

Once Cast 351

Chapter 351 The Unexpected Date

“You’ve already failed Aella once,” Virginia said quietly. “You can’t keep hurting the family who love you.”

Tyrone sat on the couch, shoulders slumped, eyes down. He only managed a low hum in response.

Virginia sighed, exhaustion written all over her face as she stood. “Raine was forced to meet Floyd Townsend today. I don’t know how it’s going, but I need to check on her.”

Tyrone rose and walked her to the door. “Mom, Floyd isn’t right for Raine.”

Virginia rubbed her temples. “Your grandfather and father insisted. Raine only agreed because she was cornered. I doubt she’s taking it seriously.”

At six that evening, Aella parked in front of a shopping mall downtown.

Just as she was about to go inside, Brad appeared out of nowhere. Before she could ask, Brad dragged her into a fancy steakhouse next door.

The moment Aella stepped inside, she spotted Raine.

Brad pressed a finger to his lips, signaling her to keep quiet, then pulled her toward the booth behind Raine’s table.

He ordered food quickly, glancing around sneakily.

Aella immediately understood what was going on. Brad had spoiled Raine since she was a kid.

Raine was slow to notice her feelings.

Brad complained about her all the time, and he'd never admit how much he actually cared.

Now the two of them crouched behind Raine's booth, eavesdropping.

Raine wore a bright orange skirt suit, simple but bold.

Across from her sat Floyd, dressed in a white casual suit with a deep-V pink shirt underneath. His short hair was perfectly styled, his sapphire earrings glinting under the light. A chain hung at his collarbone, and a ring was on his pinky finger. His laid-back posture and smirk screamed, "I don't give a damn."

The two studied each other. Raine spoke first, blunt as ever. "I'll be honest. My family forced

me to come."

Floyd gave a lazy grin. "What a coincidence. My dad chased me out of the house with a stick to make me come."

Raine crossed her arms. "I don't believe in marriage, and I don't want kids."

"Perfect," Floyd replied. "I can't stand kids. The fewer, the better."

Raine took a deep breath. "I'll never work a day in my life and I need at least 500,000 a month for pocket money."

Floyd thumped his chest. "That's the one thing I'm good at: spending my money on women."

Raine slammed her hand on the table. "I-"

Floyd cut her off. "Save it. How many excuses did you prepare before coming here? Hand them over; I'll read them for you."

Raine slowly sat back down.

She sighed. "Floyd, I'm a leech. Whoever marries me is doomed. We went to the same school. I can't ruin your life too."

Floyd burst out laughing. He couldn't help it.

Then, mid-laugh, he suddenly asked, "So the great families of Vleka all lined up for you. Your grandpa screened every bachelor in the city, waiting for your approval, and you didn't pick a single one. You expect me to believe that?"

Raine groaned. "It's not that I don't like them, Floyd. I just don't want to get married."

Edwin and Ralph were still waiting for her to report back.

And sitting across from her, this troublemaker of a rich kid wasn't someone she could offend; Raine had no choice but to brush him off.

Floyd suddenly stood up.

He leaned over the table, his palms pressing against the edge. Floyd asked in a low voice, "Don't tell me. Have you fallen for someone?"

Raine shoved him back. "What, do I look that desperate? Why would I ever fall for a guy?"

Floyd frowned. "You and Brad grew up together. Brad says he's not ready to settle down, and you say you'll never get married or have kids. Don't tell me you two-

Before he could finish, Raine burst out laughing.

With a perfectly straight face, she said, "Brad and me? Please. We're like brother and sister. He's closer to me than my brother. Holding Brad's hand feels like my left hand touching my right — absolutely nothing. No spark."

She waved her hands for emphasis. "Even when I touch his abs, it's like feeling I'm touching a row of corn kernels. And if I ever had to pull his pants down? My heart rate would drop flat. Not a single reaction!"

She leaned back and added, "If I really wanted Brad, I'd have had him years ago. Why wait until now?"

Floyd thought about it and realized she had a point.

But over in the booth behind them, Brad was far from calm.

Closer than her brother?

No feeling at all?

My abs felt like corn kernels?

Heart rate went flat when I was half-naked?

Aella gently patted his shoulder in sympathy. Official source is find•novel.net

Brad closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Unbelievable! All these years, and this

idiot still doesn't get it.

I spoiled that idiot all these years for nothing.

Maybe someday, decades from now, this same idiot would be the one taking care of me in

my

old age.

At the restaurant entrance, Noel stood frozen, blocking the doorway.

Three women—Anna, Jenny, and Daphne—were trying to get in.

Anna stared through the glass door, eyes locking on Aella inside.

She lifted her chin and rested a hand on her pregnant stomach. "What?" she asked coldly. "You worried I'm here to cause trouble for that bitch?"

Chapter 352 The Clash in the Restaurant

Anna was pregnant, so Noel didn't dare get too close. Still, he forced himself to speak. "Mrs. Cunningham, you wouldn't be able to handle the consequence of going after Dr. Reid."

Jenny added fuel to the fire. “Everyone knows Mr. Winter already divorced that bitch. Aunt Anna is Mrs. Cunningham now, and she’s carrying the next Cunninghams heir. So what if she wants to put someone in their place?”

Daphne sneered, arms crossed. “Mr. Frost, if you want to suck up to your boss, you should cozy up to Ms. Guinevere. Once she marries your boss, maybe she’ll give you a promotion. That bitch? She’s nothing but an ex-wife now, completely irrelevant.”

The trio was clearly there to stir trouble with Aella. Noel found this situation tricky.

The two bodyguards managed to block Daphne and Jenny, but Noel didn’t dare to approach the pregnant Anna.

Anna walked straight into the restaurant and called out, “Dr. Reid, what clever tricks you have! You already divorced Mr. Winter, but he still crawls back and serves you like a loyal dog.”

