

Becoming Strangers Again

Posted by Adminh, ?

Chapter 26 LILY Despite Jake's efforts to conceal his feelings, I could sense his unease following Ryan's call. Swiftly, I took the initiative to block Ryan's number, just moments before Jake managed to muster a smile in my direction. To be honest, I find myself yearning for the Jake of old—the one untouched by suspicion and insecurity. I miss the version of him that effortlessly brought joy and contentment into my life. Ever since Ryan entered the picture, it feels as though I'm constantly walking on eggshells. I'm always on edge, fervently hoping to avoid any encounters with Ryan, his calls, or conversations revolving around him. It's almost as if I'm exerting too much effort just to maintain a sense of normalcy. The ongoing predicament has become undeniably taxing, and I catch myself fervently counting the days, yearning for the moment when Ryan returns to New York, allowing the restoration of normalcy in my life. As dawn broke, I found myself stirring before Jake, prompting me to reach for my work phone in a reflexive motion, checking for any potential emergency calls from the hospital. The absence of missed calls alleviated a lingering sense of concern, allowing me to set the phone down before shifting my attention to my personal smartphone. Almost instinctively, my fingers navigated to the last message Ryan had sent before his number found itself in my block list. With a mixture of incredulity and mild amusement, I revisited his words, noting the cheekiness that seemed to define his demeanor. It struck me as ironic, almost comical, how he had seemingly issued an order for me to reach out to him as if he held some entitled claim over my time and attention. Does he presume I'm Angelo that he can boss around? Deleting the message swiftly, I spared Jake the chance of stumbling upon it. Then, I turned to my news app, anticipating the usual barrage of idle gossip about the. However, to my surprise, I stumbled upon something entirely unexpected. A video featuring Ryan caught my attention—an interview where he addressed the infamous picture. It seemed he skillfully redirected the spotlight onto himself and Stephanie. The comments section was ablaze with discussions about them, particularly highlighting a picture of the swarm of paparazzi besieging what appeared to be Ryan's residence. As I clicked through the comments, a pang of discomfort seized me. People were making harsh remarks about them, with one individual even suggesting that Ryan's alleged sterility was the reason for our failure to conceive and his current girlfriend's barrenness. The emergence of a hashtag, #theSterileCEO, underscored the intensity of the speculation surrounding them. "You do realize all he said in that video is a lie, right?" Jake's abrupt voice startled me, pulling me out of my dazed state. I blinked, somewhat disoriented, realizing he was already awake. "Um... What do you mean?" I responded, quickly dimming the screen of my phone and setting it down on the bedside drawer. "Are you referring to the part about him being sterile? Because, you know, we do have three sons together, so His response was terse, his voice raspy as he sat up in bed, "Are you being sarcastic!" he questioned. "I'm not talking about the comments. I mean the content of the video itself." I sighed inwardly, bracing myself for an early morning discussion about Ryan. "Oh, I see," I replied, trying to keep the weariness out of my voice. "What specifically do you think is untrue, then? Is

it the part about him wanting a baby with Stephanie, prompting his sudden visit to Canada? Or perhaps the insinuation that what we share is merely a doctor–patient relationship?” “The fact that he doesn’t want to get back to you,” Jake emphasized. “That was just pure, unadulterated bullshit, and I’m pretty sure you see through it as well. I couldn’t help but roll my eyes, a gesture of exasperation at Jake’s bluntness. “How about we shift our focus to the part where he shifted the attention to himself and Stephanie! I countered, attempting to steer the conversation away from the direction he is going. “Do you even realize the level of ridicule his name has been subjected to? The mockery has reached absurd levels.” In response, Jake offered a nonchalant shrug, seemingly unaffected by Ryan’s attempts at damage control. “Why are you making it sound like he’s done something extraordinary?” he interjected, his tone tinged with a hint of apathy. “Why are you giving him undue sympathy?” he continued, catching my incredulous gaze. “He caused this entire situation, so why extend your sympathies to him? He’s just trying to mop up the mess he’s created: Staring unblinkingly at Jake, I wondered what has gotten into him. “What exactly did Ryan do?” I retorted sharply, my patience wearing thin “What’s his crime for acknowledging his mistakes and attempting to seek forgiveness? Did he ask to be thrust into the limelight, captured by those intrusive paparazzi?” Jake’s jaw clenched tightly, a manifestation of his mounting frustration. “Are you seriously defending him!” he questioned, his tone filled with incredulity, as if grappling with the reality of my stance. Tam merely attempting to let you see how selfish and shallow you appear at this moment, I retorted, my words calmed since 11:35 AM Chapter 26 “Honestly, Jake, I am at a loss as to what has prompted this change in you, but all I can say is that I am disheartened by the person you seem to be changing into.” His response came swiftly, filled with disbelief and defiance. “The person I am becoming?” he echoed, his eyes widening in a blend of astonishment and indignation. “If my transformation is so displeasing to you, then do not provoke me into being that person.” Consumed by a surge of anger, I found it impossible to remain seated any longer. I rolled off the bed, rising to confront Jake directly. “How did this become about me?” I demanded, my voice tinged with frustration and desperation. “What did I do wrong?” he glared at me. Brushing aside a stray lock of hair, I shook my head in disbelief. “You know what?” I declared, my tone marked by a sense of finality. “I refuse to invest any further time and energy in this futile exchange. I have urgent matters to attend to at the hospital, followed by our medical team’s event coverage later this night. I will not squander precious moments engaging in unwarranted conflict—With that declaration, I stormed into the bathroom, the resounding slam of the door punctuating my anger, By the time the clock struck six in the evening, the handful of medical staff members selected to oversee the healthcare sector at the fashion show had all gathered and made themselves presentable. The team had been instructed to dress smartly yet comfortably, leading many of us to opt for the practical combination of loose–fitting pants, shirts neatly tucked in, and sneakers that matched our attire perfectly. We boarded the hospital bus, which smoothly transported us to the venue. Before the hour reached eight, we had settled into our designated area, fully prepared for the tasks ahead. Throughout the evening, we remained stationed in the room, venturing out only when summoned for specific duties; the majority of attendees sought us out within the confines of our prepared space. After fulfilling our roles for an hour and a half, I took a brief break to attend to personal matters, heading towards the restroom.

