

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

## Chapter 71

Willow never expected that to be the reason. For a moment, she was entirely at a loss for words.

She had only spoken to Arthur on the phone briefly, yet he had managed to pick up on the fact that she was unwell and had gone through all this trouble to send her a care package. It would be a lie to say she wasn't touched.

A warm rush of gratitude filled her chest. "Thank you so much. You really shouldn't have gone to all this trouble."

"It was nothing, really, don't mention it," Arthur replied, feeling completely unworthy of her thanks. After all, he hadn't been the one to notice her illness, nor had he been the one to suggest sending the medicine. Taking credit for someone else's thoughtfulness made him feel intensely guilty.

Eager to pivot, he quickly changed the subject. "These are just some basic essentials. They're good to have on hand. Let me know if you ever run out."

"I will," Willow said. As she spoke, another thought occurred to her. "By the way, did you happen to put the wrong phone number on the shipping label? I called the number listed earlier, and someone else answered."

Normally, Willow wasn't one to pry, but Arthur had been so incredibly kind to her. She only mentioned it because she was worried a similar mix-up might happen with future deliveries.

Hearing this, Arthur practically scrambled to check the tracking information for the shipment. The moment his eyes landed on the digits, he nearly had a heart attack. The number on the label wasn't his at all—it was Silas Thorne's!

His and Silas's numbers were off by only a few digits. He must have been distracted when filling out the form and inadvertently put his boss's number down.

Swallowing hard, Arthur asked cautiously, "When the call connected, did the other person say anything?"

Willow neatly omitted the part where she had been talking to a wall of silence, simply stating, "He didn't say much. Just that I had the wrong number."

Thank God, Arthur thought. Thank God Mr. Thorne hadn't lost his temper.

He let out a shaky breath, feeling like he had just dodged a bullet. Silas was notoriously private; having his personal contact information leaked was normally a surefire way to incur his wrath.

"It seems I did make a typo," Arthur instructed her, trying to keep his voice steady. "Ms. Horgan, if you ever need anything in the future, just use the number we're speaking on now."

"Got it," Willow replied, cementing the digits in her memory. She certainly didn't want to repeat that embarrassing mistake.

After hanging up, Arthur paced his office for a while before finally deciding to call Silas Thorne. Before the man could even say a word, Arthur launched into a deeply sincere apology for his blunder.

Surprisingly, Silas didn't seem angry in the slightest. He clearly already knew exactly why Arthur was calling, offering only a mild, two-word response: "It's fine."

But to Arthur's ears, those words sounded ominous.

If Silas had chewed him out, he would have felt better. The lack of reprimand, coupled with this eerie mildness, put Arthur on high alert. He immediately scrambled to reassure him. "Mr. Thorne, you have my word, I will never make a mistake like this again."

His groveling only seemed to annoy Silas. "I said it's fine."

Assuming he had somehow triggered a new level of fury, Arthur doubled down on his apologies. "I promise, going forward, I will triple-check any document involving your personal information. Even if it concerns Ms. Horgan, I guarantee this will never happen again. You just—"

This time, Silas didn't even wait for him to finish the sentence before hanging up.

Listening to the dial tone echoing in his ear, Arthur realized he was having an increasingly hard time understanding his boss.

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Even though she was no longer in charge of any specific projects, Willow still stuck to her usual schedule, arriving and leaving the office right on time. She knew exactly what kind of man Julian Sinclair was, and she refused to give him the satisfaction of using attendance as an excuse to penalize her during the resignation process.

Yet, even this perfectly normal behavior became fodder for workplace bullies. The moment Willow stepped into the department, she heard the snide whispering begin.

"After causing such a massive scene, she still has the nerve to show up on time every day. I honestly admire her thick skin."

"No kidding. Anyone else would have died of embarrassment by now, but she just waltzes right in. It just goes to show how desperately she wants to cling to this company. She's probably banking on Mr. Sinclair waking up in a good mood one day and handing all her projects back."

"Wishful thinking. Did you hear? None of the clients even batted an eye when they found out she was taken off the accounts. A few of them even said it was a positive change and that they were looking forward to working with Vivienne Sinclair. Guess a certain someone wasn't so indispensable after all."

"And here we thought she was some kind of prodigy. Turns out all her time in Seattle was just smoke and mirrors. One little tap and the whole facade shatters."

A chorus of muffled giggles followed. They cast sidelong glances in Willow's direction, clearly raising their voices just enough to ensure she heard every word.

Normally, Willow couldn't care less about this kind of petty gossip and wouldn't have bothered to engage. But today, feeling a sudden spark of defiance—and with absolutely nothing else to do—she decided to play along.

She stood up from her desk, crossing her arms as she leveled a cool gaze at the group. The women instantly tensed up. "What?" one of them challenged. "We're just stating facts. Is it a crime to speak now?"

Willow surveyed them with an icy stare. "You sit there dropping Mr. Sinclair and Ms. Sinclair's titles left and right, but do they even know you exist? And let's say they do. Imagine what they'd think if they found out you spend company time slacking off and gossiping behind people's backs."

"You... you..."

Stunned by Willow's sudden counterattack, the women stammered. In the past, whenever they had made snide remarks, Willow had simply kept her head down and taken it in silence. Where had this sudden burst of courage come from?

"Me what?" Willow cut them off, adopting their exact brand of biting sarcasm. "Even if I'm no longer managing the projects, my title is still Manager. My rank in this company is higher than yours. If you keep running your mouths, what's stopping me from reporting you straight to Human Resources and Julian Sinclair himself?"

Willow obviously had no intention of doing any such thing. Even if she did, Julian would never take her side. But it was highly satisfying to watch them squirm.

"Who do you think you're scaring?" one of the women scoffed, though her voice wavered slightly. "The whole company knows Mr. Sinclair can't stand you. You think he'd actually listen to your complaints?"

"You're right, Julian definitely can't stand me," Willow said with a cold laugh. "But have you ever stopped to wonder why, despite that, I'm still sitting here at Sinclair Group?"

The group fell dead silent.

Sensing their hesitation, Willow pressed her advantage. "Besides, considering the situation I'm in right now—with zero responsibilities holding me back—I really have nothing left to lose. So you'd better watch your backs. It'd be a real shame if you pushed me too far and ended up collateral damage."

Seeing the deadly seriousness in Willow's eyes, the women realized she wasn't bluffing. Fear of getting caught in the crossfire finally won out. With a few fierce glares, they scattered back to their desks.

Of course, they couldn't resist one last parting shot. "Let's see how long you can keep this attitude up."

Once they were gone, a peaceful silence settled over Willow's workspace. Dealing with people like that required a firm hand; playing nice simply didn't compute with them.

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Meanwhile, Julian Sinclair—the very man Willow had just referenced—was in his office, discussing that exact topic with Vivienne Sinclair.

Vivienne set a freshly brewed espresso on his desk, testing the waters. "It's been a few days since we announced the change in project management, and it seems the clients haven't reacted much at all."

Julian took a sip, his expression indifferent. "Willow almost had me fooled into thinking she was actually important to them. Now that she's off the accounts, the clients haven't said a word. In fact, things are running smoother than ever. Whether she's here or not makes absolutely no difference."

Truthfully, Julian had been somewhat anxious when he first removed Willow from her position. He had worried about pushback, especially from Merit Biotech.

Merit was Sinclair Group's largest client on the West Coast, wielding massive influence not just nationally, but globally. Their CEO, in particular, was rumored to be a titan in Seattle, a man with the power to move mountains. Julian hadn't wanted to risk souring that relationship.

Looking back, he realized he had been overthinking it. A titan like that would never cross paths with someone like Willow Horgan, much less care about who managed a mid-level project. Removing her had caused exactly zero fallout. Ultimately, it was the Sinclair Group name that brought in the business, not her.

Vivienne eagerly nodded in agreement. "Exactly. It's obvious the clients value Sinclair Group above all else. Willow just coasted on the firm's reputation."

"Right," Julian said, dismissing the subject. "I reviewed her portfolio. The technical requirements are elementary. I have no doubt you'll pick it up easily and far exceed her performance."

