

# CEO's Regret After I Divorced

## - Chapter 91 Joining forces with Kane

*Chapter 91: Chapter 91 Joining forces with Kane*

Sophie's POV

I arrived home with my clothes disheveled and my lipstick smeared. The apartment felt cold and empty—much like my future at Blackwood Enterprises.

Throwing my purse onto the couch, I immediately called my sister. If I remembered correctly, my dear little sister had been entangled with Kane Blackwood before.

Before running to Kane, I needed to understand his methods and style.

Half an hour later, we finally met at my temporary apartment.

This place was arranged by Ryan's assistant, twice the size of my previous accommodations and somewhat acceptable.

It was in an upscale complex where security wouldn't let you in without a resident card—strong security measures specifically requested by Ryan to prevent my "non-existent ex-husband" from finding me.

"Sis, why are you living here?" Ivy asked, pouting her lips. She clearly expected I'd already succeeded in infiltrating Ryan's home.

"Cut the crap," I snapped. "Kane's back in town. Has he contacted you?"

My question made her face turn pale, her voice trembling. "H-he's back? Why?"

I frowned at her reaction. "You're that afraid of him?"

"Of course! Sophie, that man is a monster. If he wants you dead, you won't live to see tomorrow."

I tapped the table impatiently. "Ivy, calm down. Tell me everything about your history with Kane."

She shook her head, her expression resistant. "Sis, why are you suddenly asking about this?"

"Kane's back, and I'm planning to work with him."

Ivy gasped, studying my serious expression and realizing I wasn't joking.

"Sophie, why bother? Weren't you reconciling with Ryan?"

I looked at my naive sister with irritation, waving my hand dismissively.

"It's all Serena's fault. That bitch is carrying Ryan's child, which is why she keeps getting away with humiliating me." My voice hardened. "Now people at the company dare to disrespect me. I absolutely cannot let this slide!"

I clenched my teeth, my features twisting with hatred.

From Ivy, I learned many things about Kane—including how he'd been working in the shadows against Ryan, even making Ivy pretend to be pregnant. The plan had failed spectacularly, forcing Kane to flee overseas.

"Sophie, Kane is insane. If you get involved with him, you'll never be free of him!"

I scoffed, looking at my sister with contempt.

"That's because you're stupid. Kane's power has been almost completely crushed by Ryan. He's barely hanging on. I can use what little influence he has left to get my revenge."

Seeing my determination, Ivy stopped trying to persuade me. She knew my methods were far superior to hers. If I could truly make Kane work for us, our futures would be secured.

"I support you, sis," she finally conceded.

I smiled slightly. "You can contact Kane, right? I need to see him today."

Ivy bit her lip. "Fine."

An hour later, I changed into a fire-red dress, applied dramatic makeup, and got into the car Kane had sent.

The vehicle drove out of the city, stopping at a private villa—Kane's new residence.

It was obvious his mother still maintained her stake in the family business and refused to stand by while her son struggled in the New York.

The moment I entered, I felt his burning gaze. I flashed a dazzling smile and walked toward him confidently.

"I'm here. This collaboration you mentioned—what exactly did you have in mind?" I purred.

Kane smiled, beckoning me closer. "Come here."

I moved nearer, leaning forward to give him a generous view of my cleavage. My figure was fiery hot, and combined with my face, I knew I was irresistible to men.

With one swift motion, Kane pulled me onto his lap. He raised his hand to lift my chin.

"Such a beautiful face," he murmured. "No wonder my nephew was so besotted with you."

I giggled flirtatiously. "You flatter me, Mr. Blackwood. But Ryan and I are in the past. Now that bitch Serena is by his side, I wouldn't demean myself by chasing after him."

Suddenly, his hand tightened, squeezing my face until I whimpered in pain.

"Your mouth is quite bold, isn't it?" he growled.

I trembled but refused to show weakness.

"Mr. Blackwood, you and I are kindred spirits. Give me a chance, and I'll help bring Ryan down from his pedestal, making you the new king of the Blackwood empire."

Kane laughed coldly. "You're that confident?"

Boldly, I wrapped my arms around his neck like vines.

"My confidence comes from you. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. Together, we'll make Ryan suffer a crushing defeat."

My words pleased him. He loosened his grip and stroked my cheek.

"Such a sweet mouth. I didn't misjudge you after all."

I offered him my red lips, moaning softly as things intensified between us.

"Kane," I breathed, my voice dripping with desire. "Take care of me from now on. Make me your woman."

His hands were everywhere, demanding and possessive. I felt myself being pushed back onto the leather couch, his weight pressing down on me. My dress hiked up around my waist as he tore at my underwear.

"You're soaked, honey," Kane's voice was husky and commanding. His fingers explored me roughly, making me gasp. "Thinking about revenge gets you this wet?"

"Yes," I moaned, arching my back. "I want to make them pay."

He chuckled darkly, unzipping his pants. "I'll give you exactly what you need, then."

Without warning, he thrust into me. I cried out—half in pain, half in pleasure—as he set a punishing rhythm.

"You like it rough, don't you?" he grunted against my ear. "Little slut."

The degrading words only aroused me more. I dug my nails into his back, wrapping my legs around him.

"Harder," I demanded. "Make me forget him."

Kane's grip on my throat tightened just enough to make me light-headed. "You're mine now," he growled. "My weapon against Ryan."

When we finished, I lay there breathless, my body marked by his possession. The alliance was sealed—not with signatures on paper, but with something far more primal.

"Tomorrow," he said, fixing his clothes with practiced ease, "we begin dismantling Ryan's world. Starting with that pregnant bitch he seems to care about."

I smiled, still tasting blood from where he'd bitten my lip. "I can't wait."

*Chapter 92: Chapter 92 He cooked for the first time*

Serena's POV

I closed my eyes, focusing on my breathing as I carefully moved through my prenatal yoga routine.

My doctor had recommended gentle exercise to help with the pregnancy discomfort, and yoga had become my daily ritual.

The apartment was quiet except for the soft meditation music playing from my phone.

Just as I completed a modified downward dog, the doorbell rang, interrupting my zen moment. With a sigh, I slowly rolled up my yoga mat and padded to the door.

"Who is it?" I called out, peering through the peephole.

"It's me." Ryan's deep voice came through the door.

My heart skipped a beat. I hadn't expected him today. Glancing down at my fitted yoga pants and loose tank top that hugged my growing baby bump, I hesitated before opening the door.

When I did, Ryan stood there looking impossibly handsome in a casual button-down with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His usually perfect hair was slightly tousled, and he carried several bags that smelled deliciously of food.

"I brought dinner," he announced, lifting the bags as if I might not have noticed them.

I stepped aside. "Come in. I wasn't expecting company."

"I should have called first." His eyes traveled over my yoga attire, lingering on my bump. "You were exercising? Is that safe?"

I resisted rolling my eyes. "It's prenatal yoga, Ryan. Perfectly safe and recommended for pregnant women."

He nodded, seemingly satisfied with my answer as he moved toward the kitchen to unpack the food. I quickly freshened up in the bathroom, splashing water on my face and changing into a more presentable oversized sweater.

When I returned, Ryan had arranged everything on my small dining table - steaming plates of pasta, a colorful salad, and garlic bread.

"This looks wonderful," I said, sliding into a chair across from him. My stomach growled embarrassingly loud, and Ryan's lips quirked into an almost-smile.

"The baby approves, I take it?"

"The baby is always hungry these days," I replied, helping myself to the pasta.

We ate in silence for a few moments before Ryan cleared his throat.

"I fired Sophie today," he said casually, as if commenting on the weather.

I nearly choked on my water. "You did what?"

"She's no longer employed at Blackwood Enterprises." His eyes met mine, gauging my reaction. "Her position has been terminated, effective immediately."

A wave of satisfaction washed over me, though I tried not to let it show. I kept my expression neutral, twirling pasta around my fork.

"I see." I asked, pretending I wasn't absolutely thrilled by this development.

Ryan's eyes narrowed slightly, as if he could see right through my composed facade. "Don't you have anything you want to ask?"

I shrugged, taking another bite. "It's your company. Your decision."

An uncomfortable silence settled between us as we continued eating.

After a few tense moments, he leaned back in his chair, studying me with unsettling intensity. "How are you finding the food?"

I took another thoughtful bite. The pasta was... decent. Not terrible, but definitely not up to the standards I'd grown accustomed to at the Blackwood mansion.

"It's different from Milton's cooking," I answered diplomatically. "The sauce is a bit heavy on the garlic, and the pasta is slightly overcooked, but it's satisfying."

Ryan's expression fell almost imperceptibly, his shoulders tensing. I noticed his knuckles whitening around his fork.

"If it's not to your liking, don't force yourself to eat it," he muttered.

I frowned, confused by his sudden change in mood. "Hey, what's wrong? It's not inedible or anything. Just different."

"Nothing's wrong," he insisted, his tone clipped.

I studied him more carefully now - the slight stiffness in his posture, the way he avoided my eyes, the faintest smudge of what looked like flour on his sleeve that I hadn't noticed before.

"Wait," I said slowly, my eyes widening. "Did you... did you cook this yourself?"

A faint flush crept up his neck—something I'd never seen before on the usually unflappable Ryan Blackwood.

"First attempt," he admitted gruffly, not meeting my eyes. "I followed some recipes I found online."

My heart did a dangerous little flip. Ryan Blackwood, billionaire CEO who probably hadn't boiled water in his entire life, had cooked for me—for us. For our baby.

"It's actually really good for a first try," I said softly, taking another deliberate bite to prove my point. "I'm impressed."

His eyes snapped to mine, searching for any sign of pity or mockery. Finding none, his posture relaxed slightly.

"I wanted to make something healthy for you and the baby," he explained, his voice low. "The nutritionist said salmon is good for brain development."

The thought he'd put into it—researching nutrition, following recipes, bringing it all here himself—made my throat tighten with emotion I wasn't ready to acknowledge.

I forced myself to focus on my plate, afraid he might see too much in my expression.

Then we finished dinner with lighter conversation, Ryan asking about my doctor's appointments and how I was feeling. It felt strangely... normal. Domestic, even.

After we'd eaten, I tried to clear the dishes, but Ryan firmly steered me to the couch.

"You rest. I'll clean up."

"But you cooked," I protested weakly.

"And you're growing our child," he countered, his hand briefly touching my stomach before he pulled away, as if catching himself being too familiar.

Too tired to argue, I sank into the cushions, watching as he moved efficiently around my kitchen.

His sleeves were rolled up, exposing strong forearms as he washed dishes, his broad shoulders and back creating a silhouette that seemed strangely right in this space.

As I watched his broad shoulders and strong back while he moved efficiently around my kitchen, I couldn't help but imagine what life might be like if things were different between us.

If we were a real family. The image formed unbidden in my mind: Ryan teaching our child to ride a bike, family dinners around a table, bedtime stories...

My hand drifted to my bump, feeling the slight flutter of movement inside. "What do you think, little one?" I whispered so softly that Ryan couldn't hear over the running water. "He'd make a good dad, wouldn't he?"

The baby responded with a gentle kick, as if in agreement. I smiled to myself, allowing just a moment of hope to bloom in my heart.

*Chapter 93: Chapter 93 An invitation to an exclusive gala dinner*

Ryan's POV

I finished scrubbing the last pot in Serena's kitchen, my sleeves rolled up to my elbows and my thousand-dollar watch carefully set aside.

Who would've thought that Ryan Blackwood, CEO of a billion-dollar empire, would be elbow-deep in dish soap at midnight? Certainly not me a few weeks ago.

"That's the last one," I announced, drying my hands on a kitchen towel.

Serena looked up from her spot on the couch, eyebrows raised in genuine surprise. "You actually did a decent job. I'm impressed."

"Does that earn me the right to stay a little longer?" I asked, moving toward her with deliberate slowness.

She tucked her legs underneath her, a protective gesture I recognized immediately. "It's late, Ryan. And pregnant women need their sleep."

"Just one more cup of tea," I pressed, not ready to leave her presence yet.

Serena hesitated, then glanced at the clock. "It's almost midnight."

"Since when does Serena Quinn worry about proper bedtimes?" I teased, remembering how she used to work until 3 AM on her designs.

"Since there is a little Blackwoods using my organs as punching bags," she retorted, but there was a hint of a smile playing at her lips.

I conceded defeat, grabbing my jacket. As I headed toward the door, Serena suddenly called out, "I've been craving that salmon avocado bowl from Marlow's. The one with the spicy aioli."

I paused, hand on the doorknob, momentarily confused. "Okay...?"

"For tomorrow," she clarified, not quite meeting my eyes. "If you're planning on bringing lunch again."

The implication hit me, and I couldn't suppress my smile. She was giving me permission—no, an invitation—to see her tomorrow.

"Salmon avocado bowl. Extra aioli. Got it," I confirmed, feeling ridiculously pleased with myself.

Serena nodded, trying to look nonchalant. "Good night, Ryan."

"Sweet dreams, Serena," I replied, stepping out into the hallway with a lightness in my step I hadn't felt in years.

Back in my own apartment next door, I poured myself a nightcap and looked out at the city lights.



For the first time in months, I felt like I was making actual progress.

The wall she'd built around herself had a small crack in it now, and I intended to widen it.

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The next morning, Simon was waiting for me with an envelope and a concerned expression.

"Mr. Blackwood, there's an invitation from Mr. Harrison Wells for an exclusive gala dinner next week. His assistant specifically requested that Ms. Sophie Hart also attend."

I nearly spat out my coffee. "Sophie? Who the hell authorized her return?"

Simon shifted uncomfortably. "According to HR records, Mr. Kane approved her transfer back from the Boston office last month."

Of course it was Kane. My uncle never missed an opportunity to undermine me.

"And the Wells project—was she involved with that?" I asked, my mind racing through the implications.

Simon nodded. "Yes, sir. According to the project logs, Ms. Hart handled the preliminary negotiations quite successfully."

I fell silent, weighing my options. Harrison Wells was a major potential partner, and if Sophie had built rapport with him...

"Have someone monitor her closely," I finally said. "I don't want any office gossip or drama while she's here."

"Understood, sir. Regarding the invitation—should I inform Ms. Hart about it?"

I nodded reluctantly. "Send her the invitation. Tell her attendance is mandatory."

Wells had specifically requested her presence, and I couldn't afford to offend a potential business partner worth millions.

"Will do, sir."

As Simon turned to leave, a thought struck me. The last thing I wanted was to attend this event alone with Sophie.

