

Once Cast 301

Chapter 301 The Weight of Old Ties

Aella was speechless momentarily.

Sayer clutched his chest, looking hurt, and grabbed Aella's hand. "Aella, he tried to kill me.

Hearing the car door open behind her, Aella turned around.

Tyrone straightened his tie and walked up to her.

Aella gave him a serious look. "Mr. Locke didn't do anything to you. Why did you hit him?"

Tyrone's dark eyes locked on her. "He fought back. So technically, we both threw punches."

Sayer was so furious he almost lost it. "What, you thought I'd just stand there and take it? I'm not some kid you can push around!"

Afraid they'd start again, Aella grabbed Sayer and pulled him away.

Tyrone took the umbrella from his driver and held it over Aella's head. "It's pouring. Let me walk you to the car."

Sayer snorted, then took off his jacket and covered Aella's head with it instead.

Tyrone stood there in the rain, holding the umbrella, watching Aella press close to Sayer as they jogged to the car.

Not far away, another luxury car rolled to a stop.

Justin got out and walked up to Tyrone. "Mr. Tyrone, Mr. Edwin asked you to return to the house right away."

Tyrone calmly looked away and got into his car.

Inside Sayer's sports car, Aella glanced at him again. "You're sure you're not hurt?"

Sayer grinned. "I know how strong he is. I didn't actually fight him. I just messed with him."

Aella finally relaxed.

She reminded Sayer, "Mr. Locke, this is Vleka-Tyrone's turf. Even the heads of the Eight Great Families treat him with respect. If you can win, fine, but if not, just walk away. Don't pick a fight with him."

Sayer grumbled, "It just ticks me off. He hurt you, divorced you, and now he walks around like nothing happened."

Aella sighed. "Because he's a jerk."

Over an hour later, at the Winter Estate.

Tyrone walked into the living room. The heavy air made him frown.

Edwin sat at the head of the table, stern-faced. Ralph looked furious, Virginia's brows were tight with worry, and Raine's eyes were red.

Tyrone took a deep breath and stepped forward to Edwin and Ralph.

Edwin's tone was sharp. "What's this? Think you're too important to come home when I call?"

Tyrone kept his tone even. "What's so urgent you needed me here this late?"

Edwin glanced at Ralph.

Ralph said, "We're just thinking about you and Raine's future."

Before he could finish, Tyrone cut in. "Dad, Raine and I can handle our own marriages."

Ralph pointed at him angrily. "You were reckless before, wasting years on Aella, and ended up with a public divorce. I won't bring up the past, but this time, you don't get to decide!"

Virginia tried to calm things down. "Tyrone, since you and Aella are divorced, you should both move on."

Tyrone stood still in the center of the room, expressionless. "I have my own plans, so stop pushing me."

Edwin's face darkened. "If you hadn't insisted on marrying Aella, you and the Guinevere family's heiress would've been together long ago. You might even have kids by now."

He suddenly brought up the Guinevere heiress, Vivienne Guinevere.

Tyrone frowned.

Edwin went on, "I've talked to the Guineveres. After you turned down the match, Vivienne stayed focused on her career and never married. She's always admired you and doesn't care that you're divorced."

Tyrone interrupted sharply. "I said don't push me!"

Edwin's tone hardened. "I've already spoken to the Guinevere family elders. We'll arrange a date soon and set the engagement."

Tyrone felt his chest tighten. "I'm not agreeing to this!"

He turned and walked out.

Behind him, Ralph's angry shout was followed by the sound of a glass shattering on the floor. Tyrone didn't look back.

Now he finally understood why Aella had hated coming to this house-why she'd hated this family.

Late at night, at Regal Club.

Brad pushed open the door to the private room. The sharp smell of alcohol made him frown.

He grabbed a few unopened bottles from the table, then sat down beside Tyrone.

Brad studied him for a while before speaking. "Raine told me everything. Even if you don't agree, you can't stop it."

Tyrone slouched on the couch, black dress pants, white shirt, jacket, and tie tossed beside him.

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, eyes bloodshot, rubbing his brow.

His voice was low and unreadable. "No one gets to decide who I marry."

Chapter 302 What's Left to Hold On To

Brad stared at Tyrone. "Don't tell me you're still thinking about getting back together with Aella?"

Tyrone said nothing, and Brad sighed.

“Tyrone, from the moment you decided to marry her, I warned you,” Brad said. “You’re both Scorpios. When two Scorpios come together, it’s either perfect or it’s deadly. You hurt Aella so badly for Zera. You almost destroyed her. Can you admit that?”

Tyrone lowered his head, fingers digging into his short hair.

“You and Aella are both strong-willed,” Brad went on. “You’re both perfectionists. You’re stubborn, and she’s just as bad. If she hadn’t had the courage to divorce you, you’d still be living easy, going between two women and pretending you weren’t wrong.

“Tyrone, what you’re feeling now is just habit,” Brad said. “Maybe you feel guilty, maybe you want to make it up to her, but be honest-you don’t love Aella.”

He continued, “There are so many great men around her now. All of them want her. Why should she look back?”

Brad looked him straight in the eye. “What do you have that’s worth her coming back for?”

The words hit Tyrone like knives to the heart. The pain almost knocked him off his feet.

He didn’t say a word, just grabbed his jacket and stumbled out of the private room.

He knew he had wronged Aella.

But letting her go? He couldn’t do it.

