

Once Cast 201

Chapter 201 The Dinner

Victor let out a derisive snort, his tone laced with ridicule.

He said, "Can't even handle one woman? Is he really as capable as you say?"

Leland gave Victor a sharp glare before turning to leave the room.

When he got downstairs, Aella and Tyrone had already driven off.

Once home, Aella went straight toward the guest bedroom.

Tyrone stopped her at the doorway.

He said, "Aella, you wanted me to do the checkup, and I did. You saw the report yourself. Can we stop this now?"

Aella brushed past him. "The incubation period for an STD can last anywhere from a few days to several months. Even if your results look clean, I'm not gambling with my health."

Their

eyes locked. Tyrone barely kept his temper. "I'll take the couch tonight."

Aella gave a curt nod. "Good."

They each went to get ready for bed. Aella did her nightly skincare routine.

When she noticed Tyrone still standing there, she didn't dare lie down.

Tyrone walked up, pulled out his phone, and deleted all of Zera's contacts in front of her.

Aella stared at him like he'd lost his mind.

Tyrone looked her in the eye and said, "What happened at the restaurant entrance was my mistake. I'm sorry."

Aella froze in disbelief.

In all the years she'd known Tyrone, she'd never once heard him apologize.

She blurted out, "Tyrone, did Zera cheat on you or something?"

Tyrone's expression darkened.

He said, "Aella, I know I hurt you. I know I failed you. Let's leave the Zera make you feel small again. Can we start over?"

past

behind. I won't let

Aella frowned but stayed quiet. Tyrone tried to compromise. "The McCarthys are hosting a dinner tomorrow. Will you go with me?"

Aella caught on immediately. "So all this sweet talk was just so I'd save face for you?"

Tyrone shook his head quickly. "Everything I said came from the heart. If you don't want to go, I won't push it."

Aella replied coolly, "Then I'm not going."

Tyrone restrained himself and didn't argue.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a hair tie, and handed it to her.

He said, "I saw your hair tie snapped this morning, so I bought a new one. It has the bow you like."

Aella didn't take it.

She said, "Tyrone, I never liked bows that much. I liked them because they came from the Tyrone I knew. That's what made them special."

Tyrone's eyes softened with emotion as he looked at her.

He quietly said her name, "Aella."

He could tell she still had feelings for him.

Aella said, "But now, you belong to Zera. You're her man, her child's father. I can't take anything from a married man."

They held each other's gaze.

Tyrone's eyes turned red, his voice shaking. "Aella, I'm still me. I haven't changed!"

Aella turned away. "The Tyrone I knew died last summer. I waited for his body for a month. You're not him."

She got into bed and turned off the lights.

Tyrone stayed standing there, eyes tightly shut in agony.

The next day, Aella arrived at Webster Manor right on schedule.

Victor handed her an invitation. "Got plans tonight? Come with me to a dinner."

Aella recalled Tyrone bringing it up the night before.

She asked Victor, "Is it hosted by the McCarthys?"

Their eyes met.

Victor nodded.

Aella nodded back.

She couldn't wait to see the look on the Winters' faces when she walked into their dinner as Victor's guest.

At eight that evening, during the McCarthys' banquet.

Tyrone showed

up with his parents.

He looked striking, and exuded a commanding aura that drew everyone's eyes.

Even the older business leaders treated him with deference.

Tyrone and his parents were quickly surrounded by guests.

A middle-aged woman asked, "Mr. Winter, isn't your wife attending tonight?"

Tyrone responded smoothly, "She's tied up with work. I'll bring her next time."

The McCarthys' elders all spoke highly of Aella; her intelligence, looks, and ambition.

Just as everyone was praising Tyrone, a young woman suddenly pointed toward the entrance. "Wait, isn't that Mrs. Winter?"

Everyone, including Tyrone, turned to look.

Aella entered the ballroom in a sky-blue gown, pushing Victor's wheelchair. The entire room froze at the sight.

People began whispering among themselves.

"Didn't Mr. Winter just say his wife wasn't coming?"

Sara Lili

Sara Lili is a daring romance writer who turns icy landscapes into scenes of fiery passion. She loves crafting hot love stories while embracing the chill of Iceland's breathtaking cold.

Chapter 202 No Reconciliation

“Yeah, funny she had time to show up—pushing some man in with her, no less.”

Kit

“Look at Mrs. Winter’s dress—that’s this season’s VR designer collection. First-lady-of-the- empire energy.”

“Or maybe the man in the wheelchair bought it for her-”

“You didn’t hear? Mr. Winter keeps a woman outside—and there’s a kid. He’s been cheating for ages.”

“Sounds like Mr. Winter and his wife are each doing their own thing. This should be good.”

The whispers got nastier, and Tyrone’s parents were looking darker by the second.

The McCarthys spotted Victor and wore a mix of expressions—some eager, some seething, some stunned.

Virginia lowered her voice to Tyrone. “Didn’t you say Aella couldn’t make it?”

Ralph’s face went iron blue. “Tyrone, what is going on?”

Tyrone’s gaze never left Aella.