"Simon, wait." I pulled out my phone, my fingers hovering over Serena's number. "I need to make a call first."

After Simon left, I dialed Serena, hoping she wasn't in the middle of something important.

"Ryan?" Her voice came through, sounding surprised. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine," I assured her quickly. "I was calling about something else." I paused, feeling uncharacteristically nervous. "There's a business dinner next week with Harrison Wells. Would you consider attending with me?"

The silence on the other end stretched uncomfortably long.

"You want me to be your date to a business dinner?" she finally asked, her tone unreadable.

"Not exactly a date," I backpedaled, then reconsidered. "Unless you want it to be."

I heard her soft laugh. "Why do I feel like there's something you're not telling me?"

Damn, she always could read me well. "Sophie will be there," I admitted. "Wells specifically requested her presence for some reason."

"Ah," Serena said, understanding dawning in her voice. "So I'd be there as, what? A buffer? Your pregnant human shield?"

"No," I replied firmly. "You'd be there as the mother of my children and the woman I—" I caught myself before saying too much. "As my guest. An important guest."

Serena was quiet for a moment, and I found myself holding my breath.

"Fine," she finally said. "But you're buying me a new dress. This bump doesn't fit into anything fancy anymore."

Relief washed over me. "Done. I'll have my stylist send over some options."

"No need," she countered. "I'll pick something myself. You can just foot the bill."

I couldn't help but smile. "Whatever you want, Serena. And thank you."

After we hung up, I leaned back in my chair, feeling a strange mixture of dread and anticipation.

A business dinner with my ex-wife, my ex-girlfriend, and one of the most powerful men in the industry. What could possibly go wrong?

*Chapter 94: Chapter 94 Drug him*

Sophie's POV

The invitation arrived like a gift from heaven. Harrison Wells' exclusive gala dinner—and I was specifically requested. I smiled as the department assistant handed me the embossed envelope, aware that every eye in the office was on me.

"My, my," whispered a coworker loudly enough for me to hear. "Looks like someone's getting special treatment."

I tucked the invitation into my designer purse, feigning modesty. "It's just because I handled the preliminary work on the Wells project."

I'd learned my lesson after last time. No more bragging or flaunting my connection to Ryan. I'd play the humble professional until I got what I wanted.

At five o'clock, I made my excuses to the department manager and left early, using the gala preparations as my reason. Instead of heading home, I took a taxi straight to Kane's penthouse.

Kane was waiting in his wheelchair, a crystal tumbler of scotch in his hand. His hair gleamed under the recessed lighting of his minimalist living room.

"You've done well," he acknowledged, raising his glass slightly. *freewebnovel.com*

I allowed myself a small smile. "Wells and Ryan are set to finalize their partnership. But Ryan's not going to be an easy target—we need to be careful."

Kane studied me, his green eyes calculating. "What do you need from me today?"

I perched on the arm of a leather chair, crossing my legs deliberately. "The gala dinner is coming up. I need something that will ensure Ryan remembers me fondly."

Kane reached into his pocket and produced a small vial of fine white powder.

"This should do the trick. It's tasteless, odorless, and quite potent. One dose, and he'll be unable to resist whoever's closest."

I took the vial, excitement coursing through me. "And if I can get him alone..."

"Then you'll have your second chance," Kane finished, raising his glass again. "The dress is in the guest room. Remember our deal—once you have him back, I expect access to the Blackwood shipping routes."

I poured myself a drink from Kane's bar cart, my red lipstick leaving a mark on the crystal glass. My eyes glinted with determination as I raised it in a toast.

"Don't worry, Kane. By the end of the night, Ryan Blackwood will be eating out of my hand. I guarantee it."

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The night of the gala arrived, and the famous Cliffside Manor was transformed into a wonderland of lights and luxury. I arrived fashionably late, my dress a masterpiece of subtle seduction—seemingly modest in bright lighting, but designed to catch the eye in the dimmer corners where important conversations happened.

With champagne flute in hand, I positioned myself near the entrance, waiting for Ryan. My stomach dropped when I saw him walk in—not alone, but with her. Serena Quinn, looking annoyingly radiant in a deep emerald gown that hugged her pregnant curves beautifully.

"Damn it," I muttered under my breath. This was an unexpected complication.

I watched as Harrison Wells greeted them warmly, his eyes lingering appreciatively on Serena. Ryan's possessive hand at the small of her back made me want to scream.

I took a deep breath and composed myself. The plan could still work—I just needed to separate them.

After twenty minutes of strategic mingling, I approached their little group, a practiced smile on my face.

"Mr. Wells, Mr. Blackwood—good evening," I greeted smoothly before turning to Serena with practiced surprise. "Oh! Serena, I didn't realize you'd be here. You look... glowing."

Serena's smile was polite but cool. "Sophie. It's been a while."

"Ms. Hart!" Wells exclaimed, clearly pleased to see me. "I was just telling Ryan how impressed I've been with your work on our collaboration."

"That's very generous of you," I replied modestly, positioning myself between Ryan and Serena. "I'm just a small part of the Blackwood team."

"Don't be so modest," Wells insisted. "Your insights on market penetration were revolutionary."

I seized the opportunity. "Perhaps I could show you those projection charts we discussed? I brought copies with me."

Wells nodded eagerly. "Excellent idea! Ryan, you don't mind if I steal Ms. Hart for a moment, do you?"

Ryan looked slightly relieved, which stung. "Not at all."

As Wells and I moved away, I caught Serena watching me with suspicious eyes. She wasn't as naive as she looked.

After fifteen minutes of technical discussion with Wells—during which I made sure to laugh at his jokes and touch his arm just enough to be flattering but not inappropriate—I excused myself to "freshen up."

In the bathroom, I carefully mixed Kane's powder into one of two identical champagne flutes I'd prepared. Then I returned to the ballroom, scanning for Ryan.

He was alone at last, Serena having been pulled into conversation with some designer across the room. Perfect timing.

I approached him with a warm smile, carrying the two champagne flutes. "You look like you could use a fresh drink."

Ryan eyed me warily. "I'm fine, Sophie."

"Please," I said softly, extending the drugged flute toward him. "I want to apologize for how things ended between us. No strings attached, just... closure."

After a moment's hesitation, he accepted the glass. "Fine. To closure."

We clinked glasses, and I watched with barely contained anticipation as he took a generous sip.

Within moments, his eyes began to lose their sharp focus, pupils dilating slightly. The drug was working even faster than I'd anticipated.

He frowned, tugging uncomfortably at his collar. "Is it hot in here?"

"Ryan? Are you alright?" I asked, letting false concern drip from every word. "You look terribly flushed."

"I'm..." He paused, swallowing hard as he fumbled with his tie, his usually precise movements becoming clumsy. "Something's wrong. I feel strange—dizzy."

I hid my smile behind my glass. "Maybe some air would help? There's a lovely terrace just through those doors."

Ryan nodded, swaying slightly. "Air. Good idea."

I quickly moved to his side, slipping my arm around his waist as he stumbled. "Here, let me help you," I cooed, guiding his unsteady steps toward the terrace doors. His weight leaned heavily against me as we made our way outside.

Once on the terrace, I helped him over to the stone balustrade.

"Ryan," I purred, pressing myself against his side. "Let me take care of you. You're not feeling well."

"Sophie?" he blinked hard, trying to focus. "What's happening?"

"Shh," I soothed, running my hands up his chest. "Just relax. Remember how good we were together? Don't you miss me at all?"

I reached up to kiss him, but even in his drugged state, he turned his head away.

"No," he mumbled. "Need to find Serena."

Frustration surged through me. "Forget about her! I'm here now. I'm the one who understands you, who's always loved you."

I pressed my body fully against his, my lips finding his neck. For a moment, his body tensed, and I thought I'd won. But then his hands found my shoulders and firmly pushed me away.

"Stop," he said, his voice slurred but determined. "Need to go. Not feeling right."

Before I could try again, the terrace doors opened, and Serena stepped out. Her eyes widened at the scene before her—Ryan clearly drugged, me with smeared lipstick.

"Ryan," she called, her voice surprisingly calm. "Come inside. We need to leave."

To my utter disbelief, he immediately moved toward her voice like a homing beacon. Even drugged out of his mind, he chose her.

I watched, seething, as Serena wrapped her arm around his waist, supporting him. As they passed me, she paused.

"I know what you did to his drink," she said quietly, her voice carrying a steel I'd never heard before. "I wonder what HR would think about an employee drugging the CEO?"

My blood ran cold. "You can't prove anything."

She smiled, the gesture lacking any warmth. "I don't need to. Ryan will remember enough. And unlike you, he actually does trust me."

With that, she guided him back into the ballroom, leaving me alone on the terrace, my carefully laid plans in ruins.

But this wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

*Chapter 95: Chapter 95 Rekindled love*

Serena's POV

The moment I left the terrace and caught sight of Ryan, a surge of irritation coursed through me.

How could Ryan be so blind? The moment I left his side, Sophie had managed to get her claws into him again. Did he really not see what kind of manipulative snake she truly was?

I tried to pull away from Ryan's grasp, but he clung to me like an octopus, refusing to let go.

His hands were everywhere - my waist, my shoulders, my hair. The scent of alcohol mixed with his cologne filled my nostrils.

"Let me go, Ryan," I hissed, struggling against his iron grip.

"Never," he growled against my ear, his hot breath sending unwelcome shivers down my spine. "I'm never letting you out of my sight again."

Simon approached us cautiously. "Mr. Blackwood, is everything alright?"

I shot the assistant a desperate look. "Simon, get the car ready. Now."

Simon's eyes darted between us, taking in Ryan's flushed face and dilated pupils. Understanding dawned in his expression. "Right away, Mrs. Blackwood."

The moment we were in the backseat of the car, Ryan's restraint snapped. His mouth crashed down on mine, hungry and desperate. I gasped at the sudden assault, startled by the intensity of his need.

"Ryan..." I tried to protest between kisses, but his hands were everywhere – cupping my face, sliding down my neck, gripping my hips.

His kisses moved to my neck, teeth grazing my sensitive skin. "Need you," he growled. "Fuck, I need you so bad."

I felt myself responding despite my anger, my body betraying my mind as heat pooled between my thighs. His hand slipped under my blouse, palm burning against my skin.

Only when he began fumbling with the zipper of my skirt did my senses return.

"The baby!" I gasped, pushing against his chest. "Ryan, stop—we'll hurt the baby."

He froze immediately, chest heaving with labored breaths. His eyes were wild, pupils blown wide with desire and whatever drug Sophie had slipped him.

"Shit," he muttered, running a trembling hand through his hair. "I'm sorry."

I watched him struggle for control, his jaw clenched tight, a sheen of sweat on his forehead. Despite my anger, my heart softened at his obvious discomfort.

To my surprise, Ryan pulled out his phone and dialed a number.

"Who are you calling?" I asked, straightening my dress.

He ignored me, waiting for the call to connect. "Dr. Reynolds? Yes, it's Ryan Blackwood. I have a question about pregnancy..." He glanced at me, a dark hunger still evident in his eyes. "Is it safe to have intercourse during the second trimester?"

My face flamed hot with embarrassment. I couldn't believe he was actually asking our doctor about this right now!

I could hear Dr. Reynolds's clinical voice through the phone, explaining that sex during pregnancy was perfectly safe, especially now that I was past the first trimester. As long as we were gentle and avoided putting pressure directly on my abdomen, there would be no risk to the baby.

Ryan thanked him and ended the call, a triumphant look on his face. I wanted to melt into the leather seats from mortification.

"You did not just call our doctor to ask about sex," I hissed.

"I did," he replied, reaching over to press a button that raised the privacy partition between us and Simon. "I needed to be sure."

The car suddenly felt much smaller, more intimate. Ryan moved closer, his hand gently cupping my face. *freewebnovel.com*

"Please, Serena," he whispered, his voice strained. "Whatever she gave me... I'm burning up. I need you."

I bit my lip, torn between lingering anger and compassion. His body was clearly in distress, muscles tense and trembling with effort.

"You're sure it won't hurt the baby?" I asked softly.



"I swear," he promised, pressing a surprisingly gentle kiss to my forehead. "I'll be careful."

I nodded slowly, my resolve crumbling as he groaned with relief.

"You're soaked, honey," Ryan whispered as his fingers found their way beneath my underwear. His voice was husky with need, sending shivers down my spine.

I gasped as he stroked me, my body responding instantly to his touch. "Ryan..."

"Feel what you do to me, sweetheart," he guided my hand to his hard length, letting me feel how desperate he was for me.

Then his lips found mine again, gentler this time but no less passionate. He lifted my dress over my head, his eyes worshiping every inch of my changing body.

"You're gorgeous," he breathed, cupping my breast with reverence. "Even more beautiful carrying my child."

I gasped as his mouth replaced his hand, his tongue teasing my sensitive nipple. His other hand slipped between my legs again, his fingers working magic against my core.

"Ryan," I whimpered, my body trembling under his skilled touch.

"I've got you, sweetheart," he murmured against my skin.

He positioned me carefully on his lap, facing away from him so my belly wouldn't be compressed. The new angle sent him deeper than ever before as I sank down onto his length.

"Fuck," he hissed, his hands gripping my hips. "You feel divine around me."

We moved together slowly, his chest pressed against my back, his lips trailing kisses along my shoulder. One hand splayed protectively across my belly while the other circled the bundle of nerves between my thighs.

"That's it, baby," he encouraged as I rode him with increasing urgency. "Take what you need from me."

My climax built rapidly, coiling tighter with each careful thrust. When it finally crashed over me, I cried out his name, my body clenching around him.

Ryan followed shortly after, his release triggering another wave of pleasure through my oversensitive body. He held me close as we both came down from our high, his hands still caressing my belly.

"I'm sorry," he whispered against my hair. "For everything with Sophie. I should have been more careful."

I sighed, post-coital bliss making it difficult to maintain my anger. "You need to be smarter, Ryan. She'll always try to come between us."

He nodded, pressing a kiss to my temple. "Never again. I promise."

As Simon drove us home in discreet silence, I wondered if Ryan would finally see Sophie for who she truly was—a threat that needed to be eliminated completely from our lives.

*Chapter 96: Chapter 96 A massive contract*

Ryan's POV

I woke up feeling strangely satisfied despite the lingering frustration from yesterday's events. My body was relaxed, but my mind was racing with suspicions about Sophie's latest scheme.

First thing in the morning, I sent Simon to investigate what happened at the charity event. Something didn't add up, and I was determined to get to the bottom of it.

Hours later, Simon returned to my office looking defeated. "Mr. Blackwood, I'm afraid most of the evidence has vanished," he reported, frustration evident in his voice.

"What do you mean, vanished?" I leaned forward, my hands clasped tightly on my desk.

"The security cameras at the Ridgemont Estate malfunctioned that evening - conveniently only during the hours of the gala. No footage of the event exists," Simon explained apologetically. "My team has been working non-stop, but we've hit dead ends everywhere."

I drummed my fingers against the polished wood, my jaw tightening. This was too neat, too convenient.

"And Sophie? What's she been up to at headquarters?" I asked, already suspecting the answer.

Simon shrugged slightly. "Surprisingly quiet, sir. She's been keeping a low profile since the incident."

"Of course she has," I muttered. Playing innocent was her specialty.

I dismissed Simon with a nod, leaning back in my chair. This investigation would have to wait. I had other priorities now - specifically, a pregnant wife who deserved my attention far more than Sophie's games.

The thought of Serena made something warm unfurl in my chest. After yesterday's... intensity in the car, things between us felt different. Closer. The walls she'd built were starting to crumble, and I wasn't about to let this progress slip away.

I picked up my phone and dialed her number, surprising myself with how eager I felt to hear her voice.

"Missing me already?" Serena answered on the third ring, her tone teasing. "Is it that obvious?" I chuckled, loosening my tie. "Just checking if my wife and baby are doing alright today."

"We're perfectly fine. No more drama, thankfully."

"Good. I was thinking about last night..." I lowered my voice to that tone I knew made her shiver.

"Ryan!" she whispered, and I could practically see her blushing. "I'm at work."

"So am I. Doesn't stop me from remembering how wet you were for me in the back of that car."

She gasped softly. "You're terrible."

"You weren't complaining yesterday when you begged me to—"

Her phone beeped with another call. "I have to take this. It's Maya."

"Fine," I sighed dramatically. "But this conversation isn't over, Mrs. Blackwood."

"I'm counting on it," she purred before switching calls.

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Serena's POV

"Maya, hey," I answered, still flustered from Ryan's suggestive comments. That man would be the death of me.

"Serena! Amazing news!" Maya's excited voice blasted through my phone. "Dreamland Studio just landed a massive contract! The client's offering serious money, but they specifically requested you lead the project."

I perked up immediately. This was exactly what our studio needed—a high-profile client to boost our reputation.

"That's fantastic! When do we meet them?"

"There's a catch," Maya hesitated. "It's a demanding project, and given your... condition, I was thinking maybe we should pass."

I rolled my eyes. "Don't you dare turn this down. I'm pregnant, not incapacitated. I promise to pace myself."

Maya reluctantly agreed, and we scheduled a meeting for two days later.

When the day arrived, our conference room felt charged with professional tension. I sat across from Mr. Will, the CEO of Diamond Crown Jewelry, and listened carefully to his requirements.

"These specifications are all perfectly manageable," I assured him after his detailed presentation. "We'll follow your vision exactly."

Mr. Will nodded, satisfied. "Excellent, but I have one non-negotiable condition. My assistant, Holly, must be involved throughout the entire process."

I glanced at the sleek woman beside him, my brow furrowing slightly. Was she meant to be our babysitter?

Maya immediately bristled. "I'm not sure that's appropriate—"

"Holly has a background in design herself," Mr. Will interrupted. "How can I trust the process without having my representative present?"

I studied Holly's impassive face. Having a watchdog in our studio wasn't ideal, but this contract was too important to lose over pride.

"If that's what will make you comfortable, Mr. Will, we'll accommodate Holly," I conceded with a professional smile.

He slapped the table enthusiastically. "Excellent! I knew you were reasonable, Ms. Quinn. I look forward to seeing your first-stage designs."

After the meeting, Maya escorted Mr. Will out while Holly followed me to my office like a shadow.

"Since you'll be part of our team temporarily, feel free to share any relevant input. I'll consider all constructive suggestions," I said politely, keeping my guard up.

Holly gave me a measuring look. "Where will my workstation be located?"

"We're a bit cramped at the moment. HR will arrange something by tomorrow. Today you'll have to make do, I'm afraid."

Her expression darkened slightly. "That's quite unfortunate. Your office seems spacious enough—perhaps I could work here? It would facilitate our communication."

Was she serious? My office was my sanctuary, especially now during pregnancy when I occasionally needed to rest.

"I'm sorry, Holly, but that won't work. I handle multiple projects simultaneously, not just Diamond Crown's. Having you here would be distracting for both of us."

She pressed her lips together, clearly displeased. I could already tell she was going to be trouble, but I'd be damned if I let anyone compromise Dreamland's biggest opportunity yet.

A knock at the door interrupted the tension. The HR manager appeared, and I waved my hand dismissively, signaling for them to escort Holly out and get her settled elsewhere.

Once they left, my phone buzzed with a text from Ryan: "Dinner tonight? I promise to behave... until dessert."

I smiled despite myself. At least I had something to look forward to after dealing with Holly.

I typed back: "Guess."

*Chapter 97: Chapter 97 Bossy Holly*

Serena's POV

"Please, baby. I need you," came his reply, sounding uncharacteristically vulnerable. "I'll be your good boy." The pleading tone made something in my chest soften. Damn him for knowing exactly how to get to me.

"Fine. 8PM. Don't be late," I responded, already feeling a flutter of anticipation.

Seconds later, my phone vibrated again. A photo appeared on screen—Ryan's unmistakably bulging pants, the outline of his hardness clearly visible against the fabric. "Already aching for you," read the caption.

I bit my lip, feeling heat rush to my core. That familiar hunger spread through me like wildfire.

"Missing me already?" I replied, fingers trembling slightly.

"Dying to fuck you. Want to see how much?"

My breathing quickened, fingers hovering over the screen. Damn hormones. Pregnancy had made me so sensitive that just a few dirty words could make me soaking wet.

"What if I say yes?" I finally typed back.

Seconds later, another photo appeared—Ryan's hand wrapped around his thick cock, the head already glistening. A shiver ran down my spine straight to my thighs.

"All yours tonight, little slut," came his immediate follow-up text.

I was about to reply when Maya burst through the door, causing me to toss my phone down like it had suddenly burst into flames.

Maya frowned suspiciously. "What's with you? Looking guilty as a teenager caught watching porn."

"Nothing," I said quickly, changing the subject. "Did you need something?"

Maya explained she was seeking refuge. "That woman is a nightmare," she groaned, collapsing into the chair across from my desk. "She's all tits, no brains. How the hell did she become an executive secretary?" [freewebnovel.com](mailto:freewebnovel.com)

"What happened now?" I asked.

Maya sighed and detailed Holly's latest offenses.

"So what you're telling me is that she's managed to piss off half our designers in less than a day?" I rubbed my temple, feeling the beginnings of a headache.

Maya nodded grimly. "That's putting it mildly. She's been parading around like she owns the place, criticizing everything from our work spaces to the coffee selection."

My hand instinctively went to my belly. "Is it really that bad?"

I'd been cooped up in my office most days, and my team had been deliberately shielding me from stress during my pregnancy.

"Serena, I'm not exaggerating," Maya insisted, using my first name as she always did when we were alone. "The first batch of designs is almost ready for review. What happens when she starts criticizing everything with her zero expertise?"

The project had to come first. Everything else was secondary.

"Get everyone a small bonus and buy coffee for the team to calm their nerves," I suggested.

Maya frowned. "And then what? That's just treating symptoms."

"Should I talk to Mr. Will? Ask him to recall his secretary before someone throws a coffee mug at her?" Maya suggested, only half-joking.

I shook my head. "No, this project is too important. Let me handle her."

"Are you sure? In your condition—"

"I'm pregnant, not incapacitated," I cut her off with a smile. "Don't worry. I know what I'm doing. Your temper would have you fighting with her in two seconds flat. We can't risk alienating Mr. Will right now. We'll handle this tactfully."

Maya reluctantly nodded. "Fine, but if she upsets you, I'm finding someone to teach her a lesson."

I laughed, waving away her threat. "Stop being so dramatic. We're not the mafia."

Ten minutes later, there was a sharp knock at my door.

"Come in," I called, setting aside the design sheets I'd been reviewing.

Holly strutted in like she was entering a boardroom she controlled. Tall, impeccably dressed, with a face that would be pretty if not for the permanent expression of disdain.

"You wanted to see me, Mrs. Quinn?" she asked, emphasizing my married name in a way that suggested she found it amusing.

I studied her silently for a moment, watching her confidence waver slightly under my gaze.

"Is there a problem?" she finally asked, shifting her weight.

"Actually, yes," I replied coolly, standing up and walking around my desk. "I understand you're having trouble adjusting to our studio environment."

Her chin lifted defiantly. "I've simply been pointing out areas for improvement. Mr. Will expects excellence."

"As do I," I countered smoothly. "Which is why I'm concerned that our designers are spending more time managing your complaints than working on the collection."

Holly flushed slightly. "I'm just doing my job—"

"Are you?" I raised an eyebrow, circling her slowly. "Because I was under the impression your job was to facilitate communication between Dreamland and Mr. Will, not to terrorize my staff."

"I haven't—"

"You have," I cut her off gently but firmly. "But I think I understand the problem. You're bored."

That caught her off guard. "What?"

"You're Mr. Will's executive assistant, used to managing important matters. Being relegated to simple observation must feel beneath your talents."

I watched her expression shift as I appealed to her ego.

"Mr. Will mentioned you have design training yourself," I continued. "It seems wasteful not to utilize those skills."

Holly straightened up, suddenly interested. "I did graduate from Central Saint Martins."

"Impressive," I nodded appreciatively. "Then I have a proposal. Rather than simply observing, why not assist with some of the preliminary work? It would give you more meaningful involvement in the project."

"What kind of work?" she asked, suspicion battling with curiosity.

"Documentation, coordination between departments, preliminary feedback on technical specifications—the kind of detailed work that requires both design knowledge and administrative expertise."

By the time Holly left my office fifteen minutes later, she was practically beaming with self-importance, clutching a folder of busywork that would keep her occupied and away from my designers for days.

Maya poked her head in after Holly departed.

"What kind of black magic was that?" she asked, incredulous. "She looks like she just got promoted."

I laughed, easing back into my chair. "Just basic psychology. Give someone enough rope to feel important but not enough to hang the rest of us."

"Diabolical," Maya grinned. "And very effective. Remind me never to get on your bad side."



"Too late for that," I teased. "Now, can we please get back to the actual work? I have a dinner date tonight I don't want to be late for."

Maya's eyes widened with interest. "With the ex-hubby? Things are looking up, huh?"

I smiled but didn't answer, my thoughts already drifting to Ryan and our plans for the evening. Despite the Holly drama, today was turning out to be a good day after all.

*Chapter 98: Chapter 98 She stole my man*

Author's POV

Holly practically skipped out of Serena's office, her face glowing with self-importance.

Once the door closed, Serena immediately began organizing detailed documentation for the project—trivial work that needed doing but was far removed from the actual design process.

"Lucy," she called to her assistant, handing over a thick folder. "Make sure Holly gets these by the end of the hour. Tell her it's urgent."

Lucy accepted the folder with a knowing smile. "Keeping her busy and away from the designers?"

"Exactly," Serena nodded, absently stroking her baby bump. "The real design work needs to stay protected. The last thing we need is her meddling with actual creative decisions."

After Lucy left, Serena returned to reviewing the preliminary sketches for the Will collection.

She'd barely made it through three designs when her phone buzzed with a text from Ryan confirming their dinner plans.

Meanwhile, across the studio, Holly was staring incredulously at the mountain of paperwork Lucy had just delivered.

"Mrs. Quinn said these need documentation by tonight," Lucy explained, maintaining her professional smile. "All the technical specifications need reviewing."

Holly flipped through the pages with growing irritation. "But she literally just told me I'd be involved in the design process. What is this administrative nonsense?"

Lucy didn't miss a beat. "Mrs. Quinn thought this work would be more appropriate given your position as Mr. Will's executive secretary. She specifically mentioned not wanting to overburden you with creative tasks when your primary role is liaison."

Before Holly could formulate a proper protest, Lucy had already turned on her heel. "The report is needed by end of day. Thank you for your assistance, Miss Holly."

Left alone with the towering stack of documents, Holly slammed the folder down on her temporary desk.

After scanning a few pages, she stomped off to the break room to make coffee, muttering curses under her breath.

"Busy work," she hissed, aggressively measuring coffee grounds into the machine. "This will take hours. She's deliberately keeping me occupied."

The designers passing through the break room exchanged knowing glances. Word had already spread about how Serena had handled the situation.

Holly returned to her desk with her coffee, grudgingly working through the tedious documentation. *freeweбnovel.com*

By five thirty, she had finally completed the task, her neck stiff and her mood foul. She practically threw the folder at Lucy before stalking out of the studio in her expensive stilettos.

"What a complete waste of my talents," she grumbled as she made her way to her car in the underground parking garage. "I graduated from Central Saint Martins, for God's sake!"

As she approached her BMW, a sleek black Mercedes pulled up beside her, blocking her path.

A striking woman with calculated grace stepped out, while someone remained seated in the passenger side, hidden behind tinted windows.

"Miss Holly?" the woman called out, her voice honeyed but firm.

Holly turned, confusion etching across her features as she met the stranger's gaze. "Do I know you?"

"Not yet, but I know you. I'm Sophie Hart," the woman extended her hand with practiced charm.

Holly remained guarded. "What do you want? How do you even know my name?"

Sophie smiled, the expression not quite reaching her eyes. "I have a proposition for you. I understand you're working with Serena Quinn at Dreamland Studio?"

Holly's posture stiffened. "Are you stalking me?"

"Nothing so dramatic," Sophie laughed lightly. "Let's just say we have a mutual interest in Serena Quinn. Or rather, a mutual disinterest."

Holly's suspicious expression softened slightly, curiosity piqued. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

"Serena and I have... history," Sophie explained, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "She stole something very precious from me. My fiancé, actually."

"Serena did that?" Holly asked, suddenly more attentive.

"Oh yes. The baby she's carrying? Conceived while she was drugging and seducing my fiancé," Sophie spat, her pretty face twisting with apparent grief. "She's very good at playing the innocent, isn't she? The talented, humble designer who never does wrong."

This struck a chord with Holly, who nodded slowly. "She does seem overly perfect. Today she completely sidelined me with busywork after promising me involvement in actual design."

"That's her specialty," Sophie nodded emphatically. "One face for the world, another behind closed doors. She's manipulated her way to the top of the industry."

Holly's expression darkened. "So what exactly are you suggesting?"

"I'm offering you compensation—substantial compensation—to help me expose her true nature," Sophie explained, pulling an envelope from her designer handbag. "Nothing illegal, just... information. Access. The opportunity to show the world who she really is."

Holly hesitated, glancing at the envelope. "I could lose my position with Mr. Will..."

"This is enough money to cover several years of salary," Sophie pushed the envelope closer. "And I promise, when this is over, you'll have better opportunities than being someone's secretary."

Holly bit her lip, then slowly reached for the envelope. Opening it slightly, her eyes widened at the stack of hundred-dollar bills inside.

"I'm not doing this for the money," Holly said finally, tucking the envelope into her purse. "I just can't stand fake people who step on others to get ahead."

"I knew you were a woman of principle," Sophie smiled, patting Holly's arm. "Just one word of caution—don't confront her directly. Serena is extremely skilled at turning situations to her advantage. She's built a loyal following who will defend her without question."

Holly scoffed. "She can't touch me. I'm Mr. Will's representative. Unless she wants to lose this project, she'll have to tolerate me."

"Perfect," Sophie's smile widened. "Here's my card. Keep me updated on anything useful. There will be more compensation as you provide information."

As Holly drove away, the passenger window of the Mercedes lowered, revealing Kane Blackwood's smug face.

"Quite the performance," he remarked dryly. "You're quite the actress."

Sophie slid back into the car, her sweet facade instantly replaced with cold calculation. "I do what's necessary to get results."

"Remember our agreement," Kane warned. "Ryan can never trace this back to me. I have too much at stake with the company reorganization."

Sophie rolled her eyes. "Relax. This will look like typical industry sabotage, nothing more. By the time anyone figures it out, Serena's reputation will be in tatters."

The next morning, Holly arrived at Dreamland Studio with new purpose. The designers noticed her unusually dark expression as she strutted through the workspace, but paid it little attention, already accustomed to her sour moods.

Without knocking, she pushed open the door to Serena's office.

Serena was leaning over a design board with Julian, their heads close together as they discussed fabric options for the fall collection.

The scene looked intimate, their professional rapport evident in their relaxed body language.

Serena glanced up, visibly annoyed by the intrusion. "Don't you know how to knock?"

"Am I interrupting something?" Holly asked with a pointed smirk, her eyes darting between Serena and Julian.

Serena straightened, her hand instinctively moving to rest on her pregnant belly. The subtle hostility in Holly's tone wasn't lost on her.

"Did you need something?" she asked coolly, maintaining her professional composure despite the clear provocation in Holly's eyes.

*Chapter 99: Chapter 99 This design is unacceptable*

Serena's POV

I felt my eyebrow twitch as Holly's gaze made my skin crawl.

There was something unsettling in the way she was looking at Julian and me, like she'd caught us in some scandalous act rather than discussing fabric swatches.

"Did you need something?" I asked coolly, one hand instinctively moving to my baby bump.

"Mrs. Quinn, I was just wondering if the first phase designs are ready? Mr. Will is quite anxious for an update," she said, her tone sugary yet somehow sharp.

I frowned. "The deadline isn't for another week. Did Mr. Will specifically request this update today?"

"Absolutely. Let's meet in the conference room in twenty minutes, shall we? I need to review everything before sending it to Mr. Will."

With that, Holly turned and strutted out of my office without waiting for a response.

Julian let out a low whistle once the door closed. "Who the hell was that? Talk about zero manners."

He'd been in Washington for a few days and had completely missed Holly's dramatic entrance into our studio life.

"Just the client's self-important gatekeeper," I sighed, gathering my sketches. "She's got quite the attitude, but whatever. We needed to discuss progress anyway. Can you tell the team to meet us in the conference room?"

Twenty minutes later, everyone had assembled around the large oak table. I took my seat at the head, flipping through the completed designs we had so far.

"Mrs. Quinn, let's begin," Holly announced, scanning the room with what could only be described as royal condescension.

I tapped the table lightly, choosing to ignore her presumptuous tone. "Since we're still finalizing several pieces, let's discuss our design direction moving forward."

The designers took turns presenting their concepts. Holly remained silent through each presentation, her face an unreadable mask. But when I pulled out my own designs, she suddenly cleared her throat loudly.

Everyone's attention shifted toward her, and the atmosphere instantly tensed.

I continued my presentation without acknowledging her interruption, but halfway through my explanation of the centerpiece jewelry concept, Holly cut me off.

"This design approach completely contradicts what Mr. Will is looking for. You should scrap it and start over," she declared flatly.

The room fell silent. I could feel my pulse quicken as I took a measured breath.

"Holly, I need you to clarify something. Is this your personal opinion about my designs, or has Mr. Will actually expressed these concerns? Please be specific."

Holly smirked. "Does it matter? Mr. Will appointed me to oversee your work. If you don't value my input, perhaps there's no point in my being here at all?"

She was using Mr. Will's name to throw her weight around, essentially questioning Dreamland Studio's competence.

"Miss Holly, whatever design courses you took are clearly ancient history," Celeste snapped from across the table. "Mrs. Quinn's designs are priceless. She's personally creating pieces for this collection, and you have the audacity to dismiss her work?"

My designers had reached their breaking point with Holly's constant needling.

Holly slammed her palm on the table and stood up, face flushing. "Why shouldn't I question it? I represent the client, and you should be modifying according to the client's wishes! This design is unacceptable—do it again!"

"You're deliberately causing problems! I've had enough of your crap!" Maya shouted, pushing up her sleeves like she was ready to leap across the table.

I exhaled slowly, reminding myself that getting angry while pregnant wasn't good for me or the baby.

"Everyone, please calm down. If there are concerns about the design concept, I can make adjustments."

Holly's expression turned smugger. "Not adjustments—this entire concept is unacceptable. Start from scratch."

"I swear to God, I will rip that smirk off your face," Maya growled, only held back by two other designers.

If this turned physical, we'd lose the contract for sure. All our hard work would be wasted. I could see the fury in my team's eyes, but they were restraining themselves for the sake of the project.

Holly's smirk grew even more pronounced, as if she could see our hesitation and was emboldened by it.

"Mrs. Quinn, what's it going to be? Will you redesign completely, or should I report your refusal to Mr. Will?"

I looked up, meeting her eyes directly. This clearly wasn't a professional discussion about design work—it was a deliberate power play. If I kept appeasing her, the entire collaboration would become impossible.

I needed to think not just of myself but of my team. I wouldn't let them do thankless work for someone who wouldn't appreciate it.

"Holly, I understand your position, but I'll need to discuss this directly with Mr. Will," I stated firmly as I stood up, my patience exhausted.

"And let me clarify something—you're Mr. Will's executive assistant, not his creative director. You don't have the authority to reject my designs."

I straightened my shoulders, speaking with quiet authority. "You can pack your things and leave the studio. I'll explain the situation to Mr. Will myself."

Holly's jaw dropped in shock. She clearly hadn't expected me to dismiss her. She slammed her fist on the table again.

"You can't make me leave! Unless you're ready to lose this contract altogether!"

I gave her a level stare, completely unmoved by her threat.

"Whether this contract proceeds isn't determined by an assistant. That's between Mr. Will and myself."

