

CEO's Regret After I Divorced

#Chapter 231 Return to London - Read CEO's Regret After I Divorced Chapter 231 Return to London

Chapter 231: Chapter 231 Return to London

Serena's POV

My stomach was in knots as our plane descended toward London. This wasn't just any trip back to England—this was potentially life-changing. I kept my gaze fixed on the clouds outside the window, trying to calm my racing thoughts.

What if I see them and remember everything at once? What if I don't remember anything at all? Which would be worse?

The questions swirled in my head like a tornado. Ryan's hand covered mine, his thumb making gentle circles against my skin.

"You're trembling," he whispered, leaning close.

"Just nervous," I admitted, turning to face him. "What if they expect someone different? What if I'm not the Serena they remember?"

Ryan's eyes softened. "They'll love you for who you are now. And if they don't..." He squeezed my hand. "Then they don't deserve you."

Ethan had been on his phone since we landed, coordinating with his—our—sisters. Just thinking the word "sisters" sent another wave of anxiety through me. I'd gone from being alone in the world to suddenly having siblings, parents, an entire family history I couldn't remember.

"Eleanor and Zoe are waiting at arrivals," Ethan announced, pocketing his phone and giving me a reassuring smile.

I tried to return it but my lips felt stiff. Walking through Heathrow felt like marching toward my own execution, each step heavier than the last. The rational part of my brain knew this was ridiculous—these people were my family, not my enemies. But the knot in my stomach only tightened.

"They're going to be emotional," Ethan warned me quietly as we approached the exit. "Especially Eleanor. But I've told them not to overwhelm you."

I nodded, grateful for his thoughtfulness. Ryan's hand moved to the small of my back, his presence solid and reassuring.

"I'm right here," he murmured, seeming to sense my growing panic. "Every step of the way, remember?"

I took a deep breath and stepped through the doors into the arrivals area. Almost immediately, I spotted two elegant women standing apart from the crowd. Even from a distance, something about them seemed familiar in a way I couldn't explain—not a memory, exactly, but a feeling, like recognizing a song you've heard in another life.

"Eleanor, Zoe, we're here!" Ethan called, waving.

The taller woman—Eleanor—looked our way, and her face transformed. Her eyes immediately welled up with tears as she rushed forward.

"Serena," she choked out, "after all these years, you're finally home."

Before I could prepare myself, she had wrapped me in a fierce hug. The scent of her perfume—something floral and expensive—triggered nothing in my memory, but her embrace felt oddly right, like coming home after a long journey.

"Several years without seeing you, and you've changed so much," Zoe said, her voice steadier than Eleanor's but with a slight tremor betraying her emotion.

"Eleanor, careful—she's pregnant," Ethan reminded her, and Eleanor immediately loosened her grip.

"I'm sorry," she said, wiping away tears. "I'm just so emotional. Let's get you home, and we can talk properly."

I nodded, unable to find my voice. These women were my sisters. I had sisters. The reality of it was finally sinking in, and I felt simultaneously terrified and curious.

Then Zoe's attention shifted to Ryan, her eyes narrowing slightly.

"So you're Ryan? The man who kept our sister hidden for three years?" Her tone was sharp, accusatory.

Ryan's expression tightened almost imperceptibly. "Is that how Ethan described the situation?"

"Absolutely not!" Ethan quickly interjected, looking horrified. "I never said it like that!"

"Listen, becoming part of the Quinn family isn't that simple," she said, crossing her arms. Then she turned to me, her expression softening. "Serena, don't let anyone sweet-talk you while you're vulnerable. Let's go home first."

She took my hand, pulling me gently toward her, away from Ryan. I felt caught between worlds—the family I couldn't remember and the man who had become my anchor.

"Ryan and I—" I started to explain, but Ryan interrupted with a small shake of his head.

"They're right," he said calmly. "Earning the right to be your husband isn't something simple. And your sisters are just protecting you, as they should."

I kept quiet as Ryan spoke, his words warming something deep inside me.

"I'm willing to be examined by the Quinn family in the coming days."

The sincerity in his voice touched me.

"We'll discuss this when we get home," Ethan cut in, looking exasperated. "Eleanor, Zoe, could you please tone it down?"

It was amusing to see my newly discovered little brother—apparently a powerful figure in the business world—transform into this pleading puppy in front of our sisters. His attempts at mediation carried an obvious undercurrent of trying to stay in their good graces.

"Fine," Eleanor finally conceded with a sigh. "Serena, let's get in the car."

As our convoy headed toward the Quinn family estate, my sisters wasted no time with their interrogation. Question after question about my life these past years flew at me from both sides.

I carefully edited my responses, skipping over those miserable years after marriage, focusing instead on the positive aspects—my design work, my friends, my recent reconnection with Ryan. I wanted to keep things light, to avoid causing any more tension than there already was.

"You're painting quite the rosy picture," Zoe interrupted, her eyes narrowing. "If things were so wonderful between you and Mr. Blackwood, why did you divorce him? I heard you were secretly married before splitting up."

Her question hit like a punch to the gut. My smile froze, and I felt the atmosphere in the car instantly thicken. Ryan's hand found mine, giving it a gentle squeeze.

"That's in the past," Ryan answered before I could. "Serena and I had some misunderstandings. I've been working to make amends."

Eleanor let out a cold snort. "Must have been quite the 'misunderstanding.' Let me guess—with Blackwood's empire and wealth, there were other women involved? Infidelity during marriage?"

"Absolutely not," Ryan's response was immediate, his jaw tightening. I could feel the tension radiating from him.