Tyrone didn’t even know how he made it home.

When he opened the door, the living room lights were on.

His chest tightened. He dropped his jacket and rushed inside.

For a split second, he thought he saw Aella-wearing cartoon pajamas, throwing her pillow aside, and running toward him.

“Babe!”

He opened his arms to catch her.

But his arms closed around nothing but air. She was gone.

His eyes burned red as he looked up at the empty space in front of him.

He clutched his shirt over his chest and stumbled onto the couch.

Staring blankly at the ceiling, he pulled out the crystal pendant she’d left behind and gripped it tightly in his palm.

A sharp pain shot through his heart, spreading to his stomach until it burned. He curled up, shaking.

Without thinking, he fumbled for his phone, tapping her number again and again until he finally had the courage to call.

After ringing for over ten seconds, she picked up. Tyrone sat up, forcing himself through the pain.

She still answered, even this late. He knew she wasn’t that heartless.

Tyrone held himself back and said quietly, “Aella, my stomach hurts.”

Her voice was cold. “Tyrone, if you’re really feeling bad, call 911.”

She paused before adding, “Let me remind you one last time—we’re divorced. The only reason I haven’t blocked your number is out of respect for Virginia and Raine. I’m just trying to keep things decent.

“If you call again for nothing, don’t blame me for blocking you.”

Then she hung up without hesitation.

The pain in his body and heart hit him all at once.

His phone slipped from his hand and hit the floor. He shut his eyes, hiding the redness in them.

A few mornings later, Tyrone showed up at Clyde’s school with a bouquet of sunflowers.

It was the first day of the SAT, and the school gate was packed with parents.

Even in the crowd, he spotted Aella right away.

She wore a red cocktail dress, the fitted dress tracing her curves and making her look stunning.

His

gaze

landed on Sayer beside her, and his eyes darkened.

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Straightening his tie, he started walking toward her.

“Clyde, you’re gonna ace it!”

Henry held up a big bouquet of sunflowers and handed it to Clyde.

Tyrone looked at the flowers in Clyde’s hands and slowed down.

Then he glanced down at his own bouquet, his expression stiffening.

Even the flowers he brought felt pointless now.

After Aella watched Clyde walk into the exam hall, she turned and caught a glimpse of a familiar figure.

“I think I just saw Mr. Winter,” she said to Sayer.

Sayer quickly stepped in front of her, tiptoeing to block her view. “Your eyes are playing tricks on you.”

Mason just smiled and shook his head, staying silent.

At the school gate, Aella parted ways with Sayer and caught a ride with Mason to the hospital.

At 8:30 a.m., she walked into her office and found Daniel waiting for her.

He handed her an invitation. “My sister’s turning 18 this weekend. You have to come.”

Aella smiled. “Don’t worry, Daniel. I’ll be there on time.”

Chapter 303 A Lesson in Class

Being rich was awesome.

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Aella still remembered her own 18th birthday-her parents threw a grand party, elegant and extravagant.

But when it came to her younger brother Clyde's coming-of-age, all they did was take a family photo and cook a nice meal at home.

It wasn't because they couldn't afford more.

Miriam just said, "We're regular folks now. No need to go overboard."

A few days later came Daniel's sister, Aurelia Hill's 18th birthday.

Aella took Clyde along, and with Sayer driving, the three of them headed to the Hills' mansion in the West District.

At eight that evening, they ran into Mason and Henry at the gate.

As soon as Henry spotted Aella, he ran over, shouting, "Aella, you look so pretty tonight!"

Sayer gave the boy a playful pat on the backside. "Hey, little dude, tell me the truth-did your dad teach you to say that?"

Henry turned to look at his father. "Dad, isn't Aella super pretty tonight?"

Mason smiled and nodded. "Dr. Reid's beauty is well-known. Henry doesn't need to exaggerate."

Aella knew it was just polite talk, but compliments always felt nice.

Clyde bent down and scooped Henry into his arms. "Come on, say Clyde's handsome."

Henry wrapped his arms around Clyde's neck and grinned. "Clyde's the best-way cooler than my dad!"

Sayer tugged gently on Henry's ear. "What about me? Am I the most handsome one here?"

Even at his age, Henry knew how to flatter. He gave Sayer a string of compliments.

Aella laughed. "Mason, your kid's really something."

Mason met her eyes and replied with a calm smile. "Kids tell the truth. Both you and Clyde are exceptional-looks and character included."

Aella teased, "Thanks, Mason. I happen to think we're pretty great too."

They chatted and entered the hall together.

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Aella wore an almond-gray off-shoulder gown that hugged her waist. It was understated but elegant.

The moment she walked in with Mason and Sayer, all eyes turned their way.

"Isn't that Mr. Winter's ex-wife? She's gorgeous."

"Who are the two men with her? Never seen them before."

"And the kid she's holding-who's that?"

“She just divorced Mr. Winter and already has other men hanging around. Beautiful women really are trouble.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. That’s Mr. Fulford, one of the top international lawyers. Only a family like the Hills could invite him.”

“The one on her right looks familiar-that’s the youngest Locke son. I heard he’s rich, wild, and dangerous.”

Upstairs, Tyrone stood at the railing, watching everything below.

His eyes locked on Aella’s smile as she chatted with Mason. His hand gripped the railing so tightly his knuckles turned white.

Next to him, Lysander Hill raised a brow. “Mr. Winter, are you jealous?”

