“My life was normal,” I said, voice echoing in the cold bedroom. “Now it’s… gone.”

I was alone, perched on the edge of our half-empty bed, staring at the wide, gaping closet. The left side—where my wife’s clothes once hung—was stripped bare. Her blouses, her fancy dresses, the row of color-coordinated shoes… all vanished. The overhead light flickered, reflecting on the glossy floor that looked emptier than it had ever been.

It started when I came home early from a business trip to Portland. I was actually excited—managed to wrap up everything a day early, thought I’d surprise **Dana**. We’d been married four years, together for six. I was 29 when we married, so that put me at 32 now; her at 31. That day, the excitement in me was a slow burn. I even hummed a tune on the flight, imagining how she’d run into my arms when I stepped through the door.

Instead, her car wasn’t even in the driveway. And the house was eerily silent. I called out, “Dana?” but the silence that answered felt suffocating. Then I walked into our bedroom and saw that half of our closet was empty—**not** messy empty, like she was trying on outfits, but deliberately cleared out. Methodically done.

My hands shook as I pulled out my phone to call her. Straight to voicemail. That’s when **the text** came in: “*I can’t do this anymore. I’m moving in with someone more successful—someone who matches my ambitions. I’ll have my lawyer contact you about the divorce.”*

A dryness coated my mouth. I sat on the bed for what felt like an eternity, trying to piece together the last few months. She’d been making little comments about my lack of drive, about how I never compared to her coworker Christian’s unstoppable success. His Instagram was full of business trips to Dubai, a Tesla, a summer house. She’d started “networking” more, staying out late, coming home smelling like cologne that wasn’t mine. Looking back, it seemed so obvious. But I’d been blind, too comfortable in what I thought was a stable marriage.

I didn’t scream or smash dishes. Instead, I took three steps, systematically: **Called Jared**, my best buddy who happened to be a divorce lawyer. **Took photos and videos** of everything—her missing items, the state of our home. **Sent her a single text**: *Noted. My lawyer will be in touch.*

Then I sank into a kitchen chair, poured myself two fingers of whiskey, and opened my laptop. I made lists: bank accounts, credit cards, passwords, our lease, the joint phone plan. Everything that might come back to haunt me if I didn’t handle it right. I was a swirl of emotions but oddly calm. The only phone calls I ignored were from her mother, who rang around 8 p.m., and from her sister, Kira, who texted, *What’s going on?*

Notifications from Dana started around midnight—some frantic attempt to provoke me into an emotional meltdown. But it wasn’t happening. By 3 a.m., I had a clear picture of our finances and a to-do list for the next day. Turned out the apartment lease was in **my** name, the utilities in **my** name, and ironically, she’d left her name on our joint accounts. **Rookie mistake**.

There was a numbness in me, like a cold, sharp clarity. Instead of heartbreak, I felt only readiness. The next morning, I met with Jared to initiate the divorce. I changed the Netflix password, ordered a new keypad for the front door, and packed up a few photos of us that were left on shelves. Funny enough, she’d left behind all her important documents—**birth certificate**, **passport**, **social security card**—in the fireproof safe. She probably forgot in her rush to chase “success.” I knew that was going to be an interesting card to play.

Despite her frantic calls, I didn’t feel devastation. Maybe it was shock, or maybe something darker was growing inside me. I was just… **ready**.

By the next afternoon, Jared and I were discussing the next steps in his downtown office. A sunbeam cut across his mahogany desk as we pored over documents. That’s when my phone buzzed with an incoming call from **Kira**, Dana’s sister. Jared suggested I put it on speaker.

“Jeremy?” Kira’s voice trembled. “I’m so sorry. I should’ve warned you. She’s done this before…”

I sat upright, exchanging a glance with Jared. “What do you mean?” I said. “Dana always claimed her last breakup was because the guy was emotionally unavailable.”

“That’s not true,” Kira said. “He was a normal guy. She just ditched him when she met someone she thought had better prospects. Turned out that guy was all debt and leased cars. It only lasted three months.”

I closed my eyes. So this was a **pattern**. Trading up, chasing illusions. Jared kept scribbling notes, nodding as if to say, *This fits our case perfectly.*

Just then, my phone beeped with new messages from Dana. She whined about needing her birth certificate for a new job, about being legally entitled to her passport. She even wrote, *Christian says you’re obligated to give me my property immediately!* Jared just smirked.

“She abandoned the marital residence,” Jared said quietly. “She’s not entitled to a casual handover. We can do it formally through lawyers or a supervised exchange. Meanwhile, keep that phone on silent and archive everything.”

I gave him a tight nod, feeling a flicker of satisfaction. She’d triggered a war she was unprepared for.

That same day, Dana’s mom managed to get me on the phone. She spent twenty minutes apologizing, apparently mortified by Dana’s behavior. “This started in high school,” her mom sighed. “She kept upgrading friends based on money. I thought she’d grown out of it when she married you—when she found some stability. I’m… so sorry.”

“She’s living in Christian’s downtown apartment now, isn’t she?” I asked flatly.

“Yes,” her mother said, sounding tired. “He posts about it nonstop on social media, but it’s all for show. His parents co-signed because his credit’s too low to rent there. Dana thinks she’s found this glamorous life. I can’t talk her out of it.”

I gave a humorless laugh. “She’ll learn soon enough. Thank you, though. I appreciate the honesty.”

Hanging up, I felt a strange calm. *Let them pretend. Let them plaster their highlight reel on Instagram.* Soon, the truth would catch up.

Over the following days, I put my life in order with ruthless efficiency. Changed every password, froze joint credit cards, got new door locks, updated the utilities to reflect only my name. I let her name remain on the old accounts, but those were all effectively locked down until the divorce was settled.

Then the social media storm began. Dana’s feed showcased her “new life” in Christian’s sleek apartment. Hashtag #Blessed. Hashtag #LivingMyBestLife. Perfectly angled photos of cocktails, city lights, morning cappuccinos. But behind the scenes, as Kira informed me, the furniture was leased, the entire place basically staged.

A bigger laugh came when I realized she was still using **my** credit card for that fancy gym membership. Once I froze the joint account, her membership ended. The next day, her social media posts shifted from “Morning workout selfies” to “long rants about toxic people controlling finances.” The irony was so thick I could taste it.

Two nights later, I came home from a run to find **Dana** on my front steps, mascara streaking her cheeks. She looked up desperately when I approached.

“Jeremy, please,” she said, voice cracking. “Why won’t you talk to me? I just need my documents, and—”

I brushed past, unlocking the door. “All communication goes through lawyers,” I said coolly, stepping inside. Then I shut the door on her pleas.

She stayed there two hours, switching between crying and raging text messages. I monitored everything on my new security camera, feeling only a cold, twisted satisfaction. Eventually, her phone battery died. She left, cursing my name.

That night, I packed the last of her items, found an old journal from when we started dating. Didn’t read it—just tossed it in a box. The version of her who wrote those pages didn’t exist anymore. If she ever had.

A week later, her lawyer finally reached out. We arranged a meeting in Jared’s office. **Dana** showed up wearing a designer dress, trying to look upscale, but I recognized it from her last few Instagram posts. She’d repeated it multiple times this week—suggesting maybe she was low on options.

Her posture screamed arrogance, though. She glared at me across the conference table. Jared and I sat on one side, she and her lawyer on the other. The tension was palpable.

“Good afternoon,” Jared said. “Let’s begin.”

Dana’s lawyer tried to keep it formal, discussing the separation of assets. But halfway through, Dana snapped:

“I want immediate access to my documents,” she said. “He’s holding them hostage!”

Her lawyer winced, clearly not having been briefed on her outburst. Jared remained calm, sliding some printed screenshots across the table: Dana’s own social media posts bragging about “leaving the past behind,” “moving in with Christian,” plus the text confirmations that she’d walked out. Combined, they painted a picture that she’d **abandoned** the marital home and was now living openly with another man.

“We can schedule a supervised exchange of those documents,” Jared said. “But since Ms. Dana abandoned the residence without notice, we’ll do it via proper channels. She can’t just demand them on a whim.”

Dana’s eyes filled with fury. “You can’t do this, Jeremy,” she said, turning to me. “Christian said—”

I raised a hand, cutting her off. “If Christian has legal advice, he can share it through your counsel. Otherwise, I’m not interested.”

Her lips trembled with anger. Her lawyer tried to salvage the discussion. Ultimately, we agreed to do a property exchange next week, with lawyers or an officer present. Meanwhile, we hammered out some preliminary divorce steps. Dana kept shooting me daggers, but I felt only a grim thrill.

That same week, my job recognized how I’d stepped up during a project crisis. I got a promotion—a modest title bump, better pay, more flexible hours. Ironically, all while dealing with the unraveling of my marriage. I also found solace in the gym, dropped some weight, built some lean muscle. My trainer, Marcus, introduced me to one of his friends, **Adrien**, a pediatric nurse who had a penchant for horror movies and dumb puns.

We hit it off. I wasn’t looking for anything serious, but we found ourselves talking, laughing, bonding over small joys. She was the polar opposite of Dana—no obsession with status or big, flashy lifestyles. Meanwhile, I heard from Kira that Dana’s “perfect new life” was hitting snags. Christian faced potential layoffs at his company, was behind on rent, had a Tesla repossessed. Maxed-out credit cards. The illusions were crashing fast.

A surreal sense of calm filled me. I was moving forward, leveling up at work, meeting new people, discovering I was more than her stepping stone. But part of me still burned for deeper revenge. Something in me whispered: *They deserve worse.*

Kira called now and then, giving me tidbits about Dana’s meltdown. One day, she said, “Christian’s ex-wife contacted me. Apparently, Christian’s not even fully divorced—he has a pattern of hooking up with women to mooch off them. Dana didn’t know. She’s freaking out.”

I let out a low laugh. “Sounds like karma.”

A few days later, I was grabbing sandwiches with Adrien downtown when **Dana walked in** with a friend. She spotted me, paused, her eyes flicking to Adrien, who was giggling at one of my silly stories. Dana lingered by the counter, pretending to read the menu for a good twenty minutes. I kept chatting with Adrien, making sure to laugh casually, leaning in. I glimpsed Dana’s reflection in the glass display. She looked both furious and confused.

She left without ordering, shooting me a venomous stare. That night, texts from her flooded my phone:

*I can’t believe you moved on so fast. Who is she? We need to talk about us. I made a mistake.*

I forwarded them to Jared, then turned off my phone and finished a movie with Adrien. The next morning, **Dana** showed up at my workplace, disheveled, clutching a Starbucks cup. Security stopped her from coming upstairs. She waited in the lobby for hours. I took a back exit to lunch, ignoring her presence. Later, her mother called me, saying Dana planned to move back home because Christian was a disaster.

I just shrugged it off. “I hope she finds what she’s looking for,” I said, then hung up.

I realized I no longer felt vengeful or bitter—**or so I thought**.

A supervised exchange for her documents and remaining belongings was scheduled at Jared’s office. The day arrived. I showed up early, with a box of her leftover clothes, the old journal, plus her birth certificate and passport in a sealed envelope. Adrien offered to come, but I told her it’d be too dramatic. Better I face this alone.

At 2:15 p.m., **Dana** burst in—no lawyer in sight—**Christian** trailing behind, sporting a wrinkled suit that still had a rental tag half sticking out. Jared’s secretary promptly called Dana’s lawyer, who claimed he wasn’t informed about this date. Red flag. The tension in the waiting room skyrocketed.

“Just give me my stuff,” Dana snapped, reaching for the box.

Jared quickly intercepted, “We need your lawyer present before we finalize anything, Ms. Dana.”

That’s when Dana exploded, voice rising to an almost shriek: “You think you’re so smart, playing these little games while I’m trying to rebuild my life. Did you enjoy watching me struggle? Was this your plan all along?”

I kept my voice steady. “No plan. Just consequences.”

Christian puffed up his chest. “You’re jealous ’cause she upgraded. Some of us actually have ambition.”

I couldn’t resist a barb. “That’s why your Tesla got repossessed, right?”

His face burned with anger. Dana’s turned a deep shade of red. “At least he has goals! All you ever cared about was your boring life. Christian shows me off, takes me places, isn’t ashamed to post about our love.”

“How’s he paying for those fancy posts?” I said quietly.

Christian lunged forward, snarling, “You don’t know anything!” Security hustled over, just as Jared’s assistant called for them. They escorted Christian back. Meanwhile, Dana switched tactics—**tears**. She fell to her knees, mascara trailing down her cheeks.

“Jeremy, please,” she sobbed. “I messed up. I miss our life. Christian’s apartment is being foreclosed. I have nowhere to go.”

I stared into her desperate eyes, recalling that text from months ago: *someone more successful.* My voice was hollow. “Should’ve thought of that before leaving me for bigger fish.”

She let out a choked scream, “You heartless bastard! I gave you the best years of my life. I could’ve had anyone, but I settled for you!”

“That’s why I’m letting you go,” I said calmly, “so you don’t have to settle anymore.”

Security finally dragged them out the glass doors. Outside, I saw them arguing in the parking lot—Christian waving his arms, Dana shrieking. A twisted satisfaction coiled in me, but it wasn’t enough. A part of me wanted to see them **ruined** beyond measure.

That evening, I got texts from Dana’s mother, scolding me for humiliating Dana in public. She called me “cruel,” said Christian claimed I was practicing “financial abuse.” I rolled my eyes. Then a late-night phone call from Dad, who ironically was also disappointed in me for stooping to their level. I started to wonder: **Was I going too far?** Then I remembered the betrayal. The illusions. The smug attitude. **No**, they deserved worse.

“Enough,” I whispered to myself, pacing my living room. I realized that, despite my outward calm, inside me a savage thirst for retribution was building. I wanted them to feel not just the pinch but the full **destruction** of their illusions.

I called Jared. “I have some evidence,” I said, voice trembling with dark excitement. “Financial stuff. Possibly fraudulent. Dana forging my signature on small bank transfers. Christian’s scamming. Think we can push that?”

Jared sighed. “Jeremy, we can file a complaint, sure. It might lead to an investigation. Are you sure you want to go down that road?”

I stared at the silent living room, the ghost of my marriage. “Yes,” I said coldly. “I want them to burn.”

Within days, Jared quietly submitted evidence of possible forgery to the authorities, plus an anonymous tip about Christian’s suspicious finances. Meanwhile, I took a step that even Jared cautioned against: reaching out to **Christian’s ex-wife**. Through a friend of a friend, I got her contact. We had a brief phone call.

“I heard you might have had issues with Christian,” I said carefully.

She let out a bitter laugh. “He left me with thousands in debt. He was never the success story he pretends to be. Why?”

“Because he’s now scamming my… ex-wife, essentially,” I said. “Any chance you have proof of his old stunts?”

She emailed me some old documents, credit card statements, messages. Enough to paint a picture of a habitual con man. I forwarded it to Jared, along with a note: *Use this if needed.* Jared’s response: *You’re playing with fire. But understood.*

Yes, I was. And it felt **good**.

Over the next month, everything I’d set in motion came to fruition like a symphony of **destruction**. Christian defaulted on rent again, prompting eviction. The staged furniture was repossessed. He and Dana ended up squatting in a cheap motel or possibly at her parents’ house. She posted on social media about “hitting rock bottom,” blaming me for “ruining her life,” claiming I withheld crucial documents so she couldn’t get a new job.

I watched from a distance, unmoved. Kira told me that the investigation into Christian’s finances had begun. He might be facing lawsuits from old victims. Meanwhile, the divorce papers were nearly finalized. Dana’s meltdown escalated: *“He manipulated me into leaving,”* she wrote online, painting herself as the victim of my “neglect.” Our mutual friends, those who once pitied her, turned skeptical upon seeing contradictory evidence.

And me? My career soared. I’d found new strength, new confidence. Adrien and I grew closer—she offered a warmth and sincerity that reminded me life could be kind. But a piece of me still reveled in the cruelty of it all. *They messed with the wrong man.*

A final hearing arrived for the divorce, a formality. The judge, having seen the evidence of Dana’s abandonment, the documents, and her own public confessions, ruled overwhelmingly in **my** favor. I got to keep the apartment, the lion’s share of assets. She was granted none of the spousal support she’d demanded. I watched her face contort in despair as the judge read the terms.

Afterwards, she tried to catch me in the hallway. “Jeremy,” she pleaded, eyes brimming with tears. “I have nowhere to go. Christian’s facing charges. My parents are fed up. Can’t we just… talk?”

I met her gaze with ice-cold contempt. “Talk? You want pity after you betrayed me for a man you thought was better?”

She sniffled. “I… was stupid, okay? You were always stable, but I got caught up in Christian’s illusions. I regret it.”

I sneered. “Regret doesn’t erase the months of insults, your mother’s arrogance, Christian’s taunts. You chose your path. Now live with it.”

She collapsed into sobs, but I turned and walked away, letting the echo of my footsteps be her only response. That night, I ended up at Adrien’s place, where she tried to comfort me. But a darkness lingered in my chest. My revenge was nearly complete, yet I still felt an emptiness. Was this who I was now? A man who’d become a **villain**?

Yes. Because it was necessary.

You might wonder where **my brother** comes into this. He had no role—until, well, I discovered a deeper betrayal. Right after the divorce was finalized, I found out from a cousin that Dana had once confided in my own **younger brother**, Ryan, about her dissatisfaction with me. She’d met up with him for coffee several times, complaining that I was “too average,” “lacking ambition.” Allegedly, Ryan had **encouraged** her to find someone else, to “aim higher.” He was a borderline hustler type, always chasing schemes.

That revelation snapped something in me. They’d plotted behind my back, my brother feeding her the confidence to leave me. He was part of the reason she found Christian so appealing. The rage flared again, scorching my insides. This betrayal spanned more than just my wife—my own flesh and blood had joined in the sabotage. I confronted Ryan.

“Is this true?” I said, cornering him outside a bar one night. The neon lights cast a harsh glow on his startled face.

He shrugged. “So what if it is? Dude, you were content being some middle-management guy. Dana’s eyes were always on bigger fish. I just told her not to waste time if she wasn’t happy.”

I clenched my fists. “You stabbed me in the back, you scum.”

He laughed, a mocking sound. “Don’t be so dramatic. She was never fully satisfied. You’d have crashed and burned eventually.”

Without another word, I grabbed him by the collar and **slammed** him against the brick wall. My vision blurred with fury. “You worthless traitor,” I spat. “You destroyed my marriage. You turned her away from me.”

He struggled, eyes wide. “Get off me, psycho!” He tried swinging a punch, but I blocked it. I pinned him, breathing ragged.

“You’ll regret this,” I said quietly. “Just wait.” Then I shoved him aside and stormed away, adrenaline pounding. The old me might have brushed it off, but I was no longer that man. Now, I was the **villain**. And I had one more target: Ryan.

Ryan owned a small “consulting” firm, which, from rumors, was mostly shady deals, questionable taxes, and borderline scams. Fueled by my thirst for vengeance, I started collecting info. I found old text messages from him to Dana, encouraging her to chase “real success.” I also discovered Ryan’s corporate registration was messy—he’d once used my name to co-sign a business loan, forging my signature. I’d been unaware. Now that I had the forgery documents from my fiasco with Dana, my detective sense spiked. I had enough to bury him if I linked the evidence properly.

So I did. I tiptoed around, calling old acquaintances, rummaging through old emails. Sure enough, I uncovered digital footprints proving he’d forged my signature to secure a small business loan. This was **felony** territory. I copied the files onto a USB drive, weighed my next step. If I reported him, it would lead to criminal charges. He was still my brother. But he was also a traitor who helped push my wife away.

One night, he texted me:

“We need to talk. Let’s not be enemies. I can help you if you let this go.”

I replied:

“Your help? I’d rather watch you burn.”

He tried calling, but I rejected it. The next day, I handed everything to Jared, who passed it to a contact in law enforcement. Even Jared seemed uneasy. “Jeremy, this is intense. Are you sure?”

I stared at the blank wall of Jared’s office. “I am. He deserves it.”

Ryan must have gotten wind that something was happening. He showed up at my apartment, pounding on the door. I opened it a crack.

“Go away,” I said.

He shoved the door wide, stepping inside. “I know what you’re doing,” he growled. “You reported me, didn’t you? Over some forged signatures from years ago?”

I folded my arms, letting the door swing shut. “You should’ve thought about that before messing with me.”

He balled his fists. “You’re a lunatic. You’re going to destroy my life, my livelihood.”

A twisted smile crossed my face. “Like you destroyed my marriage? Like you quietly encouraged Dana to leave me for a fraud?”

He lunged, and I was ready. Our fists collided in a flurry of rage. We tumbled over the couch, smashing into the coffee table. My knuckles cracked against his jaw; he landed a punch on my ribs. But I was fueled by months of anger. I overpowered him, pinned him to the floor.

“You’re done,” I hissed, eyes wild. “I have the documents. I told the authorities. By next month, you’ll be lucky to avoid prison.”

He spat blood. “You… you can’t do this. We’re family.”

I released him, stepping back, chest heaving. “Family? That died when you betrayed me.”

Ryan lay there, panting, eyes wide with the realization that I truly was going to ruin him. I walked to the door and opened it. “Get out,” I said.

He staggered up, coughing, looking at me like I was a monster. Perhaps I was. With a last broken glare, he limped away into the night. My hand throbbed from the impact, but I felt no remorse. I was past that.

True to my plan, Ryan’s shady empire fell. The law pinned him for forgery, plus other financial irregularities. He lost major clients, faced potential criminal charges. Our parents—shockingly—sided with him at first, but as evidence leaked, they realized the depth of his dishonesty. My father called me, voice shaky:

“Jeremy, this is your brother. Couldn’t you have settled this privately?”

I smiled bitterly. “He didn’t just cross a line. He destroyed me from within. This is the consequence.”

Dad sputtered, “But he might go to prison!”

“That’s on him,” I said coldly, then hung up. Once, I might have felt guilt. But not anymore. I was the man they forced me to become.

Kira texted me that Ryan was in meltdown mode, drowning in legal fees, no business left to salvage. She asked if I was happy. My reply: “I’m not *happy*, but I’m satisfied.”

If you think **my mother** took this lying down, guess again. She was furious when she learned how I’d systematically destroyed Ryan. She stormed over to my place one Sunday afternoon, banging on the door. I opened it, arms folded.

“How dare you!” she shouted, eyes blazing. “Ryan is your brother! You ruined him! And that poor girl Dana—she’s homeless now. You’re heartless!”

I snorted. “Poor girl? The one who left me for a con artist? Spare me. As for Ryan, he forged my signature. That’s a crime. You should be proud of him?”

Her hands shook. “You’ve become a monster, Jeremy.”

I bared my teeth in a grin. “Maybe. But I learned from the best, right? The entire family turned a blind eye when Dana humiliated me. Ryan encouraged it. Now they reap the whirlwind.”

She tried to slap me, but I caught her wrist midair. “Get out,” I growled, my voice dangerously low. “Before I decide to ruin anyone else who stands with him.”

She paled, eyes wide, then stumbled back, tears forming. I slammed the door in her face. My chest heaved, adrenaline coursing. A small part of me recognized this was extreme, but the bigger part relished it.

Word spread that Ryan was indicted for forgery and fraud. Dana, who’d been couch-surfing after Christian’s meltdown, showed up at my door late one night. The security camera alert on my phone showed her standing there, drenched in rain.

I walked out to the porch. She was shivering, hair plastered to her face. “Jeremy,” she choked. “I have no one else to turn to. My mother won’t let me stay, Christian’s gone, Ryan’s destroyed… I’m sorry. I… I regret everything. Please.”

I stared at her, a swirl of old memories flooding me: the day she said “I do,” the laughter we once shared. But that was gone. She’d chosen betrayal. And I was no longer the man she married.

“‘Please’ what?” I said icily.

She sobbed. “Please let me in. I’ll do anything. I realize now I was a fool. You’re the best thing I had, and I threw it away. I just need… a place to stay, until I can get on my feet.”

Lightning flashed overhead, illuminating her desperate expression. My heart hammered, but my face remained cold.

“Why would I help you?” I said softly.

She sank to her knees on the wet porch. “Because you were never cruel before. You were good, you loved me. Somewhere in there, the Jeremy I knew is still alive.”

A flicker of something stirred in me, but I crushed it. “That Jeremy died when you spat on our marriage.”

Her lips quivered. “People told me you turned into a villain. I see it now. But… I’m begging you.”

I inhaled, letting the thunder roll. “If I open this door,” I said, “it won’t be for your comfort. Understand?”

She blinked, confused. “What do you mean?”

I gave a cruel smirk. “I could let you in. Make you do humiliating chores, repay me in ways you can’t imagine. I could degrade you until you break. Is that what you’re asking for? Because I’m not the same man.”

Her eyes widened in horror. “You can’t mean that. You wouldn’t—”

I leaned forward, voice low. “You wanted me to be a real man, a powerful man? This is who I am now. If you think you can handle that, come inside. Otherwise, get lost.”

She stared at me, tears mingling with rain. Then, with a trembling breath, she fled down the driveway into the storm. I watched her vanish, heart pounding. I almost felt relief. I’d tested myself, confronted my darkness, and she ran. Good.

In the aftermath, the legal wheels turned. My divorce was fully finalized, awarding me the apartment, the majority of assets, and zero obligations to pay anything to Dana. Ryan faced trial for his forgeries, possibly looking at time behind bars or at least heavy fines. My mother disowned me, calling me a demon. I shrugged it off.

Adrien noticed my darkness. One evening, she asked quietly, “Are you okay? You seem so… on edge, like you’re carrying a lot of hate.”

I sighed, staring at the city lights from her balcony. “They tore me apart, Adrien. They betrayed me. I had to do what I did. But sometimes, I wonder if I lost too much of myself in the process.”

She touched my hand gently. “It’s okay to let go of the anger. You got your justice. Holding on might just poison you.”

I nodded, though a part of me found it hard to let go. The vengeance had become my new identity, and I wasn’t sure how to revert. But I wanted to try—for her, if nothing else.

Months passed. Ryan’s sentencing came—he got probation plus massive restitution fees. He slunk away to live with my parents, who were furious at me but had no choice but to host him. Dana ended up drifting, presumably living with her mother again. Rumor said she found a low-paying job, spent nights crying over how she destroyed her life. Christian? Possibly facing separate lawsuits, or maybe he ran off to another city.

As for me, I soared at work, found a quieter happiness with Adrien. We moved in together eventually, got a pair of cats—**real** living creatures that brought genuine joy. No illusions, no Instagram fantasies. And in the silent hours before dawn, sometimes I recalled the version of me that once existed: naive, hopeful, trusting. That man was gone forever. In his place stood someone who had orchestrated a thorough downfall for everyone who wronged him.

Did I regret it? Sometimes. But then I’d remember the heartbreak, the sneers about my lack of ambition, the betrayal from my own flesh and blood. The rage would simmer again, reminding me *why* I became this. If that made me a villain, so be it.

**They** started this war. **I** finished it.