Melissa could feel her heart thudding in her chest as she glanced from the clock on the stove to the groceries on the counter. The late afternoon sunlight streamed through the kitchen window, catching dust motes in the air. She was anxious, but she had decided: tonight was the night. Her husband, Jim, would be home in less than an hour, and she was determined to have a candid conversation over dinner. She was tired of the same routine—tired of the unspoken tension in her mind.

She had already chatted with her best friend, Linda, earlier that day. Linda’s words echoed in her head, fueling the resolve she now felt: “You deserve more excitement, Melissa. Life’s too short to be stuck in a dull marriage. A husband is fine, but you need to feel desirable. It’s good for your health—not just physically, but mentally. If Jim truly loves you, he’ll adapt.”

Every time Melissa replayed Linda’s statements, a fresh wave of certainty washed over her, and she felt as if she’d discovered a life-altering secret. Linda was living proof. She bragged that she could juggle multiple lovers (“multiple Johnsons,” as she joked crudely one night over wine) and come home to a loving marriage whenever she wanted.

“Jim will never see this coming,” Melissa mumbled to herself, popping open a bottle of beer to calm her nerves. She took a careful sip, glancing at the clock. Twenty minutes until Jim arrived. She inhaled deeply and headed to the dining area, mentally preparing one last time:

Prepare his favorite meal. Open a cold beer for him. Smile and speak gently. Reveal your desires.

Her phone pinged with a text from Linda:

LINDA: “You got this, girl. Make him see that YOU’RE in control. He’ll either fall in line or crawl back once he realizes how desirable you are. It’s always worked for me.”

Melissa read the message twice, smirking. She set the phone aside and resumed chopping vegetables, ignoring the fluttering in her stomach.

When Jim finally walked in, Melissa plastered on her warmest smile. The smell of fresh roast chicken filled the kitchen. He looked exhausted, sweaty from the day’s work, but his face brightened as soon as he smelled the food.

“Hey, honey,” he said, dropping his keys onto the counter. “Something smells great.”

“I made your favorite.” Melissa handed him the beer she’d opened. “Thought you’d like it after a long day.”

He glanced at her, slightly puzzled. Usually, they ordered takeout when she was this dressed up. She wore a new form-fitting dress that emphasized her figure more than usual. “You look amazing,” Jim remarked with an appreciative smile.

“Thank you,” Melissa replied, motioning for him to sit. “Go on, relax. Dinner’s ready.”

She served him the neatly plated food, then placed her own plate across the table. They ate mostly in silence at first, but Melissa could feel her pulse hammering. Finally, she cleared her throat.

“Jim, there’s something I need to tell you,” she said calmly.

He set his fork down, studying her. “You’re scaring me, Mel. What is it?”

She forced a small laugh. “Relax. It’s not about anything bad—maybe unexpected, but not bad.”

He leaned back in his chair, bracing for what was coming. “Alright.”

Melissa composed herself, recalling Linda’s pep talk. “Jim… I need more excitement. I love you, that hasn’t changed, but there’s this part of me that feels caged. I want to date other men—just for a couple of months.”

The words escaped in a single breath, as though she were yanking off a bandage. She observed Jim’s face, waiting for him to lash out or, at the very least, protest. But he didn’t. He blinked, pressing his lips together.

“You want to what?” His voice was soft with disbelief.

Melissa swallowed hard. “Date other men. You know… physically.”

By the flicker in his eyes, she understood he grasped exactly what she meant. “So you want an open marriage? Temporarily?” he asked, his tone calm but laced with tension.

She nodded. “Yes, just for a short period—like sowing my wild oats, I guess. Linda thinks it’ll be good for me. She told me how she gets new energy from being desired by different men. It’s healthy, she says, for a woman’s confidence. And when I’m done, I’ll come back a better partner. Then… we can start the family we’ve been talking about.”

Lore has it that some men explode with rage at such a suggestion, but Jim only stared at his half-eaten plate for a few seconds before exhaling. “Wow, so you’ve put a lot of thought into this, huh?”

Melissa allowed herself a small, nervous smile. “Yes. I have. This wasn’t a spur-of-the-moment idea.”

He scratched the back of his neck. “Linda… the same Linda on her third marriage, right?”

“She’s been through a lot, but she claims she’s happier than ever,” Melissa replied. “She swears by these flings. She insists her husband ultimately fell in line.”

Jim’s lips tightened. “So, you’re done waiting for me to just spontaneously be more exciting?”