Aella glanced at Brad. The two exchanged a look and stood up.

At the same time, Raine and Floyd rose from their table nearby.

The four of them looked at one another. Raine pointed at Aella and Brad and asked, “You two- what are you doing here?”

Brad pointed back before she could finish. “I should ask you that. What are you doing here?”

Raine gestured toward Floyd. “I’m on a blind date.”

Brad pointed at Aella. “We’re just here for a meal.”

Brad greeted Floyd politely. Raine quickly introduced everyone.

Floyd checked his phone, answered a call, and then excused himself and left.

The moment Floyd stepped out, Anna waddled over, her hand on her belly.

Noel's stomach dropped. Obviously, this would end badly. He quickly signaled the bodyguards to release Jenny and Daphne and step back.

Both women rushed into the restaurant. Noel followed right behind.

Aella asked, "Mrs. Cunningham, what do you mean by that?"

Anna rubbed her belly and smiled coldly. "I mean, Dr. Reid, you sure have skills. After getting a divorce, you can make Mr. Winter's men bow down to you like obedient dogs"

Aella couldn't take it anymore. She interrupted, "Mrs. Cunningham, if you have something to say, then say it. But please show some respect."

Even though Noel worked for Tyrone, he had always treated Aella with respect. Watching him get accused like this made her furious. Follow current novels on [FindN\(\)vel.net](http://FindN()vel.net)

Daphne pointed straight at Noel. "He's the one who stopped us at the door with bodyguards. He even threatened us! Isn't that your idea?"

Jenny added sharply, "This isn't your restaurant, Dr. Reid. Why is it that you can eat here, but we get blocked from entering?"

Aella turned to Noel. "Mr. Frost, are they telling the truth?"

Noel panicked and waved his hands fast. "No, no, Dr. Reid! Don't believe a word they said!"

There was no way he could let Aella find out that his boss had sent him to watch over her.

He gritted his teeth and went all in. "Here's what really happened, Dr. Reid. I was off work, buying food for my wife. When I passed by this restaurant, I overheard these three talking about causing trouble for you. They were saying awful things, things I couldn't just ignore. So, I spoke up, and they turned around and blamed me instead!"

Noel flipped the story on them. The trio instantly lost it.

Anna was now certain that Noel and Aella were working together.

She jabbed a finger at Aella. "Go ahead and deny it, but there are cameras at the entrance. We'll see who's lying!"

Before anyone could respond, Daphne lunged at Noel. "You look decent and proper, but you're a snake! You stopped us at the door, and now you're trying to twist the story!"

Noel raised his arm to shield his face, stumbling backward as Daphne shoved him. "I swear, I was just passing by!" he repeated desperately.

Aella stood up. Her voice was calm but firm. "I believe Mr. Frost. He's not the type to lie."

She had known Noel for years. Aella trusted his integrity.

Aella warned, "Mrs. Cunningham, I know you resent me, but let's be honest. Zera broke the law. She brought that on herself. You can be angry, but you can't blame me."

Anna snapped back, her tone sharp. "Don't twist my words, Dr. Reid! I came here for dinner, not for you!"

Aella's patience was wearing thin. "Mrs. Cunningham, you're not young anymore. You married into the Cunninghams because you're having a baby. Why don't you stay home, rest, and focus on your baby? If

you keep trying to get back at me and something happens to your baby, your place in that family will be gone.”

Anna’s face twisted with rage. “Did you just curse my baby?!”

Before anyone could react, she grabbed a glass of juice from the table and threw it straight at Aella.

Brad and Noel moved instantly. Brad pulled Aella toward him. The drink splashed all over Noel instead.

Aella gasped, guilt flashing across her face. She quickly grabbed some napkins and handed them to Noel.

Chapter 353 The Restaurant Brawl

Slap!

Raine swung her hand and smacked Anna across the face. “Bitch! You dare to throw juice at my sister-in-law! Oops, I mean Aella! I’ll smack you till you remember your manners!”

She quickly caught herself; she couldn’t call Aella her “sister-in-law” in front of everyone, so she changed it mid-sentence.

Anna’s cheek burned. Her eyes filled with anger and embarrassment.

Jenny pointed at Raine in shock. “Ms. Winter! You just hit a pregnant woman! Aren’t you her family will make you pay for this?”

afraid

Aella worried Raine might get hurt. She stepped in to stop Jenny. Aella slapped Jenny hard across the face and challenged, “I hit you. What are you going to do about it?”

Jenny clutched her cheek, furious. “Aella, don’t act so high and mighty. Without the Winters, you’re nothing!”

Aella turned to calm Raine down, but Raine shoved her aside.

Her temper flared. She rolled up her sleeves, grabbed Anna by the hair, and yelled, “You think being pregnant makes you untouchable? I’ll knock that attitude right out of you!”

Anna screamed and wrapped her arms around her stomach. Daphne, wild as ever, charged forward like she was storming into a battlefield.

As the four women tangled in a messy fight, Brad and Noel rushed in to break them up.

“I’ll fight you all!” Daphne shrieked.

Daphne came from a rough background. Her family ran a fish stall, and she’d grown up shouting over the noise of a busy market. When she lost her temper, no one could hold her back.

To protect Anna’s unborn baby and to keep her ticket to a rich future, Daphne threw all pride aside.

She charged around behind Brad and Noel, grabbed a handful of each man’s hair, and refused to let go.

Noel had short hair and managed to break free first.

But Brad’s hair had been styled and dyed that morning. When Daphne yanked it, he let out a

sharp groan that turned heads across the restaurant.

Meanwhile, the four women were tangled in a screaming, shoving mess.

In the end, a few waiters and some brave customers had to step in to break them apart.

Anna's face was swollen from Raine's slaps.

She sat down, holding her stomach, looking pitiful and furious. "Daphne! Call the cops!" she yelled.

Daphne's hair was a total disaster. Breathing hard, she pointed at Aella's group and shouted, "None of you are leaving until the police get here!"

Jenny's jacket had fallen on the floor. Her hair was a mess, and her face carried several fresh red handprints.

She glared at Aella and warned, "You're in big trouble now, bitch. You probably don't know this, but the police chief's last name is Cunningham. You're done for."

Aella didn't even glance at her.

Instead, she looked at Noel. His shirt was torn open, several buttons missing, with scratches along his face and neck. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Frost," she said quietly. "You got caught up in this because of me."

Noel nodded nervously, too guilty to say a word.

Brad, on the other hand, had lost it. "That crazy woman!"

Aella glanced at him. Brad's once-perfect hair now looked like a mess. Red scratch marks ran down his jaw and neck. She reached up to fix his collar, trying to help him look a little less wrecked.

When she touched her hair, Aella realized her hair clip was gone.

Her long hair hung loose over her shoulders. Jenny's nails had scratched her cheek. The belt on her dress had been ripped apart. She looked just as miserable as Brad.

Aella grabbed Raine and pulled her back to a safe distance.

Out of everyone there, only Raine still looked perfect—hair in place, clothes neat and pressed.

Well, that made sense. Raine had trained in self-defense since she was a kid—fencing, kickboxing, even close combat.

The only reason she didn't fight back was because Tyrone had warned her not to use her skills

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in public.

Restaurant Pmw!

Brad could fight, sure—but he never hit women. So while being scratched and shoved, he kept trying to protect Aella and Raine.

Noel, poor guy, had never seen chaos like this before. He was completely lost, especially with Daphne charging around like a tank.

By the end of it, everyone looked like they'd been through a storm, except Raine.

When things finally calmed down, Aella quietly pulled out her phone and sent a message.

Those three were clearly targeting her.

Noel had only stepped in to help, but now Raine and even Brad had gotten dragged into it.

It was all because of her.

She knew she had to clean up the mess.

Before long, Anna was taken to the hospital by ambulance. The rest of them were brought to the police station.

At seven that evening, the Winters and Cunninghams arrived at the police station.

George was furious. He threatened, "Mr. Winter, if anything happens to my wife or child, I swear I'll make you all pay, even if it costs me my life!"

Virginia stepped forward right away. "Mr. Cunningham, if it turns out it's my daughter who was at fault, we'll take full responsibility. We won't run from the consequences."

Tyrone stood beside his parents in silence, his face dark and unreadable. Ralph didn't speak either.

A few minutes later, the group was released.

The group were all stunned when they saw Brad and Noel walking out with clothes torn and covered in scratches.

Noel snuck a glance at George and Ralph.

Then he stepped forward, ready to put on a miserable show to save his skin. "Mr. Winter," he said pitifully, "you know today is my day off. I was just buying food for my wife when I passed the restaurant. That's when I heard Mrs. Cunningham and Ms. Townsend cursing about Dr. Reid. They were cursing and plotting to drug her and post a video online! I tried to stop them, but they turned on me instead. Next thing I knew, I got beaten up like this!"

Chapter 354 I Cannot Go to Her

George's face went pale. "No! That can't be. My wife didn't say that!"

Jenny, who had followed Noel out, jumped in. "Mr. Cunningham, don't listen to him. He and his bodyguards threatened Mrs. Cunningham."

Daphne pointed at Noel and spat, "Cut the crap! You're making things up!"

Noel glanced at Tyrone, his face bitter and miserable.

Tyrone patted Noel's shoulder and kept his face calm. "You're a Winter Group employee. It's not right for you to be treated like this. Go to the hospital and get checked. I will make this right for you."

Raine, who had started the trouble, hid behind Brad and refused to show her face.

Brad pointed to his face. "No. I need to get checked too. Tomorrow I'll have my grandma go to all of your houses and make you pay for this."

George watched as the situation shifted. His face kept changing.

Tyrone kept his eyes on the door. Aella came out last. He hurriedly walked up to her.

"Aella."

He saw a thin, long cut on her cheek and reached out to move her hair to check her wound.

Aella turned her head away to dodge him.

Tyrone stared at her stupidly. He remembered the promise he'd made to her on the island. His fingers curled for a moment, then he quietly pulled his hand back.

Ralph looked at Aella with clear disgust.

He pointed at Aella and accused, "It's you again. Trouble follows you."

Before Aella could answer, Tyrone spoke up. "Dad, what nonsense is that?"

Ralph shot back, "Am I wrong? If it weren't for this woman, Raine wouldn't have gotten into a fight."

Raine couldn't help herself and defended Aella. "Dad, don't blame the wrong person. I just didn't like Anna. I wanted to slap her."

Ralph was about to shout at his daughter, but Virginia stopped him.

Since both of his children took Aella's side, Ralph finally held back.

Daphne turned to George and spoke with steady confidence, "Jenny and I were at the scene. Noel brought men with him and threatened us. Ms. Winter started the fight. There are cameras at the restaurant entrance and inside. Check them and you'll see."

Jenny chimed in, "Mrs. Cunningham almost lost her baby because of this. Are you sure you want to let this go?"

Daphne and Jenny's firm stance gave George more confidence. Get full chapters from FundNovel.net

He didn't want to offend the Winters, but he also didn't want the matter buried. He pointed at Aella and said, "For your family sake, I won't press charges against Ms. Winter."

He paused and looked at Tyrone. "Mr. Tyrone, my wife was attacked for no reason and almost lost the baby. Someone must be held responsible. You can take Ms. Winter away, but your ex- wife-"

George didn't get to finish. Tyrone cut him off. "An ex-wife is still my wife. Her problems are my problems."

Ralph's angry voice kept echoing, scolding Tyrone nonstop.

Aella, who had stayed quiet the whole time, finally spoke up. "Mr. Winter, my problems are none of your concern," she said, her voice cold and polite.

Tyrone stood a few steps away.

For a brief second, they just stared at each other in silence before Aella turned her gaze away.

Tyrone clenched his jaw, forcing himself not to move closer.

Just then, Mason walked out from the police station.

He went straight to Aella. "Have you been waiting long?"

Aella shook her head. "Thanks for coming all the way."

Mason's smile was warm and calm—it carried a kind of steadiness that could hold the whole world.

Jenny and Daphne saw Mason. Their faces twisted with envy.

Virginia glanced at Mason, then at her son, worry clouding her face.

Raine whispered to Brad in a worrisome tone, "Do you think Aella and Mr. Fulford are actually

together?”

Brad gave Tyrone a quick, uneasy glance. “Even if she’s not with him, she’ll be with someone else. It just won’t ever be Tyrone again.”

Raine fell silent.

Tyrone’s eyes flicked between Aella and Mason.

He wanted to pull her away, to stop Mason from standing beside her, but he couldn’t.

His legs felt heavy as stone. His hands, hanging at his sides, curled into tight fists.

He had promised Aella he’d respect her choices, that he’d give her freedom.

So he couldn’t go to her now, no matter how much it tore him apart.

Tyrone’s face darkened, his expression twisted with pain and struggle.

No wonder she was so calm—she had called Mason ahead of time.

Mason politely greeted the Winters, then turned to face George.

“Mr. Cunningham,” he said coolly, “whether your wife’s charge against Dr. Reid for intentional harm holds up, I don’t know. But if you actually allow her to go through with it, I can promise you, someone’s going to end up behind bars first.”

Daphne pointed at Mason and shouted, “You’re sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong! She’s Mr. Winter’s ex-wife now. Even the Winters don’t want to help her. Who do you think you are to butt in?”

Chapter 355 What Can’t Be Fixed

Jenny chimed in, “Exactly, Mr. Fulford, Mrs. Cunningham’s pregnant, and she’s hurt pretty badly. You shouldn’t get involved in this mess. An ex-wife of the rich like her isn’t worth all this trouble.”

George shot Mason a wary look. “Mr. Fulford, what’s your relationship with Dr. Reid exactly?”

Mason looked around the crowd, calm and confident. “Dr. Reid has no connection with the Winters,” he said evenly. “It’s natural that the Winters won’t step in.”

His tone shifted as he added, “But Dr. Reid is my son’s godmother. That alone is reason enough for me to do anything for her.”

Mason’s voice grew firmer. “Her problems are my problems. Anyone who stands against her will be my enemy—forever. No one should question that.”

His words were simple but powerful. He made his position clear while choosing his words carefully.

By mentioning again that Aella was his son’s godmother, Mason drew a protective line around her—close, but not intimate.

His every move toward her showed care and distance at the same time, never crossing the boundary that would spark more gossip.

Mason turned to Aella. “I’ll wait for you in the car.”

Aella shook her head. “No need. I’ll go with you.”

Mason gave a polite nod to everyone, then left side by side with Aella.

Tyrone watched them walk past him together.

He couldn't stop himself. Tyrone took a step forward to stop her, but Brad caught his arm.

Their eyes met. Tyrone's gaze was hollow, lifeless.

He yanked his arm free and stumbled toward his car.

Behind him, Virginia's worried voice called out. Ralph shouted angrily. Raine cried his name. But he heard none of it.

Aella was in trouble. The first person she called wasn't him, but Mason.

He had been right there, but she looked past him like he didn't exist.

She'd take help or gifts from anyone else, but never from him.

Aella could open her heart to anyone—talk to them, laugh with them, and trust them completely. But when it came to him, she wouldn't let him near. She refused to say another word to him.

She ignored his pain, pushed him away with everything she had, and was determined to force him out of her life for good.

That woman was so firm, so final. She wouldn't even give him a chance to make things right.

Not even once.

Seeing his boss's pale face and empty eyes, Noel quickly climbed into the driver's seat. "Mr. Winter, let me drive," he said nervously.

Tyrone leaned back against the seat, eyes closed, his voice faint. "Take me to the Regal Club."

Noel glanced at him with worry but said nothing. He started the engine and drove off into the night.

At nine that night, Mason safely dropped Aella off at her house.

She unbuckled her seat belt and thanked him again and again. "Mr. Fulford, I really owe you for today. Let me cook dinner for you sometime."

Mason couldn't help but laugh softly at her serious tone. "Dr. Reid, you don't have to. It was nothing. Really, just a small favor."

Aella was firm about showing her gratitude.

"Alright then," Mason said with a half-smile, "if you really want to thank me, help me out next week and attend Henry's parent meeting?"

His joking tone made the air between them light again.

Aella didn't feel pressured at all. She patted her chest and agreed right away.

He had rushed out late at night just to help her and stood by her side when things turned ugly.

Mason even went up against the Cunninghams, one of the most powerful families in the city, for her sake.

After all that, she felt she owed him more than just a thank-you.

Besides, Henry was her godson.

If Mason couldn't make it to his school meeting, she was more than happy to go in his place.

Later that night, at the Regal Club.

“Are you trying to drink yourself to death?”

Brad snatched the wine glass from Tyrone's hand.

Tyrone lifted his eyes briefly, then leaned back on the couch.

He was breathing hard, but his chest still felt tight. Tyrone felt like he couldn't breathe.

His empty eyes stared at the ceiling. “I can't break my promise to her again,” he muttered. “I told her I'd change, and I have to keep that promise.”

Brad gathered every bottle on the table.

“It's over between you and Aella. You did the right thing by letting go.”

Tyrone shut his eyes in pain. Silent tears slipped from the corners.

It was over. He knew that.

But watching her so close and still out of reach—seeing her leave in another man's car—it felt like someone had ripped his heart straight out of his chest.

