

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

Chapter 91

"Excuse me?" Vivienne stared in sheer disbelief.

"Someone who hasn't even grasped the fundamental concepts of gene editing technology actually wants to manage these projects?"

All the color drained from Vivienne's face. She really didn't understand a single thing about those concepts, but she had no idea how Willow could see right through it.

"Just tell me if there's a solution or not," she demanded defensively.

"There isn't. But I'd recommend reading **The Gene**. At the very least, it'll give you a basic grasp so you aren't completely clueless."

Vivienne was about to lash out, but Willow beat her to it. "I've done what I'm supposed to do, and I expect you to keep your end of the promise. A project isn't a one-person show. It affects everyone involved and the company as a whole. It's not a toy for you to play around with on a whim."

With that, she turned to leave. But just as she reached the door, it was pushed open from the outside. Julian stood in the hallway. Seeing her, he didn't show a flicker of surprise. He simply bypassed her and walked straight toward Vivienne.

A moment later, Willow heard his gentle voice behind her. "Are you alright?"

At first, Willow didn't quite catch the implication of his words. It took a few seconds for it to click—he probably assumed she had been bullying Vivienne, which was why he asked.

Moreover, his lack of surprise at seeing her by the door meant he had already known she was in there. He had likely rushed over at breakneck speed because he was worried she might do something to his precious Vivienne.

Realizing this, Willow found it utterly pathetic. She was thoroughly sick and tired of constantly being dragged into their bizarre little love triangle.

She pushed the door open to leave, but before she could take a single step, Julian called out to her. "When are you going to give me your decision regarding our previous conversation?"

"What conversation?" He always threw out statements with zero context. Willow genuinely drew a blank.

"Being fired, or moving back to New York."

Oh, that. Willow let out a cold laugh. "I choose neither. I have my own plans."

Without another word, she walked out.

Watching her retreating figure, Vivienne cautiously asked Julian, "What did she mean by that?"

Julian scoffed. "She's just putting on a brave front. Ignore her. She'll come crawling back to beg me in the end. Let's see how long she can keep up this tough act."

Vivienne had been feeling a bit uneasy because, compared to the past, Willow had changed drastically. She seemed completely apathetic toward everything now. Especially during the last few times she saw Willow and Julian together, the other woman hadn't shown a single ounce of jealousy. It was just pure indifference.

She had been worried things were slipping out of her control, but hearing Julian's confident response instantly put her at ease. After all, he knew Willow better than anyone.

"By the way, why did you suddenly call her to your office today?" Julian asked with a hint of reproach. "You know how she is. Don't do this again."

"I know, I'm sorry," Vivienne quickly apologized. "It's just that I noticed a lot of issues with the Seattle projects, and since Willow handled them before, I figured she'd know the details best. I only wanted to ask her about them."

"And what did she say?"

Vivienne intentionally hesitated, putting on an act. "She didn't really say much, but it seemed like she was trying to shirk responsibility."

"Shirk responsibility?" Julian sneered. "She used to treat those projects like her own life, and now she's backing away?"

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"Maybe it's just a tactic to get your attention," Vivienne suggested, as it was the only logical explanation she could think of.

Julian didn't say a word, but his expression clearly showed he agreed with the theory. "Just try to avoid interacting with her from now on."

"I know." Vivienne suddenly remembered something else. "Julian, I heard Merit Biotech is planning to invest in a new project here in New York, and they're currently looking for a partner."

She leaned closer to him, her voice turning sweet and persuasive. "If we secure this project, could I be the one in charge of it?"

Merit Biotech held a stellar reputation not just in Seattle, but nationwide—even globally. This wasn't solely due to their massive capital or their consistent ranking as the most profitable company in the industry. It was because they possessed top-tier resources and cutting-edge technologies.

Back when Vivienne was studying abroad, she remembered Professor Smith mentioning that Merit Biotech was the holy grail for bio-research scholars.

Furthermore, Vivienne had heard that Merit's upcoming project was specifically focused on gene-editing technology, which perfectly aligned with her former professor's research focus.

If she could secure this partnership and deliver solid results, she would be able to show off her success to her professor.

