

Once Cast 401

Chapter 401 First Experience

The second Tyrone took a bite, his face twisted like he'd swallowed a mouthful of lava.

He started coughing, his eyes watering. Aella grinned. "If it's that bad, you don't have to prove anything."

Tyrone's pride kicked in. He frowned and forced the bite down anyway.

He coughed harder, grabbing his chest.

His gaze darted around the table, desperate for water.

Miriam rushed to pour him a glass. Clyde jumped up, holding out his own. "Here, Tyrone, take mine!"

Warren stood too, worried. "Tyrone, you know you can't handle spice. Why listen to Aella? Don't let her goad you into it."

Aella was doubled over laughing, watching him suffer.

Miriam passed over her cup, but Tyrone reached for Aella's instead and took a long gulp like a man dying in the desert.

Aella shot him a look out of the corner of her eye.

Warren patted his back. "Let me order something mild for you."

Tyrone flinched when the pat landed. A sharp hiss slipped through his teeth.

Warren frowned. "What was that?"

Tyrone shook his head. "It's nothing."

Warren didn't push it and waved the waiter over to order a plate of plain shrimp. Aella caught that tiny twitch in Tyrone's shoulders.

She knew exactly what that meant.

Yes, he managed to settle the matter quickly.

However, he hadn't just been scolded for her calling off the wedding. His father and grandfather must have taken it out on him.

Same as before. Same as their last life. He did the same thing for Zera.

She turned away, pretending not to notice, and kept peeling her shrimp.

Tyrone put on a pair of plastic gloves and quietly started peeling shrimp for her instead.

Miriam, always the motherly one, called to the waiter. "Bring some aglio olio for Tyrone. He's got a weak stomach."

The waiter nodded and left. Clyde stood when the new dish came. "Put the mild shrimp here by my brother-in-law."

Warren swapped Tyrone's shot glass for a can of beer. "You've got work calls. Don't drink too much."

Across the street, a black luxury car sat idling under the streetlight. Virginia and Ralph were watching their son sharing a moment with the Reids.

Virginia leaned against the window, watching her son laugh softly with the Reids. “Now you see why Tyrone doesn’t come home for dinner anymore?”

Ralph’s face darkened. “He’s the heir to a billion-dollar empire, and he’s sitting at a roadside stall. It’s pathetic.”

Virginia’s laugh was sharp. “You married me for my family name and my father’s business. You never cared about love. And now you’re doing the same to Tyrone. You don’t see him as your son—you see him as your replacement, your insurance policy for the Winters’ name. You never cared about his thoughts or feelings.”

Ralph’s jaw tightened. “He’s a man. His job is to protect the family legacy. That’s what matters. Not emotions.”

Virginia rolled the window up. “If you keep treating him like a machine, Ralph, I swear I’ll divorce you.”

Her son may have inherited the Winters’ empire, but Edwin and Ralph still controlled every move he made.

Even his marriage wasn’t his own.

He was nothing more than a puppet wearing a crown. His father and grandfather were the puppetmasters, pulling the strings to keep their hold on power firmly intact.

And the simple chaos of that little barbecue stand—that warmth and laughter—that was the life he truly wanted.

Later that night, Aella sat on her bed, surrounded by boxes.

Every gift Tyrone had ever given her was laid out and neatly labeled.

Her fingers flew over the calculator as she added up the totals.

Her internship at Hill Hospital started Monday. Tomorrow, she'd go see him, return every gift, every cent, and the house keys.

But as she stared at the numbers, her thoughts shifted.

He'd already agreed to go back to being childhood friends. If she returned everything now, it would feel like a slap in the face.

She couldn't afford to look petty.

Walking away with dignity mattered more than proving anything. She had to stand proud.

That was the kind of wisdom two lives had taught her.

The next day, right as the sun dipped behind the skyline, Aella stepped into the lobby of Winters Group.

Upstairs, Noel stood before Tyrone's desk. "Mr. Winters, everything's gone just as you said. Every family on the list cut their profits to keep working with us. They also signed statements promising to stay silent about Ms. Reid."

Tyrone's phone lit up on the desk.

He glanced down—and froze. Aella's name appeared on his screen. His chair scraped against the floor as he jumped up.

She'd ignored him last night, refused his offer to drive her home.

And now, she wanted to meet him, asking him out for dinner.

By the time he reached the lobby, Aella was waiting near the glass doors.

The elevator chimed, and Tyrone strode toward her. "You could've called. I could've picked you up."

Aella tilted her head, her voice calm. "You done with work?"

He nodded, eyes lowering to the loose shoelace dangling by her ankle.

hapter 402 Debt-Free

Tyrone knelt naturally and started tying Aella's shoelaces.

The employees walking through the lobby looked over with envy in their eyes.

Some even secretly took photos with their phones and sent them to each other.

Aella stood still, looking down at Tyrone as he focused on her shoes.

The scene slowly overlapped with another one scaled deep in her memory.

In her previous life, Tyrone had once knelt like this before Zera, gently helping her try on shoes.

Thinking of that, Aella felt disgust rising inside her and quickly pulled her foot back.

Tyrone looked up. "What's wrong?"

"How could I bother you with something like this? I can do it myself."

She crouched down to tie her own shoelaces.

Tyrone straightened up, watching her closely. The warmth in his eyes slowly turned cautious.

After leaving the company together, they went to a restaurant Aella had reserved earlier.

She had chosen a quiet corner on purpose.