It was during this brief break that I happened to spot Ryan engaged in conversation with an individual I found myself in a situation where most would have simply ignored him and walked away, but against my better judgment, I approached him. As he noticed my presence, he promptly dismissed the person he was conversing with, who turned out to be Angelo. "Hey," he greeted with a smile, "what brings you here?" His tone wasn't condescending at all; it was more like he knows I am not dressed rightly for the event "Our hospital is in charge of covering the medical sector for the event" He nodded thoughtfully, his demeanor suddenly taking on a playful tone. "What do you say about being my Cinderella tonight?" I raised an eyebrow, caught off guard by his unexpected proposition, "What exactly do you mean?" I inquired. "I'm asking you to be my date for this event tonight," he clarified, his expression earnest and inviting. I was on the verge of reminding him of his statements during the interview, but I held back. "That won't be possible," I replied instead. "I just came over to thank you for what you did. I believed he deserved my appreciation. Thank you for putting yourself in the line of fire." In response, he flashed me a dimpled smile. "Don't worry, I'm used to their criticism and scrutiny," he assured me. Nodding in acknowledgment, I took a step back. "Well then, if you'll excuse me, I was on my way to the restroom." He nodded in return, graciously stepping aside as I made my way past him. After using the restroom, I retraced my steps back to the medical room, but he was nowhere to be found. As the fashion show drew to a close, we commenced the gradual process of packing up. However, just as we were winding down, a final patient was brought in. Apparently, she had tripped on her heel and tumbled down a flight of stairs, resulting in a sprained ankle I couldn't help but stifle a chuckle when I recognized the patient as Victoria. Since I was the only licensed doctor present at the moment, as the others were busy loading our truck. I swiftly retrieved the necessary equipment from the medical kit. "You're not going to treat me, Victoria insisted, retracting her leg defensively. I couldn't help but roll my eyes. "If I don't treat you,

nobody else in this room can, I pointed out. However, before I could complete my statement, her son interjected, cutting me off. "What is that supposed to mean?" he scolded, his tone dripping with indignation. "Who do you think you are to order others not to treat my mother? His words grated on my nerves, coupled with irritation because he was speaking in my face "Get out of my face, young man," I requested firmly. attempting to push him back. However, he refused to budge and instead grabbed hold of my arm. "What? Are you trying to hit me he exclaimed before I could respond. His arm moved to strike me, and instinctively, I closed my eyes, bracing for the impact. But the blow never landed. Slowly, I opened my eyes to find his hand suspended mid-air, Ryan holding it firmly in place, his eyes dark with fury, 11:15 AM

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Chapter 27 RYAN 1 located the room where the medical teams are staying through the help of one of the staff. Since the event is over, and Lily didn't get to be my date for the night, I figured I should give her a ride back home. On getting to the door, I began to

hear commotion coming from within. At first, I thought that the commotion is being caused by the fact that they team are trying to pack up. However, when I walked in and found a complete stranger, holding onto Lily's arm with his hand halfway in the air, ready to strike her. I made sure the arm remained there, hanging in the air. Maintaining a vice-like grip on his arm, I applied pressure, twisted, and maneuvered, ultimately pinning his hand firmly behind his back. A pained yelp escaped the man's lips, prompting Lily's eyes to snap open in alarm. "Release my son this instant!" hissed the lady who had suffered a fall onstage, her voice dripping with venomous intent. "I will not hesitate to pursue legal action against you for assault]" With a steely glare, I met her threat head-on. I welcome any legal challenges. With a forceful shove, the man stumbled backward, colliding with one of the nearby beds. Turning my attention to Lily, I asked in a bone laced with concern, 'Are you alright, Lily?" She managed a weak nod, her eyes widening as she glanced past my shoulder. "Watch out!" Reacting swiftly to her warning, I spun around abruptly, just as the young man charged toward me with reckless abandon. Acting on instinct, I delivered a powerful blow to his jaw, aiming to inflict enough force to potentially dislocate it. Staggering backward, he crashed to the floor, subdued and incapacitated. The woman's eyes widened, a potent blend of shock and fury coursing through her veins. Despite the obvious urge to rise, she remained seated, thwarted by the injury to her ankle. "How dare you?" she bellowed from her constrained position, her voice reverberating anger. Lily shot a piercing glare at the woman, her frustration evident. "Can't you see he charged at him first she countered, her voice tinged with exasperation. "Ryan was merely defending himself" Even if I hadn't been, who would truly care? "If your son so much as looks at Lily the wrong way again, I'll ensure he finds himself in a far worse predicament than you're in right now." room, evidently responding to a As if summoned by the chaos, the door swung open, admitting a flurry of security personnel who rushed into the ro distress call Seizing the opportunity to present her version of story, the woman wasted no time in vocalizing her beliefs. That young man barged in and initiated an unwarranted assault on my son," she spat out vehemently, her words filled with conviction. The security team conducted a swift scan of the room upon their arrival, their eyes eventually settling on me. Recognition flashed across their faces, prompting a subtle widening of their eyes Both individuals approached me with expressions of genuine concern and remorse etched across their faces. "Mr. Williams, are you okay?" they inquired simultaneously, their voices tinged with worry. In response, the woman's anger flared, her face turning a shade of crimson. "I just informed you that he hit my son, and you're asking him if he's okay?" she retorted incredulously. "Are you kidding me right now?" However, the room remained indifferent to her outburst. Even the security personnel, who had just entered, paid no heed to her, their undivided attention fixed on me. "I am perfectly fine," I assured them, attempting to alleviate their concerns. The man was merely being a nuisance, I explained, "but I handled the Offering a sharp nod, the bald-headed security officer stepped forward, extending an apology on behalf of the team. "We deeply regret any inconvenience caused by him," he conveyed sincerely, "rest assured, we will address the situation promptly and thoroughly." and my Undeterred, the woman continued her tirade, shouting at the security personnel, "Do you even know who I am?! You will regret treating me a son with such disrespect Lily, intervening with authority, chastised her, "Keep quiet Victoria! Cease further embarrassing yourself." As the door

swung open, Angelo strode into the room, his gaze immediately drawn to the obvious tension in the room. "What's going on!" he inquired, turning to one of the security personnel, his voice tinged with concern. As the guard began reciting the events, I shifted my attention to Lily, silently checking in with her amidst the commotion. "Are you finished here?" I asked gently. She nodded in response, her demeanor composed yet determined. "Please, allow me to drive you home, Toller, wanting to 11:36 AM Chapter 27 Π ensure her safety and well-being. However, she shook her head in refusal, her attention now directed towards the injured woman. "Will you allow me to handle that sprain?" she addressed the woman with a compassionate yet firm tone. "No one else here is licensed to provide medical assistance at the moment. Almost on cue, the door opened once more, revealing a young woman entering the room. "Or she can handle it. Lily muttered, acknowledging the newcomer's potential to assist. Stepping forward, she approached the young woman and instructed her to administer first aid to the injured woman. before joining us outside. With one last glance towards the woman, Lily swiftly retrieved her purse and gracefully exited the room. I followed closely behind her, repeating my offer. "Let me drive you home, Lily," I insisted. Once again, she shook her head firmly. "That won't be necessary, Ryan," she replied with resolve. "We have the hospital bus for a reason." Frustration coursed through me, prompting a decisive move. I grasped her forearm, gently but firmly, pulling her to a stop. "There's something important I need to discuss with you, Lily," I asserted, my tone tinged with urgency. "It's been a long night for both of us, and I'm certain we both want nothing more than to retire to bed and rest. Her gaze fixated on my fingers wrapped around her arm, her nose crinkling in discomfort before she shrugged out of my grasp. "What does that have to do with driving me home?" she questioned, her voice filled with curiosity and fatigue. "We can discuss what's on my mind during the drive," I reasoned, attempting to persuade her. "It's a win-win situation for both of us." With a weary sigh, she studied me for a moment before exhaling heavily. "Fine," she relented, her tone laden with exhaustion. "But whatever it you want to discuss had better be very important." As we reached the entrance, Angelo had already circled the car. I hastened to open the back door for Lily, patiently waiting for her to enter before following suit. Thirty minutes into the ride. I found myself stealing occasional glances at her, offering smiles in an attempt to break the silence. Eventually, Lily grew weary of the quietude. "Are you finally going to discuss what you mentioned was important!" she queried, breaking the ice. With a nod. I reached for my phone, intending to dial her number. However, there was no ringing tone or indication that the call had connected. Lily observed my actions with a puzzled expression, her gaze shifting between me and the phone. "Did you block my number?" I ventured, finally addressing the pressing question that had been weighing on my mind. Lily let out a sigh, her hand running down her face in exasperation. "Please tell me this isn't the reason you claimed was so important that prompted me to get into your car? she implored, a note of frustration evident in her voice. Relaxing back into my seat, I blinked at her, my voice strained. "Being unable to reach you is incredibly important to me, I admitted. "But what I really

want to understand is why you chose to block my number. We agreed to maintain civility, didn't we? She met my gaze with a steely glare. "I never agreed to anything of the sort I bit my lip, grappling with the sting of her words. "That still doesn't explain why