On Tyrone’s other side, Brad Keller chuckled. “Careful with that jealousy, man. Too much and you’ll drop dead.”

Tyrone’s face darkened.

Lysander patted his shoulder. “Since you’re here, why not go down and

say hi?”

Down in the banquet hall, Aella had just greeted Daniel when Jenny suddenly spoke up.

“It’s Aurelia’s big day. I wonder what gift Dr. Reid brought?”

Aella glanced at her and immediately saw the intent behind the question. She ignored her.

The two friends beside Jenny raised their voices on purpose. “Jenny, which rich family is this

Dr. Reid from?”

Jenny cleared her throat. “Dr. Reid isn’t from a rich family. She’s Mr. Winter’s ex-wife.”

Jenny was an illegitimate daughter of the Townsends family.

If she wanted to play dirty, Jenny would make her regret it.

The nearby guests began whispering.

Sayer’s mouth ran ahead of his brain.

He jabbed a finger at Jenny and snapped to Daniel, “Hey, Mr. Daniel, where’d you dig up ugly chick? Hurry up and bury her back.”

The crowd burst into laughter. Jenny’s face flushed crimson.

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But she didn’t dare offend Sayer. “Mr. Locke, I didn’t do anything to you. Even if you’re friends with Dr. Reid, that’s no reason to insult me.”

Daniel gave Jenny a cool look. “Ms. Townsend, you’re a guest, but Dr. Reid is an honored guest of the Hills.”

Daniel’s tone was mild, but everyone caught the message. Jenny’s face stiffened with embarrassment.

Aella stood still, looking at her quietly.

Jenny had tried to humiliate her in public by emphasizing her past as Tyrone's ex-wife.

Basically, she was mocking Aella's ordinary background, implying she had no right to attend this kind of event without that title.

Aella stepped forward, stopped in front of Jenny, and said clearly for everyone to hear, "Last week, Mrs. Townsends Senior kicked you out of the Townsends family. Should I still call you Ms. Townsend, or should I call you the Townsends family's illegitimate daughter?"

Chapter 304 The Ex-Wife Who Stole the Spotlight

Jenny snapped. "I have a name, you know! Say one more word and I'll rip your mouth apart!"

Her voice was shrill and furious. Henry ran forward, hugging Aella's leg protectively. "Hey, lady, didn't your dad ever teach you that yelling at people is rude?"

"You-"

Jenny choked on her words, silenced by a child.

Aella bent down and pulled Henry into her arms, her face cold as she looked at Jenny.

"Ms. Townsend, you can call me Ms. Reid or Dr. Reid. But if you call me 'Mr. Winter's ex-wife' again, I won't be polite next time."

She was who she was-no one's accessory.

Not far away, Tyrone watched her take back her dignity in front of everyone, her tone steady and proud.

For a moment, fear crept into his heart-fear that they might never have anything to do with each other again.

Jenny hadn't managed to get the upper hand, and Aella had embarrassed her in front of everyone. Her face went pale with humiliation.

Raine arrived fashionably late in a fitted black dress that screamed confidence.

"Aella, why waste time talking to people like her? If she dares to mouth off again, just slap her."

Jenny's friend immediately shot back, "This is Aurelia's birthday party. Who do you think you are, acting so arrogant?"

Raine's aura was fierce and untamed.

She strode up to the woman who'd just spoken, looked her over with contempt, and sneered, "Who do you think you are, talking to me like that?"

Jenny didn't dare provoke her. She grabbed her two friends and stormed off in embarrassment.

Brad gently stopped Raine. "Alright, let it go."

Aella could feel Tyrone's eyes on her and frowned, but she kept her composure.

Just then, the Hills' princess, Aurelia, appeared in a sparkling tiara and a dreamy gown. She

smiled brightly. "Daniel, is this the Dr. Reid you always talk about?"

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Daniel Hill immediately corrected her. "Mind your manners. Call her Aella."

Aurelia linked arms with Aella and grinned. "Aella, you're so pretty!"

Aella smiled and handed her the gift box. "Thank you, Aurelia. Happy birthday."

Aurelia opened it for a peek, her eyes lighting up before she shut it quickly. "Wow, you have such great taste. I love it!"

Aella glanced at Mason. "It was Mr. Fulford's idea. He has great style."

Sayer pouted. "When did you two go shopping for gifts together? Why didn't you invite me?"

Everyone turned toward Tyrone, who stood silently, his expression tight.

Mason explained calmly, "Don't misunderstand, Mr. Locke. I just ran into Dr. Reid by chance."

The others accepted that, but Tyrone didn't.

He stood in the crowd, his eyes fixed on Aella, his possessiveness plain as day.

Aurelia turned to Sayer with a playful smile. "Who's this handsome guy? He's so cute!"

Sayer dodged her teasing touch. "Hey, princess, talk all you want, but no touching!"

At 8p.m., the dinner officially began.

Tyrone stayed upstairs with Lysander, but his eyes never left Aella.

Downstairs, Aella stood beside Mason and Sayer, scanning the guests.

There were a lot of people tonight, but one face was missing-Victor .

Aella leaned toward Mason. "Mr. Fulford, have you heard from Victor lately?"

He shook his head, and Aella's brow furrowed.

Victor wouldn't talk. His assistant, Norman, kept his mouth shut too. Tyrone definitely knew something, but he refused to tell her.

