

## Chapter 3 Rising Above The Ashes

Elias let out a sigh. "The Parkers are our only real enemies," he said wearily. "Going against them means the end of everything we've built. But after what they did to you..." His hands clenched into fists. "I'll spend my last breath getting justice."

"It wasn't Maverick," Aurora interrupted, her voice steady. She stood straighter, meeting her father's eyes. "And I wasn't violated."

The truth she'd been too ashamed to speak in her past life rang clear in the hospital room.

Though bruises marked her slender calves and rope burns circled her wrists, she had protected what mattered most—because someone had given everything to keep her safe.

Stunned silence followed her declaration. Her father stared at her, mouth slightly open. At the edge of her vision, she caught Naomi's face twisting with barely concealed shock.

Naomi's thoughts swirled with confusion. 'How could this be possible? Twenty hours with those thugs, and she emerged untouched?' she wondered.

"I want an official medical examination," Aurora continued firmly. "The public deserves to know the truth."

Before her time travel, shame had sealed her lips, letting rumors destroy not only her reputation but her father's spirit. She wouldn't make that mistake again.

Tears of relief welled in Elias's eyes, though concern creased his brow. "Why put yourself through more scrutiny?"

She replied, "Because I won't let our family's reputation be tarnished by lies." This time around, she would live with her head held high.

Elias squeezed her shoulder. "I'll bring in the best doctor tomorrow."

Despite his usually stern demeanor, he swelled with pride at his daughter's resilience. He had been worried she wouldn't bounce back, but seeing her grow up overnight and hearing her brave words, his heart went out to her.

"Thank you, Dad," she said quietly.

"But if not the Parkers, then who?" He shook his head. As CEO of Edge Technology, Yuresland's largest tech company, he knew few would dare target his only child. "Who else has that kind of power?"

Aurora's gaze slid meaningfully to Naomi, making her shift uncomfortably.

"Dad, give me time. I'll uncover the truth," Aurora said.

"Absolutely not." Elias's tone brooked no argument. "Let me handle this. You focus on recovery. The guards are right outside if you need anything."

She nodded and allowed herself one more moment in her father's embrace before letting him go, though she had no intention of staying on the sidelines.

Elias felt a weight lift off his shoulders and led Evelyn and Naomi out of the hospital room. After everyone had left, Naomi slipped back in.

She clutched Aurora's hand with manufactured concern. "I didn't mean to upset you earlier. I was just shocked you'd think I could hurt you. Are you sure you want to be alone?"

Aurora withdrew her hand without sparing Naomi a glance. "Yes, I'm quite sure."

"What happened in there?" Naomi pressed. "Why defend the Parkers? And how can you be so cold to Scott? He saved your life, and now he's in intensive care. Don't you have a heart?"

"He's my bodyguard. Protection is his job." Aurora's tone was arctic.

"But you swore you'd only marry him. This is perfect. Use his heroic rescue to win your dad's approval." Naomi's hands tightened into fists. She couldn't believe Aurora could be so cruel and say something so callous.

"I was naive. Some bodyguard he turned out to be." A bitter smile touched Aurora's lips. "Don't worry, his medical bills are covered."

In her past life, believing Scott as her savior had led her to push for his acceptance into the Sage family—a mistake that had cost everything.

Naomi stared at her in disbelief. "When did you become so heartless about love?"

Naomi was stunned by Aurora's sudden coldness. Before the

kidnapping, Aurora had been completely infatuated with Scott. Now, even after he had "saved" her, she showed no gratitude or affection. Instead, she was determined to cut all ties with him.

"If you're so concerned, he's all yours." Aurora noted Naomi's every reaction with clinical detachment. "Now leave. I need rest."

After Naomi was kicked out, her face darkened behind the closed door, her eyes burning with hatred. She looked ready to tear Aurora apart.

Alone at last, Aurora let her mask slip. Her reflection in the window flickered against the city lights as a decade of suppressed hatred surged through her veins.

The kidnapping was still hazy—she'd been drugged, waking only after her rescue. But one memory remained crystal clear: someone taking a bullet meant for her.

She'd been manipulated into believing Scott was her savior while despising Maverick, the man who had truly protected her and had ultimately died for her. That untouchable man who stood at the pinnacle of society had sacrificed everything in her name.

Desperate to know his fate in this timeline, she quickly freshened up, using makeup to mask her pallor before changing into clothes from the closet.

When she emerged in sunglasses and heels, her footsteps echoing against the marble, the guards couldn't help but stare.

Everyone expected the boss's sheltered princess to be crushed by trauma. Instead, she seemed to radiate an even fiercer strength.

"Miss Sage, we can't let you leave," one guard stepped forward.

Aurora arched an eyebrow. "Try to stop me?"

"No, but we're responsible for your safety," he replied.

"You're fired," she cut him off coolly. "Follow me and I'll report you for harassment."

She strode past them, spine straight and head high. Her natural authority left them paralyzed long enough for her to disappear around the corner. By the time they recovered, she was already gone.