"All men are the same," Zoe declared, crossing her arms. "Serena wouldn't have ended a marriage without serious cause. She's too forgiving by nature." She turned to me, her expression softening. "Though honestly, Serena, marrying him just because he rescued you was ridiculous to begin with. This isn't some medieval fairy tale where you owe your rescuer your hand in marriage."

I watched Ryan absorbing each barb in silence. What could he say? We both knew that during those early years of marriage, he'd been a husband in name only.

"Don't worry, Serena," Eleanor reached across to pat my knee. "Now that you're back with the Quinn family, you'll have us backing you up. Nobody will dare mistreat you again."

The threatening glare she shot at Ryan couldn't have been more obvious if she'd pointed a finger at him.

"You've all got it wrong," I finally interjected, feeling increasingly frustrated. "Nobody's mistreating me. What happened between us is in the past. I've moved beyond it."

"Of course you 'moved beyond it'—you were alone in New York without family support!" Zoe exclaimed. "If you'd been known as the Quinn family's third daughter, I guarantee nobody would have dared treat you that way!"

I sighed and gave up trying to explain. There was no point arguing when they'd already made up their minds about Ryan. Instead, I turned to look out the window, watching the unfamiliar yet somehow nostalgic English countryside roll by. How strange to feel connection to a place I couldn't remember.

Source:

Chapter 232: Chapter 232 The Quinn Heiress Returns

Serena's POV

I stared at the grand Quinn family estate, my heart racing as Zoe gently guided me from the car. Everything felt surreal—these people were my family?

Eleanor immediately positioned herself between Ryan and me, giving him the fakest smile I'd ever seen.

"Mr. Blackwood, today is a Quinn family reunion," she said with chilling politeness. "As an outsider, your presence isn't appropriate. Please leave."

I watched Ryan's expression darken slightly, but he controlled himself well. For my sake, I knew. He'd swallowed his pride many times today.

"Just take good care of Serena," he said evenly. "I'll come back for her later."

Zoe turned around, her voice colder than ice. "That won't be necessary, Mr. Blackwood. Serena is the third daughter of the Quinn family. Her place is here with us. Whether you return to New York or stay in London makes no difference to us."

Poor Ethan—I could see him wanting to smooth things over, but one sharp glance from Zoe had him shrinking back. I felt caught in the middle of a tug-of-war I never asked for.

"Ryan," I said softly, "maybe it's better if you wait at the hotel. I'll call you, I promise."

He sighed almost imperceptibly. "Alright."

My newly discovered sisters flanked me like bodyguards as we walked into the mansion. I glanced back once to see Ethan apologizing to Ryan, and something in my heart ached. This wasn't how I wanted things to go.

My parents—God, my actual parents—rushed out to meet us. My mother's eyes filled with tears immediately.

"Serena," she gasped, grabbing my hands. "It's really you. You've finally come home."

Her tears fell freely, and I felt something twist inside me. Eleanor stepped in, guiding us all to sit down.

"Hazel, let's all sit first. Don't get too upset—look, she's back with us now."

My father—Liam Quinn—nodded solemnly. "Yes, let's go inside."

Once seated, I studied their faces carefully. Ethan was right—the resemblance between my mother and me was unmistakable. Seven, maybe eight points of similarity out of ten. Seeing my own features reflected in another person's face was both comforting and strange.

"Serena, you must have suffered so much," my mother said, her eyes dropping to my rounded belly. "Are you married? Your stomach..."

"I was," I replied, feeling oddly calm despite the emotional storm around me. "A lot has happened since I fell into the sea. I lost all my memories after that."

"You lost your memory?" My mother clutched at her chest. "But you're here now. That's all that matters."

She kept repeating those words, her emotions clearly overwhelming her. I wanted to comfort her, but calling them "Mom" and "Dad" still felt foreign on my tongue.

Zoe, sensing my discomfort, quickly intervened. "Mom, Dad, Serena just arrived. We shouldn't upset her—remember she's pregnant. Let's give her time to rest. We have plenty of time ahead of us."

My father nodded in agreement. "We do have time, but Serena, please tell me what happened to you these past years."

I looked up at him, noticing the worry lines creasing his forehead and the scattered gray hairs that hadn't been carefully dyed away. A surprising warmth filled me—these people had never forgotten me.

"After falling into the sea, I was rescued by Ryan Blackwood, CEO of Blackwood Group," I explained carefully. "Out of gratitude for saving my life, I married him. The Blackwood family treated me well, but Ryan and I didn't have much of a connection at first, so we eventually divorced."

My parents' expressions darkened at the word "divorce."

"You're divorced? Then this child..." my father began.

I smiled ruefully. "I discovered I was pregnant after the divorce. But we've worked through our misunderstandings now and are back together. I plan to remarry him after our baby is born."

They seemed slightly relieved, but still concerned.

"Serena," my father said seriously, "how does he treat you now? If you're getting back together just for the child's sake, there's no need. You're home now—you don't have to force yourself into anything. The Quinn family can certainly support one more child."

"No, it's not like that," I hurried to explain. "We did have misunderstandings before, but now we genuinely want to be together."

My sisters exchanged a skeptical glance. This wasn't the first time today they'd heard me defend Ryan.

"Really?" Eleanor raised a skeptical eyebrow. "For someone who supposedly runs the Blackwood Group, he was surprisingly meek when we turned him away at the door. Didn't even try to argue—just accepted defeat and left."

My father's expression darkened. "He didn't insist on seeing Serena?"

