

Once Cast 271

Chapter 271 Meaningless

Tyrone sat on the edge of the bed and hesitantly reached for Aella's hand, gently pulling her closer.

"I drank too much last night," he said softly. "Don't take it the wrong way."

Aella's voice was calm. "The courthouse opens at nine. We should get there early. Go wash up."

Whether he had truly been drunk or just pretending didn't matter anymore.

What mattered was that she could finalize the divorce today—smoothly, once and for all.

Aella pulled her hand back and went to the bathroom.

Tyrone sat there quietly, staring blankly at her fading figure.

At exactly eight o'clock, they both getting ready and came out of their rooms. Read complete version only at

Aella was pulling a small white suitcase. Her outfit was simple—gray tones, elegant, and understated.

Tyrone stood by the study door in a black suit, holding a small jewelry box. His gaze fell on her suitcase.

He hadn't noticed last night that she had already packed everything.

A sharp ache shot through his chest. He reached for the doorframe to steady himself.

"Did you make sure to bring all your documents?" Aella asked flatly. "If everything's ready, we can go."

Their eyes met, silent and heavy.

Tyrone looked pale and tense, but Aella acted as if she didn't notice.

After taking a deep breath, Tyrone walked up to her and handed her a bank card.

"There's half of my personal savings on this card," he said quietly. "It's yours."

Aella took it without a word.

Then Tyrone opened the jewelry box and took out a diamond necklace.

"I've been saving this for a long time," he said, looking into her eyes. "I never got the chance to give it to you. Let me put it on you now."

He set down the box and reached to fasten the necklace around her neck.

Aella shook her head. "I'll take the card, but I don't need the gift."

Tyrone froze, then said stubbornly, "You already took off your wedding ring. But this necklace -you have to wear it."

Aella hesitated, then gave in.

Today, all she cared about was getting the divorce done. Everything else was meaningless.

Tyrone moved behind her, carefully fastening the necklace. Then he brushed her hair aside, his hands trembling slightly.

It was the first time he'd ever put a necklace on her.

He stared at the diamonds resting against her pale neck, then reached for her hand and held it tightly.

"Promise me you'll keep wearing it," he said, his voice low and hoarse.

When their eyes met again, Tyrone's expression gave away his heartbreak.

Aella frowned slightly, then nodded. "Okay."

They were divorcing anyway.

A necklace didn't mean anything now.

She couldn't understand what he was still holding on to.

Tyrone couldn't stop himself—he pulled her into his arms.

Aella struggled, pushing at him, but he only held her tighter.

He buried his face against her neck, breathing in her familiar scent.

"Just let me hold you for a moment," he whispered, his voice full of quiet desperation.

Aella stopped struggling.

Tyrone's arms tightened even more around her, as if trying to freeze time itself.

But Aella's voice soon broke the stillness, cold and sharp. "Tyrone, that's enough."

The irritation in her tone pierced straight through his heart.

He'd said those exact words to her once before—with the same impatience.

Now he finally understood how much it hurt to be rejected by the person you love.,

He slowly let go of her. The corners of his eyes were red.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed hard. "Let's go," he muttered.

Neither of them felt like eating breakfast.

When they went downstairs, Tyrone was carrying Aella's suitcase. In the lobby, they ran into Brad.

Seeing the luggage, Brad frowned. "Where are you two headed so early?"

Tyrone and Aella exchanged a glance before Aella replied, "I'm going to stay with my parents for a bit."

As long as the divorce wasn't official yet, anything could still happen.

She didn't want Brad to know they were going to the courthouse.

Just then, Sayer stepped out of the elevator and walked over.

"Aella," he said with a friendly smile, "I know the way. Let me drive you."

Aella hadn't expected to run into both of them on this day of all days.

“No need,” she said quickly. “You two go about your day. We’re just visiting my parents to discuss something.”

Sayer reached for the suitcase in Tyrone’s hand, but Brad grabbed his arm before he could touch it.

He

gave the two of them a brief look, then led Aella toward his car without another word.

Brad and Sayer stood watching them leave until they disappeared down the street. Only then did Brad let go of Sayer’s arm.

Sayer scowled. “Why’d you stop me? I just wanted to go see how this plays out.”

Brad raised an eyebrow. “You could tell where they were going?”

Sayer clapped his hands together. “It’s Monday morning. Aella’s not going to the hospital like usual, says she’s heading to her parents’ place, and she’s got luggage with her. If they’re not going to get divorced, then where else could they possibly be going?”

Chapter 272 Cleared Out

Brad gave Sayer a thumbs-up.

He’d already noticed Tyrone’s reaction earlier and knew something was off.

Still, he hadn’t expected Tyrone—who had been refusing to divorce for so long—to suddenly agree to it.

That part genuinely surprised him.

Sayer grinned. “Brad, why don’t we throw Aella a party tonight to celebrate?”

Brad frowned. "Don't get ahead of yourself. Wait until they actually sign the papers."

Sayer tugged on Brad's arm. "Come on, we've got nothing else to do. Let's just follow them and see what happens."

Brad sighed. "Fine, but we're just watching. Don't cause trouble."

Tyrone kept his eyes on the road, but out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a familiar sports car trailing them.

He didn't speed up—if anything, he slowed down.

They hadn't even reached the courthouse yet when Tyrone's phone started ringing.

It was Noel calling. "Mr. Winter, a few board members, and Mr. Edwin are waiting in your office. They need you to come back right away."

Tyrone turned his head slightly toward Aella.

Seeing her frown, he said, "Didn't I tell you this morning I wouldn't be at the company today and to have them reschedule?"