"Of course," Julian said, offering her immediate reassurance. "If Merit wants to collaborate, they will inevitably seek out Sinclair Group. And within Sinclair, you are obviously the best candidate."

"What about Willow..." Vivienne still felt a lingering sense of insecurity.

"Depends on her behavior," Julian said coldly. "If she's willing to beg, I suppose I could toss her some busywork."

Over at Merit Biotech, Arthur Vance was busy prepping the preliminary stages for the project. He had to be absolutely hyper-vigilant with this one, ensuring not a single mistake slipped through, because Silas Thorne would be personally involved every step of the way.

"Should I draft a preliminary supplier list?" he asked Silas.

"Wait until she gets here to decide."

"She," of course, meant Willow. Arthur understood immediately. Right now, they were only handling the basic, non-essential groundwork. Anything involving confidential data or critical decisions, Silas had ordered to be put on hold until Willow officially joined the company.

"What about the personnel allocation?"

"Wait."

"Understood."

The week flew by, and soon it was Saturday.

Hugo had asked Willow out to go skiing again. They hadn't been able to go last time because she had to visit Martha at the hospital. This time, Willow didn't refuse.

Hugo drove over to pick her up, and the two headed to the Silver Run Resort together.

Thanks to her previous training, Willow was now fully capable of skiing on her own. She was only slightly unsteady on the steeper descents and needed to check her speed.

But regardless of how well or poorly she skied, Hugo stayed right by her side the entire time, matching her pace perfectly.

After coming down from the slopes, Willow felt a bit fatigued. She took off her beanie and goggles, taking a seat on a nearby bench to catch her breath.

Hugo followed suit and handed her a hot coffee.

Willow took it with a murmur of thanks and naturally fell into conversation with him. "You really didn't need to shadow me the whole time. You could have hit the advanced trails. It's way more thrilling up there."

"There's nothing wrong with this," Hugo replied.

As he spoke, his tone and expression remained completely flat, making him look as if he didn't care about a single thing in the world. Sometimes, Willow couldn't help but feel curious, wondering if there was absolutely anything on this earth that could provoke an emotional reaction out of him.

"Are you always like this?" she asked casually.

"Like what?" Hugo didn't seem annoyed in the slightest.

"Like this." Willow gave him a quick once-over. "You just give off this vibe that you don't care about anything. Honestly, I really want to know—is there anything you actually care about?"

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Julian's circle of friends all had very distinct personalities.

Seth was arrogant, Julian was cold, and Lucas was fiercely protective of his own. But when it came to Hugo, Willow couldn't quite put her finger on the right adjective.

"Probably. How could anyone not care about anything?" Hugo took a sip of his coffee, smoothly deflecting the topic. "You, on the other hand, have changed a lot. Every time I see you, you give off a completely different vibe."

It had only been a week since they last met, but in those short seven days, Hugo noticed she had lost even more weight. She looked almost exactly like she did back in college.

Both her figure and her face had returned to how they were back then—the exact same way she looked in that photo he had seen on the university confession board.

Willow knew he was referring to her weight loss and replied calmly, "It's nothing crazy. I'm just going back to how I originally looked."

Since they were on the topic, Willow figured it was better to be upfront with him. She was leaving Sinclair Group in a few days anyway, and there was a good chance he had already heard the news from Julian.

"Oh, by the way, I'm officially leaving Sinclair Group. Next Wednesday is my last day."

"Leaving?" Hugo displayed a rare flash of surprise.

"Yeah. Did Julian not tell you guys?"

Hugo shook his head. Not only had Julian kept quiet about it, but the narrative Julian and Vivienne had spun was the exact opposite of what Willow was saying. They had claimed she was leaving New York and heading back to Seattle.

That was exactly why he had asked her about her future plans previously, offering his help.

Seeing his reaction, Willow felt a bit confused. Given how close they were to Julian, he definitely should have mentioned it. But on second thought, maybe she was overestimating her own importance. To Julian, her resignation probably meant absolutely nothing. He didn't care, so he didn't bother bringing it up.

"Well, consider this my advance notice."

"Will you leaving Sinclair affect our relationship?"

Willow was completely caught off guard. Of all the things he could have asked after hearing the news, this was the first question out of his mouth.

