

CEO's Regret After I Divorced #Chapter 191 The Fall of the Hart Sisters - Read CEO's Regret After I Divorced Chapter 191 The Fall of the Hart Sisters

Chapter 191: Chapter 191 The Fall of the Hart Sisters

Sophie's POV

I sat there fuming, watching my phone screen as my carefully constructed plan collapsed in real time.

"What the hell? All those paid accounts got suspended? I don't care how it happened—you owe me compensation!" I hissed into the phone, feeling my face grow hot with anger.

The social media manager on the other end sounded panicked. "What did you expect? How else would the news get buried so quickly? Do you have any idea how long it took me to cultivate those accounts?"

"I want out of this deal, and I expect compensation," he continued, his tone hardening. "Now."

I couldn't believe this nobody was threatening ME—Sophie Hart! The audacity!

"If you don't pay up," he pressed, "I'll leak all our chat records online. You've already pissed off both Blackwood Industries and Dreamland Jewelry. Want to see how that plays out?"

My stomach dropped. He'd found my weak spot. I had no choice but to pay him off—I couldn't afford another scandal.

"Fine," I snarled, gripping the phone so tightly my knuckles turned white. "Send me your account details. But keep your mouth shut!"

I leaned forward, injecting as much venom into my voice as possible. "Cross me, and I'll make sure we both go down together. Understand?"

There was a pause on the other end before he reluctantly agreed. People in his line of work were always afraid of reputation damage. If we had a public fight, his career would be over too.

As soon as I hung up, I transferred the hush money and threw my phone across the couch. What a disaster! Not only had my plan failed, but I was now being extorted by my own hired gun.

Ivy walked over, her face clouded with worry. "Sis, all my old scandals are trending again online! What are we going to do?"

"Shut up! Let me think!" I snapped, massaging my temples. This was supposed to be simple: make Serena look like a bully, resurrect Ivy's reputation, and strengthen our position with Lucian West. Instead, we'd lit ourselves on fire.

"Has Lucian contacted you yet?" I asked, suddenly realizing we might lose our most important ally.

Ivy shook her head. "Not yet."

I bit my lip, grabbing my phone again. Whatever happened, Lucian had tacitly approved this scheme. Ivy was now Celestial Gems' designer—her reputation in tatters didn't benefit him either. He needed to help fix this mess.

The phone rang several times before he finally answered.

"What is it?" Lucian's voice sounded tired, irritated.

I immediately switched to my sweetest tone. "Mr. West, have you seen what's happening online?"

He gave a cold, humorless laugh. "You brought your sister to work at Celestial Gems just to cause trouble?"

My heart skipped a beat. His anger was palpable even through the phone. "We were trying to create an opportunity for you," I explained quickly. "Ivy and Serena have history. If we could damage Dreamland's reputation, Celestial would benefit."

I tried to elevate our petty revenge into a strategic business move. "You're expanding into the domestic market—Dreamland can't remain the dominant force forever, right?"

Lucian wasn't buying it. I could practically feel his contempt through the phone.

"Celestial doesn't resort to such amateur tactics," he said flatly before hanging up.

The dial tone buzzed in my ear as I collapsed back onto the sofa. This couldn't be happening.

Ivy stared at me wide-eyed. "Sophie? Won't Lucian help us? What do we do now?"

I waved my hand dismissively, redirecting my frustration at her. "You idiot! You can't do anything right!"

Ivy's lips quivered, hurt filling her eyes. I knew it wasn't fair—I'd orchestrated this whole plan myself—but I needed someone to blame.

The room fell silent, tension thick between us. We sat there, marinating in our resentment and failure, with no clear path forward.

Sophie's POV

I walked through my office door, finally finished with all the prep work for the jewelry season launch. My body ached from sitting too long, but the satisfaction of completing everything on time made it worth it.

"Working late again?" Ryan stood leaning against the doorframe, car keys dangling from his fingers. His eyes scanned me with that intensity that always made my skin warm.

"Someone has to make sure we're ready," I said, gathering my things. "Didn't expect you to be my chauffeur tonight."

Ryan stepped closer, concern etching his features. "You look tired. Have you eaten anything today?"

I waved dismissively. "I had... something." Truth was, I couldn't even remember when I'd last eaten.

"That's what I thought," he said, his hand finding the small of my back as he guided me toward the elevator.

In the car, after checking if I was comfortable, Ryan's expression darkened. "Sophie really crossed a line going after you like that. I should have dealt with her permanently when I had the chance."

I could see the muscle in his jaw twitching—his tell when he was truly angry.

"It's already handled," I said, deliberately keeping my voice light. "She's just a desperate has-been. Besides, she's Lucian's problem now as their designer. We don't need to make this messier than it already is."

I knew the history between Ryan and Lucian ran deep. The last thing I needed was their corporate rivalry flaring up because of petty drama.

Ryan's knuckles whitened on the steering wheel. "That's exactly the problem. Lucian hired her deliberately to provoke us. He's clearly sanctioning her behavior."

"Hey," I placed my hand over his on the gear shift, surprised by my own boldness. "I'm not even thinking about it anymore. Let's go home—I'm exhausted."

His gaze dropped to where our hands touched before meeting my eyes again. Something shifted in the air between us, a current of electricity I wasn't prepared for.

After several long moments, he nodded. "Fine. For you."

Only when we were cruising down the highway did I finally ask about what had been on my mind all day.

"Any progress on Lucian? Found out what's driving his vendetta?"

Ryan gave a curt nod. "Looks like he's Andrew An's son—the family from the city suburb development project. His parents committed suicide after the bankruptcy."

My eyes widened. "So that's why he hates you so much? A blood feud?"

"Essentially."

I hesitated before asking the question that really mattered. "Was it... was it your family's fault? What happened to them?"

If Ryan or his parents were responsible, this would be a much more complicated situation to navigate.

"It was Kane," Ryan said flatly, naming his uncle. "He orchestrated the whole thing."

Relief washed over me. "Thank goodness."

Ryan glanced at me, a hint of amusement breaking through his stern expression. "You seem awfully relieved."

I shrugged, embarrassed by my transparency. "I just... it's better when it's not directly your doing, that's all."

"Does it matter? You'd still stand by me if it were me?" His question hung in the air, testing waters we'd both been careful not to disturb.

My heart fluttered traitorously in my chest. "I just meant... does Lucian know the truth? Should I talk to him? Clear things up?"

Ryan's expression immediately hardened. "Absolutely not. I don't want you anywhere near him, Serena."

The way he said my name—soft yet commanding—sent an involuntary shiver down my spine.

"Lucian isn't stupid," Ryan continued, his voice lower. "If he's letting Kane manipulate him, no amount of explanation from us will help. He'll discover the truth eventually—it's just a matter of time."

"Fine," I conceded, leaning back in my seat.

As we pulled into our driveway, a comfortable silence fell between us. The house lights came on automatically as we approached, bathing the entrance in a warm glow.

Once inside, I kicked off my heels with a sigh of relief. "God, my feet are killing me. I think I need a hot bath."

Ryan watched me from across the foyer, his eyes darkening in a way that sent shivers down my spine. "Need company?"

I raised an eyebrow, feeling heat bloom in my chest. "Are you offering your services, Mr. Blackwood?"

He moved toward me slowly, deliberately, like a predator who knew his prey wouldn't run. "Always at your disposal, Mrs. Blackwood."

Source:

Chapter 192: Chapter 192 Surrender

Serena's POV

Ryan swept me into his arms with startling ease, carrying me through the master suite. My heart hammered against my ribs as he set me down on the cool marble of the bathroom counter.

"Stay," he commanded, his voice dropping to that dangerous baritone that made my skin prickle with anticipation.

He turned to start the bath, steam rising as hot water cascaded into our oversized tub. The scent of jasmine oil filled the air as he poured it generously into the swirling water.

I watched, transfixed, as he straightened and began unbuttoning his shirt. Each movement was deliberate, his eyes never leaving mine. The crisp white fabric parted to reveal bronzed skin stretched over sculpted muscle. He shrugged it off his shoulders, letting it fall carelessly to the floor.

My breath caught as his hands moved to his belt. The metallic clink as he unbuckled it echoed through the marble bathroom. He unzipped his trousers with maddening slowness, pushing them down powerful thighs before stepping out of them entirely.

"See something you like?" His lips curved into that infuriating smirk.

I couldn't speak. Ryan stood before me in nothing but black boxer briefs, every inch of him a testament to power and control. The defined muscles of his abdomen, the strong column of his neck, the broad expanse of his shoulders – he was devastating in his masculinity.

"Your turn," he said, stepping toward me.

His fingers made quick work of my blouse, peeling it away from my heated skin. He unclasped my bra with practiced ease, his gaze darkening as he took in the sight of my bare breasts.

"Perfect," he murmured, his thumb grazing my nipple. I shivered despite the steam filling the room.

When we were both naked, he lifted me again, lowering us both into the fragrant water. I gasped as the heat enveloped me, my back pressed against his chest, his hardness evident against my lower back.

"I've been thinking about this all day," he confessed, his lips brushing against my ear. "You in meetings, commanding the room. Watching you work makes me want to remind you who you belong to."

His hands slid up my sides, cupping my breasts. "Who do you belong to, Serena?"

"No one," I challenged, though my body betrayed me, arching into his touch.

A dark chuckle rumbled through his chest. "Wrong answer."

His teeth scraped along my neck, biting down just hard enough to make me gasp. One hand remained at my breast, pinching and rolling my nipple between his fingers, while the other slid lower, dipping beneath the water to find the apex of my thighs.

"Try again," he demanded, his fingers circling but not touching where I needed him most.

I bit my lip, refusing to surrender so easily. "Make me say it."

Water sloshed over the sides of the tub as he turned me in his arms, facing me toward him. His eyes were storm clouds, dangerous and electric.

"Is that a challenge, Mrs. Blackwood?"

Without warning, he lifted me, positioning me so I straddled his lap. The water created a weightlessness that made me feel untethered, my only anchor the man beneath me.

"Every day you defy me," he growled, his hands gripping my hips. "Every day you make me want you more."

I rocked against him, feeling his hardness slide against my core. "Then take what's yours."

His control snapped. In one fluid motion, he lifted me slightly and then brought me down on him, filling me completely. I cried out, my nails digging into his shoulders.

"Fuck," he hissed, his head falling back against the tub. "You feel so goddamn tight."

He guided my movements, his hands bruising my hips as he set a punishing rhythm. Water splashed around us, spilling onto the floor with each thrust.

"Say it," he demanded, his voice strained with restraint. "Say you're mine."

I leaned forward, my lips brushing against his ear. "Make me believe it first."

The challenge lit something primal in his eyes. One hand tangled in my hair, pulling my head back to expose my throat. His teeth and tongue worked the sensitive skin there while his other hand slipped between us, finding the bundle of nerves that made me see stars.

"You're mine," he growled against my skin. "Every beautiful, stubborn inch of you belongs to me."

His fingers worked magic, circling and pressing with just the right pressure. My body tightened around him, climbing toward release.

"That's it, baby," he encouraged, his voice rough. "Let go for me. Show me what I do to you."

The coil inside me wound tighter, my movements becoming erratic. "Ryan—"

"I've got you," he promised, increasing the pressure where our bodies joined. "Come for me, Serena."

My release hit with blinding force, waves of pleasure crashing through me as I clung to him. He held me through it all, whispering filthy praise against my ear as I shattered in his arms.

"Mine," he growled triumphantly, his own release following moments later, his body tensing beneath me as he emptied himself deep inside.

I collapsed against his chest, my breathing ragged. His arms wrapped around me, holding me close as the water cooled around us.

"I surrender," I murmured against his neck, feeling his satisfied smile against my temple.

"About time, Mrs. Blackwood," he replied, stroking my back. "About damn time."

Source:

Chapter 193: Chapter 193 Secrets Across the Sea

Serena's POV

I wiped my face with a cool towel when Maya's video call lit up my screen. Perfect timing.

"Girl, where have you been hiding? You've only sent those quick updates on WeChat," I teased as her beaming face appeared.

"How's everything going with Mr. Quinn?" I couldn't help asking, curiosity getting the better of me. Maya and Ethan had been spending an awful lot of time together in London.

Maya's smile grew impossibly wider as she flipped the camera around without warning. There sat Ethan Quinn in all his glory—impeccably dressed in a tailored suit, focused entirely on cutting a steak with surgical precision.

"Wow, candlelit dinner already? You two move fast," I whistled, watching the soft glow of flames dancing between them.

Before Maya could respond, I witnessed something that made my eyebrows shoot up. Ethan slid his plate across the table toward her, a gentlemanly smile warming his usually serious face.

"Miss Carter, your steak is ready," his deep voice carried through the speakers.

Maya flipped the camera back to her face, grinning so wide I could barely see her eyes. "Gotta go! This steak isn't going to eat itself!"

"Wait—" I started, but she'd already hung up.

"Who was that?" Ryan called from the other room, his voice still carrying that satisfied edge from our bath.

"Just Maya," I replied, running a comb through my damp hair. "She's having dinner with Ethan Quinn."

"Quinn?" Ryan appeared in the doorway, a towel hanging dangerously low on his hips. "Interesting development."

If he only knew how interesting it really was.

Author's POV

Lucian's assistant had finally tracked down the two witnesses Ryan had provided, compiling their testimonies into a comprehensive report.

"Mr. West, here are the statements from both individuals," his assistant said, placing a folder on Lucian's mahogany desk. "I've cross-referenced them, and they're remarkably consistent."

"They should be reliable then," Lucian responded absently, his attention already focused on the documents.

He studied the papers with laser precision, noting the witnesses' employment histories which confirmed their involvement in the suburban development project from years ago. Their testimonies clearly implicated Ryan's parents in the scandal—almost too clearly.

The more Lucian read, the more his suspicions grew. These accounts contradicted several key details from his previous investigation. And the remarkable consistency between the two testimonies raised red flags—suggesting Ryan might have coached them thoroughly.

"Have there been any unusual deposits in their bank accounts?" Lucian asked, looking up from the papers.

His assistant shook his head. "I've checked, sir. Nothing suspicious."

Lucian's fingers drummed against the desk as he considered his next move. "Put someone on them. Monitor their activities for the next few days and report back. Something doesn't feel right."

"Of course, Mr. West."

The assistant remained standing, his posture revealing there was more to discuss.

"Is there something else?" Lucian raised an eyebrow.

"Regarding Ivy Hart, sir. HR has processed her termination as instructed, but..." the assistant hesitated.

"Speak plainly," Lucian commanded, irritation creeping into his voice.

"She's unreachable. Her belongings are still at her workstation, and the termination paperwork remains unsigned."

Lucian's expression hardened. "Why are you bothering me with such trivial matters? Execute standard protocols for immediate termination. Clear out her desk and make a public statement that she no longer represents Celestial Gems."

"Understood, sir."

After his assistant left, Lucian returned to the witness statements, a nagging feeling of inconsistency still troubling him. Meanwhile, HR packed Ivy's belongings into a cardboard box and issued an official statement severing all ties between Celestial Gems and Ivy Hart.

Ivy's face contorted with rage as she scrolled through the scathing comments online. The announcement of her termination had only intensified the public backlash against her.

"Sophie, they've destroyed me!" she wailed to her sister, pacing anxiously around the living room of Sophie's luxury apartment. "Not only did I fail to clear my name, but now my career is completely ruined!"

"What am I supposed to do now?" Ivy collapsed onto the sofa, genuine fear in her eyes. "People have already figured out roughly where I live. I'm terrified to leave the apartment—what if some unstable fan decides to confront me?"

Sophie's patience was wearing thin. Her younger sister's constant whining and complete lack of strategic thinking had always frustrated her.

"Celestial Gems wouldn't have cut ties so abruptly without Serena pulling strings behind the scenes," Sophie said coldly, carefully planting seeds of resentment. "Are you really content to let her continue stepping on you like this?"

Sophie gave a contemptuous laugh. "I've realized that New York has no place for women like us anymore. And it's all because of Serena Quinn."

"Without her interference, you'd still be the celebrated design prodigy," she continued, watching Ivy's expression darken. "She stole your spotlight, your opportunity to work with Lucian West, everything. The Jewelry Season showcase should have been your triumph."

Each calculated word stoked the flames of Ivy's hatred. Her previous admiration for her own talent transformed into bitter resentment.

"That bitch!" Ivy spat, her hands clenching into fists. "If it weren't for her, I'd be the one making headlines with Celestial Gems right now!"

"I swear I'll make her pay for this!"

"What good are empty threats?" Sophie taunted. "She's pregnant and still untouchable. You're powerless against her."

Ivy's face flushed with anger. "Just watch me, Sophie. I'll make sure she's humiliated at the Jewelry Season showcase. I'll destroy everything she's worked for."

Source:

Chapter 194: Chapter 194 Fatal Accident

Author's POV

Kane Blackwood paced his office like a caged animal, his patience wearing dangerously thin. Days had passed without Lucian making any move against Ryan, despite the carefully planted witnesses.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded of his subordinate. "Has West even met with our people?"

"His assistant interviewed them, sir, but West himself hasn't made direct contact."

Kane cursed under his breath. "So he didn't meet them personally?"

"No, sir."

Kane's jaw tightened as he considered the implications. His carefully orchestrated plan was failing to gain traction. West was too cautious, too methodical.

"Has West been in contact with Ryan? Or with Serena?" Kane asked, his voice sharp with suspicion.

The subordinate shook his head. "We've been monitoring all communications as instructed. There's been no contact. Celestial Gems seems fully focused on their Jewelry Season preparations and their expansion into the domestic market."

Rather than reassuring Kane, this information only intensified his agitation. With a sudden violent movement, he hurled his crystal tumbler against the wall, shattering it spectacularly.

His subordinate flinched, wisely falling silent.

Kane's breathing was heavy, his eyes wild with an increasingly dangerous obsession.

"We can't wait any longer," he declared, his voice eerily calm despite the fury radiating from him. "Arrange an 'accident' for Ryan—a car crash. If it kills him, perfect. If not, make sure everyone believes West orchestrated it."

A malevolent smile spread across Kane's face as he imagined the chaos that would ensue—the destruction of the tentative alliance between Ryan Blackwood and Lucian West, the satisfaction of eliminating an obstacle to his plans.

"Yes, sir," the subordinate replied quickly, turning to carry out these disturbing instructions.

Serena's POV

The London collaboration had wrapped up smoothly, and Maya returned to the studio bearing gifts for everyone on the design team. She certainly hadn't forgotten Serena, proudly showing off the designer bag she'd purchased while excitedly recounting her time with Ethan Quinn.

"How can I put this?" Maya gushed, her cheeks flushing a delicate pink. "That man is absolutely everything I could want."

I watched her animated expressions with amusement as she continued.

"We had private dinners together, and he even took me sightseeing along these gorgeous coastal drives. I think I'm falling for him, Serena!"

"Seriously?" I raised an eyebrow, genuinely curious. "Did either of you actually confess your feelings? Or did he make any concrete moves?"

Maya scoffed dramatically, rolling her eyes. "God, you're so conventional! Does everything need to be spelled out? It's about chemistry, the energy between us. Can't you feel these things intuitively?"

I couldn't help but smirk. "Aren't we a bit old for playing those high school games of 'does he like me'?"

Maya took a deep breath, narrowing her eyes at me. "Are you trying to support me or just rain on my parade here?"

"I'm trying to help you see clearly," I explained, my tone softening. "Ethan is naturally charming and considerate with everyone. I just want to make sure you're not misreading basic courtesy as romantic interest."

I watched as doubt flickered across Maya's face.

"Wait... you don't think he's like that with all his business partners, do you?" Her confident expression faltered. "Oh God, what if he's some kind of player? Or worse—what if he's just being polite and I'm reading way too much into everything?"

I shook my head quickly. "No, that's not what I meant. Ethan isn't that type at all. I'm just saying, you only spent a few days together on this collaboration."

I leaned forward, meeting her eyes directly. "Are you absolutely certain about your feelings for him after such a brief encounter?"

Maya lifted her chin, determination replacing her momentary doubt. "Completely certain! Even if he turns out to be a heartbreaker, I want to take that chance. So what if I'm older than him? The man is gorgeous, successful, and we have incredible chemistry. I have nothing to lose!"

The atmosphere in Dreamland Studio was electric with excitement after Maya distributed her gifts. Everyone seemed energized, diving back into their work with renewed enthusiasm. Maya announced her bold intentions before returning to her workstation, declaring she would visit Ethan in London after the Jewelry Season showcase concluded.

As I watched my friend disappear down the hallway, I made a mental note to help nudge things along between her and Ethan when the opportunity arose. Ethan was a good man with a solid character and impressive family background. If things worked out, Maya might finally find the partner she deserved.

While I was still plotting potential matchmaking strategies, my phone rang. Ryan's name flashed across the screen.

"Finished for the day?" his deep voice came through the line. "I thought I'd pick you up."

"That sounds perfect," I replied, feeling a smile spread across my face. "The Jewelry Season preparations are nearly complete, and with Maya back, I can finally breathe a little easier this week."

"I'll be there soon," he promised before hanging up.

After ending the call, I headed to the studio's private lounge to change. The dress Maya had brought me—the latest from Dior's collection—was exactly my style: elegant yet comfortable, with clean lines that flattered my growing baby bump without sacrificing sophistication.

I studied my reflection in the full-length mirror, genuinely pleased with what I saw. Since today's workday was ending early, I planned to suggest that Ryan and I try the new restaurant that had just opened nearby. I'd heard their Mediterranean-inspired menu was exceptional—exactly what my pregnancy cravings had been demanding lately.

Source:

Chapter 195: Chapter 195 Streetside Ambush

Ryan's POV

I sat in the car with my eyes half-closed, pretending to rest while my mind worked through the day's events. Business had been relatively smooth lately—Kane and Lucian West hadn't caused any significant problems for Blackwood Group.

But company matters weren't my priority right now. My thoughts kept circling back to Serena and her health.

"Drive faster," I instructed my driver quietly. He nodded and pressed the accelerator.

Traffic was flowing well before rush hour, everything proceeding normally until we reached an intersection. Without warning, a car came barreling toward us.

My driver swerved immediately, trying to avoid collision. The other vehicle unexpectedly accelerated, prompting a curse from my driver. I opened my eyes fully, sensing trouble.

CRASH!

Our car shuddered violently before stalling. The seatbelt held me firmly in place, preventing any serious injury.

"Are you alright, Mr. Blackwood?" Simon asked anxiously, turning around.

"I'm fine," I replied, my voice steady despite the situation. "Go check what happened."

Simon nodded and stepped out of the car. Our vehicle had sustained minimal damage, but the other car hadn't fared as well. Its driver was bleeding from the head, and the windshield had shattered, leaving cuts along his arms.

From inside the car, I watched Simon's body language shift as he assessed the scene. His posture stiffened—he'd noticed something suspicious. Someone in the gathering crowd had already called the police.

I observed as Simon confronted the other driver, his tone sharp with accusation.

"What's your name? Who sent you?"

The man clutched his bleeding head, looking pathetic. "What are you talking about? It was an accident! Your car is expensive—I can't afford to pay for damages."

"An accident? What exactly malfunctioned with your vehicle?"

The driver lowered his head, refusing to answer.

Simon stepped forward aggressively, grabbing the man's collar. "Tell me who sent you! If I have to investigate this myself, things will get much worse for you."

Fear flickered across the man's face, his lips turning pale. "L-let go of me! The police will be here soon. You can't assault someone in public—I'm injured!"

"If you don't talk now, you'll pay every penny in damages when the police arrive. I'll get a medical examination, and you'll be financially ruined."

That threat finally broke him. "Fine, fine! It was Lucian West who paid me to do this!"

"This has nothing to do with me personally. I just took the money to do a job. Please, I have a family to support."

Simon released him as police sirens grew louder. He handled the situation efficiently, explaining what happened and leaving his contact information.

When Simon returned to the car, I asked directly, "Did you get answers?"

"Yes, Mr. Blackwood. It was Mr. West who sent him."

My eyes narrowed as I considered this information. Would Lucian really be so impulsive as to come after me directly? And if he wanted to stage an "accident," why was the execution so amateurish? I emerged completely unharmed—hardly the outcome he would have wanted.

As we approached Dreamland Studio, the questions still troubled me.

"Keep an eye on that driver," I instructed Simon. "Find out who really hired him. If it was Lucian, there should be evidence of communication."

"Of course, sir."

I glanced at the damaged car one more time. "You all can head back now. Don't mention today's incident to Serena."

Simon hesitated visibly. "Mr. Blackwood, perhaps I should stay. If something else happens—"

I cut him off with a slight shake of my head. "Lucian isn't that stupid. Go."

After Simon left, I entered Dreamland Studio, where the receptionist immediately stood to greet me.

"Mr. Blackwood! Ms. Quinn is in her office. Would you like me to show you the way?"

"No need," I replied, heading directly to Serena's office.

When I opened the door, I saw her in that beautiful new dress, and couldn't help smiling. The Dior piece accentuated her pregnancy glow perfectly.

"What took you so long? I was about to fall asleep waiting," Serena said, lazily reclined on the couch. She looked tired—overworked, as I'd suspected. Her tendency to push herself too hard during pregnancy worried me constantly.

"Had some business to handle on the way," I answered smoothly. "You look beautiful today. Any special occasion?"

Her face lit up with a radiant smile that still took my breath away. "Of course! I'm planning a candlelight dinner with you."

"Maya was telling me about her romantic dinners and coastal drives in London with Ethan. I thought we could have our own special evening," she continued, taking my arm as we walked toward the exit.

I nodded, agreeing without hesitation. "Sounds perfect."

Once outside, Serena looked around, confusion crossing her face. "Where's your car?"

I thought fast. "Someone from the company needed it. I sent them back already. We can take yours—I'll drive."

She blinked those expressive eyes at me. "That works."

She began searching through her bag for her keys, eventually locating them and placing them in my palm.

"Mr. Blackwood, you're on chauffeur duty tonight," she teased.

I scanned the parking area, noticing immediately that her vehicle wasn't there. "Your car doesn't seem to be here."

Serena smacked her forehead lightly. "Oh! I completely forgot—Celeste took it to meet a client. She probably won't be back for a while."

"Then let's skip driving altogether," I suggested quickly, relief washing over me at the thought of keeping her safely away from cars for now.

Serena's brows furrowed as she studied my face intently. Something in my expression must have given me away.

"Ryan, are you hiding something from me?"

Damn. She always could read me too well.

Source:

Chapter 196: Chapter 196 Eyes in the Crowd

Serena's POV

Something was off about Ryan's face. I hadn't rejected his suggestion to walk, but now I was noticing his strange expression.

"Ryan, are you hiding something?" I pressed again, searching his eyes.

He shook his head, not willing to tell the truth. "Nothing at all. That restaurant you like is nearby, right? Walking instead of driving sounds better anyway, don't you think?"

Ryan took my hand firmly in his, offering this new excuse so smoothly I almost believed him. Almost.

"Really? Nothing you're keeping from me?" I raised an eyebrow, unconvinced.

"Of course not," he nodded, squeezing my hand. "Let's go eat."

After dinner, Ryan's assistant arrived with a car to drive us home. Only when we reached the Blackwood mansion did I overhear the assistant's hushed report.

"The driver has been hospitalized. We haven't detected any suspicious contacts—only family members at his bedside."

"Keep watching him," Ryan instructed firmly.

"Yes, sir."

Later, after taking a shower, I excitedly brought up the upcoming jewelry season while towel-drying my hair.

"This year's jewelry season is going to be quite the spectacle! Every major brand is pulling out all the stops to make a splash."

Ryan took a sip of water, listening with genuine interest. "I'll accompany you the day after tomorrow."

My eyes lit up instantly. "You have time? That would be perfect!"

"Have you been feeling alright these past few days?" he asked, changing the subject. "Let's schedule a prenatal checkup tomorrow, just to be safe."

I nodded in agreement. "Good idea. I'll ask Maya to come with me—you can handle your work matters first."

"It wouldn't look good if you missed two consecutive days at the office," I added thoughtfully.

"Alright," Ryan nodded. "I'll arrange a car to take you both. Be careful."

After today's mysterious incident—whatever it was—I could tell Ryan was more concerned than ever about my safety. Having his trusted people drive us would ease his mind.

The next morning, Maya rearranged her schedule to accompany me to the hospital. While waiting for results, she started fretting about her plans to visit Ethan in London.

"If I'm too forward, will I scare Ethan away? But if I play it cool, what if he keeps pretending not to notice my feelings?" She bit her lip nervously. "You know him better than anyone. What should I do?"

I considered her question, trying not to laugh at how adorably anxious she looked. "Maya, honestly, stop overthinking! Just be yourself."

"The real Maya is who people fall in love with anyway," I added with a smile.

Maya's face turned bright red as she covered it with her hands, giggling. "Stop teasing me!"

"Look at you! You're not even together yet and you're already this lovesick!" I poked her arm playfully.

Her expression suddenly crumpled as she let out a dramatic sigh worthy of a soap opera. "Serena, what if he rejects me? I'll die of embarrassment right there in London!"

"You'll dramatically collapse into the Thames?" I suggested, making her snort with laughter.

Turning serious, I squeezed her hand. "Love isn't something you can force, Maya. Even if he says no—which I doubt—at least you tried. No regrets that way."

"Besides," I added with a wink, "if Ethan doesn't appreciate you, there's a line of men who would gladly take his place."

Maya's smile returned as she nodded. "Fine, I'll take your advice. But if this fails, you're buying me ice cream for a month."

"Deal," I laughed.

After chatting a while longer, we finally received my test results. The doctor reviewed everything, nodding approvingly.

"Everything looks perfectly normal. Just remember to rest frequently and avoid stress."

"Thank you, doctor," I replied with relief.

On the day of the jewelry season opening, the event organizers had designated display areas for each major brand. Dreamland's team had arrived early to set up our exhibition, so everything was perfectly arranged by the time Ryan and I arrived.

Ryan surveyed our jewelry display, his gaze lingering on the centerpiece. "You designed this yourself, didn't you? I thought we agreed you wouldn't overwork yourself."

Hearing the gentle scolding in his tone, I playfully tugged at his arm. "I needed something to do while 'resting' at home! This piece was already in progress when I started my bed rest—hardly any effort at all."

"Besides," I added pointedly, "you saw yesterday's checkup results yourself. The doctor said everything's fine. Don't you trust medical professionals?"

With those few words, I effectively silenced his protest. Ryan sighed in resignation.

"After the opening ceremony, each brand's representative needs to give a speech," I explained, scanning the crowd. "Maya was supposed to do it, but she's handling a client issue and hasn't arrived yet."

I frowned slightly. "If she doesn't make it in time, I'll have to go up myself."

Ryan nodded, his hand finding the small of my back. "Don't worry about it."

I couldn't help laughing. "I'm not nervous! I just wanted to give Maya a chance to shine. This year's jewelry season is getting so much attention."

As we continued our playful banter, neither of us noticed the pair of eyes fixed intently on us from across the room.

Source:

CEO's Regret After I Divorced #Chapter 197 The Public Fall - Read CEO's Regret After I Divorced Chapter 197 The Public Fall Online - All Page - Nov Love

Chapter 197: Chapter 197 The Public Fall

Ivy's POV

I'd dressed down on purpose today. Plain clothes, hair loose and messy, lurking in this corner with my champagne. Nothing flashy that would draw attention.

Sophie had managed to score me an invitation to the jewelry season opening. So simple to slip in unnoticed - these security guards are absolute jokes.

From my hidden spot, I watched Serena leaning against Ryan, laughing and touching his arm with that fake innocent smile of hers. My fingers tightened around the champagne glass, nearly cracking it. The bitterness rose in my throat, burning worse than cheap alcohol.

Why should my reputation lie in tatters while she gets everything? The career, the man, the adoration. It's fucking unfair.

I took another swig of champagne, letting the bubbles burn down my throat. The way he looks at her now... it's disgusting. Does nobody remember what she did? How she stole everything from me?

My head pounded with a single thought: I'll make her pay. Today. In front of everyone who matters in the industry.

I don't care what it costs me anymore. By the time this event ends, I'll make sure precious little Serena Quinn Blackwood is completely humiliated. On the biggest day of her career.

I smiled into my champagne glass. Let her enjoy these last few moments of happiness. She has no idea what's coming.

Serena's POV

About fifteen minutes later, the jewelry season host finally steps onto the stage, ready to kick things off.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this year's jewelry season. New York's brands have truly outdone themselves this year," the host announces with rehearsed enthusiasm. "Please welcome our first speaker—"

Applause erupts as Lucian West takes the stage first.

Celestial Gems has always been an overseas powerhouse, and now they're fully entering the domestic market. The organizers clearly want to stay on their good side, giving him the prime opening slot.

Lucian keeps his speech mercifully brief, expressing his excitement about entering the local market while emphasizing friendly competition. The audience claps appreciatively—no one dares offend Celestial Gems anyway.

I notice Ryan watching Lucian with intense focus, something unreadable flickering in his eyes. Their gazes never meet before Lucian steps down from the podium.

Next up is Dreamland Jewelry. We've climbed to the top ranks in New York's jewelry scene, and my heart swells with pride thinking about how far we've come.

With Maya still nowhere in sight, I have no choice but to take the stage myself. I walk up confidently, accepting the microphone with my most professional smile.

"Thank you to the organizers for giving Dreamland Jewelry this precious opportunity," I begin, my voice clear and steady. "We look forward to working together with everyone to reach new heights in this industry."

Behind me, the LED screen displays our most celebrated pieces and my design awards from various competitions. Everything's going smoothly until—

The screen suddenly goes black. When it flickers back to life, entirely new content appears.

[SERENA QUINN: HOMEWRECKER WHO SCHEMED HER WAY INTO BLACKWOOD POWER!!!]

The words blare in bold red letters, each character looking like it's been dipped in blood. My heart stops.

Gasps and murmurs erupt from the audience. I spin around, unable to believe what I'm seeing.

Now the screen's showing photos of Sophie with Ryan—romantic snapshots from their past, overlaid with sentimental captions. My stomach drops to my feet as the blood drains from my face.

The whispers grow louder below me.

"Homewrecker? Is that true?"

"Well, the Blackwood empire is quite the prize, but they seem happy together now. Someone's clearly trying to cause trouble."

"Who would dare pull something like this at such a prestigious event?"

"Ryan Blackwood is right there! This is about to get interesting..."

Ryan's expression turns thunderous. I see him pushing through the crowd toward the stage.

Before he can reach me, a shrill voice cuts through the murmurs. "YOU BITCH!"

Something wet and cold hits me square in the chest. Red wine splashes across my champagne-colored dress—the custom gown I spent weeks designing myself.

Ivy Hart—stands near the stage, her face twisted with hatred.

"Homewrecker! You destroyed my sister's relationship with Ryan! They would be happily married if it weren't for you!"

Her voice rises to a shriek. "Everyone at Dreamland is just as corrupt as you are! None of you deserve to be at this event!"

She points at me, her finger shaking with rage. "Serena Quinn, get out! You're a fraud of a designer!"

My body feels frozen in place, the wine seeping cold through my dress as humiliation burns hot on my skin. The contrast makes me dizzy. Ryan finally reaches me, his arm steady around my waist as my knees threaten to buckle.

"Someone remove this lunatic!" Ryan roars, his voice reverberating through the now-silent room.

Security rushes in, dragging the still-screaming Ivy toward the exit.

She laughs maniacally, clearly delighted by the chaos she's created. "You'll pay for this, Serena! You'll get what's coming to you!"

Her voice echoes through the hall. "I'll haunt you to my dying breath! You don't deserve any of this! Go to hell where you belong!"

Her curses fade as they pull her farther away, but the damage is done. I feel hundreds of eyes burning into me, judging, questioning, pitying. My carefully constructed world of respectability crumbles around me in real time.

Ryan lifts me into his arms without hesitation, carrying me away from the spectacle as if I weigh nothing. My mind is racing too fast to protest.

The event organizer hurries over, apologizing profusely, but Ryan silences him with a glacial stare.

"Not a word of this leaves this room," he commands, his voice deadly quiet. "If I see a single headline or social media post about what happened here, I will hold you personally responsible."

His threat hangs in the air, crystal clear to everyone present. The crowd parts like the Red Sea as Ryan carries me out, my face buried against his chest.

I should feel grateful for his protection. Instead, a terrible thought forms in my mind—what if some tiny part of him believes what that screen said? What if everyone here thinks I'm exactly what Ivy called me—a scheming, opportunistic fraud?

Source:

Chapter 198: Chapter 198 After the Ruin

Author's POV

Lucian watched Ryan's retreating figure with narrowed eyes, a calculating expression settling across his face. Sophie Hart's little sister had caused more disruption than he'd anticipated - and for what? A moment of petty revenge that ultimately accomplished nothing.

These Hart sisters truly despised Serena with a passion that bordered on obsession. To create such a scene at the industry's most prestigious event, risking their own reputations in the process...

"Amateurs," Lucian murmured to himself, taking a measured sip of his champagne. Whatever business relationship he might have entertained with Sophie was now firmly off the table. He had no use for partners who let emotion overrule strategy.

The jewelry season opening had descended into chaos. The organizers, attempting to regain control, announced the cancellation of all remaining speeches. This announcement triggered immediate protests from other jewelry houses who'd been eagerly awaiting their moment in the spotlight.

"This is completely unprofessional!" complained the representative from Diamond Elite. "Why should all of us suffer because of one person's drama?"

"My flight was delayed three hours to make it here for this speech," fumed another designer. "Are you telling me I traveled across the country for nothing?"

The organizer looked ready to collapse under the pressure, dabbing sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. "Please, everyone, we need to maintain order. We'll reschedule all presentations for tomorrow's session."

Whispers continued spreading through the crowd like wildfire.

"Did you see those photos? They looked pretty intimate."

"That Hart girl called Serena a homewrecker! Do you think there's any truth to it?"

"Ryan Blackwood looked ready to murder someone."

"I always thought there was something too perfect about Serena Quinn's rise to success..."

Outside the venue, Maya finally arrived, breathlessly running toward the entrance just as Ryan emerged carrying Serena. Her designer heels clacked against the pavement as she hurried over, her face creased with concern.

"Serena! Ryan! What on earth happened?" Maya looked horrified at the wine stain spreading across Serena's beautiful champagne-colored gown. "Oh my god, your dress!"

Serena waved her hand dismissively, trying to appear calm despite the humiliation burning in her chest. "Dreamland needs you in there. I'm fine."

"You're fine? There's wine all over you! What happened?" Maya's voice pitched higher with each question. "Did you fall? Is the baby okay?"

"The baby? Is it coming?" Maya gasped, completely misreading the situation.

Both Ryan and Serena stared at her in exasperation.

"No," Ryan said firmly, shifting Serena in his arms. "She's not in labor. There was an... incident inside. Ivy Hart made a scene and attacked Serena."

Maya's eyes widened in shock. "That little witch! What did she do?"

"Ms. Carter," Ryan cut in, his tone brooking no argument, "Serena has had enough excitement for today. She needs rest. Can you handle the rest of the jewelry season opening?"

Maya straightened her spine, instantly switching to professional mode. "Of course. But Serena, are you really okay?"

"I'll be fine," Serena nodded weakly. "Just some red wine on my dress and wounded pride. Please take care of everything here."

"Consider it done." Maya squeezed Serena's hand reassuringly. "Rest up and don't worry about anything here."

Serena managed a grateful smile as Ryan carried her to their waiting car. Once inside, Ryan instructed the driver sharply, "To the hospital."

"No," Serena countered immediately. "I'm not going to the hospital. I just need to go home and change my clothes."

"Serena, you're pregnant. You were just assaulted. You need to be checked—"

"It was just wine, Ryan," Serena interrupted. "I'm not that fragile. I stayed well back from the edge of the stage because I was worried about falling. The wine only hit my dress."

Ryan's face remained tense with concern. "Are you absolutely certain you're not hurt?"

The driver glanced nervously in the rearview mirror, engine running but uncertain of their destination.

"I'm not physically hurt," Serena said, her voice cooling noticeably. "Though I must say, I'm surprised by how many cozy photos you and Sophie seem to have together. Quite the collection."

Ryan's expression shifted from concern to alarm. "Those pictures were from years ago. I can explain—"

"No need," Serena cut him off, turning toward the window. "Driver, take us to the Blackwood residence, please."

"Yes, Ms.Quinn," the driver replied, finally setting off with a clear direction.

Ryan's jaw clenched as he pulled out his phone. "I'm having security remove both Hart sisters from New York immediately. They won't get another opportunity to come near you again."

Serena gave a dry, humorless laugh. "Do whatever you want. I don't want to hear about it."

She turned her face away, staring out the window at the passing city lights. What should have been her triumphant moment, representing Dreamland Jewelry at the season's most prestigious event, had been utterly ruined. The humiliation still burned fresh, the gasps and whispers of the audience replaying in her mind.

Ryan sighed heavily, reaching for her hand. She didn't pull away, but her fingers remained limp in his grasp.

"Serena, I had no idea this would happen. I'm sorry."

Her expression softened slightly at his genuine tone. As angry as she was about the situation, she knew Ryan hadn't orchestrated this disaster.

"It's not your fault," she admitted reluctantly. "The Hart sisters have apparently made destroying me their life's mission."

She shifted in her seat, grimacing at the sticky feeling of the drying wine on her dress. "But this isn't over. They can't get away with this."

Ryan nodded immediately, squeezing her hand. "Absolutely. Whatever you want to do, I'll support you completely."

Serena was quiet for a moment, considering. When she spoke, her voice was eerily calm.

"I want to meet with Sophie."

Ryan's head snapped toward her, brows knitting together. "What? Why would you want to see her?"

"She was important enough to occupy your heart for years," Serena said, her eyes piercing into his. "Don't you want to know who she really is? The woman behind all this manipulation?"

Source:

Chapter 199: Chapter 199 Sisters in Sin

Sophie's POV

"YOU ABSOLUTE IDIOT!" I screamed, watching my pathetic excuse for a sister writhing on the floor in pain. Her arm hung at an awkward angle, clearly dislocated. Served her right. "What the hell did you do at the jewelry season opening?"

I'd been lounging in my bedroom, enjoying a rare moment of peace when all hell broke loose in our rented apartment. Now Ivy was sprawled on the floor like trash while Blackwood's security goons ransacked our place.

"Sophie, help me!" Ivy crawled toward me like some desperate animal, her makeup smeared across her face.

I jumped back instantly. "Don't you DARE touch me!" The last thing I needed was her grabbing onto my designer skirt with those grubby hands.

The security team's leader, a stone-faced man in a black suit, barely spared me a glance. "Mr. Blackwood has instructed us to escort both of you out of New York. Immediately."

"What?" I forced my most innocent expression. "There must be some mistake. Why would Ryan want ME to leave? What does this have to do with me?"

The security team ignored my performance, bulldozing into our bedrooms and throwing our belongings into suitcases with zero regard for organization. My designer clothes were being manhandled like cheap rags!

"Wait! Those are Chanel!" I protested as a hulking guard stuffed my blouses into a bag.

"Take your things and leave New York," the leader repeated, dropping the hastily packed suitcases at our feet. "Mr. Blackwood was very clear."

Ivy started trembling, her eyes burning with hatred. "Who the fuck does he think he is? Does he own New York now? He's already thrown me out once—why again?"

I stepped away from my sister, seeing my chance for a clean break from this disaster. "Look," I said sweetly to the security leader, "I have absolutely no idea what my sister has done. Ryan already asked me to leave the company, but surely he wouldn't be so cruel as to banish me from the entire city?"

Ivy's head snapped toward me, her mouth hanging open. "Sophie, what the hell? You HELPED me get into that jewelry event! You gave me your invitation!"

I narrowed my eyes, my voice ice-cold. "Don't drag me into your mess. I haven't left this apartment in days. Whatever stupid stunt you pulled, you did it on your own."

"Looking at your state," I added with a disgusted glance at her disheveled appearance, "you clearly fucked up spectacularly. If Ryan wants you gone, then LEAVE. As of now, I don't have a sister anymore."

The shock on Ivy's face quickly morphed into pure hatred. With a shriek, she lunged at me. "You backstabbing BITCH!"

Ivy screamed, yanking a fistful of my hair. "You never deserved to be my sister!"

I slapped her across the face, hard enough to leave a red mark. "And you never deserved ANYTHING I gave you! Ungrateful little parasite!"

Suddenly, someone knocked on a nearby table. We both froze mid-fight, looking up to see Serena standing there with a small, satisfied smile.

"Don't stop on my account, ladies. This is quite the show."

Ivy immediately broke free from my grip and lunged toward Serena, her face contorted with rage. "You home-wrecking BITCH! You dare show up here?"

Before she could reach Serena, one of the guards intercepted her. With a simple twist and push, he dislocated Ivy's arm. Her scream was piercing.

I seized the opportunity to fix my appearance, smoothing down my blouse and attempting to tame my hair. Even in this humiliating situation, I refused to look defeated in front of Serena Quinn.

"What do you want?" I spat. "If you think you can force me out of New York, you're mistaken. Unless Ryan tells me to my face, I'm not going anywhere. You mean NOTHING to me."

Serena ignored my question completely, calmly taking a seat as if she owned the place. Her eyes fixed on Ivy.

"I have a simple question, Ivy. Was today's little stunt entirely your idea? Or did someone else help you plan it?"

Ivy clutched her injured arm, her face pale with pain but her eyes still burning with hatred.

"What's the point of asking? You've won, haven't you? You've bewitched Ryan and stolen him from us. Are you here to gloat over your victory?"

Serena's smile disappeared, replaced by an icy coldness that even made me shiver.

"Ivy Hart, have you already forgotten everything you've done? When my life was in danger, you answered my desperate call for help, and if I hadn't been lucky, I'd be nothing but a ghost now."

She turned to face me. "And you've been letting your sister use your name to seduce Ryan. Did you know about that, Sophie?"

My blood ran cold. I grabbed Ivy by her collar with such force that she winced in pain. "You did WHAT? You tried to sleep with Ryan using MY name?"

Ivy spat in my face, literally spat. "Oh, like you're so innocent? When Ryan failed to become CEO years ago, you faked your own death and ran off to marry some rich old man overseas! Have you forgotten THAT, dear sister?"

I felt my face drain of color. "Shut your filthy mouth! That's not true!"

"Don't pretend with me!" Ivy screamed. "I'm your sister! I know EXACTLY who you are!"

Serena let out a soft laugh. "Faking your death? Marrying a rich old man? This is fascinating." She nodded to one of her guards, who moved to separate us. "Ivy, why don't you elaborate? If you tell me everything, I'll have someone fix that arm for you."

I tried to intimidate Ivy with my fiercest glare. "Don't you dare say another word!"

But Ivy was beyond caring. Her eyes gleamed with malice as she stared back at me.

"You abandoned me, Sophie. You threw me under the bus. So why should I protect your secrets anymore?"

She turned to Serena with a twisted smile that promised nothing but destruction—for both of us.

"You want the truth about Sophie Hart? Let me tell you EVERYTHING..."

Source:

Chapter 200: Chapter 200 The End of Sophie Hart

Serena's POV

I watched Ryan's face carefully as Sophie begged. This was my own private test - I needed to see how he'd react when his precious first love turned those tear-filled eyes on him. Would he waver? Would that old flame reignite?

But Ryan stood firm, his expression hard as granite while Ivy spilled every dirty secret about her sister. Each revelation painted Sophie in increasingly darker shades - how she'd used her looks to deliberately seduce Ryan years ago, how her supposed "tragic death" was nothing but an elaborate scheme to marry some wealthy old man overseas, how her grieving widow act was just another performance.

"Sophie even partnered with Kane to cause trouble for you!" Ivy shouted, her dislocated arm seemingly forgotten in her frenzy to destroy her sister. "She wanted to bring down the entire Blackwood Group! She's done far worse things than I ever did!"

I maintained my composure throughout this sisterly bloodbath, keeping my expression neutral. None of this was particularly shocking - I'd seen through Sophie's act from the beginning. The woman was transparent as glass to anyone with half a brain.

Every few seconds, Sophie would try to interrupt, desperately lunging at her sister until one of the security guards finally gagged her. All she could manage now were muffled whimpers while her perfectly applied makeup streaked down her face.

As Ivy's confessions wound down, I glanced at Sophie. Her face had transformed into something barely human - a mixture of rage, humiliation, and pure hatred. I almost felt sorry for her. Almost.

"You can release her now," I said coolly to the guard.

The moment she was free, Sophie delivered a ringing slap across Ivy's face that echoed through the apartment.

"You fucking bitch! Who told you to spread these lies?" she shrieked.

Ivy, nursing her swelling cheek, retaliated with an equally vicious slap. "What lies? Everything I said is the absolute truth! You're nothing but a whore who sleeps her way to the top! You don't deserve to be my sister!"

"ENOUGH!" Ryan said.

Sophie's face drained of color, her mouth twitching uncontrollably. I could practically hear her panicked thoughts: How long had he been standing there? How much had he heard?

Ryan ignored Sophie completely, coming straight to me and taking my hand.

"Let's go," he said quietly.

"Okay, let's go," I agreed, standing to leave with him.

Sophie's eyes filled with desperate panic as she realized Ryan was walking away - possibly forever.

"Ryan, please!" she cried out. "Let me explain! Nothing is what you think! Everything Ivy said is a lie - she's always been jealous of me!"

When he kept walking, her voice grew more frantic. "I really was injured back then! I had amnesia! That's why I disappeared for years!"

Ryan's steps faltered slightly, and I felt my heart clench. I watched him carefully, this was the moment of truth. If he still harbored any feelings for Sophie, I would know it now.

"Ryan!" Sophie sobbed theatrically. "Have you forgotten everything we shared? How can you be so cruel? Just look at me, please! You loved me so much once - how can you just throw me away now?"

I turned my face slightly to study Ryan's expression. His eyes had darkened, his jaw tense, and for a moment I couldn't read what he was thinking.

An unexpected surge of insecurity washed over me. I'd orchestrated this entire confrontation as a test. If Ryan showed even the slightest hesitation, the smallest hint that Sophie still held power over him, I would walk away without looking back. I refused to settle for anything less than his whole heart.

After what felt like an eternity, Ryan finally turned to face Sophie. His expression was cold enough to freeze blood.

"From this point forward," he said to the security team, "I never want to see either of these women again."

Then he tightened his grip on my hand, his thumb brushing reassuringly across my skin. "Let's go."

I stood there momentarily stunned before a slow smile spread across my face. He had chosen me - completely and without reservation. In that moment, I realized how badly I'd needed this confirmation, this proof that Ryan's feelings for me weren't compromised by ghosts from his past.

As we walked out together, leaving the screaming, sobbing Hart sisters behind, I felt something tight in my chest finally release. For the first time since our reconciliation, I allowed myself to fully believe in us.

Sophie's POV

I slumped to the floor, my legs giving out beneath me as Ryan walked away hand-in-hand with that bitch. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.

The look in his eyes just now - there was nothing but disgust. Not a single trace of the love we once shared, not even a hint of pity or sympathy. Nothing. As if I were nothing more than dirt beneath his expensive shoes.

My perfectly crafted plan, my triumphant return - all destroyed in minutes. By my own fucking sister, no less! My chest heaved with silent, furious sobs as reality crashed down around me.

Meanwhile, Ivy had already stopped crying, wiping her tears away with surprising composure as she began gathering her valuables.

"What the hell are you doing?" I hissed at her.

She ignored me, methodically packing her designer clothes into a suitcase. The security guards watched her silently, not bothering to interfere. They were giving her space - why weren't they throwing her out immediately? Why was she being treated better than me?

"We have no future in New York anymore," Ivy muttered, more to herself than to me. "Better start planning what comes next."

The head security guy nodded approvingly at her. "You have until tonight to leave New York. If you're still here after that, I'll personally ensure you're removed. Where you end up after that... well, that's not my concern."

Ivy agreed with a blank expression, her face unnaturally calm. As she wheeled her suitcase toward the door, she stopped and gave me the coldest look I'd ever seen from her.

"Sophie, stop dreaming. Your fairytale is over," she spat. "Though I suppose you could always find another rich old man to marry."

With a bitter laugh, she disappeared before I could even respond.

I couldn't process what was happening. This wasn't how things were supposed to go! I was supposed to win Ryan back. I was Sophie Hart - the woman he couldn't forget, the love of his life! How had everything fallen apart so spectacularly? One minute I was inches away from reclaiming my place, and the next...

"I need to find Ryan!" I struggled to my feet, hysteria building in my voice. "I need to explain! This is all a misunderstanding!"

The door slammed shut as I lunged forward. The head security guard's hand connected with my cheek in a sharp, stinging slap that snapped my head sideways.

"Final warning," he growled, his eyes cold as ice. "Pack your things and leave New York today, or you won't be leaving at all."

The threat hung heavy in the air between us. I stared back at him, the reality of my situation finally sinking in. Ryan had sent these men to remove all traces of me from his life. He wasn't coming back. There would be no tearful reconciliation, no chance to explain.

My hand trembled as I touched my stinging cheek. The man who had once whispered that he'd love me forever had just ordered me thrown out like garbage. The empire I'd carefully schemed to claim was forever beyond my reach.

It was over. Everything was over.

Source: