

CEO's Regret After I Divorced – Chapter 336

Serena's POV

The sterile white walls of the hospital room felt like they were closing in on me. Rancy's fever had finally broken, but her flushed cheeks and matted hair were painful reminders of our terrifying morning.

I brushed a damp strand of hair from her forehead, my heart aching. Two years old and already so brave. The doctors said she'd be fine—just a severe viral infection—but those hours when her temperature soared to 104 felt like the longest of my life.

“Mama,” Rancy's small voice cracked, her eyes fluttering open. “Vivi? See Vivi?”

My heart sank. Vivian Blackwood. Of course that would be her first coherent thought after hours of feverish sleep.

“Honey, Vivian can't come to the hospital. You need to rest and get better first,” I explained gently, offering her the sippy cup of water the nurse had left.

Rancy's bottom lip trembled dangerously. “But promised! See pitchers!”

I sighed, remembering their playground conversation that I'd overheard yesterday. Vivian had apparently invited Rancy over this weekend to see “mama's pretty pictures.” The invitation had made Rancy ecstatic all day.

“Vivi waiting,” Rancy whimpered, tears welling in her eyes. “Vivi sad no Rancy.”

“Sweetheart, Vivian will understand—”

“Want Vivi!” The tears broke free, streaming down her already flushed face. “Call Vivi! Pease, Mama!”

Any parent knows that sound—the desperate plea that cuts straight through logical reasoning and parental resolve. My daughter was sick, scared, and wanting the comfort of her best friend. How could I deny her that?

With a resigned sigh, I pulled out my phone and called Maya. If anyone could arrange a brief call between the girls, it would be her.

“Mrs.Lancaster? How's Rancy doing?” Maya answered immediately, concern evident in her voice.

“The fever’s down, thank God. But she’s crying for Vivian,” I explained, lowering my voice. “Is there any chance they could talk on the phone for just a minute? She’s convinced Vivian is waiting for her.”

An uncomfortable silence followed. “Maya?”

“That’s... complicated right now,” Maya finally said. “Vivian is with her father tonight.”

Ryan Blackwood. The name alone made my stomach clench. Our only previous interaction had been a disastrous phone call about a business meeting.

“I see,” I replied, trying to keep the disappointment from my voice.

“Mama! Vivi!” Rancy was becoming more agitated, her little arms reaching toward my phone.

I stared at the number on my screen while Rancy continued her tearful pleas. The memory of Ryan Blackwood’s dismissive tone during our brief business call made my finger hover uncertainly over the dial button.

“Vivi sad no Rancy,” my daughter hiccupped between sobs.

With a deep breath, I hit dial.

The phone rang three times before a deep voice answered. “Blackwood.”

That voice. Rich and resonant like aged whiskey, with an underlying note of authority that made my wolf stir unexpectedly. Something about it felt strangely familiar, beyond our brief previous interaction.

“Mr. Blackwood, this is Serena Lancaster,” I began formally, pushing away the unsettling reaction. “I apologize for calling so late, but—”

“Mrs.Lancaster.” His tone sharpened instantly. “What business matter is so urgent it couldn’t wait until morning?”

I swallowed my pride. “This isn’t about business. My daughter Rancy is in the hospital with a high fever, and she’s very upset about missing her playdate with Vivian this weekend. She’s been asking to speak with her. I was hoping—”

There was a long pause, during which I could hear what sounded like a heated whispered conversation in the background.

Finally, his voice returned, slightly softer. “Is your daughter alright?”

The genuine concern caught me off guard. “She will be. The fever’s down, but she’s still quite upset.”

Another pause. I heard what sounded like a child's voice pleading in the background.

"One minute," he finally said. "They can talk for one minute."

Relief washed over me. "Thank you. That's very kind."

"It's not kindness," he corrected me quickly. "Vivian has been inconsolable since hearing about your daughter's condition."

I heard rustling, then a small, excited voice came on the line. "Hello? Is Rancy there?"

I quickly held the phone to Rancy's ear. "Vivi?" my daughter asked, her tears immediately subsiding.

"Rancy! Are you okay? Daddy said you're in the hop-si-tal!" Vivian's concern was palpable even through the phone.

"Sick," Rancy confirmed in her limited vocabulary. "No come see pitchers."

"It's okay! When you're all better, you can still come see Mommy's pictures! I asked Daddy and he said maybe!"

"P'omise?" Rancy asked, her little face lighting up.

"Promise! And I'll save you the pink cupcake at Mia's birthday tomorrow!"

As the girls continued their disjointed but heartfelt conversation, I couldn't help but smile. Children's friendships were so pure, so uncomplicated by the baggage adults carried.

My smile faded as Rancy's face crumpled again. "Miss you, Vivi," she whimpered, tears returning. "Want hug now."

"I miss you too! Daddy, can we go see Rancy at the hop-si-tal? Please?" I heard Vivian beg in the background.

This was getting out of hand. Gently, I took the phone back from Rancy, mouthing "just a minute" to her.

"Mr. Blackwood? I think we should wrap this up. Rancy needs her rest, and I've already imposed enough on your evening."

"Agreed." His voice had returned to its businesslike tone, but something had shifted. It was less cold, more... contemplative.

"Thank you for allowing this call. It means a lot to Rancy."

“Vivian was equally desperate to speak with her.” He paused. “I wasn’t aware they were so close.”

“Children form bonds quickly,” I offered. “Especially when they’re as open-hearted as these two seem to be.”

Another pause. “Your daughter’s name—Rancy—it’s unusual.”

I smiled despite myself. “She couldn’t pronounce ‘Frances’ when she was learning to talk. It stuck.”

To my shock, I heard what might have been a chuckle on the other end. “Children have their own logic. Vivian insists on calling me ‘Alpha’ sometimes instead of Daddy, because of some story about wolves her grandmother told her.”

“Well, thank you again,” I said, suddenly uncomfortable with how normal this conversation felt. “I hope Vivian sleeps better knowing Rancy is recovering.”

“Mrs. Lancaster?” His voice stopped me just before I could end the call.

“Yes?”

“I hope your daughter feels better soon.”

The simple kindness in those words left me momentarily speechless. “Thank you,” I managed before hanging up.

I turned to comfort Rancy, only to freeze at the sight of Cedric standing in the doorway, his face a mask of controlled fury.

“Who was that?” he asked, his voice deceptively calm.

“Cedric! You startled me.” I moved to kiss his cheek, but he remained rigid. “That was Vivian Blackwood’s father. The girls are friends from preschool, and Rancy was upset about missing their playdate.”

“Blackwood?” Cedric’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “As in Ryan Blackwood?”

I nodded, confused by his intense reaction. “Yes. Is something wrong?”

“You’re letting our daughter associate with a Blackwood?” Each word was carefully measured, his accent becoming more pronounced as it always did when he was angry.

“They’re just children playing together, Cedric. It’s innocent.”

Cedric glanced at Rancy, his expression softening slightly before hardening once more as he looked back at me.

“I’ll be arranging her transfer to Lancaster Academy first thing Monday morning.”

My jaw dropped. “What? You can’t just—”

“It’s done,” he cut me off. “My daughter will not be friends with a Blackwood. “

As he stormed out, I was left wondering what vendetta Cedric Lancaster could possibly have against the Blackwoods.

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Author’s POV

Just three days after her hospital discharge, Rancy was bouncing with excitement, her recent illness seemingly forgotten.

“Vi-vi birthday!” Rancy exclaimed, clapping her small hands together. Her pronunciation was still developing at two and a half years old, but her enthusiasm needed no translation. “Me come!”

Vivian beamed down at her younger friend. “You really will come to my party, Rancy?”

“Yes!” Rancy nodded emphatically, her chestnut curls bobbing. “Bring p’esent too!”

Vivian’s smile widened, revealing a gap where her front tooth had recently fallen out. “You don’t need to bring anything. Just you coming makes me happy.”

The two girls exchanged delighted grins, their friendship untainted by the complex adult world surrounding them.

Across town in the European headquarters of ARt Design, Sophie Hart Anderson was considerably less cheerful. The sleek corner office did nothing to improve her darkening mood as she tapped manicured nails against her glass desk.

“So Maya Carter managed to finalize a deal between Elegant Realm and LUXE,” she said, voice tight with controlled frustration. “Wasn’t it just three years ago that Elegant Realm terminated their contract with LUXE?”

Her assistant, Jennifer, nodded cautiously. “Yes, Mrs. Anderson. After that plagiarism scandal we... informed Mrs. Lancaster about.” She carefully avoided using the word ‘fabricated.’ “The relationship between the companies was quite strained afterward.”

“And yet here they are, partners again.” Sophie’s lips thinned into a hard line. “This has Blackwood involvement written all over it. LUXE alone wouldn’t have been enough to tempt Elegant Realm back into business.”

She drummed her fingers against the desk, mind calculating rapidly. The competition between LUXE and ARt Design had grown increasingly fierce over the past three years, with both companies vying aggressively for market share. Despite ARt’s best efforts—including some that operated in morally gray areas—LUXE remained firmly in the top position, with ARt perpetually second.

Elegant Realm’s emergence as a rising star in the design world had initially seemed like the perfect opportunity for ARt to gain leverage, but that opportunity was slipping through their fingers.

“Have you managed to schedule a meeting with Mrs. Lancaster yet?” Sophie asked.

Jennifer shook her head apologetically. “Her assistant keeps deflecting. Apparently, her daughter was hospitalized recently, so she’s been working limited hours.”

Sophie’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully. “Her daughter? What preschool does she attend?”

“Bright Horizons Preschool, the same as—”

“The same as Ryan’s daughter,” Sophie finished, a slow smile spreading across her face.

“Perfect. If we can’t reach Mrs. Lancaster at her studio, we’ll intercept her at pickup time. A mother who prioritizes her child enough to reduce work hours will certainly be handling school pickup herself.”

Within thirty minutes, Sophie had convened an executive meeting, directing her team to prepare an aggressive proposal for Elegant Realm’s upcoming collection.

“This second contract is critical,” she emphasized, studying the faces around the conference table. “I want terms that Mrs. Lancaster can’t possibly refuse.”

After the meeting, Sophie retreated to her office, twirling a pen between her fingers as she gazed out at the city skyline. The European branch of ARt Design had become her personal kingdom since she’d effectively separated from her husband, David Anderson, who remained at the Canadian headquarters. Their marriage existed now primarily on paper, a fact that suited Sophie perfectly.

Why play the role of a trophy wife begging for allowance when she could wield actual power? The irony that she'd once abandoned a promising relationship with Ryan Blackwood for exactly the kind of wealth and status she now possessed independently wasn't lost on her.

When pickup time approached, Sophie's chauffeur delivered her to Elite Preparatory's ornate entrance. She'd visited this exclusive preschool numerous times before, always with the ulterior motive of orchestrating "accidental" encounters with Ryan through his daughter. Vivian, however, had proven surprisingly resistant to Sophie's charms.

Sophie checked her reflection in a compact mirror before exiting the car. Her appearance was flawless as always—chestnut hair styled in soft waves, designer sunglasses perched on her perfectly sculpted nose, and a casual-yet-expensive outfit that screamed "successful businesswoman."

She arrived early, positioning herself near the entrance where parents would congregate. Through the decorative iron gates, she spotted Vivian in the playground, her distinctive black hair immediately recognizable.

"Vivian!" Sophie called, removing her sunglasses and flashing her most winning smile.

The little girl turned, her expression instantly transforming from carefree to guarded. Sophie waved, but Vivian deliberately turned away.

"Miss Jenkins," Sophie heard the child say to her teacher, "I don't know that lady. Can you please ask her to go away?"

Sophie's smile faltered. Children's instinctive perception had always been frustratingly accurate, especially this particular child. The teacher approached the gate, clearly uncomfortable with the situation.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. Vivian is still in class. Perhaps you could wait quietly until dismissal time?"

Sophie glanced at her watch. "How long until they're released?"

"About fifteen minutes."

With a barely concealed huff, Sophie replaced her sunglasses and stepped back. That little girl was just as difficult as ever, but she wasn't Sophie's primary target today anyway.

"Where might I find Rancy?" she asked pointedly.

The teacher's expression grew even more uncomfortable. "I'm sorry, I need to return to my students now. Dismissal will begin shortly."

As the teacher retreated, Sophie was left with no choice but to wait with the gathering crowd of nannies, parents, and drivers. She scanned the assembly, suddenly freezing when a familiar

silhouette caught her attention. Her heart skipped several beats as she pushed forward, desperate for a clearer view.

Before she could make progress, the school doors opened and children began streaming out to their waiting guardians. Sophie found herself temporarily blocked by the surging crowd of excited children and adults.

Nearby, Serena knelt down to embrace her daughter as Rancy rushed toward her.

“Mama!” the little girl cried, throwing her arms around Serena’s neck.

“Hello, sweetheart,” Serena replied warmly, brushing back a strand of Rancy’s unruly hair. “Did you have a good day today?”

Rancy nodded enthusiastically. “Vi-vi birthday party! Me go!”

“Is that so?” Serena smiled, straightening her daughter’s little cardigan. “Then we should prepare a nice gift for Vivian, shouldn’t we?”

“Make cake?” Rancy suggested hopefully, her eyes wide with excitement. “Pink cake for Vi-vi!”

“That sounds wonderful,” Serena agreed. “Lucy can help you bake something special.”

As mother and daughter prepared to leave, Sophie finally managed to push through the crowd. When she caught sight of Serena’s face clearly for the first time, she froze in disbelief.

“Serena?” she whispered, stunned. “How is this possible?”

Before she could process the shocking resemblance, someone bumped into her from behind, sending her designer earring tumbling to the ground—directly at Serena’s feet.

“Hold on, Rancy,” Serena said, stooping to retrieve the glittering object. She straightened and extended her hand toward Sophie.

“Excuse me, I believe this is yours?”

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Sophie recovered her composure and accepted the earring from Serena’s outstretched hand. Their fingers briefly touched, sending an electric jolt of recognition through Sophie that Serena clearly didn’t share.

“Thank you,” Sophie managed, studying Serena’s face for any flicker of recognition.

Serena merely offered a polite smile before turning back to Rancy. “Come on, sweetheart. Time to go home.”

As they started toward their car, Sophie’s racing heart suddenly calmed. The initial shock gave way to calculating interest. Serena didn’t recognize her—that much was obvious. But how was that even possible?

“Rancy!” A childish voice called from behind them. Vivian came running across the schoolyard, her black hair bouncing with each step, the Blackwood family’s butler following at a respectful distance.

Rancy turned and beamed at her friend. “Vi-vi!”

Vivian approached, pausing to look up at Serena with an endearing smile. “Hello, Mrs. Lancaster. Did Rancy tell you about my birthday party?”

So this was why Vivian had rushed over—she was worried Serena might decline the invitation. The thoughtfulness was surprisingly touching, especially from a child Serena had only recently met.

“Yes, she mentioned it,” Serena replied warmly. “Don’t worry, Rancy will definitely be there.”

Vivian’s face lit up with delight. “That’s wonderful! Thank you so much.”

The little girl straightened her shoulders, suddenly all business. “If you’re too busy with work, you don’t have to bring her yourself. I’ll take good care of Rancy, I promise.”

Serena couldn’t help but smile at the child’s maturity. “That’s very thoughtful of you, Vivian. You’re quite the responsible young lady.”

“You should head home now,” Serena added gently.

“Yes, Mrs. Lancaster,” Vivian nodded, before returning to the butler’s side, completely ignoring Sophie’s presence as if she were invisible.

Sophie stood frozen, her mind racing to process what she’d just witnessed. Vivian—undeniably Serena’s biological daughter—was calling her “Mrs. Lancaster” instead of “Mother.” And Rancy… wasn’t that the daughter of the owner of Elegant Realm design studio?

The pieces began falling into place, even as they created more questions. Whatever confusion Sophie felt, she couldn’t let this opportunity slip away. Meeting Serena Lancaster had been her primary objective today—though she’d never imagined finding her looking exactly like…

Sophie quickly removed her designer sunglasses and stepped forward with practiced charm.

“Mrs. Lancaster! What a delightful surprise,” she extended her hand. “I’m Sophie Anderson from ARt Design. I’m sure you’ve heard of me?”

Her eyes scanned Serena’s face intently. Could this really be just an incredible lookalike? The resemblance was beyond uncanny—it was identical.

Serena hesitated momentarily before taking Sophie’s hand, her expression betraying slight uncertainty. “Mrs. Anderson, of course. Your reputation precedes you.”

“What a coincidence meeting you here,” Sophie continued smoothly. “I was picking up my niece and had no idea your daughter attended the same school.”

The lie slipped easily from her lips. Serena responded with a polite smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes, clearly seeing through the fabrication but choosing not to challenge it.

“Quite a coincidence indeed.”

“Your daughter is absolutely adorable,” Sophie’s gaze shifted to Rancy, studying the child’s features with intense interest. “I wish I had a daughter as precious as her.”

Rancy, sensing the scrutiny, shifted uncomfortably and moved behind her mother’s legs. “Mommy, go home.” she whispered, tugging at Serena’s skirt.

“Of course, sweetheart,” Serena replied before turning back to Sophie with the practiced courtesy of someone accustomed to business interactions. “Mrs. Anderson, we should be going. Perhaps we’ll have the opportunity to meet again sometime.”

“I’d count on it,” Sophie’s smile didn’t falter, though something predatory gleamed in her eyes. “We simply must continue this conversation another time.”

“Certainly. Good day.”

Sophie maintained her friendly facade until Serena’s car disappeared around the corner. Only then did her expression transform into something calculating and cold.

“Serena,” she whispered, testing the name on her tongue. “Serena Lancaster. How fascinating.”

Having been missing for three years, she now reappeared with no memory of who she was. The possibilities made Sophie’s mind race with both curiosity and a sense of opportunity.

“What happened to you?” she murmured to herself. “And how can I use this to my advantage?”

Sophie was absolutely certain that Serena had amnesia. The woman who had once been her fiercest rival would never have greeted her with such polite neutrality. Their history was too fraught with tension for such a civil exchange.

In the car, Serena found herself distracted, replaying the strange encounter in her mind. Something about Sophie Anderson had triggered an unsettling feeling of déjà vu.

“Mommy, what are you thinking about?” Rancy asked, noticing her mother’s distant expression.

Serena snapped back to the present, offering her daughter a reassuring smile. “Nothing important, sweetheart. After dinner, shall we ask Sally to help you bake that cake for Vivian’s birthday?”

“Yes!” Rancy clapped her hands excitedly. “I want to decorate it with flowers and a sunshine! I’ll listen to everything Sally teaches me.”

“That sounds perfect,” Serena stroked her daughter’s soft curls affectionately. “You’re such a thoughtful girl.”

As Rancy continued chattering about her baking plans, Serena’s mind drifted again. Why did Sophie Anderson seem so familiar? More importantly, why did that familiarity come with such a strong sense of aversion? The woman had triggered an instinctive wariness that Serena couldn’t explain.

Had they known each other before her accident?