How could her quitting possibly affect their relationship? Besides, they didn't even have a special relationship to begin with. They just went skiing together occasionally. They could barely even be considered casual friends.

"No."

Hearing her answer, Hugo let out a barely perceptible sigh of relief. "What are your plans after leaving Sinclair? Do you want me to recommend you somewhere?"

He actually wanted to say "arrange a job for you," but knowing how sensitive she might be, he carefully chose the word "recommend."

To his surprise, Willow declined without hesitation. "No need. I already have things lined up."

She didn't elaborate, and Hugo didn't push it. "Still in New York?"

"For now." Willow honestly wasn't entirely sure. During her preliminary talks with Mr. Vance, she had mentioned wanting to stay in New York to care for her ailing mother. But once Martha recovered, her plans were still up in the air.

"And after that?"

"I'll figure that out when the time comes."

Hugo nodded. At least she was still in the city for now.

The two sat for a little longer, finishing their coffees before getting ready to leave.

Just as they stood up, Hugo's phone suddenly rang. He glanced at the screen, gave Willow a quick nod, and stepped aside to a quieter spot to take the call.

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It was Julian, asking where he was.

Hugo gave a brief reply. "Out skiing."

"Perfect," Julian continued. "We were just planning on heading to the slopes too. Send over the location, and we'll come find you."

Hugo glanced at Willow standing a short distance away. "Today's not a good time. Maybe next time."

Julian was slightly taken aback by the refusal, but he didn't press the issue.

After he hung up, Seth was the first to rush over. "Well? Where's Hugo? Are we going to meet up with him?"

"No, he said it's not a good time. He said next time."

"Not a good time?" Seth laughed. "What could possibly be inconvenient about skiing? We used to hang out and party together every single day, and I never once heard him say it wasn't a good time."

Seth paused for a second, then, as if realizing something, spoke up again. "Besides, I don't remember him ever being that obsessed with skiing. Every time Vivienne won the championship and showed off her skills, he barely reacted. He always looked bored out of his mind. And now he's ditching his bros just to hit the slopes? Yeah, I call bullshit. Don't tell me..."

Seth didn't finish his sentence, but the implication was heavy. Everyone present immediately caught his drift. Lucas chuckled, Julian raised an eyebrow, and only Vivienne's expression instantly turned icy.

Seth was right. Hugo was clearly avoiding them. In the past, even though he was a man of few words and kept a cold demeanor, he always showed up on time for their group hangouts.

With such a decisive rejection today, did this mean he was going to distance himself from them permanently?

The mere thought of that possibility made Vivienne's eyes flash with a chilling hostility.

She was so lost in her dark thoughts that she didn't even hear Julian calling her name. It wasn't until he repeated it that she snapped out of her daze. "Julian, what is it?"

"We're heading out."

"Okay." Vivienne went to grab her bag, turned around, and accidentally bumped into Julian. He caught her by the shoulders.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine. I've just been so swamped with work lately, I probably haven't been getting enough sleep."

Vivienne wasn't exactly lying. She really had been overwhelmed to the point of breaking. There were far too many project details and convoluted procedures. The moment she solved one issue, another popped up, and they were all things she had never even seen before in her life. It was sheer torture.

If it weren't for her burning need to prove to Julian that she was superior to Willow, she would have thrown in the towel ages ago.

"Take it easy," Julian comforted her. "It's completely normal to run into a lot of issues when you first take over. I'll help you look through them when we get back to the office."

She was thrilled that he offered to help, but also terrified that he would judge her. "If you do that, won't you think I'm less capable than Willow?"

"How could I?" Julian patted her head. "Look at your educational background compared to hers—there's absolutely no comparison. Besides, the only reason these partners agreed to the projects is because they value the strength of Sinclair Group. If Willow could handle it without a hitch, you'll definitely be fine. Don't stress. Even if something does go wrong, you still have me, don't you?"

Hearing those words, Vivienne beamed. She linked her arm through Julian's and walked off with a look of pure bliss.

Back at the ski resort, Willow and Hugo wrapped up their session, packed their gear, and left without lingering.

Hugo dropped her off at her apartment first. Watching Willow's retreating figure disappear into the building complex, he pulled out his phone, intending to call Julian to ask about her resignation.

