It all began in the spring of 2014. I was twenty-six years old, and my wife Sandra was twenty-seven. We had been together for five years, married for two. We met in college—she was studying Accounting, and I was studying Mechanical Engineering. Our first encounter was at a fraternity party hosted by a mutual friend, and we bonded over cheap sangria and some truly awful dance music. From that first conversation, we discovered an undeniable chemistry.

Sandra was gorgeous in a sleek, elegant way—long, dark hair always pulled back in a flawless ponytail, intense eyes that looked like they were seeing right through you, and an air of confidence that made everyone in her orbit take notice. She had a manner of speaking that was firm yet refined; you always felt like you had to impress her. It drew me in like a moth to a flame. Meanwhile, I was tall, brash, and determined to succeed. People told me I looked older than I was, thanks to the intensity always etched on my face.

Although we had our differences, we quickly became inseparable. Within a year, we decided to marry. I thought of Sandra as the perfect partner—intelligent, assured, and someone who’d challenge me to be better. She wanted a comfortable life, and I convinced her I could provide that, no matter what.

But marriage isn’t just about two people—it’s about merging two families. Sandra’s mother, Isabella, never hesitated to remind us of that. From the moment I met her, she wore disapproval like a badge of honor. She acted as if I were some stray cat that her daughter had recklessly dragged in from the street. Although I tried my best to impress her at every turn—bringing flowers, offering to help around the house—Isabella had no interest in warming up to me.

I recall the first dinner we ever had together. Isabella gave me this icy stare across the table, then turned to Sandra and said, “My dear, you deserve someone far more refined.” In one single sentence, she dismissed me, and in a weird way, that was her real introduction to me. She believed I lacked the sophistication and poise that an *accounting major with a prosperous future* ought to marry. Yet in spite of her disapproval, I married Sandra. It felt like a personal victory—and I relished that.

My father-in-law, Marco, was always overshadowed by Isabella’s domineering presence. Whenever I tried to talk to him, he’d mumble pleasantries, but it felt halfhearted. I suspect he never dared to cross his wife’s formidable line of fire, so he simply nodded and stuck to small talk about the weather or the garden.

Sandra also had an older sister, Serena, who was married to Arnold. He and I actually got along at first—he and I would sometimes talk about sports or crack jokes about everyday life. He wasn’t exactly my best friend, but he wasn’t hostile like Isabella. Serena seemed gentler than Sandra; she came across as a bit fragile, and it was well-known in the family that she had been struggling with infertility for several years.

Initially, Sandra and I planned to forgo children for a while. We wanted to travel the world, pay off our mortgage, and build thriving careers. “We have plenty of time for babies,” Sandra used to say, flipping her hair with that signature arrogance. “There are more important things to focus on first.” Whenever she said that, I’d nod, reaffirming that I supported her. But part of me also liked the arrangement because I had my own ambitions. I wanted to climb the ranks at the engineering firm, make a name for myself, and then consider settling down with children. Truth be told, I liked the idea of waiting—it meant fewer constraints on my life.

A year into our marriage, everything shifted. Isabella had a fall and ended up hospitalized for two days. The doctor’s advice was simple bed rest. The moment Sandra found out, she went into a panic. If there was one person who could manipulate Sandra’s every thought, it was Isabella. After all, for years, Isabella had hammered into her daughters’ heads that *family is everything* and that *each woman’s greatest pride is producing an heir.*

Sandra insisted on staying at her mother’s bedside the entire time. I’d drop by with flowers, but Isabella would practically ignore me. If she did speak to me, it was to say something like, “Don’t you have something better to do than stand there?” or “Why doesn’t your firm keep you busier?” She never wasted a chance to take a jab at my career, my presence—anything about me, really.