Aella made up her mind-she'd go to Webster Manor herself tomorrow.

Not far away, Brad nudged Tyrone. "You've been staring at her all night, and she hasn't looked at you once. Give it a rest."

Tyrone turned away without replying.

Brad smirked. "Look, Mason and Sayer are glued to her. Even if you go over, you'll just be in the way."

Tyrone shot him a warning glance. "If you stop talking, we can still be friends."

Brad shrugged. "I'm saying it because we are friends. Think about it-Mason might have a kid, but he's still got status and brains. Sayer is young, rich, and good-looking. Aella would be better off with either of them than with you."

Every word hit Tyrone hard, and his chest tightened.

He took a deep breath, looked across the room at Aella, and muttered, "I'm taking a call."

Clyde saw Tyrone heading upstairs alone. He quickly set Henry down, handed him over to Aella, then tugged Sayer toward a quiet corner.

Pointing at Tyrone, Clyde lowered his voice. "Keep an eye out for me."

Chapter 305 Chaos Upstairs

Tonight, Clyde was determined to vent his anger. UPDATE FROM

Sayer stopped him and warned, "I've sparred with him before. Even if you train for three more years, you

still can't beat him."

Clyde wrapped his arm around Sayer's shoulder. "Then let's team up. Two against one!"

Sayer hesitated, then nodded. "Alright. This time, we'll make him eat dirt."

The two shared a look of agreement and quietly followed Tyrone upstairs.

Downstairs, Aella was watching Aurelia's coming-of-age ceremony with Henry and a few others.

When Henry got bored and asked where Clyde was, Aella finally realized Clyde and Sayer were missing.

She asked around until a staff member told her they'd just seen the two go upstairs.

Brad spoke lazily, "Tyrone went up too. Maybe the three of them are together?"

Raine cut in, "No way. Sayer and Tyrone fight every time they meet, and Clyde treats him like an enemy. There's no chance they'd hang out together."

Aella and Mason exchanged a look. Her stomach sank with a bad feeling.

Ever since her messy divorce from Tyrone—and after Clyde’s wrist got injured by him—Clyde had thrown himself into kickboxing. He even trained the day before the SATS.

With Sayer by his side, Aella was almost sure the two idiots had gone upstairs to challenge Tyrone.

Panicking, she handed Henry to Mason and rushed upstairs.

Brad, Mason, and Raine shared a look and quickly followed.

Not far away, Lysander noticed the commotion and headed up with a few guests as well.

Aella ran up the stairs, nearly jogging as she looked around.

Tyrone was not someone to mess with.

If Clyde and Sayer had gone looking for trouble, Tyrone definitely wouldn’t let them off easy.

Just then, a loud crash came from a nearby room. Aella hurried toward it and reached for the door.

But before she could open it, the door swung inward. Sayer stumbled out, his clothes disheveled, landing flat on the hallway floor.

Aella froze in disbelief, staring at him.

Sayer looked up, equally stunned to see Aella and the others standing there.

Brad was the first to react. He rushed over and helped Sayer up. "What happened to you?"

Sayer winced and pointed toward the room.

Aella and Brad exchanged a look, then she hurried inside.

The place looked like it had just been through a fight.

Tyrone and Clyde were inside, scrambling to clean up the mess.

Aella grabbed Clyde by the arm, her face tight with worry. "What happened here?"

Both men spoke at the same time. "Nothing."

Clyde said it, but his guilty look gave him away. He quickly slipped out of the room.

Sayer rubbed his back, grumbling, "Why'd he go after me and not you?"

Clyde tried to smooth things over. "Don't be mad, Sayer. Next time, we'll switch. You defend, I attack. We'll definitely take him down."

When they saw Tyrone and Aella come out of the room, both men shut up immediately.

Downstairs, Henry hugged Clyde's leg, calling him uncle, and Jenny noticed.

She didn't dare cause trouble directly, but she whispered to her two friends.

One of them raised her voice on purpose. "Why is Mr. Fulford's son calling Dr. Reid's brother 'uncle'? Don't tell me Dr. Reid and Mr. Fulford are about to get together?"

Another added, pretending to be curious, “Dr. Reid, you just divorced Mr. Winter. Already found someone new?”

Raine stepped forward, but Brad pulled her back.

Mason frowned and walked toward Aella, ready to speak, but she stopped him with a glance.

Seeing Aella remain calm, Jenny couldn’t resist anymore. “Dr. Reid, don’t tell me you’re planning to be someone’s stepmom?”

Aella stood her ground and turned her cold gaze on Jenny. Her voice was low but sharp. “Whether I become a stepmom or find someone new, that’s my business, not yours.”

Jenny looked around and didn’t dare say another word.

Then everyone saw Tyrone walking straight toward Aella. Jenny bit her lip, jealousy flashing across her face.

Tyrone—handsome, powerful, and brilliant. What woman wouldn’t fall for him?

Jenny had liked him for years but never dared to say it aloud. As an illegitimate daughter, she knew she wasn’t worthy.

When Tyrone divorced and Zera went to prison, she thought her chance had finally come.

He was still a top-tier catch, even after a divorce. She had planned to ask Matthew to help arrange a marriage.

But the Winters had already decided to ally with the Guineveres instead.

Even though Matthew was head of the Townsend family, none of the heirs from the eight great families had ever looked her way.

That was something she couldn't stand.