But after a moment of thought, he decided against it. Julian definitely had to know she was quitting. As for why he hadn't told the rest of them, he probably had his own reasons.

It was better not to make the call. He already despised the way Julian treated Willow. If he called and found out too many aggravating details, he'd probably just end up infuriating himself to death.

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For her final few days, Willow prioritized her own comfort above all else. She maintained a pleasant mood and avoided any emotional turbulence.

The days flew by, and soon it was her final day. Willow headed to the People & Culture Department to complete her exit process.

The HR rep tried to throw her weight around, adopting a terrible attitude and a condescending tone. But Willow was fully prepared. She had gathered all the necessary resignation documents and company property ages ago. Now, she dumped every single item onto the desk without missing a beat.

"Is that enough?"

Ultimately, bound by company protocol, the HR rep begrudgingly finalized her paperwork.

Stepping out of the Sinclair Group building, Willow took a deep breath of the outside air. The sky was clear, the breeze was fresh, and it had been a very long time since she had felt this incredibly relaxed.

Looking back at the place where she had sacrificed three years of her youth, Willow felt no regrets. She had no fear of the future and no attachments to the past. It was simply time to turn the page and start the next chapter of her life.

Julian had just wrapped up a meeting. Lighting a cigarette, he stood by the floor-to-ceiling windows to decompress. Suddenly, a familiar silhouette caught his eye. Her outfit and aura were strikingly similar to Willow's. The only difference was that this woman was significantly slimmer, looking much more like the version of Willow from her college days. Julian's mind briefly flashed back to how she used to look in university—quiet, introverted, always wearing white, and constantly trailing behind him with her books clutched to her chest.

Julian stared for a moment longer. The woman was carrying a cardboard box. After exiting the building, she hailed a cab and drove off, making it look exactly like she had just quit.

He had briefly suspected it might actually be Willow, but seeing that, he immediately dismissed the thought.

How could Willow possibly resign? Could she really bear to leave Sinclair Group? Right now, she was probably racking her brain trying to come up with an excuse to beg for his forgiveness.

Julian crushed out his cigarette and looked away.

Just then, Vivienne walked in to discuss the Seattle projects.

"Julian, what were you looking at out there? You looked so focused." Vivienne had noticed him standing by the window the second she walked in. He had been so entirely absorbed that he hadn't even heard her open the door.

"Nothing."

He rarely gave her such a cold shoulder. Vivienne froze. "What's wrong? Did I come at a bad time? Am I interrupting your work?"

"No." Julian suppressed the sudden, inexplicable wave of irritation flaring in his chest and softened his tone. "What do you need?"

Vivienne relaxed. For a second, she had been terrified that she had done something to piss him off. This gentle demeanor was the Julian she was familiar with.

She was there to talk about the Seattle projects, but she conveniently left out the part where she had zero understanding of data or project management. Instead, she dumped all the blame entirely onto Willow. "Julian, you have no idea. Willow left these projects in an absolute state of disaster."

She intentionally pointed out several fresh errors—ones she had made herself. "These experimental datasets and results don't align at all. There must be a massive flaw in the experiments. And these forecasts are completely detached from reality. They have zero reference value. Plus, the project timelines and resource coordination are in such a mess that it's impossible to move forward."

The longer Julian listened, the deeper the crease between his brows grew. Finally, he snatched the laptop right out of Vivienne's hands and reviewed the files himself.

It was indeed a total disaster. An absolute mess.

He stood up and immediately dialed his assistant. "Tell Willow to get to my office right this second."

A few minutes passed with no response. Julian was just about to lose his temper when his assistant knocked and hurried in, looking completely panicked. "Mr. Sinclair, Willow... she resigned."

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"What?"

"When did this happen?"

Both Julian and Vivienne stood frozen in shock.

"T-Today." The assistant was terrified by their reactions, his voice trembling. Did the boss seriously not know about this?

"Go get HR in here right now."

Not daring to waste a single second, the assistant scrambled off to grab the representative.

He returned shortly with the HR rep in tow. On the way up, he had given her a brief rundown of the situation, and she was equally terrified.

Originally, she had assumed that since the boss and Ms. Sinclair despised Willow so much, they would be thrilled that she was finally gone. She even thought that if they were in a good mood, a promotion and a raise might be in the cards for her.

But looking at the current atmosphere, things were terribly wrong.

Trembling, she pushed open the office door and meekly squeaked out, "Mr. Sinclair, you asked to see me?"

Julian didn't even look at her. He fired off a harsh demand. "When did Willow submit her resignation?"

"A... a month ago today."

At those words, Julian's eyes darkened. That was the exact day she had returned to New York.

Meaning, she had filed for resignation on the very first day she came back?

The realization ignited a suffocating wave of despair and rage in his chest.

"Why wasn't I notified when she submitted her resignation?"

The HR rep was practically paralyzed with fear. Forgetting all corporate tact, she blurted out the absolute truth. "Willow's resignation was approved through your system account."

With trembling hands, she pulled up the company system on her tablet, showing Julian his own digital signature of approval. "Furthermore, you previously gave strict orders that all matters concerning Willow did not need to be reported to you, and that we should simply process everything through standard company procedures."

Hearing those words, Julian's gaze turned glacial. He had indeed given that order, but only because he assumed Willow would stubbornly refuse to give up and constantly harass him with endless excuses. He never meant it for something like this.

And he had absolutely zero memory of ever approving Willow's resignation application.

But looking at the digital trail, he must have accidentally checked 'Approve All' while batch-processing a pile of other documents.

If that was the case, then the woman he had just seen standing by the window really was her?

An inexplicable, violent surge of frustration tore through Julian. He snapped his head toward the HR rep, his voice dripping with ice. "Is this how you do your job?"

His sudden shift in tone nearly made the poor woman burst into tears. She had absolutely no idea what she had done wrong. In her panic, she cast a desperate, pleading look at Vivienne. After all, she had done plenty of dirty work for Vivienne in the past, especially when it came to targeting Willow.

Catching her distress signal, Vivienne quickly stepped in to smooth things over. "Alright, we understand the situation now. You can step out."

She escorted the terrified HR rep out of the office, even generously handing her a tissue. "Don't be scared, you didn't do anything wrong. Julian is just a bit angry right now because the projects Willow was managing are a complete disaster. He's upset he can't reprimand her to her face, so he's in a bad mood. It will pass."

"Really?" The HR rep still hadn't recovered from her sheer terror, staring at Vivienne with wide, disbelieving eyes.

Vivienne patted her shoulder. "Don't you trust me? Just wait and see. Everything will be fine soon."

The HR rep finally nodded and hurried away.

After sending her off, Vivienne turned back into the office. She found Julian standing by the window again, smoking. The swirling smoke wrapped around him, making him look distant and unreachable.

In that split second, Vivienne felt as though a massive chasm had opened up between them—as if he were about to slip away from her forever. Panic seized her heart, and she rushed over, wrapping her arms around him from behind. "What's wrong? Are you upset?"

Julian turned around and crushed out his cigarette. "No."

Even though he denied it, Vivienne could clearly see that Willow's resignation had severely impacted him.

Not daring to ask directly, she tried to cautiously test the waters. "Honestly, her quitting on her own is actually a good thing." She spoke carefully, studying Julian's face for any reaction. "Our original plan was to either fire her or force her back to New York. Even though the method changed, the result is exactly the same. We got exactly what we wanted, didn't we?"

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"Plus, I'm perfectly capable of handling all her work anyway. Her leaving isn't a loss for us at all."

Julian knew she was right logically, but a gnawing discomfort still clawed at his chest.

Even now, he couldn't quite process the fact that Willow had genuinely quit.

She used to care so deeply about those projects and that job. How could she bear to just walk away?

Besides, where else could she possibly go? With her mediocre skills and average experience, what company would even hire her?

And given how deeply she loved him, how could she willingly abandon her only excuse to be near him?

So, in the end, Julian convinced himself that this was just another one of her dramatic tantrums. She was just using a different tactic to get his attention.

"That may be true, but she didn't have the right to make that decision. Let her throw her little tantrum. Sooner or later, she'll come crawling back to beg me."

"You're absolutely right."

Though Vivienne voiced her agreement, her internal thoughts were entirely different. Back when Willow was still around, Vivienne had constantly plotted to banish her to Seattle so that she, Julian, and Toby could live happily ever after as a family.

But looking at things now, she clearly couldn't fully predict Julian's thoughts. It was far safer to let Willow leave Sinclair Group completely, severing all ties and eliminating the threat once and for all.

The news of Willow resigning from Sinclair Group spread like wildfire. Everyone who heard it had the exact same reaction: pure shock. But they weren't shocked that she was gone—they were shocked that she had initiated it herself instead of being fired.

The coworkers who used to gleefully make her life a living hell even started whispering rumors that she actually had been fired, and Mr. Sinclair had just labeled it a resignation to save her some face.

When Seth and the rest of the group caught wind of the news, their reactions were largely the same.

Seth was the most vocal. Mirroring Julian's exact thought process, he immediately started shouting the moment he heard. "How is that even possible? Who does she think she is? Zero skills, zero experience, and she has the nerve to quit? I bet it's just another pathetic scheme to get Julian's attention."

He even took it upon himself to warn Vivienne to keep a close eye on Willow's movements, reminding her that you can never be too careful around someone with an agenda.

Lucas also had a strong reaction, though he wasn't as loudly abrasive as Seth. Instead, he genuinely pondered what could have driven Willow to actually quit.

Hugo, on the other hand, had the most underwhelming reaction of all. He looked completely unfazed, as if he had known the news all along.

Seth noticed his apathy and found it strange. "Hugo, why aren't you reacting at all?"

Hugo's voice was flat. "What kind of reaction am I supposed to have?"

"Shock, anger, disbelief—literally any emotion would do!" Seth stared at him. "Anything but this. You act like you already knew."

As soon as he said that, the rest of the group instantly turned their attention to Hugo.

Hugo didn't flinch, his face completely devoid of expression. He didn't care about their scrutiny, but he wanted to avoid causing any trouble for Willow. So, he threw them a bone. "This is just how I am."

Lucas stepped in to back him up. "Come on, you know how Hugo is. He never gets involved in this kind of drama."

"Fair enough," Seth conceded. "You've never cared about anything. You barely get involved in our stuff, let alone hers. You probably don't even remember what she looks like. Expecting you to care about this is asking for a miracle."

Hugo didn't bother replying. He pulled out his phone and sent a text to Willow: *How's the first day of unemployment?*

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How was it? It was absolutely phenomenal!

When Willow received the message, she was in the middle of packing up her things. She was getting ready to head to the airport to pick up Jade, whose business trip had wrapped up ahead of schedule.

Actually, before deciding to pick Jade up, Willow had called Arthur Vance to inform him that she had officially resigned and was available to complete her onboarding process today if needed.

But Mr. Vance hadn't been in any rush. He suggested she take some time off to rest, or even go on a vacation, assuring her that Merit Biotech would cover all expenses.

Willow politely declined. She felt bad delaying things any further, and honestly, after leaving that toxic environment, she was in a fantastic headspace. She didn't need any adjustment period at all.

After a brief discussion, they reached a consensus: Willow would officially onboard on Monday. Because of that, she had the free time today to pick up her friend.

It's going great. She picked up her phone and shot Hugo a quick reply.

Glad to hear it. Hugo responded almost instantly.

Willow checked the time and sent one more text: *I've got to go pick up a friend from the airport. Talk to you later.*

Reading her message, Hugo paused his typing. In his text box sat a half-written message he hadn't hit send on: *Silver Run Resort we went to last time is hosting an event today. Want to go check it out?*

Hugo didn't say anything else. He simply deleted the draft and replied: *Okay.*

After grabbing her keys, Willow headed downstairs to the parking garage.

Even though she had a license, she didn't drive very often, so she took it incredibly slow on the road. By the time she pulled Jade's car into the airport pickup zone, she was already significantly behind schedule.

Jade was already waiting on the curb. Seeing Willow pull up, she was fully prepared to lunge forward and tackle her in a massive hug, but after taking two steps, she froze dead in her tracks.

Seeing her stunned expression, Willow found it hilarious. She walked over and took the handle of Jade's suitcase. "What, it's only been a month and you don't recognize me?"

"You... you... you..."

"Me, me, me... what about me?" Willow teased, mimicking her stutter. She knew exactly why Jade was so shell-shocked. Ever since her successful weight loss, every single person who saw her had that exact same expression painted on their face.

"Yes, I lost the weight. I'm back to how I used to look."

Jade stared at her, her jaw practically on the floor. She had only been away on a business trip for less than a month. How could Willow have undergone such a radical transformation in that time?

And this wasn't just "going back to how she used to look." She was significantly more gorgeous than before. Back in college, Willow had been the campus beauty, but her appeal had been mostly pure and innocent, with a lingering sense of youthful naivety.

Now, having survived the brutal highs and lows of real life, a profound sense of tranquility had settled over her. Beyond her striking physical beauty, she radiated an aura of elegant composure. Just standing there, she looked like a walking masterpiece, commanding more attention than an A-list celebrity.

In the brief couple of minutes they had been standing there, Jade had lost count of how many people had turned their heads to stare at her.

Following her into the car, Jade couldn't help but gasp. "You look absolutely breathtaking!"

But she also knew just how much agonizing effort Willow had to have put in to reach this point. Willow had always been incredibly resilient. Once she set her mind to something, she would see it through to the bitter end.

"It must have been brutal, right?"

Honestly, it hadn't been that bad. Willow felt it was a small price to pay. A person had to suffer the consequences of their poor choices, and pushing through the pain was the only way out.

She offered a faint smile. "It was manageable. Diet and exercise. The weight melted off pretty fast." Wanting to acknowledge her friend's help, she added, "Actually, I have you to thank for that gym membership. I practically lived there over the past few weeks."

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Jade burst into laughter. "Well, at least it got put to good use. If it stayed with me, it would've just gathered dust until I tossed it."

The entire drive back, the two of them didn't stop talking for a second.

Jade already knew about the resignation and specifically asked if Julian had tried to make her life miserable on the way out.

"No," Willow shook her head. "He couldn't wait to get rid of me so he could hand all my projects over to Vivienne."

"Vivienne? Does she even have the brain cells for that?" Jade scoffed. "Everyone in the social circles knows exactly what's going on between her and Julian. Those two have completely abandoned all sense of shame. By the way, make sure you finalize that divorce ASAP. The sooner you cut ties with that bastard, the better."

"I know." Willow had been actively thinking about it recently. She hadn't had the mental bandwidth to deal with it before, but now that she was officially unemployed, tackling the divorce was at the top of her list.

"So, when do you start at the new place?"

"Next Monday."

"That fast? I figured you'd take at least a short break. But hey, throwing yourself into a new job isn't a bad idea. Once you're busy, you won't have time to obsess over all that toxic garbage."

Willow wanted to say she was perfectly fine, that none of that garbage affected her anymore, but she knew Jade was just looking out for her. "It's fine. I've been resting up plenty lately, so I'm not feeling burnt out."

"That's good," Jade said. "Oh, by the way, I heard Merit Biotech is dropping a massive investment for a new project here in New York. Since you're joining them, are you going to be the one handling it?"

That was news to Willow. Although Mr. Vance had discussed collaboration details with her, he had only given her a high-level overview. He hadn't specified what the exact project was or what her official title would be. Since he hadn't brought it up, she hadn't pried.

"I'm actually not sure yet. I guess I'll find out what they have planned for me. But how do you know all this gossip? You aren't even in the biotech industry."

Jade laughed. "It's Merit Biotech! The largest bio-corp on the planet. They're on the news 24/7. Who wouldn't know about them? Besides, their planned investment in New York is rumored to be worth billions of dollars. With capital that massive, it's not just your industry that's going to feel the shockwaves; related sectors are going to get flipped upside down too. It's a once-in-a-decade gold rush. Everyone has their eyes glued to it, hoping to get a slice of the pie."

"That makes sense."

"I also heard the current head of Merit Group is ridiculously hot. Like, hotter than most movie stars. If you ever get the chance to see him in person, you have to secretly take a picture for me."

This was the second time Willow had heard someone gush over how handsome Merit's boss was. The first time was from Martha. She still found it baffling. Mr. Vance was definitely well put-together, but comparing him to a movie star felt like a massive stretch.

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Nope," Jade shook her head. "Rumor has it he's totally ruthless and operates with zero mercy. And because he supposedly never gets involved in any romantic scandals, people have dubbed him Hell's Reaper. With a reputation like that, absolutely nobody dares to cross him. That's why, all these years, not a single clear photo of him has ever leaked to the press. The only ones out there are super blurry."

The more Willow listened, the more she felt Jade's description completely contradicted Mr. Vance's demeanor. Mr. Vance wasn't exactly a supermodel, but he definitely wasn't some terrifying 'Hell's Reaper' either.

"Gossip is just gossip. Don't believe everything you hear."

"Well, you can verify it for me once you start."

"I'm going there to work. I doubt I'll even cross paths with the guy."

"You never know! Plus, looking as gorgeous as you do right now, you'd probably have him completely captivated the second he lays eyes on you."

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

Chapter 100

Hearing that, Mr. Vance's face instantly flashed through Willow's mind. Just picturing the scenario Jade described gave her full-body goosebumps.

She laughed and teased Jade. "You read way too many romance novels."

"You never know," Jade refused to let it go. "Sometimes, true love is waiting right around the corner."

"And when exactly are you going to turn that corner?" Willow threw the joke right back at her.

"Oh, I'm a long way off. You know me. I don't have a romantic bone in my body. My mind is entirely focused on my career."

"Oh? Really? Then who was that guy you had a massive crush on in college?"

Jade had harbored a secret crush on a boy back in college. She never mentioned his name, and Willow never pried, but she knew Jade had fallen hard for him.

For someone as bold and straightforward as Jade, she blushed every time he was brought up. She even used to skip classes and make up excuses to join extracurriculars just to catch a glimpse of him from afar.

Willow knew back then that her friend had found someone truly special.

"Are you two still in touch?" she asked.

"Not for a long time. Besides, I'm over him." Despite her words, Jade clearly looked a bit uncomfortable bringing it up.

"Is he married?" Willow pressed.

"How would I know?" Jade's reply was awkward, though she quickly tacked on, "Probably not."

Hearing that, Willow knew her friend wasn't over him at all. She claimed they had lost touch, yet she somehow knew he wasn't married. It was painfully obvious Jade was still keeping tabs on him.

"Well, since he's not married and you're single, why not give it another shot? At least you wouldn't have any regrets," Willow encouraged.

But Jade immediately shrank back. "Let's just drop it. I'm definitely not his type, so there's no point in setting myself up for rejection. Besides, I like my life right now. I have my career and my friends. The last thing I want is to dive headfirst into love just to torture myself."

Willow couldn't argue with that. Having just suffered through the bitter reality of love herself, she really wasn't in any position to give romantic advice.

"You're right. Just live life the way you want to."

Right on cue, their car pulled into their apartment complex, putting an end to the conversation.

After getting out, they headed straight for their apartment. The moment Jade pushed the front door open, she froze in her tracks, completely stunned by the sight inside.

The living room had been thoroughly decorated with streamers, balloons, and an array of pink floral arrangements. Walking in felt like stepping into a sea of pink.

Jade gasped in sheer delight. "What is all this?"

"A celebration," Willow said with a warm smile. "To celebrate my resignation, and to celebrate you wrapping up your work trip early."

With that, she picked up a wrapped box from the couch and handed it to Jade. "Open it. It's a gift for you."

"A present, too?" Jade's eyes lit up even more. "If I had known there were so many surprises waiting for me, I would have flown back even sooner."

"Sooner or later, they were all meant for you."

The gift was elegantly wrapped. Jade carefully peeled back each layer, and as she reached the final box, it suddenly dawned on her what was inside. She let out an excited shriek. "Is this what I think it is?"

Willow watched her, her gaze softening. "Open it and find out."

She knew Jade had a serious obsession with Designer Vinyl Collectibles, especially the ultra-rare chase figures. She was so dedicated to the hobby that she had even converted a spare room in their apartment into a display shrine just for her figurines.

Keeping that in mind, Willow had spent the last few weeks hunting down this exact piece for her.