

Once Cast 221

Chapter 221 The Taste of Betrayal

"I can't help it," Aella said coldly. "When I see the food you make, I think of the blueberry cake you made for Zera. The cruise, the flowers, the beach, and that Instagram post where you declared your love to all."

She looked him directly in the eye.. "You know me. Since I was a kid, if something isn't one of a kind-if it doesn't belong solely to me-I don't want it."

Her voice turned sharp. "You made food for her. So don't ever make it for me again. I mean it- it makes me sick."

Tyrone stood frozen, watching her walk away.

He opened his mouth to speak, but it felt like something was stuck in his throat. Tyrone tried for a long time, but no sound came out.

At 8:30 a.m, Aella walked into her clinic right on time.

She put on her white coat and tied her long hair into a low ponytail with practiced ease.

Aella told her assistant, "Elvira, you can start calling the first patient."

Before Elvira could respond, someone knocked on the door. Daniel stepped in.

Aella's eyes landed on the man standing behind Daniel, holding a child in his arms.

He was dressed in a charcoal-gray business suit. His tall frame, sharp features, and calm presence made him look effortlessly striking.

The man gently soothed the little boy in his arms, who kept crying from a head injury. Despite his patience, the tiredness in his eyes was impossible to hide.

Aella stood up. "Morning, Daniel."

Daniel smiled and said, "This is Mason Fulford and his son, Henry Fulford."

Aella nodded politely and introduced herself. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Fulford. I'm Aella Reid. Please, have a seat."

Daniel added, "Mr. Fulford, I'll leave you two to talk. We'll discuss the rest later."

As soon as Daniel left, Aella's phone buzzed.

She had received a message from Daniel.

He told her that Mason was a top figure in the legal world, an international attorney with immense influence.

His firm only took on billion-dollar corporate cases. Mason's personal fortune was beyond measure.

Daniel reminded her to be extra careful during the treatment and not to offend him.

Aella took a deep breath.

Of course. Anyone Daniel brought to her personally was always someone powerful.

She asked Elvira to try coaxing Henry out of Mason's arms, but the boy refused again and again.

Left with no choice, Aella said softly, "You can hold him, Mr. Fulford. Just tell me what happened."

Every word Mason spoke was calm, precise, and right to the point.

"Three years ago," Mason began, "Henry and his mother were kidnapped. His mother was killed -she bled out before rescue could arrive. Henry was so traumatized that he developed PTSD. He's been in therapy ever since. On the surface, he seems normal, but he refuses to talk or sleep. He relies on medication. And even with that, almost every night he wakes up screaming from nightmares."

Mason's tone grew heavier. "Yesterday at school, he was verbally bullied and hit on the head. After that, he shut down completely. At 1:05 a.m., the doctor gave him a small dose of medicine, but he only slept for 40 minutes before waking up. He's been like this ever since."

Aella's eyes flickered with uncertainty. Her mind was racing to come up with a solution.

Last night, Tyrone said his son had hurt another kid at school and that the other family refused to settle. Could this be the boy?

She reached out and gently brushed Henry's cheek. The little boy flinched and cried harder.

Aella studied his small, tear-streaked face for a moment. She quietly took off her white coat, crouched beside him, and softened her voice.

"Henry," she whispered, "can I hold you for a bit?"

The boy's big, watery eyes blinked at her. He stopped crying, staring at Aella as if trying to remember something.

After a long pause, he suddenly burst out again, sobbing loudly, "Mommy!"

Aella froze for a second, then glanced awkwardly at Mason. Still, she picked the boy up, holding

him close.

Well, this was technically her first time being called “Mommy.”

She couldn’t help pressing a light kiss to his forehead.

Mason turned away, his chest tight with emotion. Watching his son cling to a stranger and call her “mother” was almost too much to bear.

The kid’s small arms wrapped around Aella’s neck as he cried into her shoulder. Elvira, standing nearby, was so stunned she forgot how to react.

Mason finally spoke again. “Dr. Hill told me that you’re not only an expert in sleep disorders but also a psychologist. If you can help my son recover, I’ll agree to any terms you ask.”

Aella smiled gently. “Mr. Fulford, I’m a doctor. I’ll do everything possible to help him get better.”

She glanced down at the child in her arms. “Right now, he’s emotionally unstable. Let me take him to the hospital room.”

Mason nodded.

When Daniel first introduced her, Mason had been skeptical. She looked too young, too inexperienced.

But after just a short while, his opinion began to change.

She was calm, careful, and had a kind of natural warmth—a mother’s patience.

Aella was careful but not rigid in the way she worked.

Even if she couldn't completely cure Henry, at least his son didn't dislike her. The fact that Henry allowed her to get close was rare.

Ten minutes later, Aella carried Henry down the hall with Mason beside her.

As soon as the elevator doors opened onto the inpatient floor, she froze. Right outside the room stood Tyrone and Zera.

Zera's eyes widened when she saw Aella holding a child in her arms, walking next to a man. And just her luck-Tyrone was standing right there to witness it. Her heart started pounding with excitement.

Once Cast-Off Wife, Now Untouchable Queen

Lucia Morh

Lucia Morh is a passionate storyteller who brings emotions to life through her words. When she's not writing, she finds peace nurturing her garden.

Chapter 222 Who is Your Wife?

Tyrone saw Aella holding a child in her arms. His gaze then shifted to Mason, who stood beside her.

Without betraying any of his emotion, he walked over and asked calmly, "You two know each other?"

Aella glanced at Zera standing behind him but said nothing.

No wonder Tyrone had insisted earlier that morning that he needed to drop her at the hospital.

It made sense now.

The only people who could make him drop everything at work to show up personally were Zera and their son.

From the look on Zera and Tyrone's faces, there was no doubt the boy who hurt Henry was their son.

The silence grew heavy. Tyrone's face darkened while Zera looked uneasy.

The air turned tense.