I gathered my designs, tucking them under my arm. "If you continue to disrupt our workspace, I'll have security escort you out."

Without another glance in her direction, I walked out of the conference room, my heart pounding but my resolve firm. I wouldn't let anyone—destroy what I'd built.

*Chapter 100: Chapter 100 Holly killed herself*

Author's POV

Holly tried to rush after Serena to argue, but several designers immediately blocked her way. Celeste stood in front with eyes blazing with fury.

"What else do you want? Didn't you hear what Serena said? Get the hell out! Even if we lose this contract, I won't let you bully her anymore, especially when she's pregnant!"

"Yeah, did you think everyone at Dreamland Studio would just roll over for you?" another designer chimed in.

Holly shot Celeste a venomous glare. "You better remember this! Don't come crying when you regret it!"

"Just get lost already. Whoever regrets this is a loser. We've been sick of you since day one!"

Holly was practically shoved out of the conference room. Though they didn't use much force, to her it felt like the ultimate humiliation.

"Security! Please escort this person out!" someone called.

Clearly, nobody in the studio liked her. Most staff just watched the scene unfold with curious eyes, content to observe the drama.

They were actually being quite decent about it - nobody piled on with additional insults or mockery. Even so, by the time Holly was escorted out of the studio, she was in tears of rage.

Her emotional state was visibly deteriorating, but the studio door closed firmly behind her. Nobody came out to check on her.

Clutching a box with her belongings, Holly had just turned the corner when she stumbled and fell.

Her ankle twisted painfully in her high heels, swelling up immediately and causing her to gasp in pain.

In her confused state, she heard what seemed like demonic whispers, making her mental state even more precarious.

When Holly regained some clarity, she realized she was having another episode.

She suffered from bipolar disorder.

With trembling hands, she frantically searched her purse for her medication, but couldn't find it.

She had forgotten to bring it this morning...

Suddenly, a woman appeared before her, slowly crouching down.

"Painful, isn't it? Perhaps only death will bring you release," Sophie whispered softly, pushing Holly deeper into her disoriented state.



She could barely make out who was standing in front of her, her pupils already dilating erratically.

"It's all Serena Quinn's fault." Sophie dropped a knife in front of Holly.

Holly grabbed the knife, bringing it close to examine it.

"Just cut yourself. This way, you'll escape all this suffering, and that bitch Serena will pay the price for hurting you."

"Don't worry, I won't let her get away with this," Sophie continued.

Sophie's words penetrated Holly's mind like a hypnotic spell, completely distorting her judgment.

Without her medication, Holly was already prone to fixating on negative thoughts.

At the mention of Serena's name, she became even more agitated.

"Serena Quinn! I hate you!"

With a soft cry, Holly slashed the knife across her own wrist.

Not long after Sophie walked away, a passerby discovered Holly.

By then, she was lying in a pool of blood, barely breathing.

The passerby panicked, immediately calling police and an ambulance.

When Holly was rushed to the hospital, she was pronounced dead shortly after entering the emergency room.

Her family arrived at the hospital only to hear the devastating news, collapsing in grief.

Before the police could properly investigate, news outlets were already breaking the story.

Various "evidence" surfaced suggesting that Holly had committed suicide right after a confrontation with Dreamland Studio staff.

The reports explicitly named Serena Quinn, accusing her of workplace bullying that had driven a vibrant young woman to take her own life.

The gossip reporters presented their stories with such detail, as if they'd witnessed everything firsthand.

In an instant, Dreamland Studio and Serena were thrust into the spotlight, subjected to vicious abuse and speculation across all platforms.

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Serena's POV

I heard the door slam behind me as I stormed back to my office, my hands still trembling slightly. I needed to be alone, needed to breathe, needed to calm down before my baby felt my stress. I pressed my palm against my belly, whispering softly, "It's okay, little one. Mommy's just having a rough day."

The commotion from the conference room carried down the hall—raised voices, chairs scraping against the floor. God, what a disaster this day had turned into.

I'd barely had time to settle behind my desk when Maya burst through my door, her face flushed with vindication.

"We kicked that witch out!" she announced triumphantly. "You should've seen Celeste standing there like a bouncer. Holly tried to argue but we literally formed a human wall until security came."

"Please tell me no one touched her," I groaned, massaging my temples.

"Relax, we didn't lay a finger on her. Though I really wanted to," Maya flopped into the chair across from me. "That woman had it coming for weeks. Did you see her face when you stood up to her? Priceless."

I wasn't in a celebrating mood. "We might lose the Will contract over this."

"So what? There are other clients who don't come with psychotic assistants attached." Maya leaned forward. "Anyway, I'm proud of you for standing your ground."

I nodded absently, my mind already racing through damage control scenarios. I'd need to call Mr. Will directly, explain what happened...

That evening, I'd just finished drafting an email to Mr. Will when my phone buzzed with a news alert. My blood ran cold as I read the headline:

**"EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT COMMITS SUICIDE AFTER WORKPLACE CONFRONTATION AT DREAMLAND STUDIO"**

"No," I whispered, frantically scrolling through the article. "This can't be real."

But it was. Holly—the woman I'd dismissed from my studio just hours ago—had slit her wrists. She was dead.

The article mentioned "workplace bullying" and "hostile environment" at Dreamland Studio. They even printed my name. My chest tightened so severely I had to remind myself to breathe.

Before I could process what was happening, there was a knock at my door. Two police officers stood outside, asking to come in.

"Ms. Quinn, we'd like to ask you some questions about Holly," one officer said gently.

I invited them in, my legs barely supporting me as I led them to my living room. "I can't believe this is happening," I said, my voice sounding distant even to my own ears.

"Please don't worry," the officer said, noticing my pregnant state. "We just need to understand the situation. Could you walk us through what happened today?"

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to focus. "It started with this project for Will Enterprises..." I explained everything—Holly's constant undermining, her arbitrary rejections, how she'd tried to use Mr. Will's name to intimidate us.

"I asked her to leave," I concluded, my voice small. "I didn't... I never imagined she would..." I couldn't finish the sentence.

The officers thanked me for my cooperation and left. But their visit was just the beginning of the nightmare.

My phone started ringing incessantly with numbers I didn't recognize. When I finally answered one, a venomous voice screamed through the speaker:

"You murderer! Why don't YOU die instead?"

I hung up immediately, my hands shaking so badly I could barely hold the phone. More calls kept coming. Eventually, I turned my phone off completely.

Curiosity and dread drove me to open my laptop. I had to see what people were saying, needed to understand how bad this was getting for Dreamland Studio.

What I saw made my stomach lurch. The comments were vicious:

"Evil capitalist drove someone to suicide!"

"This is straight-up workplace bullying! She was just an ordinary working person!"

"Dreamland Jewelry is dead to me! A company with such a heartless boss must make equally soulless designs!"

"They're literally profiting off blood money now. BOYCOTT DREAMLAND!"

I slammed my laptop shut, unable to read anymore. Somehow, everything had been twisted to make Dreamland—to make ME—the villain. I should have listened to Maya about Holly from the beginning. But it was too late now.

A series of sharp knocks at my door made me freeze in terror. What if it was some crazed stranger who'd found my address? What if—

"Serena, it's me."

Looking through the peephole, I confirmed it was Ryan before letting my shoulders sag with relief. Even in my current state, seeing him still felt like an anchor in a storm.