

# CEO's Regret After I Divorced

## - Chapter 101 She has nightmares

*Chapter 101: Chapter 101 She has nightmares*

Ryan's POV

I bolted out of my chair the moment I saw the news. Those vicious headlines splashed across the screen—accusing Serena of workplace bullying, claiming she'd driven Holly to suicide.

Complete bullshit, but dangerous nonetheless.

"Get the car ready," I barked into my phone. Simon responded with his usual efficiency, no questions asked. That's why I keep him around.

The drive to Serena's place felt endless. Traffic crawled while my mind raced through worst-case scenarios.

I've seen how quickly public opinion can destroy someone. Serena doesn't deserve this—not after everything she's already been through.

When she opened the door, she practically collapsed into my arms. Her whole body was trembling. Fuck. I've never seen her this shaken before.

"I've seen the news online. What happened?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady while guiding her inside. Her legs seemed ready to give out, so I quickly supported her to the couch.

Instead of pressing for answers immediately, I pulled her closer. "It's okay now. You don't have to be afraid. I'm here."

I felt her gradually relax against me as she explained what had happened at the studio with Holly. The situation was bad, but something didn't add up.

"Public opinion doesn't spread this fast naturally," I told her, my fingers absently stroking her hair. "There's something else going on. Let me investigate this for you."

Serena looked up at me and shook her head. Those beautiful brown eyes were clouded with guilt that shouldn't be there.

"Regardless of everything else, Holly is dead. If it really happened because of me, I have to take responsibility."

I frowned. "How could this possibly be your fault?"

"Just stop," she said, waving her hand dismissively. "This is my studio's issue. I don't want to trouble you with it. Let me handle the investigation myself."

She was being stubborn as hell, but I recognized that determined look. Fine, I'd let her believe she was handling it alone while working behind the scenes.

"It's not safe for you to stay here," I said firmly. "Come back to the Blackwood estate with me."

"Someone's already leaked your personal information online. It's only a matter of time before dangerous people show up at your door. I can't leave you here alone."

As if on cue, someone started pounding on her door like they were trying to break it down.

"Stay right here. Don't move," I ordered, my voice dropping dangerously low.

I checked through the peephole and saw some random guy I'd never seen before. The knocking continued, accompanied by vicious shouting.

"You bitch! You killed someone and now you're hiding in your house?!"

"I know you're in there, Serena Quinn! Get your ass out here!"

"You need to pay for Holly's life! With your own life!"

My blood boiled as I yanked the door open, staring the fucker down. "Who exactly are you telling to pay with their life? Who the hell are you?"

The coward clearly hadn't expected anyone to answer, especially not a man. He tried peering around me to look for Serena, but I blocked his view completely.

"How did you even get in here? By climbing the fence?" I stepped closer to him. "Good, I'm calling the police. You can explain yourself at the station."

He visibly trembled at the mention of police. "Y-you! Don't act so smug! I'm here for that bitch Serena Quinn, it has nothing to do with you. Are you her lover or something? Tell her to get out here!"

I didn't bother responding with words. Instead, I kicked him hard in the leg, sending him stumbling backward.

"Are you leaving, or do you need more encouragement?" I asked coldly.

The pathetic asshole howled in pain before limping away as fast as he could.

After locking the door, I turned back to Serena. "You saw that yourself. This place isn't safe anymore. People will come looking for trouble."

She nodded and started gathering some essentials. "I'll go stay with Maya. Can you drive me there?"

I frowned again. "Maya's just another woman. She can't handle this kind of situation either."

"I can't hide in the Blackwood estate forever," she argued. "I need to discuss the studio situation with Maya. Trust me, Ryan, I can handle this myself."

I sighed quietly, knowing how independent she could be. "At least stay with me tonight. I'll take you to Maya's place tomorrow."

To my relief, she agreed.

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Later that night, after Serena showered, I watched her toss and turn beside me. She couldn't settle, her body tense even in sleep.

Suddenly, she jolted upright, gasping for air, her nightgown drenched with cold sweat.

"What's wrong? Having nightmares?" I asked softly, rubbing her back in slow circles.

She nodded, still trembling. "I dreamed about Holly... covered in blood... saying she wanted my life in exchange for hers." Her voice cracked. "She said I don't deserve to have children. That my babies should follow her to hell."

I pulled her against my chest, feeling her heart hammering wildly. "It's just a nightmare. Dreams are usually the opposite of reality. None of that is true."

I cradled her face between my hands, forcing her to look at me. "You are not responsible for Holly's choices. Whatever happened to her is tragic, but it wasn't your fault. And our children are perfectly safe."

I placed my hand gently on her stomach. "Nobody's taking them anywhere, I promise you that."

She gradually calmed down in my arms, her breathing returning to normal as I stroked her hair and whispered reassurances against her temple until she finally drifted back to sleep.

The next morning, I drove her to Maya's place as promised, though every instinct screamed at me not to leave her. After making sure she was safely inside, I reluctantly headed back to my car.

Once inside, I immediately called Simon. "I need eyes on her around the clock. Four men, rotating shifts, discreet but effective. She shouldn't know they're there unless there's trouble."

Then I made another call. "I need everything you can find on Holly. Medical history, family background, financial records, phone records for the past month. And I want to know who's pushing this bullying narrative in the media."

Whoever was behind this attack on Serena would regret it. I'd make damn sure of that.

*Chapter 102: Chapter 102 Her death seems suspicious*

Serena's POV

I spent the next hour with Maya, discussing Holly's death, but we weren't getting anywhere.

Holly had been suddenly inserted into our team by Mr. Will, and if someone had paid her to sabotage us, there should be some evidence.

But Holly's behavior seemed to target everyone indiscriminately, not just me.

"Maybe she actually had mental issues," Maya said, pacing around the living room in frustration. "What kind of person commits suicide right outside someone's workplace?"

Her words sparked something in my mind. "Maybe... she really did have mental health problems."

No mentally stable person would take their life over a few harsh words, but someone suffering from psychological issues might easily spiral and harm themselves. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense.

"What?" Maya looked confused.

"Listen, can you hold things down at the studio?" I asked. "Tomorrow I need to find Holly's family and figure out what was really going on with her."

Maya immediately shook her head, her expression darkening. "Absolutely not! What if her family blames you? This is a human life we're talking about!"

"What if they get violent? You can't go alone!" Her voice rose with genuine concern.

I frowned, feeling the weight of responsibility pressing down on me. "Then what do you suggest? The internet is flooded with accusations. If we don't find the root cause, this will never end. I'm the one at the center of this storm—I have to be the one to face it."

Maya's face contorted with worry. "At least take Celeste or Julian with you. I refuse to let you go alone."

After considering for a moment, I nodded. "Fine."

"I'll contact Julian to pick you up tomorrow. More people means more protection."

I nodded again, my expression remaining grim. Maya noticed and reached over to playfully rub my cheeks.

"Look at you! You're going to get wrinkles with that face. Smile a little."

"Remember, if you're unhappy, your baby will feel it too," she added softly.

But I couldn't bring myself to smile. Instead, I sighed deeply, guilt washing over me.

"I'm sorry. This all happened because I lost my temper. The studio's reputation is ruined because I couldn't just stay quiet."

