

CEO's Regret After I Divorced

#Chapter 141 Previous generation - Read CEO's Regret After I Divorced Chapter 141 Previous generation

Chapter 141: Chapter 141 Previous generation

Sophie's POV

I slipped into Blue Mountain Café after meeting my client, heading straight for the private room tucked away in the back.

These days, I've been keeping my head down, terrified that Derek might track me down again. Finding out he'd been targeting Serena had my nerves completely shot.

When I pushed open the door, I found Lucian West's assistant waiting inside, his expression cold and calculating. My shoulders instantly relaxed. At least it wasn't Derek or one of Ryan's people.

"What's the matter?" I asked, sliding into the seat across from him without waiting for an invitation.

The assistant gave me a dismissive once-over, his eyes revealing nothing. "Mr. West asked me to deliver some news to you."

"What news?" I leaned forward, unable to hide my curiosity.

"Derek has... disappeared. You won't need to worry about him coming after you anymore."

I couldn't contain the flash of excitement in my eyes. "Are you serious? Is he actually—"

The assistant shot me a warning glare that made the words die in my throat. Message received - some things shouldn't be spoken aloud, even in private rooms.

"Mr. West says that if Ms. Hart can provide useful information, he'll consider the partnership we discussed. However," his voice grew colder, "if you continue to be this useless, there's no need for future contact."

I let out a soft laugh, tossing my hair over my shoulder. "Tell your boss not to worry. I was Ryan Blackwood's woman once. No one knows the Blackwood family better than I do."

"Is that so?" The assistant's eyebrow arched slightly. "And what about the previous generation of Blackwoods? How much do you know about them?"

I frowned, caught off guard. "Previous generation? Is Mr. West investigating the Blackwood family history?"

His face remained expressionless, perfectly trained. "Ms. Hart, you don't need to know these details. Mr. West's intentions are none of your concern. If you demonstrate your value, he might consider helping you when necessary."

He leaned forward, his cologne—expensive but understated—reaching my nostrils. "But I should warn you, Ms. Hart: don't try to play games with Mr. West."

I nodded, trying to look confident despite the chill running down my spine. "Don't worry. I'll find what your boss wants."

As I watched his retreating figure through the café, I couldn't help the smirk that formed on my lips.

The coffee shop's ambient noise faded into background as I imagined my future. If I could complete Lucian's task, I'd finally get Ryan back permanently. Then my golden days would truly begin.

The next day, I strutted into Blackwood Corporation's project department, my heels clicking confidently against the marble floor. The project manager's face morphed into a sycophantic smile when he saw me.

"Ms. Hart! To what do we owe this pleasure?" His voice dripped with fake enthusiasm that made my skin crawl.

I flipped my hair casually, giving him a disdainful glance. God, these middle managers were so transparent. "Mr. Blackwood sent me to review some project files."

At the mention of Ryan's name, the manager straightened his posture and began leading me toward his office with exaggerated deference.

I could get used to this kind of treatment. Settling onto his plush leather sofa, I crossed my legs and looked around imperiously.

"I need the files for the suburban development project from ten years ago. Hurry up—I don't want to keep Ryan waiting."

"The suburban project from ten years ago?" The manager's brow furrowed.

"Is there a problem?" I was too busy admiring my fresh manicure to notice the uncertainty in his expression.

He hesitated, his fingers fidgeting with his tie. "All those old files have been archived, and that particular project has top-level security clearance. Without Mr. Blackwood's signed authorization, I'm afraid I can't access them."

I hadn't expected this roadblock. My heart raced, but I maintained my composure. "Ryan personally sent me here. Are you questioning my credibility?"

The manager wasn't budging. Without seeing an authorization form, he clearly wasn't risking his job for me. "We're just following protocol. Perhaps you could call Mr. Blackwood right now, and we can sort this out immediately?"

My expression froze. The confidence I'd been radiating just seconds ago evaporated like cheap perfume.

Standing awkwardly, I smoothed down my dress. "Never mind. I'll personally ask Ryan why Blackwood employees are so... rigidly bureaucratic." I emphasized those last words, hoping he'd catch my implied threat.

But the manager seemed immune to intimidation. Instead of cowering, he politely escorted me out, his professional smile never wavering.

Once I was out of earshot, I let out a frustrated huff, my heels striking the floor harder with each angry step.

Behind me, I heard a young employee whisper, "Aren't you worried she'll complain to Mr. Blackwood?"

The manager's dismissive response drifted down the hallway: "Someone who doesn't even know basic protocols is clearly bluffing. Open the windows—let's get rid of that overpowering perfume smell."

I was absolutely fuming as I stormed out of the building. What I thought would be simple had turned into a complete disaster. If I needed Ryan's authorization to access those files, I'd have to work harder than expected.

No wonder Lucian wanted those particular documents—they were practically impossible to get. But I couldn't exactly ask Ryan for authorization when we weren't even on speaking terms anymore.

At this point, though, I was desperate enough to try anything. Glancing at my watch, I saw it was nearly noon. Perfect timing.

I ordered lunch from Ryan's favorite restaurant—the one where we had our first date—and headed straight to Blackwood headquarters.

Since I used to visit frequently, the security staff recognized me and didn't stop me as I made my way to the executive floor.

My heart pounded as I approached his office. Taking a deep breath, I straightened my blouse, checked my lipstick in my compact mirror, and pushed open his door without knocking.

Ryan was on the phone, his long legs crossed as he leaned back in his chair. Occasionally his lips would curve into that smile I once thought was just for me.

He looked powerful and gorgeous as always, his custom suit fitting his athletic frame perfectly.

His back was to the door, so he didn't notice me right away. I stood there, drinking in the sight of him, remembering how it felt to be his.

When he finally hung up and swiveled in his chair, the temperature in the room seemed to drop ten degrees.

"What are you doing here, Sophie?" His voice was ice cold, his gray-blue eyes narrowing as they met mine.

Source:

Chapter 142: Chapter 142 Have lunch together

Ryan's POV

I was in the middle of wrapping up a call when the door to my office swung open without warning. The moment I turned and saw Sophie standing there, my jaw clenched involuntarily.

"What are you doing here?" I asked coldly, not bothering to hide my irritation.

She ignored my tone completely, sauntering toward my desk with that practiced walk of hers.

The takeout bag in her hand made a soft thud as she set it down and began unpacking what I recognized as food from our old favorite spot.

"I brought lunch from Angelini's," she cooed, her voice dripping with manufactured sweetness. "Remember how we used to go there every Friday?"

Her overwhelming perfume hit me like a physical force - that same cloying scent she'd worn since college. Before I could stop myself, I sneezed violently.

"See? You're not taking care of yourself," she said, reaching across my desk. Her fingers intentionally grazed the back of my hand. "What would happen if you got sick? Who would take care of you?"

I stood immediately, putting distance between us as I moved to the window. The touch of her fingers on my skin felt wrong, invasive. Once, I might have welcomed it. Now it just made my skin crawl.

"What do you want, Sophie?" I asked bluntly, staring out at the city skyline rather than at her. I could see her reflection in the glass, the momentary flash of frustration that crossed her face before she composed herself again.

