

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 2 - The Wedding That Broke Me

Chapter 2: The Wedding That Broke Me

I did not sleep that evening.

How could I? Each time that I closed my eyes, I could see the face of Ethan, hear the voice of Ethan, feel the ground give away beneath me. The wedding dress still hung in the closet, taunting me with its unblemished white. At about 3 AM, I pulled it down and jammed it into the back of the closet, refusing to look at it any longer.

My phone wouldn't quit buzzing. Messages from relatives I hadn't heard from in years, all with the same message: how lovely it was that Ethan was living Victoria's final wish. How beautiful. How sacrificial.

No one asked how I was.

Before the sun came up, having bathed the tiny apartment in grays, I had made up my mind. I was attending that wedding. Not because I wanted to see the man I loved marry my stepsister, but because I needed to see it for myself. I needed to know how this was actually happening.

And perhaps, somewhere hidden inside my broken heart, I'd hoped Ethan would notice me and understand what he was giving up.

The location was the Grandview Estate—aptly, a house my family possessed, though they weren't aware that I knew that. I'd monitored the Hart Empire even as I've pretended to be penniless. Old habits.

I dressed in a plain black dress, the only dressy thing I had that wasn't from a bargain store. Walking through the elaborate gardens toward the ceremony area, I felt like a phantom stalking my own existence.

"Sophia?"

I faced her to see Maya hurrying to me, her expression a blend of shock and worry. "What are you doing here? I thought—after what Ethan did—"

"I have to see it," I whispered. "I have to see her."

Maya caught my arm. "This is a terrible idea. Your family is here. Victoria is acting the dying bride perfectly. And Ethan." She paused. "He looks happy, Soph. I'm sorry, but he does."

The words slap like a punch, but I continued to walk. The ceremony was taking place in the rose garden, with white chairs lined up precisely and flowers as far as the eye could see—the precise configuration Ethan and I had planned together six months prior. My eyes watered.

"Sophia Hart."

My mother's words froze me. I turned and caught sight of her standing by the door, poised in a designer gown that had cost more than six months' worth of my rent. My father stood next to her, his face hewn from displeasure.

"Mother. Father." I maintained a level tone despite shaking hands.

"I warned you not to make a scene," my mother spat, looking around to see if anyone was watching. "What brings you here?"

"I was invited to a wedding," I replied. "Or have you forgotten that it was originally going to be mine?"

My father advanced, his face stern. "That is enough. Victoria is dying, Sophia. For once, in your self-centered life, consider someone else."

Selfish. He was accusing me of being selfish.

"I sacrificed everything for him," I said in a whisper. "Six years of my life. And you're accusing me of being selfish because I'm hurt?"

"You sacrificed nothing we didn't offer you in return," my mother snapped. "We pleaded with you to leave that nobody and come home, to marry the man we had chosen for you. You refused. You made your choice, and now you live with it."

"The man you picked?" I laughed harshly. "You mean the business deal you desired. I was never your daughter to you—but an exchange. Your daughter, I must say."

"And Victoria?" My father's tone was cold. "She's been nothing but thankful for all we've provided her. She's established a career, made us proud, and now she's dying. She deserves happiness in her last few months."

"Doth she?" The words slipped out before I could catch them. "Do you know for certain that she's really dying?"

My mother's palm cracked across my cheek.

The slap rang in the garden, and instantly a few heads swiveled in our direction. I reached up and touched my burning cheek, feeling the salt of blood where my lip had broken against my teeth.

"How dare you," my mother spat, her voice trembling with anger. "How dare you say that Victoria lied about having cancer. You're jealous, bitter, and pathetic. I'm ashamed to have you for a daughter."

"Then don't." The words slipped out steady, icy. "Don't call me your daughter anymore."

"Fine." My father's tone was final, absolute. "You're no longer part of this family, Sophia. We gave you everything, and you threw it away for a man who didn't even want you. Now you want to destroy your sister's last chance at happiness? You're dead to us."

Dead to them.

The words ought to have stung more, but I was numb. Perhaps because a part of me had always suspected they'd never actually looked at me. Victoria had been their child since the day they'd adopted her. I was merely the biological inconvenience they'd been lumbered with.

"The ceremony is beginning," my mother said, already walking away. "Get out before you humiliate yourself further."

But I did not leave.

I spotted an empty seat in the very last row, partially concealed by a huge floral display. Maya sat down next to me, gripping my hand so tightly it was painful. Good. At least I could still feel something.

The music began.

Ethan marched down the aisle first, heartbreakingly handsome in his tuxedo—the very same tuxedo he was originally going to wear to our wedding. He seemed nervous but unshakeable, like a man embarking on something noble and just.

Then Victoria emerged.

She was lovely. She had to be. Her dark hair was intricately upstyled, her makeup flawless. The wedding gown—my wedding gown design, I suddenly realized—was custom-fitted to perfection. But it was the way she moved that sent icy blood through my veins.