Once Isabella was released from the hospital, she seemed even more determined to lay on the guilt about not having grandchildren. Then came her and Marco’s 30th wedding anniversary, which the entire extended family attended. It was one of those big affairs—everyone dressed in formalwear, a fancy dinner served in a small ballroom, and an atmosphere of forced cheer. I remember sensing from the start that something heavy was about to happen. Isabella, never one to miss a dramatic entrance, used the microphone that night to share her “fragile health” and her “grave fear” that she might never become a grandmother.

During that same party, Serena broke down in tears, confessing to the family that she’d been to numerous fertility clinics with no luck. She simply couldn’t conceive, and the emotional weight was crushing her. Arnold, standing quietly behind her, pressed his lips into a thin line but said nothing. Isabella, in her prime stage of theatrical gloom, lamented: “I just want grandchildren… Serena tried, but we might never have a child in this family’s bloodline. If Sandra also waits forever, I might be gone by then.” She cast a disparaging glance in my direction as if I was personally denying her a grandbaby.

And just like that, the seeds of tension sprouted. On the drive home, Sandra was visibly upset, tears brimming in her eyes. “I can’t stop picturing my mom lying in that hospital bed,” she murmured, voice trembling. “What if she never holds a grandchild? What if Serena never…?” She trailed off, her eyes fixed on the passing streetlights.

I reached over and squeezed her hand. “We have time. Let’s not rush,” I said softly. Inside, though, I had my own swirl of doubts. Because no matter how calm I sounded, I’d grown to enjoy my independence. On some level, I resented that anyone—even Sandra—might be forcing me to commit to fatherhood before I was truly ready.

In hindsight, I realize I had always harbored a deep anger. I was good at my engineering job, had built a decent life with Sandra, and wanted to keep pushing until I achieved something truly remarkable. But ironically, the more the subject of children came up, the more my resentment toward Sandra and her family grew. In quiet moments, I’d nurse these grudges, letting them fester. If she, or especially her mother, pressed the issue of grandchildren, I found myself wanting to lash out.

I had a sarcastic streak, especially when talking to Isabella. A few months after her “anniversary meltdown,” she visited our place unannounced. Sandra was napping in the bedroom upstairs, and I was on the couch scrolling aimlessly on my phone. Without even knocking, Isabella let herself in and stood in the hallway, scanning my living room like she was searching for dust.

She pursed her lips. “How do you keep this place so… improvised? Sandra must hate living in such disarray.”

I folded my arms. “Maybe if you called before barging in, I’d have had time to tidy up,” I responded, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Isabella glared. “Such arrogance. I wonder how my daughter tolerates it.”

She was pushing me. And I was itching for a fight, something to break the tension that had been building for months. But I kept quiet—barely. I wanted her out. If Sandra woke up to see her mother and me exchanging barbs, I’d never hear the end of it.

Eventually, Isabella left with a hissy, “I just wanted to check on my daughter.” She slammed the door behind her, and I smirked, satisfied that I’d triumphed in another verbal sparring match.

Time passed, and though we never said it outright, Sandra and I both understood that the fertility issue was creeping in like an unwelcome guest in our home. We mostly avoided the subject, though sometimes she’d let a comment slip about her mother’s health or about some new fertility method Serena was trying.

Then came the phone call that changed everything. It was a Saturday afternoon; I had just returned from the gym. Sandra called, her voice shaky:

“Alex, I’m at the hospital. It’s Serena. She tried to… she tried to hurt herself.”

She was quiet for a moment, gathering herself. “She’s in critical condition,” she continued. “You should come.”

I grabbed my car keys without hesitation, my mind racing. Although I was no fan of Serena’s persistent whining about needing a baby, I never wished her ill. And I knew that if she was pushed to attempt suicide, the emotional toll must have been immense.

When I arrived, I saw Sandra’s eyes were red from crying, and Isabella stood near a vending machine, arms folded, wearing that icy expression that always made me want to throw something. She barely glanced at me, as though I weren’t worth her time. Arnold paced back and forth in a corner, jaw clenched, muttering to himself.