She approached me from behind, her hand grabbing the edge of my suit jacket with familiar presumption.

"Things have been so crazy lately," she said, her voice taking on that trembling quality I'd once believed was genuine emotion. "I know I've made mistakes. I've learned my lesson."

I remained silent, waiting for her to get to the real reason for her visit.

"I promise I'll focus on work from now on, Ryan," she continued, stepping closer, invading my space.

"Actually, I was thinking I should study some of the company's previous projects to improve my understanding. Could you authorize me to access those files? Just the suburban development from ten years ago?"

So that was her angle. The suburban project - one of my father's most controversial ventures before I took over the company. Why would she suddenly be interested in that?

"Focus on your own work," I said firmly, turning to face her with narrowed eyes. "That's all you need to do."

Sophie opened her mouth to press further, but something in my expression must have warned her off.

For a split second, I saw uncertainty flash across her face - the realization that I wasn't buying whatever she was selling.

"I should get back to the office," she mumbled, gathering her things with jerky movements. "I have a meeting soon anyway."

After she left, I checked my watch and made a quick decision. The office could survive without me for a couple of hours. I grabbed my keys and headed for the elevator.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled my Maybach smoothly into a parking spot outside Dreamland Studio. I couldn't help but feel a small surge of pride seeing how well Serena's business was doing - stylish, professional, and distinctly her.

As I stepped out of the car, I noticed several young women glancing my way, whispering to each other. I straightened my tie self-consciously.

"Is Serena in her office?" I asked one of them, keeping my voice gentle. No need to intimidate her staff.

The young woman stared at me wide-eyed for several seconds before nodding enthusiastically. "Yes, yes she is!"

I thanked her with a smile and made my way down the hallway to Serena's office. I knocked lightly before pushing the door open.

The sight of her took my breath away, just as it always did these days. She was bent over her desk, completely absorbed in her sketches, sunlight filtering through the blinds and catching in her hair. Golden flecks danced in her concentrated eyes as her pencil moved with confident strokes across the paper.

God, she was beautiful. Not in the manufactured way Sophie tried to be, but in that effortless, genuine way that had always drawn me to her, even when I'd been too stubborn to admit it.

Serena glanced up, surprise registering on her face when she saw me. "Ryan? What are you doing here?"

I cleared my throat, suddenly feeling like a nervous teenager. "Thought I'd see if you wanted lunch," I said, gesturing toward the clock on her wall. "It's almost noon."

She returned her attention to her sketches without missing a beat. "I'm not quite finished with this. Maybe later."

"You might not be hungry," I said softly, my eyes dropping to the gentle swell of her stomach, "but our baby probably is."

Her hand moved instinctively to her belly, a gesture that never failed to make my heart race. After a moment's consideration, she sighed and began gathering her papers.

"Fine," she conceded, standing up. "Let's go."

I tried to hide my smile as I took her bag, but the simple victory of getting to spend time with her made me feel ridiculously triumphant.

We walked side by side toward the exit, not touching but close enough that I could catch the faint scent of her shampoo - citrus and something uniquely her, nothing like Sophie's chemical cloud.

"Ooh, Serena!" One of her designers called out playfully as we passed. "Is this a lunch date?"

Before Serena could answer with what would undoubtedly be a firm denial, I smiled at the young woman.

"Just lunch," I said smoothly. "But if anyone wants something, tell Serena what you'd like, and we'll bring it back for you."

The cheer from her team was immediate and enthusiastic.

A little bribery never hurts—especially if it helps me get into her office.

Wait—why is Serena looking at me like that?

Source:

Chapter 143: Chapter 143 Prenatal check-up

Serena's POV

"If anyone wants something, tell Serena what you'd like, and we'll bring it back for you." Ryan said, his tone surprisingly casual.

My staff erupted in cheers and excited chatter. I couldn't hide my surprise, watching him interact with my team like this.

This was the same man who once commanded boardrooms with ice in his veins? The untouchable Mr. Blackwood who barely acknowledged junior staff? Something had shifted in him - not just toward me, but in how he carried himself with others.

I felt a strange flutter in my chest that had nothing to do with the baby.

"Let's go," he said softly, his hand hovering near my back but not quite touching me.

I noticed immediately that he'd chosen Rosetta's - my favorite Italian place with the patio seating I loved. The hostess led us to a quiet corner table, away from the lunch crowd noise.

While waiting for our food, Ryan broke the comfortable silence between us. "Your next prenatal appointment is coming up soon, isn't it?"

"Tomorrow, actually," I replied, absently running my fingertip along the rim of my water glass.

"I can pick you up," he offered immediately.

I shook my head. "No need. Maya's coming with me." We'd planned it weeks ago - girl time followed by a stop at the baby boutique downtown.

"Alright. Just be careful, both of you." Ryan nodded, surprising me by not pushing the issue.

I waited for him to circle back to it, to insist on coming along or at least argue his case. But he simply moved on, asking about my latest design project instead.

Something felt off. The entire lunch, Ryan was attentive but not overbearing, interested but not intrusive. By the time we returned to Dreamland, I'd almost convinced myself I was being paranoid.

Almost.

The next morning confirmed my suspicions when my phone pinged with a text from Maya just as I was getting dressed.

"Seriously?" I muttered, staring at the screen.

[Serena, I'm SO sorry! I can't make it. Some idiot sideswiped my car this morning!]

The photo she'd attached showed her Audi with a crumpled driver's side door. No one appeared hurt, thank god, but the timing was suspicious as hell.

I texted back quickly: [Are you okay?? Don't worry about me, just deal with your car. I'll manage.]

Sighing heavily, I grabbed my purse and headed downstairs, mentally calculating if I had time to call a car service.

"Serena!"

I froze at the sound of his voice, then turned slowly. Ryan stood beside his Maybach, dressed impeccably as always, looking for all the world like this was a completely random coincidence.

My eyes narrowed. "Maya's car accident. That was your doing, wasn't it?"

"It had nothing to do with me," he replied immediately, his expression perfectly innocent.

"Really?" I crossed my arms over my chest, the baby bump making the gesture slightly less intimidating than I intended.

"Absolutely." He nodded firmly, opening the passenger door. "Now let's get you to your appointment before we're late."

I hesitated, but the alternative was calling a car and potentially being late. With a sigh of defeat, I slid into the leather seat.

During the drive, Ryan was nothing but considerate - adjusting the temperature when I shifted uncomfortably, even asking intelligent questions about my latest collection.

At the hospital, he walked slightly behind me, close enough to catch me if needed but giving me space.

"Your husband is so attentive," a heavily pregnant woman whispered to me in the waiting room, nudging her slouching partner who was engrossed in his phone. "Look at him! Take notes, Jack!"

I didn't correct her about our relationship status. Ryan just smiled politely, placing a gentle hand on my shoulder.

When the nurse called my name, Ryan stood immediately, following me to the examination room like it was the most natural thing in the world.

The wait for results felt endless. I found myself unconsciously reaching for Ryan's hand during the ultrasound, squeezing tightly when the technician went quiet for what felt like forever.

"Everything looks perfect," the doctor finally announced, pointing to the monitor. "Strong heartbeat, good growth. You've got a very healthy baby here."