"Don't worry, Julian," Vivienne replied with a confident smile. "I know I can handle it. It won't be an issue at all."

In reality, Vivienne hadn't even bothered to look at the project files yet. She simply didn't see the point.

If a lowly undergrad like Willow could manage it, how hard could it possibly be? Vivienne, after all, held a doctorate in biology from an elite university abroad and had trained under the internationally renowned geneticist, Mr. Smith. Her credentials dwarfed Willow's. There was no way she wouldn't outperform her.

"So, what's your plan for her now?" Vivienne asked, feigning casual curiosity. "I've heard she's still clocking in at the office every single day."

"Ignore her," Julian said coldly. "Where else is she going to go? Even if she wanted to jump ship, she'd actually need someone willing to hire her first."

He leaned back against the plush leather sofa, radiating arrogant certainty. "She hasn't said it out loud, but it's obvious. She's only coming in because she can't let go of the firm or her projects. It's a pathetic cry for attention. Let her throw her little tantrums. The day will come when she'll be begging me for a second chance."

Vivienne nodded, feigning sympathy. "It's just that I hear she's becoming a real nightmare to work with. Just this morning, she threw her weight around the bullpen. Some colleagues were trying to make conversation, and she snapped at them for no reason, using her Manager title to intimidate them."

"Manager? Her?" Julian scoffed contemptuously. "She only got that title because she was running those projects. Now that she's off the accounts and refusing to return to the West Coast office, it seems that title is no longer necessary."

"You're right. You're just looking out for the firm, Julian. It would set a bad precedent otherwise. I'll go speak with Human Resources right now."

As Vivienne stepped out of Julian's office, a deeply satisfied smirk spread across her face.

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Vivienne felt utterly triumphant. This time, she was absolutely certain she could force Willow Horgan right back to Seattle.

She had given her so many chances to bow out gracefully, yet Willow had stubbornly chosen this humiliating, public battle. If she insisted on being dragged out kicking and screaming, Vivienne was more than happy to oblige.

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After waiting for days without hearing any news of Willow contacting Julian Sinclair, Martha Mercer finally decided to take matters into her own hands.

She had a lingering suspicion that something was seriously wrong between Willow and Julian, though she couldn't pinpoint exactly what. Her daughter had always been fiercely independent; if Willow didn't want to talk about something, nobody could force it out of her.

But Martha didn't have Julian's contact info. In all these years, she had never called him once—and naturally, Julian had never bothered to reach out to her. So, she covertly got his number from Willow's phone. Not wanting to interrupt his busy workday, she purposely waited until late evening to make the call.

To Martha's utter shock, the moment the call connected, she froze. It wasn't Julian who answered, but a woman.

"Hello? Who is this?"

The woman's tone was breezy and intimate, projecting a natural confidence that strongly suggested this was not the first time she had answered Julian's personal cell phone.

Caught completely off guard, Martha felt a sudden wave of confusion. Assuming she had misdialed, she prepared to hang up. "I'm so sorry, I have the wrong number."

"No, you don't," the woman replied cheerfully. "You're looking for Julian, right? He's a bit tied up at the moment. You can just tell me whatever it is. It's the same thing."

Martha's expression instantly darkened. It was late at night, she was calling Julian, and a strange woman was answering his phone. Worse, the woman was claiming that speaking to her was as good as speaking to him. It was impossible not to jump to conclusions.

Her voice dropped a register. "Who is this?"

The woman on the other end must have sensed the shift in tone. She paused, then shot back, "And who are you?"

The breezy warmth was gone, replaced by a defensive, provocative edge.

Martha furrowed her brow, deciding to lay her cards on the table. "I am Willow's mother. Now put Julian on the line."

Vivienne Sinclair glanced across the room at Julian, who was currently playing chess with Toby. She let out a soft scoff. "Julian is in the shower. He can't come to the phone. Like I said, if you have something to say, you can say it to me."

Martha's temper flared. "I don't even know who you are. I have nothing to say to you."

Vivienne's voice turned icy. "I'm his sister."