She wasn't fragile. She wasn't weak. She walked down that aisle with the strength and poise of a woman in her perfect health, her smile shining, her steps sure.

"Maya," I whispered. "Does she resemble someone dying to you?"

Maya's hold on my hand tightened. "No. No, she doesn't."

I saw Victoria make it up to the altar, saw Ethan grasp her hands in such sweetness, and something snapped inside my head. The way she was acting the tragic bride, squeezing every second for maximum sympathy and notice. The way my family had stared at her with such compassion and reverence.

This wasn't about a terminal wish.

This was Victoria helping herself to what was mine because she could. Because she always did.

The officiant started talking, but I hardly heard what he said. My brain was racing, things clicking into place. Victoria had always competed with me, always had to have what I had—even when I'd been the ignored daughter. My successes, my friends, my chances. She'd all taken them with a smile and an outcry.

And now she was taking Ethan.

"If anyone has a objection to this marriage," the officiant stated, "speak now or hold your peace forever."

I rose to my feet.

The creak of my chair against the floor seemed deafeningly loud. Every eye swiveled in my direction. Ethan's face turned pale. Victoria's smile wavered for a moment—but I caught it. I saw the flicker of victory in her eyes.

"Sophia, sit down," my father spat from several rows back.

But I was finished with being quiet. Finished with being invisible.

"I object," I declared, my words echoing over the garden. "I object because Victoria isn't dying."

Gasps spread through the group. Victoria's eyes went wide, and she staggered theatrically, holding on to Ethan's arm. "Sophia, how could you? I'm dying, and you—"

"Produce your medical records," I dared her. "Now. Demonstrate that you have cancer."

"This is outrageous!" My mother stood up, her face aflame with anger. "Security! Take her away!"

"No, wait." It was Ethan who interrupted, his voice hesitant. He gazed at Victoria, and for the first time, I saw a look of doubt cross his face. "Victoria, perhaps you should—"

"I don't have to prove anything!" Victoria's voice cracked, her face streaming with tears. "My own sister—my own family—and she's blaming me for lying about dying! What kind of monster are you, Sophia?"

But still she hadn't produced any proof.

Two security guards dragged me toward the door. I didn't resist. I'd said what I had to say. I'd sowed the seed of doubt.

"You're crazy!" Victoria shouted after me, her voice cracking. "You're crazy and jealous, and I pity you!"

The other guests nodded in agreement. Poor Victoria. Heartless Sophia.

They pulled me out of the garden and literally threw me onto the pavement outside the estate gates. I scraped my palms and knees hard on the ground. The black dress ripped at the hem.

Maya came running out behind me, down on her knees beside me. "Oh my God, are you alright?"

I wasn't alright. I was as far from alright as it's possible to be.

But sitting there on the hard asphalt, bleeding and humiliated, something inside me shifted. The numbness was searing away, being replaced by something hot and sharp and completely merciless.

My phone vibrated. My father's text: "You're officially disowned. Don't contact us again. Don't use the Hart name. You're nothing."

A second text, this one from my mother: "We've frozen your trust fund. You'll get nothing from us. You made your choice."

I looked at the messages, then at my skinned and bleeding hands.

Nothing. They'd left me with nothing.

No family. No fiancé. No money—well, no access to the Hart fortune, anyway. The trust fund my grandmother had given me was now somehow "frozen," though I suspected they didn't have the right to do so. But attorneys cost cash I didn't possess.

The lease on the apartment was going to be done in two weeks. I had perhaps three hundred dollars in my own checking account. And I was pregnant with a baby whose father had just married my stepsister.

"Come on," Maya said softly, standing up with me.

"Let's get you—"

"I'm fine," I said reflexively, dusting off my destroyed dress.

"You're not fine. You're—"

"I said I'm fine."

But I wasn't. And we both knew it.

Maya took me home in silence. When we got there, I discovered all of Ethan's few belongings packed up in boxes outside the door. Thorough. He'd likely hired someone to bring them away while he was at the ceremony.

There was a note at the top: "Sorry it ended this way. I hope you can be happy for us. - E"

I folded up the note and let it drop to the ground.

Within the apartment itself, it was empty. The wedding dress was still jammed in the closet. The last night's pasta sauce still sat on the stove, dried and cracked. The smoke alarm battery was dead.

My whole life, boiled down to this.

I sat on the couch—our couch, which we'd found together at a second-hand store—and let myself cry for the first time. Not soft tears, but great, ragged sobs that ripped through my chest and shook my entire body.

Maya wrapped her arms around me, not speaking, just holding me.

When the crying finally subsided, I felt hollow. Empty. Like someone had scooped out all the insides of me and left only a shell.

"What am I going to do?" I asked quietly.

Maya's mouth opened to respond, but before she could, there was a hard knock at the door.

We both stopped moving.

"Sophia Hart?" A deep, unfamiliar male voice called through the door. "I have to talk to you. It's an emergency."

Maya and I looked at each other. "Who is it?" we called out.

"My name is Damien Blackwood. And I'm here to make Ms. Hart an offer she won't want to refuse."

Blackwood. That name made me shiver. Everyone was familiar with the Blackwood name—one of the richest and most influential families in the nation, going head-to-head with the Harts in power and money. Ruthless. Deadly. Untouchable.

What in the world could Damien Blackwood need me for?

Maya headed for the door, but I reached out and caught her. My intuition was screaming at me that this was important. This was the precipice, and I could either retreat back into my unhappy existence or leap towards the unknown.

I stepped over to the door and opened it.

The man standing in my doorway was devastating. Tall, broad-shouldered, with dark hair and darker eyes that seemed to see straight through me. He wore a suit that probably cost more than a year of my rent, and he looked at me like I was a puzzle he was determined to solve.

"Ms. Hart," he said, his voice smooth as expensive whiskey. "We need to talk about your future."

"I don't have a future," I spat.

His mouth twisted into something that could have been a smile. "That's where you're wrong. You have exactly the future you're willing to fight for." He stopped, his eyes burning. "I know what happened today. I know about Victoria. About Ethan. About your family disowning you."

"How—"

"I take it upon myself to know things." He produced a business card and offered it to me. "I'm willing to give you something your family never gave you: a true choice. Power. Revenge. All of it that you have been denied."

I gazed at the card, my hand shaking.

"What's the catch?" Maya asked warily behind me.

Damien never took his eyes off me. "The catch is easy. You do as I tell you. You take your place as the rightful Hart heiress. And you allow me to assist you in destroying everyone who ever doubted you."

My heart was thudding so loudly, I could hear it through my ears.

"Why?" I whispered. "Why would you assist me?"

"Because, Ms. Hart," he replied, his voice going low, "I've been waiting for someone just like you. Someone who has nothing to lose and everything to gain. Someone who is hungry enough to take what's theirs."

He inched closer, and I smelled expensive cologne and something else, something dangerous.

"So what is it?" he said. "Do you remain here in this apartment, penniless and shattered, standing back and letting your stepsister live your life? Or do you take my hand and become the woman they'll all regret ever messing with?"

I glanced down at the card in his palm. Damien Blackwood, CEO, Blackwood Enterprises.

Maya whispered behind me, "Sophia, I don't know if I can do this."

But I wasn't listening anymore.

I was remembering Victoria's victorious smile. Ethan's sorry eyes. My mother's slap, and my father's icy rejection. Six years lost to people who never had cared for me.

I was remembering the baby in my belly, and the life I wanted to create for them.

I reached for the card.

"Tell me what I have to do," I said.

Damien Blackwood's grin was blade-sharp.

"First," he said, "we make them wish for the day they discarded you."

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 3 - The Devil's Bargain

Chapter 3: The Devil's Bargain

Damien Blackwood didn't waste time.

Within an hour of my accepting his card, I found myself in the back of a luxury car that probably cost more than the entire apartment building I was leaving behind. Maya had insisted on coming with me, her hand gripping mine like a lifeline as we drove through the city toward the Blackwood Tower—a gleaming skyscraper that dominated the downtown skyline.

"You don't have to do this," Maya whispered for the tenth time. "We can figure something else out. Get a lawyer, fight for your trust fund—"

"With what money?" I asked quietly, watching the city blur past the tinted windows. "They've frozen everything. I have three hundred dollars to my name and a baby on the way." My hand unconsciously moved to my stomach. "I don't have time to fight legal battles I can't afford."

"But you don't know anything about this man," Maya pressed. "What if he's dangerous? What if—"

"Then he's dangerous." I turned to look at her, and I barely recognized the coldness in my own voice. "Right now, I need dangerous. I need powerful. I need someone who can help me take back everything they stole from me."

The car pulled into an underground garage, and moments later, we were being escorted into a private elevator by a woman in an immaculate suit who introduced herself as Damien's assistant, Claire.

"Mr. Blackwood is waiting for you in his office," Claire said, her smile professional and distant. "Your friend can wait in the lounge area."

"I'm not leaving her alone with him," Maya said firmly.

Claire's expression didn't change. "Mr. Blackwood's meetings are private. But I assure you, Ms. Hart will be perfectly safe."

I squeezed Maya's hand. "It's okay. Wait for me. If I'm not out in an hour, call the police."

Maya looked like she wanted to argue, but she nodded reluctantly. "One hour. I'm timing it."

The elevator ride to the top floor felt like ascending to another world. When the doors opened, I stepped into an office that screamed power and wealth. Floor-to-ceiling windows offered a panoramic view of the city. Expensive art hung on the walls. And behind a massive desk sat Damien Blackwood, watching me with those dark, calculating eyes.

"Ms. Hart," he said, standing. "Please, sit."

I sat in one of the leather chairs across from his desk, trying not to show how intimidated I felt. This man controlled an empire that made even my family's fortune look modest. What did he want with me?

"Let's not waste time on pleasantries," Damien said, leaning back in his chair. "I know who you really are. Sophia Hart, biological daughter of Richard and Margaret Hart, heiress to a fortune worth approximately eight billion dollars. You've been pretending to be poor for six years, hiding your identity to test your fiancé's love." His lips curved. "How did that work out for you?"

The words stung, but I kept my face neutral. "You've done your homework."

"I always do." He pulled out a tablet and slid it across the desk to me. "This is Victoria Chen's medical history. Or rather, her lack of one. No cancer diagnosis. No treatment records. Nothing. She's been lying."

My heart pounded as I scrolled through the documents. There it was, in black and white—proof that Victoria had faked everything. "How did you get these?"

"I have resources your family can only dream of," Damien said simply. "And I'm offering them to you. But first, I need to know—are you serious about revenge? Or are you going to lose your nerve when things get difficult?"

"I'm serious." The words came out steady, certain. "They threw me away like garbage. My own parents chose her over me. The man I loved—" My voice caught, but I forced myself to continue. "He believed her lies without question. They all did. So yes, I'm serious."

Damien studied me for a long moment, then nodded. "Good. Because what I'm proposing isn't going to be easy. It's going to require you to be ruthless, calculating, and absolutely committed. Can you do that?"

"Tell me what you need me to do."

He stood and walked to the windows, hands in his pockets, silhouetted against the city lights. "Your grandmother left you a separate trust fund, didn't she? One that your parents can't actually touch because it was set up independently?"

I blinked. "How did you—yes. But I was told I can't access it until I'm thirty or married."

"Marriage," Damien said, turning to face me. "That's the key. Once you're married, the trust fund releases. Twenty million dollars, completely separate from your family's control."

My mouth went dry. "What are you suggesting?"

"I'm suggesting we get married."

The words hung in the air between us like a bomb waiting to explode.

"You're insane," I whispered.

"Am I?" He walked back to his desk, his movements controlled and predatory. "Think about it logically. You need money and power to fight your family. I can provide both, but only if we're legally connected. A marriage gives us both advantages."

"What advantages could you possibly need from marrying me?" I demanded. "You're already one of the richest men in the country!"

For the first time, something flickered in his expression—something dark and personal. "Let's just say your family has something I want. Business connections, political influence, access to certain... opportunities. As your husband, I gain leverage over the Hart Empire. And you—" he leaned forward, his eyes intense, "—you gain everything. Your inheritance, my resources, my protection, and most importantly, legitimacy. You won't be the pathetic ex-fiancée anymore. You'll be Mrs. Blackwood."

My head was spinning. "This is crazy. We don't even know each other."

"We don't need to know each other. This is a business arrangement, nothing more." He pulled out a document. "A contract marriage. Two years minimum. In that time, we take down everyone who wronged you, secure your position as the Hart heiress, and ruin Victoria and Ethan's happy ending. After two years, we divorce quietly, and you keep the money and power you've gained."

"And what do you get out of it?"

His smile was cold. "Revenge of my own. Your father destroyed someone I cared about years ago. I've been waiting for the right moment to return the favor. You're that moment, Sophia."

I stared at the contract in front of me. This was insane. Marrying a stranger for revenge? It sounded like something out of a movie.

But then I thought about my mother's slap. My father's cold dismissal. Victoria's triumphant smile as she stole my life. Ethan's pitying eyes as he chose her over me.

I thought about my baby, growing inside me, who deserved better than a mother with nothing.

"If I agree," I said slowly, "I have conditions."

Damien raised an eyebrow. "I'm listening."

"First, this stays purely business. No... expectations beyond what's necessary for appearances."

"Agreed."

"Second, I want full transparency. If you're using me to take down my family, I deserve to know the whole plan."

"Reasonable."

"Third—" I took a deep breath. "I'm pregnant. With Ethan's baby. If you can't handle that, tell me now."

Damien's expression didn't change. "Is he aware?"

"No. And I don't plan to tell him. This baby is mine, no one else's."

"Then as far as the world will know, the child is mine." His voice was matter-of-fact. "It actually works better for the narrative. Poor Sophia, betrayed and pregnant, rescued by the powerful Damien Blackwood. It'll make them look even worse."

The casual way he said it should have bothered me. Instead, I felt a strange sense of relief. He was treating this like a business deal, nothing more. No messy emotions. No false promises.

Just cold, calculated revenge.

"One more thing," I said. "When this is over, I want full custody of my child. No complications."

"You'll have it in writing." He slid the contract toward me along with a pen. "So, Ms. Hart. Do we have a deal?"

I looked down at the contract. This was it. The point of no return. Once I signed this, there was no going back to the girl I used to be—the one who believed in love and happy endings.

But that girl was already dead.

She'd died the moment Ethan walked out the door. The moment her mother slapped her. The moment her family chose Victoria over her.

What rose from her ashes was something new. Something harder.

Something that wanted blood.

I picked up the pen.

"When's the wedding?" I asked.

Damien's smile was sharp and satisfied. "Tomorrow. We don't waste time in the Blackwood family. By this time tomorrow, you'll be my wife. And your family—" he paused, his eyes glittering with dark promise, "—they won't know what hit them."

I signed my name on the contract, each stroke of the pen feeling like a declaration of war.

Sophia Hart was dead.

Long live Sophia Blackwood.

"One question," I said as I set down the pen. "Why me? Really. You could have found a dozen other ways to get revenge on my father."

Damien took the signed contract, examining it before looking back at me. "Because, Sophia, you're the only person in the world who hates them as much as I do. And that kind of hatred—" his smile turned predatory, "—that's the most powerful weapon of all."

He stood and extended his hand. "Welcome to the war, Mrs. Blackwood."

I shook his hand, feeling the warmth of his skin, the strength in his grip.

And for the first time since Ethan had destroyed my world, I felt something other than pain.

I felt power.

Outside the office, Maya was pacing frantically. When she saw me emerge, she rushed over. "Are you okay? What happened? What did he want?"

I looked at my best friend, the only person who'd stood by me through everything, and smiled.

"He wants to marry me," I said. "And I said yes."

Maya's eyes went wide. "You what?!"

"Tomorrow, Maya. Tomorrow I'm getting married." I linked my arm through hers as we walked toward the elevator. "And then we're going to burn their perfect little world to the ground."

Behind us, through the glass walls of his office, I could see Damien on the phone, already setting things in motion.

The war had begun.

And this time, I wasn't going to lose.

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 4 - Mrs. Blackwood

Chapter 4: Mrs. Blackwood

Twenty-four hours ago, I was nobody.

Now I stood in front of a full-length mirror in a private suite at the Blackwood Tower, wearing a wedding dress that cost more than my entire year's salary. Cream silk that hugged every curve, with delicate lace sleeves and a train that whispered against the marble floor. My hair had been styled by professionals, my makeup applied by experts who made me look like someone I barely recognized.

I looked like money. Like power. Like everything I'd been hiding for six years.

"You look beautiful," Maya said softly from behind me. She'd been quiet since last night, processing everything I'd told her about the contract, the marriage, the revenge plan. "Are you sure about this?"

"No," I admitted, smoothing down the dress with trembling hands. "But I'm doing it anyway."

A knock on the door announced Claire, Damien's assistant. "It's time, Ms. Hart."

"Mrs. Blackwood," I corrected, testing the name on my tongue. It felt foreign. Powerful. "After today, it's Mrs. Blackwood."

The ceremony was nothing like the elaborate spectacle Ethan and Victoria had yesterday. It was held in Damien's private office, with only Maya, Claire, and a judge present. No flowers. No music. No pretense of romance.

Just business.

Damien stood by the windows in a black suit, looking every inch the powerful CEO he was. When I entered, his dark eyes swept over me with an expression I couldn't quite read.

"You clean up well," he said, which might have been the closest thing to a compliment I'd ever heard from him.

"So do you," I replied, my voice steadier than I felt.

The ceremony took less than ten minutes. The judge spoke words I barely heard, my mind spinning with the enormity of what I was doing. When it came time to exchange

rings, Damien slipped a platinum band onto my finger—simple, elegant, and probably worth more than my old apartment.

"You may kiss the bride," the judge said.

Damien stepped closer, his hand cupping my jaw with unexpected gentleness. "For appearances," he murmured, so only I could hear.

Then he kissed me.

It was brief, controlled, nothing like the passionate kisses I'd shared with Ethan. But something about it sent electricity down my spine—maybe because it wasn't real, wasn't supposed to mean anything, yet somehow felt more intense than anything I'd felt in years.

When he pulled back, his eyes held mine for a moment. "Welcome to the family, Mrs. Blackwood."

And just like that, I was married.

Again.

Or for the first time, really, since my wedding to Ethan never happened.

"Congratulations," the judge said, handing us the marriage certificate. "You're now legally husband and wife."

Claire stepped forward with a tablet. "The press release is ready to go out, Mr. Blackwood. Social media posts are queued. And I've arranged for the photographer to take official wedding photos for distribution."

"Good," Damien said, his hand settling possessively on my lower back. "Make sure it hits every major outlet within the hour. I want everyone to know."

Especially my family, I thought. Especially Ethan and Victoria.

The photographer worked quickly, positioning us for various shots. Damien played the role of devoted husband perfectly—his arm around my waist, his smile almost genuine, the way he looked at me making even my cynical heart skip a beat.

It was all an act. But God, he was good at it.

"Perfect," the photographer said after the final shot. "These will be ready within the hour."

"Excellent." Damien turned to me. "We have a lunch reservation in thirty minutes. Time to make our first public appearance as husband and wife."

My stomach knotted. "Already?"

"The faster we move, the harder they fall," he said, his voice low and determined. "Trust me, Sophia. By the time your family realizes what's happening, it'll be too late to stop us."

The restaurant was Le Bernardin—one of the most exclusive places in the city, where reservations were booked months in advance and the average meal cost more than most people's monthly rent. Every table was occupied by the wealthy and powerful, the kind of people who shaped the city with their money and influence.

The kind of people who knew exactly who the Harts and Blackwoods were.

"Mr. Blackwood," the maître d' greeted us with a warm smile. "Your usual table is ready. And may I say congratulations on your marriage?"

"Thank you, Pierre," Damien said smoothly, his hand never leaving my back as we were led through the restaurant.

I felt eyes on us. Whispers rippling through the room like a wave. People reaching for their phones, no doubt checking social media where our wedding announcement was probably already trending.

We were seated at a prime table near the windows, with a perfect view of both the restaurant and the city beyond. Damien ordered wine—a vintage I'd never heard of but that probably cost thousands—and then leaned back, completely at ease.

"Relax," he murmured. "You look like you're waiting for an execution."

"I feel like I am," I admitted, my hands twisted in my lap under the table.

"The execution is theirs, not yours," he reminded me. "You're Mrs. Damien Blackwood now. You're untouchable."

As if to prove his point, several people stopped by our table to offer congratulations. Business associates, socialites, people whose faces I recognized from magazines and news articles. Each one looked at me with curiosity and thinly veiled interest, wondering who this mystery woman was who'd captured the notoriously private Damien Blackwood.

None of them recognized me as Sophia Hart. Why would they? I'd been invisible for years.

We were halfway through our appetizers when my phone started buzzing incessantly. I pulled it out to find my screen flooded with notifications. Messages, missed calls, social media tags.

And then I saw it—the headline trending on every news outlet:

****"BLACKWOOD HEIR MARRIES IN SECRET CEREMONY - BRIDE'S IDENTITY SHOCKS HIGH SOCIETY"****

My hands shook as I clicked through the articles. Photos of us from today, looking perfect and powerful. Stories speculating about our "whirlwind romance." And then, buried in the third paragraph of the main article:

"Sources confirm the bride is Sophia Hart, biological daughter of business magnate Richard Hart and heiress to the Hart Empire fortune. The marriage comes as a surprise given Hart's recent low profile in society circles..."

My phone rang. My mother.

I looked at Damien, who nodded slightly. "Answer it. Let them hear how happy you are."

With trembling fingers, I accepted the call and put it on speaker, keeping the volume low.

"What the hell have you done?" My mother's voice was shrill with fury.

"Hello, Mother," I said calmly. "I'm well, thank you for asking. How are you?"

"Don't play games with me, Sophia! You married Damien Blackwood? Are you insane? Do you have any idea what you've—"

"What I've done," I interrupted, my voice growing stronger, "is marry a man who actually values me. A man who sees me as more than a disappointment or a bargaining chip."

"This is about revenge," my father's voice cut in—apparently I was on speaker too. "You're trying to embarrass us, to—"

"Not everything is about you," I said, surprised by how much I meant it. "Maybe I just fell in love."

The lie came out smooth as silk. Behind it, Damien's lips curved in approval.

"Love?" My mother laughed bitterly. "You don't know anything about love. You're pathetic, Sophia. Marrying a man you barely know just to spite us—"

"Actually, Mother, I'm marrying him because he's brilliant, successful, and treats me like I matter. Unlike my last fiancé, who threw me away for my dying sister. Speaking of which—" I paused for effect, "—how is Victoria? Still dying? Or has she made a miraculous recovery now that she got what she wanted?"

Silence on the other end.

"That's what I thought," I continued, my anger finally finding its voice. "You chose her over me. You threw me away like I was nothing. So now you get to live with that choice. Enjoy having Victoria as your only daughter. I hope she's worth it."

"Sophia—"

I ended the call and set my phone face-down on the table, my heart racing.

Damien reached across and took my hand, his thumb brushing across my knuckles. For the cameras, I told myself. For the people watching.

But his touch felt real.

"Well done," he said quietly. "That was perfect."

"I don't feel perfect," I admitted. "I feel like I'm going to throw up."

"That's adrenaline. It'll pass." He squeezed my hand. "You just took the first real step, Sophia. You fought back. How does it feel?"

I thought about my mother's shocked silence. My father's inability to respond. The panic in their voices as they realized I wasn't the powerless girl they'd discarded anymore.

"It feels good," I said slowly. "It feels really good."

"Good." Damien's smile was sharp. "Because we're just getting started."

My phone buzzed again. This time it was a text from an unknown number:

"Congratulations on your marriage. We should talk. - Ethan"

I showed it to Damien, whose expression darkened.

"He wants to talk," I said bitterly. "Now he wants to talk."

"Let him wait," Damien said coldly. "Let him see you happy, successful, with a man who actually deserves you. Let him suffer."

"And Victoria?"

Damien's smile turned predatory. "Victoria will get what's coming to her. I promise you that. But first—" he raised his wine glass, "—let's enjoy our wedding day, Mrs. Blackwood."

I clinked my glass against his, the crystal ringing out like a bell.

Like a warning.

Like a declaration of war.

The game had begun.

And this time, I was going to win.

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 5 - The Mansion and the Truth

Chapter 5: The Mansion and the Truth

The Blackwood Estate was breathtaking.

Not just expensive—breathtaking. Nestled on the cliffs overlooking the city, the mansion sprawled across twelve acres of manicured gardens and private grounds. Three stories of marble and glass, with floor-to-ceiling windows that captured the sunset like liquid gold.

This was nothing like the cramped apartment I'd called home. This was nothing like any place I'd ever been.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Blackwood," Damien said as the car pulled through the iron gates, his hand briefly touching my lower back.

A staff of housekeepers and assistants rushed to greet us, all impeccably dressed and professionally courteous. They showed me through rooms that seemed to go on forever—a library with thousands of books, a private cinema, a gym, a spa. Everything meticulously designed and maintained.

"Your suite is on the second floor," a woman named Eleanor explained, leading me down a hallway adorned with modern art. "Mr. Blackwood thought you might prefer

separate accommodations, though there is a connecting door between the master and—"

"Separate is fine," I said quickly, grateful for the excuse. The last thing I needed was to fake intimacy when I was already so emotionally raw.

My suite was larger than my old apartment. A bedroom with a California king bed dressed in Egyptian cotton, a walk-in closet already filled with designer clothes in my size, a marble bathroom with a soaking tub, and a private sitting area with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the gardens.

A personal paradise. A gilded cage.

I sat on the edge of the bed, running my fingers over the silk sheets, trying to process everything that had happened in the last forty-eight hours. Two days ago, I was nobody. Now I was Mrs. Damien Blackwood, living in a mansion, wearing clothes that cost more than I used to make in a month.

My phone buzzed constantly. Calls from people I hadn't heard from in years, all wanting to know about my "mystery marriage." Business associates eager to congratulate me. Reporters requesting interviews.

And messages from Ethan. Dozens of them.

"Sophia, please talk to me."

"I made a mistake. Can we discuss this?"

"You can't just disappear. I need to see you."

I ignored them all.

Around seven, Damien sent Eleanor to tell me that dinner was ready in the formal dining room. I changed into a simple but elegant black dress from my new wardrobe and made my way downstairs, my heart racing irrationally.

The dining room was enormous, with a table that could seat twenty. But it was set intimately for two, with candles and fresh flowers. Damien was already there, dressed in a crisp white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, making him look less like a CEO and more like the dangerous man I was beginning to realize he was.

"Did you settle in?" he asked as a server placed plates in front of us.

"It's overwhelming," I admitted. "It's beautiful, but it's... a lot."

"You'll get used to it." He took a bite of his salmon. "I had your things moved from the apartment today. Maya is in the guest house if you want her nearby."

I looked up, surprised. "You did what?"

"Your lease was ending anyway, and there's no point keeping an apartment you don't need." He said it matter-of-factly, as if he hadn't just made a massive life decision for me. "Maya seemed relieved. She was worried about you being alone."

"You moved all my things here without asking me?"

"Should I have asked?" His dark eyes met mine. "You're my wife now, Sophia. You live here. This is your home."

There was something possessive in the way he said it, something that made my stomach flutter despite my determination to keep this relationship purely transactional. "Right. Sorry. I'm just... adjusting."

"There's something we need to discuss," he said, setting down his fork. "About your pregnancy."

My entire body went rigid. "What about it?"

"How far along are you?"

"Five weeks. I found out the day before the wedding." I played with my food, not meeting his eyes. "If you want to back out of the deal—"

"I don't." His voice was firm. "In fact, I think we should make an announcement about it soon. Frame it as a happy surprise, a blessing on our marriage."

I stared at him. "You want to claim my baby as yours? Publicly?"

"Yes. And we need to do it before your parents or Ethan get any ideas about contesting it." He leaned forward. "If they know you're pregnant with Ethan's child, they'll try to use it against us. They'll claim I married you for the baby, that you're unstable, whatever narrative they can spin. But if the world believes the baby is ours—a product of our surprise marriage—it neutralizes that weapon."

It was strategic. Cold. And oddly protective.

"Okay," I said quietly. "Whatever you think is best."

"I'm glad you trust me," he said, studying me intently. "Because what I'm about to tell you requires that."

Every muscle in my body tensed. "What?"

Damien set down his napkin carefully, taking a moment before speaking. "Twelve years ago, my sister was engaged to your father."

I blinked. "What?"

"Her name was Elena. She was brilliant—an artist, a dreamer, beautiful inside and out. Your father courted her, promised her the world, and she fell in love with him." His voice was steady, but I could see the pain behind his eyes. "He broke the engagement a month before their wedding. Left her at the altar. Not because he stopped loving her, but because he found a woman from an even richer family. Margaret—your mother."