you blocked my number, I pressed, a note of frustration seeping into my tone. She observed me in silence for a moment, as if deliberating on a suitable explanation. The realization that she had blocked me without cause cut deeper than I anticipated. "I blocked you because you have no reason to be calling me, Ryan," she finally responded, her words laced with finality. My jaw tightened with a mix of hurt "Lily, I'm asking you to reconsider and unblock me," I pleaded. She remained unyielding. I won't do that, Ryan, she asserted firmly. "Just as easily as you obtained my number, I want you to lose it" "You're the only person I can rely on in Canada during an emergency," I reflected, persisting in my you keep blocking me, that lifeline disappears." attempt to persuade her to unblock me. "But if She shrugged indifferently. "If you ever face an emergency, just call Angelo. He'll always be available to assist you," she suggested casually. A dark chuckle escaped me as I leaned closer. "You have just three days to unblock my number, I informed her, the seriousness of my tone underscoring the urgency. "Just three days." ly be w Rolling her eyes, she brushed off my ultimatum with a dismissive remark. "You'll probably waiting for eternity," she retorted flippantly. ll dial your number every day at six pm, I continued, "If, on the third day, my call doesn't connect, I'll eat shrimp and wait for you to pick up before taking any amihistamines." Her gaze sharpened, incredulous at my declaration. "Have you lost your mind?" she questioned, a mix of disbelief and concern evident in her voice 11:36 AM Chapter 27 I smiled faintly in response, "My life depends on whether you

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Chapter 28 Once more, images of Ryan and me have resurfaced across various corners of the internet. Although the situation isn't as dire as our previous or discussions surrounding us persist. The particular photo in question depicts the moment when I was conversing with Ryan en route to the restroom. It seems that the deliberate distance I maintained between us steered conversations away from us and towards Ryan's choice of accessories for the evening. Additionally, there are snapshots capturing the events of that fateful night in the medical room. The photographer managed to capture the alarming moment when James raised his hand in a threatening manner towards me, in addition to Ryan's timely intervention to protect and defend me The comments, I noticed, weren't solely fixated on me but also included Ryan. They portrayed him as my knight in shining armor, my hero. Interestingly, James seemed to bear the brunt of the criticism this time around, which admittedly brought me a sense of satisfaction. It will be Intriguing to witness how Victoria will handle the challenge of convincing the board to entrust hospital leadership to James amidst the swirling allegations of harassment and abuse tarnishing his reputation across the internet. erve of opening my With a heavy sigh, I let my phone slip from my grasp, deciding to channel my focus onto work instead. Just as I was on the verge laptop, a soft, almost hesitant knock reverberated against the door, preceding its slow, deliberate swing inward. In stepped Jake, his countenance etched with a familiar expression of remorse. "Hey," he greeted, mustering a faint smile.

“Hey,” I responded, offering no reciprocal smile. There seemed to be no incentive to mask my discontent or to extend false cordiality towards him. “I came to see you,” he mumbled softly, his voice barely audible as he settled into the empty seat opposite mine. “I figured,” I replied calmly, leaning back and folding my arms, fixing my unblinking gaze upon him. “So, what do you want to talk about?” “I read the news,” he muttered, his words almost lost in the quiet of the room. I maintained my stolid expression, continuing to stare at him intently. “And? Did you come of me with Ryan?” He here to start another argument because of those pictures He shook his head, his expression earnest. “I came to make sure you’re fine, he corrected me, his tone gentle. “I saw the news about James trying to strike you, and I wanted to check on you to make sure you’re okay.” I almost let out a sigh of relief, sensing his genuine concern and glad that he wasn’t here to argue about Ryan again. “Thank you for checking in, but I’m fine,” I reassured him, offering a small, appreciative smile. “He wasn’t able to follow through with the hit he intended, While credit should rightfully go to Ryan for his intervention, I chose to refrain from mentioning his name in order to maintain a sense of peace between us. Letting out a soft, contemplative sigh, Jake reached forward, his hand extending across the table to tenderly clasp mine within his own. “I will do better, I promise. It seemed that lately, promises flowed freely from him, and I harbored a hope that he would be able to uphold each and every one of them. “I should have been the one there to defend you, but instead, I found myself at home, consumed by needless frustration over something that shouldn’t have even been a concern.” With a deliberate slowness, I blinked, meeting his gaze unwaveringly, “You’re allowing Ryan to become an unnecessary complication in our relationship, and it shouldn’t be that way.” My word that I am committed to doing In response, Jake nodded solemnly, acknowledging the truth in my words. “I understand, and I give you my better.” A gentle smile graced my lips as I responded, “We both need to put in the effort “What steps do I need to take to mend things between us, Lily!” Suggesting a change of venue, I replied, “Let’s save that discussion for home. Recognizing the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, I knew that my workplace wasn’t the appropriate setting for discussing our personal relationship. With a nod Jake rose from his seat, his movements deliberate as he circled the table. Following suit, I stood up as well, meeting him halfway. He enveloped me in a warm embrace. I love you, Lily. Never forget that.” Returning his embrace, I affirmed, “And I chose you, Jake. Never forget that.” He chuckled softly, planting a tender kiss on my temple before gently pulling away. “I’ll let you from the table where it had been left earlier, he added. ” see you at home later,” get back to your work now. Retrieving his phone “Sure,” I replied, offering him a faint smile as he exited my office. Settling back into my chair, I had barely begun to refocus on my tasks when my phone began to ring. I glanced at the caller ID and saw Becky’s name flashing on the screen. 1:36 AM 19 Chapter 28 “What’s up, girl?” she greeted the moment I answered the call. Feeling suddenly drained from the day’s events, I mustered a weak smile. “I’m fine,” I replied, though the weariness in my voice betrayed my true feelings. Becky’s voice carried through the phone with a soft chuckle, her tone laced with amusement rather than judgment. “Are you sure about that?” she queried. “Why are you and the same man constantly popping up all over the internet these days? Her words held a teasing quality, not an ounce of condemnation in them. “And isn’t it amusing how they’ve taken to calling his fine ass your knight in shining armor!” I couldn’t suppress a