The pain was unbearable; it drove him insane.

“I just want to make it up to her,” he whispered. “But she won’t even give me a chance.”

Brad reminded, “Can’t you tell? Aella doesn’t need you to make it up to her.”

Those words were brutal, but Brad said them anyway.

Brad said calmly, “The damage you did to Aella is already done. You say you want to make it up to her? Wake up, man. You’re just trying to make yourself feel better and you don’t want to live with the guilt.”

Chapter 356 Game Over

Brad said calmly, “You hurt her; that was your choice. Now Aella refuses to give you a chance to ease your guilt: that’s hers.”

He’d warned him before. Besides that, Tyrone and Aella were both Scorpios.

When two Scorpios come together, it’s either a perfect match or mutual destruction.

Back then, Tyrone used Aella’s love against her and hurt her without a care.

Now, Aella was using her coldness and determination to destroy him completely.

Tyrone was drowning in guilt and regret. The pain ate away at him day and night.

But Aella had already stepped out of his life. She had sealed off every path he could use to make things right. She stood on the sidelines, watching him fall apart under his own misery. Tyrone’s emotions were spinning out of control, with nowhere to escape.

If Tyrone could let go of the past and move on, it would be the best for all of them.

But if he couldn't, Brad dared not think about what would come next.

The next morning, in Tyrone's office.

Tyrone sat at his desk, staring at a file but completely out of focus.

Noel had called his name several times before Tyrone finally came back to himself.

He frowned and said, "Take off the mask when you talk."

Noel hesitated, then removed it, revealing a face full of fresh scratches.

Tyrone's brows drew tighter. "Why does it look worse?"

Noel admitted honestly, "When I got home last night, my wife saw the scratches and thought I'd been messing around with another woman. She freaked out and beat me up."

Tyrone glanced at the marks and gave a simple grunt. Then, he lowered his head and went back to work.

Noel stood there awkwardly for a long time.

Finally, he asked carefully, "Mr. Winter, do you still need me to keep an eye on Dr. Reid?"

Tyrone's pen paused mid-signature.

He instructed coldly, "Notify all departments. End every project with Cunningham Group."

Noel's face tightened, and he advised, "Boss, shouldn't we talk to Mr. Ralph before making that decision?"

Winter Group had worked with Cunningham Group for years. If they suddenly ended the partnership, Winter Group might not suffer a loss financially, but the backlash from investors and the board could be brutal.

Tyrone didn't flinch. "Get it done."

With his boss firm on it, Noel had no choice but to obey.

The news reached George at once.

The moment he hung up, his face darkened.

Anna lay in her hospital bed, rubbing her pregnant belly and complaining softly, "Hubby, can't you stop working when you're with me?"

George stood beside the bed, his tone sharp and heavy. "Anna, I'm over 50 and finally having a child. I've spoiled you in every way, but this—this you shouldn't have done. You should never have offended Mr. Winter's ex-wife!"

Anna was a little guilty. She acted cute and tested him. "Come on, don't be so serious. You said it yourself. She's just his ex-wife. I'm Mrs. Cunningham now. Do I really have to bow down to that bitch and watch her mood every time she walks into a room?"

George shook his head in disappointment. "You picked a fight with Mr. Winter just to stand up for your niece. Now he's furious and has cut off all business with the company! Do you realize we've lost billions because of you?"

Anna panicked and shook her head. "Honey, please calm down. I promise I'll stay away from that woman. I won't let Mr. Winter misunderstand me again."

“Just stay in the hospital and focus on the baby,” George said coldly. “I’ll make a trip to the Winter Estate.”

As soon as he left, Anna collapsed back onto the hospital bed, drained and shaking.

Daphne, who had been quiet the whole time, hurried over to comfort her. “Zera brought the situation on herself. She came home with a bastard. Tyrone wanted nothing to do with her. I told her to take the money Tyrone offered and live her own life, but she wouldn’t listen. Now look! She ended up ruined by him.”

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She lowered her voice. “Anna, we’re counting on you now. You have to keep that baby safe—for your own sake and for our family. Tyrone’s not someone to mess with. He’s ruthless and cold. We can’t cross him again”

Anna was flustered and nodded quickly. “You’re right. Go pay off the guys I hired last night. And get rid of the drug I hid in the apartment. From now on, we stay far away from that woman. Whatever happens to Zera is her problem. I can’t get involved anymore.”

Naturally, they look out for themselves. When Tyrone turned against the Cunninghams, the game was over. Survival came first.

But while the two women backed off, Tyrone’s troubles were just beginning.

Late morning, right before lunch break.

Ralph stormed into Tyrone’s office. “You’re going to cancel that order and continue the cooperation with Cunningham Group!”

Tyrone set down his paperwork and stood up. “Dad, I’m the CEO. Please stop interfering with my work.”

Father and son stood face-to-face across the desk.

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Ralph jabbed a finger at him, furious. “You’re letting a woman cloud your judgment! You’re putting personal grudges above company interests. What will our business partners think of us now?”

Chapter 357 Tyrone’s Losing His Mind

Ralph slammed the file on the table, furious. “Do you think the board of directors is just for show?”

Tyrone refused to back down. “The order’s been issued. All cooperation with the Cunningham Group is officially over. If our company wants to keep working with them, the board can start by firing me as CEO.”

Ralph almost choked on his own anger.

Luckily, Virginia stepped in before they exploded at each other.

“Tyrone,” she said calmly, “you’ve always been level-headed. You never make moves that hurt both sides. Think carefully before calling off the cooperation.”

Tyrone’s voice was steady. “Mom, don’t worry. Ending this partnership was already part of my plan. I lined up a public company to replace them last week. Whatever losses our company suffers, I’ll make up for it.”

Ralph’s anger cooled a little when he realized Tyrone had already planned ahead, but his tone was still harsh.

“That day outside the police station—you saw that woman walk off with another man, didn’t you? I told you to get rid of Zera and start a family, but you never listened. Even if you hand our company to that woman on a silver platter, she won’t come back. You’d better give this up before it kills you.”

Virginia saw the pain on Tyrone’s face deepen. She gently pulled her husband away, trying to calm things down.

When everyone finally left, only Tyrone and Noel remained in the office.

Tyrone leaned weakly against the desk, shoulders heavy, head bowed. “Go get the medicine for me,” he muttered.

Noel hurried to the coffee table in the lounge and grabbed the bottle.

Mr. Ralph is ruthless. His son’s already in pain, and he still has to hurt him with brutal words.

Tyrone snatched the bottle from Noel, twisted it open, and poured a few painkillers into his palm.

He swallowed them dry.

“Leave me,” he said quietly.

Tyrone slumped back into his chair, eyes closed, trying to breathe through the ache in his chest.

By two in the afternoon, at the hospital’s outpatient building, Vivienne stopped her mother and Jenny near the elevator.

“Mom, I need to talk to you. It’s urgent.”

Without waiting for an answer, she pulled her mother outside.

Jenny grew suspicious and decided to follow quietly.

In the small park outside the hospital, Vivienne finally stopped. She looked around to make sure no one was watching.

Jasmine, confused, asked, "Vivienne, why are you here? Shouldn't you be at the office?"

Vivienne's face hardened. "Mom, what are you doing at the hospital?"

Jasmine pulled Vivienne aside and whispered, "Mrs. Cunningham and I came up with a plan. We would make that bitch lose her job and be too ashamed to stay in Vleka."

Vivienne took a deep breath and advised, "Mom, you'd better stop right now."

Jasmine wasn't having this. "Everything I'm doing is for you! Once that video of her fooling around with those thugs gets out, everyone will see it. Tyrone will never think about getting back together with her again. Trust me, I know what I'm doing."

Vivienne sighed and lowered her voice. "Mom, Mrs. Cunningham probably hasn't told you yet. Mr. Winter has already cut off all the cooperation with the Cunningham Group."

Jasmine's face changed instantly. "What? Are you serious?"

Vivienne nodded firmly. "Without Winter Group's support, the Cunninghams won't last a few years in Vleka. Tyrone is sending a warning. Anyone who touches his ex-wife will share their fate."

Jasmine's expression changed dramatically. "In all of Vleka, the only ones who ever wanted that woman gone are Mrs. Cunningham and me. Tyrone's warning is clearly aimed at us!"

Vivienne's expression turned serious. "That's why I keep telling you. It's fine to insult her with words, but never lay a hand on her."

Jasmine sighed, disappointed. "Then what about your engagement to Tyrone?"

Vivienne spoke calmly, almost detached, "I did want to get engaged to Tyrone. It would've helped our family move up. But right now, he's not right for me anymore. What I need to focus on is keeping our partnerships intact."

The head of Winter Group was actually sacrificing the company's interests for a woman.

That said everything. He was consumed by emotion, completely losing his judgment.

If he could put his company second to his feeling, then someone like her meant nothing to him

at all.

Jasmine patted her chest, relieved. "I'm glad you told me this, or that troublemaker Jenny would've talked me into going after Aella myself."

Vivienne sighed, thankful she'd arrived in time. "Mrs. Cunningham is Zera's aunt. She's got bad blood with both Mr. Winter and Dr. Reid. And that Jenny—she's pure chaos. You need to stay far away from all of them."

After walking Jasmine back to the car, Vivienne turned to leave. From behind a tree, Jenny slowly stepped out of the shadows.

Chapter 358 The Smile That Was No Longer His

No wonder Tyrone had been so impatient; he'd already made his move against the Cunninghams

Vivienne was smart enough to back off just in time.

Jenny's heart burned with anger. Because of that bitch, her grandmother still refused to let her father acknowledge her. The hatred had been eating her alive.

But now, even the Cunninghams and the Guineveres were too scared to speak up. As an illegitimate daughter, Jenny knew that no matter how clever she was, she couldn't outplay Tyrone.

After thinking it through, she decided to wait and see how things unfolded before making any

move.

Leaving the hospital's park, Jenny ran into Aella and one of her coworkers.

The moment Aella saw her, her face turned cold.

Jenny spoke first. "Dr. Reid, don't give me that look. I'm not here to cause trouble."

Sensing the tension, Aella's coworker quickly found an excuse to walk away.

Jenny stepped closer and told Aella unwillingly. "Congratulations, bitch! You win."

Aella frowned in confusion. "What do you mean, I win?"

Jenny laughed coldly. "You really don't know? Tyrone went against his family and the board for you. He ended the deal with the Cunningham Group. Even Vivienne doesn't dare to cross you

now."

Aella glanced at her with a dull look and walked away.

Even if Jenny was telling the truth, Tyrone hadn't done it for her.

He'd done it for himself—for that small, useless bit of guilt in his heart.

That man always had his calculations. Tyrone wasn't the kind of man who'd let both sides lose.

That evening, during rush hour, Noel sat in the passenger seat. He spotted Aella standing by the road and quickly told the driver to pull over.

“Mr. Winter,” Noel said, “it looks like Dr. Reid had a flat tire.”

Before Noel even speaking, and before the car had come to a full stop, Tyrone was already out.

He shut the door and started walking toward Aella. Tyrone stopped when he saw Victor getting out of another car.

From a distance, Tyrone watched Aella jog toward Victor, her face lighting up with the kind of smile he hadn't seen in a long time. His steps faltered, his chest tightening.

“Mr. Vic, your leg's finally healed!”

Aella beamed as she grabbed Victor's hands and spun him around right there on the sidewalk, her laughter bright and clear.

Victor was dressed in a dark suit and shirt, his clean-cut look ruined just enough by that lazy, mischievous charm of his.

