

## CEO's Regret After I Divorced – Chapter 265

Serena's POV

The morning flew by in a whirlwind of designs, fabric swatches, and business decisions. By lunchtime, I felt completely immersed in work again, the creative energy revitalizing me in a way nothing else could.

My phone buzzed with a text from Ryan: "How's your first day back? Vivian misses you. So do I."

A smile spread across my face as I typed back: "Busy in the best way. Miss you both too. See you tonight."

I attached a selfie of me surrounded by sketches, my hair slightly disheveled from running my hands through it while concentrating—a habit Ryan always teased me about.

His response came quickly: "Beautiful. Even with pencil smudge on your cheek."

I touched my face, finding the graphite mark he'd noticed. The fact that he found even my messy work mode endearing made my heart skip.

Just as I was about to return to work, my office door opened and Julian stepped in, his familiar silhouette backlit by the hallway lights.

"Welcome back," he said softly, his eyes warming at the sight of me. "The studio hasn't been the same without you."

I smiled, genuinely happy to see my friend and colleague. "Julian. I hear you've been keeping my seat warm."

"Merely keeping things running until the true talent returned," he replied with his usual modesty. "How are you feeling? And how's little Vivian?"

"Both doing well," I assured him. "She's growing so fast, already trying to hold her head up on her own."

Julian nodded, his expression softening. "Children are remarkable that way. Always surprising us with their resilience."

A brief silence fell between us, laden with unspoken feelings.

"I brought you something," he said finally, setting a small gift bag on my desk. "A welcome back present."

Inside, I found an exquisite silver bracelet with a single charm—a tiny paintbrush. "Julian, it's beautiful."

"I had it made specially," he explained. "To remind you that no matter what life throws your way, your creativity will always be your greatest weapon."

The thoughtfulness of the gift touched me deeply. "Thank you. This means a lot."

He hesitated, then added, "Ryan called me."

My eyebrows shot up in surprise. "He did?"

Julian nodded. "To thank me for supporting you and Dreamland during your absence. It was... unexpected."

I could imagine Ryan making that call—formal, direct, but sincerely grateful. The fact that he'd reached out to Julian, despite knowing the man's feelings for me, spoke volumes about how much Ryan had changed.

"He's full of surprises these days," I said softly.

Julian studied me for a moment, his perceptive eyes taking in my expression. "You love him very much, don't you?"

The question caught me off guard, but I didn't hesitate. "I do. Despite everything, I always have."

A sad smile flickered across Julian's face. "He's a fortunate man. I hope he knows that."

"I think he's finally starting to," I replied honestly.

Julian nodded, accepting my answer with grace. "Well, I should let you get back to work. The team's excited to show you their progress on the winter collection."

As he turned to leave, I called after him, "Julian? Thank you. For everything."

He paused at the doorway, looking back with a gentle smile. "Always, Serena. That's what friends are for."

I stared at the final design sketches for our new collection, my eyes burning from hours of intense focus. The Dreamland Studio office hummed with creative energy around me—Maya barking directions at the marketing team, Celeste meticulously adjusting gemstone placements at her workstation, Lucy rushing between departments with sample materials.

"I think we've finally nailed it," I murmured, tracing the contours of the centerpiece necklace with my fingertip. After weeks of revisions, the "Renaissance" collection was ready for production—a blend of classic elegance and modern boldness that felt distinctly mine.

My phone vibrated against the desk, an unknown number lighting up the screen. Normally, I'd let Lucy screen my calls, but something made me reach for it.

"Serena Blackwood speaking," I answered, pushing away from my desk.

"Serena? My God, it's really you." The male voice carried a familiar British accent that instantly transported me to another life. "It's Cedric Lancaster."

My breath caught. Cedric—my old friend from university, the one who'd helped Eleanor track down the crucial surveillance footage of my "accident" at sea. The evidence that had blown my case wide open.

"Cedric! I—this is unexpected," I managed, my voice warm with genuine surprise. "How did you get my number?"

He chuckled, the sound rich and familiar. "I practically had to beg Eleanor for it. She's quite protective of you these days."

"For good reason," I replied, thinking of Olivia's recent betrayal. "Eleanor mentioned what you did for me—finding that footage. I never properly thanked you."

"No thanks needed. Though I'd love to catch up in person if you're willing. I'm actually in New York for a conference—just arrived this morning."

I found myself smiling. "I'd love that. Dinner tonight?"

"Perfect. I've heard wonderful things about The Pierre—around eight?"

"I'll be there," I confirmed, already mentally rearranging my evening schedule.

As I ended the call, I noticed Maya leaning against my office doorframe, arms crossed, a knowing smirk on her lips.

"Well, well, well," she drawled. "Was that a genuine smile I just witnessed? On a business call?"

I rolled my eyes. "It wasn't business. An old friend from university is in town—Cedric Lancaster."

Maya raised an eyebrow, sauntering into my office and perching on the edge of my desk. "Old friend? Or old flame?"

"Just a friend," I insisted, though Cedric and I had briefly danced around attraction before life pulled us in different directions. "He helped Eleanor find evidence about my accident. I owe him a thank-you dinner, at minimum."

"Mmm-hmm." Maya's expression was pure mischief. "And what will your extremely possessive, territorial husband think about you having dinner with this handsome British gentleman?"

I paused, considering. Ryan had been different lately—more open, more vulnerable, but still undeniably protective.

“I’ll tell him, of course,” I said firmly. “In fact...”

I picked up my phone again, typing a quick message to Ryan:

“Having dinner with an old university friend tonight at The Pierre, 8pm. He helped Eleanor find evidence about my accident. Would love for you to join us if you can wrap up your meetings. His name is Cedric Lancaster.”

Maya peered over my shoulder. “Smart move. Inviting the big bad wolf to dinner.”

“It’s not like that,” I protested, though I knew she was partly right. “Ryan deserves to meet someone who helped uncover the truth.”

“Plus,” Maya added with a wink, “this way there’s zero chance of gossip about the newly reconciled Mrs. Blackwood dining alone with a handsome stranger.”

“You’re impossible,” I laughed, pushing her off my desk.

My phone buzzed with Ryan’s reply: “In meetings until 7:30. Will try to make it. Send me details about this Cedric.”

I showed Maya the message, and she let out a low whistle.

“Oh, he’s definitely going to show up. That’s Ryan-speak for ‘I’ll move heaven and earth to be there and size up this man who knows my wife.’”

I shook my head, but couldn’t suppress a smile. “He’s just being... Ryan.”

“Exactly,” Maya nodded sagely. “Which means he’ll probably have Simon run a full background check on poor Cedric before appetizers arrive.”

“Let him run his checks,” I said, returning to my sketches. “Cedric has nothing to hide.”

“Unlike certain other ‘friends’ who’ve waltzed into your life,” Maya muttered darkly, clearly thinking of Olivia.

I nodded, feeling a pang at the reminder. “I should get back to work if I’m going to make this dinner. The production team needs these approvals by five.”

“Sure, sure,” Maya stood, heading for the door. “Just promise me one thing?”

“What’s that?”

Her eyes twinkled mischievously. “Text me if Ryan goes full caveman possessive. I want all the juicy details.”

“Out!” I pointed to the door, laughing despite myself.