chuckle at her remark. "His fine ass?" I repeated, a smile tugging at the corners of my lips. "Since when did Ryan become the object of your admiration?" I've always found him rather attractive, Lily," Becky deadpanned, her attempt at seriousness failing spectacularly as laughter spilled from her lips. But let's face it, being good-looking doesn't absolve him of crazy asshole behavior. He's more akin to the devil in Prada." Her colorful analogy prompted a burst of laughter from me. "Has anyone ever mentioned to you that you're certifiably insane, Becky?" You never miss an opportunity to remind me," she retorted playfully, the warmth of her tone evident even through the phone. "But on a more serious note, how's Jake handling all of this now?" she probed, smoothly transitioning the conversation. "You mentioned he was rather upset about The last picture." At the mere mention of Jake, it felt like a weight descended upon me, pulling at my spirits. "He just left a few minutes ago, I responded quietly. He's more concerned about the fact that someone almost struck me than the pictures of me and Ryan." There was a brief pause on Becky's end as she absorbed my words. "So, that's good news, right?" she asked cautiously. "Of course," I agreed, though I couldn't shake the lingering sense of unease. When Jake walked through that door just moments ago, for yet another argument. Then why do you sound like that, Lily! Becky pressed gently, her concern evident in her voice. I braced myself I let out a weary sigh. "I don't know, Becky, I admitted honestly. It felt like walking on a minefield whenever I was around Jake lately. "It's almost as if it's exhausting to even speak or be with him. Despite my earnest desire for our relationship to thrive, Jake's behavior was making it increasingly challenging. "It's like I'm constantly walking on eggshells around him" "What exactly is going on, Lily?" Becky inquired. "I don't know," I confessed, the frustration evident in my tone. One moment, we were blissfully happy, and the next, we found ourselves embroiled in arguments. "He always seems to find something to argue about, especially when it comes to Ryan. Last time, he even blamed me for it. Becky offered her perspective, suggesting. "Maybe he's just feeling jealous. You guys really need to sit down and have a heart-to-heart talk about this. Nodding in agreement, I shared, "Yeah, I'm planning to have a conversation with him tonight. Hopefully, we can find a way to address his insecurities regarding Ryan."

Curiosity took hold of Becky as she moved into Ryan's side of the equation. "But what's preventing Ryan from going back? I bumped into Stephanie the other day, and it got me wondering why Ryan is still around if the woman who should be accompanying him to the fertility specialist is in New York. ters to attend to, I offered, I hadn't disclosed to Jake or Becky that Ryan had canceled his session with Dr. Sarah. "Maybe he has some business matters to not going into the specifics of his reasons. After all, his personal affairs were no longer my concern. "Or maybe you are the business he has to run, Becky asserted with a hint of speculation. "Why do I get the feeling that he's trying to win you back?" "Let's not go into that, Becky, I pleaded feeling a surge of frustration. "Even if he does want me back, it's irrelevant because I have no interest in going back to him. I've moved on." Becky fell silent, her response weighted with a sense of caution. "Never say y never, Lily," she breathed out softly. "Never say never." "Now you're just aggravating me," I retorted, feeling my patience wane. Just then, the emergency bell chimed, signaling a diversion. "I have to get back to work, Becky," I informed her,

grateful for the interruption. "Til talk to you later. With that, I ended the call, hastily grabbing my lab coat as I rushed out of my office to attend to the emergency.

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Posted by Adminh, ?