He kept his tone even. “Dad, Mom—Aella is Mr. Vic’s attending physician. It looks like they a session, and she came along to find us.”

At that, Ralph and the other elders eased a shade.

The tight, gossipy charge in the room bled off; Tyrone had defused it with a single neat line.

He walked to Aella, caught her wrist, and drew her to his side.

“Rest. I’ll push.”

Aella noticed how chill Tyrone was. No questions, no anger. Not even a flicker of reproach.

That actually surprised her.

Aella glanced around the room, stepped back half a pace, and didn’t fight him for the chair.

She’d known it: if she showed up at a McCarthy event with Victor, neither the Winters nor the McCarthys would stay cool.

With no prenup hanging over her head, there would be no fresh threats from Tyrone anymore.

Fine—let’s see how long the Winters can handle it.

Robin McCarthy, supported by several relatives, made his slow way to Victor. He said, “Tyrone, take your uncle inside to rest.”

One sentence—and he’d made it plain: Victor was McCarthy blood.

He also laid out how Victor, Tyrone, and Aella connected.

Tyrone glanced at Aella, then wheeled Victor toward the inner hall.

Aella didn’t follow.

Virginia slipped her entourage and drew Aella into a quiet corner.

She warned softly, "Long illness makes a man sharp-tempered. Be careful with him."

Aella nodded like the model daughter-in-law.

When she first took Victor's case, his temper had been vicious.

But after her work with Samson, he'd stabilized and started cooperating.

They'd barely traded a few words before Tyrone reappeared, pushing Victor back out.

Aella stepped forward. "Mr. Vic, leaving so soon?"

Victor nodded.

"I'll take you home," Aella said.

Tyrone's eyes pinned her, his brow cut deep.

Just then, the Webster butler arrived with security. "Ms. Reid, we've got Mr. Vic."

Aella straightened and stepped back.

The night she stayed over at Webster Manor had clearly rubbed the old man wrong.

Word of her impending divorce must have reached him—he didn't want her getting too close to Victor.

Victor lifted a hand and offered Aella a rosary. "For you."

Aella reached for them—then froze at Tyrone's look.

Tyrone said, cool and courteous, "Mr. Vic, those were a gift from Grandfather."

Aella understood at once—these mattered. "Mr. Vic, rosary brings luck. You should keep them

Victor took her hand and closed her fingers around the rosary.

After he left, Virginia looked at the rosary, hesitated, then changed tack. "How did the talk go in there?"

Tyrone said, "He came to retrieve his mother's things. He refused to reconcile with Grandfather."

Aella couldn't care less. "Mom, I have work tomorrow. I'm heading out."

Tyrone caught her wrist. "Wait. I'm going with you."

Ralph strode up, face thunderous. "Both of you—back to the estate. Now."

Ten minutes later, they were in the car.

Tyrone spread a light blanket over Aella's knees, then took the rosary from her hand.

"These have passed through three priests. When Donovan Reegan died, he gave them to my grandfather. Grandfather wore them for 13 years—wouldn't take them off. Someone once offered nine figures, and he wouldn't sell. He gave them to Mr. Vic, and now, Mr. Vic has given them to you. Keep them safe."

Aella studied Tyrone's face, uncertainty flickering in her eyes.

Chapter 203 Divorce Her

Tyrone slipped the rosary into Aella's bag. "No matter what people say, I believe you."

Aella pulled her gaze away, voice flat. "I don't believe you. And I don't need your belief

The words knocked Tyrone silent.

Aella's fingers tightened around the rosary. She drew a steady breath.

She hadn't expected a simple strand to carry that kind of history. She'd have to return them to Victor herself.

She turned her head, watching the streetlights slide backward outside the window.

Tyrone watched her.

Whatever trust she'd had in him was gone.

He was being honest now, and she took it as one more lie.

They rode in silence to the Winter estate.

Aella stepped out and smoothed her hair.

Tyrone shrugged off his jacket and set it on her shoulders.

He warned her, "With me here, whatever my parents or Grandfather say, don't answer."

She met his eyes. "Save your protection for Zera. I don't need it."

Tyrone closed a hand around her wrist. "I deleted every way to reach her. I apologized. Can you drop the attitude?"

They stared each other down. Aella shook him off.

At the McCarthy banquet, the whispers had been filthy.

If they made her wince, Ralph must've been fuming.

Victor had told her he'd keep her family safe.

Fine. Let's see it. The Winters, the Websters, the McCarthys—whose weight actually counts?

She wanted to test how much Victor was worth in the Winters' and McCarthys' eyes.

She wanted to see if he could really backstop her—and help her get free.

They had just stepped into the living room together when a teacup came flying straight at

Aella's head.

Tyrone moved fast, pulling her into his chest.

The cup

missed and shattered on the floor behind them with a clear crack.

Tyrone let her go and faced his grandfather. "Grandpa, what are you doing?"

Edwin Winter stood planted before the main couch, cane in hand. He pointed at Aella. "Apologize now."

Aella pushed past Tyrone, face cool, and stopped in front of Edwin.

She shot back, "Grandpa, if you've got something to say, say it. Don't tell me to apologize every other sentence. I'm not your grandchild. I don't apologize to you if I didn't do anything wrong."

Ralph barked, finger stabbing the air. "You married into the Winters; you follow Winter rules. When an elder tells you to apologize—you apologize!"

Tyrone stepped in front of her. "Grandpa. Dad. Take it up with me. Don't talk to my wife like that."

The word "wife" made Aella frown.

She eased him aside and looked Edwin dead-on. "Yes, I married in. Did any of you ever treat me like I belonged here?"

She went on, voice even. "Your precious grandson cheated and fathered a child. As his elders, have you once stood in my shoes?"

Tyrone watched her, eyes flickering with something unreadable.

Ralph snapped, near shaking, "You're a broke heiress. Three to four years as Mrs. Winter and not a single child. Tyrone hasn't divorced you—that's mercy. Maybe try being grateful."

Aella shot right back, "Zera gave you a 'first great-grandson.' She's the real wife, right? She and her kid are the real Winters. If you want a grandson so badly, why not move them into the

estate?"

Ralph kicked a footstool across the floor.

Aella didn't let up. "I didn't have a child because your son kept a woman outside and didn't want me to. If you're so disgusted with me, tell him to divorce me. The Reids went bankrupt, sure- but don't worry, I won't cling to your family."

Virginia seized the opening. "Tonight at the McCarthy banquet, Aella, as a Winter daughter-in-law, ignored her husband and appeared with my half brother, her uncle. She dragged our name into gossip. Unacceptable."

She added, "And now, she ignores house rules and mouths off to elders. I don't think she's fit to be our daughter-in-law. Dad, why don't you make the call—shouldn't we just let them divorce?"

Tyrone's voice cut low. "Mom, what are you saying?"

He added, "How many times do I have to repeat myself? I'm not divorcing Aella."

Aella stood still, face unreadable.

She knew Virginia was trying to pull her out of the fire; she was grateful.

What she couldn't grasp was why Tyrone refused to let go.

Did he need her to cheat on him first?

Ralph jabbed a finger at Tyrone, livid. "You idiot. You're still shielding her?"

He ranted, "The dignified Mrs. Winter, dragging our family name through mud, getting us picked apart in public—and you don't even ask what she's playing at?"

Chapter 204 Emotional Abuse

Tyrone cut a glance at Aella beside him.

He knew exactly what this was.

She wanted to be free.

He'd die before he agreed.

Tyrone said, "Aella's a doctor—and Victor's junior. She's professional. She honors her elders. What exactly did she do wrong?"

Every word shielded her.

Aella didn't thank him.

She shot back, "It's not like I held a knife to Tyrone's throat and made him cheat. He slept with Zera and had a son—that's a fact. If you've got the guts, shut everyone up out there. Otherwise, stop picking on me because my family's not powerful."

Edwin's hand shook on his cane. "You little wretch—apologize now!"

Aella stood tall. "I apologize to the Gods, and to my parents. The Winters didn't birth me or raise me. Why would I apologize to you?"

She used to love the house because she loved the man.

She tiptoed around the elders so they wouldn't be offended.

That's how their bad habits got fed.

Now she didn't even want the man.

Elders, rules—screw all that.

If you

can't stand me, then divorce me.

If you don't want a divorce, then deal with it.

Want me to eat myself alive?

Not happening.

Edwin jabbed at the door. "Someone tie her up!"

As soon as he said it, a few bodyguards rushed in.

Tyrone caught Acella's wrist and moved her behind him. "Grandpa, she's my wife. Don't go too

far."

Aella slipped free.

Tyrone snapped at her, "Is this really the time to play stubborn with me?"

Her eyes went cold. "You look exactly like you did when you covered for Zera. It makes my skin crawl."

They stared at each other. The disgust in her gaze landed like a slap.

Tyrone rocked back a step.

Aella pulled out her phone, unbothered. "I'm due at Webster Manor tomorrow to treat Victor. If you lay a hand on me tonight, I'll tell him you forced me to stop. I'll let him know you want him trapped in insomnia forever—rotting in that chair."

A flash of steel cut through Edwin's clouded eyes.

He ground his teeth. "You dare threaten me?"

"Not a threat," Aella said lightly. "Self-defense."

Virginia shot Tyrone a look. Move her.

Tyrone grabbed Aella's wrist and started for the door.

Aella couldn't shake him. She looked back while walking. "Don't stroke out, sir. Your whole family's messed up from top to bottom."

"My husband cheats, and that's fine; I do my job, and that's wrong. You've got the world upside down."

"Get out!"

Edwin snatched a teacup off the table and hurled it.

Tyrone shielded Aella and carried her out.

In the car, Tyrone was sweating.

He dragged in a few breaths, then pressed her down into the seat, face dark. "You sure are feeling brave tonight. Did Victor give you that newfound courage?"

Aella lounged back, eyes on his. "Don't be ungrateful, Tyrone. If I'd managed to piss your grandpa into a heart attack, you'd not only get a feast—you could roll your beloved and her son straight into the estate without a hitch."

His voice came tight through his teeth.

"How many times do I have to say it? Whatever you think about me and Zera—it's not true. I

get back with her. I haven't touched her."

didn't

Aella leaned in, studying his face. "Then, where'd your son come from?"

