

## Once Cast 231

### Chapter 231 The Truth Between Them

Tyrone looked at Aella with conflicted eyes and said quietly, "We're husband and wife."

Mason asked in confusion, "Then who was that woman in the hospital room that day?"

Tyrone answered calmly, "I'm sorry, Mr. Fulford. The kid who hurt your son isn't mine. His mother is someone I used to know. That day, I didn't explain clearly in time. I just wanted to settle things quickly. Sorry for the misunderstanding."

Mason nodded in understanding. "No harm done, Mr. Winter. As long as Dr. Reid isn't mistaken, we're fine."

Tyrone took a step forward, wanting to approach Aella, but she turned away. "Let's go, Mr. Fulford."

Whether she misunderstood or not, it doesn't matter to Tyrone.

He was only explaining now because things had spun out of his control.

Tyrone wasn't doing it out of sincerity. He simply wanted to calm her down before she made a bigger scene.

He slowly lowered his foot and stayed where he was.

Tyrone could hear Aella speaking to Mason with a calm, polite tone. She introduced Zera as Tyrone's ex-girlfriend, saying they were a tragic couple forced apart by family elders.

Then she mentioned she and Tyrone were in the middle of a divorce.

Tyrone stood petrified. His heart slowly sank into the bottom of the abyss.

Aella was eager for the whole world to know. She couldn't wait to tell everyone that their marriage was falling apart.

A sharp pain twisted in his chest. He pressed a hand over his heart and stood there in silence.

He got back to the car and sat there for a while. He sent Aella a text before he drove away.

Tyrone simply reminded her not to forget her medication.

When Aella finished escorting the father and son to their room, she saw his message.

She couldn't help but find it sarcastic and ignored it.

Around ten that morning, someone knocked on her office door. It was Zera.

Aella checked her patient list on the computer and verified Zera's name was stated there. Her expression turned cold at this.

Before Zera sat down, Aella said flatly, "Find another doctor. I can't treat you."

Zera raised her chin, eyes full of challenge. "Dr. Reid, I know you're upset because Tyrone treats me well. But you're a doctor. Healing patients is your duty. I made an appointment with you. How can you just refuse?"

Aella didn't even want to argue.

"Zera," she said calmly, "we're both women. No matter how bad things get between me and Tyrone, I've never wanted to make things hard for you. I was blind to who he really was. I let him hurt me deeply. You're not innocent, but honestly—I don't want to deal with you."

Aella said firmly, "The elders already know your son isn't related to Tyrone by blood. You'd better go talk to him before Edwin wakes up. Tyrone will help you. If you wait until then, he'll tear you apart. It'll be too late to regret it."

Zera asked guiltily. "How can you be so sure my son isn't Tyrone's child?"

Aella raised an eyebrow. "Because Tyrone told me himself. If you don't believe me, go ask him."

Zera's legs went weak. Her body slammed against the office door with a dull thud.

Panic filled her eyes as she ran out of the clinic.

Both Virginia, that old hag, and Aella, that hateful woman, claimed Tyrone said it himself. It couldn't be a lie.

Tyrone had promised her he'd keep it secret. Why would he suddenly expose the truth?

She had to find him. She needed to hear it from his mouth.

After Zera left, Aella went to see Daniel. She said she couldn't treat Zera anymore because of personal conflict and the risk of misjudgment.

Daniel agreed without hesitation. "Don't worry. Even if she comes to our hospital again, she won't be able to book your name."

Then he asked gently, "You took a week off. Did things at home get better?"

Aella didn't hide it. "I get an abortion. The divorce will still take some time."

Daniel sighed. “Mr. Winter mistook glass for diamonds. Letting you go will be the biggest regret of his life.”

Aella didn't care how Tyrone felt anymore. All she wanted was the divorce.

At that same time, inside Tyrone's office.

Noel escorted Zera in, then quietly stepped out.

The moment the door closed, Zera burst into tears.

“Your mother came last night and threw us out of the house. She said you told her yourself that Orson isn't your son. Is that true?”

Tyrone stood by the floor-to-ceiling window. His tall frame was dressed in black slacks and a white shirt, sleeves rolled up with a dark armband.

He looked at the woman who had broken down before him. His expression was solemn as he said evenly, “Yes. I said it.”

Zera froze. Her sobs stopped at once.

She stared at him, wide-eyed, unable to believe her ears.

After what felt like forever, she finally managed to speak. “You promised me! You said you'd never tell anyone about Orson's identity!”

Chapter 232 Buried Truths

“I lost my child because I helped you hide your son's identity,” Tyrone said, his voice heavy. “My wife had an abortion!”

Zera stumbled back in shock.

So that's why.

No wonder that old hag suddenly turned on her.

That bitch had been pregnant and lost the baby.

Tyrone went on. "I regret going to the airport the night you came back. I regret staying with you that month. I regret agreeing to claim Orson as my son. And I regret losing my first child because of you and your boy. I had pushed my wife away because of you."

He looked at her coldly. "You once saved my life, and you lived overseas in disgrace for six years because of me. I'll give you 60 million dollars. Take your son and leave this city. Don't ever come back."

Tyrone continued, "That's as kind as I'll ever be. If you refuse, I won't help you again. From now on, you'll be on your own. My grandfather will deal with you however he wants."

Zera felt like she was falling straight into hell.

All her scheming—years of it

—had turned to dust.

After that bitch aborted her baby, Tyrone no longer cared about her.

Those dinosaurs of the Winters already knew Orson wasn't Tyrone's real son.

Once that old fart woke up, he'd come for her.

This time, he'd make her pay far worse than six years ago. He would probably skin her alive.

She couldn't stay in Vleka.

She had to leave. Fast.

"I'll go," Zera blurted out. "I'll leave!"

Tyrone nodded slightly.

Just as he was signing the check and passed it to her, Noel knocked and hurried in.

He gave Zera a complicated look before walking over to Tyrone.