I approached Sandra. “Is she going to be okay?” I asked, trying to keep my voice level.

Sandra nodded, tears rolling down her cheeks. “Physically, maybe. They’re pumping her stomach. She overdosed on pills.” She cast a glance at Isabella, then at me. “She couldn’t handle the stress—the constant reminder she can’t have a baby. Mom’s expectations… it all built up.”

Isabella’s eyes flicked over to me, cold and accusatory. “You do realize,” she said in a low hiss, “that if you and Sandra would just have a child, Serena wouldn’t feel all this pressure alone.”

Her audacity took my breath away. “That’s not how mental health works,” I retorted, voice trembling with rage. “Don’t blame me for your daughter’s breakdown.” I could see Sandra tense up, but she didn’t defend me. She never did in front of her mother.

Two days later, Serena was discharged, still frail, and the entire extended family gathered at Isabella’s house to “discuss solutions.” The living room was stifling, everyone perched on couches or armchairs, subdued. Isabella presided like a grim queen, her pained gaze sweeping the room.

I listened to the same old laments—no grandchildren, heartbreak, a mother’s dying wish, blah blah. My patience was worn thin. Finally, I ventured a suggestion. “What about adoption?” I asked, clearing my throat. “For Serena and Arnold, I mean. It could be a wonderful—”

Isabella practically spat at the word. “Adoption? That’s not a *real* grandchild. We’re talking about our *bloodline.*” She paused, folding her arms. “It’s not an option.”

I could feel my lips curl into a sneer. “That’s archaic and cruel, don’t you think?”

There was a beat of silence, and Sandra glared at me. Serena looked mortified, hugging her arms tight across her chest. Arnold, for his part, sat there with an annoyed expression, as though he too found my question ignorant. “Adoption is complicated. And expensive,” he muttered, not meeting my gaze.

I had no idea at the time, but that moment planted the seeds of a twisted plan I never saw coming.

A few weeks after that infamous conversation, Serena and Arnold started visiting our house more often. Sometimes they’d come under the guise of checking on us or having dinner together. But I'd catch them whispering with Sandra in the kitchen, their voices low. The moment I stepped into the room, they’d clam up. I also noticed Sandra became increasingly secretive with her phone—whenever it buzzed, she’d snatch it up and angle the screen away from me.

I tried to press her, but she brushed me off: “I’m just talking with Serena. She’s still fragile. You wouldn’t understand.”

I might have left it there, but something in my gut told me there was more. My frustrations with Sandra were growing. She was always so *arrogant,* dismissing me whenever I questioned her. I had to admit, I’d started lashing out, often with petty insults or belittling her intelligence. “Maybe if you used that fancy Accounting degree to see what a fool you’re being, you’d see the big picture,” I’d spat once, after she’d refused to discuss her secret texts.

Things reached a boiling point on July 5th. I pulled into our driveway and saw a cluster of cars—Isabella’s, Serena’s, Arnold’s, and a few others. My heart pounded, a sense of foreboding twisting in my stomach. Stepping inside, I discovered them assembled in our living room, wearing somber expressions. Immediately, Isabella turned her frosty gaze on me.

Sandra nodded to a seat. “Alex, sit.”

I sat slowly, forcing my face to remain neutral. “What’s this about?”

Isabella answered with that lethal hush in her tone. “We’re here to settle the matter of grandchildren.”

My jaw tensed. “Is that so? Well, I already mentioned—”

She dismissed me with a raised hand. “We’re not discussing adoption or test tubes or any sacrilegious approach.”

I flicked my eyes around—Sandra stared at the floor, Serena was biting her lip, and Arnold had the audacity to grin. *What the hell is going on?* I wondered.

Suddenly, Sandra snapped, her arrogance turning acidic. “Stop pretending to be clueless, Alex. You’ve been so stubborn about me having a baby. And I’m tired of waiting.”

I frowned. “I never said we’d never have a baby. I just want to do it on my timeline, not your mother’s.”

Isabella seized the moment. “Our solution has become quite simple,” she declared in an eerily calm voice. “Since Serena can’t conceive, and you—” she aimed a glare at me—“refuse to step up as a father now, Sandra will conceive a child with Arnold. Serena will raise it as her own.”

My breath caught. I stared in disbelief, but no one blinked or laughed. This was no joke. “What?” I finally croaked, heart pounding so hard it hurt.

Arnold smirked, leaning back. “We’re not asking for your permission, man. It’s basically a done deal. We just wanted you to know.”

My fury ignited, fueling the darkness in me. I glared at Sandra. “So that’s it? You all meet behind my back and come up with this twisted plan? And *I’m* the last to know?”

She shrugged, her voice clipped. “It’s for Serena. She’s depressed. She tried to kill herself, remember? This baby will give her hope. You, Alex, are selfish—always have been.”

Isabella jumped in. “You should be *grateful* we’re including you in this at all. You can stay or go; the baby will be from this family, with or without you.”

Something in me snapped. “You’re all insane!” I roared. I lunged for Arnold, fists swinging. He was caught off guard, and my punch landed square on his jaw, sending him sprawling onto the carpet. Serena screamed, Sandra grabbed at me, but I shoved her aside, adrenaline coursing through my veins. “Get out of my house!” I bellowed.

They fled, though not without hurling insults. Isabella shrieked, “You are an unworthy husband. My daughter deserves better!” Serena sobbed, and Arnold muttered curses as he clutched his bruised jaw. Sandra was the last to storm out of the living room, only to barge into our bedroom, face contorted with anger.

I followed her and slammed the bedroom door shut behind us. “You’re letting them manipulate you into sleeping with your brother-in-law? That’s vile!”

She glared, flipping her hair over her shoulder. “You have no idea how hopeless Serena feels! And you, with your big dreams and your arrogance, you’d never consider fatherhood on the timeline we need. My mother is right—she might die any day without seeing a grandchild. You’re too blind to care.”

I sneered. “You’re the blind one, giving in to that wretched mother of yours. Are you so spoiled and entitled you can’t see how disgusting this plan is?”

Our argument spiraled in circles, full of shouts and curses. Eventually, she locked herself in the bathroom, and I left the house to cool off. My anger was lethal, and part of me was disgusted at how exhilarating it felt to finally lash out. But beneath that anger was a chill that wouldn’t leave me alone—my wife had chosen a plan so morally skewed it bordered on madness.

The next day, I confided in Elliot, my best friend. We sipped coffee at a little bistro while I recounted the horrifying confrontation. Elliot listened, jaw dropping. “That’s…holy hell, Alex. That’s beyond messed up. Listen, you might need to leave for a while. Separate yourself from that toxicity.”

I scowled. “And let them think they’ve won? Not a chance.” My mind conjured images of how I could sabotage Arnold or put Isabella in her place. Some dark impulse wanted me to make them *pay* for humiliating me in my own home.

Elliot gave me a sharp look. “Careful, man. That rage will eat you alive.”

When I returned that evening, I found Sandra sitting at the dining table, eyes rimmed with tears. “Mom’s in the hospital again,” she whispered, her voice throaty. “She had a dizzy spell.”

I folded my arms. “So what?” I said bluntly. “The old bat can drop dead for all I care.”

She stiffened, shock etched on her face. “How can you—?”

“Because she’s a manipulative harpy,” I snapped. “And you’re just as bad for letting her talk you into all this.”

Sandra stood, eyes blazing. “Don’t you dare talk about my mother like that. She’s the only one who truly loves me! You’ve always been too preoccupied with yourself—your career, your comfort—to see anyone else’s pain.”

I shot back, “And you? Oh, you’re *selfless,* right? Sure, nothing more selfless than volunteering to sleep with your brother-in-law for your mother’s approval.”

She slapped me. The sting across my cheek was instant, fueling my anger. For a split second, I considered retaliating, but I clenched my fists at my sides, refusing to give in. “Go ahead,” I seethed. “Defend your mother’s sick plan. You’re rotten, just like her.”

Tears welled in Sandra’s eyes, but she refused to let them fall. “I hate you,” she spat, voice quavering. Then she brushed past me, grabbed her handbag, and walked out the door.

For a few days, we practically lived separate lives under the same roof, barely speaking. When we did cross paths, it was barbed remarks and furious glares. Then, in a move that caught me off guard, Sandra apologized. She came home one evening, knocked on my study door, and entered hesitantly. “I shouldn’t have slapped you,” she said, not meeting my gaze. “And I’m sorry for the things I said.”

I leaned back in my office chair, arms folded. “Why the change of heart?”

She sighed, tears threatening again. “Serena’s on suicide watch. My mother is in the hospital, and she’s still scolding me about not being pregnant. The entire family is counting on me to fix everything.” She shook her head. “I feel trapped, but I can’t betray them… they’re my family.”

I studied her carefully. Her eyes were red and tired, but there was still that haughty tilt to her chin. “You feel guilty, that’s obvious,” I replied. “But do you regret what you almost did? This plan with Arnold?”

She swallowed. “Mom insists it’s the only way. I’m… not sure.”

“Cut the nonsense, Sandra,” I said, my voice low. “You’re not a child. You can walk away. But you won’t.”

Her lip trembled. “Because if I walk away, who will help my sister? She’s so fragile, Alex. This might kill her.”

I eyed her for a long moment, remembering those nightmares of not being enough for her, that fear that no matter what I did, I couldn’t compete with her family’s influence. Despite my rage and bitterness, a part of me still wanted to be recognized as good enough in her eyes. *Why?* I wasn’t sure. Maybe some twisted sense of pride.

Finally, I sighed. “Fine. We’ll discuss having a baby—**our** baby—on one condition: no more talk of Arnold impregnating you. That’s off the table.”

She blinked in surprise. “Seriously? You’d consider that?”

I shrugged, half wanting to show I had the power to decide. “If it shuts your mother up and keeps you from that… travesty with Arnold, yes.”

Sandra’s face lit up with what almost looked like relief. But there was an entitlement in her eyes, too, as though she was *owed* this concession from me. And in my darkest corners, I realized part of me only offered it because I wanted to keep her under my control, away from giving her body to someone else.

We sealed our fragile truce that night, sharing a bed for the first time in days. Our intimacy felt charged by desperation rather than genuine affection. Still, we pretended to be moving forward.

Over the next six months, I gave Sandra anything she wanted. If she yearned for a new couch, I placed an order. When she mentioned wanting a spa day, I booked her a weekend retreat at a fancy resort. She soaked up the attention, growing more smug each time I handed her a new gift. “This is *exactly* what I needed,” she’d say, leaning in to give me a perfunctory kiss on the cheek.

I, for my part, enjoyed the sense of power it gave me. Yes, I was the one bending over backwards, but I took a kind of malevolent satisfaction in the knowledge that her happiness—and her mother’s and sister’s—hinged on *my* generosity. I’d dangle the possibility of fatherhood in front of them like a carrot, letting them think I was almost ready, all the while fueling my sense of superiority.

Isabella, recovering from her hospital stay, was uncharacteristically quiet in the background during those months. The few times we crossed paths, she’d merely scowl. She seemed furious that I’d effectively shut down her plan for Arnold to impregnate Sandra, but she was cunning enough to play the waiting game. Serena, too, had apparently improved; she stopped showing up at my house with tears in her eyes. Instead, she kept to herself, presumably focusing on therapy or medication.

One evening, after Sandra had spent a luxurious day shopping, she came home glowing. “I’ve found the perfect spot for a romantic trip,” she exclaimed. “Let’s go to Santorini, or maybe the Maldives. I want to celebrate… us. A new start.” She waved a glossy travel magazine in my face.

I smirked at the irony. “Didn’t know you were a fan of beaches and sunsets. I thought you were more of a city-girl.”

She tossed her hair. “I can adapt. Besides, once we conceive, we’ll be busy. We deserve a getaway before we settle into real responsibilities.”

I recognized the loop we were in—she was bragging about our financial capacity (my money, mostly) and reaffirming that our future child was on the horizon. Something about her casual assumption that *I* would fund everything, while *she* got the spotlight, made me want to laugh. But I didn’t laugh. Instead, I decided to up the stakes, to show her I could still surprise her.

I planned a grand gesture: plane tickets to Santorini for two weeks, a stay in a luxurious villa perched on the island’s cliffs. It cost me a small fortune, but part of me wanted to see just how far her arrogance could go—how grateful (or not) she’d be. On February 20th, the day the tickets arrived, I hurried home to surprise her.

The house was quiet when I walked in. I found a note on our bed in Sandra’s delicate handwriting. I started reading, my heart pounding:

**Alex,** You see that nothing in our relationship changes, no matter how much we try. I love you, but I also love my family, and I cannot watch my sister suffer. My mother’s health is precarious. They need me to provide an heir to our family’s line, one that belongs to Serena and Arnold, since her body can’t carry it.

We’ve already tried to reason with you, but I realize you’ll never truly agree. That’s why I’m doing this on my own. I’m leaving for a month. Arnold, my parents, and I will be out of town. We won’t tell you where because you’d only interfere. I have to do this for Serena.

Don’t worry—this doesn’t change **us**. I’ll come back when I’m pregnant, and we’ll pretend nothing ever happened. The baby will be theirs to raise. This is my final decision, and I know you love me enough to understand it in time.

Don’t try to find me, Alex. I’m sorry.

I stood there, reading the words over and over, a tremor building in my chest. My initial reaction was a sickening, sinking feeling of defeat. This was it: She *chose* them. She chose *him*—Arnold. I felt that dark rage, that relentless swirl of wrath, surging inside me.

Without thinking, I hurled the plane tickets across the room, letting them scatter on the floor. My entire plan—my attempt at controlling her with lavish gifts—was worthless. She wanted something else: to prove herself to her mother, to appease her sister, and to keep me on the back burner like a convenient ATM.

I sank onto the edge of the bed, choking on my fury. The more I thought about it, the more my chest burned. *They’re all conspiring against me,* I told myself. *This was never about me at all. I’m just the means to an end, or maybe an obstacle to remove.*

For a full hour, I sat in silence, rereading the note, letting it imprint itself on my brain. Then, in a moment of clarity, I realized I had enough of being the puppet they dragged around. Yes, I was far from innocent—I was controlling, cruel in my words, and twisted in my own ways—but the gall of *this* betrayal dwarfed any wrongdoing I’d done.

After two days spent wallowing in my own hatred, I decided I’d had enough. I called a real estate agent to explore renting out our house. I sold off most of our electronics, furniture, even the car. I emptied our joint accounts, leaving only a few meager dollars behind. If Sandra wanted to come back after her twisted quest for pregnancy, she’d find a hollow shell of a home and zero access to my money.

My friend Elliot was shocked when I revealed my plan to leave the country. “Dude, are you sure about this?” he asked, concern furrowing his brow.

“Absolutely,” I growled. “I’m done with these parasites. Let them figure out how to raise this *miracle baby* they want. They’re not seeing a dime from me.”

He exhaled. “Okay… well, if you need money, you know I’ve got your back. Just promise me you won’t do anything stupid.”

I forced a half-smile. “I appreciate it, but I’ve already set everything in motion. I quit my job this morning. My plane ticket is booked for tomorrow.”

The next day, I took a final look at the empty living room. Nothing remained except a single chair and a table I didn’t bother to sell. A sense of grim satisfaction settled over me; I was leaving nothing behind for Sandra. Then I left for the airport, a duffel bag in one hand, Sandra’s abandoned phone in the other.