He pulled his hands free and gave her a look of disgust. “How'd you even manage to get a flat tire?”

Aella tilted her chin up at his handsome face and teased, "Maybe I looked too good today. The tire couldn't handle it and just gave up."

Victor removed his jacket and tossed it at her. His eyes glinting with amusement. "Move aside, troublemaker."

Aella grinned and playfully poked his abs. "Still got muscles after all that time in a wheelchair, huh? Guess you've been secretly working out."

Victor batted her hand away and pushed her head back. "You're getting rude by the day, you know that?"

He crouched down to check the tire. Aella crouched beside him, giggling. "You're so handsome."

Not far away, Tyrone stood frozen. He watched every playful gesture, every laugh. The light slowly goes out of his eyes.

Once, that smile had belonged to him.

She had looked at him that way, eyes curved, calling him the most handsome man in the world.

Noel glanced at his boss and saw his face growing darker by the second. He quickly opened the car door and said softly, "Boss, your family just called. They're asking you to head back." Tyrone blinked, as if waking from a dream. His face was blank as he got back in the car, silently

shutting the door behind him.

The next morning, Aella's car was in the repair shop.

Sayer, still in his pajamas, drove her to the hospital.

As soon as she walked through the lobby, the receptionist waved her over. “Dr. Reid, your breakfast!”

Aella stopped in surprise just as her phone buzzed.

It was a message from Mason. “I drove by the hospital this morning and grabbed you breakfast. I had left it at the front desk.”

Aella smiled faintly and picked up the paper bag before heading to her office. Elvira popped her head over her computer with a mischievous grin. “Dr. Reid, who’s the handsome guy treating you to breakfast again?”

Aella chuckled, took out the food, and handed her a share. “You really are the gossip queen of this department.”

Elvira leaned closer, her eyes sparkling. “Come on, Dr. Reid, you’ve got so many handsome guys around you. Which one do you like?”

Aella rolled her eyes and walked toward the changing room.

Elvira called after her, half-joking, “Let’s see. There’s Mr. Fulford, the charming gentleman; Mr. Vic, the bad-boy type; and that adorable Mr. Locke from the Lockes. Honestly, they’re all Mr. Perfect!”

Aella’s voice came from inside the room. “Don’t be ridiculous. Mr. Fulford is a real gentleman. Mr. Vic is my ex-husband’s uncle. And Mr. Locke? He’s sweet, but too young—more like a little brother.”

Elvira asked in a soft voice, “What about Dr. Hill?”

Aella pushed the door open and gave her a sharp look. “Dr. Hill is my senior and my golden goose. I wouldn’t dare to mess with him.”

She had just crawled out of a failed marriage. The last thing she wanted was another relationship or another marriage. Original content can be found at FndNovel.net

Chapter 359 The Warmth He No Longer Had

No matter how perfect someone seems, they all have flaws. They all make mistakes.

Just like she and Tyrone once did.

To outsiders, Tyrone had it all—calm, intelligent, well-mannered, born into privilege, and always composed.

Who would've thought that a man so flawless in everyone's eyes could cheat on his wife, who was his childhood sweetheart? He tore her heart apart without mercy.

Now, with people like Mason and Victor around, Aella had learned what a healthy distance meant. They could help each other, stay close when needed, and step back when not. It was just right.

She wasn't stupid enough to fall in love again. Feelings only made people weak.

Now, success and money were the only real safety.

That morning, a little past nine, Aella arrived at the hospital's inpatient wing. At the elevator, she ran into Anna and Daphne.

Aella glanced at them with a calm face, said nothing, and turned toward the other elevator.

"Dr. Reid," Anna called out, stepping in her way.

Aella lowered her eyes, her gaze landing briefly on Anna's belly. Her tone went cold. "Mrs. Cunningham, there's a high-definition camera right above you. I'd stop right there if I were you."

Anna quickly waved her hands. “Dr. Reid, you’ve got it wrong! What happened before was my fault. Zera tricked me into giving you a hard time. But now I realize she deserved everything that’s happened to her.”

She lowered her voice, trying to sound sincere. “Dr. Reid, I swear I’ll never bother you again. Could you please—just this once—say something nice about me to Mr. Winter? Ask him not to cancel the partnership with our company.”

Aella’s tone stayed calm but firm. “I have nothing to do with Mr. Winter anymore. I can’t help you.”

And with that, she stepped into the elevator, and the doors closed between them.

Weekend.

Aella invited Daniel and Aurelia over for lunch.

The moment Aurelia walked in, she spotted Sayer stretched out on the couch like he owned the place. Sayer panicked, jumped up, and dashed out the door—wearing only one slipper.

Daniel had no control over his sister. He sighed, rubbing his forehead. “Aella, maybe don’t invite Aurelia next time. That girl is a troublemaker; nobody can handle her.”

Aella chuckled. “Come on, don’t be so dramatic. Aurelia’s just outgoing and, honestly, kind of adorable.”

She checked the time and smiled. “Stay a bit longer. Let’s play poker this afternoon.”

Daniel agreed without thinking twice. As soon as he did, Aella pulled out her phone to call a few more people over.

A moment later, the door to the guest room opened, and Henry walked out. Daniel blinked. “Hmm, this boy...?”

Aella explained, "It's the weekend. I brought Henry here to liven things up a bit."

When Henry spotted Daniel, he ran over cheerfully. "Hi, Daniel!"

Daniel picked him up with a smile. "Where's your dad? Didn't he come with you?"

Henry replied with a straight face, "Daniel, I'm not a guest here. Aella said that her home is my home."

Daniel laughed and turned to Aella. "You hear that? This kid's sharper than his dad."

The room was full of laughter as Brad walked in, followed by Sayer. That made four of them at the table. Aurelia and Clyde sat nearby to watch.

"Mr. Locke, switch seats with me," Aella said firmly. She wanted to be Brad's

opponent.

Henry patted her arm comfortingly. "Aella, you really need to practice your card skills. I'll ask my dad to teach you next time."

Aella could only smile awkwardly.

Who would've thought a top medical graduate could lose a card game to a six-year-old?

Henry offered her a snack, holding it up to her mouth. "I was just kidding. As long as you're happy, I'll make my dad pay if you lose."

Sayer was jealous. "Henry, how about you become my godson? If I lose, your dad can pay for

me too.”

The boy shook his head quickly. “Nope. I don’t need another dad; I need a mommy.”

That one line from the little boy made everyone burst out laughing.

Brad watched that clever boy with a grin, clicking his tongue twice.

Mason doesn’t need to do anything; this kid could wrap Aella around his tiny finger all by himself,

“Alright, everyone,” Brad said, pulling out his phone. “Smile. I’m posting this.”

He recorded a short video and uploaded it to Instagram.

Minutes later, Tyrone saw it.

In the video, Aella’s parents were cutting fruit in the open kitchen. Aella sat at the table playing poker with Daniel and the others. Little Henry sat beside her, feeding her snacks.

Whatever the boy said made her laugh—a genuine, bright, carefree laugh.

Tyrone replayed the clip again and again.

Every time he went to their house in the past, it had been just like this—warm, lively, and full of laughter.

He’d sit with Aella and Clyde in the living room while her parents cooked something delicious. for them.

Tyrone rarely talked much, but they treated him like their son—asking if he'd eaten, if he was tired, and if he'd been sleeping well.

Back then, little Clyde admired him. The boy would follow him around, always saying “Tyrone this, Tyrone that,” asking his opinion about everything.

Now, their home was still filled with warmth and laughter, but without him.

Chapter 360 The Taste of Regret

The warmth of that family had nothing to do with him anymore.

Tyrone stared at his phone screen.

He felt his body and soul slowly pulling apart, his mind slipping into a haze.

Virginia called his name several times before he came back to his senses.

He looked in the direction his mother was staring and toward his grandfather. “Grandpa, what did you just say?”

Edwin's face was dark. “Tyrone, business is like war. As the CEO of the company, you must carefully consider every decision you make. Cutting ties with the Cunninghams brings us nothing but harm. You've managed this company for years; how could you make such a rookie mistake?”

Tyrone stood up and calmly straightened his suit jacket.

“Grandpa, the order's already been given. If anyone has a problem with it, the board can remove me.”

Edwin's face turned ashen with anger, too furious to speak.

Ralph pointed at his son, shouting, "This entire company will be yours one day! Everything we do is for you!"

Tyrone's face stayed blank. He questioned, "Have you ever thought about what kind of life I actually want?"

They glared at each other for several seconds. Finally, Tyrone grew exhausted and walked out.

Virginia hurried after him to the door. "Tyrone, I'm free tomorrow morning. Let me take you to the hospital for a check-up."

Tyrone forced a gentle smile and tried to speak in the softest voice possible. "Mom, I'm fine. Don't worry."

Virginia watched her son's lonely figure disappear down the hall. Her heart ached with pity and helplessness.

Back in the living room, she faced Edwin and Ralph. "Our family is already the most powerful in Vleka. Our wealth is among the top in Aldoria. Why keep pushing him to take us higher?"

Ralph's temper exploded. "You're a woman! You won't understand! Business is war. Right now,

everyone looks up to us. But the day we fall, they'll trample us brutally!"

He slammed his hand on the table. "Kindness doesn't win wars, and emotions ruin business. If he keeps letting his feelings lead him, he'll end up like Warren. This family will crumble because of him!"

Edwin insisted coldly, "Business isn't charity. We live by profit. If he keeps following his heart, he'll never become great."

The living room was filled with shouting.

Meanwhile, Tyrone sat in his car, feeling his head pound. He reached for his pain pills, but the bottle was already empty.

He clenched his jaw through the discomfort and started the car.

An hour later, he stepped out of a pharmacy downtown. By chance, he spotted Aella's parents across the street.

They had just come out of a grocery store, their arms full of heavy bags.

After walking a few steps, they set everything down to rest.

Tyrone was about to walk over and help. Then, he spotted Sayer jogging across the street. He grabbed the bags and cheerfully escorted them across the road.

Tyrone stood frozen for a long time, unable to move.

He knew Aella's parents didn't want to see him, but he still wanted to help and do something for them.

Yet, Sayer had already stepped in and done exactly what Tyrone wished he could do. In that instant, Tyrone became unnecessary.

Moments like that had happened again and again.

Each one made him feel smaller, more powerless.

That helplessness of wanting to help but not being needed was driving him insane.

He didn't even remember how he got home.

Standing under the shower, he turned the water to cold, trying to shock himself awake.

But the clearer his mind became, the deeper the pain grew.

Around eight that evening, Brad stopped by.

He set a warm food container on the coffee table and said, "Aella made this herself. I shamelessly asked for an extra portion for my grandma, so she packed this for me."

Brad said no more. He left the container and walked out.

Tyrone sat on the couch, dressed in a dark robe.

He stared at the container for a long time before finally reaching out to open it.

The familiar scent filled the air.

It had been so long since he'd tasted Aella's cooking.

How long had it been?

Probably since the day Zera returned to the country. Aella hadn't cooked for him since then.

A sharp pain twisted in his chest. His hand trembled as he picked up the spoon and ate a mouthful.

It's shrimp and grits, cooked with shredded chicken for extra flavor.

Memories surged. Tyrone's eyes burned red.

Aella had never been good at cooking.

After they married, she insisted on learning because he had stomach problems.

The very first dish she learned was grits.

He still remembered that night. He came home from work, and Aella proudly handed him a steaming bowl.

He took one bite and said it tasted just okay, that she'd wasted her time. He even told her not to bother cooking again.