"Dr. Reid," Mason asked politely, "you know them?"

Before Aella could reply, Zera quickly stepped forward. "Mr. Fulford, yes-we know Dr. Reid."

Mason nodded slightly in acknowledgment.

"Mommy," Henry whispered, clinging to Aella's shoulder like a frightened puppy.

The boy brushed his cheek against her neck.

Aella gently patted his back, then carried the boy past Tyrone into the hospital room.

Zera's eyes widened. She grabbed Tyrone's arm in shock. "Tyrone, did you hear that? That kid called her Mom! You heard it, didn't you?"

Tyrone subtly pulled his arm free. "You heard it wrongly," he said flatly.

Mason was someone Tyrone knew by name, but not personally.

He was a powerhouse in the legal world, handling only high-profile corporate cases. Mason was constantly flying from city to city, rarely mingling with the upper-class families in Vleka.

Tyrone had never been close to him. Aella definitely wouldn't have crossed paths with a man like him.

It had to be a doctor-patient connection.

When Tyrone and Zera entered the hospital room, Aella was sitting by Henry's bedside, gently comforting him.

Zera stepped forward to face Mason, her arrogance from their first meeting completely gone.

"Mr. Fulford," she began, her tone suddenly soft, "this was my son's fault. He's young and didn't know any better. Please don't take it to heart."

Mason stood beside the bed, holding a children's water bottle in one hand. "Ms. Caldwell," he said evenly, "that's not the attitude you had when we first spoke."

Zera looked down, her cheeks burning in awkwardness.

Earlier that day, the teacher told her that Orson got into a fight at school.

Zera tried to bribe the teacher with a thousand dollars, but the teacher refused. She insisted the parents meet.

Thinking she could get the upper hand, Zera had shown up acting tough, confident the other family would back down once they saw she wasn't easy to mess with.

She never imagined the person on the other side would turn out to be someone she couldn't afford to offend.

Her eyes darted toward Tyrone, silently pleading for help.

Tyrone said calmly, "Mr. Fulford, I know you're an excellent lawyer. But grudges only make things worse. I'll double the payment for your son's medical and recovery expenses. Orson will make a public apology. I hope we can settle this privately."

Mason raised a brow. "Mr. Winter, are you the boy's father?"

Tyrone hesitated. His eyes flickered toward Aella, uncertain.

After a long pause, he nodded.

Mason then looked at Zera. "So that makes you Mrs. Winter. My apologies."

Zera's lips curled into a smug little smile she couldn't hide.

From the corner of her eye, Aella caught that proud, triumphant grin. What a fool!

Mason was polite because he was well-mannered, not because he thought Zera was important.

But Zera, foolish as ever, actually thought she'd won something.

Tyrone stayed where he was, his eyes locked on Aella, searching her face for any sign of what she was thinking.

Mason came today as the boy's father to take responsibility and settle things.

Now that he'd admitted Orson was his son, he couldn't deny calling Zera as his wife.

Somehow, Tyrone's chest tightened.

An odd, helpless feeling crept over him, leaving his heart heavy and unsettled.

He leaned one hand against the railing at the foot of the hospital bed, his knuckles turning white from how hard he gripped it.

"Mommy... W-wah..."

Aella tried to gently pull her hand back, but Henry panicked and curled deeper into her arms.

She looked up at Mason.

Mason said calmly, "Mr. and Mrs. Winter, let's talk outside."

Zera couldn't hide her excitement. She followed Mason out of the room, heels clicking sharply against the floor.

Tyrone stayed frozen where he stood, his feet heavy as lead.

He forced a small smile and asked, "Aella, what did that kid just call you?"

Holding Henry close, Aella replied coldly, "Mr. Winter, you should go. Don't keep your waiting."

wife

Tyrone's face turned stormy right away.

He took a step toward her, but Zera rushed back in, blocking his way. "Tyrone, hurry up. make Mr. Fulford wait."

Don't

Tyrone stared at Aella for a long ten seconds, his eyes filled with conflict. Finally, he left the room with Zera.

Once everyone was gone, Aella called in a doctor and asked them to give Henry a mild sedative to help him sleep.

She stayed by the bedside until Mason returned to the ward, then quietly stepped out.

In the hallway, Daniel stopped her.

"There's an academic conference in Qruledo in three days," he said. "One slot just opened up. Does your department have anyone to recommend?"

Three days later in Qruledo?

Chapter 223 The Choice to Leave

Da Feather

Without a second thought, Aella said, "Daniel, let me attend the academic conference in three days. Give Dr. Payne the spot for the end-of-month trip to Vofgan instead."

Daniel hesitated. "But if you're going to Qruledo, you'll have to leave tonight."

“I can leave anytime,” Aella replied calmly.

Daniel studied her for a moment, then nodded.

Inside, Aella’s emotions churned.

This way, she could go to Qruledo early and get the procedure done there. She wouldn’t have to wait until the end of the month.

She was still thinking about her plan when she reached the elevator. Tyrone caught her wrist.

Aella glanced around and shook off his hand. “If you have something to say, do it in my

They walked there in silence.

office.”

The door had barely closed when Tyrone suddenly pulled her into his arms.

Aella struggled, but he held her tight, refusing to let go.

His voice was low, rough, and full of helplessness.

“Aella, I’m sorry. I should’ve cleared things up about Zera right away. That was my fault.”

Aella fought to free herself. “You knew it was wrong, but you still did it.”

Tyrone said, "If I had clarified everything then, the school would've known Orson was a child born out of wedlock. He's just a kid. He couldn't handle that. Please, try to understand me."

Aella finally pushed him away.

She stepped behind her desk, keeping distance between them.

"Well, congratulations. You finally admitted Zera's your wife."

Tyrone's eyes were red; he locked his gaze on her.

He shook his head desperately. "No, Aella, that's not what I meant!"

