

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

Chapter 61

Vivienne was accustomed to being the center of attention. She thrived on being adored and couldn't stomach the thought of being ignored.

During a break, she had slipped away, intending to surprise Hugo. Instead, she stumbled upon this infuriating scene.

The usually aloof Hugo Harrington was patiently teaching Willow how to ski on the bunny hill?

Vivienne sneered at Willow's clumsy, timid movements. Her legs were wobbling, she couldn't ski in a straight line, and she looked absolutely pathetic.

Vivienne couldn't fathom it. She was a champion skier, a thousand times better than Willow. Yet Hugo had sneaked off to babysit a bumbling idiot.

Gripping the coffee she had bought for him, Vivienne slammed the cup into the snow and stormed off without looking back.

Back in the lodge, Seth was the first to notice Vivienne's foul mood. Ignoring his injured leg, he limped over, eager to please. "Vivienne, what's wrong? Who upset you?"

Vivienne had always viewed him as a pathetic lapdog. In her current mood, she couldn't be bothered to entertain him. "I'm fine," she snapped.

Her coldness only made Seth more anxious. Unable to read her mind, he started rambling. "Was it that psycho Willow? Did she piss you off? Don't worry, I already taught her a lesson today. If she dares to mess with you again, I'll destroy her. I know how much you hate her—"

"Seth!" Vivienne cut him off sharply. "When did I ever say I hated her? You're the one who hates her. Don't project your own garbage onto me."

Seth froze, looking like a kicked puppy. "Did I say something wrong?"

Vivienne glared at him. She despised this dim-witted man, but he was her most loyal pawn, always ready to take the fall.

She softened her tone, adopting a fragile demeanor. "Seth, please just drop it. It has nothing to do with you. I'm just exhausted and need to rest."

"Right, right. Get some rest. I won't bother you," Seth stammered.

But his mind was already racing. To him, Vivienne was the kindest, purest girl in the world. She never had a problem with anyone—except Willow. Since that woman was at the resort, she had to be the reason Vivienne was upset.

Seth silently cursed Willow. She should have stayed in Seattle. Coming back to New York just to steal Vivienne's spotlight? He wouldn't stand for it.

He had been in love with Vivienne since they were kids. It didn't matter that she was with Julian now. As long as she was happy, he was content to watch from the sidelines. But he would obliterate anyone who threatened her happiness.

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A little while later, Hugo returned to the room.

The guys asked where he had been. "Taking care of something," he replied dismissively.

Julian was busy feeding Toby, while Lucas and Seth were scrolling through their phones. Given Hugo's quiet nature, no one pressed for details. Only Vivienne sat in the corner, her expression sour, glaring daggers at him since he walked in.

Fearful that the others would notice her jealousy, she waited until Hugo walked past her to speak up. "Hugo, did you watch my competition today?"

"I did," Hugo said, adjusting his jacket without looking at her.

"Do you think I did well?"

"You won the championship, didn't you?" he countered.

Vivienne choked on her words, her face tightening. He had answered her, but his tone was completely devoid of emotion—a mere formality. He had treated her this coldly since they were children. Remembering the endless patience he had just shown Willow, Vivienne's blood boiled.

"Are you happy I won?" she pressed.

"My happiness doesn't matter. As long as you're happy."

With that blunt dismissal, Hugo walked away, leaving Vivienne fuming in silence. She wanted to chase after him, but Toby suddenly started throwing a tantrum, forcing her to play the doting aunt and soothe the brat.

The group lingered in the lodge until sunset. As they packed up, Seth abruptly announced he had some business to take care of and told them to go on without him.

The guys shrugged it off. They were a tight-knit circle, but they all had their own lives. Only Vivienne noticed the sudden shift in Seth's demeanor. She caught his eye, and he immediately looked away, guilty and evasive. Vivienne understood exactly what he was up to, but she simply looked away, pretending she saw nothing.

Meanwhile, Willow was determined to get her money's worth. After Hugo left, she continued practicing on her own. She was the type of person who poured one hundred percent of her focus into a task, easily tuning out the rest of the world.

By the time she decided to call it a day, the sky had grown dark, and the slopes were completely deserted.

She checked her phone. It was five-thirty. The resort closed at six, so she still had time.

She trudged to the rental area to return her gear, only to find the doors locked tight and the lights off.

Finding a contact number plastered on the wall, she dialed it. It rang out twice. On the third try, a staff member picked up. The guy sounded apologetic, claiming he had an urgent errand and asking her to wait ten minutes.

Willow understood emergencies and waited patiently in the freezing air. When ten minutes passed with no sign of him, she called again. This time, he said he needed another twenty minutes. She confirmed he was actually coming, and he promised he would.

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Twenty minutes dragged by. It was past closing time, and the employee was still a no-show. Shivering, Willow dialed the number again. This time, it went straight to voicemail. No matter how many times she called, no one answered.

A knot of dread tightened in her stomach. Night had fully fallen, the temperature was plummeting, and a heavy snowstorm had begun. Her legs were shaking uncontrollably.

Relying on the dim glow of the streetlamps, she made her way to the resort's main gate. It was chained shut, secured with a heavy-duty padlock.

She rattled the freezing metal bars, pushing with all her might. Nothing. Dropping her gear, she screamed into the night, "Is anyone there? Hello!"

She yelled until her throat felt raw, but the only response was the howling wind.

The snow fell harder, a biting blizzard tearing through the valley.

Willow huddled against a wall to block the wind. It finally dawned on her—this wasn't an accident. Someone had planned this.

But there was no time to play detective. She had to figure out how to survive. If she spent the night out here in the storm, she would freeze to death.

Her phone was glitching from the extreme cold. It took several tries to turn the screen on, and when it did, she saw the battery was at five percent. She had one call left.

Her mind raced. She couldn't call Martha, and Jade was out of town. She needed someone who knew the resort's location and had the power to get her out immediately.

Only one name came to mind. She despised the idea, but survival left her no choice. She dialed Julian.

Julian was behind the wheel when her name flashed on the dashboard. Annoyed, he hit decline. The phone immediately rang again. Scowling, he answered.

"What?" his voice was like ice.

"Julian, I'm locked inside the ski resort. My phone is about to die. I need you to send someone to get me out," Willow rushed out, trying to convey the emergency before the battery gave out.

The screen went black. The phone was dead.

In the distance, an unsettling howl echoed through the dark woods. Willow stared at the falling snow, wondering if Julian would actually come. If he didn't, what would she do?

Back in the warm SUV, Julian scoffed and tossed his phone into the cup holder. "She's really pulling out all the stops to get my attention. Trapped at a ski resort? What a joke."

Vivienne glanced at Seth in the rearview mirror, noting his panicked evasion, before softly saying, "Don't be mad, Julian. Maybe she really is still there. But it's fine, the resort hasn't officially closed yet. The staff will help her out."

"With her track record?" Julian sneered. "She's lying."

The car fell into a heavy silence. They kept driving until they stopped for gas. Before getting back in, Hugo suddenly announced he had some business to handle and split from the group.

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Hugo stepped out into the freezing night and hailed a passing cab.

The roads were slick with ice, and the driver took one look at the blizzard and refused to drive up the mountain.

Hugo didn't waste a breath. He pulled out his phone, scanned the driver's payment QR code, and transferred a thousand dollars on the spot. The driver's hesitation vanished, and he hit the gas.

The storm made the roads treacherous, and it took an agonizing hour to reach the resort.

Willow hadn't spent that hour waiting to die. She figured Julian would leave her to freeze, so she had started building a makeshift shelter. She dragged whatever usable materials she could find into a corner, her face red from the biting cold, her body trembling violently.

"Willow," a deep voice cut through the howling wind.

She dropped the tarp in her hands, a wave of relief washing over her. She thought it was the staff, but when the headlights illuminated Hugo's tall frame, shock rooted her to the spot.

Hugo assumed her silence meant she was heartbroken that Julian hadn't shown up. He had seen how deeply she loved Julian over the years. Wanting to spare her feelings, he lied, "Julian asked me to come. He had something to handle."

Willow shook her head. She knew Julian better than anyone. He would never come for her. In fact, she had regretted calling him the second she hung up. It had been a desperate instinct. Erasing years of emotional attachment was a grueling process.

"You don't have to lie. I know he wouldn't come," Willow said, her voice shaking from the cold. She assumed Hugo only came to protect Julian's reputation, ensuring she didn't freeze to death and become a PR nightmare for the Sinclair Group.

Regardless of his motives, he had saved her life. She didn't have to spend the night fighting off frostbite.

"Thank you," she managed to say.

Hugo studied her, bewildered. He had expected tears, hysteria, or at least crushing disappointment. Instead, she was terrifyingly calm.

"Let's get you out of here," he said.

He helped her navigate the chained gates and guided her to the waiting cab. Even safely inside the heated car, the chill had seeped into her bones, and she couldn't stop shivering.

Without a word, Hugo took off his heavy winter coat and offered it to her. "Do you mind?"

In her current state, pride was a luxury she couldn't afford. She thanked him and wrapped herself in the warmth of his coat.

The ride back to the city was suffocatingly silent. Willow felt guilty for dragging him out in a blizzard and wanted to minimize her presence. Hugo, on the other hand, was grappling with the realization that the Willow sitting beside him was entirely different from the desperate, clinging woman Julian and Vivienne constantly mocked. He didn't know what to say to her.

The heavy silence held until they dropped Willow off at her apartment.

As Hugo settled back into the cab, the driver let out a breath. "Hey, man. What's the deal with you and the lady?"

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Hugo shot him a questioning look.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm not prying," the driver quickly clarified. "It's just... the way you threw down that cash, I figured she was the love of your life. But sitting in the back, you two acted like strangers."

Hugo pulled on the coat Willow had left on the seat, adjusting the collar. "What do you think our relationship is?"

The driver pondered. "Friends, maybe? Just not very close ones."

"We aren't close," Hugo said, looking out the window as Willow's silhouette disappeared into the building. "She's my friend's wife."

The driver choked on his own spit and didn't utter another word for the rest of the ride.

Once inside, Willow popped some cold medicine, forced down a bowl of hot soup, and crawled into bed. She had been exposed to the freezing temperatures for too long and feared the physical toll it would take.

Despite her precautions, she woke up the next morning feeling like she had been hit by a truck. Her head was pounding, and her throat felt like she was swallowing glass.

As she reached for a glass of water, her phone buzzed with a text from Julian.

[Come to the office. Overtime.]

In the past, he would send these cold, demanding texts on her days off, barking orders for her to handle his menial tasks. And she had eagerly complied, desperate for any scrap of his attention.

The thought made her nauseous. She swiped the notification away, ignoring it.

Moments later, her phone started ringing. It was Julian.

She wanted to decline it, but knowing his relentless ego, she decided to make things crystal clear. She answered the call.

"Why didn't you reply to my message?" Julian demanded.

Willow ignored his tone. "Stop contacting me. I'm not going in."

Her throat was agonizingly sore, and her voice came out as a harsh, gravelly rasp, punctuated by a painful cough. Anyone with half a brain could hear she was severely ill.

But Julian just scoffed, his voice dripping with disgust. "Wow, Willow. Faking an illness just to get out of work?"

"Are you out of your mind?" Willow rasped. "I practically lived at the office for years. I'm not faking anything. I just don't want to go."

She had already handed in her resignation. In two weeks, she would be completely free of the Sinclair Group. Why should she drag herself in on a weekend?

"You don't want to? Who gave you the right to say no?"

"I'm not in the mood, I don't want to, and I won't," she retorted, deliberately pushing his buttons.

"Willow!" Julian barked, then let out a cruel laugh. "Is this a tantrum because I didn't pick you up yesterday? What a pathetic excuse. I didn't realize you were such a dedicated actress."

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A bitter smile touched Willow's lips.

When someone didn't give a damn about you, your near-death experiences were just cheap theatrics in their eyes.

"I've said what I needed to say. I'm not going in. Don't call me again."

"You're making a mistake, Willow. Don't regret this," Julian threatened.

She didn't waste another second listening to his garbage. She hung up.

After tossing her phone aside, she messaged Martha's attending physician at Harbor Mercy Hospital. Even though she couldn't visit, she checked in daily.

The doctor assured her that Martha was responding beautifully to the chemotherapy. Once she reached full remission, they could proceed with the transplant for the best possible outcome.

Relieved, Willow exchanged a few lighthearted texts with her mother, took another dose of medicine, and went back to sleep. Rest was her only priority.

By Monday morning, she felt significantly better, though her voice remained slightly husky.

She arrived at the Sinclair Group office and took her spot at a hot desk. When she tried to log into the network to check on her Seattle projects, the system flashed an error.

Assuming a typo, she tried a few more times, then attempted a password reset. Nothing worked.

It hit her—someone had locked her out. And it wasn't hard to guess who.

As she stared at the screen, the whispers of the surrounding staff grew louder. For weeks, she had endured their toxic gossip, occasionally tuning in just to see what new lies were circulating. This time, they were buzzing about a company-wide email.

She opened her personal inbox and found the HR memo. Julian had officially stripped her of her Project Manager title and transferred all her Seattle accounts to Vivienne.

Noticing she was reading the email, the gossips raised their voices.

"Mr. Sinclair is a genius. Ms. Sinclair did all the hard work in Seattle. Those patents and technologies were her creations, but someone else tried to steal the credit. Finally, justice is served. Let's see how the fraud survives here now."

"Right? Riding on someone else's coattails, acting all high and mighty. Now she's stripped naked for everyone to see. If I were her, I'd die of shame."

"We have dignity, but some people have skin as thick as a brick wall. She'll probably shamelessly linger here until she retires."

Willow tuned out the venom. So this was what Julian meant by making her regret it. He had gutted her life's work.

He really did know how to hurt her. Those projects were her babies. She had bled for them, built them from the ground up. The old Willow would have crawled on her knees and begged him to give them back.

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But things were different now. She was leaving in two weeks, and the handover was inevitable. Doing it now just meant she could clock out early.

It stung, but it was a necessary severing of ties. She forced herself to accept it.

Upstairs in the CEO's office, Vivienne was perched on Julian's lap, tracing his lapel. "Do you really think this will scare her?"

"Absolutely," Julian said with supreme arrogance. "Those projects are her lifeblood. She poured everything into them. She won't let them go. Just watch—she'll come crawling to my office, begging for them back. When she does, you can make your demands and put her in her place."

"And if she doesn't come?"

"Even better. We bleed her dry. Her job isn't that complex, and she's a mediocre employee anyway. You can easily take over. Once she's completely isolated and jobless, she'll have nowhere to run. She'll still have to come begging." Julian smirked. "Bottom line? Outside of the Sinclair Group, she's a nobody. She won't survive."

"You're brilliant," Vivienne purred, burying her face in his neck. "Let's do it your way."

While Julian and Vivienne gloated, the email had also reached the Seattle office.

Willow was about to call Leo Yardley to explain, but his name flashed on her screen first.

"Chief, this is absolute bullshit!" Leo roared, vibrating with rage. "You built the Seattle division from nothing! We saw the blood, sweat, and tears you put into those projects. And they just snatch them away with a single email? Hell no. We won't stand for this!"

"Leo, take a breath," Willow said gently. She had planned to keep her resignation quiet to prevent a panic, but the cat was out of the bag. "I'm leaving the company in two weeks."

The line went dead quiet for a second. "Did those bastards force you out?"

Instead of worrying about his job or the projects, his immediate concern was for her. Willow felt a lump form in her throat.

But there was no point in dragging them into her mess. "No, it's a personal decision."

"Where are you going? The whole team is coming with you."

"That's not happening," Willow said firmly. When she first agreed to work with Arthur, she had fantasized about poaching her team. But her own future was uncertain. If she failed, she would drag them down with her. She couldn't gamble with their lives. "You all have families. Sinclair Group pays you well and gives you stability. Staying is the smartest move."

"But we can't just swallow this! It's completely unfair!"

"Remember what I taught you?" Willow's tone shifted into her managerial cadence. "Never let emotions dictate business. Bide your time, keep your heads down, and play the long game."

Leo sighed, his anger deflating. "Alright, Chief. We'll follow your lead."

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After talking Leo off the ledge, Willow dialed Arthur Vance. She didn't want him finding out about the project transfer through the corporate grapevine.

Upon hearing the news, Arthur said smoothly, "If this displeases you, Ms. Horgan, we can immediately sever all ties with the Sinclair Group."

Willow was touched, but quickly declined. While she led the projects, hundreds of employees relied on that contract for their paychecks. She wouldn't destroy their livelihoods over a personal vendetta.

"As you wish, Ms. Horgan," Arthur replied, thoroughly respectful.

After hanging up, Arthur glanced at Silas Thorne, utterly bewildered. The billionaire's face was dark as a thundercloud. Arthur had followed his exact instructions, giving Willow full autonomy and respecting her choices without pressure.

Sweating slightly, Arthur braced himself. "Mr. Thorne, did I say something wrong?"

Silas ignored him, his jaw clenched tight. Just as Arthur was mentally drafting his resignation letter, Silas abruptly spoke. "What's the best cough and cold medicine available in Seattle?"

Arthur blinked, instantly shifting into crisis mode. "Are you feeling ill, Sir? Should I call the private physician?"

"Not for me," Silas snapped, irritated by Arthur's denseness. "Get it done. Buy every premium cold remedy in the city."

Not for him?

Arthur's brain stalled, then rebooted. If Silas was this anxious, it could only be for one person: Willow Horgan.

Arthur replayed the phone call in his head. Now that he thought about it, Willow's voice had sounded raspy, and she had muffled a few coughs. He had completely missed it, but Silas hadn't missed a single breath.

"Right away, Sir," Arthur said, breaking into a sweat.

"Wait," Silas commanded, his predatory gaze fixed on the city skyline. "Don't just get medicine. Buy every premium daily necessity she might need. Everything."

"Understood."

Arthur was ruthlessly efficient. Within an hour, he had secured a mountain of high-end supplies. Knowing better than to bother Willow for an address, he shipped the boxes directly to Harbor Mercy Hospital, using Martha's admission files.

Willow was sitting by Martha's hospital bed when the delivery notification popped up. She hadn't ordered anything, and the text mentioned a massive shipment from Seattle.

"Are you sure you have the right person?" she asked the courier over the phone.

The courier verified her name and number flawlessly. "The sender is listed as a Mr. Vance from Seattle."

Recognition dawned on Willow. During her time on the West Coast, Arthur occasionally sent over urgent contracts or project files. Assuming this was just more paperwork to tie up loose ends, she signed for it digitally, planning to check the boxes when she got home.

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After ensuring Martha had eaten dinner, the two women settled in for a chat. The conversation inevitably circled back to Willow. Worried about her daughter's career, Martha asked when she was flying back to Seattle.

Not wanting to drop the bombs of her divorce and resignation just yet, Willow deflected. "Let's hold off on that until you're discharged."

"That could be months from now," Martha said, waving a hand. "The doctors said we have to wait for the chemo results before the transplant. But I'm feeling great, so don't you worry about me. You can go back to work. The nurses here are angels, I can manage on my own."

"What, you sick of me already?" Willow teased, trying to lighten the mood.

"You know that's not it," Martha sighed, a rare shadow of melancholy crossing her face. "I'm just worried Julian will be upset if you abandon him for too long."

Martha didn't know the dark reality of their marriage, but she wasn't entirely blind. Willow actively avoided talking about Julian, and her son-in-law hadn't shown his face once since she was diagnosed with a deadly illness.

Willow felt a suffocating weight in her chest but forced a smile. "Don't overthink it, Mom. Your only job is to recover. Stress is terrible for your immune system."

This time, Martha didn't back down. She fixed Willow with a sharp, maternal stare. "Look me in the eye and tell me the truth. Are you and Julian having problems?"

"No," Willow lied smoothly. "We're doing great. Drop it."

"If you're doing so great, why hasn't he visited me once?"

"He's swamped with work."

"He's the CEO. He can't spare thirty minutes for his dying mother-in-law?" Martha's voice rose with indignation. She didn't care about the disrespect to herself, but she fiercely protected her daughter. If Julian treated her like this during a family crisis, how was he treating Willow behind closed doors?

Martha had always believed Willow was living a fairy tale, that securing Julian was her ultimate victory. But if that was a lie, Martha would burn it all down to protect her.

"Mom, calm down," Willow pleaded. "The doctor said you need to stay relaxed. Getting worked up will ruin your progress."

Martha held her ground. "Are you two fighting?"

Willow met her gaze without flinching. "I promise, we're fine."

"Alright," Martha said, a stubborn glint in her eye. "Then tell him to come see me. Just once."

"I told you, he's busy. He probably can't make it anytime soon."

"That's fine. I have nothing but time," Martha declared. "I'll wait until he clears his schedule."

Cornered, Willow had no choice but to surrender. "Fine. I'll ask him when he's free."

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Though Willow Horgan said she would, she had absolutely no intention of contacting Julian Sinclair. She wanted nothing to do with him anymore; her only goal was to finalize the divorce, resign from her job, and cut ties with him completely.

Upon arriving home, Willow immediately noticed a package that had arrived from Seattle. It was wrapped meticulously in a sturdy shipping box, but judging by its bulk, it didn't look like the usual contracts she received.

She didn't think much of it, assuming there was simply a larger batch of paperwork this time, and casually sliced it open. To her surprise, it wasn't a stack of contracts inside, but a wide assortment of medicine boxes. She stared at it for a moment, momentarily stunned.

After examining the contents carefully, Willow realized it was a comprehensive collection of over-the-counter and prescription medications. Every single one was a highly sought-after, top-tier brand in Seattle. Some were so popular that back when she lived there, she hadn't been able to get her hands on them even after waiting in line all day.

Why would Arthur Vance suddenly send her so much medicine? Willow was thoroughly confused. The shipping label included the sender's information, and the phone number looked familiar—likely Arthur's. Without overthinking it, she dialed the number on the slip.

The call connected quickly. "Mr. Vance," Willow started, "I received the package you sent. It's filled with medicine. Did you send this to the wrong person by mistake?"

There was no response from the other end. Assuming it was a bad connection, Willow repeated herself, "Mr. Vance, did this get sent to the wrong person? If so, just give me the correct address and I can forward it for you."

Still met with silence, Willow grew even more puzzled. "Mr. Vance, can you hear me? Hello? Are you there?"

As she spoke, she checked her phone screen to make sure the call hadn't dropped. The signal was fine, deepening her confusion.

Just as she was at a loss and about to hang up, a voice finally came through the speaker. "I'm not Mr. Vance."

It was a deep, magnetic voice with a slight, gravelly edge. Transmitted through the phone's speaker, the timbre washed over her like a low, resonant note played on a cello, sending a faint shiver down her spine.

Willow's heart gave an unexpected flutter.

In all her twenty-four years, she had never heard a voice quite so captivating.

She felt a rush of embarrassment, both for her presumption and for her momentary distraction. "I'm so sorry, I have the wrong number."

"It's nothing," the man replied.

He didn't hang up after that. Part of Willow actually wanted to hear him speak again, but she knew it was highly inappropriate to linger on a call with a stranger. After apologizing once more, she ended the call herself.

Once she hung up, she took a moment to calm her racing pulse before comparing the number on the package to Arthur's actual contact. Sure enough, while the digits were strikingly similar, they were not the same.

After a brief bout of frustration with herself, Willow dialed Arthur's real number. This time, his familiar voice answered the line. Everything was as it should be.

First, Willow wanted to confirm if the medications had been sent in error, offering again to forward them if needed.

But Arthur insisted there was no mistake. The medicine had been purchased specifically for her.

Willow was baffled. "But why?"

Arthur gently reminded her, "Your voice has been sounding a bit hoarse lately, and you've been coughing occasionally during our calls. If I had to guess, I'd say you're coming down with something. You'll need those."