Ethan quickly interjected, "That's because Ryan has nothing but respect for Serena's family. The entire London trip was his suggestion—he genuinely wanted Serena to rebuild her relationship with all of you."

Zoe let out a derisive laugh. "Listen to you, already on a first-name basis with him. 'Ryan' this, 'Ryan' that."

"I'm simply telling you what I observed," Ethan said defensively, his jaw tightening.

"That's enough, all of you." My father's authoritative voice cut through the tension. "Serena is home safe, and that's what matters. She can stay as long as she needs. We'll sort out the rest later."

My mother stepped forward, her maternal instincts taking over. "Darling, you must be exhausted. What would you like to eat? I'll cook it myself—none of that restaurant nonsense."

"Mom, please don't fuss," I protested weakly, though her concern warmed something cold inside me. "I'm not picky—whatever you make will be perfect."

"Eleanor." My mother's tone brooked no argument. "Take your sister upstairs. She needs proper rest."

Eleanor led me up a grand staircase, her heels clicking softly against the polished marble. "This was your room," she said, pausing before an ornate door and turning the brass handle. "After you disappeared, we left everything exactly as it was. Mother insisted we keep it clean, hoping... well, hoping for this day."

I stepped into what had supposedly been my room. It was large and airy, decorated in pale blue with white furniture. Clean, organized, and completely unfamiliar. A walk-in closet stood open on one side, filled with clothes I didn't remember wearing.

"These are all your clothes from before," Eleanor continued, gesturing toward the closet. "Though I imagine your style has changed considerably. Zoe and I would love to take you shopping—just tell us your preferred designers."

I ran my fingers along the pristine bedspread, searching for any flicker of recognition. Nothing. "That's very kind, but I won't be in London long enough to warrant new clothes."

Eleanor's face fell slightly. "Serena, I know you've built a life in New York—your studio, your independence. But this is where you belong. This is your real home."

"I want to remember," I said quietly, the admission surprising even myself. "I know you're my family, I can see how much you care, but looking at all of this... it's like staring at someone else's life through glass."

Zoe appeared in the doorway, her expression softer than it had been downstairs. "Memory isn't everything, you know. Sometimes starting fresh isn't the worst thing that can happen to a person. What matters is what you choose to do now."

I managed a small smile. "I'm trying to figure that out."

"Well, you won't solve anything on an empty stomach," Zoe said practically. "Eleanor, let's give her some breathing room. Serena, we'll call you when lunch is ready."

Source:

Chapter 233: Chapter 233 Dinner Table Interrogation

Serena's POV

I sat alone in the unfamiliar bedroom, everything around me feeling both strange and familiar at once. That helpless sensation of lost memories washed over me again, darkening my mood as I settled by the window.

My fingers traced over the books arranged on the desk—mostly design references and textbooks. So my design talent I'd always been proud of wasn't just innate gift but years of dedicated study. Curious, I pulled out a portfolio and flipped it open, surprised to discover my own work inside.

Each piece was meticulously signed and dated in the bottom right corner. Even as a teenager, I'd created impressive designs. "Damn, past Serena really knew her stuff," I muttered, feeling my spirits lift as I examined each piece one by one.

I lost track of time until my phone buzzed with a message from Ryan: [How does it feel to be home?]

I smiled and quickly typed back: [Not bad.]

[Are you at the hotel?] I asked, feeling a twinge of guilt that my family had practically chased him away.

[Yes, just near the Quinn residence. Awaiting your royal summons at any moment.]

I couldn't help laughing, picturing Ryan's serious face as he typed something so playful. The thought made him seem even more endearing somehow.

[Sorry my parents and family haven't exactly embraced us being together,] I wrote.

[I understand. I was a complete jerk in the past, after all.]

His responses came quickly—almost too quickly—like he'd been anxiously waiting to hear from me. It was reassuring that he understood the situation.

After putting the portfolio away, exhaustion suddenly hit me. I lay down on the bed and drifted into a deep sleep, unconsciously hugging a stuffed animal that must have been mine years ago.

* * *

Author's POV

Ethan watched as Zoe returned to the dining room alone, noticing the concerned look on Eleanor's face.

"Where's Serena? Isn't she eating?" Eleanor asked.

Zoe shook her head as she sat down. "She's sound asleep. She looked so peaceful I didn't have the heart to wake her."

"Let's eat without her then," Zoe suggested.

Their mother Hazel sighed softly. "Serena lost her memory and suddenly returned home—of course she feels disoriented. All of you should take her around, help her recover her memories."

The siblings nodded in agreement, and Ethan spoke up, trying to reassure his parents.

"Dad, Mom, don't worry. Serena already believes we're her family—she just needs time to adjust. I've spent the most time with her recently, so I'll help convince her."

Liam nodded. "Ethan, you've been to New York often lately. What's your impression of this Blackwood fellow?"

Suddenly all eyes at the table were fixed on Ethan, making him uncomfortable. He wanted to speak well of Ryan but didn't dare exaggerate too much, so he carefully recounted what he'd observed over the past weeks.

"Overall, I think Ryan is a decent person. Their divorce happened because they started without any real emotional foundation," Ethan explained. "It's like any relationship—couples need to work through misunderstandings and setbacks before finding happiness."

Zoe made a dismissive sound. "Ethan, you've been acting strange lately. You've never even dated—how are you suddenly an expert on relationships?"

Ethan tensed. He hadn't expected the conversation to expose him like this. "Zoe, you've been away for ages, and the minute you return you're interrogating me like a criminal?"

"You're dodging the question," Zoe smirked. "You're definitely hiding something. Have you fallen for someone?"