Aella said coldly, "Whether you meant it or not doesn't matter. What matters is you said it yourself-Zera is your wife. You said you didn't want your son to be called illegitimate."

Tyrone shook his head harder. "Aella, you have to trust me. It's all been handled. I swear there won't be a next time."

Aella's face turned cold. "Your promises mean nothing to me."

She added, "Your son's already six, and he's vicious-both with his hands and his words. Maybe it's time you start acting like a father."

Tyrone came around the desk and gripped her shoulders.

He looked into her eyes, words caught in his throat.

Aella stared right back.

“At first, I simply thought you didn’t love me. But ever since Zera and her son came back, you’ve ignored me, suppressed me, and still refused to let me go. I thought you were a jerk.”

She paused, then continued, “Mr. Locke is my friend. He only wanted to cheer me up because he couldn’t stand seeing me living miserably. But you made his grandfather drag him back to Euravia by force.”

Her voice trembled with anger. “You and Zera deserve each other. You’re both disgusting.”

“Stop it!” Tyrone shouted, unable to stand the way she looked at him—with so much pain, hate, and accusation.

Aella said coldly, “The hospital assigned me to attend training in Qruledo. I have to leave tonight, and I don’t have time to waste with you. Go find Zera. By the time I come back, I hope you’ve already decided about the divorce.”

Tyrone staggered back a step.

His eyes were red. “Aella, I know you don’t want to see me right now. I’ll give you time to calm down. When you come back from Qruledo, we’ll talk again.”

Aella looked at him steadily. His face was pale and full of pain. Despite this, her

nothing but finality.

When Tyrone walked out of the hospital, Zera quickly ran up to him.

eyes held

She studied his expression carefully and asked cautiously, “Tyrone ... Mrs. Winter isn’t angry, right?”

Tyrone stopped walking.

His voice was cold. "Zera, I can help you for a while, but not forever, Orson's already bullying his classmates at such a young age. Keep this up. He'll grow up to break the law. You need to teach him properly."

Zera rushed to defend her son. "Don't make it sound so serious. He's only six-what does he know? Besides, it was his first day at a new school. The other kids isolated him. He just lost his temper and lashed out at his classmate."

Tyrone's face darkened even further, his expression chillingly cold. Zera softened her tone. "I know I have caused trouble for you. I'll talk to him tonight and make sure it never happens again."

Tyrone felt restless. His mind unsettled and his body tense with frustration."

Without another word, he turned and walked off quickly.

He didn't go back to the office. He went home instead.

That evening, Aella returned to pack her belongings. Emma was in the kitchen cooking dinner, while Tyrone stood on the balcony, talking on the phone.

Aella packed a single suitcase and was about to leave when Tyrone stopped her at the door.

He stared at her, his voice low and almost pleading.

"Emma made dinner," he said quietly. "Eat first. I'll drive you to the airport after."

Chapter 224 The Promise He Broke

Aella glanced at Tyrone and pulled her hand free. She said calmly, "You should start thinking seriously about the divorce."

Without saying another word, she walked away.

Tyrone stared blankly at her fading figure, panic rising in his chest for no reason he could

name.

He leaned back against the wall, all strength leaving his body. His heart felt heavy and hollow.

They had been together since childhood-more than 20 years of shared history.

He refused to believe she no longer felt anything for him.

Tyrone walked into the living room. "Emma, you can go home. No need to make dinner tonight."

Hours later, Brad arrived and found the place a mess-empty bottles scattered across the coffee table, the air thick with the smell of whiskey. Tyrone was slumped on the couch, clearly drunk.

Brad sat down beside him and said, "Well, that's a first. I've known you for years and never seen you drink like this."

Tyrone's head throbbed painfully.

He struggled to sit up, but even through the fog of alcohol, his mind stayed cruelly clear. The more he drank, the harder it became to sleep.

Brad waited for a while, but Tyrone said nothing. He probed, "So you admitted Zera's your wife. Does that mean you've decided to divorce Aella?"

Tyrone froze, the cigarette between his fingers trembling slightly.

He looked up. "Did Aella tell you that?"

Brad shook his head. "No. I overheard Zera talking about it with Jenny at the bar tonight."

Tyrone took a long drag from his cigarette, frustration darkening his eyes.

He said wearily, "Orson got into a fight his first day at that private school. He put another kid in the hospital. Zera tried to handle it and ended up offending the other family. Noel couldn't settle it, so I had to step in."

Brad sighed and said, "I get it. Zera and her boy can't survive without you. You helped them

once-good deed done. But if you're that involved, maybe just end your marriage and live with them instead."

Tyrone's face turned grim.

"The other kid's father is Mason. That guy is an international lawyer. He came down hard on the school and demanded they expel Orson. At the hospital, he mistook Zera for my wife. I just went along with it so he'd agree to settle privately-out of respect for my family reputation."

Brad looked straight at Tyrone and asked, "You say you wanted to fix things, but that's not the real reason, is it? What you really care about is Zera and her son's reputation. You're worried that boy will be mocked at school, being illegitimate and looked down by all. Tell me I'm wrong."

Tyrone stayed silent for a few seconds, then admitted, "When Aella came back, I promised Zera I'd protect her and the boy."

Brad blinked rapidly, his jaw tight with anger. "And what about the promises you made when you married Aella?"

He took a step forward. "You looked Aella in the eye and called Zera your wife. Do you realize what that made Aella feel like?"

Tyrone's frustration flared. "She is my wife. She always has been!"

Brad's face darkened. "So you wouldn't admit it?"

Standing across the coffee table, Brad pointed his finger at him. "You defend Zera and her kid because you think twenty-plus years of history with Aella will save you. You count on the fact that Aella still loves you."

He went on, his voice hard and sharp. "You know what you're doing hurts her, but you keep doing it anyway. That's why you're scared. You feel guilty. You wouldn't dare to file for divorce, because you know once you let her go, she'll never come back."

