

CEO's Regret After I Divorced - Chapter 240

Serena's POV

I stood in front of the full-length mirror while Eleanor fussed with my hair and Zoe ransacked the jewelry box. The butterflies in my stomach were performing an entire circus routine, not because of the party, but because I still couldn't believe this was my life now—surrounded by family on my birthday for the first time in... well, forever.

"Hold still," Eleanor commanded, wielding her makeup brush like a weapon. "I can't create a masterpiece if the canvas keeps wiggling."

I tried to suppress a laugh. "Sorry. How much longer? We've been at this for nearly two hours."

"Beauty cannot be rushed," Eleanor declared dramatically. "Besides, when Ryan sees you, I want his jaw to physically hit the floor. Maybe chip a tooth or two."

Zoe approached with a velvet box. "This will complete the look perfectly." She lifted out a diamond necklace that practically blinded me with its sparkle. "This was Grandmother's. Mom thought you should wear it tonight."

My throat tightened as Zoe fastened the cool diamonds around my neck. In the mirror, I barely recognized myself in the limited edition gown they'd insisted I wear—midnight blue silk that seemed to flow like water when I moved.

"Ryan's probably pacing a hole in the foyer floor by now," I said, checking the time.

Eleanor and Zoe exchanged a look I couldn't quite interpret.

"Oh my God!" Zoe clutched her chest in mock horror. "We've been beautifying you for hours, and all you can think about is that man? The betrayal!"

Eleanor joined in, collapsing dramatically onto the bed. "Our own sister! Stolen by a man with good hair and an American Express Black Card!"

"His hair is not that good," I protested weakly, though we all knew that was a lie.

"It's disgustingly good," Zoe said. "Like he made a deal with some hair deity."

I couldn't help but laugh at their antics. "You two are ridiculous. Besides, this whole birthday party seems... excessive." I gestured at my elaborate outfit. "Anyone would think I'm getting married today or something."

The sisters exchanged another one of those strange looks.

"What?" I demanded. "What are you two plotting?"

“Nothing!” they chirped in unison, which only increased my suspicion.

Eleanor checked her watch. “We should head downstairs. Half of London’s elite is probably already here, wondering where the birthday girl is.”

“Half of—wait, what?” I spun around. “I thought this was just family and close friends!”

Zoe patted my arm sympathetically. “Welcome back to being a Quinn, darling. ‘Small gathering’ means only inviting people who own private islands or have buildings named after them.”

My stomach dropped. “But I don’t know any of these people! I’ve only been back in London for a few weeks!”

“Don’t worry,” Eleanor soothed, applying one last touch of lipstick to my mouth. “They all know who you are. The prodigal Quinn daughter returns from the dead—it’s the gossip of the year!”

“That’s... not comforting,” I muttered.

Zoe handed me a flute of champagne. “Liquid courage. Just remember, you’re Serena Quinn. You could show up in pajamas and these people would still kiss your feet.”

I downed the champagne in one go. “Can I have another?”

Eleanor laughed, linking her arm through mine. “After we make our entrance. Come on, smile! You’re the star tonight.”

As we descended the grand staircase of Moonlight Manor—apparently the most exclusive venue in London, because of course it was—I felt like I was floating in some bizarre dream. The enormous ballroom was filled with people in designer eveningwear, crystal champagne flutes catching the light from the chandeliers overhead.

“There’s Mom and Dad,” Zoe whispered, nodding toward our parents who were chatting with an elderly couple dripping in jewels.

My father spotted us and his face lit up with that mixture of pride and wonder he’d worn since I’d returned. He still looked at me sometimes like he couldn’t believe I was really here. The feeling was mutual.

“And there’s your knight in shining Armani,” Eleanor murmured with a smirk.

My heart did a ridiculous flip as I spotted Ryan across the room, locked in conversation with Ethan. The moment I appeared at the bottom of the stairs, his head turned as if pulled by some magnetic force. Our eyes met, and everything else blurred around the edges.

Ryan excused himself from Ethan and moved through the crowd toward me, people parting for him like water. In his black tux with his dark hair slightly tousled (deliberately, I was sure), he looked like he'd stepped out of a James Bond film.

"Your man cleans up well, I'll give him that," Zoe admitted grudgingly.

"He's not my—" I started automatically, then caught myself. Old habits died hard. "I mean, yes. Yes, he does."

Eleanor gave me a gentle nudge forward. "Go get him, birthday girl. We'll run interference with the vultures trying to get gossip about your 'lost years.'"

As I moved toward Ryan, whispers followed me through the crowd. I caught fragments—"Quinn heiress," "memory loss," "miraculous return"—but I kept my eyes fixed on Ryan, using him as my anchor in this sea of strangers who somehow all knew me.

When we finally reached each other, he took my hand and raised it to his lips, his eyes never leaving mine.

"You look absolutely stunning," he said, his voice low and intimate despite the crowd around us.

I felt heat rise to my cheeks. "You don't look so bad yourself."

"I have something for you," he said, reaching into his jacket.

My heart started racing. Was he going to—? No, surely not here, not now, with hundreds of eyes watching.

Instead, he pulled out a small velvet pouch. "Happy birthday, Serena."

I opened it carefully, gasping when a delicate bracelet slid into my palm. Tiny sapphires and diamonds winked up at me, arranged in a pattern that seemed oddly familiar.

"It's beautiful," I breathed. "But what's the design? It looks like..."

"Stars," he finished, taking the bracelet and fastening it around my wrist. "A specific constellation, actually. The one visible on the night we met."

My throat tightened. "You remember which stars were out the night you found me on that beach?"

His fingers lingered on my wrist. "I remember everything about that night."

The intensity in his eyes made my heart stutter. Before I could respond, a voice boomed over the sound system.

“Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please?”

We turned to see my father standing on a small stage at the far end of the ballroom, microphone in hand. The crowd quieted.

“Thank you all for coming tonight to celebrate a day I never thought I’d see again—my daughter Serena’s birthday.” His voice cracked slightly. “For those who don’t know our family’s story, we lost Serena six years ago. We were told she was dead, and we mourned. But fate works in mysterious ways...”

As my father continued his speech, Ryan’s arm slipped around my waist, pulling me close against him.

“Are you ready for this?” he whispered in my ear.

I looked up at him, confused. “Ready for what?”

He just smiled enigmatically, his eyes dancing with something that looked suspiciously like anticipation.

“...and now,” my father was saying, “I believe Ryan Blackwood has something he’d like to share with us all.”

Ryan squeezed my hand once before stepping away, moving toward the stage. The knot in my stomach tightened. What was happening? Why did everyone seem to be in on some secret I didn’t know about?

As Ryan took the microphone from my father, the room fell completely silent. All eyes shifted between him and me, expectation hanging heavy in the air.

And suddenly, I knew exactly what was about to happen.

Oh my God. He wouldn’t. Not here, not now.

But as Ryan’s eyes found mine across the crowded room, filled with determination and something that looked terrifyingly like love, I realized that yes, yes he would.

This birthday party was about to become a whole lot more than I bargained for.