His parents' gazes grew intensely interested. As the Quinn family's only son, his future marriage was their constant concern. Ethan had grown up abroad, barely knowing London's eligible young women. Since returning, he'd thrown himself into company business, not even hiring a female secretary. Hazel had introduced him to several suitable young women, but he'd rejected them all without even meeting them.

All these behaviors had made his parents increasingly worried about his marriage prospects.

"Ethan, is what Zoe saying true?" Eleanor asked. She was the Quinn family's second child and the smartest—her analysis of situations was almost always spot-on. If she suspected something, it was likely accurate.

Ethan's mouth twitched as he felt unprecedented pressure building. His feelings for Maya weren't even properly defined yet. If nothing came of it, admitting his interest now would just be embarrassing.

"No, Zoe's making things up," he quickly denied, causing his parents' expressions to darken.

"Ethan, you're not getting any younger. You should be thinking about settling down," Hazel sighed again.

He'd heard this lecture so many times his ears had calluses. "Mom, why don't you lecture Eleanor and Zoe for a change?"

"We're talking about your problem—don't change the subject!" Eleanor glared at him, refusing to let him deflect.

Liam grunted. "Your sisters can take care of themselves. They've at least dated a couple of men. I'm not worried about them. But you don't even have female friends!"

Eleanor nodded emphatically, then raised her eyebrows mischievously. "Little brother, you're not into men, are you?"

Ethan choked on the water he was drinking, coughing violently while facing his father's increasingly displeased expression.

"Dad, Mom, don't listen to Eleanor's nonsense. I'm attracted to women, and I do have female friends—you just don't know about them," he finally managed.

Zoe's smile grew more triumphant. "So there is someone! Tell us, who is she? A London girl or a classmate from abroad?"

Ethan felt his smile becoming increasingly strained as Zoe pressed him. The conversation was spinning wildly out of control.

In truth, Maya's face kept flashing through his mind. Her confident smile when discussing design concepts. The way she'd fiercely defended Serena at every turn. Even her blunt criticisms of his suggestions had a certain charm. Though they'd started as adversaries of sorts, he'd found himself increasingly looking forward to their exchanges, even the argumentative ones.

But how could he explain all that to his family? They'd never understand that he was drawn to someone so different from the polished London socialites they kept pushing his way. Besides, he wasn't even sure if Maya saw him as anything more than Serena's annoying brother.

"There's no one," he insisted, though the heat rising to his face betrayed him. "Can we please talk about something else? Like how we're going to help Serena adjust?"

"Your love life is equally important, little brother," Zoe said, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Don't think you can dodge this conversation forever."

Ethan glanced around the table, realizing he'd somehow become the center of attention when they should have been discussing Ryan and Serena's situation. How had the conversation shifted to his nonexistent romantic prospects?

He lifted his wrist, checking his watch with exaggerated surprise. "Oh, would you look at the time! I completely forgot—there's an urgent board meeting I need to attend."

"Right now?" Eleanor raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"Corporate emergencies wait for no one," Ethan said, already pushing back his chair. "Sorry, Mum, Dad, ladies—duty calls."

Before anyone could protest, he practically bolted from the dining room, leaving behind a table of amused family members who weren't fooled for a second by his sudden "emergency."

Source:

Chapter 234: Chapter 234 Fragments of the Past

Serena's POV

I woke up feeling like I'd been hit by a freight train, my head throbbing with the remnants of fragmented memories. The same bedroom I'd fallen asleep in earlier now felt somehow different—more familiar yet still strange.

Rubbing my eyes, I made my way downstairs, my stomach growling loudly enough to override the lingering headache. I hadn't meant to sleep so long, but exhaustion had claimed me completely.

"Serena, you're awake!" Eleanor rushed toward me, immediately gesturing to the housekeeper. "Please prepare lunch for my sister."

I smiled sheepishly. "Have you all eaten already? I guess I really overslept."

"Don't worry about it," Eleanor said, taking my arm. "I didn't eat much earlier—I'll join you."

She guided me to the dining table where Zoe was already sitting, sipping freshly squeezed juice instead of having another meal. I noticed her watching my every movement, studying me like I was some fascinating specimen.

"You've always hated cilantro," she remarked suddenly. "That's why our chef never uses it in anything."

My chopsticks paused midair as I scanned the dishes, realizing she was right—not a speck of green herb in sight.

"Was I always this picky?" I asked, feeling strange about discovering these quirks about myself.

Eleanor laughed lightly. "Not just cilantro. You never liked fresh juice either—that's strictly Zoe's thing."

"Your habits haven't changed at all, Serena," Zoe added, her eyes softening. "You've been through so much these past few years."

I shook my head dismissively. "What's done is done."

Eleanor's expression suddenly turned serious. "You know, the accident where you fell overboard happened during a celebration party I organized."

The shift in her tone made me look up, and I saw genuine remorse in her eyes.

"I still regret having that party on a yacht," she continued, her voice dropping. "If we'd stayed on land, none of this would have happened."

Something flickered in my mind—a flash of bright lights, the clink of champagne glasses, voices congratulating me on a successful business deal. My head began to throb painfully.

"It was your first major business success on your own," Eleanor continued, not noticing my discomfort. "I wanted to celebrate in style, and you were so happy that night. You drank more champagne than usual."

She put down her chopsticks, looking directly at me. "It's all my fault, Serena. Can you ever forgive me?"

More images flooded my mind—a lavish party on a yacht, people in formal wear, my own reflection in a mirror showing flushed cheeks as I accepted another glass of champagne. The pain in my head intensified, becoming unbearable.

"Serena? Serena, what's wrong?" Both sisters leaned forward in alarm.

My chopsticks clattered onto the table as I clutched my head. The fragments of memory kept coming faster, sharper, each one like a knife stabbing into my brain.

"What's happening? Someone call Dr. Shawn immediately!" Eleanor's voice sounded distant, as though coming from underwater.

The last thing I remember was the room spinning violently before everything went black.

Author's POV

Serena collapsed at the dining table, her face contorted in pain before she lost consciousness completely. Eleanor and Zoe sprung into action, panic evident on both their faces.

"How could you bring up the accident so suddenly?" Zoe snapped at Eleanor while helping to support Serena's limp form. "You've obviously triggered something!"

Eleanor's face crumpled. "I didn't think it would affect her like this! What if something serious happens to her? This is all my fault—my stupid mouth!"

"Let's get her back to her room first," Zoe said more practically, already signaling for the household staff to help.

Dr. Shawn arrived quickly, examining Serena with a grave expression before shaking his head.

"What does that mean?" Zoe demanded, her usually composed demeanor slipping. "Why are you shaking your head?"

"Let's discuss outside," the doctor replied quietly. "Ms. Quinn needs rest."

Once in the hallway, Dr. Shawn explained that physically, Serena wasn't in danger. "She's experienced a strong memory trigger that overwhelmed her system."

"Will this affect her previous amnesia? Can she recover her memories from this?" Eleanor asked anxiously.

The doctor hesitated. "It's impossible to say for certain. We'll have to wait until she regains consciousness."

Zoe nodded, partially relieved. "And the baby? Is the baby okay?"

"Ms. Quinn is pregnant, which complicates matters," Dr. Shawn said carefully. "I strongly advise against further emotional shocks. They could potentially affect both her and the child."

"We understand. Thank you, Dr. Shawn," Zoe said firmly. "And please, don't mention this to our parents yet. They'll only worry unnecessarily."

After the doctor left, Eleanor leaned against the wall, devastated. "This is entirely my fault. I shouldn't have rushed things."

"What's done is done," Zoe sighed. "Just be more careful going forward."

"I was just so worried," Eleanor confessed. "Serena's back home but treats us all like strangers. I thought if she remembered more quickly, it would be easier on our parents."

Zoe understood her sister's intentions but shook her head. "Now isn't the time."

Eleanor nodded reluctantly. "I'll be more careful with what I say from now on." She paused, then added, "What about our plan to test Ryan? Should we continue?"

Zoe considered this carefully. Despite being the middle child of the Quinn siblings, she was always the one they turned to for critical decisions.

"We absolutely continue testing him," she said after a moment. "But Serena can't know about it."

"How do we proceed?"

"Ethan seems to have developed a decent relationship with Ryan. Have him arrange a meeting—let's see how this man handles his liquor first, then we'll move to the next phase."

Eleanor's eyes brightened at the suggestion. "Perfect. I'll tell Ethan to handle it discreetly."

Both sisters shared a determined look. They might have accepted Serena's return, but Ryan Blackwood would need to prove himself worthy of their sister before earning their trust.

Source:

Chapter 235: Chapter 235 Echoes of Betrayal

I woke up with fragments of memory still swirling in my head. The flashes of that yacht party, the champagne, the cold water... they felt distant yet painfully real. My hand automatically went to my stomach, a protective gesture that was becoming instinctive.

"You want to talk about what you remembered?" Hazel asked softly, noticing my faraway look.

"I fell overboard that night," I murmured, stirring the remaining soup absentmindedly. "Someone pushed me. I'm certain of it."

Hazel's eyes widened, her hand trembling as she set down her spoon. "Pushed? Are you saying someone deliberately—"

"I can't be sure," I interrupted, not wanting to upset her further. "Everything's still so fuzzy. Maybe I just lost my balance."

But deep down, I felt it. That sudden force against my back hadn't been my imagination. Someone had wanted me gone that night.

The sound of my phone ringing broke the tense moment. Ryan's name flashed across the screen.

"I should take this," I said, excusing myself from the table and stepping into the living room. For some reason, my heart was racing. "Hello?"

"Serena." Just the way he said my name, deep and tender, made something flutter inside me. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," I answered truthfully. "Just had dinner with my mother."

"I miss you." The words were simple, direct, sending an unexpected warmth through me. "I had quite the interesting evening with your brother and sisters."

I couldn't help but laugh. "They didn't go easy on you, did they?"

"Let's just say I've never consumed that much alcohol in one business meeting before," Ryan chuckled, the sound surprisingly relaxed. "Your brother Ethan drives a hard bargain, but I think I've earned their provisional approval."

"Provisional?" I teased.

"Very provisional," he confirmed with another laugh. "But enough to secure permission to see you tomorrow."

I bit my lip, fighting a smile. "Is that so? And what exactly are your plans for this approved meeting?"

"I thought we might go shopping," Ryan replied casually. "Your mother mentioned you might need some things, considering... well, your condition."

My hand automatically went to my barely-there bump. "Shopping? The mighty Ryan Blackwood voluntarily offering to go shopping?"

"Don't sound so surprised. I've been told I have excellent taste."

"In business acquisitions, maybe. But maternity clothes?" I couldn't help the laughter bubbling up.

"I'm a man of many talents, Serena," he countered, his voice dropping lower, more intimate. "Some of which you're quite familiar with."

The heat that rose to my cheeks was instantaneous. "Ryan!"

"What? I'm simply referring to my negotiation skills," he said innocently, though I could hear the smile in his voice. "Which store would you like to ruin me at first?"

I settled into the couch, suddenly realizing how much I'd missed our banter. "I'm thinking Barneys to start. Then maybe Saks."

"Trying to bankrupt me before dinner? At least feed me first."

"I thought you were a billionaire," I teased.

"Even billionaires appreciate a good meal before financial ruin," he shot back smoothly.

We fell into easy conversation, discussing plans for tomorrow, carefully avoiding the heavier topics that hovered between us. For those few minutes, it felt almost like before—before my memories started returning, before the complications of family loyalties and past secrets.

"I should let you rest," Ryan said finally, his voice softening. "Tomorrow at ten?"

"Ten is perfect," I agreed, surprised by how much I was looking forward to it.

After hanging up, I sat there for a moment, phone still warm in my hand. The fragments of memory that had surfaced earlier seemed temporarily pushed aside by the anticipation of tomorrow.

"Was that Ryan?" Hazel appeared in the doorway, her expression carefully neutral.

I nodded, suddenly feeling like a teenager caught talking to a crush. "He's taking me shopping tomorrow."

Her face softened. "Good. You need someone looking after you right now." She hesitated, then added, "You know, he came here every day while you were staying with us. Even when Ethan and the girls wouldn't let him see you."

This surprised me. "He did?"

"Just sat in his car outside for hours sometimes," she confirmed with a small smile. "That's not the behavior of a man who doesn't care, Serena."

I didn't know how to respond to that. The Ryan I'd known during our marriage had been cold, distant—nothing like the man who'd called me just now, whose voice warmed when saying my name.

"Get some rest, sweetheart," Hazel said, kissing my forehead. "Tomorrow's a new day."

As I climbed back upstairs to my bedroom, I couldn't help wondering which version of Ryan was real—the cold husband from my returning memories, or the caring man who'd apparently sat outside for hours just to be near me.

Maybe tomorrow I'd find out.

* * *

Meanwhile, Ryan loosened his tie as he leaned back in his office chair, still holding his phone. The call with Serena had lifted a weight he hadn't realized he'd been carrying.

"I take it the meeting went well?" Simon asked, entering with a stack of documents.

"Better than expected," Ryan admitted. "Though I may never recover from that whiskey Ethan Quinn produced at the end."

Simon smiled knowingly. "And the shares transfer paperwork?"

"Ready to be finalized tomorrow," Ryan confirmed, glancing at the documents Simon placed before him. "Thirty percent of Blackwood Group. Make sure the legal team understands this isn't negotiable."

"The board won't be pleased," Simon pointed out carefully.

Ryan's eyes hardened. "The board doesn't need to be pleased. They need to understand that Serena is my priority now. I won't have her questioning her place in my life ever again."

Simon nodded, knowing better than to argue. "Will there be anything else, sir?"

Ryan turned to look out at the city lights. "No. That will be all."

After Simon left, Ryan opened his desk drawer and took out a small velvet box. Inside was not the massive diamond he'd given Serena during their first marriage—a ring chosen more for status than sentiment. This one was smaller but infinitely more meaningful: a sapphire surrounded by tiny diamonds, matching the exact color of the ocean where he'd found her.

Where she'd nearly died because he'd failed to protect her.

Ryan closed the box, his jaw set with determination. He wouldn't fail her again. Not Serena, and not their child.

Tomorrow would be just the beginning.

Source:

Chapter 236: Chapter 236 The Test of Love

Serena's POV

I was exhausted but oddly happy as we headed toward London's largest shopping center. The moment we stepped out of the car, Eleanor grabbed my arm and practically dragged me toward the most prestigious boutique in the district.

"This place does exclusive custom designs," she announced proudly. "Every seasonal piece is limited edition—no chance of seeing someone else wearing your outfit."

"I used to visit their shops back home all the time," she added with a hint of nostalgia.

I nodded, genuinely excited despite my fatigue. Today was the first time I'd felt normal in weeks—just shopping with family, no life-threatening situations or memory flashbacks to deal with.

Ryan, meanwhile, had been relegated to the role of bodyguard and designated bag-carrier. The moment we entered the boutique, he settled himself onto a plush waiting chair with surprising grace for a man of his stature. The resigned look on his face made me bite back a smile.

The staff immediately recognized the Quinn sisters, swooping in with attentive service. Before I knew it, they'd assembled a mountain of clothes and thrust them into my arms.

"This many?" I blinked at the towering pile. "You want me to try all these?"

"What's a shopping trip if not buy, buy, buy?" Eleanor threw me a playful wink. "We're here specifically for your service today, darling."

Though somewhat overwhelmed, I carried the clothes into the fitting room. One outfit after another, I felt like a life-sized Barbie doll being dressed and redressed for their amusement.

"That one's perfect—we'll take it."

"This one too—add it to the pile."

Soon enough, I'd accumulated an entire new wardrobe. Collapsing onto the boutique's velvet sofa, I waved my hand in surrender.

"This is way too much," I protested, patting my barely-visible bump. "I won't even be able to wear these for very long."

"Seems unnecessary to waste so much," I added, though part of me was enjoying the extravagance.

Zoe shot a mischievous look toward Ryan. "It is quite a lot. I wonder if Mr. Blackwood can even carry it all?"

I turned to Ryan with a teasing smile. "We're really putting you through your paces today, aren't we, Mr. Blackwood?"

Ryan's lips curved upward as he met my gaze. "Whatever you like, just get it. That's what today is for."

He pulled out a black card and handed it directly to the wide-eyed staff member, whose demeanor instantly became even more accommodating.

"I'm actually getting tired," I admitted, sinking deeper into the sofa. "Maybe we should call it a day."

Eleanor clicked her tongue disapprovingly. "A few outfits and you're done? We haven't even gotten to the limited editions yet—that's the main event!"

As if on cue, a staff member wheeled out a mannequin wearing what could only be described as wearable art. The champagne-colored gown featured clean, sophisticated lines and a skirt embellished with real diamonds that caught the light with every movement. It was breathtaking.

"Ladies, this is our top limited-edition luxury gown of the season," the associate announced with practiced reverence. "Would any of you like to try it? Our designer can adjust the measurements as needed."

Eleanor raised an eyebrow, clearly impressed. "Well, well. Flash a black card and the treasures appear without even asking. Go on, Serena, try it."

I hesitated, but then Ryan spoke, his voice low and thoughtful.

"Serena, that would suit you perfectly."

Something in his tone made my cheeks warm. With both sisters and Ryan encouraging me, I reluctantly took the gown into the fitting room.

When I emerged minutes later, the sudden silence told me everything. All three of them stared, their eyes widening in appreciation. Despite my pregnancy softening my features and rounding my face slightly, the gown transformed me—making me look elegant, regal even.

"Magnificent," Eleanor declared. "There's a reason these pieces are limited edition."

"What do you think, Serena?" Zoe asked.

I took a deep breath, my hands smoothing down the fabric. "It feels a bit tight, actually."

The staff member jumped in immediately. "We can adjust everything to your specifications, ma'am. You can purchase with complete confidence."

Nodding, I returned to the fitting room, feeling strangely emotional. What occasion would I even have for such a gown? Yet something about Ryan's expression when he saw me wearing it made me want to keep it.

With our business concluded at this boutique, the staff approached Ryan with countless shopping bags hanging from their arms.

"Sir, shall we have these delivered to your residence?"

Ryan had just begun to nod when Eleanor cleared her throat loudly.

"If I remember correctly, Mr. Blackwood volunteered to accompany Serena shopping today. Surely a few bags aren't beyond your capabilities?"

I watched Ryan suppress a sigh as he accepted the mountain of shopping bags. Though they weren't heavy individually, there were so many that both his hands were completely full. Bags dangled from his forearms, wrists, and fingers.

The sight of powerful, commanding Ryan Blackwood laden with designer shopping bags was too much—I burst out laughing.

Eleanor and Zoe were barely containing their own giggles while Ryan stood there looking utterly resigned to his fate.

"Come on, stop torturing him," I said, still laughing. "This is just one store. If we hit a few more, he only has two hands, no matter how strong he is."

The sisters exchanged glances. They'd clearly made their point about testing Ryan's commitment.

"Fine, for Serena's sake, we'll spare Mr. Blackwood from bag-carrying duty," Eleanor conceded with a dramatic sigh. "Please deliver everything to 29 Quinn Manor on Mishan Road."

The staff eagerly took back the bags from Ryan's burdened arms. "Of course. Everything will be delivered by this afternoon, and the limited edition gown will arrive within two days."

Eleanor nodded with satisfaction before linking her arm through mine. "Onward to the next store!"

The entire morning continued in similar fashion—clothes, shoes, jewelry, accessories. I lost count of how many things we purchased, all with casual swipes of Ryan's black card. The wealth didn't seem to faze him at all; he simply watched me with an intensity that made me both nervous and exhilarated.

After hours of shopping, exhaustion hit me like a wave. My feet ached, my head felt light, and my stomach growled angrily.

"Can we find somewhere to eat?" I pleaded. "I honestly can't walk another step."

Zoe quickly agreed. "Same here. Food break, please."

Only Eleanor still bounced with endless energy, looking disappointed at our stamina. "You two have such weak constitutions! Can't even handle a proper shopping spree. Fine, fine—there's a good Western restaurant nearby. Let's go."

Relief washed over me, but as we turned toward the exit, the boutique suddenly tilted sideways. My vision narrowed to a pinpoint, darkness creeping in from the edges.

"I don't feel—" I started to say, but the words died on my lips.

The last thing I registered was Ryan's alarmed expression as my knees buckled and the world went black.

Source:

Chapter 237: Chapter 237 The Collapse

Ryan's POV

I felt it before she fell. Her face suddenly went pale, and I saw her eyes losing focus as she started to sway. Without hesitation, I lunged forward and caught Serena just as her legs gave out.

"Serena? Serena?" I called her name twice, my voice steady despite the panic rising in my chest. There was no response, her body completely limp in my arms.

Eleanor's composure instantly crumbled. "What do we do? Was it too much shopping? Is she okay?" Her voice pitched higher with each question.

Thankfully, Zoe remained calm, taking a deep breath before speaking. "Don't panic. Let's get her to the nearest hospital."

I nodded once, already shifting Serena into a proper carrying position. I lifted her against my chest, one arm supporting her back, the other under her knees. Her head rested against my shoulder, her breathing shallow but present.

"I've got her," I said, already moving toward the exit. "Call ahead to the hospital. Tell them we're coming."

The boutique staff scrambled to clear a path as I strode through the store, Serena's sisters hurrying behind me. Every second felt crucial. I'd failed to protect her before—I wouldn't let that happen again.

Fortunately, there was a medical center just blocks away. Within minutes, Serena was being rushed into an emergency room, leaving the three of us pacing anxiously in the hallway.

"This isn't the first time," Zoe said after several minutes of tense silence. She explained the previous incident to me in low, measured tones. "Last time she collapsed after Eleanor mentioned things from her past. Doctor Shawn said it was just a side effect of her amnesia, nothing serious."

My jaw tightened. "If that's all it is, fine. But if these memory triggers are causing her actual harm," I said, my voice dropping to a dangerous calm, "then you need to stop. Both of you. I don't care about her remembering her past if it puts her health at risk."

I fixed both sisters with an unyielding stare. "She's found her family again. That should be enough. The missing memories aren't worth her suffering."

Zoe sighed, running a hand through her hair. "I agree completely. But today was different—we weren't actively trying to make her remember anything. We were just shopping, eating, talking... normal things."

"Then what caused this?" I asked, more to myself than to her.

The emergency room doors finally swung open. A doctor emerged, followed by an orderly wheeling Serena on a gurney. She was still unconscious, looking impossibly fragile against the white sheets.

"How is she?" I immediately stepped forward, searching the doctor's face for answers.

The doctor removed his mask, his expression reassuring. "No need for alarm. We've examined her thoroughly. The fainting episode wasn't caused by any external triggers."

"She's stable now," he continued. "We're moving her to a regular room where she can rest until she wakes up."

We all visibly relaxed at his words, though my concern hadn't fully dissipated.

"Does she have any previous medical conditions we should know about?" the doctor asked.

"Nothing specific," I replied. "Though she did fall into the ocean three years ago and lost her memory as a result. Could this episode be related to that?"

The doctor nodded thoughtfully. "That explains a lot. Lost memories often resurface gradually when exposed to familiar environments or stimuli."

"Her fainting spell might indicate that her brain is processing recovered memories—the sudden mental load simply overwhelmed her system temporarily."

I appreciated his straightforward explanation. "Thank you, doctor."

After he left, Zoe leaned against the wall with a weary sigh. "So it is the amnesia after all. Even without deliberately triggering her memories, just being around us, shopping together, talking—it's all affecting her subconsciously."

Eleanor's face had gone pale. "But she'll be okay, right?" Her usual confidence had evaporated, replaced by genuine concern.

"The doctor says she's stable. All we can do now is wait for her to wake up."

No matter what happened when Serena woke—whether she remembered everything or nothing—my feelings for her wouldn't change. I'd stand by her either way, protecting her from anything that might harm her, including well-meaning family members who pushed too hard.

Serena's POV

When I came to, I was lying in a hospital bed, surrounded by sterile white walls and the faint beep of medical equipment. My head was pounding, but something felt different. The fog that had clouded parts of my mind seemed to have lifted.

Ryan, Eleanor, and Zoe were huddled near the doorway, speaking in hushed tones with a doctor. I caught fragments of their conversation—words like "memory recovery" and "cognitive stress." I closed my eyes, trying to process what was happening.

That's when the images started flowing. Not like before—not fragmented glimpses that vanished as quickly as they appeared. These were complete, vivid memories washing over me in waves.

I saw myself as a little girl, running through the sprawling gardens of Quinn Manor in a frilly dress, my laughter echoing across the perfectly manicured lawns. Then suddenly I was older, at my grand coming-of-age celebration, wearing a stunning white gown with a delicate tiara nestled in my hair. I remembered blowing out the candles on an elaborate cake, surrounded by the elite of British society.

Another flash—I was in a sleek conference room, finalizing my first major design partnership. The pride in my father's eyes, the champagne toast, my name on glossy business cards: Serena Quinn, Creative Director.

Then darkness. Being pushed—or was I? The cold shock of water, the desperate struggle to surface, the crushing pressure in my lungs...

My eyes flew open and I bolted upright, gasping for air. Three startled faces turned toward me, frozen in anticipation.

"Serena, are you okay?" Zoe approached cautiously, taking my trembling hand in hers.

I looked at her—really looked at her—and felt the tears welling up. "Zoe," I whispered, my voice thick with emotion. "I remember. I remember everything."

Her eyes widened. "Serena, what did you just call me? Do you... do you truly remember?"

I nodded, turning to my other sister who stood paralyzed with hope and fear. "Eleanor."

Ryan exhaled deeply, relief evident in the loosening of his shoulders. I could read his thoughts—he was glad I wouldn't have to suffer through more episodes of confusion and disorientation.

Eleanor burst into tears, rushing to my bedside. "Serena, you finally remember! I'm so sorry—it was all my fault for insisting on that stupid celebration on the yacht. I've been such a terrible sister."

"Serena," Zoe cut in, always the practical one, "we should have the doctors run some more tests to make sure everything's okay. Just to be safe."

I hesitated but agreed. Despite the clarity I felt, the medical confirmation would reassure us all. Within minutes, I was wheeled away for a CT scan while they waited anxiously in the hallway.

When I returned, Ryan pulled me close, his arms providing a sanctuary I hadn't realized I needed. "Don't worry," he murmured against my hair. "Everything will be fine. And when we get back to the Quinn estate, you can reconnect with your parents properly—though maybe skip the part where I was a complete ass to you. No need to make them hate me more than they probably already do."

I couldn't help but laugh. "Too late for that. Their impression of you isn't exactly stellar."

His eyes crinkled as he leaned in closer, his lips brushing my ear. "Then I'm counting on you to put in a good word for me. Otherwise, my grand reconciliation plans might be doomed from the start."

The tension melted from my body, replaced by something lighter, more hopeful. I caught Eleanor watching us from across the room, a wistful smile playing on her lips.

The doctor returned with my scans, his expression reassuring. "Everything looks perfectly normal," he confirmed, reviewing the images. "The memory recovery appears to have happened naturally, without any physical trauma to the brain. You're free to go home."

Source: