

“Just tell them the baby’s dead and leave that hussy. It’s time you came back home, Alec,” said his mom, Thelma, in a bossy, cold tone of voice. She continued, “There’s nothing for you there in Idaho. I bet you that first child isn’t even yours. That hussy was probably pregnant when she met you, and she was just looking for a shiny, new gullible GI like you, fresh out of boot camp, to sink her claws into. And now, eleven months after her first baby was born, you two newlyweds have welcomed a crippled child into the world! It serves your dumb ass, right! Didn’t I tell you something like this would happen? When you lay down with dogs, you get fleas!”

This was not the warm welcome he was expecting from his mom when he sent his letter to her last week announcing that he and his wife, Cassandra, were the proud parents of another baby girl. Her name was Melissa, and he was careful to note in the letter that this sweet angel would need extra care and attention because of her handicap. Alec loved kids, and he was up for the challenge. He decided to tune his wretched mother out as she droned on.

As he moved the phone receiver farther from his ear, he could still hear her shouting. “No son of mine would do this. I raised you better, Alec!! I *know* that you know better!! You grew up on military bases your entire life, boy. How could you be so dumb to fall for some local piece of ass hanging round the base? They’re all just looking for health insurance and child support. Didn’t you learn anything from your dad’s Army buddies, Wilson and Carter? Both their lives were ruined by wicked women like the one you married!” his mom yelled into the phone, between quick drags on her cigarette. The more she talked, the faster and louder her words spilled out, like marbles from a bag—and the farther he held the phone receiver from his ear. Finally, there was a moment of silence, and he guessed she was stopping to come up for air and take a long drag on one of her precious cigarettes.

Alec brought the phone closer to his ear just as his mom began speaking in a hushed, cold voice, like a low growl, “Like I said, just tell everyone the baby was born crippled and died of complications. No one will be the wiser.”

Alec could just see her lips curled under as she uttered every word. She called this her “mean mouth,” and he knew it all too well, for she was quite adept at using it on him and his older sister, Vicky, or Vicks, for short. Their mom’s mean streak and controlling nature were exactly why Vicks cut ties with her and didn’t even bother coming to their dad’s funeral. Or, as he and Vicks lovingly liked to call him, “the Old Man.” But that’s a different story for another day.

Alec refocused, collected his thoughts, and steadied his nerves before calmly saying, “But, Mom, you don’t understand; as far as I’m concerned, both kids are mine, and I love Cassandra. We’ll be fine. We can move back to Philadelphia and live in your duplex. You don’t have an upstairs tenant; we can move in! You’ll see. That way, I’ll be close to you. Right upstairs, literally, as your tenant. I know you’ve been struggling to do it all since the funeral last year. You and the Old Man had a great marriage, and I know

this must be hard on you. With me there, I can easily help you and take care of my family. It doesn't have to be either-or. I can be there for you and my family. The Air Force has been good to me. I have good skills and can get a good engineering tech job, probably down at the naval shipyards." As Alec finished, he tried to keep a light, hopeful tone.

"Look, Alec," she shouted, "Now's your chance to fix your situation and clean this all up, like it never happened, then get on with your life!"