Relief washed through me so intensely I didn't even mind when Ryan squeezed my hand back, his thumb rubbing small circles against my skin.

"Make sure you're getting enough rest," the doctor instructed, looking pointedly at me. "Proper nutrition, regular sleep - no more of those all-night design sessions I've heard about."

I blushed slightly. How did she know about those?

Ryan nodded solemnly beside me. "I'll make sure of it," he promised, as though he had any say in my daily routine.

As we walked back toward the parking lot, I found myself relaxing for the first time all day. Our baby was healthy. That's what mattered most.

"I still don't believe you had nothing to do with Maya's accident," I said, but there was no real heat behind my words.

Ryan's lips quirked up at one corner. "Sometimes the universe just works in mysterious ways, Serena."

"The universe, huh?" I couldn't help the small smile forming on my face. "Funny how the universe seems to bend to your will so often."

He opened the car door for me, one hand shielding the top of the frame to make sure I didn't bump my head.

His other hand hovered near my back—not touching, but close enough to remind me he was there. Always watching. Always careful.

I slid into the seat with a quiet sigh, trying not to read too much into his gestures.

We drove in silence for a while, city lights flickering across the windshield.

Then I noticed the streets looked unfamiliar.

"This isn't the way home."

I turned to him, suspicion creeping into my voice.

"Where are you taking me, Ryan?"

Source:

Chapter 144: Chapter 144 Who are you type?

Serena's POV

I couldn't argue about going back to my appointment when Ryan casually dropped the bombshell.

"Since we're already out, why don't we stop by the baby boutique downtown?" he suggested, eyes fixed on the road. "We talked about going there a few weeks ago, remember? But something always came up."

I blinked, surprised he'd remembered.

"You actually remembered that conversation?" I asked, genuinely curious.

"I remember everything you say, Serena." His voice was so matter-of-fact it sent an unexpected shiver down my spine.

I stared out the window, trying to ignore how those simple words affected me. "Alright then. The baby boutique it is."

Twenty minutes later, we were wandering through Tiny Treasures, the most exclusive baby store in the city. The place was a wonderland of ridiculously priced infant everything - from hand-carved cribs to cashmere onesies that would probably be ruined with the first spit-up.

"This seems... excessive," I muttered, eyeing a silver-plated rattle with an actual diamond embedded in the handle.

Ryan picked it up, examining it like he was considering a business acquisition. "Our child deserves the best."

"Our child needs love and attention, not a rattle that costs more than my first car," I countered, gently taking it from him and placing it back on the shelf.

His lips twitched. "Fair point."

We moved through the store, my practical side battling with the maternal instinct to buy everything adorable in sight. Ryan, surprisingly, showed more restraint than I expected, though he insisted on the top-of-the-line car seat and stroller system.

"Safety ratings are non-negotiable," he stated firmly when I questioned the astronomical price tag.

I couldn't argue with that.

The real surprise came when we reached the stuffed animal section. Ryan paused, his fingers brushing over a soft gray elephant.

"I had one like this," he said quietly. "When I was little."

The image of Ryan as a child, clutching a stuffed elephant, was so unexpectedly tender I felt my heart squeeze.

"Then our baby should have one too," I decided, placing it in our already overflowing cart.

Ryan's smile was small but genuine, and something warm spread through my chest at the sight.

By the time we finished, we'd filled three shopping carts. The sales associate was practically salivating at the commission.

"We can have everything delivered to your home this afternoon, Mr. Blackwood," she gushed.

"Perfect," Ryan nodded, handing over his black card without blinking at the total.

As we walked toward the exit, a familiar voice called out.

"Serena! What a delightful surprise."

I turned to find Lucian West approaching us, impeccably dressed as always in a charcoal suit that highlighted his green eyes. Ryan stiffened beside me.

"Lucian," I greeted warmly. "How are you?"

"Wonderful now," he replied smoothly, his gaze dropping to my baby bump. "I see congratulations are in order."

Before I could respond, Ryan's arm slid possessively around my waist. "Thank you," he answered coolly.

Lucian's smile didn't falter. "I'd love to send a gift for the little one. Perhaps something from my recent acquisition in Paris? They make the most exquisite handcrafted cribs—"

"Unnecessary," Ryan cut him off. "We've got everything covered."

The tension was so thick I could practically taste it.

"That's very thoughtful of you, Lucian," I interjected quickly, shooting Ryan a warning glance. "But Ryan's right, we just bought half the store. Though we appreciate the gesture."

Lucian inclined his head gracefully. "Of course. Another time, perhaps."

"Don't forget about our meeting next week, darling. The Celestial Gems collaboration won't design itself."

"I'll be there," I promised.

Ryan's jaw was clenched so tight I worried he might crack a tooth as we watched Lucian walk away.

The moment we were back in the car, I turned to him. "Was that really necessary? Lucian is my business partner. You could show him some basic respect."

"I don't like him," Ryan stated flatly, starting the engine with more force than necessary.

"You don't have to like him," I argued. "But you don't need to be rude either."

"I don't want him around you." His knuckles whitened on the steering wheel.

I stared at his profile, suddenly realizing what this was about. "Are you... jealous? Of Lucian?"

Ryan scoffed, but didn't deny it.

I couldn't help but laugh. "Oh my God, you are!"

"I fail to see what's funny about this situation," he growled.

"It's just—" I shook my head, still smiling. "Lucian's not even my type. There's nothing between us. It's purely professional."

Ryan glanced over at me, his expression softening slightly. "If he's not your type, who is?"

The car stopped at a red light, and he turned to face me fully.

Suddenly the air between us felt charged, heavy with unspoken things.

I was acutely aware of how close we were in the confines of the luxury car, how his cologne—subtle and expensive—filled my senses.

"Not you," I whispered, but the words lacked conviction.

"No?" Ryan leaned closer, his eyes dropping to my lips. "You sure about that, Serena?"

My breath caught as his hand came up to brush a strand of hair from my face. His touch lingered against my cheek, warm and familiar in a way that made my heart race.

"Ryan..." My voice was barely audible.

"Tell me to stop," he murmured, his face now inches from mine.

I should have. I knew I should have pushed him away, maintained the boundaries I'd worked so hard to establish. But when his lips finally met mine, I couldn't remember why those boundaries existed in the first place.

The kiss started gentle, almost questioning, but quickly deepened into something hungry and desperate. My hands found their way to his shoulders, then his hair, as years of complicated history dissolved into pure sensation.

A car horn blared behind us. The light had turned green.

Ryan pulled back reluctantly, his breathing as uneven as mine. Without another word, he resumed driving, but his right hand found mine, fingers intertwining as if they belonged together.

I stared out the window, my lips still tingling from his kiss, wondering how I'd let my carefully constructed walls come tumbling down so easily.

And worse—wondering if I even wanted to build them back up again.

Source:

Chapter 145: Chapter 145 I never lost it again

Ryan's POV

Her lips were like a goddamn drug. One taste and I was already hard as steel, my cock straining painfully against my pants as I drove us home.

Every fiber of my being wanted to pull over right there – find some secluded spot and take her in the backseat like we were fucking teenagers.

But Serena deserved better than that. My pregnant wife deserved better.