Noel hesitated, then said, "Mr. Winter, the director for that project you closed last time—the one worth over ten billion dollars—was invited over by Mr. Lawrenson. He'll arrive at Winter Tower by nine. Mr. Edwin asked for you to receive him personally."

Tyrone pulled the car over to the side of the road.

He removed his earpiece and said quietly to Aella, "Something urgent came up. I need to go back to the office. Let me take you home first."

Before he could finish, Aella's tone turned cold. "Tyrone, are you serious right now?"

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was always more work.

His job was never-ending. And whatever came up today couldn't possibly be more important than what they were about to do.

Tyrone unbuckled his seatbelt and leaned toward her.

"Aella, I promised you I'd go through with the divorce," he said firmly. "I'll keep that promise. If you don't trust me, you can come with me to the office."

Aella hesitated, then asked, "How long will it take?"

"I'll try to wrap everything up before noon," he replied.

She opened the door and stepped out of the car.

Standing outside, she looked at him and said, "Tyrone, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt this time. Go handle your work. I'll wait for you at the courthouse entrance. If you can't make it by noon, then come in the afternoon. I'll be there until you show up."

Tyrone had just gotten out of the car when another call came in.

Brad, who had gotten out of Sayer's car, spoke up before he could answer. "If you've got to go to the office, go. I'll stay with Aella and wait for you."

He gave him a long look, then turned to Aella. "I'll be there as soon as I can."

He got back in the car and drove off toward Winter Tower, while Sayer and Brad escorted Aella to the courthouse.

Once they arrived, Aella told them, "You don't have to wait here with me. I'll be fine."

Sayer looked reluctant to leave, but Brad dragged him back to the car.

Inside, Sayer frowned. "Brad, Aella must be so bored sitting there alone. I should go back and keep her company."

Brad gave him a pointed look. "Listen, Aella's been through a lot. She's determined to divorce, but her feelings for Tyrone run deep—deeper than most people can imagine. She's not as calm as she looks. Let her be alone for a while."

At 9:50 AM, inside the CEO's office at Winter Group...

After seeing off the project director from Mudrus, Tyrone barely had time to sit down before the board members started in on him.

He'd secured the massive deal, but the profit margin was five percent lower than the original

proposal.

Now the old men on the board were taking turns criticizing him. Their endless complaints pushed Tyrone's patience to the edge.

When one of them suggested replacing him as CEO, Tyrone slammed a stack of documents on the table—proof that the man had been embezzling company funds. He didn't stop there. He exposed the web of shady side deals that tied the board member to a vice president and several senior executives.

That shut everyone up instantly.

By the time they all cleared out, it was already past ten.

Tyrone slumped back in his chair, exhausted.

He tilted his head against the seat, eyes closed. "What time is it, Noel?"

"It's 10:30 AM, Mr. Winter," Noel replied.

"Get the car ready," Tyrone said. "We're going to the courthouse."

Noel hesitated. "Mr. Winter, it's at least a 40 to 50-minute drive. By the time you get there, the clerks might already be out for lunch. Maybe you should tell Mrs. Winter to come in the afternoon?"

Tyrone pushed himself to his feet, his voice low but firm. "Get the car."

Aella had finally chosen to trust him again. He couldn't let her down—not this time.

Meanwhile, at the courthouse, Aella had already been sitting in the lobby for over two hours.

All around her were couples waiting to register for marriage—smiling, holding hands, full of joy.

But those who came for a divorce wore pain on their faces.

One middle-aged woman collapsed to the floor after finalizing her divorce, sobbing uncontrollably.

Another young wife, furious and heartbroken, fought with her ex-husband right outside the clerk's window.

Chapter 273 Farewell

Some women walked out of the courthouse with blank faces and empty eyes.

All of them carried sadness and regret.

No one left that place smiling.

That was the price of choosing the wrong person.

Aella glanced at her phone.

In 20 minutes, the courthouse staff would be off duty.

Feeling restless, she stepped outside and stood by the door, watching cars come and go.

Her thoughts drifted back to the day she married Tyrone.

She had waited outside her house, just as she was now, nervously watching for his car.

When Tyrone stepped out holding a bouquet of bright red roses, she'd run straight into his

arms.

It was the first time he had ever given her flowers.

He held her hand as they went inside to get their marriage license. When they walked out of City Hall, their fingers were still interlocked.

In the car, she had proudly posted a photo of their marriage license on her story.

He'd kissed her deeply for the first time, gently ruffling her hair and teasing that she smiled like a fool.

Aella blinked away the tears threatening to fall.

Just then, a divorced couple stormed out of the courthouse behind her, yelling at each other.

When she turned back, she finally saw Tyrone's car pulling up.

She hurried forward and opened the door for him herself.

Tyrone stepped out, his gaze fixed on her reddened eyes.

He reached out and gently wiped away the moisture at the corner of her eyes with his rough

fingertips.

Aella pushed his hand away. "Let's hurry. We need to get this done before the staff goes home

When Tyrone didn't move, she grabbed his arm to pull him along.

He caught her wrist and said softly, "Aella, do you remember what you promised me?"

Impatient, she spoke quickly. "Tyrone, as long as we finalize the divorce today, I promise I'll do everything I can to treat Zera."

He held her hand firmly. "I agreed to the divorce partly because I want you to hypnotize Zera- and because I want the truth."

He paused, looking straight into her

eyes.

"But the real reason I agreed ... is you. Because you wanted the divorce. And because I want to start over with you."

Aella looked away. She didn't argue.

She just said quietly, "They're about to close soon. Let's go."

Tyrone stared at her for a long moment, a strange unease rising inside him.

Unable to hold back, he pulled her into his arms right there in public.