Melissa pursed her lips. “That’s not how I’d put it.”

“For how long?”

“Two months—maybe three at the most. Then life goes back to normal.”

He pushed his plate away, not even finishing dinner. She was about to speak again when he stood, stepped behind his chair, and spoke quietly. “If this is truly what you want, I guess you’ve made up your mind already.”

Melissa stared up at him, heart pounding. She expected yelling, tears, maybe a slammed door. Instead, his composure unsettled her.

He cleared his throat. “I can’t stop you from… being with other men.”

She breathed in relief, about to thank him for understanding, but he continued:

“I won’t pretend I’m okay with it. And if this is the path you choose, I won’t be here to share your bed or…” He sighed. “I’ll move into the spare room for now.”

Her eyes lit up. “You’ll move into the spare room? That’s fine, it’s only temporary, and if it makes you feel more comfortable—”

“I’m not staying in the same bed while you do this,” Jim clarified, voice raw with disappointment despite the measured tone. “Just know… it’s not as simple as you or Linda make it out to be. Actions have consequences, Mel.”

“I appreciate your willingness to give me space, even if you’re not exactly thrilled about it,” she whispered. “Jim… I need this.”

He nodded slowly, took one last swig of his beer, and walked upstairs. Melissa listened to his footsteps fade. Relief and excitement warred inside her chest. She texted Linda:

MELISSA [TEXT to LINDA]: “He didn’t fight me. Probably upset, but not angry. I think he’ll come around. This might actually work!”

The thought made her grin. She had no idea she was about to unleash chaos that would spiral far beyond her control.

The next day, Melissa phoned Linda. It was midmorning, and Jim had already left for work without a word.

“Hey, Mel!” Linda chirped over the line. “How’s the free bird feeling?”

“Oh, Linda, he didn’t lose it at all,” she said, pacing the living room. “He was calm, moved into the spare room. It was almost scary how composed he was.”

Linda laughed. “Girl, that’s great. I told you. Men either throw a tantrum, or they’ll go silent to nurse their bruised egos. Don’t worry. He’ll come crawling back once he sees how desirable you can be.”

Melissa recalled Linda’s stories: the wild nights with multiple partners, the excitement Linda claimed gave her fresh perspective. “You swear you’ve done this—like, with several men at once?”

“Oh, yeah,” Linda boasted. “Last summer, Mark was out of town, so I invited a few ‘Johnsons’ over. It was unbelievably exciting. I felt so alive. Afterwards, Mark realized he couldn’t keep up if he tried, so he gave me all the space I wanted. Trust me, it’s good for your health, your self-esteem, and hey, eventually it can improve the bedroom with your husband too.”

Melissa flushed, oddly fascinated yet uneasy. She pictured Linda’s exploits, then tried to imagine telling Jim she had welcomed multiple boyfriends under their roof. Would Jim remain so calm?

Linda’s voice tugged her from her thoughts. “Remember: no guilt. This is about your empowerment. If Jim wants to pitch a fit later, let him. It shows how much control you have.”

“Yeah,” Melissa said quietly. “I guess.” She glanced down the hallway toward the closed spare room door. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“We’re going out tonight, right?” Linda pressed. “You’ll bring Brian, that cutie you kept talking about from the office?”

Melissa bit her lip. “Yes—he’s single, well, mostly. Actually, I heard rumors that he’s semi-separated. But he’s definitely interested.”

“That’s all you need!” Linda quipped. “Keep it simple. You just want to feel wanted, right? Let me know when to head out.”

After work, Melissa invited Brian out to a trendy lounge where Linda would join them. The evening was buzzing—the hum of conversation, neon lights dancing over the bar top, and playful music. Brian was tall, with a confident grin and a strong jawline. She discovered they had easy chemistry. Even Linda, rarely impressed, gave Melissa a thumbs-up from across the bar.

As the night progressed, Melissa found herself leaning in closer, letting her hand rest on Brian’s arm. He responded by brushing her hair aside, whispering compliments into her ear.

Eventually, Linda disappeared with her own date, Logan, leaving Melissa and Brian alone. They ended up squeezed into a dark corner booth, lost in their own flirtatious bubble. Melissa felt her phone vibrate. A text from Linda:

LINDA [TEXT to MELISSA]: “Take him home. ;) Life’s short. Enjoy every second.”

The idea thrilled and terrified her, but Linda was right. Melissa needed to prove to herself, to Jim, to everyone, that she could own her desire.

“I’m thinking of heading home,” she teased, letting her fingertips graze Brian’s hand. “Care to join me?”