Chapter 29 RYAN I'm utterly astounded that that imbecile dared to raise his hand against Lily. Seriously, who does he think he is? What gives him the audacity to even consider such an action? Not a single hair on her head should be harmed, with or without my consent. As I gazed out at the bustling streets, clutching a cup of scalding coffee, I struggled to quell the raging storm of anger again. I asked, trying to refocus. ger within me. "What's his name?" "James Adams," Angelo replied. "He's Victoria Adams' son. Victoria is known as one of the top event planners in Canada. Stepping away from the window, I made my way over to the sofa and sank into its soft cushions. "So, what's James up to these days?" "He's a surgeon," Angelo informed me, his eyes scanning the details recorded in the file grasped firmly within his hand. "Graduated from the University of Colombia, he made his return to Canadian soil three years back, following the passing of his father." A sigh escaped me, mingled with a hint of frustration as I reflected on how much simpler things would have been if James had just stuck to his profession. His silly actions have dragged me into business, something that could have been avoided altogether. But Angelo wasn't done yet. He cleared his throat. "Here's where it gets interesting," he continued, commanding my undivided attention once more. "Victoria's brother was once wedded to the woman who previously held ownership of the hospital now under Ms. Lily's management." The pieces began to fall into place. Their shared history hinted at a level of acquaintance beyond mere passing familiarity. "What's with the violence if they know each other!?" Angelo's response was swift and incisive. Unless their sights are set on Lily's hospital," he suggested, his words carrying the weight of possibility. The sense of entitlement can blind one to the consequences of their actions. I nodded in agreement, acknowledging the truth in his words. "So, where does James currently practice his profession?" "He works as a surgeon at Central Hospital," Angelo replied, his voice steady as he provided the pertinent information. However, my attention seemed elsewhere, lost in the flow of my thoughts. Sensing my distraction, Angelo cleared his throat, breaking through the haze of my contemplation. "I've been thinking," he began cautiously. "perhaps it's best if you refrain from involving yourself in their affairs." My brows furrowed in confusion as I redirected my focus towards him. "What do you mean by that!" I inquired, seeking clarification. "I mean, perhaps it's not wise to seek retribution, he elaborated. "Your recent prominence in the media hasn't exactly been for positive reasons." A frown creased my forehead as I locked eyes with him, determination flickering in the depths of my gaze. "I want him behind bars for assault, and I expect you to ensure it happens," I asserted firmly. The mere thought of James laying a hand on Lily filled me with a righteous fury. If I hadn't intervened when I did, the outcome could have been far worse. "And don't do that again." Confusion flickered across Angelo's features as he mumbled, "Do what, sir!" I gritted my

teeth, my tone steely. "Don't presume to advise me on what I should or shouldn't do, I articulated, my words laced with a palpable intensity. "Not unless I explicitly request it." He nodded. "I apologize for crossing the line sir." He pulled out his phone. "I will make the call to have him arrested." He slowly retreated from the living room. "I want him in there for a week!" he closed the door softly behind. Later in the day, I decided to handle business. Angelo as usual handled the steering as he is the only one who drives with calm and ease amongst my security. "Are you going to say what's on your mind?" I snapped at him. He has been sparing me glances through the rear-view mirror occasionally, thinking I will not take notice of in. "Are you still upset over the way I spoke to you earlier?" He shook his head. "I already got use to your method of communication." He replied. "Have you seen the news?" he asked me. "What on earth are they blabbering about me now? I muttered exasperatedly, my fingers swiping through the news feed on my phone. With a deep furrow etched between my brows, I delved into the articles, parsing through the words with intense concentration. While it's admittedly a relief to stumble upon some positive coverage for once, the lingering unease gnawed at me, knowing that Lily is once again thrust into the unforgiving glare of the spotlight. 11:36 AM Chapter 20 Angelo's interruption sliced through the tension, pulling me away from the screen momentarily. "Your father called while you were in the shower, he relayed, his tone tinged with a hint of weariness. "He's absolutely livid about the news." It's like clockwork with him, always finding some reason to be riled up. Perhaps that's where I inherited my lack of anger management. "He also made it abundantly clear that you've been neglecting his calls and insisted that you should give him a ring." The mere thought of entertaining that conversation sent a shiver down my spine. No way am I dialing his number now. He can stew in his anger until I return to New York. "And about those pictures, Angelo continued, his voice tinged with genuine concern, "do you have any inclination to address them?" Raising my phone once more, I fixated on the image displayed before me. "No, let it be," I murmured to myself, a smirk tugging at the corners of my lips. Let the controversy brew. The more discord the couple have over our photos circulating online, the better my chances of rekindling things with Lily. After all, no woman desires a relationship devoid of peace of mind. Just as I contemplated the potential benefit of the scandal, my phone buzzed in my palm. Glancing down, my mood soured upon seeing Stephanie's name flashing on the screen. Swiping to accept the call, I brought the device to my ear with a heavy sigh. "What do you want?" I greeted her tersely, bracing myself for the impending confrontation. Stephanie's scoff echoed through the line, "Is that any way to address your woman, Ryan?" she chided, her tone laced with irritation. When met with silence on my end, she scoffed once more. "What's the deal with those pictures of you and Lily plastered everywhere!" Leaning back in my seat. I gazed out of the window, my thoughts drifting. "Surely you didn't dial my number just to inquire about that," I retorted, my voice tinged with indifference. She sighed heavily, her voice tinged with dejection. "When are you coming back, Ryan?" she whispered, her tone pleading. I'm sure you don't have that much business over there, so why prolong your stay and drive me crazy with these pictures? Once again, I offered no response, feeling no obligation to justify my actions to her. "What's going on, Ryan?" she pressed, her voice fraught with frustration and concern. "If you truly wanted to know, Stephanie, you wouldn't have left without so much as a word, I retorted sharply, the sting of her sudden departure still fresh in my

