

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 6 - The Announcement

Chapter 6: The Announcement

One week into my marriage, Damien decided it was time.

We were hosting a charity gala at the Blackwood Estate—an invitation-only event for the city's most powerful and wealthy. Three hundred people, all connected, all watching, all ready to spread gossip like wildfire.

It was the perfect place to make an announcement.

"You look stunning," Maya said, fastening the diamond bracelet around my wrist. "That dress is absolutely killer."

The dress was a custom Valentino gown in emerald green—a color that brought out my eyes and made me look like I'd been born to money and power. Designer shoes. Jewels that belonged in a museum. Hair and makeup done by professionals.

I looked like Mrs. Damien Blackwood.

I barely recognized myself.

"I'm nervous," I admitted, touching my stomach where my baby was growing. "Is it wrong to be using my pregnancy as a weapon?"

Maya met my eyes in the mirror. "Your baby is part of you, not a weapon. And honestly? Those people downstairs deserve whatever comes to them. Your family, Ethan, all of them—they chose cruelty. You're just choosing power."

She had a point.

Damien knocked on the connecting door between our suites. He looked devastating in a black tuxedo, his dark hair perfectly styled, his presence commanding. He'd fit into this world of wealth and privilege as if he'd been born to it.

Which, I supposed, he had.

"Ready?" he asked, extending his hand.

I took it, feeling the warmth of his skin, the strength in his grip. A small gesture, but after so long feeling powerless, it meant everything.

"No," I said honestly. "But let's do it anyway."

The gala was already in full swing when we arrived. Champagne flowed, conversation hummed, and every eye turned toward us as we descended the grand staircase.

Damien kept me close, his hand on the small of my back, playing the perfect devoted husband. We worked the room, accepting congratulations on our marriage, fielding questions about our "whirlwind romance," and building anticipation for whatever announcement was clearly coming.

I spotted my parents across the room. My mother's face went pale when she saw me. My father's jaw clenched. Beside them stood Victoria, looking absolutely furious, her designer dress suddenly seeming cheap in comparison to mine.

And then I saw him.

Ethan was standing near the bar, watching me with an expression I couldn't quite read. Pain. Regret. Longing.

Good.

Around nine, Damien led me to the center of the grand ballroom where a microphone and small podium had been set up. The crowd gradually quieted, sensing that something significant was about to happen.

"Thank you all for coming," Damien said, his voice commanding the room effortlessly. "My wife and I have an announcement that we're thrilled to share."

My wife. The words sent a flutter through my chest that had nothing to do with strategy and everything to do with the way he said it—like he actually meant it.

He took my hand and raised it to his lips, kissing my knuckles while keeping his eyes on the crowd. A gesture of ownership. Of devotion. Of absolute certainty.

"We're expecting our first child," he announced. "A little Blackwood will be joining us in approximately eight months."

The room erupted in applause and congratulations. I saw my mother's face go from pale to green. My father looked like he was having a stroke. Victoria's expression twisted with something I could only describe as pure envy.

And Ethan—Ethan looked like his entire world had just collapsed.

Which it had.

Because now the world believed that the baby I was carrying was Damien's. That Ethan had been replaced not just romantically, but biologically. Not only had I married a more powerful man, but I was carrying his child.

The humiliation was complete.

After the announcement, people rushed to congratulate us, eager to discuss wedding plans and nurseries and all the trappings of new parenthood. Damien fielded the questions smoothly while I smiled and accepted their well-wishes, playing the part of a glowing bride-to-be discovering she was pregnant.

Then Ethan appeared.

He looked like he hadn't slept in a week. His usually pristine appearance was disheveled, his eyes haunted. When he approached, Damien's hand on my back stiffened, but he didn't interrupt.

"Sophia, can we talk?" Ethan asked, desperation clear in his voice. "Privately?"

"Anything you want to say to my wife, you can say in front of me," Damien said coldly.

"This isn't your business, Blackwood," Ethan snapped.

"Actually, it is. Everything that involves Sophia is my business." Damien pulled me closer, his possessiveness unmistakable. "Now, what did you want to say to her?"

Ethan's hands clenched into fists. "I made a mistake, Sophia. A terrible mistake. Victoria lied to me. She's not dying—she's never been dying. The whole thing was a manipulation to get me away from you."

I already knew this, but hearing him admit it aloud was deeply satisfying. "So you finally figured it out?"

"I should have trusted you," he said desperately. "You tried to tell me. I was blind and stupid and—" He reached for my hand. "Please, we can fix this. We can—"

"Fix what, exactly?" I pulled my hand away. "Our engagement that you shattered the day before the wedding? Our relationship that was apparently so fragile it couldn't survive one test?"

"I was confused," he protested. "Victoria made it sound like—"

"Like it was a charity case?" I stepped closer, my voice sharp enough to cut glass. "Let me explain something, Ethan. You didn't hurt me because you were confused. You hurt me because you never really valued me. You valued the idea of me—the girl working two jobs to support your dreams, the girl who made you feel generous and noble. But the real me? You never saw her. You never wanted her."

His face crumpled. "That's not true. I loved you."

"No, you didn't." The words were ice. "If you had, you would have fought for me. You would have questioned Victoria's story instead of believing it instantly. You would have thought about me for even one second before throwing away everything we had."

Behind me, Damien's hand stroked my back—approval, support, ownership.

"I'm married now," I continued. "To a man who values me. A man who fights for me. A man who would never question whether I'm worth fighting for." I held up my left hand, letting the wedding ring catch the light. "So whatever you're offering, Ethan, I don't want it. I don't want you. That chapter of my life is closed."

"Sophia—"

"Goodbye, Ethan."

I turned away from him before he could respond, leaning into Damien's embrace. He led me back into the crowd without looking back, but I could feel Ethan's stare burning into my spine.

Later, as the party wound down, I found myself on the terrace overlooking the gardens. The night air was cool, the city lights spread below like diamonds.

"That was impressive," Damien said, appearing beside me with two glasses of champagne. "The way you handled him."

"I meant every word," I said, accepting a glass. "I don't want him. I don't want anything from my old life."

"That's good." He stood close, not quite touching. "Because tonight, you became something much more important than his ex-fiancée. You became my wife. The mother of my child—" he paused, correcting himself slightly, "—our child. And a member of the Blackwood family."

"Is this still part of the act?" I asked quietly, not looking at him.

"I don't know anymore," he admitted. "That's the problem."

I turned to face him. In the moonlight, his face was shadowed but intense. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I married you as a tool for revenge," he said bluntly. "I meant to use you to destroy your father. But somewhere in the last week, you've stopped being a tool and started being..." He trailed off, frustrated. "I don't know what you are now, Sophia. But I know I don't want this to end when the contract says it should."

My heart was suddenly racing. "Damien—"

"I know," he cut me off. "It's complicated. The baby isn't mine. This was supposed to be business. But I'm telling you anyway because you deserve honesty, and I'm tired of lying about this."

He stepped closer, and suddenly we were inches apart. His hand came up to cup my jaw, his thumb stroking my cheekbone. "When Ethan touched you, I wanted to break his hand. That's not business, Sophia. That's something else entirely."

"What are you saying?" I whispered.

"I'm saying that I want this to be real," he said. "Not the marriage itself—that can stay as it is, a contract, a tool. But us. I want you to want me the way I'm starting to want you."

Before I could respond, Victoria's voice cut through the night.

"Well, well, well. Look who's finally getting comfortable in her fake little life."

We turned to find her standing in the doorway to the terrace, her dress wrinkled, her makeup smudged, her hair disheveled. She looked like she'd been crying—or drinking. Possibly both.

"Victoria," I said coldly. "Shouldn't you be home? Dying?"

"Very funny," she spat. "You think you're so clever now, don't you? Married to the great Damien Blackwood, pregnant with his child, playing house in this mansion. But it's all a lie, Sophia. Everyone knows it."

"Do they?" I moved away from Damien slightly, curious to see where this was going.

"That baby isn't his," Victoria hissed. "It's Ethan's. And eventually, everyone's going to know that. And then they'll know that you seduced Damien into marriage as some kind of revenge plot. You're going to lose everything."

Damien stepped forward, his voice deadly calm. "You need to leave, Victoria."

"Or what?" she challenged. "You'll throw me out? Everyone already knows what you are. You're a predator who preys on vulnerable girls. My parents are thinking about suing you for—"

"For what?" Damien's voice was ice. "Being married to Sophia? Having consensual relations with my wife? Your lawyer won't have a case."

"We'll see about that," Victoria snarled, but there was no confidence in her voice. She turned back to me, desperation in her eyes. "You did this on purpose. You stole Ethan, then stole Damien, and now you're trying to destroy everyone I love."

"No," I said quietly. "I'm just reclaiming what you took from me. Ethan chose you. My family chose you. But now I'm choosing myself. And if that destroys you, then maybe you shouldn't have spent so much energy destroying me."

Victoria's face crumpled, and for a moment, she looked like the scared girl she might have been underneath all her manipulation.

"You're a monster," she whispered.

Then she turned and fled, disappearing back into the house.

I stood there, trembling slightly. Damien pulled me into his arms, and I let myself rest against him for a moment.

"Is it over?" I asked.

"With Victoria? Probably not yet." He stroked my hair. "But with Ethan? Yes. He knows now that he lost you forever."

I thought about Ethan's desperate face. Victoria's tears. My parents' shock at the announcement.

The revenge was just beginning. But tonight, I'd made my first real power move.

And it felt absolutely incredible.

Later, as I lay in my bed, I heard the connecting door open. Damien stood there, silhouetted against the light from his suite.

"The offer still stands," he said quietly. "If you want something more than this arrangement."

I sat up, the silk sheets pooling around me. "And if I say yes?"

"Then we figure out what this is," he said. "Together."

For the first time since all of this started, I thought about saying yes to something that wasn't about revenge or strategy.

But old habits died hard.

"Not yet," I said finally. "Let me destroy my family first. Then we can talk about what comes after."

He nodded, as if he expected that answer. "Fair enough."

He turned to leave, and then I called out to him.

"Damien?"

He paused in the doorway.

"Thank you. For everything."

His smile was slow and dangerous. "The night's still young, Sophia. Thank me after we burn it all down."

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 7 - The Fall

Chapter 7: The Fall

The first article dropped on a Monday morning.

I woke to find my phone flooded with notifications. News alerts. Social media tags. Emails from business associates and family friends. The headline was everywhere:

****"HART EMPIRE IN CRISIS - CEO RICHARD HART UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR MASSIVE FRAUD SCHEME"*****

I sat up in bed, my heart racing, and clicked through to the full story. Page after page of detailed allegations. Damien's evidence was meticulous—emails, financial records, testimonies from whistleblowers, all proving that my father had been running an elaborate scheme to embezzle millions while manipulating stock prices and bribing government officials.

The article included quotes from former business partners, all of them corroborating the accusations. But most damaging was the interview with Eleanor Rodriguez, a woman who claimed my father had coerced her into fraudulent business dealings and then destroyed her career when she refused to participate in further crimes.

This wasn't just an accusation. This was a systematic dismantling of everything my father had built.

My phone rang before I could even process it all. My mother.

"What have you done?" she shrieked the moment I answered. "Sophia, what the hell have you done? The FBI is here! They're serving warrants, they're taking your father's computers—"

"Mother, I—"

"This is you, isn't it? This is your revenge! You did this!" Her voice was breaking. "You married that monster and now you're destroying us!"

"I did nothing," I said coldly. "If Father's guilty, then he should face consequences. If the evidence is real, then—"

"The evidence was fabricated!" she screamed. "Someone planted it! It has to be Blackwood! He married you to get close to us, and now—"

"Goodbye, Mother."

I hung up and got out of bed, pulling on a robe. Downstairs, I found Damien in his home office, surrounded by monitors displaying news coverage. He looked absolutely satisfied.

"The second wave hits at noon," he said without looking up. "Business partners abandoning ship, stock prices plummeting, shareholders demanding his resignation. By tonight, the Hart Empire will be in freefall."

I should have felt triumphant. Instead, I felt something more complicated.

"My mother is terrified," I said quietly.

"Good." His voice was hard. "She should be. She's been complicit in every crime, every manipulation, every betrayal. She doesn't get sympathy."

He turned to look at me, his expression fierce. "Your father destroyed my sister's life, Sophia. Elena spent years believing she wasn't good enough, that there was something wrong with her because a powerful man decided she wasn't worth his loyalty. She still has nightmares. She still struggles to trust anyone. And your mother? She helped cover it up. She helped protect him while he continued to hurt people."

I knew he was right. I'd seen the evidence myself—the corruption, the bribery, the complete disregard for anyone who got in their way. But watching it happen, watching my mother's voice break over the phone, was harder than I expected.

"What about Victoria?" I asked.

"Victoria's finished," Damien said, pulling up another file. "Her cancer foundation? Turns out she's been embezzling funds. Faking donations. The whole thing is a fraud. She never had cancer, never had an organization. She just played a dying girl to manipulate people into giving her money."

I stared at the evidence. It was all there—bank statements, emails, proof of Victoria's lies. Another revelation, perfectly timed.

"How did you—"

"I've been investigating your entire family for years," Damien said bluntly. "I didn't just come up with this when you showed up in my office, Sophia. I was waiting for the right moment. You were the key that unlocked everything."

My phone buzzed again. This time it was a text from an unknown number: *"Sophia, it's Ethan. Please, we need to talk. My life is falling apart."*

Another text followed: *"I didn't know about any of this. I swear. Victoria lied about everything. She told me she loved me. I believed her."*

And another: *"Please don't let me go down with them. I had nothing to do with your father's crimes."*

I showed the messages to Damien.

"He's panicking," Damien observed. "Good. Let him suffer for a while."

"Is he guilty?" I asked. "Of the crimes, I mean. Or is he just collateral damage?"

"Ethan Cole is guilty of being a coward and a fool," Damien said. "But technically? No criminal charges will stick to him. He was kept out of the loop on your father's major dealings. He's just connected by association—which is punishment enough."

By noon, the news cycle had shifted completely. Every major outlet was reporting on Hart Empire's collapse. The FBI had arrested my father. My mother had lawyered up and was refusing to comment. Victoria had made a tearful statement denying everything and blaming my father for "manipulating her."

The business world was watching in real-time as an empire crumbled.

And I was at the center of it all.

News vans circled the Blackwood Estate. Reporters were camping outside the gates, desperate for an interview. Damien hired security to keep them at bay, but their presence was impossible to ignore.

"We should make a statement," Claire suggested during a meeting in Damien's office. "Address the situation directly. Show solidarity with the investigation. Separate yourselves from Hart family crimes."

Damien looked at me. "What do you want to do?"

I'd expected him to decide without asking me. But increasingly, he was consulting me on decisions. Treating me like a true partner rather than a pawn.

"A statement," I agreed. "But not one that throws my family under the bus. Just... clarity. The truth about what happened."

That evening, we held a press conference in front of the Blackwood Tower. Damien stood at the podium, me beside him, our hands intertwined. Cameras flashed as he began speaking.

"My wife and I have learned that her father has been involved in serious criminal activity," Damien said, his voice measured and serious. "We were not aware of these crimes, and we had no involvement in his business dealings. However, we fully support the investigation and the pursuit of justice. Crime, regardless of the perpetrator's wealth or status, must be prosecuted. We have complete faith in the legal system to determine guilt or innocence."

"Will you be cooperating with the FBI?" a reporter called out.

"We have already provided all requested documents and evidence to the appropriate authorities," I said, squeezing Damien's hand. "We want justice for anyone who has been harmed by these crimes."

The press conference lasted twenty minutes, and then we left. That night, my phone finally rang with a call I'd been expecting.

It was my father.

I almost didn't answer. But something made me pick up.

"Sophia," he said, his voice hollow. "How could you do this?"

"Do what?" I asked coldly. "Tell the truth? Fight back? Choose myself over protecting you?"

"You married him to do this," my father said. "You planned this entire thing from the beginning."

"No," I said. "I married him because you threw me away. You and Mother made that choice. This—" I gestured around, though he couldn't see me, "—this is just consequences."

"I'm your father," he said, and I heard the desperation in his voice. "I'm going to prison, Sophia. Twenty years, maybe more. Your mother is facing charges too. And Victoria—" He broke off. "Victoria's going to prison for fraud."

Part of me wanted to feel something. Pity, maybe. Or satisfaction.

But mostly I just felt empty.

"That's what happens when you commit crimes," I said flatly. "You face the consequences."

"What about you?" my father asked. "Aren't you going to face consequences for what you've done?"

"I haven't done anything illegal," I said. "I married a man and became his wife. If you were committing crimes, that's your problem, not mine."

"You're a monster," my father whispered. "What happened to the girl we raised?"

"She died the day you threw her away," I said. And then I hung up.

For a long moment, I just sat there in my beautiful room in my beautiful mansion, feeling absolutely nothing.

Damien found me on the terrace an hour later. I was staring out at the city, my hand on my stomach where my baby was growing.

"Are you okay?" he asked, standing beside me without touching me.

"I just destroyed my entire family," I said quietly. "My father's going to prison. My mother's going to prison. Victoria's going to prison. And I feel... nothing."

"Is that bad?" he asked.

"I don't know." I turned to look at him. "I spent so long being angry at them, planning this revenge. Now that it's actually happening, I expected to feel... something. Triumph, maybe. Or satisfaction."

"And instead?"

"Empty," I admitted. "Just empty."

Damien stepped closer and pulled me into his arms. I rested my head against his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

"Revenge never makes you feel better," he said quietly. "It just makes the pain different. But at least it's a pain you chose."

We stood there for a long time, just holding each other. The city lights sparkled below us, and I thought about everything that had happened. Two weeks ago, I was nothing. Now I was everything.

But somehow, I felt less than I'd ever been.

"Damien," I said. "Was it worth it? For you, I mean. Getting revenge on my father. Did it help Elena?"

He was quiet for a long moment. "No," he admitted finally. "It didn't. It just reminded me of how much she lost. But at least he knows now. He knows what it feels like to lose everything."

"Do you think that's enough?"

"It will have to be," he said. "Because I'm tired of living for revenge. I want to live for something else. For someone else."

He tipped my chin up, and before I could protest, he kissed me. This time, it wasn't for show or for strategy. It was real—deep and claiming and full of emotion.

When he pulled back, my heart was racing.

"The contract said two years," he said. "But I want to renegotiate. I want this to be real, Sophia. No more lies, no more games. Just us."

I wanted to say yes. Every instinct in my body was screaming at me to surrender to this feeling, to trust him, to let myself be loved.

But something held me back.

"My baby," I said. "You know it's not yours. Eventually, everyone will know that. Are you prepared for that?"

"I know," he said. "And when the time is right, we'll tell them. But until then—" He brushed a strand of hair from my face. "Until then, I'm her father. In every way that matters."

"Sophia," I said softly. "If it's a girl, I want to name her Sophia. After myself. But everyone will call her Sofia. With one 'p'."

His smile was gentle. "Sofia Blackwood. I like it."

We kissed again under the stars, and for the first time since this nightmare began, I felt something like hope.

The revenge was complete. My family was destroyed. Justice had been served.

Now, maybe, I could finally heal.

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 8 - Six Months Later

Chapter 8: Six Months Later

The obstetrics office was warm and filled with soft music. I sat in the examination chair, my belly now noticeably swollen with pregnancy, as the ultrasound technician moved the wand across my skin.

"Everything looks perfect," the technician said, smiling at the monitor. "Baby's measuring right on schedule. Would you like to know the sex?"

"Yes," I said, squeezing Damien's hand. He stood beside me, looking at the screen with an intensity that made my heart skip.

"Congratulations," the technician said. "You're having a girl."

Sofia. Our Sofia.

"Did you hear that?" Damien whispered, leaning down to kiss my forehead. "Our daughter."

He meant it. After six months of living as husband and wife, of sharing a bed and a life, the lines between the contract and reality had blurred completely. Last month, we'd had a real wedding ceremony—small and private, with Maya and Damien's sister Elena in attendance.

Elena. The girl who'd attempted suicide twelve years ago because of my father's cruelty.

She was beautiful, though there was a sadness in her eyes that probably would never fully go away. But seeing her with Damien, the way he protected and adored her, had made me understand the depth of his pain. And his strength.

"Let's go grab lunch," Damien said as we left the doctor's office. "I'm starving."

We drove to our favorite restaurant, a quiet Italian place where the owner knew us by name. As we were being seated, I spotted a familiar face at the bar.

Ethan.

He looked terrible. His suit was wrinkled, his hair disheveled, and he had the hollow look of someone who hadn't been sleeping. When he saw me, his expression crumpled.

Damien tensed beside me. "Do you want me to—"

"It's okay," I said quietly. "Let me talk to him."

I excused myself and walked over to the bar. Ethan stood immediately, his eyes desperately searching mine.

"Sophia," he breathed. "I've been trying to reach you. I—"

"I know," I said calmly. "I've been ignoring your calls."

"Can we talk? Please?" He glanced at Damien, who was watching us like a hawk. "Privately?"

Against Damien's obvious wishes, I agreed. We stepped outside into the cool evening air, and Ethan immediately began to crumble.

"I've lost everything," he said, his voice breaking. "The wedding with Victoria was a disaster. She's in prison now, did you know that? Five years for fraud. My career is over. Everyone knows I was engaged to a fraud artist. No firm will hire me."

I felt a flash of pity, but I pushed it down. "You made choices."

"I know," he whispered. "And the worst choice was letting you go. Sophia, I think about that day every single day. I replayed it a thousand times, trying to figure out how I could have been so blind, so stupid—"

"You weren't blind," I interrupted. "You were just selfish. Victoria offered you something that felt noble and self-sacrificing, and you took it because it made you feel good about yourself. You didn't care about the cost to me."

"That's not fair," he protested weakly.

"It's completely fair," I said coldly. "You had a choice between marrying me and throwing me away for your dying stepsister. You chose her. That's on you."

"I was confused—"

"You were an asshole," I said flatly. "And now you're facing the consequences of your choices. The same consequences I faced when you threw me away. But at least you still have your life, Ethan. You're not destitute. You're just... unemployed and embarrassed."

"I deserve that," he said bitterly. "I deserve worse. But Sophia—" he stepped closer, his eyes pleading, "—I still love you. I've never stopped loving you. If you'd give me another chance, I swear I'd spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

I looked at him—this man I'd loved for six years, the man I'd sacrificed everything for. And I felt nothing. No anger, no hurt, no lingering attachment.

Just... nothing.

"I'm married," I said gently. "To a man who actually values me. To a man who would never choose someone else over me. I'm three months pregnant with his child. I'm building a real life now, Ethan. And you're not part of it."

"Is that baby—" he stopped, his face going pale. "Is it mine?"

"No," I lied smoothly. "It's Damien's. He's been my husband for six months. Do the math."

The lie was necessary. The baby would be born seven months after my marriage to Damien, close enough that the timeline could work if anyone questioned it. And I'd decided to keep the truth about the biological father private. Damien had accepted the baby completely, legally and emotionally. As far as the world was concerned, Sofia was his daughter.

And that was all that mattered.

"I'm so sorry," Ethan whispered, and I could see tears streaming down his face. "I'm so sorry for everything."

"I'm not," I said. "Your betrayal was the best thing that ever happened to me. It freed me. So thank you, Ethan. For throwing me away. For giving me the push I needed."

Then I turned and walked back inside to Damien, leaving Ethan standing alone on the sidewalk.

Damien pulled me into his arms the moment I sat down. "Are you okay?"

"Better than okay," I said, surprising myself with how much I meant it. "I just realized something. I'm not angry anymore. At any of them. They made their choices, and I made mine. And I won."

"You did," he said, stroking my hair. "You won completely."

The following week, my mother reached out.

She was being released on house arrest while awaiting trial, with a tracking device and strict conditions. She wanted to see me.

I didn't want to see her. But Damien encouraged me to go, saying it might provide closure.

My old family home looked smaller than I remembered. The gates were still there, the gardens still manicured, but something essential had died. The weight of power and prestige that once hung over the house was gone.

My mother was sitting in the living room when I entered. She looked ten years older than she had three months ago. Her face was gaunt, her eyes hollow.

She stood when I walked in, and for a moment, neither of us spoke.

"You look well," she finally said quietly.

"I am," I replied, sitting down across from her rather than beside her. The distance was intentional.

"I never thought you'd do this," she said. "I never thought you were capable of—of destroying your own family."

"I didn't destroy anything," I said calmly. "You did that yourselves. I just stopped protecting you."

"Your father wants to apologize," she said. "He's in prison now, and he wants—"

"I don't care what he wants," I interrupted. "He chose his path. He made his choices. Now he lives with the consequences."

My mother flinched at my coldness. "You sound like him, you know. Like Richard. So cold. So willing to use people and throw them away."

"No," I said. "I sound like someone who learned from the best. You taught me that love is conditional. That family is just a transaction. You threw me away when I wasn't useful to you anymore. Well, now I'm useful to the Blackwoods, and I've never been happier."

"Sophia—"

"There's nothing left to say," I stood up. "The woman you knew as your daughter is dead. I'm Mrs. Damien Blackwood now, and I have a family that actually values me. You no longer get to call me daughter. You no longer get anything from me."

I turned to leave, but my mother's voice stopped me.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "For the slap. For the words. For choosing Victoria. I'm sorry, Sophia. I'm so sorry."

For a moment, I wavered. But then I thought about six years of sacrifice. About standing in my stepsister's shadow. About the day my mother's hand had cracked across my face in front of three hundred people.

"Goodbye, Mother," I said, and I walked out without looking back.

Three weeks later, Victoria was sentenced to five years in federal prison for fraud and embezzlement. The judge was particularly harsh, noting her lack of remorse and the calculated nature of her crimes.

I watched the trial on the news from the comfort of my home, Damien beside me on the couch, his hand on my swollen belly where Sofia was kicking.

"Three down," Damien said quietly, referring to the prison sentences. My father had been sentenced to twenty-two years. My mother to eight. Victoria to five. "Your father's appeal will be denied. Your mother has already stopped fighting."

"And Ethan?" I asked.

"He took a job at a small law firm in another state," Damien said. "He's starting over. Rebuilding his life in anonymity."

"That's... good," I said, and I meant it. I didn't want Ethan to suffer forever. Just enough to understand what I'd gone through.

"You're a better person than I am," Damien said, kissing my forehead. "I would have destroyed him completely."

"Maybe that's why we work," I replied, resting my head on his chest. "You taught me how to be ruthless. I'm teaching you how to forgive."

"I don't know how to forgive," he said quietly. "I'm not sure I want to learn."

"Then I'll do it for both of us," I said. "Someone has to break the cycle of revenge, or it never ends."

We sat in comfortable silence, listening to our daughter kick inside me, feeling the future we were building together.

Six months ago, I was nothing. A discarded fiancée with nothing to her name. Now I was everything—a powerful man's beloved wife, an expectant mother, an heiress to a reclaimed fortune.

But more importantly, I was free.

Free from the need to please people who didn't deserve my love. Free from the desperation to be accepted by people who would never see my worth. Free from the lies and the hiding and the constant sacrifice.

"I'm happy," I said, surprised by the realization. "Actually, genuinely happy."

Damien's arms tightened around me. "So am I, Mrs. Blackwood. So am I."

The revenge was complete. Justice had been served. My family was destroyed.

And somehow, through all the darkness and the manipulation and the calculated cruelty, I'd found something real.

I'd found love.

In three months, Sofia would be born. In one year, the contract marriage would have ended—but we both knew it wouldn't. We were building something real now. Something lasting.

The Heiress He Threw Away had become the Heiress Who Threw Them Away.

And I was finally, completely, at peace.

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 9 - Sofia's Arrival

Chapter 9: Sofia's Arrival

Three weeks before my due date, I woke up to a dull ache spreading across my lower back.

It was 3 AM, and Damien was asleep beside me, his arm draped protectively across my swollen belly. I lay there for a few minutes, trying to determine if this was the real thing or just Braxton-Hicks contractions.

The pain intensified. My heart began racing.

This was it.

"Damien," I whispered, gently shaking him. "I think it's time."

He was awake instantly, alert and focused. "Contractions?"

"I think so." Another pain hit, and I gripped his hand. "They're about ten minutes apart."

He sprang into action immediately, pulling on clothes and calling the hospital while I changed into the maternity clothes we'd packed months ago. Everything we'd prepared for was finally happening.

By the time we arrived at the hospital, my contractions were eight minutes apart. The doctors examined me and confirmed I was in early labor. They admitted me to a private room—Damien had insisted on the best, naturally—and began monitoring the baby.

Maya arrived within the hour, refusing to leave my side. Eleanor, the housekeeper, had stayed with her at the guest house. She insisted on coming to the hospital, but I'd asked her to wait. This moment felt intimate, family-only.

The labor progressed slowly through the morning. By noon, I was in active labor, and by 2 PM, my contractions were coming fast and hard. Damien stood beside me through every one, coaching me to breathe, holding my hand when the pain became unbearable.

"You're doing so well," he whispered, brushing damp hair from my forehead. "Sofia's almost here. Our daughter's almost here."

"I can't," I gasped as another contraction ripped through me. "It's too much—"

"You can," he said firmly, his dark eyes meeting mine. "You've already beaten impossible odds, Sophia. You've already overcome everything life threw at you. This is one more thing. And you can do it."

His words gave me strength. I pushed harder, focused on bringing our daughter into the world.

At 4:47 PM, Sofia Blackwood entered the world screaming her lungs out.

She was perfect. Absolutely perfect. Tiny and angry and covered in vernix, and I had never seen anything more beautiful in my entire life. The nurse placed her on my chest, and the moment her skin touched mine, I understood why people said that becoming a mother changes you forever.

Because in that instant, I would have burned down the world for her.

"She's gorgeous," Maya cried, tears streaming down her face.

Damien didn't say anything. He just stared at our daughter with an expression of such pure wonder and love that it made my heart shatter and reform all at once. This man—

who'd married me for revenge, who'd destroyed my entire family—was now looking at our baby like she was the most precious thing he'd ever seen.

After the initial examinations, Sofia was wrapped in a blanket and placed back in my arms. Damien sat beside us on the hospital bed, his arm around both of us, and we just looked at our daughter.

"Hi, Sofia," I whispered. "I'm your mom. This is your dad. Welcome to our crazy, chaotic, beautiful life."

"She has your eyes," Damien said, his voice thick with emotion.

"She has your stubbornness," I replied. "Did you hear that scream? That's all Blackwood."

We sat like that for hours, just being a family. Hospital staff came and went, checking on us, asking if we needed anything. But mostly, Damien, Sofia, and I existed in our own little bubble of perfect happiness.

Later that night, after visiting hours had ended and Maya had reluctantly gone home, Damien held Sofia while I rested. I watched them—my husband and my daughter—and felt tears of pure joy sliding down my cheeks.

"What are you thinking?" Damien asked, noticing my tears.

"That I'm happy," I said simply. "Genuinely, completely happy. A year ago, I would have laughed if someone told me this was my future. Married to a man I barely knew, carrying his child—well, her child, but he doesn't know that yet—no family support, nothing but revenge driving me forward. And somehow, I ended up here. With you. With Sofia. With everything."

"Do you regret any of it?" he asked carefully. "The revenge? The way we started?"

"No," I said honestly. "Because if you hadn't offered me that deal, I would have spent the rest of my life broken. You gave me a way to fight back. You gave me power. And somewhere along the way, it became real."

Damien leaned down and kissed my forehead softly. "I love you, Sophia. I know I started this as a business arrangement, but I love you. Not because of who you are or what you can do for me. Just... you. All of you."

"I love you too," I whispered back. "Even though this whole thing was insane."

Over the next three days, visitors came and went. Eleanor brought flowers and champagne. Damien's business associates sent extravagant gifts. But the most unexpected visitor came on the third day.

Elena, Damien's sister, stood in the doorway holding a hand-knitted baby blanket.

"I made this," she said shyly, approaching the bed. "When Damien told me you were having a girl. I hope you don't mind."

"It's beautiful," I said, taking the blanket. It was white with tiny pink flowers, and it was made with such care that I could feel the love in every stitch.

Elena carefully took Sofia from the bassinet, cradling her like she was the most precious thing in the world. "She's perfect. She's absolutely perfect."

"Would you like to hold her?" I asked.

Elena sat down carefully, and I placed Sofia in her arms. Damien stood beside his sister, and I watched something shift in his expression—a softening, a healing.

"Thank you," Elena said quietly, looking at me. "For what you did. For bringing down the man who hurt me. I spent so many years thinking there was something wrong with me, something unworthy about me. Knowing that he's finally paying for what he did... it doesn't erase the trauma, but it helps. It helps me believe that the world is just sometimes."

"I'm sorry it took so long," I said. "And I'm sorry for what he did to you."

"It's not your fault," Elena said gently. "But I'm grateful to you anyway."

After Elena left, I found Damien on the hospital room balcony, staring out at the city.

"That was big," I said, wrapping my arms around him from behind. "Seeing her with Sofia, bringing you a kind of peace with your revenge."

"It didn't really," he admitted. "But it helps. Knowing that at least my revenge accomplished something real. That Elena can find some closure, even if the pain will always be there."

"Speaking of closure," I said carefully, "I need to tell you something."

His entire body went rigid. "What?"

"Sofia isn't yours," I said quietly. "Biologically, I mean. She's Ethan's."

For a long moment, he didn't move. Then he turned to face me, his expression unreadable.

"I know," he said finally.

I stared at him. "What?"

"I've known since the beginning," he said. "The pregnancy tests. The timeline. I put two and two together about a week after we married."

"And you married me anyway?" I asked, shocked.

"Because I fell in love with you," he said simply. "Because raising Sofia seemed like a small price to pay for having you in my life. Because somewhere along the way, she became my daughter—not through biology, but through love."

He pulled me into his arms and held me tight.

"I signed adoption papers last month," he continued. "Making Sofia legally and officially my daughter. No one else needs to know she's not biologically mine. As far as the world is concerned, she's ours. She's Blackwood."

I pulled back to look at him. "You adopted her?"

"The moment I knew you wanted to keep her," he said. "She's my daughter, Sophia. Not in name only, but in every way that matters. I will spend the rest of my life protecting her, loving her, being there for her. She's mine."

Tears streamed down my face as I kissed him, feeling more loved and protected than I had in my entire life.

"You're extraordinary," I whispered against his lips.

"No," he said. "You are. You survived betrayal and abandonment and humiliation. You fought back. You won. And now you're here, giving me the chance to be a father, to have a family, to be someone better than the man driven by revenge. That's extraordinary, Sophia. You're extraordinary."

We returned to the hospital room, and I climbed back into bed while Damien sat beside me. Sofia was sleeping in her bassinet, her tiny fists clenched, her face peaceful.

I watched my daughter—our daughter—and felt gratitude flood through me. A year ago, I had nothing. Now I had everything.

A husband who loved me unconditionally. A daughter who would grow up knowing she was wanted and cherished. A life that was built on truth and love instead of lies and sacrifice.

"What are you thinking?" Damien asked, noticing my serene expression.

"I'm thinking that we need a bigger mansion," I said with a smile. "Because I want to give Sofia brothers and sisters. I want a huge, chaotic, loud family. I want to spend the rest of my life creating the kind of family I never had."

Damien laughed, a deep sound of pure joy. "Whatever you want, Mrs. Blackwood. Whatever you want."

I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep, my hand in Damien's, Sofia sleeping peacefully beside us.

The girl who'd been thrown away had finally found where she belonged.

Not in the Hart mansion with her cold, calculating family. Not in a cramped apartment with a man who didn't value her.

But here. In the arms of a man who loved her completely. Building a family with the daughter they both adored.

Here, she was home.

Here, she was everything.

And that was the greatest revenge of all.

The Heiress He Threw Away Chapter 10 - The Dark Secret

Chapter 10: The Dark Secret

Three weeks after Sofia's birth, everything felt perfect.

She was healthy, thriving, beautiful. Damien was an incredible father, splitting his time between the mansion and his office. I was healing from childbirth, floating in that new-mother haze of exhaustion and pure love. We were a family. We were happy.

Then the letter arrived.

It was addressed to Damien, marked "CONFIDENTIAL - LEGAL." He opened it during breakfast, and I watched his face drain of color as he read.

"What is it?" I asked, immediately terrified. "Is it about the business?"

"Nothing," he said too quickly, shoving the letter into his jacket pocket. "Just some old matter with a business partner."

But I knew him well enough now to recognize when he was lying.

That night, after Sofia was asleep and the house had gone quiet, I found him in his home office, staring at the letter again. He didn't try to hide it this time—just looked at me with an expression of complete exhaustion.

"Victoria's appealing her conviction," he said bluntly.

My stomach dropped. "What? How? She confessed to everything."

"Her new lawyer is claiming evidence tampering," Damien said, his voice cold. "He's alleging that some of the documents used to convict her were fabricated. That they don't match the chain of custody records. That the FBI may have planted evidence."

"That's absurd," I said. "We watched her commit crimes. She admitted everything."

But even as I said it, I felt a chill run down my spine. Because suddenly, my memory of Victoria's trial seemed less clear. Had there been something off about some of the evidence? Some document that appeared too convenient, too perfectly incriminating?

"Damien," I said slowly, "where did you get all that evidence against Victoria?"

He turned away from me. "The same place I got it for your father. Through my investigators."

"Your investigators," I repeated. "The ones you've been using for years. The ones who work outside the law."

"Sophia—"

"Tell me," I said, my voice hardening. "Tell me you didn't fabricate evidence against Victoria."

For a long moment, he didn't answer. And in that silence, I knew.

"Some of it may have been... enhanced," he finally admitted. "To ensure it would stick. Victoria's lawyer was very good. I wasn't sure the real evidence alone would be enough to—"

"You planted evidence?" I interrupted, my voice rising. "You actually planted evidence?"

"No," he said, turning to face me. "I enhanced real evidence. There's a difference. Victoria DID commit fraud. She DID embezzle money. I just... made sure the court would believe it."

I felt like I couldn't breathe. "What about my father? Did you enhance evidence against him too?"

Damien's jaw clenched. "Your father is guilty, Sophia. That I don't regret."

"That's not what I asked," I said coldly. "Did you plant or fabricate evidence against my father?"

"Some of the documentation was compiled in ways that might not have been admissible—"

"Oh my God," I whispered, sinking into a chair. "My father might not have actually committed all those crimes. He's in prison because of you. Because you fabricated evidence."

"Your father IS guilty," Damien said fiercely. "He destroyed my sister. He destroyed countless people. He deserved everything that happened to him."

"Not like this!" I said, standing up. "Not through lies and fabrication. You're just like them, Damien. You're just as corrupt, just as willing to destroy people for your own purposes."

"I did it for Elena," he said. "I did it for—"

"You did it for revenge," I cut him off. "You did it because you're obsessed with revenge, and I've been an idiot for not seeing it."

I left his office, my heart pounding. That night, I slept in a guest room, unable to even look at him.

The next morning, before Damien woke up, I called my father.

He was still in federal prison, but we'd been allowed to talk occasionally through approved channels. He answered on the third ring, surprised to hear from me.

"Sophia? Is everything okay? Is the baby—"

"Did you commit all the crimes you were convicted of?" I asked without preamble.

There was a long silence. "Sweetheart, I don't think this is a conversation—"

"Dad, please. I need to know. Did you really commit all of them?"

Another long silence. Then: "Most of them. Not all. Some of the evidence presented at trial was... questionable. My lawyer tried to get it suppressed, but the judge ruled it admissible."

My heart sank. "So you didn't commit everything they charged you with?"

"I committed enough," my father said quietly. "Enough to deserve to be here. But no, not everything."

I felt tears streaming down my face. "I need to hire you a lawyer. A really good one. We're going to file an appeal. We're going to get you out."

"Sophia, no—"

"Yes," I said fiercely. "I'm sorry for what happened to you. I'm sorry my family treated me the way they did. But I won't let you rot in prison for crimes you didn't commit. Not anymore."

After hanging up, I sat in the nursery watching Sofia sleep, my mind racing. Damien had married me, gotten me pregnant, built a life with me—all while harboring this secret. All while knowing that his "justice" was built on lies and manipulation.

I loved him. But I couldn't be with someone like that.

By afternoon, news broke that Victoria's appeal had been granted. A federal judge had ruled that there were "irregularities" in the evidence against her and ordered a new trial. The legal world was in upheaval.

That evening, I confronted Damien directly.

"We need to talk about what you've done," I said, my voice steady despite my turmoil. "And we need to talk about what comes next."

"What comes next is we fight this," Damien said immediately. "Victoria will lose her new trial. The evidence—"

"The fabricated evidence?" I asked. "The planted evidence? You think we can win with that?"

"It's not all fabricated," Damien insisted. "Most of it is real. I just... supplemented what I knew to be true."

"That makes you a criminal, Damien. That makes you exactly what we fought against."

"I'm not your father," he said coldly. "I didn't hurt innocent people. I punished the guilty."

"You don't get to decide who's guilty," I said. "That's for the courts. That's for a system of justice, not for your personal revenge."

"And how has your precious system of justice worked out for you?" he demanded. "Your father beat the system for years. Victoria would have too. Sometimes justice needs help."

"No," I said. "Sometimes justice means taking the hard path. It means proving guilt beyond a shadow of a doubt. It means being better than them."

I stood up, my legs shaking. "I think you should leave. Stay at a hotel until I figure out what I want to do."

"Sophia—"

"Leave," I said, my voice like ice. "Now."

For three days, Damien was gone. I didn't see him, didn't talk to him. I spent time with Sofia, processing everything I'd learned. Maya came to stay with me, sensing that something was wrong.

"He planted evidence?" she asked, shocked, when I finally told her.

"On multiple people," I confirmed. "My father, Victoria, probably others. He's been playing God for years, deciding who deserves punishment and fabricating the evidence to make sure they get it."

"What are you going to do?" Maya asked carefully.

"I don't know," I admitted. "I love him. But I can't be with someone like that. I can't raise Sofia with someone who thinks the ends justify the means."

On the fourth day, Damien came home. He looked like he hadn't slept, his usual immaculate appearance disheveled. He went directly to the nursery and spent hours just watching Sofia sleep.

When he finally came to find me, his expression was devastated.

"I've been thinking about what you said," he began. "And I think you're right."

I waited, not trusting myself to speak.

"I've become a monster," he continued quietly. "I've spent so many years consumed by revenge that I forgot what justice actually means. I forgot that I have to live with myself when this is all over."

He sat down heavily. "I'm going to turn myself in."

"What?" I said, shocked.

"I'm going to confess everything to the FBI," he said. "The evidence tampering, the illegal investigations, all of it. I'm going to tell them exactly what I've done and take responsibility for it."

"Damien, that means prison—"

"I know." He looked at me with eyes full of pain. "But it's the right thing to do. And if I can't do what's right, then I'm not worthy of being your husband or Sofia's father."

I stared at him, seeing the man I loved finally becoming the man he should be. But at what cost?

"What about Victoria?" I asked. "What about my father?"

"I'll recant my testimony," Damien said. "I'll tell the truth about what I did. It will likely mean your father's conviction stands—he really did commit those crimes—but Victoria will probably walk free. And I'll face the consequences."

"Damien—"

"It's time," he said quietly. "It's time for me to stop running from who I am and become who I need to be."

He stood up and pulled me into his arms. For a long moment, we just held each other, both of us crying.

"I'm sorry," he whispered into my hair. "For everything I've done. For the lies. For putting you in this position."

"I know," I said. "And I forgive you. But Damien, we can't go back to how things were. This is going to change everything."

"I know," he said. "But at least it will be honest."

The next day, Damien's lawyer accompanied him to FBI headquarters. He spent six hours in interrogation, confessing to years of crimes, fabricated evidence, and corruption.

By evening, the news had exploded across every outlet:

"DAMIEN BLACKWOOD CONFESSES TO EVIDENCE TAMPERING - MULTIPLE CASES UNDER REVIEW"

Our perfect life, built on revenge and lies, was about to come crashing down.

And this time, there was no one to blame but ourselves.