The screaming started before I even stepped outside.

At first, I thought it was just a stray cat wailing in the alley—until I heard the unmistakable slam of fists on glass. I opened the front door and froze.

There she was.

Julie. My ex-wife. Trapped inside her own Audi, which was now tilted at an awkward angle as the tow truck lifted the front wheels off the ground. She was pounding on the windows from the inside, her face twisted in panic and rage. Hair wild. Eyes wide. Screaming like she was being dragged into the underworld.

But Derrick didn’t flinch. He kept the winch line steady, jaw tight, movements practiced. The taillights flared red as the car jolted forward, Julie’s silhouette thrashing inside like a caged animal.

She shouldn’t have parked in my driveway.

Not after everything she did.

And that, right there—her getting locked in her car and towed down the street like a lunatic screaming through the windshield? Now let me tell you how it started.

I turned thirty-four last Saturday…

Not exactly the biggest milestone, but my then-wife, Julie, told me she was planning something “special” to mark the occasion. She kept hinting all week about a surprise. Kept smiling to herself whenever her phone buzzed with new messages. Of course, I should have known something was off because, for the last few months, our marriage had been hanging by a thread—tension so thick you could swing a knife and hit resentment in midair.

Julie and I had been together for six years. We met in college: me, the scholarship kid juggling three part-time jobs just to afford textbooks and Ramen noodles; her, the polished business major with a wealthy family who wore their status like an embroidered badge of honor. Julie’s parents—particularly her father, Bronson—never cared to hide their disapproval of me. They made it clear I didn’t fit into their neat little world of charity galas, country clubs, and million-dollar real estate investments.

But I tried. I put my head down, worked harder, tried to climb the ladder at my modest tech job so that maybe, just maybe, I could earn a shred of respect from them. Or from her. It wasn’t enough.

It’s important you know that before I tell you how everything went down. Because on my birthday—of all days—Julie decided to throw me a “party.” I got home from work, tired and sweaty from a day of dealing with clients who wanted miracles, and found the apartment empty. A text pinged in:

*“Meet me at my parents’ house. I have a big surprise planned. Trust me!”*

Ordinarily, that alone would’ve set off alarm bells—her parents’ place was the last spot on earth I’d pick for a birthday gathering. But I thought maybe she was making amends, bridging the gap between me and Bronson. So, like a fool, I drove there.

Their McMansion loomed at the end of a pristine cul-de-sac lined with manicured lawns. The second I walked in, I got that feeling. You know the one—like stepping into a room you’ve never seen but somehow recognizing the stench of a setup. The living room was filled with her entire family. Her mom, Linda, hovering near the fireplace with a smirk. Her sister Annabelle, looking uncomfortable in a corner. A few cousins who never bothered learning my name. All holding champagne glasses. Julie stood at the center, wearing this forced smile, her eyes cold.

“Happy birthday,” she said, voice dripping with something I couldn’t place.

Bronson, my father-in-law, gave this low, snickering laugh, like a pantomime villain from a bad action film. The man even had the salt-and-pepper hair slicked back. It was painfully cliché.

That’s when Julie dropped the bomb. She pulled out a manila envelope and said, “Surprise. I’m leaving you for someone who isn’t a disappointment.”

My body went numb. My ears rang. Bronson laughed—loud, cruel. The rest of them stared, some a little guilty, some outright triumphant. Linda popped the champagne bottle, as if they were celebrating a business deal. Julie shoved the divorce papers in my hands. Already filled out, just waiting for my signature.

I remember glancing around at all their smug faces, my mind oddly calm, almost disembodied. I asked for a pen. Julie’s smile wavered in confusion. Bronson handed me his fancy Montblanc fountain pen, the same type he’d once told me I couldn’t afford even if I saved up a month’s paycheck. I signed on every line without a word. I could feel the tension thickening in the room, but I didn’t give them the reaction they craved—no tears, no screaming. Just quiet detachment.

When I finished, I slid the papers back into the envelope, looked at Julie, and murmured, “Thanks for the birthday gift. It’s the best one I’ve ever received.”

I turned around and left. Didn’t look back. Didn’t slam the door. Drove until my mind found a place of razor-sharp anger, the kind that runs cold and focuses your every thought on dismantling the people who tried to destroy you. Because, make no mistake, I wasn’t just the pitiful schmuck who got blindsided—I was already planning my revenge.

I went to a dive bar that night and nursed whiskey after whiskey, letting my anger crystallize. My phone buzzed incessantly with texts from Julie:

*Why didn’t you say anything?* *Are you just going to give up like that?* *You really are the disappointment I said you were.*

I ignored them. By midnight, I’d decided on three tasks: **Call Larry.** My friend from college, now the most ruthless divorce attorney in the city. **Gather Evidence.** We had a shared cloud storage setup for photos. If she was cheating, there’d be traces. **Contact Allies.** I had connections in the industry, small-time perhaps, but enough to spread the truth before Julie or her father could spin their narrative.

Her father Bronson was a man with many skeletons. Over six years, I’d overheard him boasting about questionable business deals to his equally arrogant buddies. I knew about the hush-hush lawsuits, the times he’d cheat sub-contractors out of their pay. I also knew about his shady accountant who “massaged” the numbers to keep the business afloat. Bronson acted like I was invisible, or beneath notice, so he never realized how much I was listening.

By the following morning, I was crashing on a buddy’s couch, phone ringing off the hook with calls and texts from Julie. She seemed rattled that I didn’t fold, that I wasn’t crawling back begging for another chance. My own attorney, Larry, was in top gear. He’d filed counter paperwork by noon, seized upon every morsel of potential blackmail to keep Bronson at bay. My half of our joint accounts was legally extracted, leaving Julie with hers. No argument there. I wasn’t about to let them claim I robbed her blind.

I was set up in an Airbnb within two days, scanning through everything in our iCloud: photos, screenshots, old text messages, even contact details that might help me. That’s how I found out the full extent of Julie’s affair. His name was Ronan, a coworker at her father’s real estate firm. The messages were nauseating—pet names, details of meetups at hotels, cunning remarks about me being “simple-minded.” They’d been carrying on for months. That alone gave me all the ammo I needed for the divorce proceedings.

Three weeks blurred by. I got into a routine: commute to work, hit the gym, then crash at my Airbnb. Meanwhile, Larry kept me updated. He said Julie’s attorney was scrambling because she’d expected me to be a naive pushover. The evidence of her affair cut her leverage to zero. She’d asked for alimony, but the judge was unlikely to grant her a dime, especially once Larry revealed their “specially curated” evidence.

Julie’s family started calling me. Bronson never dialed me directly, but Linda left one voicemail that was full of “we can work this out” talk, which I found insulting after the birthday fiasco. I never replied.

Until one day, Bronson himself showed up—unannounced—at the Airbnb. I remember I was sitting on a little couch, sipping coffee, when I heard a loud knock that rattled the cheap door.

“Todd! Open up!” Bronson’s commanding voice carried through the hallway. The property owner, who lived upstairs, poked his head out, looking concerned. I gave him a small nod to let him know I had it under control.

I opened the door a crack. Bronson, in a tailored suit, gave me this look like he was staring at a roach. “We need to talk.”

I didn’t move. “I’m not interested. Step away.”

His eyes narrowed. “Look here, you ungrateful bastard. You owe my daughter a conversation.”

I let out a sharp laugh. “Owe? Interesting choice of words. I owe her *nothing* after the little show you threw.”

He bristled, trying to push the door open. “Let me in, Todd.”

I stood my ground, letting him shove his weight against the door. “You set me up on my birthday,” I said softly, “and now you think you can barge in here to discuss… what exactly? Did Julie send you to grovel?”

“She doesn’t grovel,” he snapped. “She’s better than that. She’s better than *you*. Don’t act like you’re some hero. Sign the final papers, keep your mouth shut about that worthless affair, and maybe we won’t ruin you.”

I pushed the door fully open, stepping forward into the hallway, letting the cheap wood slam against the wall. For a moment, Bronson’s eyes widened at my posture. I had been hitting the gym, after all, and he was a few inches shorter than me. But arrogance made him throw his shoulders back.

“You can try to ruin me,” I said, leaning in. “But I’m already miles ahead, Bronson. You didn’t realize I had an attorney who’s smarter than you. So go ahead. Threaten me again.”

His gaze flickered. He took a step forward, and I braced, half-expecting him to swing. “You *will* let me in,” he growled, jabbing a manicured finger at my chest. “My daughter is in tears. This fiasco has gone on long enough. We’re here to take her back.”

I gave a short, cruel laugh. “Take her back? She’s not an item you can collect from lost property.”

He lunged with surprising speed for a man in his fifties. He grabbed at my shirt collar, hissing, “You worthless—”

I’d had enough. My blood boiled at the memory of him laughing while I signed my divorce papers. I swung my left arm up in a swift motion, breaking his grip on my collar. Then I slapped him. Not a childlike, petty slap—no, a deliberate, open-palmed crack across his face that resounded in the cramped hallway. His head snapped to the side, and he stumbled back.

For a beat, Bronson looked stunned, one hand flying to his reddened cheek. I stared him down, unblinking.

“You just assaulted—”

“Get out,” I said coldly. “Leave before I do worse. I’m done playing the good guy. You wanted to see the side of me you always suspected was there, right? Well, here I am.”

His eyes watered, either from pain or sheer shock. Then, with a shaky intake of breath, he turned and hurried down the hall. The property owner upstairs watched from behind his half-closed door, gawking. Bronson barked, “This isn’t over,” but his voice trembled. He hurried out, flustered, and I shut the door behind him. My heart pounded as I leaned against the wall, exhaling slowly.

I’d never been violent in our entire relationship, but Bronson had gone too far. He’d clawed at me physically, and, in that moment, it felt like the final line crossed. The feeling that coursed through me wasn’t regret—it was a twisted satisfaction. Maybe I wasn’t the hero I once fancied myself to be. Maybe I was turning into the villain they had painted me as. And you know what? Part of me liked the power in it.

After that confrontation, I decided the Airbnb wasn’t for me anymore. I found a small three-bedroom house for rent in a decent neighborhood, big enough for the new life I envisioned. No more cramped spaces. I needed a workshop area to indulge my newfound hobby: customizing and selling vintage furniture online. Julie once mocked me for it—called it “tacky.” But guess what? My first sale netted me a little profit, and I felt a small thrill at proving her wrong.

As the divorce dragged on, I started talking to other women. Nothing serious, just casual dates here and there. But eventually, I met **Rebecca**. She wasn’t from my old social circles, wasn’t from wealth. She worked as an independent graphic designer, had a sharp wit, and didn’t mind that I was in the middle of messy legal proceedings. She asked me questions about what I wanted for my life, what kind of furniture I liked to build, rather than focusing on the brand of my watch or the cost of my suit. It felt so refreshingly genuine.

Weeks passed. I closed on a permanent home purchase—a modest place, but it had a yard big enough for the dog I’d always wanted. Julie had always vetoed the idea, claiming she was allergic (even though I never saw an actual doctor’s note for that). I guess the final divorce settlement gave me the impetus. I found a three-legged Pitbull at a shelter, named him **Max**, and he became my daily companion. I worked, came home to Max, and spent nights with Rebecca. The gloom that once hung over me started lifting.

Yet I wasn’t about to forget what had been done to me. I learned Bronson’s real estate empire was teetering. Rumor said he was under investigation for shady bookkeeping. Good. Let him squirm. Let him feel the panic. This was exactly the type of karmic blow I’d been waiting for.

Six months after my world supposedly ended on my birthday, I found myself a different person—one with a sharper edge. The divorce was finalized with humiliating terms for Julie. She got almost nothing. I let her have a few pieces of furniture, half out of pity, half out of wanting to start fresh with my own style. The house was in my name alone, financed by my decent job and a stroke of luck in the stock market I’d ventured into on a friend’s tip. Life wasn’t perfect, but it was mine. And I felt no guilt about the subtle manipulations I’d used, the hints I’d dropped to certain investors about Bronson’s unscrupulous nature. I was playing my own game now.

One Thursday night, I was at home, preparing a simple dinner—pasta with homemade sauce—while Rebecca flipped through a design magazine on the living room couch. Max snored at her feet. My phone buzzed with the Ring doorbell alert. It was nearly 9 p.m., so I frowned. Checking the camera, I saw **Julie** standing on my porch, a pair of suitcases at her side.

I hissed a curse under my breath. “You have got to be kidding me,” I muttered, pressing my palms against the kitchen counter.

Rebecca heard my tone. “What’s wrong?”

“Julie,” I said. Just the name tasted bitter. “She’s here. On my porch.”

Rebecca’s eyes widened slightly. “Are you going to talk to her?”

I wiped my hands on a dish towel, then looked at the monitor again. Julie was wearing a rumpled jacket, her hair tied back in a messy ponytail. She looked… smaller. That fierce smugness had drained away from her face. But I wasn’t about to let my guard down. “I’ll handle it,” I finally said. “Keep Max in here, okay?”

I stepped outside, shutting the door gently behind me. The night air was brisk, and the scent of freshly cut grass tickled my nose. Julie blinked at me, looking like she was on the verge of tears.

“Todd,” she began, voice trembling. “I—I know I have no right to be here. But I didn’t know where else to go.”

I eyed her suitcases. “Go to your parents’ mansion. Or your sister’s. Or a hotel.”

She let out a shuddering sigh. “I can’t. My father’s under investigation. Everything’s been frozen. We don’t have the money I thought we did, not anymore. He’s… selling the mansion to cover legal fees.”

The corners of my mouth curved in a humorless smile. “Karma’s a funny thing, huh?”

She swallowed hard, eyes darting past me toward the front window. She noticed the glow of lights. “Who’s inside?” she asked.

“Rebecca,” I said flatly.

“Rebecca who?” She tried to peer around me.

“That’s none of your concern.” I crossed my arms. “What do you want, Julie?”

Her lips trembled, and she exhaled shakily. “I’m here because…” She paused, searching my face. Then she blurted, “Because I’m pregnant.”

My stomach dropped. A thousand thoughts crashed through my mind. Pregnant? With whose child? She must have noticed the suspicion in my eyes because she continued in a rush:

“It’s yours, Todd. I—there hasn’t been anyone else since Ronan, and that ended months ago. Please, just let me come in so we can talk. I’m so scared. I have nowhere else to go.”

I stared at her, uncertain whether she was lying. The timing was plausible, but also convenient. She had parted ways with Ronan around four or five months ago, from what I’d heard. Could the timeline fit? Possibly. Or it could be a ploy to tug at my sympathies. I tried to keep my face impassive, but inside, a war raged between shock, anger, and a tiny flicker of concern.

“I’m not letting you move in,” I said firmly. “We have a legal agreement. You severed ties. I have a life now that doesn’t include your manipulations.”

She stepped forward, reaching for my arm, but I pulled away. “I swear I’m telling the truth,” she whispered, eyes gleaming with tears. “I went to the free clinic last week. I’m about eight weeks along. It’s yours.”

**Eight weeks** was well after our last physical contact, if memory served. We parted intimately maybe three months before the divorce was final. My mind reeled. Could she be lying about the timeline? Or had she somehow counted from the wrong date? I ground my teeth. “You want me to take you at your word?” I asked, letting out a cold laugh. “You did a lot of lying before.”

“Todd, please.” She looked so desperate. “Just let me inside for a night, okay? I’m exhausted. I promise I’ll figure out my next steps in the morning. I—I need to talk to you about the baby.”

I felt a flicker of worry. If by some twisted turn of fate it was mine, I would have obligations. But I also felt a flare of anger, remembering how she’d humiliated me on my birthday, how her father had threatened me. And now she was coming back with a sob story?

“Let me guess,” I said softly, eyes narrowed. “You saw that my life was improving, that I have a stable job, a house, and you realized your father can’t prop you up anymore. So you want a roof over your head, courtesy of the man you publicly declared was beneath you?”

“That’s not—” She took a shaky breath, voice cracking. “Look, you can hate me all you want, but there’s an innocent baby involved now.”

My jaw clenched. Behind me, the door opened. Rebecca stood there, arms folded, posture tense. “Everything okay?” she asked, glancing from me to Julie.

Julie’s eyes flickered with recognition. She took in Rebecca’s confident stance, the casual clothing, the interior light shining behind her. I could almost see the jealousy coursing through her. She let out a bitter scoff. “So this is the new fling, huh?”

Rebecca bristled. “*Excuse me?*”

I stepped between them. “Julie, calm down. This is none of your business. You can’t come barging in here with suitcases and announcements of pregnancy, expecting me to roll out the red carpet.”

Julie stared at Rebecca with undisguised malice. “Did he tell you how he used to be a doormat? Because apparently now he’s turned into a grade-A jerk.”

I felt something snap inside me. “You called me a disappointment,” I reminded her, voice low. “You, your father, your entire family. You left me publicly, tried to take half my assets, and laughed as I signed those papers. Now you want my help? You want sympathy? Let’s not pretend you’re the victim.”

The tension hung thick in the air. Julie clenched her fists, glancing wildly at Rebecca. Then, in a sudden move, she lunged forward, trying to push past me into the house. “This is *my* home!” she shrieked.

I blocked her with my arm, forcing her back. “It’s not your home anymore. You lost that right the day you handed me those divorce papers.”

She started screaming curses, directed at both me and Rebecca. Her voice grew shrill, and she lifted a hand toward Rebecca’s hair as though to yank her backward. I saw the glint of madness in her eyes—wild desperation. She managed to get a handful of Rebecca’s hair and *pulled* before I could intervene.

Rebecca let out a startled yelp, her face contorting in pain. “Get off me!” She raised an arm defensively, trying to free her hair from Julie’s grip.

I tore Julie’s hand away, twisting her wrist gently but firmly until she released. “Stop it,” I snarled, stepping between them. “Have you lost your mind?”

Julie was panting, tears streaming, hair falling out of her ponytail in sweaty chunks. She looked unhinged. “This was supposed to be my life,” she cried, voice shaking. “That was *my* house. You’re *my* husband. How dare you replace me with—her!”

I whipped out my phone. “I’m calling the police. You just assaulted my girlfriend on my property.”

At first, she scoffed, “You wouldn’t—” Then her eyes locked on my phone’s screen, flicking to 9-1-1. Realizing I was dead serious, her breath caught in her throat. But I pressed call anyway. I was done letting her treat me like a doormat. My hands trembled with adrenaline, but I maintained an icy composure.

When the operator answered, I calmly explained that my ex-wife had come to my home uninvited, assaulted my girlfriend, and refused to leave. They told me officers would arrive shortly.

In those tense minutes, Julie paced the porch, tears rolling down her cheeks, hissing insults at me. “You’ve become a monster,” she spat.

I stared at her, heart pounding, voice level. “You have no idea.”

The squad car pulled up sooner than I expected—maybe the department had an extra patrol car in the area. Two uniformed officers stepped out, a man and a woman, looking mildly exasperated that they had to respond to a domestic dispute call at 9:30 p.m.

I gave them a succinct rundown, pointing out the red mark on Rebecca’s scalp from where her hair had been yanked. Julie turned on the waterworks, claiming I’d manipulated the entire situation. The female officer eyed me suspiciously at first, but once she recognized the difference in our stories—and saw the scratch marks on Rebecca’s arm—she asked Julie politely to step away.

Julie refused. She started shouting again, accusing me of all sorts of nonsense: that I was lying, that she was pregnant, that we used to be married so she had the right to come inside. The male officer tried to calm her, but she shoved him aside in a burst of frantic energy.

That sealed her fate. The officers exchanged a glance, then proceeded to arrest Julie for assault and disturbing the peace. She screamed my name in fury as they handcuffed her. My neighbors peeked through their curtains. The officer escorted her to the patrol car, reading her rights, while her suitcases were left on my porch.

Rebecca stood behind me, arms still folded, her hair disheveled from the scuffle. “That was… intense,” she whispered.

I nodded, my pulse thudding in my ears. “You alright?”

She shrugged, wincing a bit. “My scalp stings, but I’m okay. I just didn’t expect her to snap like that.”

I turned, watching the squad car drive away, red and blue lights reflecting off the windows. “Neither did I,” I admitted, “but maybe I should have. She’s desperate.”

Rebecca didn’t ask whether Julie’s pregnancy claim was real. She just took my hand, squeezed it once, and said, “Let’s go inside.”

We spent the rest of the night talking tensely, trying to figure out if Julie’s pregnancy was real. If it was, I’d have to face the idea of being a dad. If not—or if the dates didn’t add up—she might just be lying to get back in. Either way, she was locked up for the night, which was a small relief. No angry father-in-law at my door, no rich snobs picking me apart.

I poured us both some wine. Rebecca sipped hers slow, still shaken. Max curled at our feet, feeling the stress.  
 “Why are people so hard to deal with?” she asked, pushing her fingers through her messy hair.

“Money,” I said flatly. “Status. Ego. They ruin people.”

We turned on the TV to zone out, but I couldn’t focus. Julie’s angry face stayed in my head. The next morning, I called Larry to give him an update. He didn’t sound shocked.

“Desperate people do crazy things,” he said. “Stay sharp. If she really is pregnant, ask for a DNA test once she’s out.”

“She says she’s eight weeks. That doesn’t match our last time—”

Larry cut me off. “Don’t get stuck thinking ‘maybe it’s not mine.’ Stay calm. If we need to, we’ll file papers. Just stay alert.”

I thanked him, hung up, and tried to get on with my day. Two days went by with no word. On the third morning, my doorbell rang at sunrise. When I opened it, Julie’s sister Annabelle was there. She looked drained, eyes red like she’d cried a lot.

“Todd,” she said in a low voice. “Can we talk? I come in peace.”

I studied her face. She’d never mocked me like Bronson or Linda. She always felt a little out of place in that snobby family. Still, I was careful.  
 “What do you want?”

She shifted, uneasy. “Julie’s out. She’s staying with me, but… I can’t keep her. Dad’s money is a mess. The whole firm might crash soon. She has no place else to go. She won’t talk to me about anything but… you.”

I sighed. “And what am I supposed to do?”

“Just talk to her,” Annabelle said. “She says she’s pregnant. The test results are real—she showed me the clinic’s paperwork. I don’t know if it’s yours or if there’s more to it, but you should know. She’s mad about being arrested. She’s raging, but also scared. She lost her job. Dad’s in trouble. Everything’s falling apart.”

I felt bitter. “And you think I should fix this because…?”

Annabelle’s eyes filled with tears. “Because you two were good once. I know it sounds crazy now, but you really did care about each other. And if she *is* carrying your child…” She let the words hang.

I wanted to shut the door—but didn’t. Maybe I was curious. Maybe I needed to end things right.  
 “I’ll think about it,” I said, my voice stiff. “But she’s not staying here. That’s final.”

Annabelle nodded. “I get it. I want to help her, but I can’t. And Dad sure can’t.”

I didn’t say anything. She turned and walked off, shoulders low. I stood in the doorway, staring at the quiet street, wondering how my life had turned into a soap opera. Then I shut the door and breathed out.

I had no plans to let Julie back into my life—not as a partner. Pregnant or not. But if the baby was mine, I’d do what the law asked. Nothing more.

I didn’t hear from Julie for a few more days. Rebecca and I carried on. We’d started planning a brief vacation to the coast, a chance to breathe. My job was going well. My furniture side hustle was booming more than I expected, thanks to a few viral social media posts. Everything was trending up.

But Julie wasn’t done.

It was late—just past 11 p.m.—when my phone buzzed. A text from a neighbor:  
 **“Your ex is outside in her car again.”**

I exhaled sharply, jaw tightening. I walked to the window and, through the slats, there it was: the sleek silhouette of her Audi, headlights off, cloaked in shadow. Same silver frame her father had gifted her—the “entry-level” Audi that still cost more than I made in six months. She’d been there a while. Lurking. Watching. Waiting.

I pulled back. Rebecca was asleep upstairs, completely unaware. I didn’t want to wake her, didn’t want her dragged into this warped game. But the minutes kept passing. The car didn’t move.

Then the messages came.

**“Let me in. We need to talk about the baby.”** **“You can’t ignore me forever.”** **“I’ll wait all night if I have to.”**

Something cold and sharp twisted inside me. Rage. Not the explosive kind—but slow, focused, deliberate. She was stalking my peace, violating the boundary I’d built. After everything—her attack on Rebecca, her arrest, her lies—she still wouldn’t let go.

So I made a call.

Derrick. An old friend from high school who ran a tow company now. We hadn’t talked much lately, but I knew he’d be up. And I knew he owed me.

“That’s messed up,” he muttered when I explained. “Want me to get rid of the car?”

My fingers clenched around the phone. It was vindictive. Maybe even cruel. But I’d reached my limit.

“Yeah,” I said. “Do it.”

I gave him the address. Told him I’d cover whatever the cost. Let Julie try explaining that to her father when she couldn’t retrieve his precious Audi from the impound lot.

Thirty minutes later, headlights swept across my street. Derrick’s tow truck rolled around the bend like a predator, slow and sure. I stood at the window, hidden behind the curtain, every nerve on fire. His lights caught the Audi in their beam—Julie’s car lit up like prey in a spotlight.

Then it happened.

The truck stopped. Hooking cables. The hydraulic arms slid into place.

And suddenly, the Audi shifted.

The driver’s door flung open, and Julie *erupted* out of the vehicle, hair wild, eyes frantic, confusion giving way to raw, unfiltered panic. She stumbled barefoot onto the pavement like she’d just woken up in a nightmare—and in truth, she had.

She had been sleeping inside.

Derrick didn’t flinch. He kept working, silent, mechanical. Julie darted toward him, yelling—no, *screaming*—words I couldn’t hear, but I could *feel* their venom through the glass.

She tried to plant herself in front of the truck. Arms wide. Mouth twisted in fury. Desperation radiated off her like heat. Her voice cracked the silence of the street. She pointed at the car, at the house, at the heavens. Begging. Threatening. Pleading.

Derrick barely glanced at her. He walked around her like she was part of the landscaping.

The tow rig’s engine groaned as it began lifting the Audi’s front tires. Julie snapped. She clawed at the door handle, flung herself into the driver’s seat—like she could stop the inevitable by sheer will. Her body rocked with motion inside the cabin, hands slamming the glass, mouth open in a scream of helpless defiance.

But the car kept rising.

Inch by inch, steel arms gripped the chassis and hoisted it up—Julie and all. The Audi’s taillights tilted toward the sky as if in surrender. Inside, her figure thrashed. Her fists pounded the dash. Her screams were muffled but furious, a symphony of chaos trapped inside a luxury box on wheels.

Then the truck began to roll.

Slow. Deliberate. Like a procession. The Audi hung behind, slightly tilted, its engine dead but its passenger alive and raging—trapped in the very cage she chose. Her face stayed in the rear window, twisted in disbelief, the shadow of her hand slamming the glass as the distance between us stretched.

And still, I didn’t move.

I stood frozen behind the curtain. Not in fear—*in resolve*. This was the consequence. The last stand. The tow truck disappeared around the corner, red lights dimming into the dark.