

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

Chapter 5

The cryptic remark, paired with that maliciously smug look, sent a chill down Willow's spine. Was Julian's proposal somehow connected to Vivienne?

Before she could process the implication, heavy footsteps approached from behind. "What's going on up here?" Julian demanded.

Before Willow could get a word out, Toby dramatically threw himself toward Julian, pointing a tiny finger at her. "Dad! She attacked me! She tried to hit me! You have to punish her! Get rid of the ugly lady!"

Real tears welled in the boy's eyes, a shocking contrast to the vicious sadist he had been just moments ago. It was an Oscar-worthy performance for someone so young.

And Julian bought it instantly. Or perhaps he just instinctively chose to assume the absolute worst of Willow.

"Apologize to him," Julian ordered.

Willow let out a breath of pure disbelief. Without asking a single question or caring about the facts, he had instantly taken the boy's side. His bias was blinding.

She gave Julian one final, contemptuous look. Refusing to utter a single word of apology, she held Cooper tight and walked straight past him.

Toby's fake wails and Vivienne's exaggerated comforting echoed down the hall, sounding utterly pathetic to Willow's ears.

During the cab ride to the clinic, Cooper violently trembled in her arms, completely unresponsive to her soothing whispers.

At the veterinary hospital, the vet took one look and shook his head. In all his years of practice, he had rarely seen an animal so brutally traumatized. The severe bruising and fractured ribs were bad enough, but the psychological damage was catastrophic. After stabilizing the dog, the vet gently told Willow to prepare for the worst.

Seeing her once-vibrant puppy reduced to a broken shell fueled a roaring fire of hatred inside her. But guilt chewed at her conscience too. If only she had fought harder to take him to Seattle, none of this would have happened.

There was no undoing the past. All she could do now was give him the safest, most loving home possible for whatever time he had left.

After getting Cooper settled at her temporary apartment, Willow headed to the Sinclair Group headquarters. Even though she had formally resigned, her unapproved flight to New York meant she still had an attendance violation to clear up.

She hadn't set foot in this towering skyscraper in three years. Standing before the sleek glass facade felt like a lifetime ago.

Before her banishment, she had been a highly visible rising star here, known for her stunning beauty. As soon as she crossed the lobby, heads turned, and the malicious whispers started buzzing around her like flies.

"Is that Willow Horgan? What happened to her? She used to be gorgeous. How did she let herself go like that?"

"I know, right? Absolutely zero self-control. Who would ever look twice at her now?"

"She probably just gorged herself on the corporate expense account in Seattle. I heard the West Coast office brought in millions in profit under Ms. Sinclair's overall direction. I bet Willow skimmed plenty off the top."

The relentless murmurs buzzed around her as she walked.

They thought they were being discreet, but in the cavernous lobby, the cruel gossip carried straight to her ears.

But Willow couldn't care less.

Her years in the corporate trenches had forged her into steel. When she was grinding for funding and lab approvals, men in boardrooms had called her far worse things to her face. Besides, office gossip never lasted long.

Right on cue, a sudden commotion rippled through the entrance, shifting the spotlight to someone else entirely.

"Ms. Sinclair is just flawless. She looks like a supermodel!"

"Better than a model. She has this elegant, untouchable vibe. It's like pure, old-money class."

"And she's a genius on top of it. I heard she has a Ph.D. in bioengineering from a top-tier Ivy, and she developed multiple patents and won global awards before she even graduated."

More fawning murmurs rippled through the crowd.

Following their fawning gazes, Willow watched a slender, striking woman glide through the revolving doors. Decked out in runway haute couture and carrying an exclusive crocodile-leather bag, it was none other than Vivienne Sinclair.

Vivienne flashed a picture-perfect, benevolent smile at the admiring staff. But the moment her eyes locked onto Willow, that smile instantly froze into a glacial sneer.

Unfazed, Willow simply broke eye contact, stepped onto an empty elevator, and hit the button for the People & Culture Department.

She had scheduled a meeting in advance, so the HR rep was already expecting her.

Unaware that Willow had already submitted her resignation, the rep coldly outlined her punishment for abandoning her post. According to company policy, they were docking an entire month's pay and revoking her annual bonus completely.

Willow frowned. She had expected a slap on the wrist, but this was corporate theft. Furthermore, she knew the employee handbook back to front—no such draconian penalty existed.