"Sister?" Martha repeated, genuinely baffled. She vaguely remembered Willow mentioning the Sinclair ward years ago, but she had assumed the girl was studying abroad. Willow hadn't brought her up in years.

Undeterred, Martha held her ground. "I don't know you. Hand the phone to Julian. I need to speak with him."

"Sorry, can't do that," Vivienne dismissed her smoothly. "If you want to talk to me, go ahead. If not, there's nothing I can do. Oh, and as for who I am? Why don't you ask your daughter, Willow?"

With that, Vivienne ended the call.

Listening to the dial tone, Martha felt a sharp, suffocating ache in her chest. The way that woman spoke—she didn't sound like a sister at all. She sounded exactly like a wife asserting her territory.

Her immediate instinct was to call Willow and demand to know what on earth was going on. But as her finger hovered over her daughter's contact, she hesitated.

If she had stumbled upon this after just one random phone call, what must Willow be dealing with? Willow had to interact with them constantly; there was no way she didn't know about this woman. Calling her now wouldn't solve anything; it would only add to her daughter's heavy burden.

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It finally clicked for Martha. That was why Julian hadn't visited her once since she fell ill. That was why, every time she asked Willow about him, she never got a straight answer.

It wasn't that Willow was intentionally keeping her in the dark or refusing to confide in her; it was simply because there was nothing good left to say.

Martha couldn't begin to imagine how much pain Willow had been carrying on her own.

Her daughter had always been this way—silently shouldering her burdens, terrified of inconveniencing anyone. Martha had seen hints of it even when she first brought Willow home as an infant.

When Willow was hungry, she wouldn't cry; she would just stare with those big, soulful eyes. She never fussed through the night, allowing Martha to get a full sleep. Even when she woke up at the crack of dawn, she would just play quietly by herself so as not to wake the adults.

As she grew older and started school, she was incredibly well-behaved. Martha never had to worry about her academics, and she handled every problem independently. Unless it was an absolute emergency, she would never ask for help.

And now, this sensible, sweet girl was being subjected to such cruelty. Tears spilled over Martha's cheeks.

She picked up her phone, forcing herself to act as if nothing had happened. Sticking to their usual routine, she sent Willow a text: [Did you have dinner yet?]

Almost immediately, Willow replied with a photo of her meal, followed by questions asking what Martha had eaten and how she was feeling today.

Martha answered every question. Finally, she brought up the idea of Willow taking her out for a walk when she had the time. It had been so long since they'd gone anywhere together.

Willow didn't agree right away, insisting they needed to check Martha's physical condition and get clearance from the doctor first.

Across town, Julian finished his game and noticed the missed call log on his phone. He knew Vivienne had answered it—he had given her free rein to do so. Casually, he asked, "Who called?"

"Willow's mother," Vivienne replied, seeing no reason to lie.

"Her?" Julian couldn't care less about Willow, and he cared even less about her family. "What did she want?"

"Nothing major." Vivienne stepped behind him, gently towel-drying his hair as she tested his mood. "I'll tell you, but you have to promise not to get mad."

Julian let out a short, cynical laugh. "I wouldn't waste my anger on her. Out with it."

Seeing that she had laid the groundwork perfectly, Vivienne continued, "She said you should restore Willow's position at the firm as a favor to her, and agree to let Willow stay in New York."

"A favor to her?" Julian sneered. "Why would I do her any favors? I haven't even met the woman. I guess the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree. They're both completely delusional."

Vivienne wrapped her arms around him from behind. "You promised you wouldn't get mad."

Julian patted her hand, signaling that he was fine.

Vivienne pressed her advantage. "I mean, she is an elder, so let's just take the high road and not hold it against her. Honestly, I think the real blame lies with Willow. She makes a massive mistake, then sends her mommy to beg for mercy. It's so inappropriate."

"She's always been exactly like this," Julian said coldly. "Tell her to give it up. I am definitely handling Willow. And tell her if she wants something in the future, she needs to use her own words instead of hiding behind some random, so-called elder. It's pathetic."

"Alright, alright, let's not talk about this anymore," Vivienne cooed, burying her face into his chest, a triumphant smile playing on her lips. "Let's do something fun instead."

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Half an hour later, while Julian was in the shower, Vivienne lay in bed and unlocked his phone, opening the camera app.

She angled the lens toward the gift sitting on the nightstand, intentionally ensuring the edge of her own clothing was visible in the frame. The fabric was conspicuously rumpled, practically screaming the implications of what had just happened.

After snapping the photo, she opened Julian's social media feed, posted the picture to his timeline, and headed to the bathroom, deeply satisfied.

The post caused an immediate stir. It was rare enough for Julian to post anything personal at all, let alone something this suggestive.

Seth Sterling was the first to comment: [Look at you, Julian! But as a guy who's been around the block, let me give you some advice: pace yourself, don't overdo it.]

Lucas Lane simply left a silent "Like" on the post.

Hugo Harrington, upon scrolling past it, remained completely impassive and kept scrolling without reacting.

When Julian stepped out of the bathroom, he was momentarily taken aback by the sheer volume of notifications lighting up his screen. Tapping into the app, he discovered the photo Vivienne had posted. His brow immediately furrowed.

He was a private man. He rarely shared snippets of his personal life online, especially not something this overtly intimate. He found her actions incredibly distasteful.

As Vivienne emerged from the bathroom, she spotted Julian holding his phone, a dark look crossing his face. A spike of panic hit her.

She had posted the photo for two reasons: to test Julian's boundaries, and to provoke Willow.

Seeing his displeasure, she feared she might have overplayed her hand. She quickly rushed over, wrapping her arms tightly around his waist. "Julian, I'm so sorry. I was just so happy, and I loved the gift you gave me so much. I just wanted to capture the moment. I didn't think about how it might look. Please don't be mad at me."

Julian didn't say a word, though his expression remained hard.

Vivienne tried again. "Are you worried someone will figure it out? If that's it, you don't have to worry. My face isn't in the picture. Only our inner circle will notice. And even if anyone else does, they'll just assume it's your wife, Willow."

At the mention of Willow, Julian's icy demeanor finally cracked. "What are you talking about? Is that the kind of man you think I am?"

Vivienne didn't reply. She simply leaned against his chest, shedding silent tears. "I didn't mean anything by it. It's just because I love you. I just want to be with you."

Seeing her cry, any remaining anger evaporated. His expression softened completely. "I know this has been hard on you. But don't worry, this is all just temporary. Once everything is settled, we'll live a normal life together. You'll get everything you deserve."

"I don't want anything," she whispered. "I just want you."

Julian pressed a kiss to her forehead. "It's late. Let's go to sleep."

With the crisis averted, Vivienne settled into bed with a deeply satisfied smile. She felt completely secure, resting easy in the knowledge that someone else out there would likely be tossing and turning all night.

After taking a shower and playing with Cooper for a while, Willow climbed into bed and opened her messages. It was a nightly habit to check her phone before sleep to ensure she hadn't missed anything important. If she had the time, she'd scroll through her feed. Tonight, she happened to be turning in relatively early.

Julian's post was right at the top of her timeline. It was impossible to miss. Even without tapping on it to enlarge the image, she could clearly see the intentionally rumpled fabric in the corner of the frame.

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Judging by the angle and composition, the photo was painfully deliberate.

It seemed she didn't know Julian Sinclair at all. She used to believe that whatever his other faults, he was at least a man who valued his privacy and would never broadcast such things to his contacts. Clearly, she was wrong. When passion struck, he was apparently willing to do anything for the object of his affection.

She honestly didn't know if this post was meant for her eyes or if it was just a byproduct of his new romance. Not that it mattered. Willow swiftly tapped the "mute" button, refusing to let such trash pollute her screen.

Just as she was about to lock her phone and go to sleep, a new notification popped up. It was from Hugo Harrington. The message was incredibly brief.

[Around?]

Willow hadn't expected to hear from him at this hour. Although they had exchanged contact info, they hadn't spoken since she left Silver Run Resort. Still, he had done her a massive favor, and she needed to find a way to repay him.

She replied with equal brevity: [Yes.]

Hugo responded quickly, sending over a link. Tapping it, Willow saw it was a promotional flyer for a weekend event at the ski resort.

A follow-up message from Hugo appeared: [Interested? I happen to have extra passes.]

Truth be told, Willow was tempted. She hadn't skied much in her life, but after her last attempt, she realized she loved the exhilarating sense of freedom, the brief escape from her overwhelming problems. Plus, Hugo had proven to be an excellent instructor; going with him would not only help her improve her technique but save her a small fortune on lessons.

Unfortunately, the event was scheduled for this Saturday, and she already had plans. She was going to spend the weekend with Martha Mercer, and she needed to consult the doctor about taking her mother out for a walk.

[Sorry, the timing doesn't work out. Maybe next time.]

Hugo didn't push the issue, accepting her decline with easy grace.

However, a few minutes later, another message came through: [Mind if I ask why the timing doesn't work?]

[I'm going to the hospital to visit my mom.] Willow saw no reason to hide it. Julian knew her mother was sick, which meant the rest of his little circle definitely knew as well.

Unsurprisingly, Hugo didn't seem shocked by the news. But his next request caught her entirely off guard. [Would it be alright if I tagged along?]

[Huh?] Willow stared at the screen, unsure how to process that.

[Would it be okay if I came to visit your mother?]

Willow's immediate instinct was that it was highly inappropriate. She and Hugo barely knew each other. But then she remembered Martha expressing a desire to see Julian, and she hesitated.

She absolutely refused to reach out to Julian. Could she let Hugo go in his place, pretending to be a supportive friend of her husband, just to give her mother some peace of mind?

Still, Willow had reservations. She hated doing things under false pretenses. [I don't think we're close enough for you to be making hospital visits to my mother.]

[We were college classmates, remember? Visiting a classmate's mother is perfectly normal.]

[You can come, but my mother doesn't know about the situation between me and Julian, and I'd like to keep it that way for now.]

[Understood.]

[And if you come, I'd need you to introduce yourself as Julian's friend. Are you okay with that?]

[I am.]

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Hugo Harrington arrived on Saturday morning.

When he walked in, Willow was sitting with Martha Mercer, watching TV. Because Willow had given her a heads-up, Martha wasn't caught off guard. After that disastrous phone call, Martha had easily deduced that Willow had likely orchestrated this visit specifically to ease her mind.

As a result, Martha didn't betray a hint of suspicion. She treated him with the same warm, easygoing hospitality she showed all of Willow's friends, doing her best to put her daughter at ease.

Hugo, on the other hand, was visibly stunned the moment he laid eyes on Willow. It had barely been a week since they had gone skiing, yet she looked completely different.

She had lost weight.

Her figure was more toned, her facial features sharper and more defined. Paired with her luminous skin, she radiated a quiet, self-possessed elegance—reserved yet striking. For a fleeting second, the woman standing before him perfectly overlapped with the girl he remembered from college.

Except back then, she had possessed a youthful innocence; now, she carried an air of sophisticated maturity.

"You've lost weight," he observed.

"Yes," Willow admitted, seeing no reason to lie.

Thanks to a strict regimen of diet and exercise, she had indeed shed several pounds, though she wasn't quite back to her baseline. Clearly, the changes were noticeable, as it was the first thing Martha had mentioned when she walked in earlier that morning.

"You know, you don't have to do this for anyone else's sake," Hugo said quietly.

Knowing exactly who he meant, Willow looked him in the eye. "This has absolutely nothing to do with him."

She was doing this entirely for herself.

To change, to find her own happiness, to rebuild her life from the ground up.

She couldn't change the past, and she refused to dwell in regret. The only thing left to do was leave it all behind and move forward.

Hearing the steely resolve in her voice, Hugo didn't press the issue.

Hospital visits couldn't run too long. After half an hour, Willow walked him out. As they rode the elevator down to the parking garage, she broke the silence. "Thank you for coming today."

"It's nothing."

Stepping out of the elevator, Hugo saw his driver had already pulled up. Before getting into the car, he couldn't help but ask one final question. "What are your plans going forward?"

Willow knew exactly what he was really asking. She wasn't sure if Julian had told his friends about the divorce yet, but she didn't mind repeating it. It was already in motion anyway.

"I've already signed the—"

Before she could finish the sentence, her phone began to ring. It was her mother's doctor. Panic flared in her chest, assuming something had gone terribly wrong with Martha. She quickly excused herself, bid Hugo a hasty goodbye, and sprinted back inside.

Hugo watched her go without another word. It wasn't a conversation that could be summarized in a few sentences anyway; he could always ask her again later.

When Willow arrived breathlessly back at the ward, she realized the doctor had only called to give her an update regarding taking Martha outside. Relieved it wasn't bad news, Willow let out a long exhale.

The doctor was incredibly thorough, refusing to give a blanket answer. He carefully weighed both Martha's physical condition and her mental well-being before making his recommendation. Based on his expertise, a little light activity outside would be beneficial, provided she was properly protected from the elements and they monitored her stamina closely.

Upon hearing the news, Martha looked even more excited than Willow. She immediately asked the doctor if they could go out that very day.

With the doctor's blessing, Martha eagerly urged Willow to start packing a bag.

Willow was still a bit hesitant, but seeing the bright, hopeful look in her mother's eyes melted her resolve. She figured Martha was just suffering from a severe case of cabin fever after being cooped up in the hospital for so long.

After double-checking every precaution with the doctor and bundling Martha up in several layers of warm clothing, Willow finally guided her out the doors.

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When Willow asked where she wanted to go, Martha simply said anywhere was fine, leaving the decision to her daughter. The destination didn't matter to Martha; she just wanted to get Willow out of that hospital environment for a change of scenery.

Willow didn't have anywhere specific in mind either. Her only goal was to make her mother happy.

After mulling it over, she finally thought of the perfect place: Luxe & Co. Boutique. It wouldn't be too crowded, and more importantly, she wanted to buy her mother a new outfit.

With the holidays approaching, she wanted to do for Martha what Martha had always done for her when she was little—buy her beautiful clothes, shower her with gifts, and make her smile.

During the drive, Willow kept their destination a surprise, and Martha didn't ask. Instead, Martha kept up a steady stream of conversation. One minute she was discussing the meaning of marriage, the next she was dissecting the definition of true happiness, and eventually, she drifted onto the topic of life goals. The profound philosophical shift left Willow slightly bewildered.

Moreover, as Martha spoke, she kept closely monitoring Willow's reactions, almost as if checking to ensure she wasn't triggering any emotional distress before continuing.

Willow thought her mother's behavior was incredibly strange today, but just as she was about to ask, they arrived at their destination.

Stepping out of the car and realizing they were standing in front of a high-end designer boutique, Martha instantly tried to back out. "Willow, why did you bring me here? I've heard this brand is incredibly expensive. A single piece of clothing here costs what normal people make in a year. Let's just go somewhere else."

"It's fine, it's not like we shop here every day. Just this once," Willow insisted, catching her arm gently to keep her from retreating. "The holidays are coming up. Just consider it an early gift. Here's to wishing my mom a happy, healthy year."

A lump instantly formed in Martha's throat. Any parent would be moved to tears hearing their child say something so sweet. But then she glanced at the winter coat Willow was wearing—the exact same jacket she had bought three years ago before moving out of New York. "No, let's forget it. How about you buy something for yourself? I'm getting old, I don't need to dress up. You buy something nice. You'll need it for work."

"I'll buy something for you this time, and next time, I'll buy something for myself. Deal?"

Eventually, unable to resist her daughter's gentle coaxing, Martha agreed to at least go inside and browse.

But browsing was all she intended to do. After doing one lap around the store and catching sight of the price tags, she immediately started trying to convince Willow they should leave.

Willow refused to budge. After browsing the racks, she spotted several pieces that would suit her mother perfectly. The brand was known for its understated elegance, making it ideal for women of Martha's age.

One winter coat, in particular, caught Willow's eye. The cut was minimalist and chic, and the color would be incredibly flattering. She motioned for a sales associate to bring it over for Martha to try on.

Though she had no intention of letting Willow buy it, Martha was compliant. She always went along with whatever Willow suggested, refusing to ever embarrass her daughter in public.

As it turned out, Willow had an excellent eye. The moment Martha slipped the coat on, her entire aura shifted. The color brought a healthy flush to her cheeks, completely masking the pallor of her illness and making her look vibrant and revitalized.

Even the sales associate couldn't help but lavish praise on how perfectly the garment suited her.

"We'll take it," Willow announced. "Please wrap it up for us."

"Willow..." Martha started, trying to intervene.

"It's fine, Mom. We're taking this one."

"Right away, miss. Just give me one moment and I'll get that packaged for you," the sales associate replied warmly.

Just as the associate reached for the coat to take it to the register, a sharp, entitled female voice rang out from the entrance.

"We'll take that coat."

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

### Chapter 80

Hearing the voice, both Willow and Martha turned around. Standing at the entrance were Vivienne and Susannah Sinclair. Dressed to the nines and draped in designer labels, they pointed haughtily at the coat Willow and Martha had been admiring, demanding it for themselves.

The sales associate looked deeply uncomfortable. "I'm so sorry," she apologized gently, "but this piece has already been selected by another client. Would you like to look at something else? We have many other beautiful styles and fits you could try on."

"No, we want that one," Vivienne refused to back down. "My mother loves it, and I'm buying it for her as a gift."

"But we only carry one of each style, and this one truly has already been claimed. How about I recommend a few other options? I promise we can find something that will look absolutely stunning on your mother."

"Are you deaf?" Vivienne snapped. "I said we want that one. Everything else is your problem to solve. And just so you know, I am a VIP client at this boutique."

"Ma'am, I am truly sorry," the associate said, looking close to tears.

Vivienne scoffed. "Clearly, you don't understand English. Go get your manager."

The atmosphere instantly froze.

Martha didn't actually know the two women standing across from them. She simply assumed they were entitled, spoiled socialites throwing a tantrum over a piece of clothing. It really wasn't worth the hassle. Besides, she wasn't dead set on the coat anyway; the price tag was far too steep for their current situation.

She was about to suggest to Willow that they just leave, but when she turned, she noticed the color had drained from Willow's face. The two women were glaring at Willow with a cold, vicious intensity. It was then that Martha realized this wasn't a random dispute.

Even in her fragile state of health, Martha instinctively stepped in front of Willow, shielding her. "Willow, do you know them?"

Before Willow could answer, the older woman spoke up. This time, it was Susannah. "Your boutique really is going downhill. You just let anyone walk through the doors now. Even if you don't care, shouldn't you consider the comfort of your other clients?"

She cast a disdainful, sideways glance at Willow and Martha. "Just breathing the same air as these penniless nobodies makes me feel filthy. I'll definitely be having a word with your management later. If you keep letting people like this in, I'll be taking my business elsewhere."

With a theatrical look of disgust, she barked at the sales associate, "Hurry up and wrap the coat. Spending another second in here is pure torture."

If Martha had previously thought they were just dealing with the bad manners of the ultra-rich, she now knew for a fact that this was a targeted attack against her and Willow.

She could tolerate being pushed around herself, but she absolutely refused to let anyone bully her daughter right in front of her.

Martha planted her feet, glaring fiercely at the two women. "Who do you think you are? You think having a little money makes you royalty? Do you know anything about basic respect? Or the concept of waiting your turn?"

The entire store fell dead silent. Everyone was startled by her outburst, especially Willow. She knew Martha as the gentlest, most mild-tempered woman on earth. In all her life, Martha had never started a fight with anyone. Seeing her suddenly erupt in anger left Willow stunned.

More than anything, Willow was terrified that this sudden spike in adrenaline would trigger her mother's precarious health.

Ignoring Vivienne and Susannah entirely, Willow desperately tried to pull Martha toward the door. "Mom, forget it. Let's just go."

But Martha refused to budge. The pieces had finally clicked into place. The voice of the young woman standing across from them sounded exactly like the one she had heard on the phone that fateful day.