After buttering everyone up, Mr. Clooney-Wannabe pulls Mark aside and *straight-up offers him $100K to spend the weekend with Lucy.* Yes. Like a bad plot twist from a sleazy '90s movie. Mark laughs it off, thinking it’s a joke. But then Lucy—his *wife*—chimes in like, “Actually babe, I think we should consider it.”

I mean... **girl, what?!**

“How the heck is *this* your job?” Mark muttered under his breath, watching his wife, Lucy, prattle on with a flamboyant client from across the marketing-firm lounge.

From the outside, the marriage of Mark and Lucy seemed picture-perfect. They were both in their early thirties, each with good careers at the same company—Mark led the IT team, and Lucy served as some sort of “Customer Ambassador.” In truth, neither Mark nor Lucy could explain exactly what “Customer Ambassador” meant, other than Lucy attending dinners and events to keep top clients happy. They owned a newly renovated house after sinking money into a bottomless pit of repairs. They had two kids—thirteen-year-old Emma and eleven-year-old Daniel—who they adored, at least outwardly. Life *looked* successful. Their parents lived nearby, they had a network of close friends, and everyone assumed they were the perfect couple.

But behind the scenes, there was a creeping toxicity. Mark had a cruel streak—a need for control that sometimes bled through. He liked to appear affable and easygoing, but Lucy, more than anyone, knew how nasty he could be. He never hesitated to humiliate others if it served his interests. Even so, Lucy had stuck by him for over a decade.

One afternoon, their CEO, Jack Edwards, dropped a bombshell: a longtime corporate client—William Fellows—had invited key partners to his private island for a long weekend. The entire marketing team was abuzz with rumors about William’s lavish wealth, an inheritance from his distinguished family.

“Lucy, you’re definitely invited,” Jack said, avoiding Mark’s direct gaze. “You’re William’s primary liaison, and you’ve done a stellar job keeping him happy.”

Jack then turned to Mark almost as an afterthought.

“Since IT always has some metrics to crunch, you can come too, Mark, if you’d like. William specifically asked that you accompany Lucy. There’s room on his private plane.”

Mark forced a smirk. He usually relished exclusive events, places where he could show off or gather strategic advantages. But Lucy’s quick acceptance set off alarm bells in his mind. She seemed almost *too* excited. She insisted she just wanted a relaxing holiday; Mark had no clue how much chaos awaited him on that island.

Two weeks later, Mark found himself strapped into a sleek private jet. Lucy, practically bouncing in her seat, kept glancing around at the other passengers: Jack and his wife, Margaret, plus a handful of directors and their partners. Mark half-listened to the hum of conversation. William’s name cropped up repeatedly, always in a reverent, borderline awed tone. Lucy, already enthralled by William’s confidence, glowed every time she heard his name.

Upon arrival, the island was more decadent than Mark could’ve imagined: tropical vegetation, immaculate beaches forming a perfect crescent, a central mansion built in old colonial style, flanked by smaller guest bungalows.

“Gosh,” Mark whispered, stepping off the plane. “This must have cost a fortune.”

He saw Lucy’s eyes sparkle. Perhaps it was the sunshine, or maybe some deeper, dangerous excitement.

They were greeted by William Fellows himself—a tall, handsome man in his forties with a commanding presence that overshadowed everyone else. At his side stood a security guard, a bulky figure with sharp eyes and a stoic face. William introduced him curtly as “Shane,” then seemed to dismiss the guard as if he were invisible.

“Welcome, everyone,” William said with a polished smile. “Please relax, enjoy yourselves. My staff will show you to your rooms. Lunch is served on the veranda in an hour. Make yourselves at home.”

His gaze lingered on Lucy, and for a split second, Mark caught a flicker of something primal. It grated on him, and he reflexively squeezed Lucy’s arm, as if to stake his claim. She shrugged him off with a small laugh.

Lunch was served on a sprawling veranda overlooking a turquoise bay. The group sipped tropical cocktails and indulged in gourmet dishes. William, playing the charming host, asked Lucy about their marketing work. She responded eagerly. Mark tried not to let his annoyance show, but Lucy could sense his tension.

“Stop glowering,” Lucy whispered to Mark. “You’re gonna embarrass us both.”

“I’m not glowering,” Mark snapped, forcing a grin. “Just listening.”

William overheard, his lips curving with faint amusement.

“You two seem like quite the duo,” he remarked, though his direct gaze locked onto Lucy.

That first afternoon was full of poolside chatter, couples sunbathing, and the staff offering endless drinks. A few times, Mark noticed Lucy huddled in conversation with William. Sometimes Jack or Margaret joined them, but Mark always felt excluded. He told himself it was simply business talk, yet it left a bitter taste.

Evening arrived. Everyone dressed up for dinner in the mansion’s elegantly lit courtyard. Lucy came down wearing a tight-fitting cocktail dress, hair pinned up to emphasize her swanlike neck.

“You’re not wearing that for me,” Mark said, a tinge of venom in his tone.  
 “Stop being dramatic,” Lucy retorted, rolling her eyes.

Mark forced a pleasant demeanor during dinner, sipping wine, half-listening to talk of William’s philanthropic efforts, the expansions of the marketing firm, future investment opportunities. He decided to keep an eye on Lucy, but it didn’t help his mood when he saw William guiding her from one conversation to the next.

At one point, a stunning brunette named Charlotte approached Mark. She introduced herself as a friend of William’s. Up close, she was tall, poised, and breathtaking. As they chatted, her manner was overtly flirtatious, making Mark uneasy. But part of him liked the attention.

“You must be Lucy’s husband,” Charlotte purred. “William mentioned you might be… in need of company if Lucy’s busy.”

“Interesting choice of words,” Mark said, raising an eyebrow.

Charlotte simply smiled. Mark excused himself, wanting to avoid speculation, but the dynamic unsettled him.

Late that night, Mark and Lucy returned to their shared bungalow. Tension simmered in the air, but Lucy became surprisingly affectionate, almost frantic. Their lovemaking was intense. In the midst of it, Lucy whispered,

“I love you, no matter what.”

The next morning, Lucy got up early, showered, and rushed off to join William and Jack, who were conferring in a side lounge. Mark woke late, found her gone, and eventually tracked them down near the pool. He noticed Lucy looked nervous, while William casually sipped a mimosa. The moment Mark approached, they disbanded, heading in different directions.

That evening, William invited Lucy and Mark to his private office, a mahogany-paneled study within the mansion. The security guard, Shane, stood by the door like a silent sentinel. Mark had barely settled into a leather armchair before William spoke.

“Mark,” William said, his tone deceptively polite, “I’d like to discuss… a special arrangement.”

Mark noticed Lucy’s rigid posture. She perched on the sofa’s edge, avoiding eye contact.

“Alright,” Mark said. “Go on.”

“I’ve built a wonderful rapport with Lucy,” William continued. “She’s charming, intelligent, and truly understands my needs. I’d like to spend the rest of this weekend—exclusively—with her. I’m prepared to compensate you, of course.”

Mark let out a half-laugh, half-cough.

“Compensate *me*? You realize how insane that sounds? This isn’t some Hollywood movie, pal.”

William gave a tight smile, ignoring the condescension.

“I assure you, I’m quite serious. I’ll transfer one hundred thousand dollars—immediately—into your joint bank account if you allow Lucy to remain by my side for the next two days. Think of it as a business transaction. Charlotte—my dear friend—would be very disappointed otherwise. She was hoping you might keep *her* company.”

At that, Lucy cleared her throat.

“Mark… I know this sounds nuts,” she whispered, “but… William’s been hinting at this for a while. He says he’s open to negotiating. The money could be life-changing for us.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Mark barked. His voice rang with outrage. “You want me to pimp you out?”

Shane, the guard, took a small step closer, eyes alert. William kept a smooth expression, yet Mark could see the arrogance behind his eyes.

“It’s hardly pimping,” William said. “It’s a consensual arrangement. Lucy has her own voice.”

Lucy’s face was stark white, but she spoke firmly:

“We’ve discussed it. I… I’d rather not do it behind your back. This *is* my body, Mark. And… the money’s for *us.* You and me.”

Mark clenched his fists. He shot to his feet, ignoring the dark shape of Shane stepping forward.

“This is insane,” Mark hissed. “Lucy, you can’t possibly… You know what? Screw this. I’m out.”

He turned on his heel, ready to storm off. William’s silky voice followed him:

“There’s no need for drama. Let’s be adults. Surely, we can negotiate a fair price.”

Mark’s face blazed with fury, but the presence of Shane was daunting enough to stop him from swinging a punch—yet. Lucy’s eyes flickered with desperation.

“Mark, wait,” she pleaded. “Let’s just talk this out. It’s *two* days, that’s all, and we can take the money and invest it in the kids’ future.”

“The kids?” Mark snarled. “Don’t you dare bring them into this twisted arrangement.”

Lucy shrank back. William waved a hand.

“We’ll continue this conversation tomorrow. Don’t reject it outright. Reflect on what that money can do. Lucy, come with me.”

When Lucy followed William out of the office without protest, Mark felt an ice-cold fury spreading in his chest. Before he could charge after them, Shane stepped in front, immovable.

“Let’s not do something stupid tonight,” Shane said coolly. “Go take a walk. Cool off.”

Mark shot Shane a venomous look, but turned and left.

Mark marched through the dimly lit garden, cursing under his breath. He was not a man accustomed to losing face. He was known as a cunning, often ruthless professional who despised being played.

By the time he reached the poolside bar, he was livid. A few coworkers milled around, giving him sympathetic or curious glances. It infuriated him to think they might *already know* about William’s “arrangement” offer. They probably found it all very amusing—Mark, cuckolded by the rich boss.

“Screw them,” Mark muttered, knocking back two stiff whiskeys in quick succession.

His mind raced with vicious ideas. **He** should be the one in control, not Lucy, not William.

Eventually, he retired to the bungalow, only to find it empty. Lucy never returned that night. Mark smoked a cigarette on the patio, eyes glinting with cold determination.

“She’d better come crawling back on her knees,” he whispered to himself, “or I’ll make her regret it.”

Morning came, and Mark marched to the dining hall, ignoring the flutter of conversation that died when he appeared. Lucy was already there, sitting next to William, their chairs a little *too* close. She visibly tensed at Mark’s arrival.

Jack, the CEO, and a few other directors looked uneasy. They knew Mark well enough to sense he was primed for conflict.

Mark scanned the table, a sarcastic sneer curling his lips.

“Everyone enjoying themselves?” he asked, voice taut with hostility.

No one answered. William dabbed his mouth with a napkin, then spoke in a silky tone:

“Mark, I’d like to finalize our understanding. Charlotte has asked about your availability—”

“Shut your mouth, asshole,” Mark snarled. “Get your freaking hands off my wife.”

Shane, standing by the door, took a deliberate step forward. Lucy cut in quickly, voice wavering:

“Mark, please—this is just a business arrangement. It doesn’t mean anything. You’re making it bigger than it is. Think about the kids, the house—”

“Stop throwing the kids in my face,” Mark snapped. “You want me to *sell you* for a hundred grand?”

Several people gasped. Lucy’s cheeks blazed red. She shot to her feet, a trembling stance of defiance.

“We’re adults,” she said, her voice rising. “I *choose* what I do with my body. It’s not like you’re so innocent. You’ve never cared about my feelings anyway. We’ve seen how you treat me, Mark—like a trophy you can put on a shelf. This time, *I’m* making a decision for myself.”

Mark slammed his palm on the table, rattling the plates.

“Oh, you think you’re the only one who gets to *make decisions*? Alright, Lucy. Let’s show them exactly who’s in charge here.”

He looked around at the stunned audience.

“Enjoy your freaking circus,” he spat, turning on his heel and stalking out.

He could hear laughter from William, a low chuckle, as he left, which stoked his rage even further.

By noon, Mark was back in his bungalow, stewing. He felt humiliated and needed an outlet. Suddenly, there was a brisk knock. Lucy walked in cautiously, accompanied by William—unannounced. Mark leapt to his feet, fists clenched.

“You have some nerve coming here,” Mark growled.

William held out a folded document—a check.

“Look, Mark. Let’s cut the nonsense. I’m upping the offer to two hundred fifty thousand dollars. That’s a quarter of a million, instantly in your account, if Lucy remains with me until we depart Monday.”

Mark’s eyes flickered to Lucy, who just stared at the floor, refusing to meet his gaze.

William added, “In all honesty, Lucy’s worth every penny.”

That was the final straw.

“You smug piece of shit,” Mark roared. In a flash, he lunged at William, swinging wildly.

For a moment, Mark’s fist connected with William’s jaw, sending him staggering back. Lucy shrieked. Immediately, Shane crashed through the doorway. The big security guard seized Mark, twisting his arm behind his back. Mark fought like a cornered animal, half-blinded by fury.

“You want to pay me for my wife?” Mark shouted, kicking at William. “Pay me for *this*, asshole!”

But Shane overpowered him, using professional grappling techniques. In seconds, Mark was pinned. Another guard appeared, and together, they dragged him outside. William followed, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth, his expression a mix of anger and triumph.

Lucy stood in the bungalow doorway, her face pale, but Mark saw a flicker of smug satisfaction behind her eyes—like she wanted him to see she had chosen William’s side.

“Toss him out by the gate,” William ordered. “He can cool off away from the main house. If he tries this again, we’ll press charges.”

Shane forcibly marched Mark down a gravel path leading to a side gate near a utility shack. Then he released him with a shove. Mark stumbled. He glared back, lip curled.

“You’re messing with the wrong guy,” Mark spat. “Don’t think I’ll forget this.”

“Maybe you should,” Shane replied calmly. “Because you sure as hell can’t win right now.”

Then Shane turned and strode away, leaving Mark furious, panting, and humiliated.

Mark had no intention of staying on that island if Lucy was going to keep humiliating him. He managed to sneak onto a small cargo ship Monday morning, outrunning Shane, who only half-heartedly tried to stop him.

“Screw them,” Mark muttered. “They can all rot in that paradise for degenerates.”

He refused even to wait for the private plane that would ferry the rest of the guests home. He wanted out *now*.

It took hours to reach the mainland, after which Mark caught a commercial flight back. The entire journey, he felt sick with rage. His mind looped over Lucy’s betrayal, William’s smug face, and how everyone—Jack, Margaret, the directors—had known about it. They had laughed behind his back, complicit in the entire fiasco.

**By the time he arrived home, Mark was a man on fire.**

The house felt empty without Lucy and the kids. The children were with Lucy’s parents for the weekend. Mark flung his suitcase aside and went straight into the master bedroom. He wrenched open Lucy’s closet, pulling out her dresses, her shoes, her personal keepsakes. A bloodthirsty impulse burned in his eyes.

He dragged everything into the backyard fire pit they had built for cookouts. One by one, he hurled Lucy’s possessions into the pit, stuffing it with old newspapers, dousing it all in lighter fluid. The acrid smell hung in the evening air.

“She wants to sell herself like a whore?” Mark snarled at no one. “Fine. Then she can come home to fucking ashes.”

He flicked a match. Instantly, the pit roared with flame, devouring Lucy’s clothing.

An hour later, Lucy’s once-lovely belongings lay in blackened embers. Mark stood over the smoldering pile, a half-empty whiskey bottle in hand, face cast in flickering orange light. He *liked* the destructive power he held at that moment.

Lucy and the kids arrived home Tuesday morning. The kids ran inside, excited to see Mark—unaware of the storm that had brewed. Lucy approached, wearing sunglasses and trying to maintain composure.

“Mark?” she said softly. “Where… where did you go? Everyone was worried.”

He didn’t smile. Instead, he pointed to the backyard. When Lucy saw the ashes, the twisted lumps of fabric, her face went ashen.

“You bastard,” she breathed. “My clothes… my photos… How could you?”

Mark barked a laugh, stepping close so only Lucy could hear.

“You sold yourself for a quarter million, Lucy,” he sneered. “I’m sure you can afford new clothes. Where’s your fancy check from your boyfriend?”

Lucy tensed. *This* was the moment she’d been dreading.

“He… he never transferred the money,” she whispered. “There was no formal contract. I was an idiot. I believed him.”

Her eyes flicked up to Mark, searching for pity. She found none.

“You sold yourself,” Mark repeated icily. “And you didn’t even get paid? Jesus, you’re pathetic.”

“He made promise after promise,” Lucy said, voice shaking. “He said the funds would come through. Then, after I slept with him, he…” She stopped, tears brimming in her eyes. “He basically said it was a misunderstanding. He left me with nothing, Mark—no check, no contract. And… he fired me from the account. Jack said they don’t need me as an ambassador anymore. I’m… I’m unemployed.”

Mark’s lips pulled into a twisted grin.

“Couldn’t have happened to a more deserving person.”

Lucy’s anger sparked.

“You’re not innocent,” she hissed. “You humiliated me in front of *everyone*. You attacked William like some psycho. You made me look like—”

“Shut up,” Mark said, voice low and threatening. “You’re the one who strolled around with him, basically giving him a lap dance for the entire island to see. *I’m* the psycho? You threatened me—said I’d lose my house, my kids, my job if I didn’t agree to your little fling. Now your own plan has blown up in your face.”

Lucy trembled, tears sliding down her cheeks.

“I didn’t threaten you, Mark. That was William talking, not me—”

“The hell it was,” Mark growled. “Now get out of my sight before I do something I’ll regret.”

At that moment, thirteen-year-old Emma popped her head outside, her face apprehensive.

“Mom? Dad? Are you guys okay?”

Lucy quickly wiped her tears. Mark forced a smile so fake it was painful.

“Go inside, Emma,” he said coldly. “We’ll talk later.”

Emma frowned, sensing that something was horribly wrong. She retreated. Lucy turned away, shoulders shaking.

Over the next few weeks, the tension in the household became suffocating. Lucy discovered that William had blacklisted her from returning to any of his other businesses. She tried to contact lawyers about forcing William to pay the promised $250K, but every attorney told her the same thing: without a contract or written agreement, she had no case.

“He fired me,” Lucy lamented to Mark one morning, tears tracing her cheeks. “I have no job at the firm. He told Jack I’d be bad for their reputation if I stayed. *He* doesn’t want a scandal. They cut me loose to keep William happy. I’m the scapegoat.”

Mark’s eyes gleamed with triumph.

“Poetic justice,” he said, arms crossed. “You dug yourself into this hole.”

Lucy tried to quell her anger.

“I’ll find a way to sue him for wrongful termination,” she snapped. “Jack can’t just let me go without cause.”

“Try it,” Mark said, smirking. “William has top-tier lawyers. You’ll get steamrolled in court. You’re a fool, Lucy.”

Lucy’s face hardened.

“I might be a fool, but I won’t stand here and let you treat me like trash anymore. I’ll do what I need to do to survive.”

Mark’s grin was chilling.

“Go ahead. Because I’m going to get custody of the kids. No judge would side with a mother who sold herself out on a business trip.”

Lucy blanched.

“You can’t prove anything. It was just an affair—”

“Try me,” Mark said with a sneer. “I recorded enough audio on my phone before you left with William. I can paint you as an unfit mother. My lawyers are already drawing up the petition.”

Lucy stormed out, flinging a vase against the wall on her way.

The next months turned into a legal minefield. Mark was determined to crush Lucy in divorce proceedings. He used every tactic—accusing her of moral unfitness, painting himself as a concerned father. Lucy, on the other hand, couldn’t gather enough ammunition. She had lost her job, her credibility, and most of her professional references. Jack and Margaret refused to testify against Mark, claiming ignorance.

When Lucy tried to claim that Mark was abusive or controlling, he pivoted it against her, pointing out she *voluntarily* hopped into bed with William for money. With the firm’s hush-hush support, Mark’s version of events seemed more credible. Even Lucy’s own mother quietly advised her to step aside if it meant sparing Emma and Daniel further trauma.

Their children were confused, stuck in the crossfire. Emma, old enough to sense the tension, asked Lucy directly:

“Mom, did you cheat on Dad with some guy named William? Kids at school are saying you did something.”

Lucy couldn’t meet her daughter’s eyes. The rumor mill had begun.

“It’s complicated, honey,” Lucy whispered, tears forming. “It was a mistake. I thought I was helping us… I was wrong.”

Emma scowled, unsettled and resentful.

“Helping us by sleeping with someone else? That doesn’t even make sense.”

Lucy had no good answer.

The day of the custody hearing arrived. Mark strode into the courthouse in a sharp suit, exuding confidence that bordered on arrogance. Lucy, looking worn and underdressed, held her shoulders stiffly, trying to project some dignity.

In the hearing, Mark’s lawyer presented texts and partial voice recordings. They implied Lucy arranged to “auction herself” for a sum of money during a firm retreat. Mark’s lawyer hammered on her “poor judgment,” insinuating it was an ongoing pattern, not a one-off mistake. Lucy was portrayed as reckless and morally compromised.

Lucy’s attorney tried to argue that Mark was abusive and had a history of humiliation, but the evidence was too vague. Plus, Lucy’s revelations about Mark’s controlling nature were overshadowed by the fact she’d *accepted* an immoral proposition from a client on a *work trip.* The judge seemed unimpressed by Lucy’s tearful claims that William had manipulated her. Without concrete evidence of Mark’s alleged emotional abuse, Lucy’s case fell flat.

By the end, Mark had more compelling (if biased) evidence. The judge awarded him *primary custody*. Lucy would receive visitation rights, but Emma and Daniel would remain in Mark’s home, the same address they’d grown up in. Lucy was required to pay a portion of child support—an amount painfully high considering her new unemployment.

Lucy left the courthouse that day hollow-eyed and defeated. Mark stepped outside wearing a victorious smirk. As Lucy passed, he whispered:

“Told you I’d ruin you if you tried to cross me.”

She stumbled away, cheeks burning with shame, tears threatening to spill down.

In the following weeks, Lucy’s life disintegrated further. She was forced to move into a small apartment in a cheaper part of town. She took a lower-paying retail job to meet the child support demands. Meanwhile, Mark soared. The firm quietly gave him a “settlement” to keep him from filing any wrongful dismissal lawsuit—Jack wanted no more scandals, especially with Lucy gone and William still funneling money into the company’s marketing sector. Mark used the settlement to start a side venture in IT consulting.

Emma and Daniel stayed primarily with Mark. At first, Lucy tried to see them every week. But with the bitter air between Mark and Lucy, visits were tense. Emma, especially, was standoffish, still confused by the swirling rumors about her mother.

Eventually, Lucy sank into depression. She started drinking heavily, stumbling through her days in a haze of regret and alcohol.

“If I’d just… never let William talk me into that proposition,” she’d lament on lonely nights, sipping cheap wine until she passed out on her dingy couch.

She tried once to file a lawsuit against William for failing to pay the promised sum. Her attorney shut it down after a brief consult.

“Lucy, there is *no written contract*. No recorded proof he promised you money. You’ll only dig yourself a deeper hole in legal fees.”

Out of desperation, Lucy even reached out to Charlotte, but the woman had disappeared into William’s wealthy world, unreachable. Lucy was completely alone.

Months bled into a year. Lucy’s phone calls to Emma went unanswered. She barely saw Daniel because Mark refused to facilitate visits outside the court-ordered schedule, and Lucy’s pride was too wounded to beg. Each missed call, each canceled meeting, pushed her deeper into an alcohol-soaked despair.

One bleak evening, Lucy found herself standing outside the old house—the very one she and Mark had renovated so painstakingly. She reeled slightly, half-drunk. Over her shoulder, a battered duffel bag.

Rain fell in cold sheets. She gazed up at the windows, remembering the warm glow it once had. She pressed the doorbell, breath unsteady.

Moments later, the door cracked open. Thirteen-year-old Emma—now nearing fourteen—stood there, wearing pajama pants and an oversized T-shirt. She blinked in surprise at the sight of Lucy, hair plastered to her head, mascara running.

“Emma…” Lucy said, her voice cracking with emotion. “Sweetie, can I come in? I just… I just want to see you. I know it’s not my night, but I—”

Emma’s expression hardened with heartbreak and anger.

“Dad’s out. I don’t think he’d want me to let you in.”

Lucy’s lip trembled. She tried to compose herself, but the smell of stale liquor clung to her.

“You’re my daughter. I—I can’t go on like this. Let me in, please.”

Emma didn’t move aside. She swallowed, tears glistening at the corners of her eyes.

“Mom,” she said quietly, “I saw the video.”

Lucy froze, confusion swirling in her alcohol-numbed mind.

“Wh-what video? Emma, what are you talking about?”

Emma’s eyes turned steely with hurt.

“The video Dad found. The one William recorded in that hotel room… or wherever it was. I saw you… with him. I know what you did.”

Lucy’s face crumpled in horror. She realized that William must have recorded them on the island or in that bedroom, then perhaps bragged about it. Maybe Mark had gotten a copy from somewhere. Lucy had no idea. The thought made her want to vomit.

“Emma… oh God… I never wanted you to see… it wasn’t supposed to happen. I was—”

“You were what?” Emma snapped, voice cracking. “Mom, you cheated on Dad, you tried to *sell yourself* for money, and now you show up here, drunk, expecting me to open the door like everything’s fine?”

Tears slid down Emma’s cheeks. Lucy, sobbing openly, reached out.

“I’m so sorry. Please… Let me explain.”

Emma shook her head, stepping back.

“You’re not my mom. *Moms* don’t do that to their families. Just… get out of here.”

Lucy’s entire body shook. She stumbled forward, desperate to close the gap, but Emma put a hand on the door, eyes burning with betrayal.

“Don’t come back unless Dad says it’s okay. But I… I don’t want to see you.”

Lucy was too choked by grief to speak. She could only whisper:

“Emma… please…”

But the door slammed, the lock clicking into place. Lucy stood, drenched in rain, her soul hollow. The final shred of hope that her daughter might forgive her had just been extinguished.

She slid down to sit on the wet stoop, head in her hands, shoulders shaking with broken sobs. The sign of her total defeat.

Inside, Emma pressed her back against the door, tears streaming, half-hating her father for making her watch that video, half-hating her mother for *being* in the video. She was torn between confusion and a profound sense of betrayal. But the only thing she knew for sure was that life as she knew it had changed beyond repair.

Outside, Lucy finally realized that her old life was gone. Mark had won custody, had turned everyone against her, had used her own reckless actions to burn her reputation to the ground. William never paid. The marketing firm was done with her. And her children wanted nothing to do with their disgraced, humiliated mother.

“I did this to myself,” Lucy mouthed silently, tears mixing with rain. “There’s no going back…”

She pushed herself up on trembling legs. Alone and soaked, she staggered into the darkness, hoping the liquor would dull the ache enough to get her through the night—knowing she had nowhere left to go.