So I gripped the steering wheel tighter, jaw clenched, painfully aware of her scent filling the car.

She kept stealing glances at me, those brown eyes wide and uncertain, lips still swollen from our kiss.

"Ryan..." she started, but I cut her off.

"Not now, baby. If we start talking about what just happened, I won't be able to focus on driving. And I need to get you home safe."

The flush that spread across her cheeks was delicious. I wanted to devour her.

When we finally pulled into the driveway, the staff had already unloaded our purchases from the baby boutique. I dismissed them with a nod, then took Serena's hand.

"Come with me," I said, leading her upstairs.

I guided her down the hallway to the room adjacent to our bedroom – what would soon be the nursery. The space was massive, with large windows flooding it with natural light. It had remained empty since we'd moved in, waiting for this exact purpose.

"I thought we could set everything up," I suggested, watching her face carefully. "Together."

Her expression softened. "I'd like that."

We spent the next hour unpacking baby clothes, arranging furniture, and arguing good-naturedly about where everything should go.

"The crib should be away from the window," I insisted. "Safety first."

Serena rolled her eyes. "The window has triple-pane glass and security features that would make the Pentagon jealous. You installed them yourself."

"Still." I moved the ornate white crib to the opposite wall.

She didn't fight me on it, instead busying herself with arranging stuffed animals. When she picked up the gray elephant we'd bought, she placed it prominently in the crib.

"For your mini-me," she said with a small smile.

Something primal and possessive roared to life inside me at those words. My child. Our child. Growing inside her.

I came up behind her, my hands sliding around to rest on her swollen belly. She stiffened momentarily before relaxing back against me.

"Thank you," I whispered against her ear.

"For what?"

"For giving me this. A family."

She turned in my arms, looking up at me with those eyes that had haunted me since the day she left. "Ryan..."

I couldn't help myself anymore. I captured her lips with mine, groaning when she immediately opened for me. My tongue slid against hers as my hands cupped her face, keeping her exactly where I wanted her.

She whimpered, her body melting against mine. I backed her slowly toward the wall, careful not to apply any pressure to her stomach.

"I need you," I growled against her neck, nipping at the sensitive skin. "Been dying for you."

"Yes," she gasped, her hands clutching at my shoulders.

I dropped to my knees in front of her, looking up at her flushed face. "Let me taste you, baby. Need to make you feel good."

I dropped to my knees in front of her, looking up at her flushed face.

"Let me taste you, baby. Need to make you feel good."

"The nursery—" she protested weakly, her voice barely above a whisper.

That was all it took for reality to crash back in. My breath hitched, and I forced myself to pause, dragging my gaze up to meet hers.

Not here.

"Bedroom," I said hoarsely, the word catching in my throat like it cost me something.

She nodded, eyes dark with want, and I took her hand, leading her down the hall to my room—our room, if I had anything to say about it. Once inside, I kissed her again, slower this time, savoring every second.

When I revealed her lace panties, already damp with arousal, I nearly lost my mind. "Look how wet you are for me," I growled, pressing my mouth against the fabric. "All this for daddy?"

Her breathing hitched at the name, and I filed that reaction away for later exploration.

I hooked my fingers into her panties and dragged them down her legs, helping her step out of them before tossing them aside.

Then I lifted one of her legs over my shoulder, opening her to me completely.

"Ryan, I—" Whatever she was about to say was cut off by a sharp cry when I licked a long, slow stripe through her folds.

"Fuck, you taste even better than I remember," I groaned, diving back in for more. I devoured her like a starving man, focusing on her clit with firm circles of my tongue while my fingers teased her entrance.

Her hands found my hair, gripping tight as her hips began to move against my face. I slipped two fingers inside her, curling them to find that spot that made her—

"Oh god!" she cried out, her walls clenching around my fingers.

"That's it, baby," I encouraged, not letting up. "Come on my face. Show me how much you missed this."

It didn't take long before she was trembling, her thighs quivering around my head as she came with a strangled cry of my name. I worked her through it, gentling my touch as she came down.

When I finally stood, my cock was painfully hard, tenting my pants obscenely. But I knew I shouldn't push further – not with her pregnancy.

"I'll take care of this in the bathroom," I said, already turning away.

Her hand on my arm stopped me. "Let me," she whispered, those big doe eyes looking up at me with determination. "I want to."

Before I could respond, she was sinking to her knees in front of me, her fingers already working my belt.

"Serena, you don't have to—"

"Shut up," she commanded, surprising me. "You think you're the only one who's been craving this?"

My cock jerked at her words, and all protests died in my throat.

"Been dreaming about your thick cock," she murmured as she freed me from my boxers, her small hand wrapping around my length. "How it stretches me, fills me up so perfectly."

Jesus Christ. When did my wife get this filthy mouth? And why was it turning me on so fucking much?

When she flicked her tongue over the sensitive head, collecting the bead of pre-cum that had formed, I nearly came right then and there.

"Baby," I warned, my voice strained.

She looked up at me through her lashes, those innocent eyes a stark contrast to the way she was stroking me. "Let me make you feel good, daddy."

The word sent electricity down my spine. And hearing it in her sweet voice nearly undid me.

Then she took me into her mouth, those soft lips stretching around my girth, and I lost all coherent thought. My hand found the back of her head, not pushing, just resting there as she set her own pace.

"That's it," I encouraged, my voice hoarse. "Take what you want."

She hummed around me, the vibration making my knees weak. I watched, mesmerized, as she took me deeper with each bob of her head, her hand working what she couldn't fit.

"Not gonna last," I warned her, feeling my release building embarrassingly fast.

She just looked up at me again, those eyes telling me exactly what she wanted. And fuck if that wasn't the hottest thing I'd ever seen.

When she hollowed her cheeks and sucked hard while her tongue pressed against the underside of my cock, I was done for.

"Serena—" I tried to warn her, but she just doubled down, moaning around me as I began to pulse in her mouth.

I came with a strangled groan, my entire body shuddering as she swallowed everything I gave her, not pulling away until she'd wrung the last drop from me.

When she finally sat back on her heels, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and looking entirely too pleased with herself, I knew I was completely, utterly fucked.

This woman owned me, body and soul.

And I was perfectly fine with that.

Afterward, I pulled her up beside me, cradling her against my chest as our breathing slowed. Her head nestled under my chin, fitting perfectly as if designed to rest there.

"Stay here tonight," I murmured into her hair.

She didn't answer immediately, and I tensed, wondering if I'd pushed too far too fast.

"Okay," she finally whispered. "I'll stay."

As she drifted to sleep in my arms, I realized with startling clarity that this—her, us, our child—was everything I'd never known I needed.

And I would do whatever it took to make sure I never lost it again.

Source:

Chapter 146: Chapter 146 Internal projects

Sophie's POV

I felt a rush of nervous energy as I paced back and forth in the empty hallway. It had been a whole damn day, and I still hadn't found my chance to check on that suburban development project. The anxiety was eating me alive.

My phone buzzed—Lucian West calling again. Shit.

I ducked into a corner where nobody could hear me, my voice barely above a whisper. "Mr. West, please be patient. I'm working on it. These are confidential files and I need special clearance to access them."