Aella patted his shoulder gently. "Tyrone, it's just a divorce. It's not like we'll never see each other again. Don't be like this."

He slowly released her. Their eyes met one more time before he took her hand and led her inside.

It was the last Monday of May, 11:45 AM.

Tyrone and Aella walked out of the courthouse together.

Aella hadn't expected it to go so smoothly.

She lifted the divorce decree in her hand, letting the sunlight fall on it as she studied it closely

No thirty-day waiting period, no more delays.

It was finally over.

Her lips curved into a small smile. All the tension and weight she'd carried for so long melted away.

She felt lighter than she had in years.

That smile hit Tyrone like a knife. He clenched the decree in his hand so hard it crumpled

“You're this happy to be divorced from me?” he asked bitterly.

Aella suddenly remembered he was still beside her. She quickly tucked the decree into her purse.

Her phone was buzzing nonstop. “It's all done now,” she said calmly. “You should get back to work. Just leave my luggage here—I can grab a cab.”

Her tone was polite, even gentle, but it drew a deep ache in Tyrone's chest.

He forced down his emotions. “It's already lunchtime. Let's eat first. I'll take you afterward.”

Before she could refuse, he added, “I have something to tell you.”

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Aella hesitated, then nodded. "Alright, Mr. Winter. Lunch is on me—it's our farewell meal."

The way she called him Mr. Winter made his face darken.

They got into the car. Tyrone stayed silent the entire time, his expression unreadable.

Aella didn't bother him. She took the divorce decree out of her purse and looked at it again, even smiling as she snapped a photo.

Before she could post it, Tyrone's hand shot out to stop her.

Aella pushed his hand away. "Mr. Winter, we're not married anymore. You have no right to tell me what to do."

His jaw tightened as he shoved the decree back into her purse.

"I'm still the CEO of Winter Group," he said coldly. "Our divorce will go public soon, but not before we release an official statement. I've already asked Noel to prepare it. Until then, you are not posting that story."

Chapter 274 It's Over

Aella thought about it for a moment and nodded.

"You're right. I got a little too excited. I'll wait a few days before posting it."

Tyrone pressed his lips into a tight line as he stared at her.

They chose a quiet restaurant and ordered their meals.

When the waiter left, Tyrone, being his usual thoughtful self, cut Aella's steak into small pieces and slid the plate toward her.

Aella said softly, "Tyrone, we're divorced now. You don't have to do this anymore."

He looked at her seriously. "You once promised me that if I agreed to the divorce, you'd give me a chance to win you back."

He leaned forward, his tone firm but gentle. "Aella, starting today, I'm going to pursue you again—and this time, I'll do whatever it takes to make you happy."

She frowned. "I did say that if you divorced me, I'd give you a chance to chase me again. But you never agreed to it."

Tyrone's face darkened. "If I hadn't agreed, you never would've gotten that divorce. Not even with Mason and Victor backing you up!"

Aella sighed. "You divorced me for Zera, not for me. Don't twist that around."

Tyrone froze for a second, clearly not expecting that.

His jaw tightened, and he glared at her. "Believe what you want. But I'll make you come back to me—willingly. I'll prove that my feelings for you are real."

Aella pursed her lips. She didn't believe him.

When she her food, Tyrone's plate was barely touched.

After lunch, Aella was ready to head back to the Reid Residence, but Tyrone insisted on driving her.

By three in the afternoon, Warren and Miriam were already waiting anxiously at the door.

When they saw Tyrone and Aella step out of the car together, their faces immediately changed.

He placed Aella's suitcase by the door and greeted them politely. "Hello, Warren. Hello,

Miriam."

Warren let out a heavy sigh. "Since you two are divorced now, you should live your own lives. You don't need to come by anymore."

Aella didn't say anything. She just picked up her suitcase and turned to leave.

Tyrone's eyes turned red when Miriam turned away. "Miriam ... "

She stopped, her back still facing him. "You're divorced now, Tyrone. There's nothing left for us to say."

He stood there watching them walk inside, and a wave of sadness crushed him.

Ralph and Edwin had always been strict with him growing up.

Edwin and Virginia were constantly fighting.

The only place he'd ever felt true warmth was at the Reid Residence.

Warren and Miriam had always treated him like family.

They celebrated his good grades. They were proud when his company succeeded.

They treated him like a son—and now he had disappointed them, too.

Looking at Miriam's back, Tyrone said quietly, "Miriam, I'll make things right. One day, you'll accept me again."

She stopped walking but didn't turn around.

Aella didn't want to speak, but she knew she had to.

"Tyrone," she said firmly, "stop being so stubborn. When I decided to leave you, I never planned on looking back."

When she tried to walk away, he grabbed her wrist.

She pulled free and said sharply, "If Zera finds out you're divorced, she'll probably be so happy her illness will disappear halfway. You should go home and celebrate with her."

Tyrone stood there speechless, unable to find the right words.

When Aella finally went inside, Warren and Miriam couldn't help asking, "So it's really over?"

Aella took the divorce decree from her purse. Warren sighed in relief.

Miriam sat on the couch and pulled Aella into her arms. Tears streamed down her face.

"It's okay," she said, voice trembling. "You'll find someone better."

Aella nodded gently, trying to comfort her.

But deep down, she had already given up on love.

People who cared too much were always the ones who got hurt.

From now on, she wouldn't be so naïve.

She'd live for herself—and never depend on anyone again.

She stayed with Warren and Miriam for a while, chatting to ease their worries. Chapters first released on

Outside, Tyrone was still standing by the gate, unable to leave.

Noel finally walked up, looking uneasy. “Mr. Winter ... Ms. Caldwell called again.”

Tyrone frowned deeply, then turned and got into his car without a word.

Late that night, Tyrone dragged himself home, exhausted.

The huge house was painfully quiet, the kind of silence that made his chest ache.

He walked into the main bedroom, tossed his jacket aside, and collapsed flat on the bed. All the emotions he'd held back hit him at once.

Something hard pressed against his back. He reached under him and pulled out a small crystal pendant.

Inside it was a photo—a tiny figure standing alone, looking so lonely it hurt to see.

Tyrone closed his hand around it and pressed it against his chest.

His voice cracked as he whispered, “Baby ... Aella’s not really gone, right? She wouldn’t just leave me like this ... right?”

His eyes turned red as he choked on his words.

And just like that, Tyrone and Aella ended their marriage with no one else knowing.

Chapter 275 Right Person

Even though Brad and Sayer both knew what was going on, Tyrone and Aella hadn’t made their divorce public yet. So neither of them dared to ask any questions.

On Tuesday evening, after work, Tyrone returned to Winter Estate.

The family had just dinner. Everyone was surprised to see him suddenly come back.

Ralph said. “Since you two are planning to get along again, why don’t you bring her to more business dinners? That’ll help clear up the rumors.”

Then he added, “And if she really wants to stay your wife, she should give you a child soon.”

Tyrone didn’t reply. He simply placed the divorce decree on the coffee table.

“Dad, Mom, Grandpa,” he said quietly. “Aella and I are divorced.”

The moment he said that, everyone’s expression changed.

Raine quickly picked up the divorce papers. Her eyes turned red as she read them carefully. Then she passed the papers to Ralph and Virginia.

Virginia glanced at them briefly, then looked away.

Edwin, who had been sitting silently the whole time, still didn't say a word.

Ralph frowned. "How much of your assets did she take?"

Tyrone lowered his eyes, hiding the emotion behind them. "She didn't take anything."

Ralph gave a sharp snort and slammed the divorce decree back on the table. "At least she knows her place."

Edwin finally spoke, his tone calm and cold. "She's just a bankrupt heiress with a stubborn temper and no children. It's better this way."

Tyrone stood up wearily. "I only came to tell you the news. I'll head out now."

He turned and left the living room.

Raine rushed after him and caught him beside his car, eyes red.

"Tyrone," she said, her voice trembling. "You know better than anyone how Aella treated you all these years. You were the one who cheated. You're the one who betrayed her. How can you let her leave with nothing?"

Her words hit him hard, making it difficult to breathe.

He didn't answer. He just gently pushed her aside, got in his car, and drove away.

When Raine returned to the living room, Ralph's face darkened. "Tyrone and Aella are divorced. From now on, stop seeing her."

Raine stomped her foot in anger. “Dad, Tyrone’s the one at fault! It’s bad enough that you’re defending him—why are you forbidding me from seeing Aella?”

Ralph’s tone was firm. “She used to act arrogantly because she was Tyrone’s wife. Now that she divorced, she’s nobody.”

Raine opened her mouth to argue, but Virginia quickly stopped her.

Then Edwin, who had been silent, looked up and asked, “Raine, how’s it going with that set you up with last week?”

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Her anger flared again. “I’m never getting married! And you can forget about using me for you family alliances!”

She grabbed her car keys and stormed out.

Late that night, Tyrone and Brad were in a private room on the second floor of Regal Club, each stretched out on a long couch.

Brad asked, “Why’d you suddenly agree to the divorce? Just because of what Aella said that night?”

Tyrone sat there in a white dress shirt and black slacks, looking exhausted.

He stared at the red wine in his glass, saying nothing.

What Aella said that night had stuck with him.

In her eyes, he'd been a terrible husband—neglectful, distant, and full of regret.

He'd thought that once he dealt with all the mess in his life, he could start over with her.

After a long silence, Tyrone changed the topic. "You ran off overseas to escape your family's pressure to get married, and you still have the nerve to lecture me?"

Brad sighed. "I'm still young. I haven't had enough fun yet, and they keep pushing me to get married and have kids. Old people's thinking is terrifying."

Tyrone asked, "So, is it that you don't want to get married, or have you just not met the right person yet?"

Brad tilted his head toward him. "When you married Aella, was she the right person for you?"

Tyrone's grip on his glass tightened unconsciously.

"When I decided to marry Aella," he said quietly, "I was ready to spend my whole life with her."

And even now, that hadn't changed.

On Wednesday, Winter Group publicly announced Tyrone's divorce. The news sent shockwaves through the business world.

That afternoon, Aella met Mason at a restaurant.

"I didn't expect your divorce to go through so smoothly," Mason said. "But now that it's done, just let things take their course."

He didn't say "congratulations."

Aella smiled lightly. "I was hoping to invite you, Mr. Vic, and everyone else out for dinner, but he's in Ressovia right now. We'll have to wait a few days."

Then she added, "But either way, I still need to thank you."

Without Mason's help, the 30-day waiting period alone would have dragged things out much longer.

Mason smiled. "No need to thank me. It just means your story with Mr. Winter has reached its end. At least he let you go gracefully."

He truly had a way with words—never too much, never too little. He neither flattered Aella nor criticized Tyrone.

Chapter 276 Privilege

That was why Aella always felt so at ease around Mason.

Henry, sitting quietly beside Mason, didn't interrupt while the two adults talked. When they , he tugged at Mason's sleeve and whispered, "Dad, can I ask Mom to help me pick some cool sneakers?"

Mason chuckled and looked over at Aella.

Aella smiled. "Henry, if you want my help, just ask me directly anytime, okay?"

Henry hadn't seen her in days, and his shy little smile made her heart melt.

After lunch, Aella and Mason took Henry to the mall.

Aella walked hand in hand with Henry up front while Mason followed behind them, pushing a small shopping cart.

That warm family-like scene didn't go unnoticed—Zera and her mother, Shirley Caldwell, happened to spot them from across the mall.

Zera's eyes lit up. She quickly pulled out her phone and snapped several photos before dragging her mother into the restroom. Her excitement was impossible to hide.

Shirley scoffed. "No wonder she got divorced so quickly. Turns out she already has another man!"

Zera's hands trembled as she stared at the photos. Tyrone and Aella were finally divorced. This was her chance.

Shirley said seriously, "Zera, you'd better grab this opportunity before some other woman does."

Zera shoved her shopping bags into her mother's hands. "Mom, you go home. I'm going to see Tyrone right now."

Around eight that night, Zera waited outside Tyrone's apartment building until he returned.

When Tyrone got out of his car, he kept his expression calm. "You sounded urgent on the phone. What's this about?"

Zera's tone was soft and sympathetic. "Tyrone, I know you just got divorced. You must be feeling awful. I didn't want to disturb you, but I couldn't just keep this to myself."

She pulled out her phone and sent him one of the photos she'd taken—Aella and Mason

looking close together.

Tyrone opened the picture, stared at it for a moment, then locked his screen without saying a word.

Seeing that he didn't react, Zera continued, "I thought you might not believe me, so I took a photo. Honestly, they looked even closer in person than what you see there."

She added, "I really thought she loved you. I didn't expect she wanted the divorce because of him."

Tyrone looked at her coldly. "You called me all the way here just to tell me this?"

Zera froze, then quickly stammered, "No, of course not! I ... I came because my condition's getting worse. I just happened to mention your ex-wife."

Tyrone glanced at her from head to toe. "Aella already agreed to treat you. I'll schedule a session with her and take you there myself."

Zera hadn't expected him to still care about her even after the divorce. Her heart fluttered with fake gratitude.

"Tyrone, thank you for doing this," she said sweetly. "I'll wait for your call. I won't bother you anymore."

Tyrone watched as she left. Then he leaned against his car, lit a cigarette, and took a deep drag.

He opened his phone again, staring at the photo she'd sent. His chest tightened with frustration.

He didn't want to go back to that empty house without Aella.

What he wanted was to drive straight to her place.

But what excuse could he even use now?

He couldn't just show up anymore—he'd have to think of a reason first.

Feeling drained, Tyrone leaned against the car door, tilted his head back, and closed his eyes.

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The next morning, Tyrone went straight to the hospital to find Aella.

He waited in the parking lot until he saw her car pull in, then stepped out to meet her.

Aella spotted him and paused mid-step.

Tyrone stared at her, momentarily speechless. Her light makeup made her look radiant- nothing like a woman who had just gone through a divorce.

He held out a paper bag. "I got you your favorite croissant."

But Aella didn't take it. "No, thank you. I live with my parents now. My mom makes breakfast for me every morning."

His hand dropped to his side, the croissant suddenly feeling heavy.

He'd

gone out of his way—two whole blocks—to get it for her, and now it was pointless.

He sighed quietly.

Aella asked calmly, "Was there something else you needed?"

Holding back his frustration, Tyrone said, "I'll be bringing Zera over this afternoon. You promised to help with her hypnosis treatment."

Aella glanced around, lowering her voice. "I don't have any appointments this afternoon. I'll call you when I'm available."

With that, she turned to greet a colleague nearby and walked off with her.

Tyrone stood there, watching as she disappeared through the hospital doors, his gaze lingering long after she was gone.

Somewhere along the way, he realized, he'd lost every bit of "privilege" he once had with her.

When Aella reached her office, Daniel handed her a new case file. "This is from Aldoria's youngest Oscar winner," he said. "His condition's a little better than Mr. Locke's was back then, but his family situation's complicated. Take a look before you decide."

Chapter 277 Cheap

Aella took the file from Daniel and smiled. "Don't worry. I love taking the rare cases no one else dares to touch."

Daniel gave her an approving look. "There's one more thing."

He continued, "The local TV network is running a segment about holistic medicine. It's a free educational program for the public, but it could really help build your reputation—and the hospital's too. I think you should give it a try."

Aella hesitated. She'd never been on TV before. "Daniel, are you sure I can handle it?"

He chuckled. "Aella, you don't have to believe in yourself—but you do have to believe in my judgment. If I say you can do it, then you absolutely can."

Aella laughed softly. "Back when I was just starting, I was fearless. It's because of your constant encouragement that I made it this far. I may not trust anyone else, but I'll always trust you."

TV exposure spread fast. If she went on that show, not only could she build a positive public image, but she could also raise both her own and the hospital's reputation.

There was no way Aella would miss such a good opportunity.

She worked straight through the morning. Around noon, she got a call from Raine asking her to meet for lunch near the hospital.

Virginia and Raine were already at the restaurant when she arrived, and they'd even ordered for her.

Aella hesitated for a moment, then said politely, "Virginia, since Tyrone and I are divorced now ... how should I address you?"

She poured herself a glass of juice and smiled. "Just call me whatever makes you comfortable, Aella."

Raine held Aella's hand and frowned. "Aella, Tyrone's not short on money. Why did you leave with nothing?"

She patted her hand gently, then reached into her purse and pulled out a bank card.

She placed it in front of Virginia. "This card was from him. The amount inside is way too much. I can't accept it. Please hold onto it for him instead."

She had checked the card before coming—and found an eye-popping balance of 500 billion

dollars.

Until then, she had always thought the Winters men were cold, selfish, and heartless.

She'd never understood how their family managed to stay at the top of Vleka's elite for so many years—or why Tyrone treated powerful men like Mason, Victor, and even the Lockes from Euravia as if they were nothing.

But after seeing how many zeros came after that “5,” she finally understood just how powerful the Winters truly were.

If the other two Winters men ever found out Tyrone had given her that money, she and her family would never know peace again.

Virginia said gently, “Tyrone didn't touch the company shares or any of his real estate. Not even his domestic accounts. That means this money must've come from one of his overseas personal accounts.”

She added, “If he secretly transferred that much to you, it means he wanted you to have it. You should keep it. Raine and I won't tell anyone.”

But Aella shook her head firmly. “I can't take it. I'd feel guilty if I did.”

Raine sighed. “Come on, Aella. What's the harm in taking it? If Tyrone gave it to you, it's yours. Besides, it's not that much.”

Not that much?

Aella's mouth twitched awkwardly.

“Raine, I really can't take it,” she said.

She knew better than anyone how difficult the Winters men could be.

She was divorced now, and she was more than capable of earning her own money. The last thing she wanted was unnecessary trouble.

Seeing her so determined, Virginia finally took the card back.

Aella let out a quiet breath of relief.

The three women ate and chatted, and before long, the atmosphere had softened.

But outside the restaurant, Zera happened to pass by—and froze when she spotted them through the window.

She saw Virginia lovingly placing food on Aella's plate while Raine chatted with her like an old friend. Jealousy burned through Zera like acid.

That woman—Aella—was divorced! Why are Tyrone's mother and sister

still treating her so well?

Fuming, Zera hid behind a nearby billboard and waited.

When the three finally lunch, she watched Virginia and Raine drive away. Then she hurried after Aella, who was walking toward the crosswalk.

“Hold it right there!” Zera said, stepping in front of her.

Aella frowned. “What do you want?”

Zera lifted her chin proudly. "Aella, you're divorced from Tyrone now. I want you to stay away from him—and from his family."

Aella looked at her like she'd lost her mind. "Zera, in what capacity are you warning me right now?"

Zera smirked. "Tyrone divorced you for me. What do you think my position is?"

Then she added coldly, "If you have any sense, you'll leave Vleka while you still can—and never come back."

Aella raised an eyebrow. "Weren't you begging me to treat your illness just a few days ago?"

Zera crossed her arms with a smug grin. "If you leave Vleka, my life will be half healed already. I don't need your help to get better."

Aella stepped back onto the sidewalk and looked her up and down from head to toe.

Everything Zera wore was a cheap imitation—her clothes, shoes, even the handbag. The whole outfit couldn't be worth more than a thousand dollars.

Aella's lips curled into a cold smile. "The Winters' maids wear uniforms that cost at least ten thousand dollars each. You're standing here in knockoffs worth less than a grand. What gives you the right to act superior towards me?"

Chapter 278 What Zera Didn't See

Zera glanced down at the shoes on her feet, her face tight with embarrassment.

If she hadn't fallen for Virginia's lies and wrecked her own career, if she hadn't been stupid enough to get played by that old woman, she wouldn't be in this mess.

Tyrone refused to give her money. Most of what she borrowed from Jenny had already been squeezed out of her by her greedy sister-in-law. The payday loans she took out online barely covered her basic expenses. There was no way she could afford designer brands anymore.

But now, she wasn't worried.

Tyrone had promised to let Aella treat her illness and said he'd take good care of her and Orson. She believed Tyrone, he was the type who either gave nothing or gave big.

Aella said, "Even if I am Tyrone's ex-wife, I could call up Virginia right now, and the Winters' people would slap you three times a day. You believe that?"

Zera's eyes flickered with all kinds of emotions.

When she spoke again, the arrogance from before had mostly faded.

She said, "Aella, we're both women. Why make things harder for each other? I'm just trying to remind you that since you're already divorced from Tyrone, maybe it's time you stayed out of his life and stopped trying to make yourself relevant.

She sighed.

She said, "Zera, instead of wasting time running your mouth with me, maybe focus on locking down that marriage certificate with Tyrone. Because if Mr. Edwin sets him up with someone who actually matches his status, you'll be screwed way worse."

With that, Aella turned and walked away.

Zera stood there, furious, her foot stomping the pavement.

Aella had hit a nerve. She'd schemed and waited forever for Tyrone to finally get divorced. No way was she letting another woman swoop in and take her place.

Aella paused once she crossed the street.

Zera, that idiot, still didn't get it.

Clearly, it was time for Aella to make good on her promise to Tyrone and hypnotize her.

Whatever drama they had going on, Aella didn't care, as long as they stayed the hell out of her life.

As she walked, Aella called Tyrone.

He picked up almost instantly.

Aella said, "Friday morning. Bring Zera in to register."

On the other end, Tyrone immediately left the conference room, abandoning the people inside. Before he could even get a word out, Aella had already hung up.

Just after nine on Friday morning, Tyrone brought Zera to the hospital.

Even though Aella knew perfectly well there was nothing wrong with Zera, she still went through the formalities—asked all the intake questions, ordered the tests, ran her through the whole process.

Over an hour later, Zera came back into Aella's office.

Aella looked at Tyrone and said, "It's hard to say right now. Let's try a round of meds and some holistic therapy and see how it goes."

Tyrone nodded. "You're the doctor. Whatever you say."

Aella continued, "Three sessions a week. Each one's 40 minutes. Come see me directly next Monday."

Zera put on her fake smile and said, "Thank you, Dr. Reid."

Aella glanced at her but didn't respond.

Tyrone lowered his gaze, hiding whatever emotion flashed in his eyes.

Without a word, he stepped closer to Aella and said quietly, "Can you start the therapy this afternoon? She's been really worn out lately. I just want her to get treated sooner and start healing faster."

He didn't want to wait even one more day.

He wanted to get this over with as soon as possible so he could finally explain everything clearly

to Aella.

Zera heard Tyrone's words, and the corners of her mouth lifted without her realizing it.

She hadn't expected Tyrone to care about her so openly, right in front of his ex-wife. To speak

for her like that? It made her feel warm all over.

up

She gave a shy little explanation. "Dr. Reid, please don't take it the wrong way. Tyrone's just really worried about me. If it's too much trouble, I can wait until Monday."

Aella exchanged a look with Tyrone and instantly picked up on the message behind his eyes.

Victor hadn't come back from Ressovia yet, and she didn't have to be at Webster Manor any time soon. Might as well take care of the Zera situation while she had the chance.

Aella stood and said, "Since Mr. Winter's so concerned, fine. Come back at 2:30 this afternoon. Don't be late."

Tyrone gave Aella a quick glance, then left the office with Zera.

He had the driver take Zera home, while he got into Brad's car.

Zera walked into the house humming, and told Shirley, "Tyrone's personally taking me to the hospital this afternoon for rehab. Can you believe that?"

Shirley raised an eyebrow. "The way those two divorced so clean, and now they're both so cooperative about getting you treated ... You sure there's not something fishy going on?"

Her words made Zera's heart skip a beat.

That woman Aella might look calm and classy on the outside, but who knew? Maybe she was just waiting for the perfect moment to get revenge.

Suddenly feeling uneasy, Zera turned to Shirley and said, "Mom, maybe you should come with me this afternoon. Don't leave my side, not even for a second."

At exactly 2:30, Zera and Shirley arrived at the hospital.

When Zera noticed Tyrone's gaze land on Shirley, she quickly explained, "Tyrone, I know you're busy with work. Since Dr. Reid already agreed to treat me, you go ahead and do thing, my mom will stay with me and help take care of everything."

He gave a subtle nod, saying nothing. Then he brought both women to Aella.

Chapter 279 Truth Under Hypnosis

Aella glanced at Tyrone's hand tapping lightly on his phone screen. She turned, checked her own phone, and saw the message Tyrone had just sent her.

Sliding the phone into her pocket, she faced Zera and Shirley. "Family members aren't allowed in during therapy. Ms. Caldwell can come in alone," she said calmly.

Zera hesitated, clearly uneasy. She said, "Tyrone, I haven't been doing well lately. Could you ask Dr. Reid to make an exception and let my mom come in with me?"

Before Tyrone could say anything, Aella cut her off. "If you don't even have the most basic trust in me, then you should probably find another doctor. You're free to leave right now."

She threw Tyrone a glance, then turned and walked into the treatment room without waiting for a response.

Zera looked at him, flustered. "Tyrone, I didn't mean it like that. I just ... I ...

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Tyrone said patiently, "Zera, I promised her I'd go through with the divorce. In return, she promised me she'd help you recover. Even if you don't trust her, you should at least trust me."

Zera stared at him, eyes welling up with tears.

She asked, "Tyrone ... Did you really divorce her because of me?"

Tyrone answered with a straight face, "If you don't believe me, you can go in there right now and ask her yourself."

Zera burst into tears, nodding hard. "Tyrone, I believe you. I really do."

She turned to Shirley and said, "Mom, go on home. Tyrone's here, nothing's gonna happen to me."

Shirley, teary-eyed herself, nodded quickly and left the hospital without another word.

Tyrone pulled out a tissue and handed it to Zera.

"Come on. I'll walk you in," he said.

Zera wiped her tears and followed him obediently into the office.

At exactly 2:30, Zera was successfully coaxed into the treatment room.

Half an hour later, Aella successfully hypnotized Zera.

With Aella's help, Tyrone managed to guide Zera into confessing every truth he needed to hear.

What shocked Aella was how someone as seemingly dumb and timid as Zera could be hiding such a vicious heart—all the twisted, dirty things she'd done.

Just to climb her way into high society, she'd schemed, manipulated, and even cost someone

their life.

The original 40-minute session stretched into an hour and a half.

As Zera lay unconscious on the treatment bed, Aella stopped Tyrone and said, "She's about to wake up. You can't keep going."

Tyrone turned off the voice recorder in his hand and pulled Aella into the restroom.

He shut the door behind them and said, "You heard everything Zera admitted just now. This is why I kept her around."

Aella stood at the sink, calmly disinfecting her hands.

She replied, "Tyrone, whatever drama you two have, I don't care. She's waking up, go back out there."

Tyrone grabbed her arm, turning her to face him.

Holding back emotion, he spoke with difficulty.

"Aella, I regret not standing my ground before. I hurt you because of Zera, and I hate myself for it, but I never wanted to lose you because of her."

He added, "I know you haven't forgiven me yet, and I'll wait. I'll do whatever it takes to earn that back, but can you please stop being so cold to me?"

Aella pushed him away, her face serious. "Tyrone, not every mistake deserves forgiveness. Stop being so stubborn."

Before she could say anything else, both of them heard a soft noise coming from outside.

Tyrone opened the bathroom door and saw Elvira entering the room. He and Elvira exchanged a quick look, then Aella walked out.

Elvira walked up to Aella and quietly reminded her, “Dr. Reid, she’s waking up.”

Aella nodded, her gaze shifting to her, still lying on the treatment bed.

Zera’s lashes fluttered as she slowly came to.

The moment her eyes opened, her first instinct was to grab her phone.

When she saw the time on the screen, her expression changed instantly. She glared at Aella and snapped, “Wasn’t the treatment supposed to take 40 minutes? Why did I sleep until four? What did you do to me?”

Aella didn’t answer. She turned her head slightly, looking toward Tyrone, who had just come out of the bathroom.

Tyrone walked over to the bed and spoke calmly, “You fell asleep during the session. I told them not to wake you, thought you could use the rest. How are you feeling now?”

Hearing his explanation, Zera immediately relaxed.

Rubbing her temple, she put on a weak expression and said, “Guess I really needed the sleep. My headache actually feels a bit better now.”

Then she added with a fake-sweet smile, “No wonder so many celebrities come to Dr. Reid. She’s really amazing.”

Aella stood a short distance away, silently watching Zera put on her performance.

She hadn't actually done any treatment, just hypnosis. Nothing more.

Elvira gave Zera a few post-session reminders, then gently urged her to leave soon.

Tyrone didn't say much else.

As he passed by Aella, he paused for a moment, looked at her, then walked out with Zera.

At the curb outside the hospital, Tyrone told the driver to take Zera home first.

Chapter 280 Winter Estate on Fire

Zera lingered by Tyrone's side, unwilling to leave. She said, "Tyrone, my birthday's in a couple days, will you have time?"

Tyrone looked her up and down and said, "I've been too busy lately and haven't taken good care of you. You've had a rough time. But on your birthday, I'll make it up to you with a gift you'll remember for the rest of your life."

Zera's heart nearly burst with excitement.

She nodded quickly, blurring out, "I don't care about the gift, just having you there that day would make me so happy."

Tyrone gave her a small nod, and Zera obediently got into the car.

Through the window, she watched Tyrone walk over and get into Noel's car. She couldn't help but smile.

Tyrone had said he'd give her a once-in-a-lifetime birthday gift.

And if he said it, it had to be something extravagant and completely unexpected.

Her hands clasped over her racing heart as her mind spun with endless fantasies.

Her suffering was finally about to pay off.

On the sidewalk, Tyrone watched as Zera's car drove off. His expression slowly turned ice cold.

He got into Noel's car and handed him the voice recorder.

Tyrone said, "Everything we need, every clue, every piece of evidence—is on this."

His face was dark, his voice even darker.

He continued, "You've got three days. Compile everything, run another paternity test on Orson, and bring those two people to me."

Noel nodded. "Understood, Mr. Winter. I'll get right on it."

After giving his orders, Tyrone got out of the car.

Just past 5:30, he spotted Aella walking out of the outpatient building. He immediately walked over to her.

Aella paused and asked, "You're still here?"

Tyrone reached out to take the shopping bag from Aella, but she hesitated and didn't hand it

over.

His hand dropped awkwardly. He said, "Thanks for helping me today. I made a dinner reservation—"

Before he could finish, Aella cut him off. "I only helped you because I made a promise. No need to thank me. My parents are waiting, I'm having dinner with them tonight."

Tyrone said, "Let me drive you home. I've got a few things I want to ask you anyway."

Aella glanced around, then walked ahead toward the small park just outside the hospital, with Tyrone following behind.

She turned and said, "Whatever you need to say, say it here."

Tyrone stood there quietly, staring at her for a long moment, struggling to hold back emotion.

He finally asked, "Why did you return the card I gave you?"

Aella wasn't surprised, she'd expected this.

Her expression stayed cool, her tone distant. "Tyrone, getting divorced from you is already the best thing that's happened to me. I don't need compensation."

Tyrone's emotions slipped. He grabbed her arm and pulled her closer.

Looking straight at her, he asked, "You really want to cut ties with me for good?"

Aella pushed him away and took a step back. She shot back, "Do I look like I'm joking to you?"

Tyrone ran a hand through his hair and turned in frustration, pacing a small circle.

He lowered his voice. "Aella, I know I hurt you. This—this money, it's my way of making it right."

Aella replied firmly, "I don't want it."

The two stared each other down, the tension heavy between them.

Then Aella spoke again, her tone a bit softer.

"Tyrone, you know your grandfather and father better than I do. The men in the Winter family -cold, selfish, ruthless. They've never respected women."

She went on, "If they find out you gave me hundreds of billions in a divorce settlement, they're

not going to let it slide. I don't want that kind of trouble in my life."

Tyrone stared at Aella, his chest tightening with pain.

He took a step closer to her, just about to speak when his phone rang.

He glanced at Aella, then answered the call.

Aella clearly heard Raine crying on the other end, begging Tyrone to come back to the Winter Estate as soon as possible.

Worried, Aella pushed his arm and said, "Raine sounds like she's really upset. Go—go check on her."

An hour later, at the Winter Estate, Brad and Tyrone stepped out of the car.

Brad frowned and asked, “Your family’s fighting, why’d you drag me into this?”

Tyrone gave him a look but didn’t answer.

Justin rushed over to meet them. “Mr. Tyrone, Mr. Keller, thank God you’re finally here. It’s been a mess for hours. Please, say something and calm them down.”

Tyrone and Brad exchanged a glance, then walked into the house one after the other.

The atmosphere in the living room was thick with tension. Shards of broken glass were scattered across the floor.

Edwin sat in the main chair, face dark, saying nothing. Ralph stood in the middle of the room, visibly furious.

Virginia stood protectively in front of Raine, shielding her from Ralph. Raine was crying hard, buried in Virginia’s arms.

When Virginia saw Tyrone and Brad walk in, she finally let go of Raine.

Brad’s sharp eyes immediately caught the red slap mark across Raine’s cheek. His expression darkened.

He said, “Mr. Ralph, seriously? What could possibly be so bad you’d hit her? Raine’s not a kid anymore.”