Tyrone's face was dark as he stepped in front of Aella. "I need to talk to you."

Mason read the room and took the child away, leaving them alone.

Chapter 306 Lines That Can't Be Crossed

After everyone left, only Tyrone and Aella remained in the quiet hallway upstairs.

Tyrone tried to explain himself. "Even if you hadn't come up, I wouldn't have hurt Clyde."

Aella let out a dry laugh. "Tyrone, don't pretend you've never hurt him."

Remembering that day, Tyrone's expression faltered.

He took a cautious step closer. "I didn't mean it that time. Besides, Clyde hit me too. I just let him vent his anger."

Tyrone looked into her eyes. "Aella, can we just forget about it?"

Aella stepped back, her voice steady.

"Forget it? The pain you caused me and my family—I'll remember that for the rest of my life."

She added, "If you want me to forget, you'll have to wait until the day I die."

Ignoring the hurt flickering in Tyrone's eyes, Aella turned sharply to leave.

He instinctively reached out and grabbed her wrist.

Aella turned back. They stared at each other.

Tyrone asked quietly, "Everyone misunderstood you and Mason just now. Why didn't you clear it up?"

Aella yanked her hand free. "Misunderstood what? We're both single. There's nothing to explain."

Tyrone stood frozen, watching her walk away. His emotions churned until he slammed his fist into the wall.

Downstairs, the party was still buzzing with laughter and chatter.

Sayer and Clyde rushed over. "He didn't give you a hard time, did he?"

Aella shook her head.

When Tyrone came down with Lysander, Aella lowered her eyes, pretending not to see them.

Tyrone couldn't stop looking at her, though he kept his distance.

Lysander said, "We'll be drawing lots later. Whoever gets picked dances the first dance with Aurelia."

Brad chuckled. "I'm too old for that. Let the youngsters draw."

Clyde lifted both hands. "Dance? I don't even know how!"

Sayer crossed his arms proudly. "I'm not dancing with that little rascal."

Everyone laughed.

Just then, a tall woman walked up, holding a wine glass with casual elegance. "What's so funny over here?"

She wore light-toned tailored pants, flawless makeup, and a short bob tucked neatly behind her ears. Other than a watch and a thin necklace, she had no extra jewelry.

She looked sharp, confident, and effortlessly stylish.

Lysander gave Tyrone a subtle glance, then introduced her. "Everyone, this is Vivienne Guinevere."

After the introduction, Vivienne's gaze landed on Aella. Her eyes brightened with curiosity. "Lysander, who's this beautiful lady?"

Aella smiled politely. "Nice to meet you, Ms. Guinevere. I'm Aella Reid."

The two locked eyes—poised, calm, and unflustered.

Aella looked away first.

It was clear Vivienne already knew exactly who she was.

Tyrone didn't miss a thing, his gaze following Aella's every move.

Aella took Henry by the hand and said to the group, "You all keep chatting. I'll grab something to eat with the kid."

Just as she turned, a waiter passed by with a tray of drinks.

The tray tilted toward Aella. Mason reacted instantly—he caught her around the waist and spun her safely out of the way.

When she found her footing, Aella realized she was pressed close to him, their position far too intimate.

Tyrone froze.

He had reacted fast, but he'd been too far away. Mason was right beside her, close enough to pull her in.

Seeing another man holding Aella, Tyrone's eyes darkened. His fists clenched at his sides.

Everyone noticed the tension and exchanged wary looks.

Mason quickly let go and apologized. "Sorry, Dr. Reid. I moved on instinct."

Aella waved it off. "You saved me. I should be thanking you."

Their tone was polite, but the easy familiarity between them was obvious.

Vivienne watched as Aella and Mason walked off together, then quietly stepped up beside Tyrone. "Seems your ex-wife's pretty popular, Mr. Winter."

Tyrone lowered his gaze, hiding his emotions, and walked away without a word.

Vivienne watched him leave, a faint smirk curling on her lips.

Aella and Mason were chatting when Daniel, Brad, and Raine arrived with Aurelia in tow.

Aurelia leaned close to Aella. "Aella, do you know Sayer's home address?"

Aella blinked. "Sayer?"

Aella couldn't help glancing at Daniel.

He shook his head with a helpless smile. "She's always been wild. Give her a little room, and she'll climb all over you. Don't encourage her."

Aella laughed softly. "Without Mr. Locke's permission, I can't give you his address. But you're welcome to come over to my place instead."

Chapter 307 What You Can't Let Go

Aurelia clung to Aella's arm, pouting playfully. "You promised, Aella. Don't go back on your word."

Watching Aurelia leave with her group of friends, Aella felt a pang of envy.

18 years old—an age burning with passion, when love and hate both came easy.

If the Reid family hadn't gone bankrupt and she'd had a few siblings to protect her, maybe she wouldn't have been hurt so deeply by Tyrone.

After Aurelia left, Brad couldn't resist teasing Raine. "Look at her—already chasing handsome guys at her age. And you?"

Raine blinked in confusion. "What about me?"

Brad sighed. "You're hopeless. Dense as a brick."

Raine stared at him in disbelief.

She'd always been quick and clever since she was little. No one had ever called her slow before.

Everyone was chatting and laughing downstairs, while Aella went upstairs to use the restroom.

When she came out, she ran into Vivienne.

Aella gave her a polite nod and started walking away.

