

My CEO Ex: Let Me Go. Chapter 5 - Chapter 5

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I swallowed hard, fighting the sourness in my throat as a whirlwind of emotions churned inside me. “But Miss Isabella’s image doesn’t align with the product’s theme,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady as I explained to Alexander.

Isabella Blackwood, known internationally for her cold, elegant style, clearly didn’t fit with our brand’s current positioning.

“This is your business, not mine,” Alexander replied indifferently. “I know you’ll figure it out. This brand endorsement is crucial for Isabella. You’ll oversee the entire process.”

I felt numb, my face stiffening to the point that it was almost impossible to move. That familiar pain surged in my chest but was quickly suppressed.

Alexander placed so much faith in my abilities, yet without hesitation, he handed over his first love, pushing her into the role of his rightful wife. Alexander, do you really think I’m so heartless that I wouldn’t suffer?

“Alright, I’ll do my best,” I said, my voice hoarse as if shards of glass filled my throat. Every word felt like it took all the strength I had left.

I walked into the bathroom, gagging, trying to vomit, but nothing came out. The baby inside me was eerily still, and a sharp pang of guilt hit me. I couldn’t help but gently caress my abdomen, silently encouraging myself.

The reflection in the mirror was a stranger: pale, eyes rimmed with redness. The pain felt like it was stealing my breath. I splashed cold water on my face repeatedly, telling myself that everything would be okay.

It’ll be fine...

It’s just a matter of managing Isabella’s brand endorsement—arranging her deals and the advertisement shoot. This is my expertise. I can handle it.

I stared at my reflection, forcing a weak smile. I had promised my father before he passed that I would stay strong, no matter the obstacles. I knew he would be watching from above, and I couldn’t disappoint him. I couldn’t disappoint the baby growing inside me.

Back in the office, I immediately called Lena Ashford’s talent agent, apologizing patiently and arranging a smaller fragrance brand endorsement for Lena. I also

promised that she'd be considered first for any future suitable deals. That seemed to calm Sophia Archer's dissatisfaction.

After hanging up, I had my assistant bring in Isabella Blackwood's file, and soon we were in a departmental meeting.

After a full day's work, we had narrowed it down to three potential options. I then had the assistant contact Isabella's talent agent to arrange discussions for the brand endorsement.

Leaning back in my chair, I pinched the bridge of my nose, exhausted, my gaze lingering on the papers on my desk—Divorce Settlement Agreement.

Flipping through it briefly, I couldn't help but notice how generous Alexander had been. At the time of our divorce, he was remarkably free-handed: two villas, 10% of the company's shares, and twenty million dollars.

Such generosity, CEO Hawthorne.

I smiled bitterly to myself, not wanting to think about it any further.

When I entered the meeting room, the Operations Director, Product Manager, and Creative Director were already there. But Isabella Blackwood and her team hadn't arrived yet.

Annoyed, I turned to the assistant. "Go contact Isabella Blackwood's talent agent and hurry them up."

Before long, the assistant returned. "Director Vivienne, I've called them—they said they'll be here shortly."

As the minutes ticked by, the others began to show signs of impatience. Finally, I couldn't hold back. "What's Isabella Blackwood's talent agent's number? Send it to me."

Just then, the door opened, and Isabella and Alexander walked in together.

"Miss Blackwood, Boss, you're here too?" a staff member hurried to greet them.

I narrowed my eyes as they walked in, their closeness undeniable. Isabella wore a soft yellow gown, her arm playfully linked with Alexander's. He, in turn, wore the sharp suit she'd chosen for him this morning and laid out on the bed.

The others exchanged knowing looks, and I could feel the gossip bubbling up. Rumors had long circulated that the Oscar-winning Miss Blackwood was Alexander's first love, and it seemed they were true.

“They really make a perfect couple!” The thought struck me like a knife to the chest. My fingers instinctively curled into fists, but I forced my face to remain neutral as I stepped forward. “Boss, Miss Blackwood, since you’re both here, let’s begin.”

Alexander had once promised that after our divorce, he’d still treat me like a sister. But deep down, I knew someone who had once been loved that deeply could never easily become just a friend.

Watching the bond between him and Isabella, I knew I could never compete for the place she held in his heart.

Isabella, noticing me, seemed genuinely surprised and grabbed my hand. “Vivienne, you’re here too!”

I lowered my gaze, briefly glancing at her hand gripping mine. Then I quietly pulled away, nodding politely.

Isabella, seemingly unaware of my distance, smiled warmly. “It’s been three years! You’ve become so much more mature. I remember when you were still in college, calling me ‘Sister-in-law.’”

No one seemed shocked. Director Vivienne was CEO Hawthorne’s adopted sister, and it was clear that she and the Oscar-winning Miss Blackwood were well acquainted. By now, everyone probably guessed that my relationship with Alexander was over.

I knew I could never compete with Isabella for the place she held in his heart.

Three years ago, Alexander Hawthorne brought Isabella back to Ashford Manor.

At the time, she was still in college. Though the school was far from Ashford, she made the daily trip, just so she wouldn’t miss his occasional visits.

That day, she didn’t miss it.

I watched with my own eyes as Alexander introduced Isabella to his family as his girlfriend.

I watched them embrace and kiss in the garden.

I thought, perhaps for the rest of my life, I would only be able to watch him from afar.

The day I married Alexander Hawthorne, I even thought I was dreaming.

But since it was a dream, I knew it would one day end.

Isabella Blackwood was the one who woke me from that dream.

A sharp pain spread through my chest, and I forced a faint smile. "Long time no see, Ms. Blackwood. You're even more radiant than before."

I feared that I could never again call her "Sister-in-law."

Isabella smiled. "Thank you. You too. By the way, Vivienne, do you like the signed Avery Rose album? I heard you're a fan, and she's a friend of mine from abroad. I had her sign it for you when I came back."

For a moment, I felt as though I'd been struck by lightning. The calm, composed version of me was suddenly lost, confused, and unsure of how to respond.

It felt as though I'd become a fool, the source of everyone's amusement.

I glanced at Alexander, my eyes pleading.

I so desperately wished he would tell me that Isabella was mistaken—that the gift was from him, that he'd arranged it himself.

But Alexander just looked at me coldly, his words piercing my heart like a knife. "What? Don't you like the gift Isabella brought you?"

My face stiffened, unable to show any emotion.

After a long pause, I regained my composure and said quietly, "Let's talk about the past another time. Everyone's been waiting. Let's get down to business now."

"Alright," Isabella replied, turning to Alexander. "Alexander, you go back to the office. Remember, we're having lunch together."

"Mm."

I watched his back, the bitter taste of helplessness rising in my chest, struggling to catch my breath.

I had actually thought there was some consideration behind Alexander's actions.

I had actually thought he might still have feelings for me.

How laughable.

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The meeting wrapped up at three in the afternoon, and both teams shook hands.

I gathered the papers in front of me. "Thank you all for your hard work. Let me treat everyone to a meal. There's a new fondue restaurant downstairs, and the food's great."

Eliza Knight, Isabella's talent agent, said, "Sounds good. We'll graciously accept."

The staff from both sides exchanged pleasantries as they headed for the elevator.

Eliza Knight asked, "Isabella, Mr. Hawthorne said he'd eat with you. How about inviting him along?"

Isabella smiled. "I'll ask him, but he might not agree."

"How could he not? He's so kind to you."

Isabella's assistant teased, "Sister Isabella, don't be so modest. What's your relationship with Mr. Hawthorne? As soon as you return to the country, he gives you the V&R Brand Ambassador position. Doesn't that say something?"

"Alright, enough," Isabella said, glancing at me with a hint of embarrassment. "Vivienne, you take them down first. I'll join Alexander later."

Seeing her smile, a sharp pain surged in my chest. I nodded silently, returned the folder to my office, and went downstairs to the fondue restaurant to reserve a private room. I ordered some side dishes, trying to keep the mood light.

This was my job, and I was in control.

At the table, the atmosphere grew lively as the staff from both sides chatted and laughed.

Eliza Knight steered the conversation toward me. "I've heard of Director Vivienne. You must have been in this industry for quite some time, right?"

The product manager immediately chimed in, patting my shoulder with a proud smile. "Not long, just three years. Don't let her youth fool you. Director Vivienne is quite capable. Last year, the DOTA2 MOBA mobile game became a huge hit. It was Director Vivienne who was brought in as the market consultant."

But Eliza Knight wasn't interested in that. She asked, "She sounds impressive, alright. But I heard that Director Vivienne is Chairman Hawthorne's sister?"

The product manager's face darkened, but he didn't say anything.

Her words implied that I had advanced in my career due to nepotism.

"Well, you could say that," I said with a polite smile. "My grandfather took care of me."

“To be personally trained by Chairman Hawthorne, that’s no small matter,” Eliza Knight said with a smile.

Her words carried a subtle undertone, and it wasn’t just the product manager whose expression soured. The other staff members seemed uncomfortable too.

I remained calm. “My father and Chairman Hawthorne are old friends. That’s why I was lucky enough not to end up on the streets.”

“Oh? Isn’t it because your father donated his liver to Chairman Hawthorne?” Eliza Knight asked next.