

Chapter 5

Lily:

"NO... No... Hot... No!"

I jolted awake with a sharp gasp, my lungs greedily pulling in air. My entire body trembled as my eyes darted around, struggling to make sense of my surroundings. The room felt unfamiliar at first, but as my mind cleared, recognition settled in.

"Where am I? Who saved me?" I whispered, my voice shaking.

Blinking rapidly, I forced myself to focus. I was in my own apartment. But that didn't make sense. I threw off the duvet and rushed to the mirror, my heart pounding. My hands shook as I traced my reflection, expecting to see burn marks, scars—anything to remind me of the fire. But there was nothing. My skin was smooth, unblemished, my face... younger than I remembered.

"What is going on?" I murmured, confusion twisting in my chest.

My gaze landed on the calendar hanging beside the mirror. The moment I saw the date, my breath hitched.

"Three years ago..." I breathed, a wave of disbelief crashing over me. My fingers trembled as I pinched my arm, wincing at the sharp sting. This was real. Somehow, impossibly, I had been reborn.

A mixture of relief and fierce determination flooded through me. I stared at my reflection, the corners of my lips curling into a slow, incredulous smile. "The heavens have given me a second chance," I whispered. "This time, things will be different. The Miller family, Rose, Riley, Ryan... you'll all pay for what you did."

My mind raced, piecing together the timeline. Right now, I was still in a relationship with Ryan, blindly supporting Rose and Riley's careers while preparing to launch my own design studio. And in two days, the Miller family would throw their grand business celebration—the event that changed everything.

"This time, I'll play my cards differently," I vowed. "No more being a pawn in their games. I'll follow my dreams and find my real parents."

For a brief moment, my expression softened as memories of my parents surfaced, filling me with longing. But the sharp ringing of my phone dragged me back to the present.

I glanced at the screen.

Rose is calling...

Bitterness curled in my chest. I remembered too well how she had manipulated me, convincing me to take an audition while I was sick—an audition that she later stole, launching her career at my expense.

I sneered. Not this time.

“Hello Rose,” I didn't immediately start smiling like I used to whenever I would receive her call. And I am sure she noticed.

I cleared my throat, making sure to sound as weak as possible. “Rose, is that you?” My voice came out hoarse, just as I intended.

“Elder sister, are you okay? You sound unwell.” Her voice dripped with concern, but I wasn't fooled. I could practically picture the fake sweetness in her expression.

“Yes, I'm feeling terrible,” I replied, adding a weak cough for effect.

“Oh no, elder sister! Do you need me to come take care of you?” she offered, her tone sickeningly sweet.

I rolled my eyes. “No, I'll manage. Why did you call?”

“Well...” Rose hesitated, and I could almost hear the gears turning in her head. “There's an audition for a movie I really want to be in, but... My ankle is sprained, and I can't go. I was hoping you could go for me, but since you're unwell...”

I felt a smirk tug at my lips. “I'd love to help, Rose, but I can't even leave my bed right now.” My voice was dripping with false regret.

“Oh... it's okay, elder sister. I'll figure something out. Take care,” she said, trying to mask her disappointment.

As the call ended, I lay back against my pillows, my mind already brimming with plans. That audition had been a crucial stepping stone in Rose's rise to fame, but without my help, it would be so much harder for her to succeed.

‘Let's see how you manage this time,’ I thought, a satisfied smile curling on my lips.

I had made up my mind—this time, I wouldn't be a tool for others to manipulate. I wouldn't let Rose climb to stardom on my back. Without my help, let's see how she plans to secure that coveted role.

I had no idea what Rose might be doing after I had denied helping her. My mind was elsewhere, tangled in thoughts of the future. Leaning against my bed frame, I felt a steely determination settle in my eyes. I wouldn't let anyone take advantage of my kindness and naivety ever again.

I knew what would come next. Rose would either complain to her parents or the man that I thought was mine. I was waiting to find out what their next moves would be.

‘This is my second chance,’ I thought, my jaw tightening. ‘This time, I'll carve my own path—and no one will stand in my way.’