Vivienne adjusted her hair in the mirror and said, "Dr. Reid, can we talk for a minute?"

Aella stopped. "Ms. Guinevere, we're not exactly close."

Vivienne smiled as she walked up. "That's fine. The more we talk, the closer we'll get."

Her tone was polite but faintly commanding, the kind that made people uncomfortable without knowing why.

"Dr. Reid, let me properly introduce myself," she said. "I manage the Guinevere family business—and I might be engaged to Mr. Winter soon."

She said "might," choosing her words carefully.

Aella stayed calm. "Congratulations."

Vivienne looked surprised. "You're not curious?"

Aella shook her head.

Vivienne smiled faintly. “No wonder Mr. Winter insisted on marrying you back then. You really do have something special.”

Aella corrected her. “You misunderstood. Mr. Winter’s marriage to me had nothing to do with love.”

Vivienne wasn’t surprised at all.

She openly admitted her interest in Tyrone right in front of Aella.

“Mr. Winter is attractive, comes from a powerful family, and has the looks, brains, and drive that perfectly

match what I look for in a man.”

Looking at her, Aella suddenly realized she and Tyrone were the same kind of people—cold, calculating, pragmatic.

Back then, if Tyrone hadn’t seen Zera through the lens of gratitude and first love, that woman wouldn’t have lasted long either.

When Aella didn’t respond, Vivienne chuckled softly. “Don’t look at me like that, Dr. Reid. Maybe I’m a few years older than you, so I see marriage differently.”

She went on, “For people like us, marriage is built on interests. As long as the partnership is solid, I don’t care if he has other women.”

Aella couldn’t help but admire her bluntness.

If she had thought like that back then, she might not have ended up so humiliated.

After a long silence, Aella finally said, “I hope you get what you want, Ms. Guinevere.”

Vivienne watched her walk away, her calm steps fading down the hall. Her face slowly turned cold. "You can come out now."

Jenny stepped out of the bathroom awkwardly.

She walked up to Vivienne and said quickly, "Ms. Guinevere, don't let that woman fool you."

Vivienne frowned. "Just say it."

Jenny sneered. "Aella might be divorced, but she's still tangled up with Mr. Winter. She's manipulative and calculating.

"She can't let go of the Winters' money or Mr. Winter himself. She told me that herself. Don't let her play you."

Vivienne gave her a long, unimpressed look. "Trying to use me as your weapon?"

Jenny panicked. "No, you've got it wrong. I'm just trying to help. If you think I'm overstepping, forget I said anything."

Before Vivienne could reply, Jenny turned and hurried off.

At the end of the hallway, Aella was about to head for the stairs when a strong hand suddenly pulled her into a room.

The door clicked shut behind her. She turned around and saw Tyrone standing there.

His dark eyes locked on hers. "What did Vivienne say to you?"

Aella shook off his hand, irritated. "Nothing important. Just small talk. If you don't believe me, go ask her yourself."

Tyrone hesitated, then said, "Whatever she told you, ignore it. I'm not getting engaged to her."

Aella's patience snapped. "Tyrone, I don't want to hear anything about you. Move. Let me out."

Her cold tone only made his frustration worse.

He grabbed her shoulders, pulling her closer.

His voice was low and rough. "Aella, why did you let Mason get that close to you? Why did you let him hold you like that?"

The room went silent. The more Aella struggled, the tighter Tyrone's grip became. He refused to let her
Chapter 308 The Breaking Point

Before long, Aella was drenched in a thin layer of sweat.

She steadied her breathing and forced herself to speak clearly. "Tyrone, we're divorced!"

She glared at him. "So what if Mason hugged me to help me today? Even if I slept with him, it wouldn't have anything to do with you!"

Before she could finish, Tyrone snapped. "Aella, don't

Their eyes locked, tension thick in the air.

you dare!"

Aella's voice was calm but sharp. "Why wouldn't I dare? If I wanted, I could nod my head and have a line of men waiting to crawl into my bed."

She didn't even finish before Tyrone grabbed her and kissed her hard, completely losing control.

His breathing turned ragged. He trapped her in his arms, his possessiveness so strong it felt like he wanted to crush her.

His hand slid down, yanking at her dress strap with practiced ease. His fingers brushed her back as he unhooked the clasp.

She couldn't break free—he was too strong.

Her back went cold, and her heart clenched tight.

"Tyrone,

are you insane?"

Aella held her dress up with all her strength, fighting to keep it from slipping.

Tyrone gripped her waist, his voice low and rough, his eyes bloodshot with desire.

His touch softened for a moment, then his breath brushed her ear. "Aella, you can only sleep with me."

He growled, "If any man touches you, I'll kill him."

Aella's fear finally surfaced.

She had always known Tyrone was manipulative and cold, but she had never seen him this unhinged before.

Panic hit her. She pushed against him, struggling hard.

But he inhaled her familiar scent, refusing to let go.

His breathing was out of control now. Every muscle in his body was tense from restraint.

“Aella,” he warned, “you’re mine. I won’t let anyone else have you.”

Aella’s mind was spinning. Her heart raced, her hands trembling.

If she’d known this would happen, she would rather have stayed downstairs forever.

Just then, Vivienne’s voice came from outside the door.

Aella froze, her entire body going rigid.

If anyone saw them like this, there would be no explaining it.

People always admired the powerful.

They would only say she couldn’t let go of Tyrone’s wealth—that she was the one trying to seduce him.

They’d paint her as the desperate ex-wife, clinging to the rich heir to get back together.

Aella tightened her grip on her dress, afraid to move or make a sound. Tyrone just pulled her closer from behind.

Then Brad’s voice came from the hall, saying to Vivienne that Tyrone was downstairs.

A few minutes later, he knocked on the door softly. "The hallway's clear. You can come out now."

Tyrone hesitated, reluctant, but finally released her.

Aella scrambled to fix her clothes, her hands shaking.

Smack!

She slapped him hard across the face.

They stared at each other in silence.

Before he could speak, she yanked the door open.

Brad was standing right there. His eyes dropped to the faint marks on her neck, and he pointed toward the

restroom.

Aella felt her face heat up.

She ran her fingers through her hair to cover the marks and quickly walked toward the bathroom.

Brad stepped inside. The air still carried tension and heat.

He handed Tyrone a cigarette. "You held it together all night, but the second you saw Mason hug Aella, you snapped, huh?"

Tyrone stood by the window, cigarette between his fingers, saying nothing.

He had his back to Brad, so he couldn't see the look on his face.

Brad walked up beside him and teased, "Pretty sure I heard a slap just now."

Tyrone lifted his hand, brushing the cheek she'd hit, but stayed silent.

He turned his head and glanced at Brad but didn't say anything.

When the cigarette burned out, they both headed downstairs.

Aella came out of the bathroom later, borrowing a shawl from Aurelia to cover her neck.

She said goodbye to Daniel and slipped out early.

Sayer tugged at the fringe on her shawl. "Aella, are you cold?"

Aella forced a calm smile. "I accidentally spilled water on my dress earlier. It's not really fit to wear."

Henry was getting sleepy, so he left with Mason, walking out beside Aella.

At the entrance, Henry grabbed Aella's fingers. "Dad, I want to go to Clyde's house."

Mason picked him up gently. "Aella's tired tonight and has work tomorrow. You need to be good."

Henry pouted. "Then you come too! We can all sleep at Aella's house, and you can drive her to work tomorrow."

Before he could finish, Sayer grabbed his ear playfully. “You little rascal, you’re not looking for a mom for yourself—you’re trying to find a wife for your dad!”

Mason gave Aella an embarrassed smile. “Sorry, Dr. Reid. Kids say whatever comes to mind. I’ll talk to him.

ater.”

After Mason and Henry left, Aella, Clyde, and Sayer all got into the car and headed home.

Chapter 309 Visiting Victor

As Sayer drove, he muttered, “Aella, Mr. Fulford’s son is way too clever for his age. You’d better be careful around him.”

Aella couldn’t help laughing. “He’s just a kid. Don’t blow things out of proportion.”

Clyde leaned over the back of Aella’s seat and asked, “Aella, why is that Townsend woman always picking on you?”

Aella pursed her lips and didn’t answer directly.

She turned to Sayer and Clyde and said, “That Winter guy isn’t someone you want to mess with. Stay away from him, both of you.”

Sayer and Clyde both nodded in perfect sync.

The next morning, as soon as Aella got to work, she went straight to Daniel.

She told him, “Daniel, Mr. Vic’s sleep has gotten a little better, but he’s got a long way to go before he’s fully recovered. He’s been off treatment for a while now.”

Daniel put down his files. “You’re Mr. Vic’s doctor. You can try reaching out to him again by phone. If he doesn’t want to come back for treatment, don’t push it. We have to respect his wishes.”

When Aella left Daniel’s office, she still felt uneasy.

She’d visited Webster Manor that day, and she was sure Victor had been hurt.

Aella always believed that if someone treated her right, she had to pay it back.

Back when she was divorcing Tyrone, Victor had really been there for her.

He’d even pressured Tyrone to help her secure the divorce, not caring that he’d angered both the McCarthys and the Winters.

Now, knowing Victor was in trouble, there was no way she could just sit back and do nothing.

That evening, Aella drove to Webster Manor alone after work.

She hadn’t let Victor know she was coming, so she parked outside the manor and started thinking up an excuse.

Just then, a power company van pulled up in front of the manor.

Two middle-aged men got out, wearing faded uniforms and carrying clipboards. They walked straight toward Aella.

Aella checked the time. It wasn’t even 7:00 p.m. yet.

She'd seen power company vans in the neighborhood before, so she didn't think much of it.

The two men stopped outside her car and asked, "Miss, are you the owner of this manor?"

Aella sat inside, sizing up the men through the window.

Thinking of Victor's recent injury, she became extra cautious.

She kept her guard up, raised her window halfway, and said, "I'm just passing through, stopping to make a

call."

The men exchanged a glance, then turned to leave.

Aella called out after them, "Are you looking for the owner for a reason?"

The men stopped for a second, then hurried back to their van and drove off.

Aella was sure something was off, so she hurried out, rang the doorbell, and asked to see Victor.

Real power company employees would have gone to the door and told the owner what they were there for, whether it was a routine meter inspection or maintenance. They wouldn't have just asked her if she owned the place or ignored her questions and left.

The butler let her in, and she got inside without a hitch.

She drove into the manor, got out, and followed the butler into the living room.

Victor was nowhere to be seen, and there were no staff or bodyguards either.

Aella started feeling uneasy.

Upstairs in the study, Victor sat silently in a wheelchair, dressed in loose dark loungewear, quietly rolling a string of rosary beads in his hand.

When he saw Aella come in, his whole posture turned serious.

Aella explained, "Mr. Vic, I was in the area after work and thought I'd check in on you."

Victor steered his wheelchair closer.

It was over an hour's drive from her hospital to the manor, since they were at opposite sides of the city.

Yet she could lie to his face without batting an eye.

When Victor didn't reply, Aella knelt beside him and helped adjust the blanket on his legs.

"Mr. Vic, I drove over an hour to get here. At least let me check your pulse," she said.

Victor offered his arm and gave her a sidelong glance. "You're quite a caring doctor, aren't you?"

Of course.

As she checked his pulse, Aella watched him closely.

She'd seen Victor hiding his injury before, but she never confronted him about it.

Now, it seemed he was doing okay.

Once she , Victor immediately ordered Norman to see her home.

Aella stalled a bit and said, “Mr. Vic, someone was watching me when I came in just now.”

She told Victor the whole story about the two men at the gate.

Victor sent Norman to check the security cameras.

Once Norman left, Aella said, “Who knows if those two have accomplices? If I leave now and someone follows me home, I am going to bring trouble to my own place!”

She couldn't be sure what exactly was going on with Victor, but she was convinced he was in some kind of trouble.

She'd come tonight to make sure he was okay. She never expected to run into suspicious people at the

manor gate.

Those two men had already seen her face and license plate.

Now, if she drove off from Webster Manor, there was no telling if they'd follow her home.

Chapter 310 Save Mr Vic

Her parents were just regular people, and her younger brother had only just his SAT exam. She had to be careful not to bring trouble to them.

Norman returned and leaned in to whisper something to Victor.

Victor looked at Aella. "You're staying at Webster Manor tonight. Take the room next to mine."

Aella's heart leaped into her throat when she heard that.

At 1:00 a.m., the entire manor suddenly lost power.

Aella had never been a heavy sleeper, especially with so much on her mind.

She woke up to strange noises coming from the room next door and realized the lights had gone out.

She remembered the two men in power company uniforms she'd seen at the gate, and also Victor's warning before bed. She didn't dare use her phone for light and instead groped her way to the door.

Mr. Vic.

Aella crept into Victor's room and called out softly.

In the dark, a hand covered her mouth and shoved her into a small cabinet under the desk.

With Victor's urgent whisper in her ear, Aella shrank into the tiny space, her heart pounding.

Her first thought was that intruders had broken into the manor.

She couldn't let herself drag Victor down.

A few minutes later, a beam of light suddenly sliced through the darkness, the patio window shattered, and several masked men rushed in.

Their first move was to go after Victor, who sat motionless in his wheelchair with only Norman at his side.

Peeking through a crack, Aella saw several attackers lunging at Victor with knives.

Panicking, she sprang from the cabinet and shoved Victor's wheelchair to the far side of the room.

Caught off guard, Victor rolled away from Norman.

Norman was speechless.

Two knife-wielding men charged straight at Aella, and she ducked under the desk.

Just then, Tyrone arrived in time,

Aella shoved him toward the attackers. "Save Mr. Vic!"

Tyrone didn't even have time to say anything to Aella before she pushed him out.

There was no room for hesitation. He raced to Victor's side.

In the melee, Victor and Tyrone both found themselves surrounded.

Aella rushed in again, shielding Victor with her own body.

Tyrone was stunned as he watched Aella rush past him, putting herself in harm's way to protect Victor.

He shoved his own feelings aside, shielding Aella with his body.

That move left an opening for one of the attackers.

Aella heard Tyrone grunt behind her and spun around, just in time to see two knives plunge into him at once.

Still, Tyrone didn't move. He refused to let go of Aella.

He grabbed Victor's shoulder. "Your targets are surrounded. You can close the trap now!"

Victor gave Norman a look, and Norman whistled sharply. Suddenly, every light in the manor flicked on.

Then, the missing bodyguards flooded in and quickly subdued the intruders.

Aella finally understood that Victor had set this up from the start.

She apologized. "Sorry, Mr. Vic. I didn't know you had a plan."

If she'd known, she never would have gotten involved.

Victor gave her an approving look. "Next time, be more observant."

Aella nodded as she checked him over. "Mr. Vic, are you hurt?"

Before she , Tyrone yanked her over to him.

He pressed his lips together, voice tight with pain. "Can't you see I'm hurt?"

Aella finally remembered Tyrone was there, too.

He wore a black suit jacket, and it was soaked with blood at the waist now.

Blood kept oozing from between his fingers as he pressed on the wound. He couldn't hold back the bleeding with his bare hands.

She checked the wound. "Bad weeds grow tall. Mr. Winter, you'll be fine."

Her calm words made Tyrone freeze.

He stared at her, stunned, his body finally giving out as he dropped to one knee.

Aella had only known Victor for a short time.

But in a crisis, she chose to save Victor first, leaving him in danger.

After it was over, her first concern was still Victor, as if Tyrone didn't even exist.

He knew she hadn't forgiven him.

But he never thought she'd stop caring about him altogether.

Norman entered. "Mr. Vic, everything's taken care of."

Victor said, "Get Mr. Winter to the hospital."

Norman rushed to help Tyrone up.

Fighting the pain, Tyrone shot Victor a look. "You want to set a trap? Fine. But don't drag Aella into it. She's not like you."