark gaze unreadable. "It's not the right time."

When the right time would be, Arthur had no idea, and he certainly wasn't going to ask. Just as he thought the interrogation was over and let out a quiet sigh of relief, Silas's pitch-black eyes snapped toward him, practically radiating hostility.

Arthur froze in terror. "W-What is it?"

Silas's lips curled into a faint, dangerous sneer. "You certainly played the perfect gentleman out there on the sidewalk."

Arthur stared at him, utterly bewildered. What?

If memory served, Silas had explicitly commanded him to be impeccably polite to Ms. Horgan.

Now he was getting death glares for shielding her from the wind?

Swallowing hard, he nodded frantically. "I'll be more mindful in the future."

"Mindful of what?" Silas demanded, clearly unsatisfied with the answer.

Arthur was legitimately sweating now. Mindful of what? I don't know! Breathing too close to her?

"Whatever you want me to be mindful of, sir."

Silas ignored the panicked response, dropping his gaze back to his phone. Displayed on the screen was a photo he had snapped through the tinted window just moments ago. Though it was slightly blurred by the glass, Willow's side profile and delicate frame were unmistakable.