

Reborn and Freed: It's Your Turn Now

Chapter 2

Mom flew into a rage, shocked that I dared to defy her so openly. Her composure was gone, and she raised her hand to slap me.

Meanwhile, Willem stood off to the side, watching the drama unfold.

Honestly, he was already annoyed by my stunt. If I hadn't been somewhat good-looking, he probably would've left by now.

However, I wasn't the Zara from my past life—the pushover they knew.

I grabbed Mom's hand and yanked it away. A cold smile tugged at the corners of my lips as I calmly said, "Give it up. I'm not marrying him."

Without waiting for a response, I picked up my bag and walked out.

Mom collapsed back into her chair and started hurling curses at my retreating figure.

"I spent years busting my back to put you through college, and now that you've got a job, you think you can talk back to me? I say one thing, and you've got ten smartass replies! What a curse! To think I raised an ungrateful brat like you!"

Her words nearly made me laugh out of sheer disbelief.

How did she even have the nerve to say that?

From as far back as I could remember, Mom had never treated me kindly. I had been the one stuck doing all the dirty work around the house.

Dad had been worse.

Every time he got drunk and didn't like the look of me, I had become his punching bag. New wounds had layered on top of old scars, and my skin had been a constant mess of bruises.

In stark contrast, Jake, who was only a year younger than me, had been spoiled rotten. Mom and Dad had given him everything he wanted, and he had grown up rude and entitled.

Jake had never treated me like a sister. He had mimicked our parents, hitting and cursing at me whenever he pleased.

Their blatant favoritism had been right in my face, reminding me of the cold, brutal reality that maybe they didn't love me at all.

I remembered one particular incident clearly.

It had been during the second semester of my sophomore year, the first weekend after I had come home from being bullied at school.

I had had a cut on my face, and my hair had been a tangled mess.

It had been obvious I'd been beaten up, but when I had walked in the door, Mom hadn't even glanced at me. Instead, she had sat at her vanity to apply makeup.

She must've sensed me standing there because she had cast a sideways glance my way, though her eyes had never left the mirror.

"Wash the dishes, then clean my room and your brother's. I'll be picking him up from school. Make sure dinner's ready by the time we get back."

I had never had a room of my own. I had slept in a cramped, musty storage room, where the air had always felt heavy and oppressive.

Mom had kept talking as she had admired herself in the mirror, pleased with her appearance. Upon realizing I hadn't moved, she finally turned to look at me.

When her eyes had fallen on my torn backpack and the missing buttons on my shirt, her anger had flared instantly. She had grabbed a wooden stick nearby and beaten me with it.

Crying from the pain, I had tried to explain that kids at school had been picking on me. Yet, that had only fueled her anger, and her blows had come down even harder.

"You must've done something to provoke them! People don't just bully for no reason! We're not made of money, you know! How do you ruin your clothes and backpack in less than a year? You're useless!"

I had begged her to stop, but it had been like she couldn't hear me.

Thankfully, the phone had rung just then, and Mom had paused, dropping the stick.

It had been Jake's teacher calling to tell her that he had beaten up a classmate. That news had only enraged Mom further.

She had shouted, "How dare you accuse my son? He would never bully anyone!"

Without sparing me another glance, Mom had then rushed to slip on her shoes and had hurried out the door, heading to Jake's school.

It had turned out that Jake had indeed hit his classmate, and Mom had ended up paying a thousand dollars in medical bills to settle the matter.

But when she had come home and had seen the small scrape on his forehead, she had been so concerned she had rushed him to the hospital for a full check-up.

I had stood in the dark corner of the room as I watched them.

The glaring contrast between their treatment of him and me had been suffocating.