"Enough excuses," Lucian cut me off, his voice ice cold as he drummed his fingers against his desk. I could practically feel the frost through the phone. "Ms. Hart, if you can't deliver, say so now. Don't waste my time."

My face burned with humiliation. I wanted to snap back, but I couldn't afford to lose Lucian as my backer right now.

"I assure you, just give me a little more time," I forced myself to sound confident. "I'll get what you need."

He made a dismissive sound. "I'll be waiting for your good news, then."

After hanging up, I finally allowed myself to breathe. Since I couldn't get anywhere with Ryan, there was only one option left—Kane.

Kane might have lost his influence, but he was still a Blackwood. His word would carry more weight than mine ever could.

I went home to change first, slipping into something more flattering before heading to Kane's private villa. The man barely had any real power these days. When he wasn't keeping the old lady company at the family estate, he was holed up here.

We'd worked together before. I wasn't thrilled about crawling back to him, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

Standing outside his locked gates, I took a deep breath and pressed the buzzer.

Minutes later when the door opened, I felt a wave of relief wash over me. I'd worried he might refuse to see me altogether.

Inside, I found him sitting in his wheelchair, nursing a drink. I plastered on my most charming smile as I approached him.

"Mr. Blackwood, it's been a while."

Kane barely glanced up at me, not bothering to respond.

"Drinking alone?" I purred, reaching for the bottle to pour myself a glass. "Doesn't that get lonely?"

That finally got a reaction—a cold laugh.

"What's wrong? Not having a good time with Ryan anymore, so you've come crawling back to me?"

Perfect opening. I sighed dramatically, swirling the amber liquid in my glass.

"Ryan's a heartless bastard. All he cares about now is that Serena woman. He doesn't give a damn about me."

I leaned closer, letting my perfume waft toward him. "I've realized he's not worth my time. He could never measure up to you, Kane."

I clinked my glass against his, making sure to arch my back just so, letting my dress pull tight across my chest.

Kane looked me up and down with undisguised contempt. "Cut the crap. Why are you really here?"

I smiled, dropping the act. No point trying to fool him.

"To work with you again, of course. To bring down Blackwood Enterprises."

Kane raised an eyebrow, clearly amused. "Do you understand my current situation, Sophie? I'm hardly in a position of power."

The last time he'd tried to take down Ryan, he'd nearly ended up in prison. If the family matriarch hadn't intervened, he'd be behind bars instead of in this luxurious prison of his own making.

"Are you really going to let one setback stop you?" I moved closer, my voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper.

"That's not the Kane Blackwood I know. Last time we failed because we didn't understand his weaknesses. But what if we found something he couldn't escape from?"

"Weaknesses?" Kane's eyes lit up with interest as he turned to face me. "Don't tell me you think Serena is his weakness. I don't need you to state the obvious."

"I'd never insult your intelligence like that," I waved dismissively. "I'm talking about internal projects within Blackwood Enterprises. There must be something that could bring Ryan down."

Kane leaned forward slightly. "Be more specific. What internal projects?"

I laughed nervously, scrambling to elaborate on my lie.

"I've heard rumors about some projects from ten years ago that had... irregularities. If we could find evidence of tax evasion or under-the-table dealings, Ryan wouldn't be able to escape the consequences..."

I trailed off, watching his face carefully. His interest was definitely piqued. Good.

"Think about it—our chances of success would be so much higher."

Kane studied me. "If you've thought this through so carefully, why haven't you investigated yourself?"

"I've tried! But these files are classified. I can't access them without help." I let my voice take on a plaintive tone. "If I could handle this alone, I wouldn't be bothering you."

"So what do you need from me?" Kane asked flatly.

"I need your authorization slip."

"You mean... Ryan's authorization?"

I hesitated. "Yours should work too, right?"

I wasn't even sure if Kane's credentials still had any power, but if Ryan's were out of reach, Kane would have to find another way.

Kane didn't seem offended by my suggestion. Instead, he appeared thoughtful.

"I can get you authorization, but you need to tell me which specific project from ten years ago you're interested in."

I shifted uncomfortably, having no intention of revealing my true motives.

"I only heard rumors, honestly. We'll have to check several of them."

"Is that so?" Kane's voice dripped with sarcasm. "Then don't bother. Even with authorization, you can only access one or two project files at a time."

Kane knew the procedures well from his time at headquarters. I couldn't fool him. Finally, I gritted my teeth and mentioned the suburban development project.

"The suburban development from ten years ago?" Kane narrowed his eyes. Something flickered across his face—recognition?

"Do you know something about it?" I asked eagerly. "If you remember details, maybe I wouldn't need to investigate at all."

Kane studied me with growing suspicion. "Why are you so interested in this particular project?"

"I'm not," I lied quickly. "I just heard rumors."

Kane clearly wasn't buying it. "I don't recall the details," he said coolly.

I tried to hide my disappointment. "Then I'll have to check for myself. About that authorization slip..."

Source:

CEO's Regret After I Divorced #Chapter 147 Are you really not considering remarriage? - Read CEO's Regret After I Divorced Chapter 147 Are you really not considering remarriage?

Chapter 147: Chapter 147 Are you really not considering remarriage?

Author's POV

Kane nodded slowly, processing her request. After she left his villa, he immediately dispatched people to investigate that suburban project.

"Hold on," Kane called to his assistant before they left. "Look into Sophie Su as well. Find out who she's been closely associating with lately."

He wheeled himself to the window, watching her car disappear down the driveway. "Why would she suddenly want to work with me again?" he muttered, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

Kane didn't trust Sophie one bit. He knew better than anyone that beneath that angelic face lurked a serpent's heart.

"Be discreet during your investigation," he instructed his assistant. "Ryan absolutely cannot catch wind of this."

"Yes, Mr. Blackwood," the man replied with a slight bow before leaving.

Kane's position was precarious at best. If the Blackwood matriarch wasn't protecting him, Ryan would have eliminated what little influence he had left. Under such

circumstances, Kane had been keeping a deliberately low profile, minimizing his presence within family affairs.

And now Sophie had brought trouble straight to his doorstep.

"Might as well make the most of this opportunity," he thought, drumming his fingers against the armrest of his wheelchair.

The project files proved difficult to obtain. Ryan's people were everywhere inside Blackwood Enterprises now. Kane had to pull significant strings and eventually bribed a clerk from the project department to steal the files for him.

As his assistant reported their findings, Kane's expression grew increasingly cold.

"What about Sophie? What did you find?" he demanded.

"Sir, Ms. Sophie has been in frequent contact with Lucian West, CEO of Celestial Gems. I suspect—"

Kane shot him an irritated look. "You only suspect?"

"While we don't have concrete evidence, considering Ms. Sophie's recent activities, they're very likely working together. As for what they're planning, I couldn't determine."

Kane let out a derisive snort. "Of course. Sophie never could sit still, could she?"

"How much do you know about this Lucian West?" he asked, leaning forward in his wheelchair.

"Sir, I only know that Mr. West is the CEO of Celestial Gems, an overseas jewelry business. He has quite a reputation and considerable influence. He's... something of an enigma."

"That's public knowledge!" Kane snapped, his eyes flashing with anger. "Useless! Go dig deeper—I want everything, right down to his darkest secrets!"

"Yes, Mr. Blackwood. I'll get on it immediately."

After dismissing his assistant, Kane took a moment to compose himself before opening the decade-old project files.

The suburban development project wasn't just familiar—he'd been directly involved in it.

At that time, the person in charge hadn't been Kane but rather his older brother—Ryan's father. Though Kane was already an adult then, his brother had treated him like a child, pretending to involve him in the project while merely humoring him.

Naturally, Kane had resented this and insisted on giving orders anyway.

His brother, being straightforward and good-natured, had only warned him a few times after noticing his interference. But Kane had played a double game, appearing compliant while secretly offering terrible advice to the project managers.

As Kane flipped through the files, he could clearly see the records of the project lead's various decisions—decisions that he himself had actually made.

He let out a cold laugh and closed the file.

If he remembered correctly, the business partner from that project had gone bankrupt shortly afterward.

Sophie wanting to investigate this specific project? Someone must be pulling her strings.

After a moment's thought, Kane fixed his suspicions squarely on Lucian West.

Serena's POV

After my check-up, I rested for two days at Ryan's estate before returning to Dreamland Studio. The moment I walked in, Maya excitedly shoved a stack of order forms into my hands, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm.

"Serena, your reputation has absolutely skyrocketed after that celebration party! Look at all these new orders—more than our last two months combined!" she gushed.

I took the files, flipping through each page with a little surge of pride swelling in my chest. "Really this many?"

"Are you actually questioning my counting skills?" Maya pretended to be offended. "Don't worry though, your designs are worth double now. Unless clients are willing to pay premium prices, these standard orders can just go to the team."

She leaned closer, gently patting my shoulder as her tone shifted to concern: "How was your rest these past two days? As long as you and baby are okay, that's all that matters."

"We're both fine," I nodded, but couldn't help worrying, "But with all these orders, can the studio keep up?"

"Don't stress about it. Some clients already agreed to wait when they signed the contracts," Maya said confidently. "Besides, they all said they'd wait however long it takes for your designs."

That reassured me somewhat, but I still frowned. "Even so, we should try to complete them as quickly as possible."

"I'll personally oversee everything, don't worry."

I nodded, thinking for a moment before adding: "Maybe I should still handle the important orders myself. It would be faster that way."

Maya sighed dramatically, "Serena, you have more important things to do. Look, while you were resting, invitation requests flooded the studio mailbox. I've already filtered through them, and this event is particularly interesting."

I took the invitation she handed me, scanning it quickly before breaking into a smile. "San Francisco Design Competition judge? That does sound intriguing."

"Right? Want to do it? I didn't immediately accept—just said you'd consider it."

Without much hesitation, I agreed. "Yes, I'll go." Being a judge wouldn't be too physically demanding, certainly manageable in my current condition. Plus, serving as a judge at such a prestigious international competition would be an enormous boost for Dreamland Studio's reputation.

"I knew you'd say yes!" Maya grinned triumphantly. "Here's their business card. You should contact them yourself. I need to get back to work."

I dialed the number on the card. "Hello, this is Serena Quinn."

The person on the other end clearly recognized me immediately, their voice filled with delight: "Ms. Quinn, hello! Have you considered our invitation to join our judging panel?"

I responded straightforwardly: "I'm honored to accept your invitation."

"Wonderful! Ms. Quinn, the competition is set for next week, starting this weekend. Will that timing work for you?"

"I'll arrange my schedule accordingly," I promised with a smile. "See you in San Francisco."

After hanging up, I immediately messaged Ryan to share the good news. It was worth celebrating, and well... I wanted him to be the first to know.

Seconds later, my phone rang.

"You're going to San Francisco alone?" Ryan's voice clearly conveyed his displeasure, or more accurately, his concern.

I understood his worries—the doctor had just advised me to rest more during the check-up. How could judging a competition possibly count as rest? If something went wrong...

"Do you really have to go?" he asked, his voice low.

"Yes," I answered firmly. This was important for both me and the studio.

"Fine."

He ended the call abruptly after that single word. I stared at my phone screen, letting out a soft sigh. Typical Ryan response—disapproving but not directly interfering.

Several hours later, with afternoon sunlight streaming warmly into my office, I was dozing on the couch, half-asleep when I sensed someone at the door. I was too tired to open my eyes.

"Mr. Blackwood, aren't you going in?" Maya's voice drifted in.

"Serena's resting. Is there something I can relay to her?"

I heard Ryan's voice soften: "Is she participating in the design competition?"

"No, she's judging it," Maya corrected, her tone playful. "That's quite different. What, Mr. Blackwood doesn't approve?"

"Her traveling to San Francisco alone isn't safe," Ryan stated his concern directly.

"She'll have assistants with her the whole time, and people specifically looking after her," Maya reassured him, adding, "Besides, judging really isn't strenuous—it's mostly just evaluating designs, which is what Serena does best and enjoys most."

Even through the door, I could sense the warning in Maya's words: "If you try to stop her from doing this, she might get angry with you!"

"Hmm." Ryan responded simply.

I continued pretending to sleep, listening to their conversation outside my door. Eventually, Ryan left without coming in to disturb my rest. His consideration touched something in me.

When I woke up, Maya immediately came over, embellishing the story of Ryan's visit.

"You should have seen his worried face! He looked like he was afraid you'd run into trouble the moment you stepped outside!" Maya described dramatically.

I couldn't help laughing. "Was it really that bad?"

"Absolutely! He stood at your door for a full five minutes, just watching you sleep through the glass. The scene was..." Maya winked, drawing out her words.

After teasing me for a while, she suddenly turned serious: "Honestly though, Ryan is treating you really well these days. You must have noticed too, right?"

I found myself smiling involuntarily, feeling heat rise to my cheeks. "Let's talk about something else."

"Serena, in a few months the baby will be born. Are you really not considering remarriage?" Maya cut straight to the point. "Even for the baby's sake..."

Source:

Chapter 148: Chapter 148 Lucian's reason for revenge

Serena's POV

I bit my lip, the question hitting a nerve. Part of me wanted nothing more than to build that family with Ryan, to give our baby everything I never had. But another part remembered the pain, the loneliness of our first marriage.

"I'll think about remarriage... later," I finally said. "Right now, I need to focus on work. There's too much happening."

Maya sighed but didn't push. That's why I loved her—she knew when to back off.

"I'm assigning you two personal assistants for San Francisco," she said instead. "And don't even think about arguing."

"I wouldn't dream of it," I replied gratefully. "Dreamland Studio is in your hands while I'm gone. I owe you dinner when I get back."

"Please," Maya waved dismissively. "We're way beyond keeping score."

The next few days flew by in a flurry of preparations. The night before my departure, Ryan showed up to walk me home from the office.

We walked side by side under the soft glow of street lights. The silence between us felt charged yet comfortable—so different from the tense, empty silences of our marriage.

"Take care of yourself," he finally said, his deep voice cutting through the quiet night. "Call me immediately if anything happens."

My heart softened at his concern. "I'm not a child, Ryan. I'll be fine."

He made a small disgruntled noise that was oddly adorable coming from such a powerful man. "Don't overdo it. Promise me?"

