

Once Cast 361

Chapter 361 Flames of Retribution.

Later, Tyrone finally found out that the bowl of grits she once made for him was something she had secretly practiced for a whole month. She thought it was the best she'd ever cooked.

Back then, he hadn't cherished it at all.

Now, the bowl of grits he was eating had been brought by someone else—under false pretenses.

Tyrone gave a short, bitter laugh.

He laughed until his eyes filled with tears.

Tyrone lay weakly on the couch.

His stomach hurt. His chest ached. He couldn't eat or sleep. Tyrone just stayed awake through the night, hurting in silence until morning came.

By late afternoon the next day, Tyrone sat staring blankly at Aella's latest Instagram post in his office.

She had taken the day off to attend Henry's parent-teacher meeting. Aella even picked the boy up after school.

Did she really want to be with Mason?

Was she planning to become someone else's stepmother?

Tyrone's breathing turned uneven. Without thinking, he dialed her number.

At that moment, Aella was walking Henry across the street. When she saw Tyrone's name flash on the screen, she hung up right away.

"Aella, I think someone's following us," Henry said suddenly.

Aella looked around. She didn't take him seriously. "Really? You're not just trying to scare me again, are you?"

Henry squeezed her hand and suddenly broke into a run. They crossed the street together.

"Aella, you have zero sense of danger," he scolded.

He quickly tried calling his bodyguard using his smartwatch, but there was no signal. The call wouldn't go through.

Aella looked at Henry, and her heart sank.

Tyrone had once mentioned that Mason had taken a dangerous case.

After Mason won the lawsuit, the losing side suffered huge losses.

To get revenge, they kidnapped Mason's wife and son.

The boy was rescued, but Mason's wife was killed.

Could it be happening again? Was someone targeting Henry to get back at Mason?

Aella's grip tightened around her phone. She didn't call Mason right away. He was overseas. Even if she told him, he couldn't come back in time.

Real or not, she had to be careful.

"Henry, we're going to the hospital," she said, pulling him toward her car.

The hospital wasn't far, and Daniel was there.

He'd know what to do.

She opened the back door for Henry to get in.

But before she could react, a hand shot out from inside the car and yanked Henry inside.

It happened in broad daylight. Aella froze. She hadn't realized someone had broken into her car.

A man held a dagger to Henry's neck and ordered her to get in.

For Henry's safety, Aella did as she was told.

It was late at night in the suburbs of Vleka.

Inside an old, abandoned gas storage warehouse, Aella and Henry had been tied up separate warehouses.

Mason bursted in with his bodyguards, storming through the darkness to rescue his son. "Buddy, are you hurt anywhere?" he asked anxiously.

The moment the tape was ripped off Henry's mouth, the boy let out a loud cry. Tears streamed down his face as he pointed toward the next warehouse. "Dad! The bad guys took Aella in there!",

Mason's face turned hard instantly.

He handed Henry to one of his men. "Get him out of here. Now."

"Mr. Fulford, wait!" One of the guards blocked his path. "We already made too much noise. The next warehouse is full of propane tanks. It's too dangerous. You can't go in!"

Before the guard could finish, Mason was already sprinting toward the warehouse.

Inside, Aella sat bound to a metal post, her mouth sealed with tape.

The men around Aella were talking in low, vicious voices. "Break her legs first," one said. "We'll use her as a hostage when we leave."

Her mind went blank with fear. These men were ruthless—killers with nothing to lose. And Henry ... Was he okay?

One of them raised a metal rod and swung it toward her legs. Aella shut her eyes in despair, bracing for the hit.

But before the blow landed, a scream split the air, followed by the sound of fists slamming into flesh, bodies hitting the ground, and chaos breaking loose.

When she finally opened her eyes, those men who'd been threatening her were crawling away, groaning and clutching their injuries.

And in front of her was Mason, frantically untying the ropes around her wrists.

The moment she saw him, tears welled up and spilled over.

The sight of him felt like hope itself—so close, so familiar, so safe. Mason glanced up, his voice steady but gentle. “Hey. You’re okay. I’m here now. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Aella tore the tape off her mouth, her skin burning from the pull.

“Mason—Henry! He’s next door!”

He steadied her by the arm. “It’s okay. He’s safe. Let’s get you out first.”

Hearing that, Aella finally let out a shaky breath of relief.

But just as they turned toward the exit, a burning lighter flew in through the window.

Mason’s face changed in an instant. “Damn it—run!” He grabbed Aella’s hand and sprinted for the door.

Before Aella could even react, an explosion roared behind them. A blast of scorching heat and

Chapter 362 Extra in Her Story

In that split second of danger, Mason threw himself over Aella, shielding her with his body.

“Aella!”

Tyrone rushed to the scene and froze when he saw both Mason and Aella lying among the rubble.

Aella shook her dizzy head hard and opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was Tyrone’s worried face. “What are you doing here?” she asked weakly.

Tyrone looked down and said, "I was driving by and saw Mr. Fulford's car parked outside."

Aella didn't think much about it. She struggled to push him away.

Police officers arrived right after Tyrone and began clearing the debris.

Tyrone noticed a deep cut on Aella's arm. He bent down and tried to pick her up. to the hospital," he said.

But Aella pulled free with all her strength and ran to Mason.

He was lying on the ground, unconscious. She didn't dare to move him.

"I'll take you

"Mason, wake up!" she cried, tears running down her face. "You still have a son to raise! Why would you risk your life for me?"

Tyrone stood there, watching her cry over another man in a loss. Something twisted painfully inside him.

Even without him, there was always someone willing to risk their life to protect her.

He stared at Aella, crying so hard she could barely breathe. His eyes burned red—with pain, jealousy, and despair.