My heart was pounding. "Damien, I didn't know—"

"Elena couldn't handle the public humiliation. She tried to take her own life." He paused, his jaw clenching. "She survived, but barely. She spent years in psychiatric care, recovering from the trauma. She's better now, but she's not the same person she used to be. And your father—he faced no consequences. No scandal. He married your mother, consolidated his power, and lived his life while my sister suffered."

"Oh my God," I whispered. "I'm so sorry. I didn't—"

"You didn't know," he said, cutting me off. "But I've known for twelve years. I've been waiting for the right moment to make your father pay for what he did. And then you walked into my office, broken and desperate, and I realized—the universe had handed me exactly what I needed."

I felt sick. "So this marriage—this whole thing—it's just about using me to hurt my father?"

"It started that way," Damien said, and there was something in his tone that made me look at him carefully. "But it's not anymore."

"What do you mean?"

He stood and walked to the window, looking out at the gardens bathed in moonlight. "I've built a file on your father, Sophia. Years of research. Illegal business deals, bribery, corruption at the highest levels. I have evidence that will send him to prison for at least twenty years. I'm planning to expose all of it publicly."

"My father... he's a criminal?"

"Worse than that. He's a hypocrite." Damien turned back to face me. "He preaches about family values and business ethics while he builds his empire on lies and broken lives. And your mother—she's complicit. She's known about his dealings for years."

I thought about my mother's slap. My father's cold dismissal. The way they'd protected Victoria while casting me out. Maybe Damien was right. Maybe they deserved whatever was coming.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Nothing you haven't already done," he said, returning to the table. "Be my wife. Be seen with me at public events. Let the world know that you're happy, that you've moved on, that you're untouchable now. When the time is right, we'll make the announcement about your pregnancy. We'll position ourselves as the perfect couple—young, in love, expecting our first child."

"And then?"

"Then I expose your father. I destroy his empire piece by piece. I make sure he loses everything—his money, his power, his freedom. And you, Sophia, will be positioned safely outside all of it, protected by the Blackwood name and fortune."

It was a masterplan. Brilliant and brutal.

"What about my mother?" I asked quietly. "She'll go down with him."

"Probably," Damien said without mercy. "Unless you want me to go easier on her."

Did I? My mother had raised her hand against me. She'd chosen Victoria over her own daughter. She'd told me I was an embarrassment to the family.

"No," I said finally. "Don't go easier on her."

Damien nodded, a flash of satisfaction crossing his face. "Good. Then we're aligned."

We finished dinner in silence, but it was a different kind of silence now. Understanding. An acknowledgment of what we were—two people bound together by vengeance and circumstance, willing to burn down the people who'd hurt us.

After dinner, I went back to my suite and took a long bath, trying to process everything. The water was perfect, the bathroom luxurious, but my mind was spiraling.

I was married to a man I barely knew, carrying another man's baby, and participating in an elaborate scheme to destroy my family. It should have terrified me.

Instead, all I could think about was how right it felt.

My phone buzzed. A text from Maya: *"Babe, this place is INSANE. But are you okay? Like really okay?"*

I stared at the question for a long moment before responding: *"I'm better than okay. For the first time since all this started, I feel like I have control. I feel powerful."*

And it was true.

The girl I'd been—the one who'd sacrificed everything for a man who didn't value her, who'd hidden her true self to gain the approval of people who didn't deserve it—she was gone.

In her place was someone new. Someone strong. Someone willing to do whatever it took to reclaim her life.

Later that night, as I lay in my silk sheets in my enormous bed, I heard a soft knock on the connecting door to Damien's suite.

"Come in," I called, curious.

He stood in the doorway in silk pajama pants and nothing else, his chest bare, his dark hair disheveled from sleep.

"Just wanted to check on you," he said. "You looked shaken at dinner."

"I'm okay," I said, sitting up, suddenly very aware that I was wearing only a silk nightgown. "I'm just... processing."

He walked to the edge of my bed but didn't sit. "I know this is complicated, Sophia. I know you didn't sign up for a vendetta against your family."

"No," I agreed. "But they signed up for betraying me. So fair is fair."

Something flickered in his expression—approval, maybe. Or attraction.

"Your father destroyed my sister's life," he said quietly. "And I'm going to make sure he pays for it. But I won't let this destroy you. Whatever happens, I protect what's mine."

The possessiveness in his voice should have bothered me. Instead, I felt a strange sense of safety wash over me.

"Goodnight, Sophia," he said, turning to leave.

"Damien," I called out. "Thank you. For taking me in. For giving me a choice, even if it's not a choice you wanted me to make."

He paused at the door. "We're allies, Sophia. In this life, in this war. That's worth something."

Then he was gone, the door closing softly behind him.

I lay back in my silk sheets, my hand instinctively moving to my stomach where my baby was growing.

Tomorrow, the world would see me as the lucky girl who married the powerful Damien Blackwood.

But I knew the truth.

I was a weapon. A beautiful, calculated weapon aimed directly at the heart of everything my family held dear.

And I was going to enjoy pulling the trigger.