"You'd already put up with her for too long!" Maya insisted, squeezing my shoulder. "I wanted her gone from day one. You did nothing wrong."

She gave me a gentle nudge. "Stop overthinking. Get some rest."

After a shower, I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, my mind racing through worst-case scenarios. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Holly's accusing face. The online comments swirled in my head—murderer, bully, monster. How had my life collapsed so suddenly? Just yesterday I was celebrating our new contract, and now people were calling for my head.

My hands instinctively moved to my stomach. My baby. Would this stress hurt my child? Would I ever be able to give them a normal life after this scandal? What kind of mother would I be, forever known as the woman who drove someone to suicide?

The darkness in the room felt suffocating. I tossed and turned, trying to find a comfortable position, but my thoughts wouldn't quiet down.

I finally gave up and checked my phone. Amid the flood of hate messages and death threats, Ryan's texts stood out like a lighthouse in a storm:

[I've got people investigating Holly's background. Should have information by tomorrow.]

[Also, there's a large unexplained deposit in Holly's account. I'm tracing where the money came from.]

[Try to rest. You don't need to read these messages right away.]

I read his texts several times, feeling my panic gradually subside with each reading. Something about knowing Ryan was working on this made me feel less alone.

Maya peeked over my shoulder, a knowing smile forming on her lips.

"Well, well... looks like Mr. Blackwood is actually useful in a crisis. His texts seem to work better than my comfort. Think you can sleep now?"

I set my phone aside without responding, but felt a strange warmth in my chest despite everything. Before the sun rose, I managed to fall into a mercifully dreamless sleep.

The next morning, Julian and Celeste accompanied me to Holly's family home. The place was decorated with white mourning cloths—traditional signs of a household in grief.

Though Holly's death had been ruled a suicide, her family was evidently not accepting the verdict. Her body was still at the morgue.

I knocked gently, choosing not to identify myself immediately.

"Excuse me, is this the residence of Holly's family?" I called softly.

The sounds from inside the yard suddenly stopped. No one answered or came to open the door, pretending no one was home.

I frowned, finding this strange, and tried a different approach.

"I was Holly's colleague. We worked closely together. May I pay my respects?"

My words unleashed an immediate torrent of rage from behind the door.

"What lies are you telling? She never had close colleagues! You all called her crazy behind her back! We know the truth—you people killed her! All of you!"

"Get out of here! NOW!"

Even through the closed door, the raw fury from Holly's family was palpable.

Celeste muttered under her breath, confused. "So Holly wasn't well-liked at Mr. Will's company either?"

"Then why did he keep her on staff?"

Julian's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Maybe Mr. Will deliberately sent her to Serena's studio, knowing she'd be trouble."

"He knew what Holly was like, but probably didn't expect her to take such an extreme action as suicide."

I nodded slowly, the pieces starting to align in my mind. "That makes sense, but if Mr. Will wanted to fire Holly, he could have done it directly. Why go through all this trouble?"

We fell into contemplative silence. The yard beyond the door had gone completely quiet—clearly, no one would be speaking to us today.

I called Maya, asking her to try arranging a meeting with Mr. Will. Holly was his employee after all; he couldn't ignore this situation forever.

Within minutes, Maya called back.

"That old snake won't answer my calls! My assistant tried reaching him too—same result."

"Good thing he paid enough deposit upfront, or we'd really be working for nothing!"

My expression darkened. I was certain Mr. Will knew something important about this situation.

"Julian, let's go to Mr. Will's company and confront him directly."

I pulled on a hat and mask to disguise myself. My photo had been plastered all over the internet; the last thing I needed was to be recognized and mobbed.

As we walked toward the car, I felt a chill that had nothing to do with the weather. Something about this whole situation felt increasingly calculated. *freewebnovel.com*

Holly's death might have been suicide, but I was becoming convinced someone had pushed her toward that fatal edge—and I needed to find out who.

*Chapter 103: Chapter 103 The real truth behind it all*

Serena's POV

I arrived at our destination with Julian and Celeste, but Julian suggested they wait in the car.

"Mr. Will has never met me before, so he'll let his guard down. Wait for my call before coming in."

"Alright," I agreed.

I trusted Julian's ability to handle situations like this. Sure enough, barely fifteen minutes later, my phone buzzed with his message.

"Let's go, Serena," Celeste whispered as we headed inside. "Whatever we find out in there, try not to get too worked up, okay?"

I nodded, placing a protective hand over my stomach. "I'll keep calm, don't worry."

When we entered the meeting room, Mr. Will's welcoming smile instantly vanished. Despite my disguise, my silhouette had given me away immediately.

"Ms. Quinn, what is the meaning of this?" he demanded, looking cornered.

I removed my hat, not bothering with pleasantries. "Mr. Will, Holly was your secretary. She's dead, and you don't seem the least bit upset about it. Why is that?"

"Oh my!" he exclaimed dramatically. "What good would being upset do? That girl couldn't get past her own demons. This outcome was inevitable, sooner or later."

My eyes narrowed sharply. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

Mr. Will seemed to realize he'd slipped up, immediately trying to backtrack and change the subject.

"Mr. Will," I cut him off, "if you don't tell me the whole truth today, I'll have the best legal team in the country review our contract. Hiding from responsibility won't be an option."

"Are you threatening me?" he snapped, color rising in his cheeks.

"I just want the truth. Why can't you tell us? Did Holly have some kind of mental illness?"

It was just a guess, but watching his reaction, I knew I'd hit the mark. His face paled instantly.

"You know?" he asked, voice suddenly quiet.

"So it's true? Then why keep her employed?"



Mr. Will exhaled heavily, collapsing back in his chair. "You think I wanted to? My worthless sister married some deadbeat, and then they had this... this problem child! What was I supposed to do?"

The three of us exchanged shocked glances. So that was it—Holly was Mr. Will's niece. No wonder someone with such mediocre skills had remained in his employ.

"I kept her where I could see her, to keep her from causing trouble," he continued, rubbing his temples. "I've been dealing with this for years. I'm exhausted! I just thought sending her to your studio might toughen her up a bit. How was I supposed to know she'd do something this extreme?"

He slammed his fist on the table, making me flinch.

"I should never have felt sorry for my sister! Should've let them figure out their own damn problems!"

A heaviness settled in my chest. I'd never experienced mental illness personally, but I'd heard how those suffering often lived in a kind of private hell that others couldn't see.

"Ms. Quinn, this isn't entirely your fault," he added, seeing my expression. "She chose this path herself."

My chest tightened as I fought to control my breathing. "Why didn't you tell me about her condition before sending her to my studio? Did you deliberately plant a time bomb next to me?"

"Please," he scoffed, waving dismissively. "If I'd told you, would you have taken her? This situation was impossible from the start." *freewebnovel.com*

"Maybe it's better this way," he muttered coldly. "Now I don't have to worry about what she might do next."

I felt bile rise in my throat at his callousness. Celeste tensed beside me, clearly about to tear into him, but Julian stepped forward first, his voice measured but firm.

"If you were truly as heartless as you're pretending to be, Mr. Will, you wouldn't have helped Holly in the first place," Julian said. "Since we can't bring her back, perhaps the best thing now is for Ms. Quinn to meet with Holly's family."

"Some compensation or at least words of comfort might help. And your assistance in explaining the situation would be invaluable."

"Ultimately, Holly's death stemmed from long-term suffering, not from anything Ms. Quinn did. Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Will?"

Mr. Will fell silent, considering Julian's words. After what felt like an eternity, he reluctantly nodded his agreement.

With Mr. Will's help, we finally arranged a meeting with Holly's parents.

When we arrived at their modest apartment, they were still raw with grief and anger. I let them scream and cry, accepting their pain without defending myself. Only after they'd exhausted their initial fury did I speak.

"I deeply regret what happened to Holly," I said softly, tears stinging my eyes. "While I can't bring her back, I want to do everything in my power to help your family through this difficult time."

The elderly couple sobbed uncontrollably, clearly devastated by their daughter's death. The pain in their eyes made my heart ache—no parent should have to bury their child.

Mr. Will explained everything to them and later issued a public statement clearing me of direct responsibility. He also revealed Holly's history of mental health struggles, though respectfully and without unnecessary detail.

Slowly, public opinion began to shift. The hateful comments on Dreamland's social media accounts gradually gave way to more understanding messages. Some mental health advocates even reached out, wanting to collaborate on awareness initiatives.

It would take time, but the studio's reputation was beginning to recover.

Exactly the way I want it

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Sophie's POV

Meanwhile, in a luxurious penthouse across town, I paced furiously, the sharp click of my heels echoing off the marble floor as I scrolled through the latest news updates.

**【Mr. Will Issues Statement: Serena Quinn Has No Direct Ties to Holly's Death】**

**【Company Confirms Holly Had a History of Mental Health Issues — Urges Public to Stop Unfounded Speculation】**

I let out a bitter laugh, jaw tightening as I tapped into the comments section.

□ @DramaWatcher88

Told you—Serena never seemed like the type. Now that Mr. Will spoke up himself, maybe she'll finally get the justice she deserves.

□ @DesignInsider101

So many people trashed her before, and now they're all conveniently silent? Holly had issues, the company was a mess—Serena was just caught in the crossfire.

@LogicOverHype

"Washed clean"? Please. She didn't need to be. She never did anything wrong—people were just too quick to judge.

@NoBS\_Nancy

If Mr. Will is stepping in personally, you know it's serious. Clearly the company investigated this thoroughly. I fully support Serena—hope she's doing okay.

@RegretfulGossip

I'll admit it—I got swept up in the hate. I feel awful now. She never deserved it. We were way too quick to believe the worst.

@ThinkFirstActLater

Let's be real—Holly was added to the team last-minute, and her behavior was off even before the incident. All the signs were there, yet people chose to blame Serena.

@TeamQuinn

Serena has always been professional and low-key. She didn't deserve this mess. Thank God Mr. Will had her back—finally, someone in this industry with integrity.

@UnfilteredTea

Where are all the loudmouths who accused her? Funny how they disappear when the truth comes out. Maybe next time, don't crucify someone before you know the facts.

I scrolled through the feed, cold laughter bubbling in my throat as the comments piled up. My chest tightened, fury simmering just beneath the surface.

So that's it? Just like that, she's clean?

"How is this getting resolved so quickly?" I hissed, throwing my phone onto the couch.

Kane sat nearby in his wheelchair, watching me with that maddening calm. "Seems my nephew stepped in. He's rather protective of his ex-wife, isn't he?"

His words only twisted the knife.

Protective? Please. Try obsessed. Always shielding her, always ensuring she came out spotless—no matter how much dirt clung to her.

My jaw clenched as a cold, burning resolve settled in my chest.

This isn't over.

No. I won't let it be.

One way or another, Serena Quinn will pay.

*Chapter 104: Chapter 104 No Safe Haven*

Serena's POV

I thought the Holly situation was finally settling down, but I couldn't have been more wrong. The moment I stepped back into my studio, it was like walking into a storm that refused to die.

"Ms. Quinn! Is it true you drove that poor girl to suicide?" A reporter shoved a microphone in my face as I tried to enter the building.

"Did you know about her mental illness all along?" Another one called out.

I ducked my head and pushed past them, my heart hammering against my ribs. Even with Mr. Will's statement clearing me, some people had already decided I was guilty. The studio phone rang constantly with threatening calls. Our social media was still bombarded with hate comments, though fewer than before.

"This is getting ridiculous," Maya muttered, deleting another batch of vicious comments. "These people don't even know Holly or you."

I nodded wearily, one hand instinctively moving to protect my belly. The stress wasn't good for the baby, but what could I do?

Things went from bad to worse three days later. I was working late, alone in the studio after everyone had left. The soft click of the door made me look up, expecting the cleaning lady.

"Hello?" I called out, receiving only silence in return.

The lights suddenly flickered and went out. In the darkness, I heard soft, dragging footsteps approaching my office. My heart leaped into my throat.

"Who's there?" I grabbed my phone, turning on the flashlight.

The beam caught a horrifying sight – a figure dressed in white, with long matted hair covering its face, blood dripping from its hands. It let out an ungodly wail that sent ice through my veins.

"You killed me, Serena... Now you'll join me..."

I screamed, stumbling backward. My legs hit my desk chair and I went down hard, my phone clattering away. The figure advanced, moaning eerily. In the dim emergency lights, I could see it reaching toward me with bloody fingers.

"Help! Somebody help!" I scrambled backward, my vision blurring with tears of terror.

Just as the figure lunged at me, the studio doors burst open. Ryan charged in with his security team, flipping on the main lights. The "ghost" froze, then tried to flee, but two security guards tackled her to the ground.

It was a young woman, probably hired by someone who wanted to terrorize me. Under the harsh lights, her cheap Halloween makeup looked pathetic rather than frightening.

Ryan was at my side instantly, his face a mask of fury and concern. "Are you okay? Did she hurt you?"

I couldn't answer, just trembled violently as shock set in. My hands instinctively covered my belly.

"The baby..." I whispered, feeling a sharp cramp.

Ryan's expression turned deadly. He barked orders at his security team to handle the intruder, then swept me into his arms.

"I'm taking you to the hospital. Now."

I didn't argue. The cramping was getting worse, and fear for my baby overshadowed everything else.

After a thorough examination, the doctor assured us the baby was fine, but warned that my stress levels were dangerously high.

"You need rest and a safe environment," she insisted. "This kind of emotional trauma could lead to serious complications if it continues."

Ryan didn't even let me go back to my apartment. His car drove straight to the Blackwood mansion – my former home.

"This isn't necessary," I protested weakly as he carried me from the car. "I can stay with Maya or—"

"No arguments," Ryan cut me off, his voice leaving no room for discussion. "No one will get past my security here."

As we entered the grand foyer, memories flooded back – not all of them pleasant. This place had once been my prison as much as my home.

"Madam, you've finally returned!" The elderly butler hurried forward, his face wreathed in genuine smiles. It was touching to see how happy he was.

"Please don't call me that," I said gently. "I'm just... staying temporarily."

Ryan didn't comment, but I caught the tightening of his jaw. He instructed the kitchen to prepare some light, nutritious food, then guided me upstairs, his hand firm against my lower back.

"Why are you taking me upstairs? I can stay in one of the guest rooms downstairs," I protested, my heart racing for a different reason now. The master bedroom held too many memories – both sweet and bitter.

"The guest rooms aren't comfortable enough. The master suite was decorated by you, remember? If you don't want to share, I'll take one of the guest rooms instead."

He opened the door to reveal our old bedroom, exactly as I'd left it. Nothing had changed – the pale blue walls, the cream bedspread, the reading nook by the window. It was like stepping into a time capsule.

Ryan took my hand, leading me toward the walk-in closet. "Look. These are all for you."

My eyes widened as I took in rack after rack of new clothes – designer dresses, casual wear, shoes, handbags – all in my size and favorite styles. All recent collections, purchased after our divorce.

"Do you like them?" he asked softly, watching my face.

I snorted, trying to hide how touched I actually felt. "Fancy gifts won't work on me, Ryan."

His lips quirked into a half-smile. "Then what will? Tell me, and I'll make it happen."

My gaze drifted to the rocking chair on the balcony – the one where I'd once caught Sophie lounging, acting like she owned the place. The memory still stung.

"I'll think about it," I said, turning away. "I'd still prefer the guest room downstairs. This place... I'm not comfortable here."

Ryan looked confused but didn't argue. With my emotional state still fragile, he wasn't willing to push.

The next few nights were a strange dance. I'd retreat to the guest room, and Ryan would find excuses to linger in the adjacent sitting room. He'd bring me tea, ask about work, or just sit quietly nearby, pretending to read reports.

"You don't have to babysit me," I finally told him on the third night, after he'd knocked on my door with yet another herbal tea concoction "for the baby."

"I'm not," he said innocently. "I just sleep better knowing you're safe."

When I firmly closed the door in his face, he finally took the hint.

After a week, the Holly situation had finally died down enough that I felt safe returning to my apartment. I packed my things while Ryan was at work, leaving only a brief note of thanks.

"Madam, are you really leaving?" The butler looked genuinely disappointed as he helped carry my small suitcase to the waiting car. "When will you and Master Ryan remarry?"

I touched my growing belly gently, feeling a flutter of movement within. "We'll see," I said softly.

The path ahead was still complicated. Ryan and I had made some progress, but we were far from resolving our past. For now, my focus needed to be on my baby and my business.

As the car pulled away from the mansion, I caught a glimpse of Ryan's car turning into the driveway. I sank lower in my seat, not ready for another confrontation.

One step at a time, I told myself. One day at a time.

*Chapter 105: Chapter 105 Desperate Measures*

Sophie's POV

I watched from across the street as Serena finally left the Blackwood mansion. Perfect timing. The storm of controversy around Holly's death was settling, but I hadn't finished yet. Not by a long shot.

With trembling hands, I applied more concealer to the marks on my neck. The bruises from Kane's "lesson" last night were still fresh, still burning. But I couldn't show weakness now.

"You failed me again," Kane growled, shoving me against the wall of his penthouse. His fingers dug into my throat while his other hand tore at my silk blouse, buttons flying across the marble floor. "Every time you promise results, you deliver nothing."

I begged, pleaded as he bound my wrists to the bedpost with his expensive tie. "Kane, please... I'm trying..."

"Not hard enough." His eyes went cold as ice as he took out the leather riding crop from his drawer. "Perhaps you need motivation to succeed where that pathetic girl Holly failed."

The first lash across my bare back made me scream. By the fifth, I was sobbing uncontrollably, my mascara running down my cheeks. He didn't stop until my skin was striped with angry red welts, some breaking open and bleeding onto the Egyptian cotton sheets.

"Look at you," he hissed, grabbing my face and forcing me to look in the mirror across from the bed. "See what happens when you disappoint daddy?"

I whimpered as he tore away my lace panties, spreading my legs with brutal efficiency. His fingers roughly probed between my thighs, not caring if I was ready.

"Please," I gasped, "I'm still hurt from last time—"

"Shut up," he snapped, slapping my ass hard enough to leave a handprint. "You think I care? Your comfort isn't my concern."

He mounted me from behind, forcing himself inside me with brutal thrusts that made me cry out in pain rather than pleasure. Each movement sent fire racing through my welted back as it rubbed against his chest.

"Remember," he whispered in my ear, his breath hot and reeking of expensive bourbon, "I own you. I made you. I can unmake you just as easily."

As he pounded into me mercilessly, one hand wrapped in my hair pulling my head back at a painful angle, I realized how far I'd fallen. There had been a time when I was Sophie Hart, the girl Ryan Blackwood couldn't live without. Now I was just a tool, a weapon wielded by a monster.

"Say it," he demanded, his rhythm becoming more erratic. "Say who you belong to."

"You," I choked out, tears streaming down my face. "I belong to you, Kane."

He came with a grunt, not caring about my pleasure or satisfaction, then pulled out roughly and slapped my ass again.



"Clean yourself up," he ordered, zipping his pants. "You're disgusting."

But I had no choice. Kane held too much over me - the truth about my faked death, the money I'd embezzled, the fake identities I'd used. If I failed him again, he wouldn't just beat me. He'd destroy me completely.

When he'd finally finished using my body, rolling off with disgust rather than satisfaction, he delivered his ultimatum: "This is your last chance, Sophie. Break them apart or I'll make sure you disappear for real this time. And not in the way you planned before."

I changed into fresh clothes, wincing as the fabric brushed against my wounds. There was no time to properly clean or bandage them. My body ached, but I had a job to do—a life to save. Mine.

Now, looking at the Blackwood mansion, I straightened my posture despite the searing pain from my back. My wounds hadn't been treated - Kane had made it clear they were to remind me of the consequences of failure. Every movement was agony, but that would work in my favor today.

Ryan's car pulled into the driveway just as Serena's was leaving. I watched his expression change through the windshield - confusion, then disappointment. Perfect.

I waited until Serena's car disappeared around the corner before making my move. My driver pulled up to the mansion gates, and I put on my most vulnerable expression.

"Ryan!" I called out, tears already flowing as I stumbled toward him. "Please help me..."

Ryan turned, his eyes widening in shock. "Sophie? What are you doing here?"

I collapsed dramatically at his feet, letting my coat fall open just enough to reveal the edge of a particularly nasty bruise on my collarbone.

"He's going to kill me," I sobbed. "I didn't know where else to go..."

Ryan's face hardened as he took in my battered appearance. Despite everything, he was still a man who couldn't ignore a woman in distress. "Who did this to you?"

"It's urgent. My ex-husband... he's found me again." I whispered. "He's been... hurting me for months. When I tried to leave him, he threatened to..."

Ryan's jaw tightened. He hesitated only briefly before helping me to my feet. "Come inside. We'll get you medical attention."

As he led me into the mansion, I caught the butler's disapproving look. But it didn't matter. I was inside - exactly where Kane wanted me to be.

"What happened to your back?" Ryan asked sharply as I winced while sitting down.

I lowered my eyes, the perfect picture of shame and fear. "He... he likes to use things. Whips, belts... anything that leaves marks no one else can see."

The disgust on Ryan's face was genuine. So was the pity. "I'll call my doctor."

"No!" I grabbed his arm. "No doctors. He has people everywhere. Please, Ryan... I just need somewhere safe for a few days."

Ryan ran a hand through his hair, clearly conflicted. "Sophie, I can't just—"

"I know I have no right to ask," I whispered, letting my voice break. "After everything... but you're the only one he wouldn't dare approach. The only one powerful enough to protect me."

I could see him weighing his options, his sense of duty battling with his wariness of me. Finally, he sighed. "I can arrange for someone to protect you, but you can't stay here."

"Alright..., Thank you," I breathed, relief washing over my face. "You always were my hero."

His expression hardened. "Don't mistake this for forgiveness, Sophie. I'm helping you because no woman deserves what was done to you. But that's all this is."

I nodded meekly, playing the perfect victim. "I understand."

As Ryan made a quick call to arrange private security, I stood quietly by the window, wrapping my arms around myself as if trying to hold in the tremors. When he hung up, he turned to me with a guarded expression.

"I've arranged for a private apartment just a few blocks from here. It's secure, and my men will be stationed nearby."

I forced a grateful smile. "That's more than enough. Thank you, Ryan."

He nodded stiffly. "You'll leave in an hour. My driver will take you there."

I bit the inside of my cheek to suppress the irritation. Not quite what I wanted—but close enough.

As I sat in the backseat of his car, watching the city blur past, I let my expression fall back into shadow. This wasn't his house, but it was his protection. His attention. His guilt. That was all I needed to start.

Kane would be satisfied. Phase one was complete. I was back in Ryan's orbit, with the perfect excuse to stay close. Now I just had to make myself indispensable—and Serena, expendable.

That night, in the minimalist apartment Ryan had provided—cold, sleek, and impersonal—I stood by the window and stared at the skyline. My phone buzzed.

A message from Kane:

"In position?"

I replied:

"Yes. Not at his place, but under his protection. Will proceed."

His response came almost immediately:

"Don't get comfortable. You know what happens if this fails."

I swallowed hard, the sting in my back a cruel echo of the threat behind his words. I turned off the phone and climbed into the bed, the sheets too clean, too sterile.

I lay awake for a long time, listening to the silence, letting the pain and fear sharpen my focus.

Tomorrow, I would begin. Ryan thought he was saving me—but he'd learn soon enough that I wasn't the one who needed saving.

He was.

And this time, I wouldn't fail.

*Chapter 106: Chapter 106 Police? Go ahead*

Ryan's POV

I gripped my phone, staring at the empty room. Damn it.

She'd actually done it—moved out without even having the decency to tell me face to face.

My knuckles turned white as I pressed the call button, listening to the ring with mounting frustration.

"Did you seriously just move out without telling me?" I kept my voice tight, controlled, though rage bubbled just beneath the surface.

"I left a note," Serena replied, her tone infuriatingly casual. "The Holly situation has died down enough. I need my own space."

"Serena, that's not—" I stopped myself, taking a deep breath to calm down. Getting angry wouldn't help. "Fine. But my security team stays with you."

"I don't need babysitters," she shot back.

"It's not negotiable," I said firmly, leaving no room for argument. "Not after what happened at your studio."

The silence on the other end told me she was remembering that horrific incident too. Finally, she spoke.

"Fine," she conceded. "But they stay outside. I won't have them hovering over me in my apartment."

"Agreed." Relief washed through me. At least she wasn't fighting me on this. "How are you feeling? Is the baby—"

"We're both fine," she cut me off coldly. "I need to go. I have work to finish."

I was about to press further when another call came through. Sophie's name flashed on the screen. Fucking perfect timing.

"Ryan, he found me again!" Her voice was shrill with panic.

I immediately straightened, tension flooding back into my body. "Where are you? Where's my security team?" I demanded, jaw tightening. I'd specifically assigned men to watch her apartment.

"I...I came home to get some things. I don't know how he got in!" Her sobs pierced through the phone. "Please—"

Then came a sickening thud, followed by dead silence.

"Sophie?" My chest constricted as the line went dead.

Goddammit. I grabbed my keys and headed for the garage. This wasn't how I planned to spend my evening—I'd intended to talk with Serena, to try to understand why she'd left so abruptly. Now that would have to wait.

Twenty minutes later, I was at Sophie's door. My security team stood outside looking sheepish, claiming they'd been instructed to stay in the lobby. Idiots. I pushed past them and found the apartment door unlocked.

Sophie was huddled in a corner, trembling, her cheek bright red with what looked like a fresh slap mark. "Ryan...please help me," she whimpered.

A man stood over her, belt in hand, his face twisted with rage. He turned toward me, eyes narrowing.

"Who the fuck are you to interfere?" he snarled, snapping the belt against the floor with a crack that made Sophie flinch. "Her old boyfriend?"

Sophie spat back at him, "Ryan and I were never like that! Don't you dare suggest—"

"Oh, protecting him, are we?" The man laughed cruelly, raising the belt again. "Let's see how he likes watching this."

He swung the belt toward Sophie's cowering form. I moved fast, grabbing his wrist mid-swing.

"Enough," I growled, squeezing until he winced. "Breaking and entering. Assault. Should I continue listing the charges while you call the police?" I directed this last part to Sophie.

The man yanked his hand free, surprisingly strong. "Police? Go ahead. She's still my wife."

He pulled out a marriage certificate with Sophie's name clearly visible. I glanced at Sophie, my expression hardening. She'd told me about her "ex-husband"—apparently that was another lie. [freewebnovel.com](http://freewebnovel.com)

"Ryan, it's not what you think!" Sophie crawled toward me, clutching the back of my jacket. "He forced me to sign! He threatened to kill me if I left!"

Her entire body shook as she hid behind me. "The police won't help—he has connections. They'll release him, and he'll come after me again."

Sophie's voice cracked with desperation. "Please don't leave me here. Take me with you."

"Sophie, you're quite the little seductress, aren't you?" the man—her husband—sneered. "Who's this one? Another rich sucker?"

"Shut your mouth, Derek," Sophie snapped, surprising me with her vehemence. "Don't you dare talk about Ryan that way."

Derek's smile turned sinister, his eyes cold and reptilian. "Neither of you is walking out of here today. And Sophie—you can run to the ends of the earth, but I'll always find you."

Something in his eyes made my skin crawl—pure malice, no humanity. I'd seen that look before in business rivals I'd destroyed. This wasn't a man who made idle threats.

I'd had enough of this circus.

"You have three days to get out of this city," I told him, voice dangerously low. "If I see your face after that, you'll regret it."

"I'm showing restraint today. Don't mistake it for weakness. Leave. Now."

On cue, four of my security team entered the apartment, surrounding Derek. He glared but knew he was outnumbered.

I led Sophie out without another glance at him, my hand firm on her elbow. She was shaking so badly I could feel it through her sleeve.

Only when we reached my car did she seem to breathe again, collapsing into the passenger seat.

"Ryan, thank you," she whispered, wiping at her tears. "I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't come."

She looked up at me, eyes red-rimmed and frightened. "I'm terrified he'll come back. Could I...could I please stay at the Blackwood estate? Just for a little while?"

When I hesitated, she rushed to add, "I promise I won't cause any trouble. And I won't let Serena misunderstand. I know you two are together."

I looked at her bruised face, the way her hands wouldn't stop trembling. Against my better judgment, I nodded.

"I'll have someone take you there. And don't come to work for a few days."

Relief washed over her face. "Thank you, Ryan. You're saving my life."

I nodded stiffly, already planning to call Serena later to explain everything. The last thing I needed was for her to get jealous or for us to fight over Sophie's presence at the estate.

As I watched Sophie being driven away in one of my cars, something nagged at me—the timing of it all, the convenient distress call right when I was about to reach out to Serena.

But I dismissed the thought almost immediately. I'd seen the terror in Sophie's eyes, felt her body trembling against mine. No one was that good an actress.

I'd deal with Serena first, then figure out what to do about Sophie's situation. One fire at a time.

*Chapter 107: Chapter 107 Make sure she thinks Ryan and I are rekindling*

Sophie's POV

I smirked when Ryan wasn't looking, gently touching the fake bruises on my face. This trick worked beautifully. Poor, sweet, gullible Ryan.

Back at the Blackwood estate, I settled into my old guest room like I'd never left. It felt good being back here—like the first step in reclaiming what should've been mine all along.

My phone buzzed with a message from Derek.

"How was my performance? Good enough? I need the rest of my payment. A few more shows like this, and Blackwood really will run me out of town."

I transferred him part of the money, not the full amount. Always keep people hungry for more—that's how you control them.

"Be patient. I'll need you again. Money won't be a problem."

The price was steep, but worth every penny. Ryan had always been susceptible to damsels in distress. Getting close to him again was phase one. Phase two would be making him remember what we once shared.

Around midnight, I screamed deliberately—a piercing sound that echoed through the mansion. I'd practiced it for maximum effect, the perfect blend of terror and vulnerability.

Footsteps thundered down the hallway. Ryan appeared in my doorway, hair tousled from sleep, eyes narrowed with concern. I threw myself at him, pressing my body against his solid chest.

"Ryan, I'm so scared," I sobbed, clinging tighter. "I dreamed about Derek. He's a monster!" I buried my face against his neck, breathing in his familiar scent. "Thank God you saved me... I miss how things used to be between us."

His hands came up to my shoulders, pushing me back firmly. "You had a nightmare. You're safe now."

I gazed up at him with hopeful eyes. "Ryan... have you really forgotten about us? About what we had?"

His frown deepened, jaw tightening. "Sophie, I've been clear. Whatever feelings I had for you are gone."

"Serena is the only one in my heart now."

The conviction in his voice made my hopeful smile freeze. This wasn't the script I'd planned.

"Go back to bed," he said, already turning away.

I hesitated just a second too long. By the time I decided to follow, he was already climbing the stairs, disappearing into the darkness of the hallway.

Damn that Serena bitch. Ryan was completely whipped.

Morning came, and I wasn't about to give up. I dressed carefully—nothing too flashy, but enough to remind Ryan of what he was missing. I timed my exit perfectly, catching him just as he was heading out.

"Ryan, I'm feeling much better today. I should go to work too. Would you mind giving me a ride?" I slid into his car before he could object.

During the drive, I chatted brightly about old memories, projects at work, anything to get him talking. He barely responded beyond grunts and one-word answers. The atmosphere grew increasingly stiff.

When we approached the office, Ryan suddenly signaled his driver to pull over.

"You should get out here," he said, not even looking at me. "It wouldn't look good if people saw us arriving together."

My smile froze on my face. After a moment, I had no choice but to exit the car.

As I watched him drive away, my facade crumbled. So this was how it would be? He was deliberately keeping his distance to avoid making his precious Serena jealous?

What did he see in that woman? What did she have that I didn't?

I clenched my fists, abandoning my plans to go into the office. Instead, I called my sister.

"Ivy, I need you to visit Dreamland Studio. Pretend you're there to order jewelry. I want you to meet that bitch face-to-face."

"And say what exactly?" Ivy sounded bored.



"Tell her Ryan and I are getting along wonderfully. How he solved my ex-husband problem and invited me to stay at his home. Use your imagination—just make sure she thinks Ryan and I are rekindling something."

Ivy hesitated. "Sophie, she won't even let me in her office. After that whole Star Moon Jewelry and Dreamland blowup, they probably have my picture at security."

"You idiot!" I snapped. "Figure something out! What am I paying you for?"

"Fine," she huffed. "I'll try my best."

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Serena's POV

I watched as the receptionist hurried into my office, clearly flustered. She'd obviously been intimidated by someone outside.

"Ms. Serena, there's a woman claiming to be a major client," she explained nervously. "She's quite... insistent about seeing you."

"What's her name? Which big client?" I looked up from my design sketches, genuinely confused. I kept track of all our major accounts personally.

The receptionist shook her head. "She wouldn't say. Just insisted she's responsible for a huge order and demanded to see you right away."

I nodded, not wanting to put my staff in an awkward position. "Send her in. I'm free at the moment anyway."

"Right away."

A few minutes later, Sophie's sister Ivy sauntered into my office like she owned the place. The moment she sat down across from me, I couldn't help but laugh softly.

"Ivy Hart? Well, this is unexpected. I'm curious which of Dreamland's major clients you're supposed to be?"

Caught out, Ivy removed her oversized sunglasses and looked around my office, her eyes betraying the jealousy she was trying to hide.

"I must say, you've certainly landed on your feet nicely," she remarked, her voice dripping with false sweetness.

I took a slow sip of water, enjoying this moment far too much. "And I never imagined you'd fall so far. Those clothes are rather dated, aren't they? Pretending to be a big client while dressed like that... aren't you embarrassed?"

Her mouth twitched. I'd clearly hit a nerve.

"You bitch," she spat. "If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be in this situation right now!"

"I don't have time for old grudges," I replied calmly. "Why don't you tell me why you're really here?"

I gave her a once-over, already guessing her purpose. She was here to stir up trouble—these sisters were nothing if not predictable.

Ivy let out a contemptuous snort. "You don't know yet, do you? Ryan and my sister have reconciled. He helped her deal with her ex-husband's harassment and invited her to stay at the Blackwood estate!"

She leaned forward, her eyes glinting with malice. "Even if you're carrying his child, you're just a breeding vessel to him. Ryan only has room in his heart for Sophie."

I couldn't stop myself from rolling my eyes. The same tired script. These sisters really needed new material—I was bored with their performance.

"Ivy, have you ever heard the story of the boy who cried wolf?"

She froze for a moment, then recovered.

"You don't believe me? Why don't you call Ryan and ask him yourself? See if what I'm saying isn't true!"

"Honestly, Ivy, aren't you a bit overconfident about your little scheme?"

Watching her grow increasingly agitated only improved my mood. I'd seen through the Hart sisters' pathetic tactics long ago. Their whole plan revolved around exploiting Ryan's sense of compassion.

"Do you really think this is the first time you've tried this routine? You two aren't exactly master strategists," I said, leaning back in my chair. "Let me guess—Sophie played the damsel in distress, and now Ryan's gallantly protecting her?"

"It's more than that!" Ivy insisted, her voice rising. "He cares about her! Always has!"

I shook my head, almost feeling sorry for her desperation. "If that were true, he wouldn't have been calling me nonstop since yesterday, explaining everything that happened with your sister."

Ivy opened her mouth to argue, but I cut in, my voice calm and razor-sharp.

"Ivy, go back and tell your sister—she'd better know her place. One word from me, and Ryan will have her out of New York before she even knows what hit her."

*Chapter 108: Chapter 108 Let Him See The Truth Himself*

Serena's POV

I watched with satisfaction as panic flickered across Ivy's face.

Perfect.

"What's this nonsense about an ex-husband?" I leaned forward, tapping my manicured nails against the desk. "Another actor you hired from some second-rate talent agency?"

I laughed, not even trying to hide my contempt. "All these pathetic schemes only prove how desperate and incapable you both are."

Ivy's face contorted with rage. Her body actually trembled as she stood there, completely blindsided.

I know she'd walked in here expecting to shatter my confidence, but instead found herself cornered and exposed.

"You! You bitch!" she shrieked, her voice cracking with fury.

The jealousy and hatred in her eyes exploded into something dangerous. Before I could react, she lunged across my desk, hands outstretched like claws aiming for my face.

I jerked backward, my chair rolling awkwardly against the wall. If I hadn't been pregnant, I'd have taught this psychopath a proper lesson. My hand instinctively covered my stomach, protecting my baby.

"STOP RIGHT THERE!"

Julian burst through my office door, grabbing Ivy's wrist mid-lunge and yanking her away from me. I hadn't even heard him arrive.

"Do you know where you are?" His voice was ice cold as he dragged her up by her arm. "You dare try to attack Serena?"

He threw her aside like she was nothing more than trash, then immediately pulled out his phone to call the police. *freewebnovel.com*

"What are you doing? You can't call the police!" Ivy shrieked, flailing wildly as she tried to grab his phone.

Julian shoved her away again, his expression disgusted. "Stay away from me. You're filthy."

The commotion had drawn attention. My office door burst open again as Maya charged in like a protective mother hen, instantly positioning herself between me and Ivy.

"Ivy Hart, you green-tea bitch!" Maya spat. "You actually came here to physically assault someone? Have you lost your mind? Serena, are you okay?"

I shook my head calmly, my face betraying none of the adrenaline pumping through my veins. "Since the police have been called, let them handle it."

"Don't worry," Maya said, glaring at Ivy. "I've already sent someone to pull the security footage. We'll get the best lawyers too. Enjoy prison, honey."

Ivy's face drained of color. The reality of her situation was finally sinking in.

"Stop trying to scare me!" She backed against the wall, suddenly defensive. "I never actually hit her! But you—" she jabbed a finger toward Julian, "you manhandled me! I'm going to sue you for harassment!"

She was like a rabid dog, biting at anything within reach. Julian didn't even dignify her accusations with a response. He just positioned himself protectively in front of me, creating a human barrier between Ivy and myself.

The police arrived within fifteen minutes. Julian explained the situation calmly, handing over a copy of the security footage.

Ivy tried repeatedly to interrupt, but Maya kept nudging her aside.

"Officer," Maya said with convincing concern, "this woman impersonated a major client to gain access to our premises. I'm worried she might have concealed weapons on her. She seems mentally unstable."

Between Maya's persuasive words and the clear security footage, the officers looked increasingly stern.

"Ma'am, do you have any dangerous items or prohibited weapons on your person?" one officer asked Ivy, his expression dead serious.

That sent Ivy into a total meltdown.

"What dangerous items? What weapons? I just came to deliver a message! I got angry, but I didn't hurt anyone! You can't arrest me for that!"

"Ma'am, please watch your tone and cooperate with our investigation," the officer warned.

His partner nodded. "Take her in."

Ivy struggled briefly against the officers, earning herself even more suspicious looks.

"Serena, you sneaky bitch! You'll regret this!" she screamed as they escorted her out.

I stood behind Maya, watching her with cool detachment. Her threats meant nothing to me.

After they took her away, I returned to my desk as if nothing unusual had happened and continued working on my designs. Maya stayed close, hovering anxiously.

"Are you really okay?" she whispered, rubbing my shoulder. "Don't believe anything those sisters say. They're clearly just trying to upset you."

I nodded, my pen moving steadily across the page. "I know. You heard what I said to her while watching the security footage, right?"

"Sophie's making such a spectacle of herself that eventually Julian will be the one to send her packing."

Maya let out an impressed whistle. "Damn, Serena! You're so clear-headed now!" She paused, looking thoughtful. "But why not just tell Ryan directly about these sisters and their true colors?"

I stopped sketching for a moment, carefully considering my answer.

"Sophie will always be someone special from Ryan's past," I finally said, looking up at Maya. "If he's going to truly see who she really is, he needs to discover it for himself."

I absently stroked my growing belly, feeling my babies kick in response.

"I don't want him choosing me just because of our children. If he loves me, I want his whole heart. Not a single piece left for anyone else."

*Chapter 109: Chapter 109 Revenge and Traps*

Sophie's POV

I hung up the phone, my fingers trembling slightly with rage.

Ivy, that stupid fool, had actually gotten herself detained by the police! Couldn't even deliver a simple message without screwing everything up.

Completely useless! I slammed my phone down onto the leather sofa, clenching my jaw to suppress the scream building in my throat.

"Are you Ivy Hart's sister? Regarding the assault case against Serena Quinn—they've hired an attorney." The officer's matter-of-fact tone had cut through me like a knife. I'd asked for details, my face darkening with every word.

Now I sat before the floor-to-ceiling windows of my luxury suite, staring at the glittering cityscape without seeing any of its beauty. The curse slipped through my gritted teeth: "What an absolute idiot! How does someone get arrested just delivering a message?"

Serena Quinn. What makes you so damn special? Why does Ryan look at you that way?

I clenched my fist so tight my nails dug deep into my palm, the sharp pain actually helping to clear my head.

Taking a deep breath, I picked up my phone again and scrolled to a number I'd hoped never to dial again. Derek—that pathetic actor who'd played my abusive ex-husband.

A man who cared about nothing but money. Right now, he was exactly the pawn I needed.

When the call connected, ear-splitting music nearly burst my eardrum. The chaotic background noise immediately set my teeth on edge.

"Hello? Ms. Sophie! What can I do for you?" Derek shouted, his voice slurred with excitement and alcohol. I could practically see him writhing around in that low-class establishment.

I wrinkled my nose in disgust, holding the phone away from my ear before abruptly hanging up. I wasn't about to converse with a drunk. I quickly typed a text: "Find somewhere quiet and call me back! Paid job."

Predictably, Derek called back within three minutes. A cold smile curved my lips—the power of money truly is remarkable.

"Boss Sophie, what do you need me to do this time?" His voice was notably clearer now, the background much quieter.

I got straight to the point: "Serena Quinn—heard of her? I want you to make trouble for her. Make her uncomfortable. I'll pay you well."

My voice was ice cold, each word dripping with frost.

Derek paused briefly. I could almost picture his surprised expression. "Isn't she Ryan's woman? If I cause trouble for her, Ryan will trace it back to me in no time. That's not worth the risk."

I gripped the phone tighter, my index finger impatiently tapping against the table. This coward!

"What are you saying? You won't do it?" I asked through clenched teeth, already considering alternative options.

Derek gave a forced laugh that made my stomach turn.

"Boss, it's not that. I just value my life. Besides, causing minor trouble would only annoy her for a few days. What real benefit would that give you?"

I suddenly stopped tapping. He had a point. What did I really want from this? Just to make Serena uncomfortable for a few days? No, I wanted much more than that... I wanted her completely erased from Ryan's life!

A wild idea took shape in my mind, coiling like a venomous snake.

"So you're suggesting we shouldn't let Serena off so easily?" I asked slowly, my voice dropping lower.

On the other end, Derek gave a meaningful chuckle without responding directly, but his laugh said everything.

I stood up and walked to the window, gazing at the twinkling lights as my heartbeat quickened. "What about kidnapping her? Ryan would surely pay a hefty ransom, and you could use that money to leave the country." ***freewebnovel.com***

I pressed my hand against the cold glass, feeling the chill against my skin. "You could go anywhere, be anyone. Even with all their resources, the Blackwood family couldn't touch you overseas."

The silence on the other end told me Derek was intrigued by the proposal. I could imagine his greedy eyes, practically seeing stacks of cash dancing before him.

"This could be your only chance to completely turn your life around," I continued, reeling him in. "You'd never have to do these dangerous jobs again. You could even hire others to work for you."

I knew Derek's weakness—always dreaming of getting rich quick without any real skills or talent. This opportunity must seem like a gift from heaven to him.

"So, Derek," I licked my lips, smiling with the certainty of victory, "will you consider it? I'll help arrange everything for your departure abroad afterward."

My voice grew softer, almost a whisper against the phone: "Just make that bitch disappear, and all your problems will be solved."

After a few seconds of silence, a short but definitive answer came through:

"Deal."

I ended the call, gazing out at the night skyline, a cold smile playing on my lips. Serena, you'll soon learn what true despair feels like. This time, no one will be able to save you...

*Chapter 110: Chapter 110 Someone Wants You Dead*

Serena's POV

I finished sending the last email and stretched my arms above my head, feeling the satisfying pop in my spine after hours hunched over my desk.

The office was quiet now, just a few dedicated designers still working on their projects, the soft clicking of keyboards and occasional murmur the only sounds breaking the silence.

"Serena, you're still here?" Julian appeared in my doorway, his tie loosened and sleeves rolled up. "It's getting late. Let me drive you home."

"Thanks for the offer, but I'm fine," I smiled, gathering my things. "My car's just at the shop for maintenance. I'll grab a taxi—it's not a problem."

Julian frowned, his concern evident. "Are you sure? It wouldn't be any trouble."

"I'm positive," I insisted, slinging my bag over my shoulder. "I do this all the time."

If only I'd known what was waiting for me. If only I'd accepted his offer.

The cool night air hit my face as I stepped outside, refreshing after hours in the air-conditioned studio. A few designers called out their goodbyes, telling me to be careful, but it was just the usual pleasantries. I stood at the curb, raising my hand to hail a taxi.

When one pulled up, I slid into the back seat without a second thought.

"Where to, miss?" The driver asked, his face partially obscured by a baseball cap pulled low.



"Stone Flower City, please," I replied, settling back into the seat.

"Got it." He flipped the sign from vacant to occupied and pulled away from the curb.

The dim lighting inside the cab created a cozy atmosphere, and I tucked my phone into my purse, leaning my head back against the headrest.

The pregnancy was making me tired all the time now, and the gentle motion of the car was soothing. I let my eyes close, figuring I could rest during the drive home.

The driver occasionally glanced at me through the rearview mirror as he accelerated onto the main road.

The evening rush hour had passed, making for a smooth ride through the city streets.

When I opened my eyes again, something felt wrong.

The bright city lights had given way to darkness and unfamiliar surroundings. My heart rate instantly doubled as I realized we were far from the city center.

"Excuse me," I said, fighting to keep my voice steady despite the alarm bells ringing in my head. "I think you've taken a wrong turn. Stone Flower City is in the opposite direction. This looks like we're heading to the outskirts."

I reached for my phone, intending to send Maya my location, but before I could get a firm grip on it, the driver slammed on the brakes.

The sudden stop threw me forward, my head smacking against the back of the front seat. My phone flew from my hand, clattering to the floor of the cab. **freewebebmovel.com**

The driver turned around swiftly, snatched my phone from the floor, then rolled down his window and tossed it outside into the darkness.

My blood turned to ice. This wasn't a mistake. This was deliberate.

"Listen," I said, trying to sound calm despite my racing heart, "I have money in my purse. If that's what you want, take it all. Just drive me back to the city, and I won't report this to the police. I promise."

I held out my bag toward him, hoping he was just after cash.

The man let out a derisive snort. "You've got guts, I'll give you that. No wonder you're Ryan's woman."

The use of Ryan's name made my entire body go cold. This wasn't a random crime.

"Who... who sent you?" I managed to ask, my mouth suddenly dry.

"That doesn't matter," he replied, restarting the engine. "What matters is that you cooperate and let me get the ransom money. Otherwise, I can't guarantee your safety."

He kept glancing at me in the rearview mirror as he drove, his tone becoming increasingly threatening.

"Better behave yourself. If you try anything, that baby in your belly will be the first one in danger." He smiled coldly at me through the mirror.

"I wouldn't mind making you lose that child before asking Ryan for the money."

I felt my face drain of color, but I refused to show fear. Sitting passively waiting for whatever he planned wouldn't help me or my baby.

"Who are you really? If it's just ransom you want, I can pay you myself," I said, trying to sound confident. "You must have heard of Dreamland Jewelry? I can afford whatever price you name."

The man laughed mockingly. "Nice negotiation skills, but unfortunately, someone wants you dead."

My heart sank. There was only one person who hated me enough to arrange this.

Sophie.

"Haven't you considered that if you kill me, you won't live to enjoy the money?" I challenged him. "Ryan will hunt you down to the ends of the earth. Why don't you stop the car so we can talk properly? We're in the middle of nowhere, and I'm pregnant—I couldn't outrun you even if I tried."

The driver studied me in the mirror, surprise crossing his features.

"You're pretty calm for someone in your situation."

"I won't press kidnapping charges if you let me go. We can work something out. Just stop the car," I said, my eyes darting to where my phone had been thrown, though I knew retrieving it was impossible.

The car gradually slowed and finally came to a stop.

"Alright, let's hear what you have to say," he said, turning around to face me in the confined space of the vehicle.

"I can offer you more money than whoever hired you," I said with as much conviction as I could muster. "Double whatever they're paying you."

"You know my net worth. The price of my life isn't a problem for me."

He considered this, greed visibly fighting with caution in his expression. "Really?"

"Absolutely," I said firmly, seeing his resolve waver.

"Then transfer the money to this account right now. No tricks," he demanded, showing me his phone.

I smiled faintly. "I don't remember my accountant's number. Or did you want me to call Ryan for help instead?"

His expression darkened. Without warning, he unbuckled his seatbelt, opened his door, and climbed into the back seat with me.

From his pocket, he pulled out a switchblade and pressed close to me, the knife glinting in what little light filtered into the car.

"Make the call," he growled, his breath hot against my face. "And don't try anything stupid, or I'll end your life right here."