Brian smirked. “Absolutely.”

They stumbled into her dimly lit living room. Melissa kicked off her heels, pressing a finger to her lips. “Shh. My husband’s asleep,” she whispered, surprising herself with how brazen she sounded.

Brian raised an eyebrow. “Wait, so… your husband is upstairs?”

Melissa shrugged mischievously. “He’s in the spare room. We have an… arrangement.”

There was a flicker of confusion in Brian’s expression, but also curiosity. “That’s… interesting.”

She grabbed his hand, leading him down the hallway. They slipped into the master bedroom—her and Jim’s old bedroom—shutting the door quietly. The atmosphere crackled with tension. Melissa’s heart hammered. For the first time since marrying Jim, she was about to be intimate with another man right under the same roof.

But she refused to feel guilt. Wasn’t this exactly what she wanted—what Linda insisted was her right to experience? She flicked on the bedside lamp. Brian chuckled as he glanced around the room.

“You want me to wear something of his?” he teased, noticing a folded pair of men’s underwear on the dresser.

Melissa, emboldened by alcohol and Linda’s words, giggled. “Sure. Might be a twisted bit of fun.”

Brian, playing along, waggled his eyebrows. “I’m game if you are.” He picked up the underwear. They were definitely Jim’s, maybe a size too big for Brian. It felt surreal and almost comedic, but it gave Melissa a strange electric thrill, a petty act of defiance.

As Brian slid them on, Melissa could hardly breathe. She was stepping way beyond her comfort zone. But something inside her insisted that she’d reclaim her power by crossing these boundaries. They soon collapsed onto the bed, their quiet laughter turning into breathless murmurs.

Brian left around three in the morning to go back to his own apartment. Melissa dozed off with a triumphant smile, certain that the new exploration of her freedom felt better than she’d imagined. She hadn’t heard a peep from Jim.

Early the next morning, Melissa jolted awake to the shrill ring of her phone. She glanced at the screen: Linda.

“Hey,” Melissa mumbled, still groggy.

Linda’s voice came through at top speed. “Girl, guess what? Mark—my husband—he’s been snooping on me, and we had a nasty fight last night. But that’s not the point. You better brace yourself. Jim might do the same if he starts feeling threatened. He might hire a private investigator, or—”

“I… I think Jim’s fine,” Melissa interrupted. “He’s barely said a word. I snuck Brian into our bedroom last night, and Jim didn’t even text me to complain.”

“Really?” Linda seemed almost disappointed. “This loser will crawl back when he finds out how desirable you are. That’s for sure. But you gotta call me if you see any signs of him turning on you. Men can snap when they realize their wives actually have options.”

Melissa yawned, feeling a sliver of fear. “Alright. I’ll keep an eye out. But he’s always been the calm and collected type. I doubt he’ll do anything extreme.”

Linda’s voice dropped lower. “Don’t underestimate him, hon. Whenever a man’s ego is involved, even the nicest ones can become vicious.”

“Duly noted,” Melissa replied, though she wasn’t fully convinced.

A week later, the tension at the office was palpable. Melissa had casually dated Brian, and Linda continued her nights out. But somewhere along the way, rumors started circulating. One coworker, Valerie—a woman who always wore impeccably tailored suits—seemed unusually interested in Melissa and Linda’s personal lives. She’d spot them whispering with Brian or Logan and raise her eyebrows in disapproval.

“Melissa, is everything okay at home?” Valerie asked in the break room one morning, stirring sugar into her coffee.

Melissa tried to feign nonchalance. “Sure, everything’s fine.”

Valerie gave a sugary smile. “Just heard you’ve been… enjoying some extracurricular activities with certain coworkers. Be careful. People talk.”

Melissa’s stomach knotted. She tried to play it off with a tight laugh. “Thanks for the concern, but I’m good.”

By noon, Linda stormed into Melissa’s office, eyes blazing. “You won’t believe this. My boss just called me in for a discussion about ‘office conduct.’ That snake Valerie apparently reported me for fraternizing with colleagues. She claims it’s unethical.”

“What? She’s always threatened by us,” Melissa hissed.

Linda shook her head. “It gets worse. Did you hear about the voice recording I told you might exist?”

Melissa frowned. “Recording?”

“My husband once threatened to install secret cameras or audio devices in my car. Maybe Jim picked up the same idea. Men talk, especially if they want revenge.”

Melissa’s heart skipped. “Jim? That’s paranoid, Linda. He wouldn’t do that.”

Linda scoffed. “Honey, you have no idea how men operate. My ex once recorded me hooking up with his own boss to get leverage in the divorce. Be careful.”

Swallowing a growing sense of dread, Melissa reminded herself that Jim was far too gentle, too stable to go that route. He’d said next to nothing about her new lifestyle, other than scowling whenever she walked in late.

During lunch, Valerie approached Linda and Melissa at their usual corner table. Her tone carried measured politeness. “Good afternoon, ladies. I assume you’re enjoying your day? Talking about weekend plans with your ‘boys’ again?”

Linda shot daggers from her eyes. “I’m sorry, how is that your business?”

Valerie shrugged, glancing around. A small crowd of coworkers turned their heads to see what was happening. “Just want to inform you that we all got an interesting email. Contains some… explicit audio clips. And a few steamy videos. Strange how they star certain people from this office.”

A hush fell. Melissa’s blood ran cold. “What… what are you talking about?”

Valerie’s lips curled in a smug smile. “Oh, you haven’t checked your phones yet? I guess your husbands must be more resourceful than you think.”

Linda practically lurched out of her chair. “You lying—!”

Valerie raised a palm. “I’d watch the language. The clips are all over the building now. I’ve heard them, and so have half your coworkers. They’re repeating every single detail of your ‘rendezvous.’ It’s humiliating, really.”

Melissa, trembling, yanked her phone from her pocket. Countless text notifications from colleagues. “No,” she whispered, dread sinking in. “Jim wouldn’t do this.”

“You sure about that?” Valerie asked, arching an eyebrow. “From what I hear, the mastermind behind all of this had a hidden camera in the bedroom. Possibly audio from a phone left on record.”

One voice message stared at Melissa from the top of her screen: “Hey, Melissa, so I just… oh man, I can’t believe I’m saying this, but we got forwarded a file that appears to be you—and, well, it’s definitely you. You need to handle this.”

Linda slammed her fist on the table. “Which one of you forwarded it around? Who’s humiliating us?”

Valerie shrugged, unbothered. “I have no idea who started the chain, dear. Perhaps you upset the wrong man.”

Melissa’s cheeks flamed. Fury and shame exploded simultaneously. “I… I can’t believe this is happening.”

Valerie smirked. “Like I said, be careful. Actions have consequences. Anyway, good luck. By the way, your boss wants to see you. Both of you.” Then she turned on her heel and strutted away, her heels clacking on the tiled floor.

Melissa and Linda rushed to the boss’s office, only to find the door locked. A muffled voice from inside: “Take a seat, ladies, I’ll call for you soon.”

They slumped in the hallway chairs, hearts pounding. Coworkers walked by, whispering to each other. Melissa saw pity in some faces, delight in others. She wanted to vanish.

Five agonizing minutes later, the door opened, revealing the boss fuming. He pointed at Linda. “Inside, now.”

Linda shot Melissa an anxious look, then disappeared into the office. Melissa was left alone, flinching at the muffled argument inside. Suddenly, there was a loud shriek from the hallway behind her. She twisted around to see Valerie, phone in hand, filming something. A coworker rushed by anxiously.

That’s when Melissa spotted a coworker named Tisha stepping forward. Tisha’s eyes flicked with adrenaline as she said, “Oh my God, Melissa, you better come. Some woman is claiming she has a ‘surprise’ about you.”

Melissa’s heart rate skyrocketed. “What woman?”

“Short, blonde hair, looks furious.”

Confused, Melissa followed Tisha’s frantic steps to the open area near the cubicles. There stood a woman she recognized dimly as one of the upper managers’ wives—someone’s spouse she’d seen at a holiday party.

The woman turned the moment she spotted Melissa. She raised her phone, pressed a button, and a voice recording boomed through a mini speaker. It was the sound of intimate moaning—the exact audio from Melissa’s bedroom with Brian. The woman’s voice was triumphant: “Maybe you’ll think twice before messing around with my husband, you nasty—!”

Melissa’s jaw dropped. “Husband? I didn’t… Wait, hold on—Brian’s not married, right?”

“He’s my fiancé!” the woman spat, eyes red with anger. “And you’re disgusting. Did you think you’d get away with it?”

A crowd gathered, drawn by the confrontation. The woman pivoted to address the onlookers. “You all want details? Because I have it all. My fiancé’s phone was synced to the cloud, and guess what? He recorded everything. Then apparently someone else also recorded the two of them from another angle—maybe your precious spouse, honey.” She gave Melissa a spiteful smirk. “Either way, I’ve got all of it, in unbelievably graphic detail.”

A hush fell, broken only by hushed gasps from the onlookers. The color drained from Melissa’s face. “Look, I’m sorry,” she began, “I didn’t know—”

But the woman continued without mercy: “Blow-by-blow commentary. She hooks up with her boss, apparently, and half the men around here. It’s all on video. Did you all know she’s a cheat and a homewrecker?”

Melissa’s mouth snapped shut. “Wait… hooking up with my boss? That’s not true.”

“Oh, it is,” the woman hissed. “I’ve got the date-stamped footage. You’re in his office after hours—there’s audio, too. You’re calling him ‘sir.’ Maybe you were hoping for a promotion?”

At that, a few employees snickered. Melissa’s eyes darted frantically. She had no memory of being with her boss, but she had flirted with him at a party once. Could Jim have doctored footage? Or maybe her boss, in a moment of mania, had approached her after she’d had too much to drink. The memory was spotty.

A fiery wave of shame overtook her. She stammered, “I don’t know what you’re talking about—”

It was hopeless. The woman played more humiliating audio. As the moans and half-sentences poured out, Melissa recognized her own voice. Her face went scarlet. Furious, humiliated, and backed into a corner, she lunged for the phone. “Stop playing that!”

Chaos erupted. The woman let out a startled squeal, stumbling backward as Melissa grabbed a fistful of her hair. Melissa, not in her right mind, yanked, causing the phone to hit the floor. People shouted, trying to break them apart. The woman fiercely scratched at Melissa’s arms.

A few employees rushed in, but not before Valerie started filming again, capturing the entire brawl. Security arrived, radioing the police. Melissa barely registered meaty security guards pulling her away until she was slammed against a cubicle partition, pinned at the wrists. She heard someone bark, “Enough!”

Moments later, local police officers strode into the office. They demanded order, took statements. The blonde woman was sobbing, her hair in disarray, scratches on her neck. Melissa stood in shock, trembling. As the officer questioned them both, it was soon clear that, while the woman had started the confrontation verbally, it was Melissa who had initiated physical assault.

“You’re under arrest for misdemeanor battery,” the officer said, reading Melissa her rights.

Sick to her stomach, ignoring the stares and camera phones, Melissa felt cold metal handcuffs snap around her wrists. They led her down the hallway, past the glaring eyes of coworkers and the shock on Linda’s face as she emerged from the boss’s office.

Hours later, Linda posted Melissa’s bail. They stumbled out of the police station, the late-night air crisp on their faces. Melissa’s eyes burned from tears.

“This is insane,” Linda groused, shaking her head. “Getting arrested for inch-long scratches on that woman’s neck. She basically provoked you.”

Melissa sank onto a nearby bench, ignoring the hustle of the city street around them. “I… lost it. She was blasting that audio. Everyone heard it. Linda, that was me. Everyone heard me moaning on tape in the middle of the office.”

Linda sat beside her, placing a hand on her shoulder. “Listen, you’re being charged with assault, but it’ll probably just be a fine. You’re out on bail now, so let’s regroup.”

Tears welled in Melissa’s eyes again. “My boss is going to fire me—”

“Not if we can help it,” Linda interrupted, though her voice lacked certainty. “You have me in your corner.”

Two days later, Melissa went to court for a quick hearing. She pled no contest to misdemeanor battery. The judge, unimpressed by her attempt to explain “extenuating circumstances,” slapped her with a fine, plus anger management classes. Dorothy—that was the name of the fiancé’s wife-to-be—smiled with grim satisfaction from across the courtroom.

Embarrassed, furious, and reeling from the humiliating day, Melissa walked out, Linda supporting her. She felt tension coil like a spring in her stomach. Her adrenaline was wearing off, leaving behind the creeping realization that the life she once had—a normal home, a normal job—was in serious jeopardy.

One evening, not long after the incident, Melissa confronted Linda in the parking lot of a restaurant where they were supposed to meet for drinks.

Melissa’s eyes were red-rimmed from crying. “Linda, I just got off the phone with Jim’s lawyer. They want to settle the divorce quickly, calling me an adulterer. He’s going for everything. How could you not warn me this could happen?”

Linda’s own eyes flashed. “I told you men can be ruthless. You said you had it under control!”

“But you’re the one who said it would be healthy, you said men love a desirable woman. Now I’m facing divorce, I got humiliated at the office, there are videos, and my reputation is destroyed. Jim is calling me all sorts of things. He’s painting me as the villain. This is your fault!”

Linda’s anger boiled over. “Excuse me? You’re grown. You made your own choices. Don’t pin it on me.”

Melissa snorted bitterly. “Didn’t you brag about how many men you had at once? How your husband ended up kneeling at your feet? You said Jim would do the same. But look at me now!”

Suddenly, Linda’s hand shot out. She shoved Melissa backward against a parked car. “Don’t you dare try to blame me for your mistakes!”

Melissa stumbled, letting out a sharp cry. “Get your hands off me!”

Linda shoved again, and they grappled, cursing each other. Melissa managed to push Linda away, hair flying. A security guard from a nearby store rushed to break them up.

“Ladies, you need to leave!” he barked, placing himself between them.

Linda brushed off her jacket, seething. “You’re not the only one whose life is ruined, you know! Mark left me, too. I’m losing everything. But I don’t blame you for my mess—you don’t see me whining!”

“Screw you, Linda,” Melissa spat, tears streaming. “Just stay out of my life.”

She turned on her heel, leaving Linda fuming, the security guard still glancing nervously between them.

Surrounded by boxes and suitcases in the trunk of her car, Melissa drove through the winding streets toward what used to be her home with Jim. The sun was dipping below the horizon, painting the clouds pink and orange. She felt numb. She’d been served official divorce papers. The lease on her new apartment was denied once her potential landlord got wind of her arrest record. She had no place else to go.

“Please,” she whispered under her breath, pulling up to the curb. Carson Street looked the same—neighbors’ houses quiet, the gentle hum of an AC unit humming from across the road.

Stepping out, she dragged her suitcases up the driveway. Her heart sunk at the sight of Jim’s truck in the garage. Lights glowed inside. So he was home. Maybe he’d at least let her crash on the couch.

She knocked gently, then again more firmly. “Jim?” she called softly. The door swung open, revealing her husband, or soon-to-be ex-husband, standing in sweatpants and a T-shirt. Darkness flickered behind his eyes.

“Melissa.” His tone was flat.

“Jim…” She glanced at the suitcases, tears threatening to spill. “Please, can we talk? I have nowhere else to go.”

His gaze hardened. “That’s not my problem.”

She swallowed hard. “I—I messed up. I know. You’re probably the last person I deserve kindness from, but can I just come in, talk for a minute?”

He remained unmoved, stepping forward onto the porch, making sure not to let her slip inside. “You should have thought about that before you turned our lives into a circus—before you humiliated me, slept with half your coworkers, and let your so-called friend Linda run your life.”

Melissa’s lip quivered. “Linda… she’s not my friend anymore. Please, Jim, I was stupid. I got caught up in the excitement—I believed all the nonsense about it being healthy. God, I regret it all.”

He glanced at the suitcases. “So what, you want me to just open my arms and say, ‘Welcome back’?”

She bowed her head, silent tears dripping onto the doorstep. “I don’t know what to do. I’m begging you.”

Jim set his jaw. “I’ve heard enough. You filed your open-marriage ultimatum, you cheated, you got humiliated, and now you want me to fix it. That’s not happening.”

He stepped back, took one last look at her tear-streaked face. Then, slowly, deliberately, he closed the door in her face and locked it.

Melissa stood there, suitcases by her feet, hearing the deadbolt click. The porch light illuminated her as night fell, but that light offered no warmth. She realized, with a hollow ache, that this wasn’t just Jim being distant—this was final.

The fallout from Melissa’s decisions had been swift. After she was arrested for the office altercation, charges were brought against her for assault and battery, leading to a hefty fine and a mandatory anger management course. Her divorce from Jim quickly followed. In court, Jim’s lawyer presented not just the explicit audio and video evidence of her affairs but also statements from coworkers who had witnessed her meltdown.

Though most states favored an equitable split, she had few marital assets to begin with. Their shared home was on a lease, so Jim canceled it to move somewhere else, leaving her with no roof. The judge ruled out alimony based on the short duration of the marriage and her own earning potential. As for Melissa’s job, the company soon announced that she and Linda were both under investigation for violating the moral turpitude clause in their employment contracts.

Less than a month later, Melissa lost her position, and Linda was fired too. The men involved—Brian, Logan, a few others—faced divorces and financial ruin once their own spouses discovered the extent of their deception. Lawsuits tangled around the workplace. The company faced negative PR but distanced itself from the scandal by terminating or pressuring resignations from everyone involved.