

Once Cast 194

Chapter 194 A Calculated Fall

Zera tried to keep her composure, her chest rising and falling in sharp, uneven breaths.

She said, "As long as they stay together, they're still legally married. They're in the same social circle, so having dinner with friends is perfectly normal, right?"

Shirley glanced at her and asked, "Did that Winter guy ever say when he plans to bring you and Orson to Winter Estate?"

Hearing that, Zera's expression darkened.

Annoyed, she snapped, "Mom! You know exactly whose child Orson is, don't you?"

Shirley fell silent.

Zera continued, "Tyrone might feel guilty toward me, but he's not stupid. I worked hard to make him admit Orson is his and promise to keep it secret. Can't you see he already regrets it?"

She added, "The only reason he's keeping it together is because he made a promise to me and still feels guilty. That's just the way he is. How could I ask for more right now?"

Seeing her daughter so worked up, Shirley tried to calm her down. "Don't get too caught up, Zera. Men are all the same—they always want what they can't have. You're his first love. Nobody can ever replace that."

Zera closed her eyes, exhausted.

Yes, she had been Tyrone's first love.

But she had spent an entire year chasing him before he even agreed to date her.

During their time together, Tyrone was distant, never showing desire.

If he had, she wouldn't have spent years abroad, patiently waiting for another chance to get close to him.

She had used every trick she could think of to get back into his life.

Shirley said, "You worked hard to catch such a big catch—don't let him slip away. The Winters are one of the richest families in Vleka. Most people would never even dream of that kind of opportunity."

She added, "Your nephews' chance to study abroad depends on you. If you have to, just listen to that old hag in the Winters and take a big gamble."

Zera's eyes flickered with uncertainty.

She said, "Mom, Virginia isn't naive. What if she's setting me up?"

Shirley urged her, "If you don't risk anything, you get nothing. You've worked too hard—don't tell me you're giving up now."

Zera leaned forward, resting her head on the steering wheel, a pounding headache setting in.

She had spent years building this plan to get close to Tyrone—there was no way she'd just give up.

When she was little, Shirley would wait until after dark to buy discounted bruised fruit to save

money.

She'd cut away the rotten parts, keeping only the good bits—most of the time, just a tiny piece remained.

Growing up, Zera and her brother never ate a whole apple once.

When she finally got to college, she secretly kept a pair of ballet shoes she found and didn't return them.

A classmate accused her of stealing, calling her a thief. For a whole semester, she was bullied and called poor—until the ringleader transferred.

From that moment, she swore she'd become rich someday.

Like people say, marrying rich beats studying hard.

Tyrone was her shortcut to wealth.

After calming down a little, Zera touched up her makeup in the car.

When she was done, she leaned close to Shirley and whispered a few words. Then, they got out together.

Over an hour later, Aella came out of the restaurant with Tyrone, Brad, and Sayer.

Sayer, who always liked to get involved, pointed ahead. "Hey, what's happening over there? Why is there such a big crowd?"

Brad tugged at Aella and Tyrone's sleeves. "Let's go check it out."

They walked closer.

Shirley lay unconscious by the side of the road, while Zera cried, begging bystanders for help.

Seeing Tyrone, Zera sobbed even harder. “Tyrone, my mom fainted! Please, I’m begging you, help me!”

The people nearby hesitated, not daring to move. Tyrone grabbed Aella’s wrist and pulled her closer.

He said, “You’re a doctor. Please take a look.”

Aella pulled free and stood beside Shirley, her expression cold.

Her eyes

fell on Shirley’s slightly trembling eyelashes.

She said to Tyrone, “She’s fine.”

Zera slumped beside Shirley, crying. “Dr. Reid, you’re a doctor! My mom fainted on the street, and not only are you refusing to help, but you even say something like that?”

In front of the crowd, Zera deliberately called her “Dr. Reid” instead of “Mrs. Winter.”

As soon as she did, the crowd began accusing Aella of being heartless and unfit to be a doctor.

Tyrone lowered his voice. “Aella, you’re a doctor. Someone’s life could be at risk–this isn’t the time to throw tantrums.”

Aella looked at him steadily, her voice calm and controlled.

She said, "Tyrone, after all my years of studying medicine, I can tell you this—they're both sick in the heart."

She added, "If you just help Zera up, say a few comforting words, and take her mother home, I promise they'll be fine. Not only will they cook for you, but they'll even warm your bed."