

Three Hearts, Three Roads...

The city lights reflected off the wet pavement as three women walked side by side through downtown, their heels and boots hitting the ground in rhythm like they owned the street. People slowed down, some staring in admiration, others simply curious about the confidence that surrounded them. Mariah, Sage, and Lauren had been inseparable for years. Three women in their early thirties, three completely different personalities, and three complicated journeys when it came to love.

Mariah walked on the left, calm and composed as always.

She carried herself like a woman who knew her worth. Her long natural curls framed her face, and her classy pink blouse and black skirt made her look both elegant and powerful. She was the type of woman people noticed the moment she walked into a room. But her life wasn't as perfect as it seemed.

Mariah, 31, was the heart of the trio. Mariah was a single mother to a 13-year-old son who had recently discovered the rebellious stage of teenage life. Between working hard in her career and trying to guide her son in the right direction, she rarely had time for herself. Still, when it came to love, she refused to settle. As a single mother who balanced raising her child, her faith, and a successful career. From the outside, she looked like she had it all together. But behind the strength was a woman who had been hurt more times than she could count. Mariah believed deeply in God and the life He wanted for her. Because of that, her standards were high and she refused to lower them just because she was lonely. She wanted a man of God. A man who took care of himself, who worked out, who could provide, who communicated openly, who was emotionally available, gentle when needed, and good with her child. She wasn't looking for a father because her daughter had one. What she wanted was a man who values the fact that they come as a package deal and someone who could lead. Mariah was looking for a husband! But dating never seemed to work out. One man would text her all day but never make plans to see her or take her out on a date. Another would seem interested until his intentions slowly turned sexual. Some were inconsistent. Some sent mixed signals. Some ghosted her completely. Mariah would quietly remove them from her life the moment she saw the red flags. No cut cards.

"Next," she would say calmly.

"Maybe your standards are just too high," Sage would tease sometimes.

Mariah would shake her head. And say, "I'm not asking for perfect... just intentional."

Still, the constant ghosting and shallow attention sometimes reopened the old wounds of abandonment she carried deep inside. Being attractive made it worse. Many men wanted her body, but very few wanted to truly know her heart. If they actually take the time to get to know her they would know that she is very smart and super intellectual. Yet deep down, part of her wondered if she would ever find someone who matched both her standards and her heart.

In the **middle** of the trio walked **Sage**.

Sage, 30, had been Mariah's best friend since they were little girls running through their neighborhood barefoot. She was the complete opposite of Mariah in almost every way. Sage was carefree, a little stubborn, and lived life in the moment. She loved music, parties, laughter, and excitement. Getting into relationships was never hard for her. Men were drawn to her energy. The problem wasn't finding a man. Men struggled to keep up with her.

When Sage went out, the entire room noticed. Her long knotless braids swung behind her as she laughed loudly, danced freely, and lit up the night. But Sage had a weakness. Rude boys. The problem was which man she chose. Sage had a habit of falling for the bad ones. The charming ones who made her laugh but couldn't stay loyal, the exciting ones who made life feel like an adventure but couldn't be trusted. The reckless ones. The exciting ones who promised everything and delivered nothing. And deep down, no matter who she dated, a part of her heart still belonged to her ex. Everyone could see he didn't value her. Everyone except Sage.

"He just needs to grow up," she'd say whenever the topic came up.

Mariah would sigh, knowing Sage deserved so much better.

Then there was **Lauren**.

Lauren, 32, Lauren was the quiet storm of the group. A tattoo artist with a short burgundy pixie cut and ink decorating her arms and stomach was the wild card of the group. Mariah and Sage met her in high school, and somehow she became the third piece that completed their circle. Lauren was a tattoo artist who spent her days surrounded by ink, loud music, and people from every walk of life. She had a tough exterior, sharp humor, and a reputation for dating men who brought chaos with them. But the truth was simple. Lauren liked toxic men because she was toxic too. Trust didn't come easy for her. Every relationship seemed to end the same way with screaming matches, broken things, sometimes even police lights flashing outside. Yet somehow, after every disaster, she'd laugh it off like it was nothing. But Lauren carried a secret she never told anyone. Well... almost anyone.

One night, while sitting on the balcony with Sage, she admitted it.

“I think I’m in love with Mariah.”

Sage nearly dropped her drink.

Lauren quickly looked away, staring out at the city lights. “I know she’d never see me like that,” Lauren said quietly. “She wants the churchgoing, suit-wearing type... not some tattooed mess like me.”

Sage didn’t laugh this time. Because deep down, she knew Lauren’s feelings were real.

Three women.

Mariah searching for a godly man who would truly see her heart.

Sage chasing excitement while still holding onto a love that refused to grow up.

Lauren hiding feelings she believed could never be returned.

Each of them looking for love in their own way. Each of them carrying wounds, hopes, and secrets. And none of them realized yet... That their biggest lessons about love were still waiting for them.

TO BE CONTINUED...