She added, "Did he pop out of a rock, or grow on a tree?"

They stared at each other, face to face. Tyrone's lips pressed tight, silent.

Aella closed her eyes,

bored.

They drove home in silence.

Still not talking, they each went to wash up.

When Tyrone came out, Aella was already in bed, ready to sleep.

He stood there, heavy, then asked, "If I don't come over and start talking, are you planning to keep this cold war going?"

She sat up and nodded, serious.

Tyrone snapped, "That's emotional abuse."

That actually iced her expression.

She knelt on the mattress, chin tipped up.

"Me not talking is abuse? Then what do you call you sneaking out to Zera in the middle of the night, leaving me alone, not even caring when I fainted?"

They stared at each other in silence.

He wanted to punch himself.

Every cut he'd given her—she remembered.

He shouldn't be demanding anything.

He sat, took her hand before she could refuse, and changed the subject. "I'm flying to Mudrus tomorrow. Business trip. I'll be back in about two weeks."

Chapter 205 Dream Life

Tyrone dodged the topic, and it left Aella speechless.

She shook off his hand. "Your business trip isn't something you need to report to me."

He didn't let her pull away—just leaned in and wrapped her up, hard.

Finister

He buried his face against her neck, voice low. "You're my wife. If I don't tell you, who am I telling?"

He was holding so tight she felt queasy. Aella fought free, breathless.

"A real man should learn to share his love. If you've still got energy, head to Aunt Zera's. Talk all night for all I care. I'm dead tired and going to sleep."

She yanked the quilt over herself. "On your way out, shut the door."

Tyrone studied her, his face going dark.

"I know you're disappointed in me. But hear me out—Victor is hostile to both the Winters and the McCarthys. Don't let yourself be used. Stay away from him unless you have to."

Aella was unimpressed. "Victor is your uncle, not a stranger. What's wrong with me being a little closer to him?"

Tyrone frowned. "He's been overseas for years and has ties with international underworld circles. I'm just trying to protect you."

She shot back, cool as ice, "Push me again, and I'll try a little harder to become your aunt."

His face went black. “Don’t you dare.”

Aella shot back, “You cheated, slept with another woman, and have a secret son. What’s stopping me?”

They stared each other down, air tight and heavy.

Tyrone’s breathing roughened; his chest rose and fell,

He held her gaze for a long beat, then abruptly turned and left.

The moment the door clicked, Aella slipped out of bed, bare feet on the floor, and flipped the lock.

Early next morning, while Tyrone was on a call in the study, Aella slipped out first.

A little after nine, he knocked and walked into her office.

He set a tray on her desk. “I’m boarding soon. If anything comes up, call me.”

She reminded him, “Your second mother-in-law is still lying in that hospital room. Not gonna look in before you go?”

Tyrone’s face visibly darkened.

Aella let it drop.

He stood there staring at her, feet drifting closer without permission.

Then, he pulled her into him, unguarded, and held on. “Aella, stop with the barbs. You’re the only one I have.”

A knock from the door—Noel. Tyrone let her go, regret in his eyes.

In all the years they’d known each other, they’d been apart plenty.

He’d never been this reluctant to leave.

Aella couldn’t take that look; she grabbed his sleeve and steered him to the doorway. “Travel safe. Bye.”

After he left, she dove headfirst into work.

On the way to Webster Manor that afternoon, she spotted Virginia meeting with Zera.

Aella wasn’t surprised.

No matter how much Virginia pitied her, Tyrone was her son.

Zera had given the Winters a grandson—blood that never untangles.

That night, Aella went home, took a long bath, and crashed.

For the next half month, with Tyrone out of the country, she ate well, slept hard, and even rounded out a little.

Victor’s treatment was going smoothly too—down from five sessions a week to three—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

April rolled around in a blink.

After work, Aella flipped on the TV and caught Tyrone on a Mudrus business channel.

The tailored suit, the long lines of his frame, that nine-heads-tall silhouette—set against a row of middle-aged titans, his cold, restrained power was blinding.

Once upon a time, she'd been young and dumb and dazzled by that face. She lost her love and her marriage to it.

Beauty ruins lives.

When she had a minute, she'd warn Sayer: stop worshiping faces.

She clicked the TV off.

Back at the hotel, post-interview, Tyrone's eyes landed on the calendar.

He'd been gone for over two weeks. There was not even one call or text from Aella.

Every time he rang her, he got the same two words: "At work."

He told Noel, "Wrap everything fast. We're flying home tomorrow."

Weekend, Bluehaven Residences.

Aella dragged the poker table out of the lounge and parked it in the living room.

She and Brad were partners; Sayer and Victor partnered up.

Emma was clattering in the kitchen; Clyde played gopher—tea, snacks, chatter.

Aella drew a card, lips fighting a grin.

Life with money and no man—now that was the dream.

One word: awesome.

Sayer started to overheat. “Clyde, grab me a cold water.”

Clyde hustled it over. “Here, Sixer.”

Brad pointed at a lighter on the coffee table. Clyde passed it quickly. “Here you go, Brad.”