Leaning close, he whispered a few words.

When he finished, Noel stepped back.

Tyrone's expression didn't change. "Zera," he said calmly, "something urgent just came up. Go home for now. I'll think about this and give you an answer later."

Zera's eyes lingered on the check sitting on the desk. "Tyrone, please—you have to help me."

He nodded once but didn't speak again. Zera left the office with a restless mind.

Once she was gone, Noel locked the door and returned to the desk.

Noel said, "After Mr. Ivan's death, the ski resort explained it as an equipment malfunction. They said a warning sign had been moved by a tourist, which led to the accident. The police report concluded that

the ski slope wasn't properly marked or fenced off, so the resort was fined and ordered to close for inspection. The case was then closed."

Noel continued, "According to our new findings, the employee in charge of Mr. Ivan's slope back then was a relative of Ms. Caldwell's ex-husband—a man named William Scott."

Tyrone sat at his desk, elbows resting on the wood, fingers pressed against his forehead.

His low voice carried a dangerous calm. "Why did it take years to find something this important?"

Noel steeled himself and explained, "William and Ms. Caldwell's ex-husband's sister were together when they were underage. They never registered a marriage. By the time the accident happened, both of them were already married to other people and living in different cities. So it was overlooked in the investigation."

He added carefully, "Mr. Winter, the case was closed long ago, and it happened overseas. Too much time has passed. Ms. Caldwell has returned to the country. For now, we can't confirm if she had any direct connection to Ivan's death."

Tyrone stood up slowly. His voice was cold and sharp. "Keep digging."

He remembered what his grandfather had once threatened.

If Tyrone insisted on staying with Zera, he'd lose everything. The inheritance would go to his half-brother, Ivan Coleman.

Zera had sacrificed herself for him back then. She left the country and married someone else just so Tyrone could keep his right to inherit.

Now, a wave of thoughts flooded his mind—dark, messy, and endless.

A few hours later, Tyrone left work early and went home.

Emma was in the kitchen, cooking dinner. She greeted him warmly.

“Is Mrs. Winter back yet?” Tyrone asked.

“Not yet,” Emma replied.

He headed straight to the main bedroom and opened the walk-in closet. Kneeling, he reached deep into the bottom shelf and pulled out an old jacket.

He remembered when he was a kid, overhearing his parents fighting. That’s when he learned the truth. His father had cheated, and he had a younger half-brother.

Back then, he hated that brother he had never met.

Because of that child, his home had fallen apart.

Then came his sophomore year of college. It was a warm, sunny day during the basketball championship.

Tyrone was sweating on the court, playing his best game.

From the stands, a teenage boy cheered for him, shouting louder than anyone, jumping like he couldn’t wait to run to the court.

After the game, the boy ran up to him—tall and skinny, wearing a school uniform. He handed Tyrone a bottle of water with a bright smile, revealing two small dimples.

Then the boy took off his jacket and spread it out on the grass. He said, “Here, sit down.” That was Ivan.

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#### Chapter 233 The Lost Brother

The boy was tall and skinny, wearing a white shirt with two little canine teeth showing when he smiled. "Hi, Tyrone. I'm Ivan, your younger brother," he said cheerfully.

Before Tyrone could respond, the boy waved his hands nervously, worried he disliked him. "Don't be mad! Mom told me I had an older brother. I just wanted to meet you. I told her I was visiting my teacher, but really, I came to see you. I'll leave after this. I'm not here to take anything from you."

For some reason, Tyrone didn't feel annoyed. Having a younger brother didn't seem as bad as he thought.

When Ivan left, he looked up and asked, "Tyrone, when I grow up, can I come back to see you?"

Tyrone nodded without thinking.

The boy smiled brightly under the sunlight, those small canine teeth glinting as he waved goodbye.

Then he was gone, leaving behind a blue-and-white school jacket.

Four years later, the Winters received news of Ivan's death.

He had died abroad, in the winter of his 18th year.

Just hours before his death, Tyrone got a message from him.

Ivan had written that he was turning 18 tomorrow.

He said he was buying his flight ticket to visit Tyrone.

Tyrone had secretly gotten a basketball signed by a famous player and locked it in his cabinet, hiding it from his parents. Now it would stay there forever—waiting for its owner, who would never come home.

Hearing familiar footsteps outside, Tyrone quietly folded the jacket and put it back in the closet.

If Ivan's death wasn't an accident, he would find out the truth.

For that one word—brother—he owed him that much.

Aella saw Tyrone walk out of the closet; his face looked pale.

She hesitated, then turned away without saying a word.

Tyrone noticed her coldness but didn't speak. He stepped out to the balcony and lit a cigarette, brooding in silence.

After her shower, Aella sat at the vanity, working on a handmade craft.

Tyrone came back in, walked over, and stood beside her.

It took him a long time before he finally said, "Aella, if something serious happens and I need your help—would you stand with me?"

Zera was the prime suspect now. To keep her under control, Tyrone had to stay calm. He needed to pretend nothing was wrong and keep her in Vleka.

If Aella agreed to help, he was ready to tell her everything—about Ivan and what he planned to do next.

Aella looked up at him briefly, then went back to her work. "Your problems have nothing to do with me," she said. "I won't help you."

Of course, in her mind, his biggest problem was that Zera's son wasn't his biological child. For that reason, he couldn't convince his family to let him be with Zera openly.

Tyrone stood beside Aella, staring at her reflection in the mirror—her face calm, distant, and unreadable.

Yeah, her reaction was expected.

She hated him now.

There was no way she would ever trust him, be understanding, or stand by his side.

His gaze slowly dropped to the craft she had just finished making.

"Why did you suddenly decide to make something by hand?" he asked softly.

Aella stood up without a word.

She looked straight into Tyrone's eyes and said softly, "I had a nightmare last night. In the dream, a baby was calling me 'Mom.' He said it was so cold that day. He was freezing."

Their eyes met. Tyrone's eyes went bloodshot.

His throat tightened as he fought back the tears. He finally reached for her hand. "I'm sorry," he choked out. "It's all my

fault."

Aella pulled her hand away and placed a small pendant in his palm.

"I drew our baby," she said quietly. "Then used AI to make a picture of him. I sealed it inside this crystal pendant."

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Her voice turned cold. "You're such a loving man. You even give your fake son all devotion. Since you're so warmhearted, maybe you can warm up your real son too—he said he's cold."

With that, she turned to leave.

She turned at the bedroom door and saw Tyrone slumped weakly in the chair by the vanity.

His eyes were bloodshot. He clutched the crystal pendant she had just made, pressing it tightly against his chest.

She turned away, expressionless.

He was a man with a top education. Tyrone knew better than anyone that crystal glass was one of the worst conductors of heat.

That pendant, with their baby's image sealed inside, would stay cold forever.

Late that night, inside a private room at the Regal Club, Tyrone sat on the couch.

His expression was dark and unsettling.

Noel spoke carefully. "Mr. Winter, last night Ms. Townsend transferred half a million to Ms. Caldwell's account. Ms. Caldwell is now staying at a hotel with her child."

Tyrone's long fingers tapped lightly against his glass. "Prepare an apartment," he ordered. "Full surveillance, every corner covered."

Noel reminded him, "If you approach Ms. Caldwell again for the truth about Mr. Ivan's death, your wife will misunderstand."

Tyrone closed his tired eyes. "Even if we didn't share the same life, we shared the same blood. He was my brother. I can't let him die without peace."

As for Aella, he was beyond saving in her eyes.

Telling her now would only add to her pain.

Ivan's death had already broken his mother's heart.

If Virginia knew Tyrone was still investigating the case, it would only make things worse. His mother would probably overthink this.

As long as Aella didn't mention divorce, as long as she didn't walk away from me. She could punish me however she want.

But inside, Tyrone's heart was in chaos.

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Tyrone changed the subject and told Noel, "Follow up tomorrow on merging the two tech teams. Promote Maxine as the new team lead."

Noel hesitated. "Mr. Winter, Maxine's only been full-time for less than a year. Once the groups merge, she'll be managing over a hundred people. You think she can handle that?"

Tyrone sent Noel a photo from his phone. "That's Maxine's father—Brigham Herrera, core AI chip engineer at Ressovia. His contract ends in a week. Tomorrow, tell HR to draft an offer. Three days from now, have the vice president accompany Maxine to Ressovia. Bring him back, whatever it takes."

It clicked for Noel. He couldn't help but admire his boss.

No wonder Tyrone had personally insisted on Maxine Herrera's promotion among all the interns.

The real goal wasn't her; it was her father.

He couldn't help but admire his boss again. When it came to recruiting top talent, Tyrone was as sharp as ever.

By midnight, Tyrone finally got home. The entire house was dark.

He went up to the main bedroom and tried the doorknob. It was locked from the inside.

Tyrone leaned against the door, exhausted. He closed his eyes in despair.

The next morning, Jenny showed up at Zera's hotel to ask for her money back.

Zera smiled nervously and rejected, "Jenny, don't worry. Tyrone gave me a check for 60 million dollars yesterday, but I left in such a hurry I forgot to take it. I'll pay you back in a few days."

Jenny asked suspiciously, "You already have a kid with Mr. Winter. What's going on with his family? Even if they don't like you, how can they ignore their grandchild?"

Zera forced a laugh and said, "Tyrone hasn't gotten a divorce yet. He's such a catch. It's normal for his wife to refuse to let go."

Jenny crossed her arms, irritated. "Whatever. You said you'd only need the money overnight. I'll give you a few more days, but you'd better pay me back fast."

As soon as Jenny left, Zera's phone rang.

#### Chapter 234 Quick Sand

She picked up and rushed out of the hotel.

Outside a small diner on the south side of the city, Shirley was waiting, and she wasn't alone. Julian and Daphne stood beside her, blocking Zera's path.

Shirley scolded, "Why do you owe people so much money?"

Daphne grabbed Zera's bag and snapped, "Back then, you were always chasing rich men to climb up the social ladder! We spent everything we had on you. While you were abroad for six years, we helped you to take care of your mother! You just came back, but you are already drowning in debt and dragging us down with you!"

Julian pointed a finger at her. "If you want to play homewrecker, that's fine, just don't drag us into it! You can ruin your reputation, but we still have kids to raise. They'll need to marry one day!"

Zera's head was spinning as her mother and sister-in-law screamed at her from both sides.

Finally, she shoved them away, shouting, "Will you two just stop already?!"

She looked at their faces, and all she felt was hurt and heartbreak.

Zera glared at Julian and snapped, "Six years ago, if I hadn't secretly given you money, would you have even been able to buy a house in Vleka and send your kids to school?"

She pointed at him, her voice trembling with anger. "Everything you eat, wear, and live—and your kids' tuition—all of it came from me!

"I know you all think I'm shameless, that I was trying to climb higher," she said bitterly. "But wasn't I just trying to make sure our family lived better? That we didn't have to stay poor forever?"

Daphne screamed back, waving her arms. "Don't act like the victim, Zera! We had to move back here because of you! You caused all this! You better give us money to settle down, or I swear I'll ruin you!"

People passing by started to stare. Zera clenched her jaw, forcing herself to stay calm. She pulled out her phone and transferred 100,000 dollars to them.

"Here," she said coldly. "Take this for now. Once Tyrone gives me the check, I'll send you more."

Looking at their greedy faces, Zera warned, "You'd better remember this. If I go down, you go down too. If I'm okay, you'll be okay. But if I fall, you're finished."

She warned, "The Winters already know about Orson's true identity. I'm barely holding it together. Don't make things worse for me. Even if someone holds a dagger to your throat, you

only say three words—I don't know. Got it?"

After parting with her family, Zera could barely breathe.

Jenny was still asking her for money. Virginia was after her too. Her family were all demanding cash.

If she didn't get Tyrone's check soon, she'd be done for—long before that old fart ever woke up.

Zera tried calling Tyrone, but he wouldn't answer. Every time she reached out to Noel, he only said, "Mr. Winter is busy."

The more she failed to contact him, the more panic set in.

By noon, she rushed to the hospital where Aella worked—just in time to see Tyrone stepping out of his car.

Zera ran toward him, tears streaming down her face. "Tyrone," she cried, "please, I'm begging you. Please help me. I can't live like this anymore!"

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Chapter 235 I'm Not Dead!

Tyrone and Noel exchanged a glance.

Across the street, Zera pointed to a restaurant. "Tyrone, I have a lot to say to you. Can we sit down and talk somewhere quiet?"

Ten minutes later, Tyrone and Zera arrived at the restaurant. Zera deliberately chose a booth by the window.

Zera didn't bother ordering. She leaned forward, anxious. "Tyrone, why haven't you answered my calls? Your grandpa already knows about Orson's identity. When he wakes up, he'll come after me. What should I do?"

Tyrone stayed calm and comforted her, "Don't worry. I promised to protect you, and I'll keep my word."

When Tyrone promised to take responsibility, Zera burst into tears. She grabbed his hand, her voice trembling. "Tyrone, I knew you'd never be that cruel to me."

Just then, Aella walked into the restaurant with Mason and Henry. The moment she stepped in, her eyes landed on Tyrone and Zera sitting together.

Mason leaned toward her and whispered, "Do you want to go somewhere else?"

Aella pointed to the table right behind Tyrone. "No. We'll sit there."

Tyrone froze when he saw them walking past. Instinctively, he pulled his hand away from Zera's.

Zera noticed his face turned grim. Trying to smooth things over, she hurried to Aella and said, "Dr. Reid, please don't misunderstand. I asked Tyrone to meet me. I just needed to talk to him."

Aella set her bag on the table and smiled faintly. "Oh? And what exactly would I be misunderstanding? The way you two were holding hands just now?"

Tyrone stayed seated. His fingers were tightening into fists beneath the table unknowingly.

Zera fumbled for words. “Dr. Reid, could you not speak so harshly?”

Henry gripped Aella’s hand and urged her to sit. “Mommy, here.”

Zera’s gaze

flicked between the child and Mason. Her tone sharpened.

“You’re still married to Tyrone, yet here you are dining with another man and acting like this child’s mother. Have you even considered how Tyrone must feel?”

Aella sighed softly, then smiled with deliberate calm. “That’s the Winters tradition. Since you haven’t married into the family, it’s natural you wouldn’t understand. I don’t blame you.”

Zera’s face went pale. She nearly choked on her

anger.

Aella turned her head and swept across Tyrone behind her.

She reached over, grabbed his arm, and said coldly, “Why don’t you tell your sweetheart how it feels to be the father of someone else’s child?”

Tyrone’s gaze locked on her face, full of complicated emotion.

He gently held her hand and said, “Don’t be upset. Make sure you eat your lunch. I need to head out anyway.”

Tyrone gave Mason a polite nod, glanced toward Zera, and walked away.

Zera panicked and hurried after him, leaving the restaurant in a rush.

Mason exhaled heavily.

Aella gave an awkward smile. "Mr. Fulford, that was awkward, wasn't it?"

Mason said quietly, "As long as you've made up your mind, that's what matters."

She had.

But Tyrone—stubborn as ever—still refused to let go.

And she still couldn't understand why.

After lunch, Aella and Mason returned to the hospital with Henry. From a distance, Aella spotted a black Bentley parked by the curb.

Tyrone stepped out of the car. Mason carried Henry in his arms and said softly, "You two should talk it out. I'll take Henry inside."

He walked away with the boy, leaving Aella standing still on the sidewalk.

Tyrone walked up to her and handed her a thermos. "It's chicken soup. Have some later if you get hungry,"

Aella reached out and took it.

She'd just gone through an abortion and needed to take care of herself now.

After she accepted it, Tyrone continued, "I just met with Zera. It was about—"

“I don’t want to hear it.” Aella cut him off coldly.

He froze mid-sentence.

Their eyes met. For a moment, his expression flickered with something complicated and unreadable.

When he spoke again, his tone was calm but tight with restraint.

“I can tell you really care about Mr. Fulford’s son. If you want to make it official, I can plan a small ceremony and buy the boy a proper gift.”

Aella stared at him for a long moment before answering quietly, “Henry needs a mother, not another father. I’m enough. You don’t need to be involved.”

Tyrone’s face darkened at this.

He said sharply, “I’m still your husband. I’m alive. You’re telling me I can’t even be his godfather? That’s absurd.”

Aella shot back, “When you secretly claimed Orson as your son, did you remember we were husband and wife?”

She took a step closer. “Or was I already dead to you back then?”

Her words hit him like a knockout blow. Tyrone opened his mouth but couldn’t find a single word to say.

After a long silence, he finally managed, “I know what I did was wrong. You’re still recovering. If you’re angry, take it out on me, just don’t hurt—”

Smack!

Before he could finish, Aella slapped him hard across the face. Then, she walked away without a word.

Tyrone stood frozen, one hand on his cheek, stunned.

Not far away, Noel saw everything. He quickly ducked his head and turned around, sharply pretending he hadn't witnessed his boss get hit and humiliated in broad daylight.

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Chapter 236 The Clash of the Families

That afternoon, Aella had an appointment with Beatrice.

Beatrice always spoke highly of Aella, but Jenny came along with a face full of disdain.

Aella ignored her and personally helped Beatrice into the car.

As soon as Aella closed the door, Jenny sneered, "Dr. Reid, if a man doesn't love you, you're just taking up space. Zera already has Mr. Winter's child. Staying won't help you. You should just ask for more money and leave while you can."

Aella looked at the fool in front of her and frowned. "Why don't you help me file for divorce, then?"

Jenny gave a cold laugh, eyes full of disdain. "When a couple wants a divorce, it only takes one side to decide. I know it's not easy for a fallen socialite like you to cling to someone like Mr. Winter, but Zera already has his son. You can't win. Give it up."

Aella raised her hand and knocked on the car window.

When Beatrice rolled it down, Aella said with a calm smile, "Mrs. Townsend, your

granddaughter is quite something. She just threatened me to divorce my husband. Anyone who didn't know better would think she's trying to take my place."

With that, Aella walked away.

"Grandma, don't listen to that bitch!"

Jenny whined as she lifted her skirt and climbed into the car, only to be slapped hard across the face.

Beatrice glared at her and snapped, "Out of respect for your father, I've tolerated you. But if you cause trouble again, you can pack your bags and go live with your mother!"

Jenny stood there fuming as she watched the luxury car drive off. She stomped her feet in rage,

Aella returned to her office. She gathered her things and got ready to head to Webster Manor.

Just then, Daniel knocked and stepped inside. "You already have plenty of VIP patients under your care. Why are you still doing clinic hours this afternoon?"

Aella smiled. "Beatrice was one of my grandmother's closest friends. She hasn't been sleeping well lately. I wanted to check on her and give her something to help."

Daniel set a file on her desk. "This patient's from the royal family of Mudrus. They'll be in Vleka

next week. You'll handle the case. Take some time to review it."

Aella gave him a thumbs-up. "Daniel, your connections are wonderful."

Working with him brought her both status and success.

This job also opened doors to powerful people she never would've met otherwise.

Daniel chuckled modestly. "Not just mine. Our families' networks go way back. I just make use of it."

After he left, Aella slipped the medical file into her bag and headed out to Webster Manor.

Late in the afternoon, just before closing time, the door to the CEO's office burst open.

Noel ran in, out of breath. "Mr. Winter, your grandfather has been discharged from the hospital!"

Tyrone set down his pen and looked up sharply.

Noel braced himself before reporting, "Mrs. Winter was on her way to Webster Manor, but your grandfather's men intercepted her and took her to the estate."

Tyrone shot to his feet. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?!"

Sweat was breaking out on Noel's forehead as he explained, "Her parents were also invited there."

Evening, the Winter Estate.

Edwin sat in the main seat of the living room, his expression dark and cold. Ralph and Virginia stood beside him.

Across the room, Aella stood with her parents.

Justin waited respectfully by the door with several bodyguards.

The air was thick with tension—two families facing each other, the weight of resentment heavy between them.

Ralph pointed angrily at Aella's father. "Warren, you owe us an explanation today!"

Warren's face had gone pale with rage. He and Miriam had been heartbroken ever since they learned their daughter had lost her baby.

He was so furious that his whole body trembled. Warren shouted, his voice shaking with anger, "An explanation? We gave you a good daughter, and your family drove her to the point of losing her baby! And now you have the nerve to demand answers from us?"

Edwin slammed his cane against the floor, the sound echoing through the tense room.

His expression darkened as he said, "Your daughter married into this family—she is a Winters. She hid her pregnancy and ended it in secret. Is that what you call good upbringing?"

Miriam gripped Aella's hand, her eyes red and wet with tears.

She rebuked angrily, "My daughter may not be perfect, but she never begged to marry into your family. Since you despise her so much, we'll take her home right now!"

She tugged Aella toward the door, but Justin and several guards stepped forward, blocking their

way.

Aella looked at her parents, then gently pulled her hand free. She returned to the living room and faced Edwin.

“With a father and grandfather like you, Tyrone only deserves to raise someone else’s son. You don’t deserve to have a grandson or great–grandson.”

Edwin’s eyes went wide. His face was flushed with rage, and he almost passed out from it.

He lay stiff on the couch. Edwin pointed at Aella and roared, “Someone lock this disgrace in Tyrone’s room and let her reflect on what she’s done!”

The guards rushed forward to seize her, but Tyrone arrived just in time.

He pulled Aella behind him, his expression firm. “Grandpa, the baby’s gone. If anyone’s to blame, it’s me. None of this has anything to do with Aella!”

Edwin’s hand trembled as he pointed at Tyrone, teeth clenched. “You rascal! You’re driving me insane!”

Chapter 237 You Can’t Touch Her

Tyrone took a step forward with a blank face.

Miriam saw him and completely lost control. She rushed forward, shouting, “You jerk! What did my daughter ever do to deserve all this pain from you?”

Crying, she grabbed his shirt and punched him. “My daughter gave you everything, even her heart! And you kept another woman outside your marriage. What did she do wrong that you had to treat her like this?”

Warren pointed at Tyrone, eyes red with anger. "Did you forget what you promised us when you married Aella? Do you have a heart?"

Tyrone stood still. He let Miriam hit and scold him.

His eyes were bloodshot as he choked out, "Miriam, Warren ... I was wrong. It's my fault. I let Aella down."

Miriam cried harder, her voice breaking. "Don't you dare speak of my name!"

She grabbed his collar and refused to let go. "If you know you've wronged her, then why won't you divorce her? Do you want to drive her to death before you can set her free?"

Her cries tore through Tyrone's chest.

Tyrone staggered from her pushing.

His eyes were wet, his throat tight, and he was unable to speak a word.

Not far away, Virginia stood silently, eyes red, watching everything but not stepping forward.

Aella and her father finally pulled Miriam away.

Warren said coldly, "We're leaving."

But Edwin pointed at the family and barked, "As long as they're not divorced, Aella is still his wife. She must follow my family's rules!"

Ralph said coldly, "You think you can just walk in and out of my house whenever you want? What do you take us for?"

Before he could finish, Norman rolled Victor into the room.

The Winters froze when they saw Victor. Each wore a different expression.

Victor sat lazily in his wheelchair, wearing a black suit with a white deep-V shirt underneath. He casually flipped a metal lighter between his fingers.

“Mr. Vic,” Aella said softly as she pulled her parents behind him.

Victor gave her arm a reassuring pat.

His sharp gaze swept across the room before settling on Ralph.

He said coolly, “I heard your family is the top among the Eight Great Families. Didn’t expect you to treat your in-laws with such disrespect.”

Ralph corrected him with a long face. “Victor, this is our family matter. You’re crossing the line.”

Victor smirked, bold and defiant. “Mr. Ralph, that’s where you’re wrong. Dr. Reid is my personal physician. Making sure her family stays safe—well, that’s in my best interest too.”

Edwin’s cloudy eyes flashed with cold fury. “Even if that’s true, you have no right to storm into my house and take them away.”

Victor arched a brow. “Fine. If I can’t take them, then I’ll stay here with them.”

Tyrone rose from his seat, eyes bloodshot, his gaze locked on Aella.

“Grandpa, please let Aella and her parents go home and get some rest. If you’re angry, take it out on me.”

Before Edwin could respond, Virginia cut in smoothly. "Victor is Tyrone's uncle. He's family, not an outsider. It's normal for an elder to step in when the younger ones are fighting."

Tyrone shot Justin a warning look. Justin hesitated but finally stepped aside.

Victor calmly led the Reids out of the living room.

Ralph wanted to explode, but Edwin's sharp glare stopped him.

Tyrone walked Aella and her parents out.

"Go home and rest," he said quietly. "I'll come by later."

Aella gave him a cold glance. She said nothing and got into Victor's car with her parents.

Tyrone stood at the doorway, watching the car disappear down the driveway before turning back into the living room.

Just then, Noel rushed in and leaned close to whisper, "Mr. Winter, Ms. Caldwell was dumped at the border of three countries by your grandfather's men. Our people are already on their way."

Tyrone lifted a hand, signaling Noel to leave.

Virginia threw a folder onto the table; inside was the paternity report. "All this for a child that isn't even yours? You lied to your parents and your grandfather! Are you trying to destroy yourself?"

Tyrone didn't flinch. "Zera's son isn't mine," he admitted calmly.

"You fool!" Edwin roared, swinging his cane.

It struck Tyrone's head hard enough to draw blood. But Tyrone didn't move. He just stood there and let Edwin hit him.

"When I was in college," he began, his voice low but steady, "Zera saved my life once. Later, when we were dating, you forced her out of the country behind my back and made her marry another man. You gave her 60 million dollars, but she never spent a cent of it. She was abused for years. She was forced to give birth to that child after being violated. That boy is her nightmare."

Tyrone continued, his tone firm. "When she came back, she was desperate. She begged me to keep her secret—to help her hide what had happened so she could start over. She was terrified you'd send her away again or force her into another marriage. She begged me to claim her son as my own so you wouldn't find out and drive her away again. I did it to help her survive."

"I know I handled it wrong," he admitted, his voice thick with regret. "I shouldn't have let Aella get dragged into this. But it's done, and I'll take full responsibility."

He looked directly at Edwin. "Grandpa, I need Zera alive. She's still useful to me. For now, you can't touch her."

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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.

Cast Off Wife, Now Untouchable Queen

## Chapter 238 The Empty House

Tyrone looked at his parents and said quietly, "I've failed Aella. I'll spend the rest of life trying to make it up to her."

Virginia's anger flared. "You hurt her like this, and you still want her to grow old with you? Keep dreaming!"

Tyrone's tone stayed calm. "Mom, if that day ever comes. If I lose even the chance to make things right—I'll never remarry. I won't have more children. I'd rather live alone for the rest of my life."

When he finished, he walked out of the estate without looking back.

Ralph slammed the table, sending things crashing to the floor. "You ungrateful fool! We raised you, gave you everything, and this is how you repay us?"

Edwin was so furious he coughed up blood and fainted on the spot.

Virginia's vision blurred. She nearly passed out herself.

Ralph shouted, his voice trembling with rage, "From now on, no one interferes with that unfilial son! Let him destroy himself if that's what he wants!"

The estate was in chaos that night.

Around 3.30 a.m., a helicopter landed on the Winters' private airfield.

Tyrone leaned against the car, smoke curling from between his fingers.

He wore crisp black slacks and a white shirt with the top three buttons undone, the shirt hanging loose around his waist.

The night air was cold, but he looked calm and unbothered. Zera stumbled out of the helicopter, eyes red and face streaked with tears. She ran toward him, crying, "Tyrone!"

He turned slightly. She missed his embrace and fell hard to the ground, dust covering her face

and hair.

Desperate, she clutched the hem of his pants. "Tyrone," she sobbed, "I almost didn't make it! Your grandpa—he almost killed me!"

Tyrone's voice remained cold and even. "If I could bring you back, I can guarantee your safety."

He added, "I've prepared another apartment for you. Move there with your child. If you run into trouble, come to me—but only then."

Zera nodded through her tears, with a pang of fear.

Noel opened the car door for her, and she climbed in. Through the window, she saw Tyrone standing beside his luxury car, the smoke from his cigarette curling upward in the moonlight. His gaze flickered unsteadily.

Her heart pounded. She knew it—he still had feelings for her.

It had to be because of his status—he was a man from a powerful family, bound by rules and pressure from the elders. And since he hadn't divorced that bitch, he couldn't act freely. He had to keep his distance, to pretend there was a line he couldn't cross.

Otherwise, Aella had lost her child, and his grandfather had thrown her out in a fit of rage.

Tyrone would draw the line with her. He wouldn't have brought her back.

Yet, he did. Not only that, but he even prepared a new place for her ahead of time.

Men were all the same.

They always craved what they couldn't have.

She clenched her fists. This was her last chance. She would make Tyrone truly hers.

That night, Tyrone returned home. The house was silent and dark.

He flicked on the lights, exhaustion etched into his face.

As he bent down to change his shoes, he opened the shoe cabinet and froze. A few pairs of shoes were missing.

He realized something was off. Tyrone rushed into the living room. He found the main bedroom door stood open.

Tyrone stepped inside slowly. The room was spotless. The bed was perfectly made; no one had slept there.

“Aella!”

Tyrone rushed into the walk-in closet. He yanked open her wardrobe, but it was empty.

Her clothes were gone.

He slumped to the floor, his strength completely drained.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the small crystal pendant—the one with the baby’s

Then he pressed it to his chest, shut his eyes, and a tear instantly slipped down his face.

Somehow, he knew.

This time, Aella wasn’t coming back.

The next day at noon, Tyrone went to the hospital to find her. Her coworker told him, “Dr. Reid took a few days off.”

At that very moment, across the city, Aella and her parents walked out of a newly developed villa area after paying the deposit.

Miriam and Warren both looked uneasy.

Aella tried to reassure them. “I was going to open my own clinic,” she said, “but Daniel talked me into joining his hospital. The department I work in is managed by the hospital, but I still get a good salary and a share of the profits.”

Miriam frowned, still worried. “Aella, you’re divorcing Tyrone soon. You’ll need money. We don’t have to live in such an expensive house.”

Aella smiled and shook her head. “It’s a villa, Mom. When the divorce is final, I’ll move in with you two. I’ll make the money, Clyde will study hard, and you two can relax—grow vegetables, play chess, take dance classes, and cook for us. We’ll live however makes us happiest.”

She added brightly, “Your daughter is capable of making good money now. You don’t have to

worry.

I'll hire someone to clean the place, and by May, we'll move in."

Victor was Tyrone's uncle.

Meanwhile, Tyrone had been trying to smooth things over between the two families.

Even though Victor had stood up for Aella, Tyrone didn't want to turn it into a family feud.

With Victor involved, Aella's plan for separation would finally work.

That night, around 10, at the Regal Club downtown.

Aella and Raine sat in the bar on the first floor. They'd called over four male escorts just for fun. Raine posed between two of them, snapping stylish photos for Instagram.

Aella, who couldn't hold her liquor well, barely touched her drink.

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.

Once Cast-Off Wife, Now Untouchable Queen

Chapter 239 True Love

Aella and Raine had hired the male escorts just for fun—and it wasn't even their credit card they were using.

Aella reached over and took away the full bottle of wine in front of Raine. "Raine, I haven't seen Brad around lately. Where's he been?"

Raine scratched her head. "Oh, him? His family's been pushing him to get married. He ran off overseas to hide for a while."

Aella nodded. That made sense.

Raine was two years younger—24.

Brad was the same age as Tyrone, exactly 30.

Raine had a straight-shooting personality. Every guy around her was just another buddy.

Brad's parents had been pressuring him to settle down, but he kept escaping abroad. He wasn't interested in anyone and swore he'd never marry.

Still, he spoiled Raine. Both families secretly hoped the two would end up together.

But Raine always said she wouldn't even think about marriage until she turned 30. Brad said he still had plenty of fun left before he'd ever settle down.

The two of them were close—almost like siblings.

So close that their family doesn't know what to do about them.

Watching Raine surrounded by handsome escorts, laughing her heart out, Aella felt a strange knot tighten in her chest.

She wanted to ask how Raine really felt about Brad but didn't know how to start.

After a moment's hesitation, Aella crooked her finger, motioning Raine closer.

Those escorts around them stood up and walked away. Raine straightened her back, folding her arms and sitting up properly. Aella suddenly felt a chill behind her.

She followed Raine's line of sight and froze. Tyrone was standing there like a statue, his expression unreadable.

Aella pursed her lips. She calmly poured herself a glass of wine and took a slow sip.

Raine, clearly nervous, got up and stammered, "Uh, Tyrone, don't be mad at Aella. It's my fault. I was thirsty and came in for a drink."

Tyrone pointed toward the door. "The car from the estate is waiting outside. Go home. Now."

Raine grabbed her bag and bolted.

As Tyrone looked around the room, he noticed several lecherous eyes darting away. His face darkened as he asked coldly, "Are you leaving on your own, or do I have to carry you out?"

Aella rolled her eyes, picked up her bag, and walked out.

At the curb outside the bar, Tyrone stopped her.

"It's late," he said quietly. "Let me drive you home."

Aella blinked, surprised. He wasn't forcing her this time.

She stopped and turned to face him.

Aella said softly, "We've known each other for over 20 years, and this is what we've come to. Keeping this up feels pointless, doesn't it?"

Tyrone stepped closer and carefully reached for her hand.

"Then what do you want to do?" he asked.

Aella looked at him, her eyes calm and distant.

She pulled her hand away. A sarcastic smile on her lips. "You make it sound like what I want actually matters."

Tyrone stared at her without blinking.

"Aella," he said quietly, "don't look at me like that, please."

She met his gaze, unwavering.

"What I'm doing to you now is nothing compared to what you did to me."

Losing control, Tyrone gripped her shoulders tightly.

"I know I was wrong," he said, his voice trembling. "Just give me another chance!"

Aella laughed.

Her eyes curved as she smiled.

“Another chance?” she asked. “So you can buy Zera another house and keep her hidden away like before?”

Tyrone felt all of his strength had left him and let go of her shoulders. “You knew?”

Aella stepped back, putting space between them.

“Don’t look so miserable,” she said calmly. “If someone saw you now, they’d probably think you actually love me.”

Tyrone’s eyes turned red. He blurted out, “What if I do love you?”

Aella laughed again.

She laughed until her chest hurt, then finally caught her breath and asked, “Do you even know what love is?”

”

They stood in silence on the empty street, night wind brushing past them.

Then Aella began to speak, her voice quiet but steady.

“Back then, whenever my parents made something delicious, I’d save the best part for you, because you were always the first person I thought of.

“When your parents fought, I’d drop my homework and run to your house just to check on you.

“When pretty girls came near, I’d find ways to get rid of them. I was scared someone would steal you from me.

“When I found out you had insomnia, I gave up my dream and went to med school, because I wanted to help you sleep.”

Her voice trembled slightly.

“After we got married, I worried about your stress. Every night when you came home, I’d greet you with a smile. I’d tell you jokes, cling to you, and try to make you laugh.

“I was afraid you didn’t eat well, so I spent hours in the kitchen learning how to cook your favorite meals.

“When you were upset, I panicked, scared I’d make it worse. When you couldn’t sleep, I stayed up with you. I studied medicine so I could find ways to help you sleep. When your stomach hurt, I felt your pain more than you did.”

Tears shimmered in her eyes.

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Chaplet 230 True Love

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“That,” Aella said quietly, “is what love truly looks like.

“Love is when I don’t need you to say a word to know how you feel.

“It’s when I take on all your pain, willingly, afraid I’m not doing enough, afraid I’m giving too little. It’s when I ache for you, worry for you, and wish I could hand you my heart if it would ease your hurt.”

“Tyrone,” Aella said coldly, “the highest form of love is when your heart aches for someone. I once felt that for you.”

“Aella,” Tyrone’s voice broke, and his eyes turned watery as he pulled her into his arms.

Aella pushed against him, struggling to break free, but he only held her tighter.

He trembled, his breath catching. “I’m sorry, Aella. I failed you. It’s all my fault.”

Aella’s eyes stayed calm. “The way you care for Zera is the same way I once cared for you. The love I gave you—now you’ve given it all to her. Don’t bother denying it.”

Tyrone’s grip loosened.

He held her arm and looked into her eyes. “I admit I wavered when Zera first came back. That was wrong—I know it. But I don’t love her.”

Aella interrupted him. “Maybe you don’t love her, but you surely don’t love me either.”

They stared at each other in silence. Tyrone’s lips parted, but no words came out.

After a long moment, he finally found his voice again.

“Aella,” he pleaded, “give me one more chance. Let me learn how to love you.”

Aella smiled faintly as she turned him down. “I can give any other man the chance to love me. Just not you. You don’t deserve it.”

If she hesitated even for a second, she’d betray the version of herself who had suffered so much. She’d betray the child who never got the chance to be born.

She pushed him away and said firmly, “From now on, we’ll live separately. I’ll have my lawyer file the papers. This marriage has to end.”

Tyrone met Aella's steady gaze, and pain twisted deep in his chest. His eyes were wet as he pressed a hand over his heart, trying to keep himself from breaking down.

"I know I've made unforgivable mistakes," he said hoarsely. "I'll agree to live apart for now, give you time to calm down. But divorce? Don't even think about it."

A rideshare car slowed to a stop by the curb.

Aella glanced at him, her voice calm and distant. "Then we'll start with separation."

#### Chapter 240 The End of Us

No matter what he said, she wasn't giving up on leaving him.

Tyrone stood frozen as she got into the car. He watched the taillights fade into the distance. His body was weak, leaning against a tree just to stay upright.

A few minutes later, Noel rushed over. "Mr. Winter, the security footage shows Ms. Caldwell leaving her house late last night."

His report snapped Tyrone out of his daze. He turned without a word and got into his car.

Two nights later, his insomnia returned. He couldn't sleep at all.

In the past, whenever he lay awake, Aella would stay up with him.

She'd fuss over him, trying different ways to help him rest. Aella would work harder to take care of everything around him.

Now the house was silent. So quiet that he could hear only his breathing and heartbeat.

Restless, Tyrone paced the bedroom barefoot. He picked up his phone and started scrolling aimlessly. It was already 5:30 a.m. when he saw Aella's latest post on Instagram.

The short video was taken in the garden at Webster Manor.

Tyrone's chest tightened again, an irritation and ache rising for reasons he couldn't explain.

"Did she stay at Webster Manor again last night?"

Tyrone stormed into the dressing room, tearing off his clothes.

As he moved, the handmade crystal pendant he always carried slipped from his pocket and landed on his slipper.

He bent down to pick it up and froze,

Tyrone stared blankly at the photo. Inside the clear crystal lay a tiny photo of a baby, no more than five inches tall. The baby's dark, glistening eyes seemed to stare right back at him. Were those eyes crying, or did he simply feel cold?

Tyrone's legs gave out. He sank into the chair, weak all over.

Holding the pendant tightly to his chest, he struggled to breathe.

He had promised Aella he'd stay away for now, that he wouldn't disturb her. Her body had only just begun to recover after the abortion. He couldn't upset her again.

But the words she'd said to him last night on the sidewalk kept echoing in his head. His chest

Tyrone was in such sharp pain that he had to bend forward, clutching himself as sweat broke across his forehead.

He remembered the way Aella used to fuss over him whenever he wasn't feeling well. How she'd stay up all night, unable to eat or sleep, worrying about him.

The thought tore through his heart like a blade. He slid off the chair and hit the floor with a dull thud.

His phone dropped on the ground. It kept ringing beside him.

But he didn't hear a thing. His mind was drowning in guilt and grief that he shut down all the noise from the outside world.

Zera called three times in a row. Tyrone never answers her call. Finally, she gave up.

The next morning, Zera hurried out of the house Tyrone had arranged for her.

She found her family waiting right outside the gate.

Daphne wasted no time and demanded money. "Zera, you told us to sell our house and move to another city. You said we were getting in the way of you and Tyrone! Now we can't even make a living there. If you don't give us money today, I swear I'll never let this go!"

Zera panicked as passersby began to glance their way. She grabbed Daphne's arm, hissing under her breath, "Keep your voice down! This place isn't mine! Tyrone gave it to me!"

Shirley chimed in and reminded, "Your nephews are both in school. Julian and Daphne have bills piling up. You should be helping them out. Ask Tyrone for more money—enough to buy two houses, and make sure they're in good neighborhoods."