Brad's words hit like a punch. "Tyrone, those who betray their true love would suffer immensely. Mark my words-Aella will divorce you."

After Brad left, Tyrone just sat there, blank and numb.

He was trapped in his own mind. His chest felt tight, like someone was crushing him from the inside. He couldn't breathe right.

When Aella returned from Qruledo, he would apologize properly. They would talk things through.

No matter what it took, he'd fix this.

He needed to have a child with her-that would make everything better. A child was the bond that held a marriage together, the bridge that softened resentment.

If they had a baby, Aella wouldn't want a divorce anymore. She'd stay-for the family, for their child.

He would make it up to her, love her twice as much, and give her the life they once dreamed of when they first got married.

For the next three days, Tyrone could barely focus. His mind always drifts away.

In the office, Noel noticed his boss wasn't all there. He finally steeled himself and reminded his boss. "Mrs. Winter's flight will land at Vleka at eight tonight."

That evening, Tyrone waited at the airport.

He saw two of Aella's colleagues come through the exit and rushed over to ask about her.

One of the women said, "Dr. Reid said she's staying another day in Qruledo to buy some gifts for her family."

Tyrone immediately pulled out his phone and called Aella. She didn't answer.

Back in the car, unease crawled through his chest. Something didn't feel right.

He sent several texts, but there was still no reply.

Noel glanced at him through the rearview mirror. "Mr. Winter, everyone says Qruledo's a shopper's paradise. Mrs. Winter works so hard. It's good for her to relax a little."

Tyrone forced himself to nod. That made sense.

Last time, Lara had brought back gifts for Aella and her family. Maybe this time, Aella just wanted to return the favor.

Chapter 225 Tyrone's Lost Control

Aella didn't answer his calls or reply to his messages. She must still be mad.

Maybe some space would calm her down.

But that night, Tyrone felt like he'd lost his mind. He paced back and forth in the huge, empty bedroom, unable to sleep.

His chest felt tight, a strange sense of dread creeping over him. Tyrone had a feeling that something terrible was about to happen.

At 3:30 a.m., he called Noel. "Track Aella's phone location," he ordered.

By 8:30 a.m. Noel rushed into Tyrone's office.

"Mr. Winter." He knocked on the door, out of breath. "Mrs. Winter's location just moved from the hotel to Qruledo Hospital."

Tyrone froze mid-sip, his coffee cup halfway to his lips. "Call Qruledo Hospital," he said sharply.

Noel hesitated before speaking, "I just found out. Mrs. Winter scheduled a ten o'clock abortion procedure."

Crash!

The cup shattered in Tyrone's hand, coffee spilling across the desk.

9:40 a.m., Qruledo Hospital.

Aella was already in pre-surgery prep, chatting casually with an old college friend while she waited.

She turned to her friend and urged. "Kayla, when I go in, can you stay outside for me? No matter who shows up, don't let anyone stop the surgery, okay?"

Her phone was on silent mode, but it had been buzzing nonstop since 8.30 a.m..

If her guess was right, Tyrone was already on his way.

She had planned everything carefully. Aella had delayed registering until 8.30 a.m. and got the procedure scheduled for 10 a.m..

No matter how hard Tyrone tried, he wouldn't make it in time.

Kayla Blue, who worked in the hospital's OB-GYN department, already knew what had happened.

Her colleague husband had cheated on her, and he had a son with that homewrecker. She was furious on Aella's behalf.

"Don't worry," she promised. "It only takes a few minutes. I'll stay right outside the whole time. You'll get through this. He won't be able to stop this."

Aella placed a hand over her stomach, her face calm and pale.

There was a time when she had wanted a baby more than anything.

Now, she was determined to get rid of it.

The day she married Tyrone, she'd proudly told herself she was the happiest bride in the world.

Now, she just wanted to escape him and cut every tie that bound them together.

Looking back on her 26 years of life, she realized how wrong she'd been.

She was still young. She could start over.

Aella could walk away from the wrong road and from the wrong man.

She would sever everything between her and Tyrone with her hands. Even this child.

At exactly 10 a.m., Aella was wheeled into the operating room.

A few minutes later, Tyrone rushed to the door of the operating room.

"Aella!" He shouted, his eyes red and voice cracking.

He lost his cool. Tyrone slammed the door of the operation room, trying to break in.

Kayla quickly blocked him. "Sir, there's a patient in surgery. Please don't yell or cause a disturbance."

Tyrone pleaded, "My wife is in there. Please, just let me talk to her for a second."

Kayla frowned. "The operation has already started. You can't go in. It's against the rules."

"I'm the baby's father! The woman inside is my wife!" Tyrone shouted, losing control.

Kayla stood her ground. "I don't care if you're the father or her husband. No one goes in until the surgery is over."

Tyrone's eyes burned with desperation. He turned to Noel and barked, "Call Director Blue. Now!"

Noel flinched and quickly did as he was told.

Kayla, hearing that, raised her chin. "Even if you bring my dad here, you still can't stop this surgery!"

Before she could finish, the light above the operating room door flicked off.

The door opened. A nurse carefully helped Aella out.

Kayla hurried over. "What took so long?"

"The anesthesiologist arrived a few minutes late," Aella said weakly.

When she looked up and saw Tyrone standing not far away, she whispered, "Kayla, thank you."

Kayla and the nurse helped Aella to Tyrone, then quietly left.

Tyrone looked at her pale face and trembling body. His heart seemed to twist in pain.

He stepped forward and pulled her tightly into his arms, shaking uncontrollably.

His voice trembled, low and broken.

"Why? Why did you get rid of our baby?"

Aella didn't resist.

Her voice was weak and steady. "I didn't want to. But I couldn't keep the baby."

Tyrone's hands were shaking. "Why not? This was our first child!"

His voice broke. "Do you know how long I've waited for this?"

Aella gave a faint, broken laugh.

"Tyrone, do

you really want me to bring this baby into the world, just so the child can live like me? Ignored, controlled, used-and forced to swallow every ounce of pain while watching you run back to that woman and her son every day?"

Tyrone's control finally snapped.

His red eyes filled with tears that slid down his cheeks.

"Aella," he said hoarsely, his voice shaking, "Zera and I were never truly together."

He looked into her eyes and spoke each word like a confession that tore him apart. "Orso he's Zera's son with her ex-husband. He's not my child."

Chapter 226 I Won't Let You Go

Aella's face was pale. Tears slipped down without her noticing.

She tried to smile, but it came out weak and bitter.

“Tyrone,” she said quietly, “we grew up together for over 20 years. We’ve been married for three. I gave you everything I had—my love, my trust—and you still chose Zera. You even agreed to be a father to her son.”

Her voice trembled. “Your honesty doesn’t make things better. It only shows how cheap, how small, how worthless I must be to you.”

Aella’s vision darkened. The world slowly faded away.

When Aella opened her eyes again, she was home in Vleka.

Tyrone sat by her bedside, his head resting near her arm, holding her wrist as he slept. She tried to sit up and reach for her phone, but the small movement woke him.

It had only been a day and a night, yet Tyrone looked like he’d aged years.

His jaw was rough with stubble, his eyes still red from crying.

He pulled his phone from his pocket and carefully handed it to her.

His voice was hoarse and low, filled with anguish. “I called Daniel for you,” he said. “You’ve got a few days off. Just rest, okay?”

Hearing that he’d already taken care of it, Aella didn’t respond. She simply took the phone, lay back down, and stared at the ceiling.

Tyrone stood there for a long moment, watching her. His lips were trembling like he wanted to speak, but nothing came out.

Then Emma came in, holding a bowl of warm grits. Tyrone quickly took it from her.

He set it on the nightstand and gently pulled the blanket down from Aella's shoulder. "Emma made this for you," he said softly. "Eat a little, then sleep more."

Tyrone waited for a long time, but Aella didn't move or answer. Defeated, he finally stood up and walked out of the bedroom.

Emma sighed softly, her eyes full of pity. She sat by the bed and patted Aella's shoulder.

"Sweetheart, your body's your own," she said gently. "You have to eat a little, no matter how sad you are."

Aella slowly sat up, weak and pale.

Emma slipped a pillow behind her back to support her, then started feeding her spoon by spoon.

After a few bites, Emma couldn't help but sigh again. "That's a perfectly healthy baby," she murmured. "It's such a pity."

Aella's eyes reddened. Her voice trembled.

"Emma," she whispered, "I wanted to keep the baby too, but I was scared."

She blinked back tears and went on, her voice breaking. "He did everything for Zera. He treats Zera's ex-husband's son like his own. For them, he ignored me and threatened me. He wouldn't let me cry, wouldn't let me argue, and wouldn't even let me get a divorce."

She took a shaky breath. "He told everyone right in my face that Zera was his wife. He said her child couldn't be called illegitimate—that he was the boy's father."

Aella's lips trembled as she continued. "Emma, he gave everything to them. That was his choice. For Zera and her son, for the child he calls his own, he gave up on me and killed ours."

Her voice was faint, almost a whisper, but every word was filled with pain.

Outside the door, Tyrone stood frozen. His eyes were bloodshot, his chest tight with agony.

Every word Aella said hit him like a blade—each one cutting deeper than the last—until breathing itself felt like punishment.

It was late at night when Emma went back to her room to rest.

Tyrone walked into the main bedroom.

Aella was lying flat on the bed, staring at the ceiling. When he came in, she didn't move or say a

word.

Tyrone stood there for a long moment, watching her. He wanted to approach her and hold her, but his legs felt like they were made of lead.

He couldn't make a move.

Finally, Aella spoke, her face blank. "Are you getting a divorce or not?"

Tyrone's throat bobbed. His Adam's apple moved as he forced out a bitter smile.

With red eyes, he said hoarsely, "I won't divorce you."

Aella picked up her phone and said coldly, "Then don't blame me for exposing your fake son's identity."

Tyrone quickly stepped forward, sitting at the edge of the bed. He grabbed her wrist. "Aella, please. Give me one more chance."

She looked straight into his eyes and pressed. "It's simple," she said. "Either divorce me, or I'll tell your grandfather the truth about Orson. Choose."

They stared at each other, only inches apart.

Tyrone's voice was soft but stubborn. "I know you're hurt. But as long as you don't divorce me, you can do whatever you want. I won't stop you."

Before he could say more, Aella dialed Virginia's number right in front of him.

Her voice was steady as she told Virginia that Zera's child wasn't Tyrone's and that she had just ended her pregnancy.

When the call ended, silence filled the room.

The air felt heavy, suffocating.

Tyrone's eyes turned red, but he suppressed his tears from falling. He said nothing but quietly pulled the blanket up to Aella's shoulders.

Aella looked at him with icy detachment. "Tyrone, I—"

He cut her off. "If you're about to tell me you want to separate, don't."

Seeing her frown, he added quietly, "I'll stay in the study."

Aella gazed at him for a long time before she spoke again. "You've done so much for that woman and her son," she said bitterly. "Why are you still holding on to this marriage? What's the point?"

Tyrone took her hand, his voice steady but firm. "I was wrong before," he said. "I'll make things right. I'll go public and clear up everything about Zera and her son. Just trust me one last time."

Chapter 227 The Pain He Chose

Tyrone had overestimated how much Aella loved him. He was sure she couldn't live without him.

Because of this, he believed he could control their marriage and handle anything that came their way.

That's why he agreed so easily when Zera asked him to acknowledge her son. He thought nothing would go wrong.

He was mistaken.

Tyrone had broken Aella's heart and destroyed their unborn child with his own hands.

Aella pulled her hand away, her face blank.