“You can order,” she said. “Dinner’s on me tonight. Get whatever you want.”

Tyrone told her there was no need. He had a membership card for this place.

When the restaurant first opened, the owner had sent him a VIP card loaded with a million dollars’ credit as a favor.

He ordered two entrées and then added a chocolate truffle dessert just for her.

After the waiter served their food and left, Tyrone kindly cut Aella’s steak and switched plates with her.

When Aella didn’t say a word for a long time, Tyrone couldn’t help but ask, “So... why did you suddenly invite me to dinner?”

There was a hint of curiosity in his tone—gentle but cautious.

Chapter 402 Debt-Free

Aella picked up her knife and fork. “I’m hungry. Let’s eat first.

Watching her take big bites, Tyrone smiled softly, his expression full of fondness.

But when Aella looked up and saw that rare smile, her chewing stopped.

In her memory, Tyrone was always cold and serious—quiet, distant, rarely smiling.

In two lifetimes, this was the first time she'd seen such a strange expression on him.

Halfway through the meal, the waiter brought the chocolate truffle.

Aella's gaze froze on the dessert, and her appetite vanished instantly.

"I ordered this for you," Tyrone said, pushing it toward her. "Try it."

Aella lowered her eyes and calmly set down her utensils.

"I'm on a diet," she said. "I have to cut down on sugar, so no desserts for me."

As long as she remembered, she could never stomach chocolate truffles again.

Tyrone noticed the stiffness in her face, and his own expression darkened.

In their past life, after Aella found out he had baked a blueberry cake for Zera, she never touched another chocolate truffle.

He could still remember her red eyes and the way she had cried while calling him "disgusting."

A sharp pain twisted in his chest. He quickly lowered his head to hide it.

No... impossible.

I've already

tested her. She didn't come back.

Her refusing dessert must just be a coincidence.

Suppressing his panic, Tyrone pushed the truffle aside and said lightly, "There's a new dessert place downtown. I'll take you there next time."

Before he could finish, Aella slid a bank card across the table.

Tyrone stared at her, his sharp gaze cutting straight into her eyes.

Aella took a deep breath. "Tyrone Winter."

"What did you just call me?"

Before she could continue, Tyrone interrupted her with a cold face.

Aella inhaled again, correcting herself. "Tyrone, this card belongs to my mom. The money your finance team has been sending every month—I haven't touched any of it. I also gathered the full amount you paid to cover the Reids' debt. I've transferred everything back to this card, principal and interest included."

She still felt that calling him "Tyrone" was too familiar, but since they'd grown up together like she had with Brad, it was the most appropriate way to address him.

Tyrone immediately sensed the change in how she addressed him, but right now, he had something more urgent to ask.

"Did you sell the imperial emerald set?" he asked sternly.

Aella didn't deny it.

Tyrone's tone rose, no longer calm. "That was your mother's family heirloom! How could sell it so easily?"

That terrifying thought flashed again through his mind, and disbelief filled his eyes.

Aella, however, remained calm.

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"Jewels or money—it's all just material stuff," she said. "Those pieces were left to me and Clyde by our parents. Everyone says it feels good to live debt-free, so instead of carrying a debt forever, I sold the jewelry to clear it."

"Aella, I'm not 'everyone'!" Tyrone snapped, cutting her off.

Their eyes locked across the table.

Aella gave a cold smile inside.

If she hadn't lived through it all once before, she would never have believed that in Tyrone's heart, she meant less than a stranger.

Chapter 403 Two Choices

Aella steadied her thoughts and said calmly, "This was a family decision. We've already cleared out the house you gave us."

Before she could finish, Tyrone suddenly stood up.

His chair screeched loudly against the floor as he moved too fast.

He grabbed the bank card off the table, walked over, bent down, slipped it into her purse, and gripped her wrist tightly. Without another word, he pulled her out of the restaurant.

Outside, on the sidewalk by the street, Aella yanked her hand free.

Tyrone was clearly struggling to contain his emotions. "If you've got something to say, get in the car and say it," he said, his voice low but tight.

Aella glanced at the luxury car parked not far away, then quickly snatched her phone and purse back.

They stared at each other.

Tyrone's dark eyes locked on hers as he demanded, "Aella, you broke off our engagement. You pushed me back to being just your childhood friend. You said you wanted to focus on work ... but all of that's just an excuse, isn't it? You just want to cut ties with me completely, don't you?"

His voice rose sharply, the tension between them growing thick.

Aella stayed calm. "Even between close friends, money should be handled clearly. I'm just paying you back. How does that mean I'm cutting ties?"

Of course, that was her real intention—but she wasn't about to admit it.

"Can you honestly say your grandpa and your dad never looked down on me for being the bankrupt daughter of the Reids?" she asked coldly.

Tyrone said nothing.

Aella went on, "I just don't want your family to think less of me. My parents worked hard to get me through school. I want to build a better life for them with my own hands. I want to stand on my own before marriage—is that so wrong?"

Her words made Tyrone's anger slowly fade.

He took a step closer and bent slightly so they were eye level. "Aella," he said softly, "we've known each other since we were kids. You can rely on me, like a brother."

Rely on you?

Aella almost laughed out loud.

Tyrone continued, "Aella, the money my finance team sends your parents every month—it's from my personal account. No one else knows. And the money I used to pay off the Reids' debt, I have already reimbursed it. No one will ever find out. You don't need to feel guilty."

Aella pressed her lips together, trying to stay composed.

In her last life, Tyrone had come after her for every cent, almost ruining her. She'd never forget that.

She opened her purse, pulled out the card and a folded list, and shoved both into Tyrone's hand.

Her expression hardened. "Tyrone, I've made my feelings clear. Even if no one else ever finds out what you did for the Reids, I can't live with it."

Tyrone blurted out, "I did it because I wanted to!"

Aella shook her head. "Even so, I don't want to owe you anything for free."

Everything he gave her came with strings attached. His kindness was never unconditional—it was control disguised as generosity.

They stared at each other in silence.

Tyrone raised the list in his hand. “And what’s this supposed to be?” His voice grew heavier. “You made a list of gifts—what does this mean?”

Aella looked him straight in the eye. “I packed up every gift you’ve ever given me. If you still see me as your childhood friend, I’ll keep them without guilt. But if not, I’ll return them all exactly as they were. After that, we’re even.”

For a moment, neither of them spoke. The street around them was quiet, the night still.

Tyrone’s fear grew with every passing second. His gaze on Aella turned darker, more complicated.

Seeing him stay silent, Aella said softly, “I treasure the bond we’ve had for over 20 years. But if you’d rather be strangers, I can accept that too.”

Then she turned and walked away without looking back.

In other words, Aella had given him two choices.

One—he could give up inarrying her, let her keep the gifts, and remain friends.

Or two—if he insisted on marrying her, she’d return everything and they’d be done for good.

Tyrone stood frozen on the sidewalk, clutching the card so tightly his fingers turned white

In her last life, all Aella ever wanted was to be free from him.

Was I right all along? He thought.

Did Aella really come back from the dead?

When he got back in his car, Tyrone immediately called Noel.

Next Monday at 8:30 AM, as soon as Tyrone arrived at his office, Noel hurried in with the results. “Mr. Winter, I’ve sent Ms. Reid’s new address to your phone. I also tracked down the buyer of that jewelry set—but they refuse to sell it back.”

Tyrone sat behind his desk, irritation written all over his face. “Cancel everything I have today, he ordered. “Set up a meeting.”

Chapter 404 Someone New

At two in the afternoon, Tyrone arrived at the small rental apartment where the Reids were living.

Warren and Miriam welcomed him into the living room.

Tyrone set down the metal case in his hand and pushed it toward them. “Warren, Miriam, I bought back your family’s jewelry. It belongs to you again.”

The couple exchanged a surprised look. Miriam opened the case to check, and sure enough—it was their family’s heirloom, the imperial emerald set.

She closed the case, then gently pushed it back toward him. “Tyrone, we already sold it. You paid to redeem it, so it’s yours now. We can’t take it back.”

Tyrone hesitated, then asked quietly, “Warren, Miriam, can you tell me why Aella suddenly called off the engagement?”

Seeing their hesitant faces, he added firmly, “Please. I want the truth.”

Warren sighed. “Tyrone, you come from a great family, and we’ve always liked you. But Aella’s our only daughter—we’ve spoiled her. If she says she doesn’t want to marry, we can’t force her.”

Miriam spoke softly. "Aella didn't lie to you. The reason she gave us is the same one she gave you. She just wants to focus on her career for now, and honestly, that's not a bad thing. She started her new job at Westside Hospital today."

Tyrone lowered his gaze, hiding the emotion in his eyes.

So Aella

really went straight to the hospital to start work.

Miriam continued, "Warren and I wanted her to stay home a bit longer, too. She only just graduated, after all."

Tyrone said earnestly, "Warren, Miriam, if you're worried about her, she can keep living here after the wedding. I'll fully support her career. I won't let her suffer, I promise."

His words touched them deeply, but they still didn't want to decide for Aella.

Warren sighed again. "Tyrone, Aella isn't your match. Let fate take its course."

Miriam nodded. "We appreciate your kindness, but take the jewelry back for now. Whether it's returned or not—let Aella decide."

Since Warren had made his stance clear, Tyrone could only nod.

"In that case," he said, "I'll keep it safe for now. If you ever change your minds, I'll bring it right over."

If even her parents wouldn't take it, there was no way Aella would.

Still, he needed to test his suspicion one last time.

Tyrone left their apartment with a heavy heart.

Once inside his car, he lit a cigarette.

After finishing it, he said to the driver, "Take me to West District."

Over an hour later, the black Bentley stopped by the curb outside Westside Hospital.

Through the car window, Tyrone spotted Aella walking toward the street with her classmate, Kayla.

He hesitated but decided not to get out or disturb her.

Aella and Kayla stood on the sidewalk, waiting for another friend.

Kayla said, "You're still so young. If you get married now, you'll be stuck serving your husband's family, dealing with all their drama, and then end up taking care of a baby. How would you ever have a life of your own?"

Aella nodded seriously. "You're right. I've finally come to my senses."

Kayla linked arms with her. "You've been head over heels for Mr. Tyrone all these years—like the most loyal simp ever. What changed your mind?"

Aella lowered her eyes and replied casually, "When you keep giving and never get anything back, you get tired. One day, I just woke up and realized I didn't want to keep torturing myself."

Kayla took the chance to push further. “Yeah, Mr. Tyrone’s handsome and powerful, but he’s made you give up everything for him. That alone is enough reason not to marry him. A man like that will only ruin your life!”

Aella nodded in agreement. “Don’t worry. If I ever marry again, it’ll be someone who’ll me, care about me, and treat me right.”

protect

She would never let her past life repeat itself.

Kayla grinned. “Well, everyone says the fastest way to get over an ex is to find someone new. You said you’re seeing someone, right? Who is he? When did it start? How long have you two been dating?”

Aella smirked and turned the question around. “You first. Tell me how things are going with your boyfriend, and then I’ll tell you who my new guy is.”

Just then, a white sedan honked and pulled up beside them. Laughing and teasing each other, the two girls got in and drove off.

Moments later, the black Bentley’s window lowered slightly.

Tyrone sat inside, replaying every word of their conversation in his head. His fingers brushed absently against the fabric of his suit pants, the tension in his body hard to hide.

Things like this don’t happen overnight—it takes time to build up.

He could almost convince himself now. Aella hadn’t come back from another life.

He’d imagined it.

Her sudden decision to call off the engagement must've come from her friends' influence. She probably resented Ralph and Edwin, felt disappointed in him, and, with her friends pushing her, she decided to walk away.

But when he remembered Kayla's words—"The fastest way to forget an ex is to find someone new"—a restless unease settled deep in Tyrone's chest.

Chapter 405 Ghost Hunting

It didn't matter whether Aella liked someone else or not—Tyrone had no plans to give her up.

That evening, Aella met two college friends who were visiting from out of town. She reserved a booth on the first floor of the Regal Club..

While waiting for them, she ran into Brad.

The moment she saw him, she remembered how he and Clyde had tricked her into going to the Winters' private airport last time.

Brad pretended not to see her and tried to slip away, but Aella grabbed his collar and shoved him back into the seat.

She knelt on the couch, pinning him down, and smacked him across the face again and again. "Finally caught you, huh?"

Aella didn't hold back at all. "It was bad enough you lied to me for your buddy, but you even used my brother! You've got no conscience!"

Brad covered his head and face. "Okay, okay, I was wrong! I swear it won't happen again!"

Only when he begged for mercy did Aella stop hitting him.

Brad quickly pulled out his phone, using the camera as a mirror to fix his messy hair. "I've told you a hundred times—don't hit a guy in the face! Or the head!"

Aella straightened his jacket. “Well, I’d hit your butt instead, but you wouldn’t let me.”

Just then, a middle-aged man dressed way too “sexy” for his age walked past.

Aella and Brad both gave him a look, then turned back to each other and started whispering and laughing.

A moment later, Aella waved to her two friends from across the room.

Brad took the chance to leave.

Not far away, Tyrone stood in the shadows, his face dark, watching the scene.

His sharp eyes moved between Aella and Brad again and again.

Treat her right?

Care about her?

Someone mysterious?

Tyrone’s chest tightened with a heavy, bitter feeling.

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About ten minutes later, Tyrone was upstairs in a private room with a few friends when Brad walked in.

Brad came straight over, patted his shoulder, and asked, “When’d you get here?”

Tyrone turned his head slightly, holding his glass, and stared at Brad in silence.

Brad frowned, confused. "Dude, what's with that look?"

Tyrone said quietly, "Are you really my friend?"

The whole room went still.

Brad glanced around awkwardly, then looked back at Tyrone. "What the hell are you talking about? You sound crazy."

Tyrone shook his head. "It's nothing." Everyone relaxed after that.

When the others left, Tyrone didn't.

Brad noticed and stayed behind, too.

Once they were alone, Tyrone suddenly asked, "Why haven't you gotten engaged yet?"

Brad leaned against the bar, giving him a wary look. "Even my grandma doesn't pressure me about that. You think you can?"

Tyrone pressed again. "Is there someone you like?"

Brad froze, glancing nervously at the door before clutching his chest like his secret had been exposed.

How the hell did he notice? I

hid it so well!

Tyrone sat quietly on the couch, studying Brad's shifting eyes. Brad looked guilty as hell. Tyrone's expression darkened.

When they stepped out of the club, they happened to see Aella walking her two friends to their car.

Tyrone pushed Brad aside and went over to her. The faint smell of alcohol hit him as he spoke. "You've been drinking. It's not safe to walk home. I'll get a cab for you."

Aella glanced at him, then looked toward Brad.

Brad could tell something was seriously off with Tyrone tonight.

He grabbed Aella's arm and whispered, "I'll take you home. I actually need to talk to you about something."

Aella cleared her throat and said to Tyrone, "It's fine, Tyrone. You go ahead. Brad's taking me home."

Tyrone's face turned even darker as he watched them lean close, whispering to each other before getting into a cab together.

Around midnight, Brad was humming a tune as he got off the elevator—until he froze.

Tyrone was standing right outside his house, wearing dark pajamas, staring straight ahead.

Brad nearly jumped out of his skin. "Jesus, what are you doing here in the middle of the night? Are you insane?"

Tyrone's voice was low. "Couldn't sleep. Thought I'd have a drink with you."

Brad sighed and opened the door. They walked in one after another.

Brad grabbed a bottle of whiskey and sat in the living room. "The wedding's canceled. Why'd you even move in here?"

Tyrone didn't answer. His eyes scanned the whole place slowly, like a radar sweeping for signs of life.

Brad frowned. "What are you doing, man? Ghost hunting?"

They locked eyes for a few seconds before Tyrone sat down.

Taking the glass Brad handed him, Tyrone said calmly, "I'm thinking about sending Raine abroad for a few years. What do you think?"

Brad blinked. "What? She's doing fine at Vleka University. Why would you send her overseas all of a sudden?"

Tyrone looked up at him. "Aunt Lara wants to introduce her to a nice young man. If she studies abroad, they'll have a chance to get to know each other."

Chapter 406 Daniel?

Brad frowned, curious. "Raine's only 20. Isn't her mom rushing things a little?"

Tyrone explained calmly, "Outstanding young men don't stay single for long. Getting Raine introduced early isn't a bad idea."

Brad had nothing to say to that.

When he stayed quiet, Tyrone sighed and stood up. “Honestly, I thought you and Raine were the most likely pair. You two are always hanging out together. Guess I was wrong.”

In his last life, Brad had liked Raine.

But this time, even Aella’s feelings had changed. Tyrone wasn’t sure of anything anymore.

Brad walked him to the door, still sulking.

As soon as Tyrone stepped outside, Brad muttered, “Man, I was just waiting for Raine to graduate before I went for it. What’s your hurry?”

Tyrone suddenly stopped walking.

When Brad looked up and met Tyrone’s eerie smile, he instinctively took two steps back.

Tyrone patted his shoulder. “Good luck. I believe in you.”

Brad blinked in confusion.

As Tyrone left, his mood lightened.

If it isn’t Brad... then who could it be?

Aella did know a lot of people, but she was only 20–something, just out of college.

She had sold that family jewelry, then somehow landed a job at Westside Hospital right after. All of that—Tyrone knew—was thanks to Daniel helping her behind the scenes.

Kind–hearted. Keeps his feelings secret. Mysterious identity.

Could it be Daniel?

A few days later, Virginia brought Tyrone and Raine to visit an elder at the hospital.

In the hallway, they ran into Aella and Daniel.

Tyrone stopped walking. He saw Aella in a white lab coat, her hair tied up in a ponytail, walking beside Daniel.

His dark eyes locked on her carefully done makeup.

Aella never wore makeup when they were kids.

Now she was trying to impress someone—he was sure of it.

Raine smiled and waved. “Hey, Aella!”

Aella and Daniel both came over politely.

Because Tyrone’s stare felt so sharp, Aella decided to greet him first. “Hi, Tyrone.”

Virginia glanced back at Tyrone, then sighed. “Aella, I actually have some errands nearby. How about we grab lunch together later?”

Since Virginia was the elder—and she said it right in front of Daniel—Aella couldn’t refuse.

At noon, Aella arrived at the restaurant only to find Tyrone there alone.

She sighed quietly.

It felt like everyone in the world was trying to push her back toward Tyrone.

Anyone who knew she was the one who called off the wedding thought she was heartless or fake.

Tyrone finally looked up from his phone when he saw her hesitating a few steps away.

He stood, met her halfway, took the bag from her hands, and pulled out her chair like a gentleman.

Aella stayed standing. "Where's Virginia and Raine?"

Tyrone's deep gaze locked onto her face. "You said it yourself—we grew up together. Now that my mom and Raine aren't here, you can't even have lunch with me alone?"

With him saying that, Aella couldn't exactly argue.

She sat across from him calmly.

After ordering, she handed him the menu.

Tyrone didn't take it. "I'll have whatever you're having."

Aella hesitated, then set the menu down beside him. "How would I know what you like to eat?"

Tyrone was notoriously picky.

In her last life, she had tried to impress him by cooking for him herself—and ended up making a complete fool of herself.

She wasn't about to repeat that mistake.

She didn't even want to order for him now.

Tyrone stared straight at her for a few seconds, then turned to the waiter. "I'll have the same thing she ordered."

While they ate, Tyrone asked, "How's your internship at the hospital going?"

Aella's eyes lit up.

lit up at the topic. "It's been great! Daniel's been mentoring me, and I've learned a

The second she mentioned Daniel, Tyrone's expression froze.

His hand tightened around his knife and fork. His gaze fixed on her.

Aella felt a chill run down her spine.

His face looked dark and tense, and the way he gripped his utensils was downright scary.

She cleared her throat, then picked up a piece of fruit and dropped it onto his plate. "Here. Have some fruit."

Tyrone silently put his knife and fork down, staring at the fruit for a long moment.

Then he asked slowly, "Do you really know Daniel that well?"

Aella frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

Tyrone lowered his eyes. "When he was a kid, he was kind of chubby. Probably runs in the family."

Aella stared at him, confused.

She frowned, thinking it over, but couldn't figure out what he was getting at. Finally, she pointed at her own head. "Tyrone, could you speak a little clearly? I'm not that smart—I can't keep up with you."

Chapter 407 Just Postponed

Tyrone's face was dark, and he clearly had no appetite. "If you can't think straight, then go home and take your time."

Aella didn't say a word.

They both sat through lunch, each lost in their own thoughts.

When they walked out of the restaurant, Aella pointed across the street. "Go ahead with your work. I'll walk back."

Tyrone gestured in the same direction. "My car's parked by the hospital entrance. Let's walk back together."

Aella pressed her lips together but ended up walking with him anyway.

When they reached the parking lot in front of the outpatient building, Tyrone stopped. "Aella, come sit in my car for a minute. I need to talk to you."

Aella was getting impatient. "I need to clock in soon. If you've got something to say, say it now. If not, I'm leaving."

Something about Tyrone felt off today, almost like he wasn't himself.

His tall frame cast a shadow over her as he said, "I bought back the jewelry set you sold at the auction. It's in my trunk."

Aella's eyes widened in surprise. "But I already paid you back. Why would you buy that set again?"

Tyrone said quietly, "I bought it to give it back to you."

"I don't want it!" she blurted out.

She couldn't forget what happened before.

"Since you paid for it, it's yours now," she said firmly. "When I have enough money, I'll buy it back from you. Just don't raise the price."

Tyrone's eyes darkened as he stared at her.

"I'll keep it safe for now," he said. "If you ever want it, you can come get it from me."

They locked eyes.

Aella knew exactly what he was trying to do.

A set of jewelry and her freedom—she knew which one mattered more.

When she refused to take it, Tyrone didn't push her.

He stepped closer. "I'm going on a business trip to Mudrus for a few days. The herbs and incense you made for me are running out. Can you make more?"

Aella hesitated, then said, “Come to the hospital tomorrow and register. I’ll give them to you then.”

Tyrone shook his head. “No need for that. Just make them, and I’ll pick them up from you. No paperwork.”

Seeing her still hesitate, he added, “Didn’t you always say we grew up together and that you see me as a brother?”

Aella frowned. “Yeah, I did.”

Tyrone sighed. “I haven’t been sleeping well, and I’ve had splitting headaches all day. Shouldn’t a sister feel a little sorry for her brother?”

Aella couldn’t even argue.

She knew Tyrone was sharp and cold, but she didn’t expect him to twist her own words like that.

In the end, she agreed to let him come by the next morning to pick up the medicine.

The next day, Tyrone showed up right on time—and even brought a bag of dried fruit and veggie chips that his mom, Virginia, had made.

When he ran into Daniel, he stopped and greeted him politely. “Mr. Hill, thanks for taking care of my fiancée.”

Daniel gave him a puzzled look. “Mr. Winter, didn’t you and Aella call off the engagement?”

Tyrone corrected him with a faint smile. “Not called off—just postponed.”

Daniel nodded, pretending to understand.

When Aella stepped out of the elevator, Tyrone walked over right away.

As Daniel walked off, Aella looked after him and asked, "What were you two talking about?"

Tyrone lifted the bag in his hand. "My mom made these dried snacks for you. I saw Mr. Hill and offered him some."

Aella led him to the break room. "He didn't mean to refuse you. He just doesn't eat snacks at all."

Tyrone tightened his grip on the bag. "You seem to know him pretty well."

"Of course I do," Aella said without hesitation.

eyes lit up when she said it, and the sight made Tyrone's chest tighten.

Her eyes

He stepped closer, just about to speak—when someone called from the hallway, "Dr. Reid! Dr. Hill wants to see you in his office."

"Got it!" Aella replied, taking the bag from Tyrone's hand.

She handed him the medicine she'd prepared earlier. "Here, this is for you," she said quickly, then rushed out before he could say another word.

Tyrone stood alone in the break room for a long time, staring at the door she had just left.

Ever since he got a second chance at life, it felt like everyone else had changed.

But maybe it was just him.

A few days later, in the afternoon, Edwin sat in the living room of the Winter Estate with Ralph and Virginia. Their faces were serious.

The butler reported the investigation results. "Zera and Shirley never left Tuspuyria. Mr. Tyrone is still on his business trip in Mudrus. They haven't met."

Edwin nodded in approval. "As long as Tyrone's not married, we can't let our guard down."

Ralph added quickly, "You're right, Dad. Our heir can't marry a woman like Zera!"

Virginia sat beside Ralph, uneasy.

Tyrone's refusal to get married—or even engaged—might not be because of Zera.

Edwin turned to her. "When Tyrone gets back, arrange for Mrs. and Ms. Guinevere to visit us. And make sure you stay close to them from now on."

Chapter 408 Buy It

Edwin's meaning was clear. Virginia nodded. "I'll try."

But just because she agreed didn't mean she planned to do exactly what he said.

Vivienne was young but calculating. Her ambition matched any ambitious man's.

A woman like that might fit well in business—but not in marriage.

Besides, Virginia could tell Tyrone had been unusually attentive toward Aella lately. As his mother, of course, she noticed.

When Tyrone returned from his business trip, Virginia followed Edwin's instructions and invited Jasmine and Vivienne to the Winter Estate as guests.

Edwin also told the butler to personally pick Tyrone up from the airport.

That evening, the butler entered the living room with his head lowered. "Mr. Edwin, about Mr. Tyrone ..."

Seeing him hesitate, Virginia spoke up in front of Jasmine and Vivienne. "There's no one here but family. Just say it."

The butler lowered his voice even more. "Mrs. Winter, after landing, Mr. Tyrone went straight to Ms. Reid's house."

Virginia shot Jasmine and Vivienne an apologetic look.

Ralph's face darkened. "Go bring that brat back here right now!"

The butler looked torn but said nothing.

Vivienne stepped in to ease the tension. "Mr. Ralph, it's already such an honor for my mother and me to be invited here. If Mr. Tyrone has business to handle, that's perfectly fine. He doesn't have to rush back."

She spoke politely, but her expression was stiff.

Tyrone knew she was visiting the Winter Estate, yet he had gone straight to Aella's place instead.

His attitude toward her couldn't be clearer.

It looked like the idea of getting engaged to Tyrone was nothing more than wishful thinking.

After Jasmine and Vivienne left, Edwin slammed a glass on the floor in anger. "He's the heir of the Winter Group, yet he keeps chasing after a bankrupt woman! This is outrageous!"

Ralph called Tyrone himself, demanding he comes home immediately.

At that moment, Tyrone was sitting in Aella's living room when the call came. He left shortly after hanging up.

Once he got into the car, Noel spoke carefully, "Mr. Winter, I thought you said you'd wait until Ms. Reid got home?"

Tyrone gripped the jewelry box tightly. "Take me back to the Winter Estate."

Noel quickly told the driver to start the car.

Not long after Tyrone left, Aella returned from work.

When she walked into the living room and saw the expensive health supplements piled on the table, she frowned. "Dad, Mom, did we have guests today?"

Warren and Miriam exchanged a look.

Miriam sighed. "Tyrone dropped those off. We told him not to, but he insisted on leaving them."

Since Tyrone was already gone and the things were there, Aella didn't

press further.

She said, "Dad, Mom, this apartment is just temporary. My job keeps me busy, and I don't have much time, so you two should start house hunting. Look for one with a small yard or a terrace."

Renting like this was never meant to be permanent.

Clyde would be starting 9th grade next year, and she didn't want him staying in the dorm

anymore.

Plus, her parents were getting older. Warren loved tending flowers and birds, while Miriam enjoyed housekeeping.

A smaller house with a yard would be perfect for them to enjoy their retirement.

By mid-October, while Aella was at work, Warren and Miriam called to say they'd found the right place.

During her lunch break, Aella went with them to check it out.

The house was in the heart of the city—a newly renovated duplex on the ground floor, with front and back yards. The price was even ten thousand dollars lower per square foot than the

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market average.

Aella frowned. Bargains like that usually meant trouble. She quietly pulled her parents aside. "Dad, Mom, something's off. We can't buy this one."

Miriam tried to reassure her. "This is one of the best properties here. Great location, brand- new, no one's ever lived in it, and no accidents or bad history. Don't overthink it."

Aella shook her head. "Nothing good comes that cheap. Houses priced way below market value usually have hidden problems."

"Don't say that!" Warren flicked her forehead lightly. "Tyrone talked to the developer and got us an insider price!"

Aella blinked. "When did you even tell him we were buying a house?"

Miriam explained, "Your dad and I had been looking for weeks without luck. Then we ran into Tyrone. We mentioned it, and he said he knew the developer here. As soon as we came to see it, we loved it."

Warren added, "The developer was going to give us the house for free because of Tyrone, but we refused. We just asked for a discount. We didn't expect them to cut the price in half!"

Aella didn't know what to say.

Looking at her parents' excited faces, she finally gave in. "If you both like it, then buy it."

No matter whose favor the discount came from, since it was the developer offering it, she couldn't object.

Besides, Warren and Miriam had always treated Tyrone like their own son. It wasn't strange for him to help them out.

After they finalized the purchase, the three of them left the sales office, chatting happily.

They decided to move in on the 20th of the month.

Since moving day fell on a Friday, Aella requested the day off from work.

Chapter 409 Accused

That afternoon, when Aella came home from work, she found Tyrone and Clyde out on the balcony, carrying her flower pots one by one.

She stopped by the doorway, watching them.

In the past, Tyrone had always been the proud and untouchable one—the kind of man who’d never lift a finger for manual work.

Yet now, he was doing the most ordinary chores.

If Edwin and Ralph saw this, they’d probably be furious.

When Tyrone turned around and saw Aella standing there, his expression softened into something cautious.

Before Aella could say anything, Warren walked over. “Aella, Tyrone’s been helping us move all day. He’s exhausted. Everything’s almost done here. Why don’t you and your mom go buy some groceries and cook something at the new house? Tyrone and I can share a drink tonight.”

Just as Warren speaking, the butler from the Winter Estate knocked on the door. “Mr. Tyrone, Mr. Edwin has arranged a dinner at the hotel tonight and has invited Ms. Reid’s family to join him.”

Aella let out a short, cold laugh.

Edwin hadn’t changed one bit—still as overbearing as ever.

She was about to refuse, but Tyrone spoke first. "Go back and tell Grandpa he doesn't need to do this."

The butler looked uneasy but didn't leave. "Mr. Tyrone, Mr. Edwin gave strict orders. Please convince Ms. Reid to attend."

Warren hesitated, then turned to Tyrone. "Tyrone, we were in the wrong for ending the engagement so suddenly. Even though it's been a while, we never formally apologized to your parents. Since your grandfather extended an invitation, we should at least meet."

The butler nodded quickly. "Mr. Reid, I'll inform Mr. Edwin right away."

Tyrone's dark eyes stayed fixed on Aella's face, unreadable.

Aella stood silently for a moment.

She knew exactly what kind of men the Winters were.

Even if she refused this time, Edwin would just find another excuse later.

So, she might as well face it now and get everything out in the open.

She pulled Tyrone aside into a separate room. "Tyrone, you can see it yourself. The closer you get to us, the angrier Mr. Edwin becomes. You should stay away from us. It's better for everyone."

Tyrone's voice softened. "Aella, what my family thinks doesn't represent how I feel."

He promised, "Don't worry. I won't let my family give you or your parents a hard time."

In his last life, he hadn't protected her.

In this one, he swore he would never let her suffer again.

But Aella wasn't convinced. "We'll see how they act tonight."

A few hours later, Aella arrived at the hotel with Warren and Miriam.

Tyrone met them at the entrance. "Where's Clyde?"

Aella shot him a sharp look. "We're not here for dinner. Why would I bring him?"

Tyrone had no response.

From the doorway, Aella looked into the private dining room. She noticed Raine wasn't there.

Virginia stood

up from her seat and came over to greet them warmly.

Tyrone invited Warren and Miriam into the private room.

Edwin and Ralph sat there with arrogant, dismissive looks on their faces.

Virginia glanced back at Edwin and Ralph, then sighed in frustration.

Tyrone pulled out chairs for Warren and Miriam. "Warren, Miriam, please, have a seat."

But before her parents could sit, Aella stepped forward and pushed the chairs back in place.

“From the way Mr. Edwin and Mr. Ralph look,” she said coolly, “it doesn’t seem like we were invited here to eat.”

She turned to Edwin. “We’ll stand. Mr. Edwin, go ahead—say what you need to say.”

Edwin’s sharp eyes landed on her.

His tone turned icy. “Your engagement has already been canceled. Why are you still accepting gifts from Tyrone? Do you take him for your family’s personal ATM?”

Warren stepped forward, ready to speak, but Tyrone cut him off. “Grandpa, I was the one who wanted to call off the engagement. The Reids haven’t taken anything from me. How could you accuse them like that?”

Edwin snorted. “I won’t even mention the things you bought on your business trip to Mudrus. But what about the charity auction? You spent more than 100 million dollars there—who exactly did you buy those gifts for?”

Tyrone’s face went cold. “Grandpa, I earned that money myself. What I buy and who I give it to is my business. You have no right to interfere.”

Bang!

Before he even , Ralph slammed his hand on the table and stood up, face flushed with

anger.

“You think we don’t know?” he shouted. “Back then, you embezzled company funds and falsified the books just to help the Reids pay off their debts! You really thought we wouldn’t find out?”

The entire Reid family froze.

Virginia's eyes darted between Tyrone and Aella, shock flickering in her gaze.

She hadn't expected Tyrone to go that far for them.

Warren and Miriam exchanged a heavy look, their faces dark with worry.

But Tyrone didn't flinch. "Dad, if you're accusing me of embezzlement, then show me the proof."

Chapter 410 Perfect Idea

The veins on Ralph's forehead bulged with rage. "Back then, your grandpa and I didn't trust you to handle money, so we kept your accounts under supervision. You couldn't even touch your

own funds!"

He slammed the table. "When the Reids were cornered by debt collectors, you panicked and took cash from the company account. The timing and the amount match perfectly! You might fool others, but you can't fool me!"

Tyrone's voice stayed calm. "Dad, unless you show proof, I won't admit to anything."

Aella turned to look at Tyrone, frowning slightly.

The year the Reids went bankrupt, she had just started college. When the creditors showed up at her family's door, she ran to Tyrone in tears.

At that time, Tyrone was still a student, learning company management under Ralph. He had no real authority in the business. He comforted her and told her he had money in his account, then secretly helped her family pay off the debt. He even warned her not to tell anyone.

But now she realized—his accounts had already been under Edwin's control. The money he used wasn't his own. He had actually embezzled company funds to help her family.

Ralph turned and pointed accusingly at Warren. “You even let Tyrone help you move houses today! Do you know how much he’s worth? How dare you treat him like your personal mover?”

Warren’s face darkened. “Mr. Ralph, that’s too much! We’re grateful Tyrone has helped us, but we’ve never taken advantage of your family.”

Tyrone pulled a bank card from his wallet and placed it on the table. “The debt payment back then was my own decision,” he said firmly. “The Reids have already paid me back with interest. If you don’t believe me, check this card yourself.”

Ralph scoffed. “When the Reids went bankrupt, they were practically fighting beggars for scraps. Where would they get that kind of money to repay you?”

“Dad, that’s enough!”

Tyrone’s sharp tone silenced him immediately.

Aella snapped, “You just look down on people, don’t you?”

Ralph pointed at her furiously. “Did you just insult me?”

Aella crossed her arms. “I’m not marrying Tyrone. So what if I did?”

Before she could finish, Ralph grabbed a water glass and hurled it at her.

Miriam and Virginia gasped, but Tyrone moved fast—he threw himself in front of Aella and took the hit.

Ignoring the sting in his back, Tyrone quickly checked Aella over. “Are you hurt?”

Aella shook her head.

Even though he'd protected her, she didn't feel thankful. He was part of the Winters, and their behavior was his responsibility. He should have taken that blow.

Aella's voice was cold and steady. "Listen up, you two old geezers—so long as the Winters still have people like you, Tyrone's going to die single!"

Ralph's face turned crimson. "You!"

Tyrone looked at Ralph with controlled anger. "Dad, respect goes both ways. If you keep acting like this, then just pretend you don't have a son."

Without another word, he walked out with Aella, Warren, and Miriam.

Though Warren and Miriam were angry, they held back and didn't say anything harsh.

Behind them, Edwin and Ralph's furious shouting echoed through the hallway. Aella couldn't help feeling a little satisfied hearing it.

Still, things couldn't go on like this.

As she stepped out of the hotel, she caught sight of a woman holding the hand of a little boy, no more than three years old.

An idea flashed through Aella's mind.

Tyrone's birthday was just a few days away. She had to find a way to bring Zera and Shirley back from Tuspuyria.

Once Tyrone saw Zera again, he'd surely reconcile with her.

And when that happened... Aella could finally be free.

Perfect.