



# *The Last* Herbal Book

· Bonus Scenes ·

## Bonus Scenes

### Rowan's Journal

#### *From the Willowmere Notebooks*

I knew she would come back. Not because she promised. She didn't.

Clara never made promises she wasn't certain she could keep. That was one of the things I noticed about her early on, she chose her words carefully, like someone who understood that words, once spoken, carried weight.

But I knew anyway. The garden knew too.

It's hard to explain that to anyone who hasn't spent enough time here. The garden changes when someone begins to belong to it. The air feels different. The quiet shifts. Even the bees seem to move with a different rhythm.

After she left, I kept walking the same paths we had walked together.

The linden tree. The thyme slope. The orchard row where she first started asking questions that went deeper than remedies.

I didn't do it on purpose at first. My feet just carried me there. Habit, maybe. Or something else.

The first morning after she left, the garden felt larger. Not empty. Just... quieter.

I checked the rosemary beds. Tied back the lavender that had leaned too far after the wind. Turned the soil in the lower herb row where the rain had packed it tight.

The work didn't change. But something else had.

My father used to say you could tell when someone had begun to root themselves in a place. He said the garden would start to lean toward them, not in any way you could see, but in the way you felt when you walked through it.

He believed gardens noticed.

I used to think that sounded like something meant to comfort people. Now I'm not so sure.

Because after Clara left, the linden tree felt quieter.

I know how that sounds. But I noticed it.

The iron bench beneath it caught more sunlight than usual. The breeze seemed softer. The thyme along the slope released its scent more slowly in the morning.

It was as though the garden had grown used to her presence. And was waiting.

I didn't tell my mother that. She would have smiled in that knowing way of hers, and I wasn't ready to hear what she might say.

Instead, I kept working. That's what my father taught me. When you don't know what comes next, tend what's in front of you.

He believed that most things in life weren't meant to be forced. He said people rushed too quickly toward answers when what they really needed was time.

"Gardens don't hurry," he used to say. "And people shouldn't either."

I found myself thinking about that often while Clara was gone.

Some evenings, I'd walk the orchard at sunset, the way we had done together. I'd check the lower branches, watch the light settle across the valley, listen to the bees returning to their hives.

And I'd wonder what she was doing. Whether she was writing. Whether she was thinking about Willowmere. Whether she felt the pull of this place the same way I did.

I never let myself imagine too far ahead. My father had another philosophy about that.

"Don't build a future around someone who hasn't chosen it yet," he once told me. "But leave the gate open if they want to walk through."

So I left the gate open. And I waited.

The morning she returned, I was in the lower herb beds.

The thyme had begun to spread farther along the stones, filling in the spaces where the soil had worn thin. I was kneeling, pressing the earth gently around the new growth, when I heard footsteps along the path.

I didn't look up right away. There are some moments you recognize before you see them.

When I did look up, she was standing at the edge of the path, the sunlight behind her, the familiar tilt of her head as she took in the garden again.

And just like that, the quiet shifted. The air felt warmer. The bees moved differently. The garden leaned back toward her.

She didn't say anything at first.

Neither did I.

She simply stepped forward, and I realized something my father had once told me, something I hadn't understood fully until that moment:

"Some people don't arrive loudly. They arrive quietly, and then everything feels more like itself."

Clara walked toward me, her smile soft but certain. "I came back," she said.

I nodded. "I know."

And in that moment, the garden felt complete again. Not finished. Just... growing. The way it always had. The way, I realized, it always would.

Because Willowmere had never been about holding onto the past. It had always been about who chose to stay.

And that morning, as Clara stepped fully into the garden again, I understood something else my father used to say:

"People don't belong to gardens. Gardens belong to the people willing to tend them."

I brushed the soil from my hands and stood.

She stepped beside me.

And the garden, quiet and steady, welcomed her home.

## Clara's Journal

### *Written While Away from Willowmere*

I thought leaving would make things clearer.

That was what I told myself as I packed my bag in the writing room, as I closed Elspeth's journals, as I walked the garden one last time before the car arrived.

Distance, I believed, would help me decide.

But clarity, I discovered, doesn't always come from leaving. Sometimes it comes from noticing what follows you.

The first morning back home, I woke earlier than usual. The light filtered through the curtains differently here, sharper, less softened than Willowmere's quiet mornings. I lay still for a moment, listening for sounds that weren't there.

No bees. No breeze through herb rows. No distant clink of jars from the kitchen. Only the quiet hum of the house settling.

I rose anyway. Habit, I suppose.

I made tea without thinking, my hands reaching automatically for herbs that weren't there. I paused, realizing I was searching for linden leaves, for chamomile blossoms, for the small comforts that had become part of my rhythm.

Instead, I settled for plain tea. It tasted... fine. But not the same.

I carried the cup to the window and looked out across the yard. It was neat, tidy, familiar. But it lacked the gentle unpredictability of Willowmere, the way herbs spilled into paths, the way thyme softened stones, the way the orchard leaned toward the light.

I found myself wondering what Rowan was doing. The thought came quietly, without invitation.

I imagined him in the garden, kneeling beside the herb beds, brushing soil from his hands, moving slowly through the rows the way he always had.

I told myself it was simply curiosity. But I knew it wasn't.

My days filled quickly enough. There were letters to answer, notes to organize, decisions waiting for me that I had postponed while I was away. Yet even as I worked, something felt... unfinished.

I caught myself writing differently. Slower. More carefully. As though the garden had changed the way I thought.

One afternoon, I opened my notebook and began writing without intending to.

Not manuscript pages. Just thoughts.

I wrote about the linden tree. About the iron bench beneath it.

About the way Rowan walked the paths at dusk, checking the herbs as though he were greeting them one by one.

I hadn't realized how much I had noticed until the words began to appear.

My grandmother once told me that places leave traces in us. I hadn't understood that fully

until now. Because Willowmere hadn't stayed behind. It had followed me.

I began noticing small things differently. A patch of thyme growing between stones along the walkway. The way sunlight moved across the garden beds in the afternoon. The quiet comfort of working with my hands rather than simply thinking.

The garden had changed my pace. Changed my attention. Changed... something else too.

I missed the conversations. Rowan standing beside me without needing to fill the silence.

Elsbeth watching from the kitchen window with that knowing expression.

The gentle rhythm of shared work.

One evening, I found myself sitting with my notebook open, staring at the same sentence for far too long.

The question I had avoided since leaving Willowmere rose quietly.

Was I writing about the garden? Or had I become part of it?

I thought of Rowan then. Of the way he had said he would wait. Not asking. Not pressing. Simply steady. My chest tightened slightly at the memory.

My father once told me that you know you belong somewhere when leaving doesn't feel like relief, it feels like distance.

I closed the notebook slowly. I already knew my answer. The garden hadn't demanded anything from me.

It had simply made space. And somewhere in that space, I had begun to grow.

The next morning, I packed again. This time, the decision felt quiet but certain.

I folded my clothes carefully, placed my notebook at the top of the bag, and paused only once, glancing around the room that had once felt so settled. It still did. But it no longer felt complete.

I stepped outside, the morning air cool against my skin.

Somewhere nearby, I caught the faint scent of thyme from the small patch near the path. I brushed my fingers across it without thinking, the familiar warmth rising softly.

Quiet courage. I smiled.

The drive felt shorter this time. Not because the distance had changed. But because I was no longer leaving something behind. I was returning to something that had already begun to feel like home.

And as Willowmere came into view once more, I realized something that surprised me. I wasn't nervous. I wasn't uncertain. I was simply ready.

Ready to walk the garden paths again. Ready to sit beneath the linden tree. Ready to see Rowan standing in the herb beds, brushing soil from his hands.

Ready, finally, to choose.

And as I stepped from the car, the garden quiet and waiting, I understood something clearly for the first time: Some places don't just change you. They show you who you were becoming all along.