She said coldly, "You don't deserve my forgiveness. I can't trust you anymore."

It was her fault for overestimating her place in his heart.

Even though her family had gone bankrupt, she no longer had a powerful family to back her

up.

Aella still had her pride—beauty, grace, education, and a respectable career. She never mixes with the wrong crowd. Her nature was kind, her personality outgoing. She played the violin, raced cars, spoke several languages, and even knew chess and calligraphy.

She never thought she was perfect, but she knew she wasn't lacking either.

All along, she believed Orson was Tyrone and Zera's child—a symbol of their love.

Tyrone's favoritism toward them made sense to her because they had a child together.

But she never imagined the truth. The boy Tyrone defended so fiercely wasn't his son but Zera's son with her ex-husband.

Her husband had betrayed their marriage and hurt her beyond repair, all to protect another woman's child.

How could she accept that?

Aella turned away, closing her eyes as tears welled up.

Tyrone sat silently on the edge of the bed, motionless. He said nothing and didn't leave.

When Aella finally drifted to sleep, he slowly moved closer.

He kissed her hair gently. His eyes were red and wet.

Through the blanket, he wrapped his arms around her but didn't dare hold her tightly.

He curled his body beside her. In a hoarse whisper, he said, "Aella, I'm sorry."

The next morning, the doorbell rang sharply and woke Aella from her sleep.

She looked at Tyrone, who curled up at the end of the bed, asleep while still holding her calf through the blanket.

Aella pulled a long face and kicked him lightly. Tyrone woke instantly.

When he heard the movement from outside, he got up quickly. "I'll

get it."

By the time he came out, Emma had already opened the door.

Virginia and Raine walked in.

Tyrone lowered his gaze as they passed him. The two went straight into the main bedroom.

From inside came the sound of sobbing. Tyrone's eyes turned red as he quietly stepped into the study.

Ten minutes later, Virginia came out of the bedroom and asked Emma, "Where's that bastard?"

Emma pointed to the study. Virginia stormed over, heels clicking against the floor.

As soon as she shut the door behind her, Virginia raised her hand and slapped her son—twice.

Tyrone stood still, taking both hits without moving or dodging.

Virginia pointed a trembling finger at Tyrone's face, furious. "For some other woman's child- you pushed your own wife to end her pregnancy. Are you happy now?"

Tyrone sat on the couch, shoulders slumped, eyes hollow. All strength drained from his body. His voice was low and tired. "Zera was forced to live overseas for six years because of Grandpa. She was assaulted and had that boy. She couldn't survive out there, so she came back to me. I just wanted to make it right for her."

Virginia's hands shook as she pointed at him again. "Make it right? You call this making it right? You're playing daddy to her kid and destroying your own family!"

Tyrone shook his head, pain flashing across his face. "When Zera came back, she was deeply depressed. I promised to keep her child's identity a secret because I didn't want Grandpa to

pressure her again. I just wanted her to find her footing and live peacefully with her son without fear."

He pressed a hand against his chest, trying to hold back the dull ache that wouldn't go away.

Tyrone thought he could balance the relationship between both women, that he could protect them all.

He never imagined it would spiral this far.

Tyrone never imagined Aella would hide her pregnancy and end it behind his back.

Virginia's voice shook with anger. "Tyrone, you're my son. Don't think I don't know how your mind works. Divorce her—whether you want to or not!"

Tyrone's eyes darkened, his voice firm and filled with pain. "I'm not divorcing her."

Virginia's fury exploded. She tore into him. "You're just like your father! Like your grandfather! All the men in this family are cold, selfish, and heartless!"

Her face turned pale with rage as she went on, each word sharp as a knife.

“You keep saying you’re only trying to make it up to Zera. Then explain this—lying to Aella for a whole month, staying out all night, planning that cruise, the beach trip, the flowers, baking her a cake yourself, and posting that picture on Instagram. How do you explain that?”

Tyrone leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his fingers buried in his hair.

He stayed quiet for a long time before finally speaking.

“Mom,” he said slowly, “Zera was my first love. We were forced apart by Grandpa. I admit seeing Zera again stirred up many emotions, but I have my limits. I never touched her. I never betrayed Aella. And I never once thought about leaving my wife.”

Chapter 228 Shattered Beyond Repair

She calmed herself, then said to Tyrone slowly, word by word, “Son, betrayal comes in many forms. Emotional betrayal counts too.

“The moment you acknowledged Zera’s son as your own, everything was already doomed. You lost Aella’s baby because of it. Soon, you’ll lose Aella too.

“Last night, your grandfather found out that you caused the loss of his great-grandchild because of that boy. He was so furious he had a heart attack and was sent to the hospital.

“You’d better end your marriage with Aella before he wakes up. Move in with Zera and her boy. That way, maybe—just maybe—you can still protect them.”

Virginia turned and saw Brad standing at the door. She left the study quietly.

Tyrone sank into the couch, his whole body weighed down by anger and regret. His emotions trembled at the edge of collapse.

Brad noticed Tyrone's shaking hands struggling to light a cigarette. He took the lighter, clicked it for him, and passed it back.

The room was dim. Tyrone sat with his back to the light. His sharp features were hidden in the shadows. He took a hard drag, the smoke rising between them.

After a long silence, he finally asked, "You came to talk me into getting divorced too?"

Brad gave him a look. He sat across from him. "Aella didn't even think twice to end her pregnancy. That was her way of saying she's done with you. Do I really need to convince you now?"

Tyrone lost control at this.

He hissed, "There are plenty of men who cheat, and their families still hold together! I just helped Zera. I agreed to claim her son out of kindness. Why is everyone treating me like a criminal?"

Tyrone slammed his fist on the couch arm. "I know Aella's angry. I know her temper. Once she recovers, I'll make it up to her. I'll cut Zera off completely. As long as I don't get divorced, Aella

and I can start over."

Brad stared at him and asked, "You hurt Aella over and over. You made her cry, you made her lose her child. You keep talking about making it up to her—but with what?"

Tyrone's voice dropped low. His eyes were dark and stubborn. "We have a lifetime ahead. I'll make her forgive me."

Brad let out a short, mocking laugh. "You and Aella will never have a lifetime."

He put down the lighter, rolled up his right sleeve, and picked up a glass from the coffee table.

Brad gripped the rim tightly and slammed the bottom of the glass against the table.

Tyrone looked up as Brad let go.

The next second, the glass shattered—pieces scattering across the table.

Brad pointed at the shards on the coffee table. “Even if you had all the power in the world, could you ever put that glass back together?”

Tyrone’s face darkened. His lips pressed into a tight, grim line.

Brad said, “Even if you glue that cup back together with the best materials, even if you melt it down and remake it, will it ever be the same cup again?”

Tyrone opened his mouth, breathing hard.

Brad went on, “A broken rope will always have a knot, no matter how you tie it. People who say a shattered mirror can be made whole again, they’re lying to themselves.”

He looked straight at Tyrone and said, “Making peace is easy. It’s impossible to turn everything back to the way it was. The wall between you two—you built it yourself. It’s a gap you’ll never cross. Even if you stay married, you’ll never get close to her again.”

After Brad left, Tyrone stayed alone in the study for a long time.

Virginia’s and Brad’s words kept echoing in his head. He couldn’t think straight.

In the coming days, Virginia, Raine, and Emma took turns caring for Aella, staying up late to comfort her. Thanks to their help, Aella’s health recovered quickly.

By Sunday night, Aella said to Virginia, "All three of you should go back to the estate. I'm returning to work at the hospital tomorrow."

Virginia agreed, and the trio left together.

Once everyone was gone, Aella took a shower and laid out her clothes for tomorrow.

Maybe it was because she'd been bedridden for too long—after a few steps, her body went weak.

Before she could fall, Tyrone was suddenly behind her, catching her by the arm.

He stared at the sweat forming on her forehead. His eyes were dark with guilt and pain. Tears started to well in his eyes again.

Tyrone said softly, "You can punish me all you want, but you don't have to hurt yourself."

Aella pushed his hand away and sat down on the chair to rest.

She said coldly, "I ended the pregnancy because I don't want any more ties with you. I did it for myself, not to get even. You're not worth the pain, so don't think too highly of yourself."

Her frail but icy tone cut straight into Tyrone's chest.

He knelt beside her, his hands gripping her knees tightly.

Looking into her eyes, he said in a hoarse voice, "Aella, we've been married for years. I kept going back and forth between you and Zera. I hurt you because of her and her son. I was wrong."

Chapter 229 Terms of Peace

Tyrone slowly reached out and held Aella's hand. His throat tightened, and his eyes were wet.

"I'll cut ties with Zera," he said hoarsely. "I'll never hurt you again."

He looked at her with desperation. "As long as you don't file for divorce or move out, I'll agree to anything you ask. I'll wait for the day you forgive me."

Inside the walk-in closet, they stood close, staring into each other's eyes.

Aella hesitated for a moment. "Tyrone," she said softly, "I'm still going to end this marriage. But until the divorce is done, we can stay in the same house."

Before Tyrone could speak, she added, "But I have conditions."

"Anything," he said quickly.

"I'll sleep in the main bedroom," Aella said calmly. "You take the couch. We stay out of each other's way."

The baby was gone. The elders already knew Zera's son wasn't Tyrone's.

Edwin had been so furious that he ended up in the hospital. The old man loved his grandson—but not her.

Once that old man woke up, Aella knew she'd be the first one he'd question.

great-

Things had come this far, but Tyrone still refused to divorce. If she fought him head-on, she'd be the one to lose.

Tyrone looked at her. Aella's eyes were cold and distant. "Whatever you want," he said.

He believed time could heal everything.

As long as Aella stayed by his side, he would do whatever it took to make her forget the

past and

start over.

Meanwhile, across town in a downtown condominium, Zera was on the phone with Jenny.

She bragged that Virginia, that old hag, had suddenly turned nice and offered her a place to live. Just then, the doorbell rang.

Zera opened the door and froze.

It was late at night; Virginia had showed up at the door with two bodyguards.

Zera quickly invited her in and told her son to bring water for their guest.

She sneaked a glance at the bodyguards standing by the door, then walked cautiously toward Virginia.

Zera spoke carefully, testing the waters. "Mrs. Winter, did Edwin agree to let Orson join the family?"

Virginia's lips curved into a faint, unreadable smile.

Zera watched her closely. Her heart racing with excitement, she could barely contain it.

Before Virginia could answer, she nudged her son. "Orson, hurry up and thank your grandma."

Before the boy could speak, Virginia cut in sharply. "You seriously thought the son you had with your ex-husband could become a Winters? You sure have the nerve to dream big."

Boom! Zera's mind went blank.

She stared at Virginia, frozen in disbelief.

How did this old hag find out the truth about her son's birth?

Standing there, guilt was written all over her face.

Trying to sound innocent, she said, "Mrs. Winter, I don't understand what you mean."

Virginia raised a brow. "Tyrone already confessed. You can drop that act."

Zera's eyes

flickered nervously. She forced herself to keep calm.

"Mrs. Winter, there must be some misunderstanding. You've seen the DNA report. If you still don't believe it, you can have them tested again."

Virginia nodded. "You're right."

As soon as she finished, two bodyguards stepped forward. They grabbed Zera and her son separately. Then, they quickly plucked a few strands of Orson's hair.

The boy cried out loud, kicking and punching in fear. "My dad's rich! He'll kill you for this!"

Zera panicked at this.

She quickly covered her son's mouth and pulled him behind her, terrified.

Her eyes darted to the strands of hair in the guard's hand. Losing control, she lunged forward to snatch them back.

Smack!

Virginia's slap landed hard across Zera's face, knocking her back several steps.

"Zera," Virginia said coldly, "I let you live here because I thought that boy was my grandson."

She paused, then added, "But now that he's not my blood, I see no reason to keep helping you."

Zera refused to admit it, her voice trembling as she shouted, "Mrs. Winter, someone must've lied to you! Orson is Tyrone's son! If you don't believe me, call Tyrone here right now!"

Her tone was loud but shaky, revealing her guilt.

Something had gone horribly wrong.

How did this old hag find

out?

Tyrone had promised to keep it secret.

If not him, then who else knew?

Could it be that man? Has he come back?

Zera's mind spiraled in panic and racked with all sorts of ideas.

Virginia took out a lease agreement and placed it on the table. "I wouldn't have come here without proof. You haven't lived in my house long, but you've ruined its design and energy. On top of the rent, you owe me 30 million dollars in damages. Cash or transfer—your choice."

Zera's expression shifted dramatically. She realized Virginia was serious,

Losing control, she screamed, "Mrs. Winter! You promised me yourself that I could change anything in the house after I moved in! How can you go back on your word?"

Chapter 230 Paper and Debt

Virginia laughed softly. "You claimed I promised you. Do you have proof?"

Zera's body trembled violently. She bit her lip hard.

She had fallen for her trick.

Virginia's voice went cold. "It's all on paper. I won't take a penny more, and I won't take a penny less. You and your son need to move out tonight."

"I know you don't have that kind of money," she added. "So before I came, I already had people check on your family. Your purse and jewelry will cover part of it. The rest of your family can pay."

Panic flared in Zera's eyes. "You can't go to my family!" she snapped.

Virginia sneered coldly. "Your family raised a good daughter. You sold your body to support two nephews' schooling. Of course, I need to help you and make this public. Let your family share the spotlight and be proud of your achievement."

Zera ground her teeth and threatened, "No matter what, I'm Tyrone's beloved," she hissed. "Aren't you afraid your son will hate

your son will hate you for this?"

Virginia gave her a cold look. "Whether I even want to call him my son is still up for debate. Why would I care if he hates me?"

Zera froze, staring at her in disbelief.

Virginia leaned closer, her tone suddenly sharp. "Edwin already knows the truth about your son. If you want to stay alive, you'd better find a way to survive."

She gave a look at the bodyguards, then walked away.

Thirty minutes later, everything valuable Zera owned was gone,

Her phone buzzed nonstop. First her mom, then her brother, Julian Caldwell, then her sister-in-law, Daphne Caldwell, Zera had a mental breakdown. She snapped and slammed the phone against the floor, shattering it.

The sound of her son crying behind her was irritating.

She stormed over, roughly grabbed the boy, and dragged him into the bathroom.

She pressed his neck and shoved him toward the toilet. After that, she forcibly twisted his small body.

The boy screamed in pain and begged, "Mom, please don't hit me. I'll be good."

Zera's eyes were bloodshot. Anger twisted her face into something dangerous.

She pinched her son and hissed through her teeth, "You useless brat. You can't make anyone like you. What good are you? If I'd known you'd be so useless, I should never have kept you. You're just dead weight."

Zera had fallen for Virginia's bait. Someone had framed her for selling knockoffs. She'd lost her job. For more than a month the internet had turned on her. Her reputation was ruined.

Someone had thrown paint on her rented house. Her car was smashed. People had blocked the school gate when she went to pick up her son. Even her mother had gotten dragged down into this. Shirley had broken her leg and was now staying at her brother's house.

Now that old hag had taken the last thing Zera had. She'd cut off every option and driven Zera and her family to the edge.

Zera told herself she would not let this old hag walk away.

First she had to get her son and herself settled. Then she would find Tyrone and demand the truth.

The child's cries lasted deep into the night. Zera didn't stop until she had vented all her anger and worn herself out.

Afterward, she forced herself to call Jenny, then took her son out of the house.

The next morning, around eight, Aella had just arrived at the hospital when a small figure ran straight toward her.

She bent down just in time to catch Henry in her arms,

The boy said nothing, just hid his face against her chest.

Aella gently pinched his cheek. “Hey, Henry. Be good, okay? Let me give you a hug.”

She lifted him up. Henry rested his head on her shoulder, whispering, “Mommy.”

Her heart tightened. She thought of the baby she never got to hold, the one who never made it into this world.

Aella’s chest ached with tenderness. She touched the boy hair and didn’t stop him.

Mason, standing nearby, sighed helplessly. “Sorry, Dr. Reid. Once Henry calms down, I’ll make sure he calls you the right thing.”

Aella smiled lightly. “If he really can’t change it, I don’t mind being his godmother.”

Before she could finish, Mason nodded firmly. “Then that’s settled.”

Aella was taken aback by his decision. “Wait, what?”

She stared at him in bewilderment.

Mason explained himself embarrassingly. “Dr. Reid, you’re the only person in three years Henry has ever warmed up to. When you were away these past few days, he actually spoke to me—the first time in years. He asked to go look for you. I just thought—”

Before he could finish, Aella said kindly, “You don’t have to explain, Mr. Fulford. You’re a good father. I understand. If being his godmother helps him heal, then so be it.”

Mason noticed the sweat on her forehead and quickly took the boy from her arms. “I didn’t expect you to be so open-minded, Dr. Reid. On Henry’s behalf, thank you.”

Aella smiled faintly. She didn't argue.

Typical lawyer. He knows exactly what to say.

As they turned toward the main hospital building, Aella heard someone call her name.

She stopped and turned around. Tyrone was standing a few steps away, holding a small paper bag. He walked up and handed it to her. "You didn't answer your phone, so I brought your medicine over myself."

Aella took the bag without a word.

Beside her, Mason politely said hi to him. "Mr. Winter, may I ask? What's your relationship with Dr. Reid?"