"Aella, sob, sob. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON

"Daddy, sob, sob."

Henry's cries broke through the chaos. He stumbled out of the car, tears streaming down his face, and ran straight to Aella and his father.

Aella pulled the boy into her arms, holding him close to calm him down.

Tyrone tightened his fists, forcing down the storm inside him. When he finally spoke, his voice

"The ambulance is almost here," he said. "He's going to be okay."

But Aella didn't even look at him. She stayed by Mason's side, holding Henry close, calling Mason's name again and again, desperate for him to wake up.

Tyrone stood beside them, feeling completely useless.

He wanted to protect her with his life—to make up for all the hurt he caused—but fate never gave him that chance.

No matter what he did, or how hard he tried, he was always too late.

There was always someone else standing where he wanted to be.

And once again, the cruel truth sank in. He was nothing but the extra man in her story.

Two paramedics climbed out of the ambulance and asked the family to help load Mason onto the stretcher.

Tyrone stepped forward and stopped Aella. "He's still a kid," he said, pointing to Henry, who was crying in her arms. "You take him in the car. I'll go with the ambulance."

Aella glanced down at Henry's tear-streaked face and didn't argue.

By the time they reached the hospital, it was past midnight. Mason was rushed into a patient room.

Aella gently laid the sleeping Henry on the sleeper sofa for family, then walked back out.

She turned to Tyrone and said, "Thank you for your help, Mr. Winter. You can go now."

Her tone was cold and distant. Tyrone felt something inside him snap.

He couldn't help but blurt out, "What right do you have to thank me for him?"

Aella shot Tyrone a cold glance and said nothing.

When Aella avoided the topic, Tyrone forced his tone to stay calm.

"You still have work tomorrow," he said quietly. "Let me drive you home so you can rest."

"No need," Aella replied flatly. "I'm staying here to take care of them."

Tyrone's expression darkened again. "If you're that worried, I'll call two caregivers over here. He's a grown man; it's not proper for you to "

Aella met his eyes sharply, her face solemn and her voice cold.

"

When we were still married, you stayed away from home for more than a month to take care of the woman you loved. You didn't think that was improper."

Her words hit him like a slap. "I'm single, and so is Mr. Fulford," she added. "Tell me, what's so inappropriate about me taking care of him?"

Tyrone's Adam's apple bobbed, but no words came out.

He could only stand there, silent, his chest heavy with regret.

That one mistake—his betrayal—had become the knot between them that would never untie.

She reminded him, "In a few months, I'll have known you 27 years. Out of respect for Virginia and Raine, I don't want things to get ugly between us."

She paused, then said quietly, "Don't forget what you promised me on that island."

The room fell silent. They looked at each other for a long moment—everything that once existed between them buried under the weight of things unsaid.

Finally, Tyrone forced out the words, hoarse and low. "Get some rest."

He turned and walked out. As soon as he left, Aella locked the door behind him.

Tyrone stood in the hallway, staring through the small glass window in the door. Inside, Aella sat by Mason's bedside, dipping a cotton swab in water and gently moistening his lips.

Her movements were soft and careful, every gesture full of quiet tenderness.

The sight felt like a blade twisting in his heart. His chest tightened, his breath came short, and his body trembled with the ache he couldn't release.

They had known each other since childhood—over 20 years.

He knew exactly what she was like—stubborn, a perfectionist, someone who couldn't accept betrayal, and someone who used to care about him more than anyone else.

So why had he chosen Zera? Why had he destroyed what they had?

Tyrone's fist slammed into the wall.

Pain shot

up

his arm. When he lowered his hand, a streak of blood marked the white surface.

Chapter 363 A Bitter Night

An hour later, Brad and Sixer finally found Tyrone. He was completely drunk.

Tyrone's injured right hand pointed shakily at Sayer. "What are you doing here?"

Sayer flopped down on the coffee table. "This club doesn't belong to you, does it? Why can't I come?"

Tyrone rolled his eyes and poured himself another drink.

Brad stepped forward and snatched the glass away. "Raine called me. Your parents had a huge fight. Virginia already took her back to your grandparents' house."

Sayer clicked his tongue. "Your dad actually argued with his wife? Man, that's low."

Tyrone gave him a dull, numb look.

“You’re right. Man in my family? None of us are any good.”

Sayer froze. He stood up slowly, taking a few cautious steps back.

Then he pointed at Tyrone and turned to Brad. “Is he—uh—okay?”

Brad frowned in disgust. “He’s losing it. Ignore him.”

Sayer asked hesitantly, “I heard Mr. Fulford got hurt. Is it bad?”

Tyrone’s voice turned bitter. “He’s fine. Someone’s staying by his bedside, making sure he’s well taken care of. He’s living a high life!”

“Right...” Sayer said, backing toward the door. “Brad, I’m going to grab some food and check on Aella. She can’t stay up too late. I need to take over and let her rest.”

Brad looked at Tyrone slumped on the couch, then stopped Sayer at the door.

“Sixer,” he asked, “you’ve always been proud and hard to please. Why are you so good to Aella? Why do you listen to her?”

Sayer straightened his face. “That’s easy. She’s beautiful, smart, and a great doctor. Plus, she’s kind to me.”

Brad glanced back into the room at Tyrone. “Funny,” he said. “I’ve never noticed her being that nice to you.”

Sayer puffed his chest proudly. “You wouldn’t know. When she first treated me, I gave her a

hard time all the time, but she never gave up. She even introduced me to a bunch of new friends.”

He went on, his voice softening, “She knows things between me and my grandpa aren’t great, so she talks to me a lot. Once, it was raining like crazy, and she still came to check on me. She was so tired she almost fell asleep standing by the stove, but she still cooked for me.”

Sayer smiled faintly. “I’ve never met a woman so real and so

kind. If she hadn’t insisted on treating me like her little brother, I swear I’d have married her and treated her like a queen.”

After Sayer left, Brad returned to the private room.

Aella had always been sincere with people. It was a trait she clearly got from her

parents.

The Reids were all like that. Clyde, especially, was straightforward and kind, without a mean bone in his body.

Brad noticed the strange look on Tyrone’s face. He asked quietly, “Where’s your medicine? I’ll get it for you.”

Tyrone’s hand tightened around the empty glass. His voice was low and rough, his eyes hollow.

From the moment he swore on that island that he would never bother Aella again, his heart had already died.

No medicine could save him now.

He shut his eyes in pain. "I'm fine," he murmured.

Brad knew he wasn't drunk. Sitting beside him, he poured a glass of water.

"Tyrone, you know how much you mean to your family and to your company. Pull yourself together. Don't make everyone worry about you."

Tyrone's reply drifted away from the question. "Let Mom and Raine stay at the grandparents' house for a while. They need some peace."

Brad frowned. "You think those two old men can manage the house on their own?"

Tyrone lowered his head, lips pressed tight.

Brad sighed helplessly. "Aella's good to everyone—to Sixer, to Mr. Vic, to Mason—that's just who she is. She's like her parents, pure and genuine."

He added, "That kindness she had, she gave it to you first. And you're the one who let it slip

away."

Tyrone sat on the couch, his suit jacket draped across his lap.

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, fingers digging into his short hair.

Brad could see the pain written all over him, but he still reminded him gently. "Some mistakes can't be fixed. You have to let go. Stop torturing yourself."

Tyrone leaned back heavily, the weight of his body sinking into the couch.

He pressed a hand against his chest, his voice breaking. "I want to let go, but I can't!"

Every night, when he was alone in that empty house, lying on the same bed they once shared, he didn't dare close his eyes.

He couldn't stop imagining how Aella—that bright, lively girl who used to fill every room with laughter had survived three long years of his coldness.

Aella used to be so full of life—dramatic, playful, always shining wherever she went. How had someone like her endured three long years of his coldness?

Now she was the one turning cold, shutting every door on him, leaving no way to make things right.

She didn't give him a chance to explain, didn't even give him a chance to try. Aella just stood there, watching him suffer, watching guilt and regret eat him alive.

Her indifference was driving him insane.

Tyrone pulled out the crystal pendant he always carried with him.

His fingers trembled as he touched the tiny photo inside, the one Aella had sealed there herself.

Chapter 364 Doom From the Start

Tyrone's eyes were bloodshot, his voice shaking.

He said, "I don't deserve to live."

Brad frowned at the crystal pendant in Tyrone's hand.

He sighed. “Man, you need to throw that thing away.”

When Brad tried to grab it, Tyrone clenched his fist so tight his knuckles turned white.

Brad urged, “Tyrone, this thing is eating you alive.”

Aella had terminated her pregnancy but still made that pendant for him.

It wasn't a keepsake. It was a curse, a constant reminder of what he'd done.

Tyrone held it tighter. His voice trembled. “This is the only thing she left me. I can't throw it away.”

Brad saw there was no convincing him and gave up.

Watching Tyrone's pain, he hesitated before asking quietly, “Do you love Aella?”

Tyrone clutched the pendant tightly and stared blankly at Brad.

Aella had asked him the same question on that small island.

Brad watched Tyrone's reaction and already knew the answer.

He said, “Don't take this the wrong way, but you grew up under Edwin and your dad's influence. Your idea of love and marriage is twisted.”

Brad continued, “They built you to think like a businessman—profit and loss, strategy and control. If you'd married some woman you didn't love but who brought the right connections, you'd probably be living a perfect life right now.”

He leaned forward and added, "But you didn't. You went and married a fallen heiress, a woman who'd lost everything. Aella loved you, but you didn't love her. From the start, the two of you were doomed."

Tyrone suddenly snapped.

He staggered to his feet, his breath heavy with alcohol. He shouted, "Then you tell me what is love?"

His eyes burned red as he lost control. "Brad, let me tell you the truth! There's no such thing as real love in this world!"

Brad wasn't surprised by Tyrone's outburst.

From childhood, Tyrone had been molded by Edwin's strict lessons and Ralph's expectations. He carried every quality a top heir should have—discipline, confidence, and a sharp business mind.

In the corporate world, he thrived. He held the key to power and wealth, standing at the peak where everyone looked up to him.

But when it came to family, marriage, and love—he was a complete failure.

Tyrone swayed unsteadily in front of Brad, eyes red and wild.

He shouted hoarsely, "There's no such thing as love without strings attached! Every act of love is just people getting what they want!"

Brad sat on the couch, calm and steady, watching Tyrone fall apart. "You're wrong," he said quietly. "What you felt for Zera and her son, that was love without expecting anything in

return."

Tyrone sneered. "Zera saved my life. Being good to her— isn't that what I should've done?"

Brad's voice hardened. "You crossed the line, Tyrone. You hurt your wife and destroyed your marriage."

Tyrone's voice cracked as he spoke, his emotions breaking through the last bit of control he had left.

"When Zera came back, I was the fool who fell for her lies—that's on me!

"I rented her a private beach, set off fireworks, baked her a cake with my hands, and stupidly posted it on Instagram," he shouted. "But that was because she slit her wrists, Brad! She was out of her mind, begging me to do something—anything—to help her!"

He pressed a trembling hand to his forehead, his breath ragged. "She said I ruined her future. I owed her a lifetime of happiness. She begged me and said that even if it was fake, even for one minute—she just wanted to feel joyful again. She promised that if I did those things, she'd let go of the past and live on."

Tyrone laughed bitterly. "I deleted that post after one minute—one damn minute—but Raine still took a screenshot and sent it to Aella!"

Brad stayed silent for a long moment, his expression cold and steady. Then he said, "You might be able to explain that post. But what about everything after that? The way you kept defending Zera and the way you kept hurting Aella? How do you explain that?"

"Yes!"

Tyrone snapped, his voice hoarse and desperate.

His eyes were horrifyingly bloodshot, his face twisted in agony. "I favored Zera! I went against Aella! I used underhanded tricks! I deserve to die for that!"

He stumbled back, clutching at the table for balance, his chest heaving. "I grew up with Aella! Don't tell me I never treated her well!"

His voice broke again, and tears burned his eyes as he recalled their past.

“Since we were kids, I always found a way to get her anything she wanted, even if I couldn’t do it right away.

“When she wanted to go shopping, no matter how tired I was, I went with her. I couldn’t stand the thought of her walking home alone at night.

“When it rained and she said no one was there to pick her up, I ran three blocks through the storm, shoes soaked through, just to carry her home.

“When her family went bankrupt and everyone turned on them, my grandfather was watching every cent in my accounts. But I still risked everything; I embezzled money from the company to pay off their debts.

“And when I wanted to marry her, to give her a shoulder to lean on, I begged my grandfather for a whole day and night. He whipped me more than 20 times, but she never knew any of this.”

Chapter 365 He Can’t Let Go

“She said she didn’t want to leave Vleka and wanted to stay close to her parents. So I gave up my plans to move abroad. Every day I faced my grandfather’s and father’s control and pressure- who could I even talk to about that?

“After she married me, have I ever made her worry about anything at home?

“Yes, I schemed against her, but only because I wanted her to stay by my side. Why does everyone twist my intentions?

“I never wanted her to lose. I swore I’d be her shelter for life. Divorce? That thought never crossed my mind!

“Yes, I had feelings for Zera. I was attracted to her. That was my unforgivable mistake. But what does that have to do with love?”

Tyrone speaking, bent down, and drained his glass in one long swallow.

All love at first sight begins with physical attraction. All love that grows over time is a matter of weighing gains and losses.

There’s no such thing as pure love in this world.

“I might be cold and heartless,” Tyrone said, his voice hoarse, “but don’t doubt that I gave Aella everything I had.”

Brad said nothing. He just watched Tyrone quietly.

He could feel Tyrone’s pain and helplessness.

Even now, Tyrone’s thoughts were a mess.

Back then, he had gone against his whole family for Zera and even used ruthless tactics against Aella. His family’s control shaped much of who he became.

Zera once saved his life. Tyrone admired her for that, maybe even romanticized her. Six years later, when she came back, his guilt made things worse. Edwin’s interference at that time only fueled Tyrone’s rebellion.

Everyone shows love differently.

Maybe Tyrone did love Aella, but even he couldn’t believe or admit it.

The businessman's instincts were carved deep into his bones, making him forget the most precious part of being human—how to love.

Brad sighed. "You already know you're wrong. You know you don't love her the right way. You can think clearly, weigh every gain and loss, and put profit above all else. So why can't you just let her go?"

He looked at him quietly. "Tyrone, what are you really holding on to?"

Tyrone slumped on the couch, his whole body drained of strength.

Before Brad could say more, his phone rang sharply, cutting through the silence.

"I've got something urgent coming up," Brad said, standing up. "I'll have Raine come pick you up."

When Brad left, Tyrone sat alone and downed several more glasses.

Something flickered through his mind. Suddenly, he laughed—low at first, then louder, until his eyes turned bloodshot.

He wasn't unwilling to let go or reluctant to admit defeat.

Tyrone simply couldn't let go.

His hand trembled around the glass. Even if he said it out loud, who would believe him?

He never believed losing Aella would break him, that without her, life would feel worse than death.

Tyrone closed his eyes, pain twisting his face. He let the tears spill silently down his cheeks.

A sudden metallic taste filled Tyrone's mouth. Before he could react, he coughed hard, and a stream of blood splattered across the white floor in front of the couch.

"Tyrone!"

Raine rushed into the room and froze in shock at the sight.

Her hands trembled as she grabbed her phone. Tyrone stopped her before she could call for help.

"Tyrone, you can barely stand," Raine cried, clutching his arm. "I'm taking you to the hospital right now."

"Raine," he said weakly, his voice rough and tired, "do you also think ... your brother doesn't deserve forgiveness?"

Raine's nose stings. Tears welled in her eyes.

"Tyrone," she said, her voice shaking, "everyone makes mistakes. What matters is that you're trying to fix them. Please stop torturing yourself. You're going to make yourself sick!"

Tyrone wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand.

He used to believe the same thing.

Tyrone thought that if he admitted his faults and changed, he'd have a lifetime to make it right.

He thought he could win Aella back.

But reality was cruel. Aella never gave him the chance.

Not even once.

He was in terrible shape but still refused to go to the hospital. Raine threatened she would call their mother if he refused.

Tyrone reluctantly promised to see a doctor the next morning.

After bringing Tyrone home, Raine called the family doctor. The doctor checked him over and set up an IV drip. Raine refused to go home. She stayed by her brother's side the whole night.

By morning, she'd lost all patience. "If you don't go to the hospital," she said firmly, "I'm calling Mom." After a long back-and-forth, Tyrone finally agreed.

On the drive there, Raine pulled over to grab breakfast.

Before she could get out, Tyrone stopped her. "I'll go," he said, stepping out of the car. He came back with a donut and an americano.

Raine couldn't help but glance at him.

Aella used to drink americano, and donuts were her favorite.

When they arrived at the hospital, Raine went to find Tyrone's doctor.

As she turned back, she saw him still holding the breakfast bag. "I'll take it," she offered softly. "You should rest."

But Tyrone didn't let go. His voice was quiet but steady. "She's probably not at work yet. drop it off at her office, and then I'll leave."

I'll

Raine hesitated for a moment and decided to let him go.

Chapter 366 When the Heart Breaks

Ten minutes later, Tyrone knocked on Aella's office door. He found Aella already inside.

He stood by the doorway. She stood across the room. For a second, they just stared at each other in silence.

Aella glanced at the clock on her phone, her face cold. "Did Winter Group shut down, Mr. Winter? You don't have to work anymore?"

Tyrone walked in and placed the breakfast he'd brought on her desk.

His eyes fell on another bag of breakfast already there.

Aella saw where he was looking, and she said, "You can keep yours. I've got work to do. I won't see you out."

She grabbed the other breakfast set and turned to leave. On impulse, Tyrone caught her wrist.

Aella turned back sharply. "Are you taking that to Mason?" he asked.

Aella yanked her hand free. "Does it matter to you?"

Tyrone's expression darkened. He pointed at the bag in her hand. "From your neighborhood to that café, you'd have to pass at least three more stoplights and take an extra thirty minutes just to get to the hospital. What's so special about Mason that makes him worth it?"

Aella's tone was calm and deliberate. "He's absolutely worth it. I got up early to buy it, and I'll feed him myself if I want to. Any problem with that, Mr. Winter?"

Her words hit Tyrone like a punch to his gut.

The familiar ache in his chest spread fast. He gripped the edge of her desk to keep himself steady.

As Aella moved to walk past him, Tyrone bent slightly and blocked her way. "Aella," he gasped, "my stomach hurts."

Her face didn't change. "This is a hospital. Go downstairs, get a number, and have them cut out whatever's hurting."

She turned to leave again, then froze at the sudden sound behind her.

Tyrone coughed up a mouthful of blood.

Aella, acting purely on instinct, dropped the breakfast and rushed to hold him

up. "What

Tyrone pressed one hand to the desk and the other around hers.

His eyes were bloodshot, his voice choked, "You still care about me, don't you?"

They were close enough to feel each other's breath. Aella met his gaze and said, steady and cold. "I'm a doctor. You're in a hospital. I don't stand by when someone's in danger."

Tyrone shook his head hard, the pain twisting his face. "I don't believe you."

Aella pulled her arm free from Tyrone's grip. "If I did something that made you misunderstand," she said calmly, "then I'll pretend it never happened."

She wanted to walk away, but Tyrone suddenly wrapped his arms around her from behind, his voice breaking.

"We grew up together for over twenty years. We were married for three. Do I really mean less to you than Mason, someone you've only known for a few months?!"

Aella slipped out of his embrace without struggling.

She turned to face him, her expression calm and distant.

"You're right," she said quietly. "We've known each other for a long time and were once married. But tell me, wasn't I always second to Zera?"

Her words cut deeper than a slap. She picked up the bag of breakfast and walked out without looking back.

Tyrone's body gave out. He collapsed on the floor.

Hearing the thud, Aella stopped instantly.

She rushed to the hall at her fastest speed and flagged down two passing nurses. "There's a patient in my office with severe stomach bleeding, and he has passed out. Get a doctor now! He needs the ER!"

Moments later, Raine arrived just in time to see her brother being carried out of Aella's office on a stretcher.

Not far

away, Aella stood still, clutching the breakfast she never delivered. She watched silently but did not move closer.

Raine ran into the office. On the desk was the breakfast Tyrone had bought for Aella. On the floor, a dark stain of fresh blood.

Tears filled her eyes as she ran out again, following the doctors as they pushed Tyrone toward the emergency room.

When she passed Aella in the hallway, she stopped for a moment. Her eyes were red, her expression was full of hurt, but she said nothing.

Aella stood there, unmoving, watching as the elevator doors closed on the stretcher. Then she left quietly.

By eight that night, Tyrone finally woke up in the hospital room.

Tyrone opened his eyes weakly and glanced around the room. His parents and Raine were there, but Aella was nowhere to be found.

His

eyes

dimmed. He looked up at the ceiling, silent and hollow.

Gabriel walked into the hospital room. Ralph rushed forward, his voice filled with worry. "Doctor, how's my son? Tell me the truth. How bad is it?"

Gabriel glanced toward Tyrone, who lay pale and weak on the bed.

Before he could speak, Virginia stepped in front of him, her face tense. "Doctor, please," she said firmly. "Just tell us everything."

Cornered, Gabriel sighed and gave them the full report.

When Gabriel saw that they panicked, he softened his tone. "Don't be too alarmed. As long as Mr. Winter avoids emotional stress and keeps his mood stable, he'll recover gradually. I suggest scheduling a specialist to help regulate his sleep. His stomach condition will take long-term care—his diet and emotions both need close attention. Please be mentally prepared. This won't be a short process, but with patience, he'll get better."

Chapter 367 The Bond Between Sisters

After Gabriel left, Raine turned to her parents. "Mom, Dad, stay here. I'll go buy us some dinner."

But no one in the room had an appetite. Tyrone's condition had gotten worse. Their parents were too worried to eat.

Virginia urged, "It's been almost twelve hours since Tyrone came out of the emergency room. Go home and ask the kitchen to make him some grits. Bring it back as soon as you can."

Raine nodded and stepped out of the hospital room. As she called the estate to relay the instruction, she dug through her bag for her car keys.

Coincidentally, Aella stepped out of the Mason's hospital room located next door. She noticed a lipstick fall from Raine's bag. Aella bent down and handed it back to Raine.

Raine saw her and hung up the phone.

Her eyes locked on the lipstick in Aella's hand, but she didn't take it.

Raine's eyes reddened. "Since we were kids, how have I treated you?"

Aella gently slipped the lipstick back into Raine's bag. "You've always treated me like a sister."

Tears burst out from Raine's eyes. "And how has my mom treated you?"

Aella lowered her head. "Like a daughter."

Her voice was calm, without hesitation.

Raine broke down, sobbing.

"I know Tyrone hurt you. I know he doesn't deserve another chance. But we grew up together. You're family to me. My mom loves you like her own. She even helps you to get a divorce, set you free, and spare you from more pain."

Her voice trembled as she pointed to her chest. "Even if Tyrone deserves every bit of punishment, my mom and I have always cared about you. You might not care about me anymore, but for my mom's sake, how could you just stand there and watch Tyrone cough up blood and pass out in your office like it meant nothing?",

Aella's lashes trembled. She looked down, hiding the storm in her eyes.

After a long pause, she said quietly, "Raine, I called the doctor for him."

The hospital hallway fell silent. Two women who once shared every secret now stood across from each other with no words left to say.

Aella's expression was complicated.

Raine's tears fell faster.

Her lips trembled as she finally said, "Then thank you."

...

She turned and ran into the elevator, crying as the doors closed.

Aella turned around. Her eyes blurred with tears. She understood Raine's pain. Tyrone was her brother, the one who'd protected her since they were kids.

She cherished their sisterly bond. She loved Virginia too, who had treated her like family.

But no matter how much she tried, she couldn't bring herself to get involved with Tyrone again.

She stepped back into Mason's room and met his steady, concerned gaze.

Aella wiped the tears from her cheeks. "You saw all that, didn't you?"

Mason was in a hospital gown. He stood tall. His face was calm and steady.

He pulled a tissue from the box and handed it to Aella. Mason tried to comfort her gently. "Ms. Winter's an emotional person," he said. "Once she cools down, things between you two will get better."

Aella looked at him and asked quietly, "You really think Raine and I will ever make up?"

Mason smiled and nodded. "Birds of a feather, Dr. Reid. You're exceptional, so I'm sure your friend isn't far behind. Ms. Winter may have her flaws, but someone who's been close to you since childhood must have her own irreplaceable strengths."

Aella tilted her head, meeting his calm gaze. "Mr. Fulford, thank you."

No matter how heavy her heart felt, speaking with Mason always eased the weight.

After spending time with Mason, Aella realized that despite his high status, he always carried a quiet sense of warmth that made people feel naturally comfortable around him.

That warmth, however, always came with just enough distance to keep things proper. It made her feel relaxed, without the weight of pressure or expectations.

Mason chuckled. "You're too polite. If it weren't for you protecting Henry, we wouldn't even be here. My son and I should be the ones thanking you."

Outside the room, Virginia and Ralph happened to pass by. They caught sight of Aella and Mason talking, smiling warmly. The look on their faces turned complicated as they walked away without a word.

For the next three days, Tyrone sat in his hospital room, eyes fixed on the doorway.

He watched Aella pass by again and again, sometimes carrying fruit, sometimes a lunchbox, and sometimes holding Henry's hand. But not once did she step into his room. Not once did she even glance his way.

Raine sat by his bedside, peeling an apple for him. "You just focus on getting better. When the year ends, let's take a family trip. Just the four of us."

Tyrone's eyes drifted from his laptop screen to her face.

He lowered his gaze and said, "Alright. But only if you come help me at the company."

Raine was stunned.

She'd inherited ten percent of the company shares after her eighteenth birthday.

Though she majored in finance and was later pushed into endless executive courses, she had never actually worked a day in her life.

Her yearly dividends alone were more than enough to last several lifetimes. Besides, she already made a fortune managing her investments. Working a nine-to-five job had never seemed necessary.

Chapter 368 A Promise Between Siblings

Raine watched her brother's face carefully. "Tyrone, you promised me and Aella we'd never have to work a day in our lives. You said you'd take care of us forever."

The memory of Aella's bright smile when he promised he'd support her forever flashed in Tyrone's mind. His lips curved into a faint, bitter smile.

He lowered his eyes and stayed quiet for a long time.

Then he said softly, "If you help me at the company, I can focus on getting better."

Tyrone added, "I'll train you myself. Noel will be your assistant. Once you've settled in, I'll take our family on a trip to Euravia at the end of the year. Everything's on me."

Paying for the trip wasn't the point; it was making sure he got proper treatment that really mattered.

Raine stuck out her pinky finger. "Pinky promise."

Tyrone sighed with an affectionate smile and hooked his finger with hers.

"Alright," she promised. "You've got yourself a deal. I'll start work at the company tomorrow."

Tyrone's expression turned unreadable as he locked his gaze on Raine's. He looked away and said quietly, "Help me with the discharge papers."

Raine's smile froze.

Tyrone explained, "I don't like staying in hospitals. We have a private doctor at home. It's more comfortable there."

She hesitated, then nodded obediently.

Even though this floor was full of private suites, there were still people walking around at night.

Tyrone had always struggled to sleep; home was simply quieter.

When Raine stepped out into the hallway, she ran into Aella and little Henry.

Both adults stopped. Henry waved politely. "Hi, Ms. Lovely."

Raine gave Aella a glance. She smiled faintly and handed the boy an orange.

She walked up to Aella and apologized awkwardly, "That day ... I didn't mean to do it."

Aella sighed and reached out to take her hand. "I know, Raine. You care about Tyrone, and you were just worried. I don't blame you."

Raine looked toward the hospital room. Her eyes turned red, but she couldn't help smiling. "Tyrone's doing better. He promised to take his treatment seriously and go on a family trip by the end of the year."

Aella nodded with relief.

If Tyrone could finally let go of his stubbornness, that would be the best outcome anyone could hope for.

That night, after Aella left the hospital with Henry, Tyrone visited Mason in his room.

The two men stood by the window. Tyrone was in his usual sharp suit, while Mason still wore his hospital gown.

Mason noticed the fatigue on Tyrone's face. He asked quietly, "Mr. Winter, are you sure you would rather not stay a few more days before leaving?"

Tyrone didn't answer right away. His dark eyes studied Mason's expression. "Mason, what kind of love do you think really exists between a husband and wife?"

They stood in silence for a moment, the hospital room dim under the night lights.

Mason finally said, "If you love someone, you'll be careful. You'll never put yourself in a position where you could lose her."

His short answer hit Tyrone like a blade. Tyrone's eyes turned red at the edges.

Mason continued, his voice calm but firm, "Do you know why Dr. Reid can't forgive you?"

Tyrone lowered his head. His hands tightened into fists at his sides.

"One mistake might be an accident," Mason said. "But when it happens again, it's a choice. And when it's a choice, the pain it causes doesn't deserve forgiveness."

Tyrone's voice came out rough, trembling. "Did she tell you that?"

Mason hesitated, then nodded slightly. "There was a night she got drunk. She cried and told me something."

He paused, then said softly, "She said when she found out you cheated, she tried to save the marriage. But your indifference made her feel worthless. And when she tried to end her life just to get your attention, you still looked down on her. She said in that moment, she realized how cheap she had become."

Tyrone pressed his hands against the window frame, his shoulders shaking. He shut his eyes, his face twisted with pain.

Mason said, "When you truly love someone, you can't help but soften for them. You'll bend your pride, lower your head, and always give them strength, support, and a sense of safety."

He added, "If you really love her, you'd never drain her. You'd lift her up when she's at her lowest and stay beside her when she's hurting the most."

"Real love means helping each other grow, giving strength instead of taking it away. It's two people lifting each other up, not one person standing on top while the other breaks."

Tyrone didn't say a word. He turned and quietly walked to the door.

Behind him, Mason's voice carried through the still room. "She spent over twenty years revolving her whole world around you. You didn't lift her. You almost destroyed her. That's not love."

Tyrone didn't remember how he made it home.

Everything felt blurred, like walking through fog.

He dropped onto the couch, staring blankly at the ceiling. Mason's words echoed over and over in his head.

Tyrone remembered the time before their wedding, when his grandfather and father told Aella to quit her job and become a full-time wife. She didn't even hesitate before agreeing.

Chapter 369 Separate Ways

That night, when Tyrone drove her home, Aella turned to him before getting out of the car. She said quietly, "I don't have much to offer. But if my compromise can bring peace to your family and help you focus at work, then I'm willing."

After their honeymoon, one of his company's new projects hit a serious problem. He hesitated to use the emergency plan suggested by a new hire.

That night, she brought him some warm milk and squatted beside him to give him a foot massage. Aella gently persuaded him to give the newcomer a chance.

In their second year of marriage, he met his first real rival in business. She stayed by his side through it all, telling him not to give up.

Aella helped him to pull in the investment and get him through tough times. She accompanied him to every business dinner and social event, talking politely with the other rich men's wives.

She had given up so much for him—compromising with Edwin and Ralph again and again just to keep the family at peace.

She gave up her dreams and her career. Aella cooked for him and studied holistic medicine just to take better care of him.

Aella even attended events she hated and met people she would rather not see.

When he couldn't sleep, she stayed up with him.

When he traveled, she called three times a day to ask if he'd eaten and if he was resting well.

Whenever anyone said something bad about him, she would instantly fight back to defend him.

And now, he finally realized, she doesn't need him to survive.

It was him who had been standing all along because she was there holding him up.

At that moment, it hit Tyrone like lightning.

When Brad walked in, he found Tyrone curled up on the couch, trembling violently.

Without saying a word, Brad grabbed a handful of pills—stomach medicine, heart pills, sleeping pills—all mixed together—and forced them into Tyrone's mouth.

Then he helped Tyrone back to bed, sweating from the effort.

Tyrone lay there, pale, beads of sweat on his forehead from the pain.

His eyes were red as he looked up at Brad and asked, "Is it too late for me to love her now?"

Brad's upturned eyes widened. "Love? There's no such thing as love, man. It's all desire and deals. That's all this world runs on."

Tyrone lay weakly on the bed. His voice trembling as he muttered, "Aella's love for me was real."

Brad sat by Tyrone's bed and patted his shoulder. He mocked, "Aella's a gold-digger, man. She's after your money and your body. Her family went broke, and now she's looking for a long-term meal ticket. You better wake up. What she feels for you isn't love!"

Tyrone turned his back, eyes shut tight, hiding the redness in them. "Get lost!" He snapped coldly.

Brad rubbed his nose, hearing the choke in Tyrone's voice.

He walked around to the other side of the bed. "So, you finally get it now?"

When Tyrone stayed silent, Brad sighed. "It's too late, Tyrone. Everything's too late."

He went on and asked, "You think she's sitting around waiting for you? I'm telling you, I already know five or six guys chasing her. None of them are ordinary."

Brad gave a half-smirk. "If you want a fair shot at loving her, maybe try again in your next life. Oh! Remember to take a number."

He waited, but Tyrone never answered. When he leaned closer and pushed Tyrone's shoulder, Tyrone rolled flat onto his back.

Brad inhaled sharply, panic rushing in. He quickly checked for breath.

"Oh my gosh!" He panted heavily, clutching his chest in relief.

Tyrone was just asleep; the sleeping pills had kicked in.

The next morning, Aella passed by Tyrone's hospital room. Two nurses were cleaning inside.

She frowned.

Tyrone's condition was severe. How could his family allow him to discharge so soon?

A few days later, after Mason was released from the hospital, he invited Aella to dinner.

On her way there, Aella passed a shopping plaza. On a giant LED screen outside, she saw Raine dressed in a sharp business suit. She calmly stood beside Tyrone as they faced a group of reporters.

On TV. Tyrone appeared in a crisp suit. He looked a little tired but still sharp and dazzling as

ever.

Beside him stood Raine, once the sheltered little princess; facing the swarm of reporters throwing sharp, tricky questions at her brother, she stepped forward to protect both him and the family's reputation.

She handled herself with grace and confidence. It was clear she'd been raised for this, trained by her family since childhood. She was educated as one of the best in finance. Watching her, Aella couldn't help but see a bit of Tyrone in her.

After that, their lives went their separate ways.

Since the day Tyrone left the hospital, he had never appeared before Aella again.

By September, Clyde had started college.

Aella's life was packed with new responsibilities. She began filming the first episode of a TV program on holistic medicine, all while managing her department and seeing patients three days a week.

On top of that, she still made time for the show's recording sessions.

Her career was thriving. She met new people, built new connections, and every day was busy, full, and rewarding.

Chapter 370 A Father's Desperate Plea

It was finally the weekend. Aella stayed home with her parents for once, enjoying the rare quiet night instead of hanging out with friends for poker.

In the middle of the night, her mom shook her awake.

“Aella, the Winters are here.”

Aella grabbed her phone and checked the time—12:40 a.m.

She quickly got dressed and came out of her room. Tyrone’s parents were already waiting in the living room.

Ralph sat with his head down, silent, with none of the arrogance he had the last time he came to challenge her family in the past.

Virginia’s eyes were red. The moment she saw Aella, she rushed forward and grabbed her hands, trembling all over.

She could feel the fear and panic in Virginia’s touch.

Aella couldn’t bear to see her like that. “Virginia, please, take a breath. Tell me what’s going on.”

Virginia shook her head, her voice breaking. “Aella, I know it’s rude to come here this late, but we didn’t know what else to do.”

Her words started to choke. “Tyrone has been hiding his illness. He said he was fine, traveling for work, but this morning Raine found him coughing up blood and nearly passed out. If she hadn’t called us, we’d still think he had almost made a full recovery!”

She bent forward, almost begging. “Aella, he won’t listen to anyone. Please, I’m begging you to talk to him. If this goes on, he’s not going to make it!”

Aella helped Virginia sit on the couch.

Her tone stayed calm. "Virginia, his life is his own. If he's really given up on living, no one can stop him. I can't help you with this."

Virginia stared at her, helpless and broken.

Her eyes turned toward Aella's parents, silently asking for help.

The couple stood on the sides, their faces heavy with sadness.

They were parents too. Virginia's tears had melted their heart.

Miriam finally sighed. "Mrs. Winter, whatever our daughter decides, we stand with her."

Virginia's eyes filled with bitterness as she turned toward her husband.

Ralph took a deep breath, straightened his suit, and stepped forward. He bowed low before Aella's parents.

"I owe you all an apology," he said quietly. "I mean it."

Warren exchanged a look with Miriam. "There's no need for that," he replied. "Since Aella doesn't want to go, you should head home."

But Ralph didn't move.

He walked up to Aella and said, "If you can help my son get back on his feet, I'll give you whatever you want."

Aella's face stayed cold and unreadable. "Mr. Winter," she said evenly, "I know you have money and power. But I don't need either. I can't help you."

Ralph's eyes were bloodshot as he suddenly leaned forward to bow at the Reids.

Aella reacted fast, stepping back to stand beside her parents.

Virginia stood up from the couch in shock. She couldn't believe her proud husband lowered his pride for their son.

Aella's parents were just as stunned. They'd always known Ralph as a proud man, but to see him this humbled for his son's sake was almost unbelievable.

Standing between her parents, Aella looked at the man before her.

Once, he had been untouchable—arrogant, dismissive, always looking down on others.

Now, he was just a father.

And to humble himself for his son was something challenging for him.

Ralph turned toward her, his reddened eyes looked desperate.

He said, "Everything that happened before was my fault. I apologize to you here. Please, for the years you and Tyrone grew up together—talk to him. Help him get back on his feet."

His voice cracked as he went on, "Virginia and I only have two children. We've placed all our hopes on Tyrone. He's the future of the family and the next in line for the company. He can't fall apart like this!"

Warren and Miriam quickly moved forward to help Ralph stand up.

Aella's voice was calm, almost cold. "Whether he lives or dies, that has nothing to do with me. I can't help you."

She went into her room, locking the door behind her.

Tyrone was calculating, profit-driven, and heartless. A man like that wouldn't break down for something irrational.

After Aella's parents sent Tyrone's parents away, they found her sitting quietly in the living room again.

Miriam looked at her daughter with worried eyes. "No matter what you decide, your father and I will always support you."

Aella smiled faintly and comforted them instead.

They were older, emotional people.

The couple had watched Tyrone grow up. Of course, they still felt something for him, even if they resented him deeply.

But Aella's heart was firm.

She had wasted the best years of her life on him.

Because of his betrayal and cruelty, she'd nearly lost herself once. In her lowest point, she nearly killed herself.