I remember the day everything spiraled as if it happened this morning. The first sign that my marriage was doomed began with an innocent, almost casual comment my wife, Clarice, made in our apartment’s modest living room. She was 27, I was 30, and we’d been married for four years. I still harbored the naive belief that we had a solid foundation—me with my successful jewelry business run alongside my brothers, and she with her cherished café. The cracks in our union revealed themselves in a single sentence: “There’s a new guy who comes to the café,” she said, “and he’s…super interesting.”

I’d heard it in her tone: a certain thrill, that hush of excitement she rarely used except when she was talking about her favorite romance novels. The detail she shared—his name was Ivan, he was from Serbia, tall, blond, and apparently unbelievably charming—stabbed at my sense of security. But at the time, I tried to brush it off as something harmless.

“Interesting, huh?” I said, leaning back on the couch. “You see so many people at that shop. What makes him stand out?”

Clarice’s eyes brightened. “He’s like a character from one of those books I read—brooding, mysterious, but also surprisingly sweet. You know, he even reads Western novels. He told me he’s searching for a better life in the United States and—” She paused, her cheeks coloring. “He has this accent, I don’t know, it’s just so…unique.”

I tried to keep my face neutral, though an unexpected, uncomfortable knot formed in my stomach. “That’s nice. Always good to have a well-read customer, I guess.”

The conversation drifted elsewhere, but I remained uneasy. Over the next few days, Clarice’s musings about Ivan became near-constant. She’d come home, eyes shining, rattling off tidbits about his day, his thoughts on the American workforce, his abiding love of Tolstoy or Tolkien. Part of me felt silly for feeling jealous—Clarice was allowed to be friendly. And I wasn’t exactly the world’s most sentimental husband. I’d always been pragmatic and, if I’m honest, controlling. If anything, she usually complained that I didn’t give her enough compliments, that I was too wrapped up in the jewelry business to praise her new hairstyle or the pastries she tested for her shop.

So it’s not like I was the best spouse. But I sure wasn’t ready for what was to come.

About three weeks after she first mentioned Ivan, I popped by her café unannounced. It was late afternoon, and the place had the usual crowd of college students reading novels or folks on laptops searching for free Wi-Fi. I looked around and spotted Clarice behind the counter, wearing her flour-dusted apron. She was all smiles, so I stepped up, intending to surprise her with a small bouquet of tulips I’d picked up from the stall nearby—my attempt at being thoughtful.

Right as I was about to call her name, the door swung open behind me. I felt a presence pass by—a man with broad shoulders, neatly styled blond hair. My skin tingled with that inexplicable sense of rivalry that sometimes hits when another male enters a space. I glanced sideways, and the man shot me a cursory glance before focusing on Clarice. His eyes lit up.

“Clarice!” he said, accent unmistakably Eastern European. “You…you forgot your phone in the back room, I think.” Then he held up her cell phone.

She smiled widely. “Oh my God, thank you, Ivan! I was looking for that. I owe you, you lifesaver.”

The warmth in her voice was obvious; my gut clenched. Laying a hand on the counter, I cleared my throat. “Hey, honey.”

She spun and appeared startled to see me. “Oh! Hey. You…didn’t mention you were dropping by.”

Ivan hovered by the corner, an amused half-smile on his face. I offered my own attempt at a friendly nod, but I could already feel tension in the air. Clarice gestured between us. “Ivan, this is my husband. He helps me with some of the rent here, and you know, all that. And babe, this is Ivan, the customer I was talking about.”

“So you’re Ivan,” I said. “Heard a lot about you.”

He extended a hand. “Is pleasure to meet you. Your wife is…eh, very nice. She makes me best cappuccino in all of city.”

I forced a short laugh and shook his hand. But as I did, something about his nonchalant expression felt off, like he was quietly studying me, deciding if I was competition. When I stepped back, Clarice reached across the counter and touched my arm. “I’m kinda busy right now. But thanks for the flowers.” She gave me a quick peck on the cheek, and I was dismissed.

That evening, while we cooked dinner, I asked her more about Ivan. She shrugged, telling me that he was just a friendly guy, that I had no reason to be suspicious. When I admitted I felt a bit uneasy, her reaction was swift. “Don’t be ridiculous,” she snapped. “I get to have friends, especially ones who actually like reading as much as I do. Just because we share intellectual interests doesn’t mean there’s anything else going on.”

I didn’t press it further. But something told me there was more to the story.

Less than a week later, I sat at home alone, flipping mindlessly through a sports channel, waiting for Clarice to return from the café. She normally closed up by seven p.m., and it was already nine. My phone had no missed calls, no texts. At 9:15, she came bounding in, face flushed from the cool night air, her hair a bit mussed.

“You’re late,” I said flatly, standing up from the couch.

She rolled her eyes, tossing her purse onto the table. “I know. Sorry. The café had a busy day—plus, I was showing Ivan around. He’s still new to town, so we decided to grab a slice of pizza. You wouldn’t believe he’s never had a proper New York–style slice. So we walked a bit, chatted about our favorite books, and—”

“You went out with him. Alone.” I let the statement hang in the air.

She lifted a brow. “Don’t start. I already know where your mind’s going, and you’re dead wrong. He’s a friend. And from what he told me, he might be gay for all we know. He never explicitly said it, but he dropped enough hints about not being into women. So, get that suspicious look off your face.”

I let out a harsh breath. The notion that he was gay seemed a little too convenient. “It’s after nine, Clarice. You could have at least messaged me, told me you’d be late.”

“Seriously?” she shot back, grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge. “You never check in with me when you get stuck at the jewelry store, sometimes until midnight. But I do one spontaneous thing with a friend, and you act like I’m cheating? Get over yourself. I’m not your property.”

Anger flared in me. “I never said you were my property, but you can’t pretend this doesn’t look suspicious,” I snapped. “You told me he was new in town, you read books together—that’s fine. But it’s crossing a line when you’re out alone with him for hours, not telling me. And you come back looking like…like you’ve had the time of your life.”

She puffed out a laugh, almost mocking. “Oh, sure, because heaven forbid I actually enjoy myself talking about novels you barely even glance at. I’m sorry if reading is ‘nerdy’ to you. But I have a right to talk to people who share my passion. At least he listens when I discuss stories. You get that glazed look in your eye every time I bring up books, as if I’m speaking another language.”

I ran a hand down my face. “Do not twist this into me ‘not supporting your hobbies.’ I’ve always been proud you opened the café. I just—” My voice caught. “I don’t trust this guy, gay or not. Something about him sets off alarm bells.”

“Well, that’s a you problem,” she said coldly. “You can’t control who I’m friends with. And I’m not gonna stop seeing someone who’s literally the only intellectual buddy I have right now.” Then she stormed down the hallway, slamming the bedroom door behind her.

I spent that night pacing in the living room, rage building in my chest. I wasn’t proud of how controlling I felt. But I couldn’t shake the sense that she was lying—this story about Ivan possibly being gay? It smelled like a half-baked excuse to keep me off her trail.

A few days later, I decided to confront her directly. I’d stopped by the café earlier that day and caught a glimpse of them sitting at a table, heads bent close, an intimate hush in their voices. The second Clarice saw me, she jumped up, all flustered, claiming they were discussing a new reading club she wanted to start. Ivan had barely looked up from his phone, flashing me a thin smile.

That night at home, I set aside the takeout boxes and turned to her. “We need to talk,” I said firmly.

She eyed me warily. “About?”

“About Ivan.”

She clicked her tongue. “Again?”

“Yes, again. I saw how close you two were today. Don’t try to spin some nonsense about him being a reading buddy. You’ve been spending way too much time alone with him, and you come home with that goofy grin on your face. What do you expect me to think?”

Her face hardened. “I expect you to trust me. I’m your wife, not your hostage. I can have coffee, conversation, or read with whoever I want. If you hate reading so much, that’s on you. Don’t you dare blame me for finding some company.”

“I’m not blaming you for having a friend,” I growled. “I’m blaming you for lying.”

She scoffed. “What lies? I said from day one, he’s just a kind soul who loves books. And guess what—he’s polite, respectful, and he compliments me on the café. Everything I’ve wanted from you for months, but all you do is bury yourself in the family jewelry biz. The last time you said something kind about me was, what, on our anniversary last year?”

“Don’t turn this into that,” I snapped, though a pang of guilt tugged inside me. “Fine, maybe I haven’t been showering you with compliments, but that doesn’t justify your—”

“My what?” she challenged, crossing her arms. “My cheating? Because that’s what you’re about to say, right? That I must be a cheater if I like talking to a man about my favorite authors?”

I shot her a glare. “What am I supposed to think when I see him draping his arm around you, or you two locked in some private conversation about God knows what? Don’t treat me like a fool.”

She leaned forward, voice trembling with anger. “You want me to promise I won’t see him again? Is that it? Are you that controlling?”

“Yes,” I said flatly. “That’s exactly what I want. Stop seeing him outside of the café. If he comes by and orders a latte, that’s one thing. But none of these little pizza outings, museum trips, or reading circles alone. You want to start a reading club, do it at the café with other people. This sneaking off is done.”

Her jaw tightened. I saw tears welling in her eyes, though she was too furious to cry. “You think you can snap your fingers and tell me who to be friends with? God, you’re such a—such a bully sometimes. It’s not enough that I run a café that you partly fund? I have to bow to your every whim, too?”

I forced myself to keep my voice steady, though my chest was pounding. “Call it bullying if you want. But I’m your husband, and you owe me honesty. Either you cut off these private outings with him or I swear, Clarice, we’re gonna have bigger problems than you think.”

Her expression shifted from rage to a grim acceptance. She eyed me, then finally said in a hollow tone, “Fine. You win. I won’t see him again, not outside the café. Happy?”

I sighed, relief and tension mixing. “Yes,” I said. “That’s all I’m asking.”

She brushed past me and marched into the bedroom, slamming the door. I stood there, exhaling, feeling more like a dictator than a spouse. But I told myself it was necessary, because something about Ivan felt wrong.

Days passed. Clarice was noticeably colder, but she seemed to follow my decree—no more late nights, no more weekend museum trips. She insisted they were canceled. She did mention once, “He still comes by the café, but only to grab coffee.” I tried to appear calm, but my mind stayed restless.

Then came the day I randomly swung by the café to drop off a promotional flyer for my jewelry store. The plan was to set a small stack of them at the register, part of a cross-promotion I’d discussed with my brothers. As I approached, I noticed Clarice wasn’t behind the counter. One of her employees, Maria, gave me a polite nod and said Clarice stepped out for a moment. A flicker of suspicion took root in my gut. I decided to wait.

Minutes later, I saw them through the big glass window: Clarice and Ivan, strolling up the sidewalk with their arms interlocked. Worse, they were laughing together, looking like the picture of a couple in love. My heart seized. I moved aside so they wouldn’t immediately see me. They walked in, Clarice’s face glowing—until her gaze landed on mine. A flash of sheer panic stretched across her features. Her arm slipped from Ivan’s in an instant.

“Uh…hey,” she said, forcing a smile.

Ivan gave me that same thin-lipped grin. “Hello again,” he said, his accent making the words sound almost mocking.

I felt a cold sweat break across my brow. She’d promised not to do this—yet here she was, arms linked with the very man she swore she’d stop seeing. Without a word, I grabbed her arm. “Come on,” I said tersely. “We’re going home.”

She tried to protest. “But I have a business—”

“Now,” I barked, ignoring the wide-eyed stares from the café patrons.

Ivan started to speak, but I whirled around, pinning him with a vicious glare. “Get away from her. Or I swear, you’ll regret it.” I might have looked insane, and maybe I was. But that’s how furious I felt. A hushed wave fell over the café. Some of the regulars stared, uncertain if they should intervene. Ivan just pursed his lips and stepped back.

Red-faced, Clarice tossed her apron aside. “Fine,” she snapped. “You want to humiliate me in front of my own customers? Let’s go.”

I practically dragged her to the car. The drive home was suffocating—neither of us said a word. The tension crackled. My knuckles whitened on the steering wheel, while Clarice stared out the window, arms folded tight.

Once inside the apartment, I turned to face her, chest heaving. “What the hell was that? You promised you wouldn’t meet him outside of the café. And now I find you walking arm-in-arm, practically glued to him!”

She flung her purse onto the couch. “Maybe because you keep stifling me! I told you, we’re just friends. He told me he’s not into women, that he only flirts because it’s his nature. That’s it! Why can’t you trust me?”

“Because you keep lying!” I roared. “You said you’d stop. You said no more sneaking around.”

“Sneaking around? I literally walked down the main street with him. That’s not sneaking, genius. If I wanted to hide it, I’d pick a deserted alley or something.”

I scoffed. “Don’t be sarcastic. You promised you’d cut it off.”

She jabbed a finger toward my chest, eyes blazing. “No, I said I wouldn’t see him outside the café. But you can’t forbid him from walking me back if he wants a cappuccino. It’s a free country, last I checked. Stop trying to control every step I take!”

My fists clenched, and I had to fight the urge to punch a wall. “Stop spinning it. I literally saw you linking arms with him. That’s not just a coworker walking you. That’s romantic body language. Do you think I’m blind?”

She let out a bitter laugh. “He linked arms with me. I didn’t see the big deal in the moment, all right? Besides, I told you—he might be gay! Gay men do that all the time with female friends, and it doesn’t mean anything.”

I ran both hands over my face, exasperated. “I can’t do this. You keep feeding me the same line. Either you think I’m an idiot, or you’re in denial. Which is it?”

She trembled with anger. “I can’t believe this. All my life, I’ve wanted someone who respected my love for books and conversation. Now that I find a friend who shares those interests, you turn into some barbaric control freak. If you truly cared, you’d try reading with me sometimes, instead of making me feel lonely. But no, you just want to cage me in. Maybe I needed an escape. You ever think of that?”

A wave of guilt surged, but my anger overshadowed it. “Clarice, I might not be perfect, but I’m not going to stand by and watch you cheat. That’s the bottom line. So it stops. Completely. Or we’re done.”

She stared at me for a moment, tears welling up. Then, with a brittle laugh, she wiped her eyes. “We’re already done, in case you didn’t notice,” she hissed. “You’re not a husband anymore; you’re some…some dictator. I’m sick of it.”

Without another word, she stomped to the bedroom, slamming the door so hard one of the picture frames on the wall rattled. I stood there, heart pounding, unsure whether to follow her or storm out. Eventually, I chose the couch, drowning in a swirl of hatred, jealousy, and an unshakable sense of betrayal.

In the following days, Clarice claimed she would avoid Ivan entirely. She insisted, “I get it. I’ll draw boundaries. He can come to the café, but I won’t let him walk me anywhere.” Each time she said that, my trust chipped away. It felt like a bandage on a gaping wound. I knew in my gut something else was going on—her eyes were distant, and every time her phone pinged with a message, she’d rush to read it, turning the screen away from me.

One night, curiosity overcame me. As she slept, I slipped her phone from under her pillow, heart thumping in my throat. Her WhatsApp had a pinned conversation with “I.” My worst suspicions confirmed. I opened it. The messages soared up the screen in a flurry of digital heartbreak:

**Ivan (2:12 PM):** “I miss you, baby. Today was so much fun. Your husband suspect anything?”

**Clarice (2:15 PM):** “He’s losing his mind. I had to promise I’d avoid you. God, I hate lying to him, but I hate how controlling he’s become.”

**Ivan (2:20 PM):** “He is fool, yes? We keep going. Let him be in the dark.”

As I scrolled further, my pulse hammered. Their messages weren’t just friendly. They talked about stolen kisses, secret trysts after closing time at the café, how thrilling it felt to keep me, the “jealous bully,” clueless. There were references to hooking up in the back office, and I felt physically ill seeing Clarice’s giggling responses: “This is so wrong, but you’re right—it’s exciting. He’s turning into a total villain, so I don’t even feel guilty.”

I nearly crushed her phone in my grip. My eyes scanned the conversation with growing horror. They described intimate moments in detail, mocking me for suspecting but not having proof. She mentioned how she occasionally told me Ivan was gay to keep me off her back. He found it hilarious.

My hands shook as I exported the chat to a text file, emailing it to myself. Then I scrolled through her photos. Several pictures of them, arms around each other, smiling in front of different city landmarks—stuff she never mentioned visiting. She’d obviously blocked me from seeing them on social media, because I had no clue. I took screenshots of each, sending them as well. Once finished, I wiped the evidence off her phone and replaced it quietly on the nightstand.

That entire night, I couldn’t sleep. My mind raced with fury at how brazen they were. To find out she’d used the “maybe he’s gay” line so effortlessly made me sick. I felt like the biggest fool on Earth. She was living an entirely separate life, treating me like a controlling villain while she rolled around with a cunning manipulator who knew exactly how to exploit her craving for compliments. And yet, ironically, I was more determined than ever to reveal the truth, punish them both. If that made me the villain, so be it.

The next morning, I confronted Clarice. She was rummaging through the kitchen cabinets when I walked in, face stony. I didn’t even wait for a polite hello. “Stop,” I snapped. “I know everything.”

She turned, blinking. “Everything about what?”

“Drop the act. I read your messages with Ivan.” My voice cracked with anger. “The photos, the filthy details…all of it.”

Her cheeks blanched. For a split second, she seemed genuinely terrified. Then her face hardened, and she slammed a cabinet shut. “You went through my phone?”

“You bet your ass I did. I found out how you’ve been lying, hooking up with him after hours, mocking me every step of the way, telling him I’m some controlling jerk.” I stepped closer, eyes blazing. “So guess what? We’re done.”

For a moment, her lip quivered, tears pooling. Then her temper flared. “You had no right to snoop! That’s an invasion of privacy!”

I let out a harsh laugh. “That’s your response? Not an apology, not denial—just whining that I found out the truth illegally? Give me a break.”

She trembled with fury. “You want a confession? Fine. Yes, I’ve been with him. But maybe if you had bothered to be a good husband—someone who appreciated my interests—this wouldn’t have happened! You’ve become so obsessed with controlling me, calling me a liar every time I talk to another human being, that you pushed me away.”

“Don’t you dare shift blame onto me,” I roared. “I might not be a perfect spouse, but I sure as hell never deserved to be lied to like this. You literally told him in your messages that it felt ‘so wrong but exciting.’ That’s on you, Clarice.”

She flinched, a flicker of shame crossing her features. “You know what? Believe whatever you want,” she spat. “You’re the reason I needed to escape in the first place.”

My blood pounded in my ears. “Escape? That’s the word you use? I gave you everything—helped pay the café’s rent, tried to be supportive. Yet I guess I wasn’t supportive enough of your ‘hobby,’ right? So you found the first sweet talker who gave you big compliments about your books, and you jumped into bed with him? Unbelievable.”

She shook her head, tears finally rolling down her cheeks. “Fine. It’s done. You can have your meltdown. But know this: the reason we reached this point is because you never gave a damn about what I love. All you care about is your business, your money, and making me fall in line. I can’t breathe with you around.”

I exhaled, shoulders trembling. “Then breathe somewhere else. Get your things and get out of my house. I’m filing for divorce.”

True to my word, I contacted a divorce lawyer within hours. The same day, Clarice left in a storm of tears and curses, spending the night on a friend’s couch. Over the next few days, I compiled every scrap of evidence. My lawyer was stunned by how blatant the messages were. “This is bulletproof,” he told me. “You’re going to walk away with everything, especially if you can prove infidelity was the main cause.”

In the midst of all this, I uncovered something even more revolting: Ivan had a YouTube channel. Not just any channel, but one boasting how he specialized in seducing wives who felt “neglected” by their husbands. He had thousands of subscribers, posting videos in which he bragged about “conquests,” sometimes in heavily accented English, sometimes in Serbian. The titles were pure poison: “How to Capture a Married Woman,” “Seducing an Unhappy Wife,” “Tips for Secret Affairs.” I watched him speak to the camera with smug confidence, referencing “a café owner who is bored with her controlling husband.” My stomach churned at the possibility that he was describing Clarice to the entire world.

Worse yet, the channel linked to an OnlyF, which teased “real videos of me with cheating wives.” The previews showed blurred faces, but I recognized Clarice’s silhouette in one. She might have been complicit or maybe tricked. The idea that he was profiting off my wife’s betrayal ignited a new wave of fury.

My lawyer advised me to keep calm, finalize the divorce, and then we’d consider further civil lawsuits. I tried to heed his words, but the rage wouldn’t subside. I fantasized about wiping that smug grin off Ivan’s face.

Meanwhile, Clarice tried to contact me multiple times. At first, her messages were apologetic, even pitiful. Then they shifted to angry and bitter, blaming me for pushing her away. Finally, one morning, she texted that she was pregnant. I just stared at my phone, heart pounding. She insisted it was mine, claiming we’d been intimate enough in the last few months. But I knew she’d been sleeping with Ivan, so the timeline was murky.

One last confrontation took place a week later, when Clarice and I crossed paths at the café. She was supposed to be away, but she happened to be there, rummaging through boxes. She looked pale and exhausted, but her eyes still sparked with defiance.

“Is it true?” I asked, voice low. “You’re pregnant?”

She pressed her lips together. “Yes. And you’re the father, obviously.”

I barked a short laugh. “Obviously? You’ve been sleeping with Ivan. Don’t treat me like an idiot again.”

She flushed. “He…there’s no chance it’s his. I mean, well, it’s complicated, but…” She rubbed her forehead. “We never used protection, but it was more frequent with you. I’m almost positive it’s yours.”

“Almost positive,” I repeated, the words like acid in my mouth. “That’s not exactly comforting.”

Her eyes hardened. “You can do a DNA test once the baby’s born. Until then, you’re still my husband, and this baby is still half yours. You should step up.”

I leaned closer, voice dripping with sarcasm. “Step up for a child that might be the product of your affair? Not a chance. We’ll wait for a test. If it’s mine, I’ll decide how involved to be. If it’s not, you can chase after your reading buddy.”

She trembled, tears threatening to spill. “You’re so cruel.”

“You made me this way,” I snapped back. Then I walked out, ignoring her sobs.

Time blurred after that. The divorce papers were served to Clarice in a humiliating fashion, right at her café. She had no real defense in court. Evidence of her affair with Ivan was undeniable. My lawyer hammered home the transactions in our joint account that matched suspicious gift purchases for Ivan, painting her as an unfaithful gold digger. Meanwhile, I came off as the wounded husband, albeit a bit controlling, but that paled in comparison to her blatant cheating.

Throughout the proceedings, she hurled glances of pure hatred my way, as though I’d become a monster in her eyes. Yet ironically, it was her betrayal that had transformed me into this. Ultimately, I kept the house, avoided alimony, and retained my share in the family jewelry business. She only got the café, the old sedan I’d previously bought for her, and that was it.

As the judge finalized the divorce, Clarice’s father stepped in. He confronted me outside the courthouse, growling that I had a responsibility to the baby. I told him to back off—that no one could force me to sign a birth certificate without a DNA test. He snarled, calling me a villain who had crushed his daughter’s heart. I just stared him down, unflinching.

All the while, the question of the baby’s paternity loomed. I felt no excitement for fatherhood, just dread. We arranged the test for after birth. There was no point doing one early. Clarice had her own meltdown, occasionally texting me that I was “heartless” for abandoning her financially and emotionally. She sold the sedan to pay the café rent. She left voicemails of rage, calling me controlling and evil. Each time, I hung up or deleted them, coldly unmoved.

And still, I couldn’t let Ivan go unpunished. He’d systematically hunted for wives like Clarice. That knowledge burned in me. One afternoon, after the divorce was finalized, I waited outside the café, hidden in a borrowed SUV with tinted windows. I’d gathered two men I knew from my rougher teenage years. They each owed me a favor. We planned to intercept Ivan, teach him a lesson.

He emerged from the café around closing, walking confidently down the street, filming himself on his phone. I watched him talk in that accented English, probably updating his followers on another successful conquest. My blood heated. Without hesitation, I motioned to my friends, and we stepped out.

“Hey, Ivan,” I called. He froze mid-sentence, looking up warily. “It’s me,” I said, stepping closer. “Remember me? The controlling husband?”

He tried for a cocky grin. “You want trouble, friend? Because that is how you get trouble.”

My buddies, both large and masked, flanked him, grabbing his arms. He struggled, spitting foreign curses. I saw the fear flash in his eyes. I smirked, stepping in. “How about that YouTube channel of yours? Or that OnlyF page? You’re profiting off destroying marriages?”

He sneered. “I do not destroy them. The wives, they come to me willingly. Maybe they want real man, not bully like you.”

I punched him, a quick jab to the jaw. He gasped, and my friends pinned him to the wall. “You messed with my life,” I hissed. “Filmed my wife, posted her online, bragged about seducing her. Now, you pay.”

He tried to headbutt me, but one friend yanked him backward. Another blow to his ribs made him yelp in pain. I snatched his phone from his trembling hand and hurled it against the pavement, shattering it.

“You think you can do that?” he wheezed. “I have lawyer, I have—”

“I have more money. More resources. Try me,” I snarled. “I’ll sue you for Alienation of Affection. I’ll tip off immigration. I have your texts mocking me. Don’t test me.”

He paled. “You…you have no right.”

“No? You think filming unsuspecting wives is a right?” I snapped. “If I see a single video of Clarice or me on your sleazy channels, I will personally drag you to court—and trust me, you can’t hide from me.”

I nodded to my guys, who let him drop to the ground. He clutched his bruised jaw, eyes wild. “You threaten me…?”

“You’re damn right I am,” I said, grabbing his collar. “Now pack up your conquests and go back to whatever hole you crawled out of. Or else.”

He spat blood. But behind that hatred, I saw real fear. “All right,” he muttered. “I leave.”

“Good,” I said, stepping back. “And if you ever come near Clarice again, I’ll make sure you regret it even more.”

He glared, but the fight was gone. My friends and I left him there, phone destroyed, ego bruised, and hopefully deterred from continuing his twisted game in our city.

Days turned to weeks, weeks to months. Clarice’s pregnancy advanced. She called me repeatedly, sometimes sounding desperate, sometimes furious. I refused to answer more than a handful of times. Eventually, she gave birth to a boy. Her father attempted once more to coerce me into signing the birth certificate. I told him to back off until the DNA results were in.

When the test was finally done, the result was unequivocal: 0% chance I was the father. As soon as I read those words, I laughed bitterly. All those months of drama, her swearing it was “obviously” mine—what a joke. The child belonged to Ivan or some other lover she hadn’t admitted to. Either way, it wasn’t my problem. I texted Clarice a screenshot of the results: **We’re finished. Don’t contact me again.**