"Yes, boss," I teased gently. "I'll behave."

Walking beside him felt so natural now—nothing like the awkward, painful encounters we'd had after our divorce. Something had shifted between us, something I wasn't quite ready to name yet.

As we approached my apartment building, his hand brushed against mine—just slightly, but enough to send warmth shooting up my arm. I pretended not to notice, but my traitorous heart was hammering against my ribs.

"I've arranged for a private car to take you to the airport tomorrow," Ryan said as we stopped at the entrance.

"You didn't have to do that," I protested weakly.

"I know." His eyes were intense as they locked with mine. "I wanted to."

We stood there for a moment, the air between us electric. Part of me wanted him to kiss me, while another part was terrified he might try.

"Goodnight, Ryan," I finally said, taking a step back.

He nodded, his expression unreadable in the dim light. "Goodnight, Serena. Text me when you arrive."

As I watched him walk away, I placed a protective hand over my growing belly. This baby had already changed so much between us.

Maybe... maybe getting back together wasn't as impossible as I kept telling myself.

But I still needed time—time and courage—to trust this fragile, blooming thing between us again.

Author's POV

Kane finally received the latest intelligence late that night.

The lights in his office cast long shadows across his face as he leaned forward in his leather chair, eyes gleaming with interest.

"Mr. Blackwood, Lucian West wasn't originally from overseas, but from right here in the city," his assistant reported, standing stiffly at attention before the imposing desk.

Kane turned his head slowly, a slight smile crossing his lips as he savored this unexpected revelation. His fingers tapped rhythmically against the polished mahogany.

"From our city? How interesting. Continue," he said, eyes narrowing like a predator scenting blood.

"Sir, his parents weren't the West family from abroad, but actually the former Thompson family that went bankrupt years ago," the assistant continued nervously. "After their collapse, he disappeared for a while before being adopted by the West family, becoming the CEO we know today."

The assistant shuffled the papers in his hands before adding, "The West family values him highly. Even though he's adopted, they've never disclosed this information publicly. They've protected this secret meticulously."

Kane fell silent, the name "Thompson" turning over and over in his mind as he stared unseeing at the cityscape through his floor-to-ceiling windows.

The gleaming lights of skyscrapers twinkled against the night sky while memories stirred in the recesses of his mind.

After a moment, he said with a knowing smile, extending his manicured hand toward his assistant. "I see now, bring me the suburban development project files from ten years ago. The northeast quadrant venture."

"Right away, sir."

Moments later, the documents were placed in his hands, the weight of past schemes heavy between his fingers.

He flipped through them briefly, his gaze settling hungrily on the Thompson corporation listed among the business partners, a forgotten casualty of business warfare.

"Found you," Kane's mouth curved into a satisfied grin, excitement flickering in his eyes like flames. He leaned back in his chair, the leather creaking ominously in the silence of the late-night office.

So Lucian was a child of the Thompson family.

That project had been unsuccessful, with devastating consequences that eventually led to bankruptcy.

The family had lost everything—their wealth, reputation, and social standing, vanishing from the city's elite circles overnight.

Now he had returned with a new name and powerful backing, undoubtedly seeking revenge against those who had destroyed his family. The pieces of the puzzle were falling neatly into place.

With this realization, everything suddenly made perfect sense—Lucian's aggressive business moves, his strategic targeting of Blackwood subsidiaries, his peculiar interest in Ryan's affairs.

"Modify the project documents," Kane instructed, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Make it look like all reasons for the Thompson family's bankruptcy were caused directly by Ryan's parents. Create a compelling trail of evidence."

He leaned forward, eyes glittering with malicious intent. "Also, find people who were involved in the project back then and send them Lucian's way. Make sure these stories become convincing. Feed him exactly what we want him to believe."

"Do it discreetly," he added, straightening his already impeccable tie. "This has to appear entirely organic."

His assistant nodded confidently, recognizing the familiar pattern of his employer's machinations. "Consider it done, sir. No one will trace it back to us."

As the assistant left with the files, footsteps fading down the corridor, Kane poured himself another glass of aged whiskey from the crystal decanter on his desk.

The amber liquid glinted under the warm light as he swirled it thoughtfully, his mind already leaping ahead.

Kane could already picture the look on Ryan's face when Lucian finally struck back—a delicious image that made his lips curl in genuine amusement.

He downed the whiskey in a single, decisive motion, savoring both the burn in his throat and the image of Ryan's downfall.

The empty glass made a satisfying sound as he set it down firmly on the desk, a smile of anticipation spreading across his face.

"This time, Ryan... let's see how you survive Lucian's wrath."

Source:

Serena's POV

I landed in San Francisco right on schedule, greeted by the warm California sunshine that instantly felt several degrees hotter than what I'd left behind in New York. The organizer's staff was already waiting for me at the airport, whisking me away to my hotel with practiced efficiency.

"Miss Serena, if you need anything during the competition, please don't hesitate to contact me. I'm here to assist with whatever you require," the young woman said earnestly, handing me her business card.

I nodded politely, accepting the card. "Thank you for your thoughtfulness."

The hotel was luxurious - all gleaming marble and tasteful art pieces in the lobby. My suite overlooked the famous bay, where fog was just beginning to creep in over the water. San Francisco really was beautiful with its year-round spring-like climate, so different from the intensity of New York's seasons.

As soon as I settled into my room, I called Ryan. He'd been texting me every hour since I boarded the plane, his protectiveness both amusing and touching.

"I've arrived safely," I said when he answered on the first ring.

"How was the flight? Did they send someone to meet you? Is the hotel acceptable?" The rapid-fire questions made me smile.

"Everything's perfect. Maya arranged two assistants who are practically hovering outside my door. She's treating me like I'm made of glass."

"Good. That's exactly how you should be treated," Ryan's voice softened. "I miss you already. The bed feels empty without you."

Heat bloomed in my cheeks. "It's only been twelve hours since you saw me off at the airport."

"Twelve hours too long," he murmured. "Remember what I said - let the assistants handle everything. You focus on resting and the competition."

"Yes, sir," I teased, twirling a strand of hair around my finger. "I know how to take care of myself, you know. I was doing it quite successfully for years before you came back into my life."

"And now you'll never have to do it alone again," he replied, his voice dropping to that husky tone that always made my knees weak. "Call me after the reception tonight. I don't care what time it is here."

We talked for another fifteen minutes, his voice wrapping around me like a caress before we reluctantly said goodbye. I flopped back onto the king-sized bed, hugging a pillow to my chest and smiling like a lovesick teenager. How had this happened to me? The ice queen of Dreamland Studio, reduced to grinning at hotel ceilings because of a man's voice.

A knock at the door startled me from my reverie.

"Who is it?" I called, quickly smoothing my hair and straightening my blouse.

When I opened the door, another staff member from the organizing committee stood there, immaculately dressed.

"Miss Serena, tonight's welcome reception will be held on the second floor at eight o'clock," he informed me with a polite smile, extending an elegantly designed invitation.

I took the card, admiring the artistic calligraphy and thoughtful design. "Thank you, I'll be there."