Aella tipped her chin at the coat on the couch; Clyde fetched it and draped it over Victor’s shoulders. “Easy there, Mr. Vic. Don’t catch a chill.”

Sara Lili

Sara Lili is a daring romance writer who turns icy landscapes into scenes of fiery passion. She loves crafting hot love stories while embracing the chill of Iceland’s breathtaking cold.

Chapter 206 Tyrone Returns Suddenly

Victor’s gaze

held approval. “When you’re free, come to Webster Manor and pick a sports car”

Sayer grinned. “Clyde, go study in Euravia for college. I’ll cover the tab.

Brad chuckled. "He's got me. Quit fussing."

Clyde piped up, sugary sweet. "Three big bros, eat and drink well—and if you get tipsy, we'll all crash on the floor with me."

While the men chatted, Aella stared laser-focused at her cards.

Sayer said, "Aella, Clyde's back to school tomorrow—no one to fetch our tea. I'll hire you another housekeeper, yeah?"

Before he , the doorbell rang.

Emma opened up. "Mr. Tyrone, you're back."

Tyrone rolled in a suitcase—and froze at the sight of a living room full of men playing poker with Aella.

He stared them down. Half a month away, and his home had turned into a "casino."

None of them expected him either; they all looked like they'd seen a ghost.

Aella held the eight of spades.

Feeling Tyrone's stare drilling into her, she tossed it down and murmured, "All in."

Tyrone's hand tightened on the suitcase handle, eyes glued to Aella.

He didn't see her for over two weeks—she didn't even come grab his coat—and she still had the mood to play poker.

Sensing the temperature drop, Emma hurried over to take his suitcase. "I've got it, sir."

The

guys... kept drawing cards.

Tyrone handed off the coat, changed into slippers, and stepped to Aella's side. His on Clyde.

eyes

landed

He asked Clyde, "How'd last week's exams go?"

Clyde snorted, turned his back, and plopped beside Brad.

Aella tugged Tyrone's sleeve. "That's my parents' lane. Don't."

Tyrone dragged his gaze from Clyde back to her—his face was... not great.

He said, "Get up. I'll play a couple rounds for you."

She slapped her hand over her cards. "No. I finally drew a good hand."

She'd been losing all afternoon; she was not quitting on a winner.

Sayer, who'd once lost a fat sum to Tyrone on a cruise, shot to his feet.

"Not with me, you won't."

Brad shook his head, too. "Playing Aella is hanging out. Playing you is gambling. Hard pass."

If Tyrone sat down, they'd get cleaned out.

Victor rolled his cigarette between his lips, long fingers tapping the table, eyes narrowed. "I wouldn't mind a little skills match with Mr. Winter."

Seeing where this was headed, Aella looped her arm through Tyrone's and steered him toward the bedroom. "Emma's cooking your favorites. Go shower and change, then come eat."

He stopped at the doorway, eyes cutting back to the table.

He grumbled, "Cooked for me, huh?"

Aella pasted on a smile. "Of course. Dinner's for you. I invited them to keep you company."

They held each other's eyes—her smile thin, his face dark.

She nudged him into the bathroom and hustled back to the table.

Brad said to Victor, "You should move into this building. Easier to get a game going."

Sayer cut in, "No vacancies. Only the 18th floor, and that place is bad luck. Can't move in."

Victor, cigarette between his lips, tapped his slender fingers on the table, eyes narrowed.

"For others, the 18th floor is haunted. For me, it's the reaper collecting debts. Bad luck doesn't apply to me."

Brad grinned. "Then move in and keep the spooks away. Be our building's talisman."

The three men chatted; Aella silently counted cards, all business.

Victor sighed and pushed his hand forward. "All in."

Aella's mouth flattened; her eyelids drooped in defeat.

Tyrone emerged; Brad swept his cards in. "Let's eat."

Aella briskly pushed Victor's wheelchair—Tyrone slid in first. "I've got it."

Clyde beat him to it, gripping the handles and rolling Victor toward the dining room.

Watching them bunch up in the doorway, Tyrone asked Aella, "Since when is Clyde this tight with them?"

She answered without much heat, "You were away, they came to play poker, and that's how they met."

Tyrone's face gave nothing away.

He said to Aella, "Your game's lousy, but your addiction isn't. How much did you lose?"

Aella grinned sheepishly. "We're playing ten a point. Not much."

His look said he didn't buy it. "Those three 'play for fun' at a million a wind, easy. You sure they're charging you ten bucks?"

She rolled her eyes. "Maybe I can't beat them at cards, but I can balance the books. Don't underestimate me."

Chapter 207 Tyrone Lost Control

Seeing Aella bristle, Tyrone cased his face.

He laced his fingers with hers. "I'm not blaming you. I'm telling you—those three? Almost nobody beats them."

Aella slipped her hand free without a ripple and followed him into the dining room.

This morning, he'd called from overseas; she'd brushed him off—said she'd be tied

up

late.

Then, he showed up unannounced, walked in on a poker party ... and didn't blow up.

Something was off.

One woman, five men, one table.

Lively didn't begin to cover it.

Sayer popped up to pour Victor a drink. "Mr. Vic, bottoms up. Treat this like your own place."

Brad chimed in, "Swing by often. No need to stand on ceremony."

Tyrone sat, expression flat, staring holes through Sayer and Brad.

These two really did forget whose house it was.

He clocked Clyde picking around the fish. “You’re still growing. No picky eating.”

Clyde shot him a lofty look and grabbed a rib.

Tyrone swallowed the rest.

Since the rift with Aella, the kid—usually obedient—had him painted as the villain. Every time they met, it was either a glare or a cold stare.

Brad shot him a side-eye.

“Being picky is fine. Eating anything that moves makes you sound like livestock.”

Tyrone met Brad’s gaze, warning clear.

He told Clyde, “We’ll run you home after and check on Mom and Dad.”

Sayer shook his head. “I know the route. I’ll take him.”

Tyrone set his forks down, calm as a knife. “You’ve been there before?”

Sayer puffed his chest. “Of course. Her folks love me.”

Tyrone glanced at Aella and drew a slow breath.

After dinner, Sixer took Clyde home, the housekeeper picked up Victor, and Brad went upstairs.

The apartment shrank quiet: just Tyrone and Aella.

She broke down the poker table; he stepped in to help.

From above, his stare pinned her face.

“So that Sixer is a regular at your parents’ now?”

Aella veered. “Your little darling’s selling knockoffs on a livestream and getting roasted. Not sure anyone’s guiding your son either. Maybe go check.”

Tyrone caught her wrist.

“This is my home. The only one. Quit with the snark.”

She pouted. “Your granddad came for me last week. I pissed him into a relapse. I have no clue if he’s discharged. Want to swing by the old place first?”

His control slipped a notch.

He said, “It’s the middle of the night—what are you trying to push me into?”

She yawned, exhausted. “Don’t be mad. It’s a reminder, not a directive.”

She added, “You flew for hours. You must be exhausted. Go get some sleep.”

She turned for the bedroom; he snagged her at the waist.

“How long are you planning to keep me on the couch?”

They locked eyes.

She pointed toward the small guest room. “Or I vacate the master for you?”

That did it—something twanged in him.

He lifted her onto the poker table.

Black trousers, white shirt—his long frame cut leaner, sharper.

He leaned in, one hand cinching her waist, the other planted by her hip, caging her.

They stared, breath tangling.

Hands braced behind her, Aella’s gaze was tense, guarded.

She bargained, voice low. “We can talk. Put me down first.”

His palm at her waist crept higher. His eyes dropped to her mouth; his voice softened without permission.

He asked, “You haven’t seen me in days. Miss me?”

Aella was caught off guard by the question.

She blinked, then caught up.

She protested, “Tyrone, are you sick? That’s a question you should ask-”

Before she could finish, Tyrone cut her off.

His hand locked behind her head, giving her no room to retreat.

His mouth pressed to hers, lingering, hungry—like he wanted to be gentle and couldn’t.

Maybe she didn’t miss him.

He missed her.

Her thoughts. Her voice. Her body.

His hand slid under her shirt, deft on the clasp.

He kept her pinned, kissing hard, breath rough with pent-up

Aella felt his body change, jolted—and struggled.

desire.

His mouth was moving lower, heat flaring—when her stomach lurched.

“Ugh-”

She shoved him, gagging, nearly tumbling off the table as she doubled over.

Chapter 208 Pregnancy?

Tyrone's face went dark as he caught Aella before she toppled.

Before he could speak, she shoved him off and bolted for the bathroom.

Minutes later.

He crouched beside her—tissues in one hand, a glass of water in the other.

Aella was draped over the toilet, retching so hard she was drenched in sweat.

He said, offering the glass, "Rinse first. If this doesn't let up, I'm taking you in for a full workup."

She rinsed, splashed her face, and steadied herself.

Then, she said simply, "I'm fine. Go out."

He stayed put. Their eyes met in the mirror.

Tyrone asked quietly, "You hate me that much now?"

She hated him so much that even his touch made her sick.

Her head was a mess—irritated, scattered.

She said nothing, palmed him out the door, and shut it.

Back pressed to the wood, she slid down, wrung out.

Her cycle always came at the end of the month like clockwork.

Today was April 3rd. She was a couple of days late, but it was still within the normal range.

Two days ago in the cafeteria, she'd gone queasy out of nowhere.

She blamed it on a chill and didn't think much of it.

Tonight, she'd gotten sick for the second time.

Lately, she'd been eating and sleeping like a champ; coworkers teased she'd filled out.

She'd chalked it up to peace and quiet while Tyrone was away.

But now, she realized that she'd been careless.

Doctor or not, with zero personal experience, the picture was coming together.

Arms around her knees, breath hitching, she shut her eyes.

Tomorrow at work, she'd need to pick up a pregnancy test first thing in the morning.

Outside, Tyrone stared at the bathroom door, something clicking.

He thumbed open his calendar, scanned dates.

His expression shifted hard, then softened. He stared at the door again, grip tightening on his phone.

Excitement slipped through anyway, quickening his breath. His mouth twitched; warmth into his eyes.

Just then, his phone rang.

He tapped the door. "Aella, I've got to take this. Don't stay in there too long."

There was no answer.

"Aella?" he tried again, worry edging in.

crept

Aella squeezed her eyes shut and forced a slow inhale, gathered herself, and opened the door.

He took in her washed-out face, guided her to the bed, and lifted the covers.

Bending close, he smoothed a stray lock from her forehead. "I'll be in the study. Call me if you feel off."

Gentle hands, careful voice. "Cover up. No getting chilled."

Something in her chest fluttered—unnerved for no reason.

She gave a noncommittal nod and curled onto her side.

He stood, looking at the new softness in her figure, and his gaze went liquid.

The phone rang again. He slipped out on quiet feet.

She meant to think. Her eyelids sank like weights.

In the study—door left open—the call was from Noel.

“Mr. Winter, Ms. Caldwell’s in trouble.”

Tyrone’s brow drew tight. “Be specific.”

“Paint on her door and stairwell. Car smashed. She’s a mess. She asked to see you—says she needs to tell you something in person.”

He hesitated a beat.

Then, he said, “Tell her I’m busy. Handle everything for her.”

He hung up and returned to find Aella asleep.

He eased onto the mattress, slipped an arm over the blanket, and pulled her close.

Through the covers, his palm brushed her lower belly, feather—light; he pressed a kiss to her brow, her lashes.

Early the next morning, a scream suddenly echoed through the bedroom.

Aella jolted awake to Tyrone in her bed and nearly rolled off.

He caught her in time and hauled her back.

Wide—eyed, clutching the comforter, she glared. “Why are you

in

my bed?”

Her color was better. He slid out, scooped the fallen blanket, and stood at the edge.

“Didn’t see you freak out like this the first time we slept together.”

He sat, tucking the covers up over her.

He stared her in the eyes. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder. If I can’t sleep with you, can’t I at least hold you?”

There was something in his tone she couldn’t unpack—but there was no time.

By 8:30 a.m., Aella walked into the hospital right on time.

Chapter 209 Throwing Him Off

Aella locked herself inside her office bathroom and pulled out the pregnancy test she’d just bought from a pharmacy near the hospital.

When the two red lines appeared almost instantly, she sank by the toilet in shock.

Tyrone had trapped her.

She was pregnant.

Aella sat frozen on the cold tiles, her mind blank, her hands trembling.

Fear churned in her stomach, but she didn't dare make a sound.

She leaned against the wall, helpless as a lost child.

Tyrone wanted her pregnant—he must've planned it.

The baby would only be a chain, another way to keep her bound to him.

She couldn't give this baby a healthy, whole family.

Even if the child was born, it would never be loved for itself—only used.

Sure, the child was innocent.

And though none of this was the child's fault—she couldn't let it happen.

No one could ever know she was carrying Tyrone's child.

She had to find a way to end it—fast.

A knock sounded outside. She forced herself to breathe, wiped her face, and opened the door.

Daniel stood there, concern etched across his face. "You look pale. Are you overworked again? Maybe take a few days off?"

She managed a faint smile. "Thanks, Daniel. I probably just didn't sleep well last night. I'm fine."

He set a folder on her desk.

“There’s an expert panel symposium in Vofgan at the end of the month—three slots from our hospital. I want you to represent us. Will you be available?”

When she heard about the symposium, Aella’s eyes lit

up.

She said, “Daniel, I’ll go.”

She was only about four weeks along—still early.

She could go to Vofgan openly for “training,” far from Tyrone’s sight.

After the symposium, she could stay a couple of extra days and quietly end the pregnancy.

Once Daniel left, Aella paced around her office, restless.

If Tyrone had gone this far to trap her, he’d be watching her closely.

Last night’s nausea, his strange calm—it all fit. He probably suspected already.

She needed to throw him off.

Aella picked up the office phone. A few minutes later, her assistant, Elvira, slipped in.

Aella whispered a few words into her ear. Elvira nodded and left.

An hour later, she returned with a lab report and a small paper bag.

The report bore Aella's name.

Her white blood cell and neutrophil counts were both high—signs of an infection.

After stopping by Webster Manor that afternoon, Aella went straight home.

Tyrone was already there.

He walked over, bent down, and placed a pair of slippers at her feet.

She slipped them on wordlessly.

Tyrone said, "You work long hours. Flats would be better for your feet. I'll take you shopping tomorrow."

The cautious tone set off alarms. She caught the test beneath the kindness.

Without replying, she crossed to the minibar.

Seeing Tyrone follow, she set down her bag.

Tyrone followed and poured her a glass of warm water.

He stared at her and said, "You look pale. Let's do a full checkup tomorrow. I'll go with you."

She lowered her gaze to hide her eyes.

"I'm fine."

Then, she reached into her bag and took out the small pack Elvira had brought.

One by one, she laid the pills on the counter.

Tyrone's eyes flickered when he saw the cold medicine in front of her.

Before she could swallow them, he caught her wrist. "Don't just take medicine. Let's get you checked first."

She yanked free, her voice calm but firm.

"Did you forget I'm a doctor?"

He studied her face.

Nothing gave her away.

Without hesitation, she tossed the pills into her mouth and swallowed them with the water.

Lowering the glass, she met his heavy stare. "It's just a cold. A few pills and I'll be fine. Stop worrying so much."

Then, she turned and headed for the bedroom.

Once inside, she quietly shut the door.

A few seconds later, she cracked it open just enough to peek out.

Tyrone was rifling through her bag. When he pulled out the lab report, her breath caught, held, then eased.

She knew him too well; he'd never just take her word for it.

Luckily, she'd planned ahead.

She locked the bathroom door and tore open a fresh pack of sanitary pads.

From her pocket, she pulled out a small blood vial.

Over an hour later, she came out with her hair dry and found Tyrone straightening the bed.

Sara Lili

Sara Lili is a daring romance writer who turns icy landscapes into scenes of fiery passion. She loves crafting hot love stories while embracing the chill of Iceland's breathtaking cold.

Chapter 210 Cautious to the Bone

Aella walked to the bed, grabbed her pillow, and turned to leave—but Tyrone blocked her way.

He took the pillow out of her arms, his voice low. "I had the bed in the next room taken out.

She froze for a beat. "If you're taking this bed, I'll sleep on the couch."

Her tone was firm. His face darkened.

Both hands gripped her shoulders, his eyes complicated—somewhere between restraint and pleading.

He said, “Aella, I know I did things you can’t forgive, but we’re still husband and wife. Are you really planning to keep living like this?”

She let out a sharp, bitter laugh. “Tyrone, if I’d slept with another man and had his kid, would you still tell me, all calm and righteous, that we’re husband and wife?”

Her anger broke loose, hot and shaking. “You cheated. You keep a woman and a child outside this house. You refuse to divorce me, but won’t even let me lose my temper. I’ve already swallowed everything—what more do you want from me?”

He saw her unraveling and forced himself to bend.

He stepped closer, pulling her into his arms, his palm rubbing soothing circles down her back.

He said quietly, “Aella, I’ve already apologized. I deleted every contact with Zera. Can’t we just turn the page and start over?”

She shot back, “You think apologizing makes it all go away?”

They stared at each other in silence, air caught tight between them.

After a long moment, his tone softened. “Even if you can’t forgive me right now, we’re still married. And married people don’t sleep in separate rooms.”

He added, “I promise I won’t touch you. Not until you want me to. But sleeping apart? Forget it.”

Seeing that he meant it, she didn’t argue.

When Tyrone dug in, he was immovable.

Aella's face hardened; she climbed onto the bed without a word.

He went to shower.

Ten minutes later, the mattress dipped behind her.

Feeling his weight near, she closed her eyes, feigning sleep.

He'd definitely seen what she'd "set up" in the bathroom earlier.

If her guess was right, he'd come back to confirm it for himself—to see if she was really on her period.

Half-asleep, she felt his hand move tentatively across her side.

She didn't flinch, waited it out, until he finally rolled off the bed. Only then did she exhale.

He was cautious to the bone. He must've noticed every detail she'd planted.

Lesson learned. She'd have to tread carefully for the next few days.

Late that night, on the balcony, Tyrone stood alone—his shadow melting into the dark.

The disappointment in his eyes was almost visible.

He smoked one cigarette after another, silent for a long time.

The next afternoon.

After leaving Webster Manor early, Aella went with Sayer to the racing club to blow off steam.

An hour later, in the Winter Group's executive office-

Tyrone scrolled through social media and stopped cold on a video from Brad's feed.

Two cars—red and blue—shot down the track side by side.

The red car surged forward, then spun in a perfect drift, stopping nose-to-nose with the blue one.

Cheers exploded around the track. The driver's door opened.

Aella stepped out in a red-and-white racing suit, hair spilling down her back as she lifted off her helmet.

Sayer caught her around the waist and spun her in circles while the crowd went wild.

Under the lights, with that suit hugging her curves, her smile was dazzling—like a red rose in full bloom.

Noel, standing nearby, glanced at his boss staring at the screen in a daze and wisely looked away.

Well, damn.

Mrs. Winter is stunning.

No wonder the man refused to divorce her.

He couldn't help whispering, "Mrs. Winter's driving is ... impressive."

Tyrone calmly looked away.

He said, "I taught her."

Noel said nothing to that.

Tyrone walked to the lounge, but his mind replayed that image—Aella pulling off her helmet, eyes bright, fearless.

She'd been into racing since she was a teenager.

Daring, reckless, always pushing boundaries—but she'd never mastered the drift they called the 'kiss of death.'

When she found out he could, she'd begged him to teach her.

They'd wrecked more cars than he could count before she finally nailed it.

That evening, sunset bleeding across the track, she'd kissed him first.

She said, "From now on, your kisses belong only to me."

He stood at the bar now, fingers drumming lightly against the counter.

His kisses had always belonged to her—no one else had ever touched them.

So, she, too, would always belong to him.

Tyrone poured himself a glass of red wine and turned toward the window.

The white shirt, black slacks—every inch of him sharp, composed, dangerous. Wine glass in one hand, phone in the other, his voice low as he took a call.