mind. She sighed again, the sound laden with resignation. "Is that what this is about? Are you trying to punish me for leaving?" "Punish you?" I scoffed incredulously, my laughter tinged with bitterness. "Don't flatter yourself. Stephanie. I have things to attend to. With that, I ended the call abruptly, feeling no inclination to indulge her further. Attempting to dial Lily's number next, I found it still blocked, eliciting a surge of frustration. "Lily thinks I'm bluffing about the shrimp." I muttered to myself. Angelo shot another glance at me through the rear-view mirror, his curiosity evident. "She still hasn't unblocked you?" His words held a hint of amusement, and I could swear the smirk danced across his face. "But you're blunting, right?" "I'm not," I replied flatly, my tone devoid of any hint of jest. His eyes widened in disbelief, a comical expression crossing his face. "Do you have a death wish?" he exclaimed, his shock palpable. "Refusing your injection after consuming something you're highly allergic to is akin to courting death." "She's testing my patience." I muttered, more to myself than to Angelo, the frustration simmering just beneath the surface. "But I'll show her just how resolute I can be. Later that evening, ng, after wrapping up the day's tasks, I indulged in a shower, preparing to call it a night when my phone broke the silence

. Glancing at the screen, I noted the unfamiliar number and briefly debated ignoring the call. However, on a whim, I decided to answer. "Ryan Williams, I greeted. "I sensed you were avoiding my call," my father's low yet authoritative voice filled my ears, a pang of regret gnawing at me for not heeding my instincts. "I haven't been avoiding your calls; I've simply been occupied," I replied, making a beeline for the bar to pour myself a drink, knowing I'd need it for this conversation. "Occupied with what exactly?" he countered sharply, his tone a mix of incredulity and concern. "You've been absent from the office for two weeks, haven't made any strides toward starting a family with Stephanie, who's been here for over a week, and you're not even considering marriage! How 11:36 AM Chapter 29 do you plan to safeguard your position at the office?" I'm attempting to do both, I argued, feeling the weight of his expectations pressing down on me. "Trying to do both of what?" his voice rose in frustration. "Marriage and starting a family. Though the latter takes precedence over the former," I explained, bracing myself for his reaction. "What does that even mean? his frustration was palpable, his words laced with disappointment. "It means I'm in the process of courting the woman who will eventually become the mother of my children." Chapter 30

Becoming Strangers Again

Posted by Adminh, ?

Chapter 30 LILY Jake and I sat down and had an extensive conversation where we delved into our feelings and concerns. He made a heartfelt promise to address his feelings of jealousy towards Ryan, and I could sense his genuine commitment through the intensity of his gaze. In response, I offered reassurance by gently reminding him that Ryan's stay in Canada was only temporary, which seemed to alleviate some of his apprehensions. As today marks Jake's birthday, I find myself contemplating various ways to celebrate the occasion. One idea that crosses my mind is treating him to a luxurious spa experience followed by a delightful dinner. However, before I could initiate

any plans, Jake pleasantly surprises me by arranging for a bouquet of flowers to be delivered to my office. The accompanying card not only expresses his thoughtful gesture but also hints at an evening dinner reservation set for 6 pm. Due to a scheduling clash between my dinner reservation and the spa appointment I had previously arranged, I promptly contacted the spa to request a rescheduling of my appointment to the following day. Although they graciously accommodated my request, it did come with an additional fee to cover the incurred inconvenience. As the clock struck five, marking the end of my workday, I made a quick stop to the salon to go through the process of fixing my hair before proceeding with the evening's plans. Departing from my usual curls, I opted to have them straightened, desiring a subtle change in appearance for the night ahead. Upon returning home, I was greeted with a text from Jake, notifying me of the impending arrival of a limousine to transport me to our dinner destination. However, mindful of the time consumed at the salon, I politely requested a brief extension to my preparation time, recognizing the need to ensure a perfect makeup and look for tonight. As I finished applying my makeup and securing my hair into a sleek ponytail, the clock ticked closer to eight o'clock. At last, the limousine pulled up, and I gracefully stepped inside as our journey commenced. Before departing, the driver handed me another delicate flower, adding a touch of elegance to the evening. After thirty minutes of anticipation, the car came to a halt at the driveway of a charming restaurant. Stepping out, I was greeted by a courteous gentleman who guided me inside. As I crossed the threshold, it became evident that Jake had spared no expense, having reserved the entire venue for our exclusive celebration. Despite the grand gesture, I couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt. It was Jake's birthday, and here I was, being treated to such extravagance. In my mind, the roles should have been reversed, with me as the one orchestrating the lavish affair. However, Jake's generosity and thoughtfulness knew no bounds. As our eyes met across the room, Jake rose from his seat and made his way towards my side of the table, his genuine warmth radiating with every step. Standing by my side of the table, he patiently awaited my approach. With a tender gesture, Jake reached out and gently took hold of my hand, pressing a soft kiss upon it. "You look absolutely stunning," he complimented, his eyes twinkling with admiration as they danced across my features. I couldn't help but offer a shy smile in response. "Thank you," I murmured softly, feeling a warmth spread through me at his words. As he pulled out the chair for me, I settled into my seat, unable to contain the confusion bubbling within me any longer. "What's going on, Jake? Today is your birthday, and I should be the one orchestrating all of this for you, not the other way around." A warm smile graced Jake's lips as he leaned back in his seat. "I've caused you enough heartache and stress in these past few weeks. This is my way of seeking redemption. "But you could have chosen any other day," I reasoned, my brow furrowing with uncertainty. "Today should be about you." With a gentle shake of his head, Jake offered a reassuring smile. "Every day is about you, Lily." As our dinner was served, we ate our meals, enveloped in a comfortable silence punctuated by occasional glances exchanged between Jake and me. Each time our eyes met, a smile effortlessly graced my lips, though we continued our meal without much conversation. The evening unfolded in a serene manner until our plates were cleared, signaling the conclusion of our main course. With the arrival of dessert, the atmosphere shifted, and we found ourselves engaged in light-hearted chatter, savoring each bite of sweetness while