With several hours to spare, I laid out my evening gown - a midnight blue piece that Maya had insisted I bring - and decided to take a long shower to wash away the travel fatigue.

The hot water eased my tense muscles, and I found myself drifting off during my post-shower rest.

I jolted awake to the realization that I was running late.

Glancing at the clock - 8:17 - I scrambled to get ready, applying my makeup with practiced speed while mentally kicking myself. Late to the very first event! What kind of impression would that make?

By the time I made it to the second floor ballroom, the reception was in full swing.

Soft jazz filtered through the air, mingling with the hum of conversation and the clink of champagne glasses.

A long table of elaborate hors d'oeuvres and desserts lined one wall, while well-dressed attendees clustered in small groups throughout the space.

I took a deep breath and stepped inside, immediately feeling eyes turning my way. A familiar voice called out almost instantly.

"Miss Serena, good evening!"

It was Mr. Xavier Brook, the head of the organizing committee - an enthusiastic man in his fifties with salt-and-pepper hair.

"Mr. Brook, good evening. I'm sorry I'm a bit late," I apologized, smoothing down my gown.

He waved dismissively, smile never faltering. "Not at all! Your timing is perfect. This reception is just for everyone to mingle and get acquainted. We're incredibly honored to have you as a judge - your reputation precedes you."

I felt my cheeks warm at his flattery. "You're too kind. I'm the one who's honored to be invited."

As we exchanged pleasantries, a sudden commotion near the entrance caught my attention. The crowd seemed to part like the Red Sea, and conversations dimmed as all eyes turned toward the doorway.

A man had entered - tall, commanding, dressed in what was clearly a bespoke suit that fit his broad shoulders to perfection. Every movement he made exuded power and confidence. Even from across the room, his presence was magnetic.

"Who's that?" I whispered to Mr. Brook, intrigued despite myself.

Mr. Brook's expression shifted to one of deference. "That's the primary sponsor of our competition and the CEO of LUXE. Let me introduce you."

As we approached the newcomer, I maintained my professional smile, though something about him seemed oddly familiar in a way I couldn't quite place.

"Mr. Quinn," Sin called out warmly. "May I introduce one of our esteemed judges? This is Miss Serena Quinn, the brilliant designer I mentioned. You've surely heard of her work."

The man turned, and as our eyes met, I felt an inexplicable jolt of recognition.

His intense gaze locked with mine, and for a moment, the noise of the party seemed to fade away completely.

Source:

Chapter 150: Chapter 150 A woman resembling his mother

Author's POV

Ethan Quinn lifted his gaze, scanning the room briefly before freezing in place. The woman before him had a face that bore an uncanny seven-eighths resemblance to his mother!

If Serena didn't look so young, he might have actually mistaken her identity.

Was this merely coincidence?

The shock in Ethan's eyes was unmistakable, leaving Serena completely bewildered.

"Mr. Quinn, pleased to meet you," Serena broke the awkward silence, extending her hand.

Ethan finally snapped back to reality, suppressing the complicated emotions swirling inside him as he briefly shook her hand.

"The reputation of Lazuli precedes you, of course," he said with a slight twitch at the corner of his mouth, his gaze repeatedly returning to study her features.

The more he looked, the more striking the similarity became.

Everyone present was astute in reading social dynamics.

Mr. Brook immediately noticed the strange atmosphere between them and, without prying, excused himself to attend to other guests.

Serena smiled politely, intending to find a place to sit down. Before she could excuse herself, Ethan spoke.

"I noticed we share the same surname," Quinn isn't particularly common. Quite the coincidence."

Serena blinked, surprised by the observation. "Oh? I hadn't realized. I always thought it was fairly common."

"Do you have a middle name, Ms. Quinn?" he asked, his tone casual but his eyes intense.

Serena offered a polite smile, her voice light but leaving no room for further inquiry. "I do, but... I'd rather keep that to myself, if you don't mind."

Ethan inclined his head slightly, a faint smile touching his lips. "Of course. My apologies if I was being intrusive."

Relieved that the conversation seemed to be over, Serena let out a small, quiet breath—only for Ethan to speak again. "Ms. Serena, where are you from originally?"

Serena blinked, assuming this was just casual conversation and not giving it much thought.

"I'm from New York."

"Have you always lived there?"

Ethan's questions struck Serena as peculiar, leaving her increasingly confused.

At such a formal reception, discussing competition matters would be normal, but personal questions seemed somewhat inappropriate.

Still maintaining her polite smile, Serena answered briefly, "More or less. Except for business trips and vacations, I've mainly stayed in New York."

"I noticed we share the same surname," Ethan remarked suddenly, his eyes narrowing slightly. "Quinn isn't particularly common. Quite the coincidence."

Serena blinked, surprised by the observation. "Oh? I hadn't realized. I always thought it was fairly common."

"Do you have a middle name, Ms. Quinn?" he asked, his tone casual but his eyes intense.

Serena offered a polite smile, her voice light but leaving no room for further inquiry. "I do, but... I'd rather keep that to myself, if you don't mind."

Ethan inclined his head slightly, a faint smile touching his lips. "Of course. My apologies if I was being intrusive."

Reaching for a glass of juice from a nearby table, she raised it slightly toward Ethan. "I need to sit down for a bit. If you'll excuse me."

This time Ethan didn't follow. Serena sat down, sipping her juice while surveying the room. She recognized a few familiar faces, but most attendees were strangers to her.

Mr. Brook bustled about, socializing with obvious charm and popularity.

The design competition preliminaries would begin tomorrow, so she needed an early night to be well-rested. Several people approached to greet her, and Serena handled each interaction gracefully.

Occasionally, she sensed a gaze upon her—probing, assessing, almost searching. Serena initially ignored it, but as she prepared to leave, she noticed someone approaching.

Turning her head, she found Ethan Quinn.

"Mr. Quinn, is there something you need?"

"Not particularly. It's just getting rather noisy in here, so I thought I'd step out for some air."

Serena laughed dryly, realizing she'd misinterpreted his intentions.

"Please, don't let me stop you."

They entered the elevator together, and Ethan spoke again.

"Is this your first visit to San Francisco, Ms. Serena?"

"Yes, it is."

"There's an excellent coffee shop nearby. Would you care to try it?"

Serena grimaced slightly, pressing the button for her floor.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Quinn, but in my current condition, coffee isn't advisable."

She shifted slightly, making her rounded belly more noticeable. Serena had assumed the CEO was flirting and offered a subtle rejection.

Ethan nodded repeatedly. "That was thoughtless of me. Ms. Serena, being pregnant and serving as a judge must be quite demanding. Please take care of your health."

Serena glanced at him, surprised to find genuine concern rather than the embarrassment or disdain she'd anticipated.

Something stirred within her – perhaps she had misjudged him.

"Ms. Serena, you bear a striking resemblance to someone I once knew. I find it... comforting. I hope you don't mind my saying so?"

Just as Ethan finished speaking, the elevator doors opened with a soft "ding," bringing Serena back to the moment.

"Not at all, but I'm quite tired today. I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Quinn."

She stepped out, waving goodbye.

Ethan nodded as the doors closed, then sighed quietly.

"The resemblance grows stronger the more I look..." he murmured to himself, his words heard by no one.

Source: