

Chapter 9

Lily:

I felt trapped, surrounded by flames, my cries for help swallowed by the deafening roar of the fire. Panic surged through me as I spun around, desperately searching for an escape, but the inferno offered none.

“Help me... someone, please!” I screamed, my voice hoarse with desperation.

Then, suddenly, laughter rang out—mocking, cold, and disturbingly familiar. I turned toward the sound, my heart sinking as I saw Rose, Ryan, and Riley standing outside the fire, their faces twisted in cruel amusement.

“In this life too, you’re destined to remain our puppet, Lily,” Rose sneered, her voice slicing through the chaos like a blade. “Now... die!”

Their laughter echoed around me, growing louder, more menacing, as if it were the final blow to my soul.

“No!” I screamed, bolting upright from my bed. My breath was ragged, my heart pounding wildly in my chest. I was drenched in sweat, my hands trembling as I looked around the dimly lit room. No fire. No Rose. Just the haunting remnants of a nightmare.

Taking deep, steadying breaths, I forced myself to calm down. “It’s over,” I murmured to myself. “Just a dream... but not my future.” I clenched my fists tightly, the fire of my determination burning brighter than ever. “This time, I’ll change my destiny. Rose, Ryan, Riley—you won’t control me again.”

With renewed resolve, I swung my legs over the side of the bed, my feet hitting the floor with purpose. I moved to the bathroom, the cool water of the shower washing away the remnants of my nightmare, helping me regain focus. Refreshed, I dressed in a simple yet stylish blue top paired with white jeans. After applying a light pink lip gloss and styling my hair in a half-up, half-down look, I slipped on my sneakers, grabbed my purse, and left the apartment.

As the cab pulled up to the towering building of Marvellous Universe, I felt a surge of resolve course through me. Standing before the impressive structure, I thought, ‘This is where it begins.’

I entered the lobby, my heels clicking softly against the polished floor as I approached the receptionist. “Excuse me,” I said hesitantly, “can you tell me where Sister Mia’s office is?”

The receptionist, a young woman with oversized glasses that gave her a sweet, endearing appearance, looked up at me and smiled. “Are you Miss Lily?”

I nodded. She quickly made a call, and within moments, a staff member arrived to escort me. I followed them into the elevator, silently absorbing my surroundings, until we reached the floor where Mia’s office was located.

Standing before the door, I knocked lightly. “Come in,” I heard Mia’s voice call from within.

I opened the door and stepped inside with a polite smile. “Good morning, Sister Mia.”

Mia looked up from her desk, her eyes softening as she took in my presence. I saw her expression shift—her gaze lingering on me with something almost like admiration. Her appearance was immaculate, radiant yet understated, and as she rose to her feet, she smiled warmly.

“Lily, I can’t thank you enough,” Mia said earnestly, taking my hand. Her gratitude was genuine, her words heavy with sincerity. “If not for your help, I don’t know what I would have done.” The weight that had once seemed so heavy on her shoulders seemed to lift with her words.

I smiled back, feeling the powerful sense of change taking root, both in my life and in the future I was determined to shape. This was only the beginning.

“It was nothing, Sister Mia,” I replied modestly, my smile sincere.

Mia beamed at me before saying, “Well then, let me introduce you to our CEO.” She gestured for me to follow her.

As we walked through the bustling office, my sharp eyes picked up on the respectful greetings Mia received from every corner. Occasionally, curious glances flicked my way, but I paid them little mind. I was focused on what came next—meeting the man who would be key to my new beginning.

We arrived at the CEO’s office, and Mia knocked before a deep, cheerful voice called out from inside, “Come in.”

The door opened, and I found myself face-to-face with Mr. Parker, the young and charismatic CEO of Marvellous Universe. His friendly smile and sharp features radiated confidence and warmth, the kind of presence that immediately commanded attention.

“Boss Parker,” Mia began with a smile, “this is Lily, my new artist.”

Mr. Parker’s eyes sparkled with pleasant surprise as he turned his gaze on me, his grin widening. “So, this is the person who’s caught Mia’s attention,” he said, chuckling warmly.

I blinked, slightly taken aback by the familiarity in his tone. I didn’t recall much about this man from my previous life, but his easy demeanor made me wary. “Do you know me?” I asked, tilting my head slightly, curious about his reaction.

Mr. Parker laughed awkwardly, his smile never fading. “Know you? Not exactly. I just mean that you’re exceptionally talented and beautiful—it’s no wonder Mia noticed you.”

I smiled politely, but something about his tone seemed off. Before I could dwell on it, Mr. Parker leaned forward, his expression suddenly serious. “Miss Lily, may I ask you something?”

“Of course,” I replied courteously, keeping my composure.

“Why did you choose to work with our company instead of ‘Motion Stars’? You know, by signing here, you’ll be directly competing with your sister,” he said, watching me intently.

I didn’t let my smile waver as I prepared my response, my resolve unwavering. Mia had likely shared details about me with him already, so I didn’t see the need to dwell on his apparent familiarity with my situation.

I remained composed, my voice confident as I responded. “I have no problem competing with my sister,” I said smoothly. “Besides, your company is far superior to ‘Motion Stars.’ They already have Rose; they don’t need me. Or... is Boss Parker afraid of a little rivalry?”

Mr. Parker raised an eyebrow, clearly amused by my boldness. He laughed heartily, finding my response unexpectedly refreshing.

“Fear? Not at all,” he replied with a grin, clearly entertained. “It will be a pleasure to work with someone like you.” He then pulled a stack of documents from his desk drawer and placed them in front of me. “Here’s the contract. Let’s make it official.”

I glanced down at the papers, feeling the weight of the moment. This was it—my future, right there in front of me. And with it, the opportunity to change everything.

My heart swelled with a mix of emotions as I picked up the pen. My grip tightened for a moment, and I had to fight back the tears threatening to surface.

This is it—the first step toward achieving my dreams.

Taking a deep breath, I signed the contract with steady resolve, my hand firm and sure as the pen moved across the paper. When I finished, I placed the pen down and extended my hand toward Mr. Parker. “I look forward to working with you,” I said, my voice steady, my smile determined.

“The feeling is mutual,” Mr. Parker replied warmly, shaking my hand with sincerity.

With the formalities completed, Mia and I left the office.

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Author’s POV:

As the door closed behind them, Mr. Parker leaned back in his chair, a mischievous grin spreading across his face. He reached for his phone, dialing a familiar number. As he waited, he couldn’t help but chuckle to himself.

A commanding voice answered on the other end, sharp and to the point. “Speak.”

“Ethan, guess who I met today?” Mr. Parker said, grinning as though his friend could see him.

“Five seconds.”

Mr. Parker blinked, caught off guard. “What?”

“Four seconds,” Ethan’s voice came again, calm but firm.

Realization hit Mr. Parker like a brick wall. This guy! He’s counting down to hang up! Panic set in as Ethan continued, “Three seconds...”

“Wait, wait!” Mr. Parker exclaimed, almost tripping over his words. “I met Lily!”