exchanging anecdotes and observations. As the final crumbs of dessert disappeared, I seized the opportune moment to present Jake with his birthday gift. Reaching into the medium-sized purse I had carefully selected for the occasion, I retrieved a neatly wrapped box and slid it across the table towards him. His eyes lit up with genuine appreciation as he accepted the gift, a warm smile gracing his features. "Happy birthday, Jake," I whispered softly, my voice filled with heartfelt warmth. "May all your wishes and prayers find fulfillment in the days ahead." He gazed at me with a certain intensity before a sudden smile illuminated his face. "I hope so too," he murmured, his eyes dropping to the gift. Seeking permission, he inquired, "Can I open it?" I nodded, granting him the freedom to unveil the surprise. As he unwrapped the box, his smile widened upon discovering the Rolex nestled within. "Wow," he exclaimed, admiration evident in his voice. "This is truly lovely." Yet, I couldn't help but reminisce about the Lamborghini he had gifted me during our anniversary, recognizing that his reaction was likely influenced by the joy of receiving a gift from me. "I'm glad you like it," I responded, appreciating the simple pleasure of bringing him happiness. The mood shifted as a soft melody began playing in the background. Jake carefully placed the box aside and gracefully rose to his feet. He approached me, extending his hand with a charming request. "Can I have a dance with you, miss?" he asked. Chuckling softly, I nodded in agreement before placing my hand in his outstretched palm. With his gentle guidance, I rose from my seat and allowed him to lead me to the open space of the room. His hand encircled my waist, while mine found its place on his shoulder. Together, we swayed in harmony to the melodious rhythm enveloping us. "I love you, Lily," he whispered softly into my ear, his breath warm against my skin. "Not a single day goes by without me marveling at how fortunate I am to have you in my life." A smile tugged at the corners of my lips as his words washed over me. "We both hit the jackpot when we found each other, Jake," I replied, feeling a surge of affection welling within me. He shook his head gently, his voice filled with quiet conviction. "No," he countered, his gaze sincere. "I'm the lucky one. To have crossed paths with the most remarkable soul, and to be welcomed into her world alongside her beautiful children—it's a privilege beyond measure. To be embraced and treated as family by them is the greatest gift life could offer." He leaned in, his eyes twinkling with affection, and gently pressed his lips against mine in a soft, lingering kiss. I melted into his embrace, losing track of time as we savored the moment together. When he finally pulled back, it felt as though an eternity of bliss had passed in that single embrace. "Have I mentioned how utterly breathtaking you look tonight?" he whispered, his voice filled with admiration, causing a warm flush to spread across my cheeks. A playful smile danced across my lips as I replied, "I do recall, but I must admit, I never tire of hearing it." His gaze softened. "You are truly breathtaking," he repeated, his words wrapping around me. "I could spend an eternity simply staring at your beauty and never grow weary of it." Grateful for his words, I couldn't resist teasing him lightly. "And you, my dear, are not too shabby yourself," I teased, eliciting a hearty chuckle from him as he pulled away slightly, still wearing that infectious smile. As I basked in the warmth of his compliments, his next action caught me completely off guard.

With a sudden resolve, he gracefully sank to one knee, producing a small, elegantly wrapped box from his pocket. "Will you do me the honor of making me the happiest man

alive by agreeing to take my last name?" he asked, his eyes shimmering with hope and fear, as if the entire universe held its breath whilst waiting for my answer. I blinked at him, the small smile that had adorned my lips slowly fading. "Is this because of Ryan?" I questioned, my gaze searching his for any telltale signs. His eyes widened a fraction, and he shook his head vehemently. "Of course not, he reassured, the sincerity in his voice evident. I scrutinized his reaction, still grappling with the idea. "I've been wanting to do this for a very long time," he explained earnestly. "But today just felt like the right time. My decision to make you my wife has nothing to do with Ryan." Despite his assurance, a lingering doubt persisted within me, and I could sense that Jake was aware of it 100, can plan the wedding "In an effort to prove that my intentions are sincere and have nothing to do with Ryan, we can wait, he proposed. "We can pl whenever you want—this year, next year, anytime that suits you." The proposition seemed fair, allowing me the freedom to choose the timing that felt right. Nodding in acknowledgment, I extended my hand, and he delicately slipped the ring onto my finger.