By the time the plane took off, I was so steeped in anger that I couldn’t even feel anxious about leaving the life I’d known. I was 26, no, nearly 27 by then, with a mechanical engineering background. Canada beckoned with a promise of anonymity and a fresh start, an escape from the labyrinth of betrayal.

Three weeks after I arrived in Toronto, I rummaged through Sandra’s phone out of morbid curiosity. I’d turned it off for most of my journey, but now I connected it to Wi-Fi in my new apartment—a modest sublet, musty but serviceable. Notifications flooded in. One, in particular, grabbed my attention: a family WhatsApp group titled *Baby.*

I clicked on it. The latest message was from Serena: *“It’s finally happened, everyone! After more than 20 attempts, we’re going to have a grandchild!”*

She’d attached photos: Arnold looking smug, half-naked, and my wife—my *wife*—in nothing but her underwear, her hair plastered to her forehead with sweat, a triumphant grin on her face. The second photo showed a pregnancy test with two pink lines.

I felt physically ill. Though I’d known on an intellectual level what they were doing, seeing photographic evidence seared my brain. My teeth ground together, rage vibrating in every cell of my body. But I was thousands of miles away. I couldn’t rush over and smash Arnold’s face again or burn down Isabella’s house.

I turned off the phone. I paced for hours, the memory of that image burned behind my eyelids. By the next morning, my anger transformed into a numb determination. I’d come this far—no going back.

Despite my qualifications, the only job I could get on short notice was as a warehouse worker at a small factory on the outskirts of Toronto. It paid decently, all things considered, and gave me time to figure out a long-term plan. Every day, I hauled crates, loaded trucks, and tried to push thoughts of Sandra from my mind.

But then, a Sunday morning came with a fresh horror. Sandra—somehow remembering her own phone number—sent me a text. The words rolled across the screen like acid:

**Love, I’m home now. Everything went perfectly. I’m pregnant with Arnold’s child. Please come back—I have news for you.**

I stared at that message for a good minute, a sardonic laugh escaping my lips. *She dares call me ‘love’ after all that?* I thought, shaking my head at her arrogance. Then more messages followed:

**Darling, come home. We need to talk. The accounts are empty, and the cards don’t work. I need money for groceries.**

I let out a bark of harsh laughter. “Now you want me to fund your brother-in-law’s child? Over my dead body.”

She tried calling repeatedly. I let the phone ring, refusing to answer. Then came a barrage of calls from Serena, from Arnold, from Isabella of all people. My block list grew by the hour. In their twisted minds, I was still part of their family, so they expected me to pick up the slack—foot the bills, provide emotional support. My revulsion deepened.

One evening, my own father called. I answered reluctantly. “Alex,” he said with a sigh. “Your mother’s worried. We heard you ran off to Canada? What’s going on? Sandra is trying to reach you. She said you abandoned her, that you left her with no money.”

I grimaced. “Dad, stay out of it. I left because Sandra decided to get pregnant with her sister’s husband. This is the *real* story. She and her mother manipulated everyone.”

A stunned silence. Then, in a quivering voice, he said, “That’s… are you sure you’re not misunderstanding something?”

I swore under my breath. “I’ll send you the pictures. Then you’ll understand.” And I hung up. A day later, Dad called back, outraged. “Alex, that woman is insane, and her mother is—” He paused, fuming. “I can’t believe they’d do that to you. You made the right choice.”

For once, I felt a small sense of vindication.

Over the next few weeks, I turned Sandra’s phone on occasionally, just out of a perverse desire to see them squirm. The messages were frantic: **Isabella**: “You irresponsible ingrate. Sandra is losing weight from the stress you’ve caused! If anything happens to my grandchild, it’s your fault.”  
 **Serena**: “We just want you to come back, Alex. This baby is a blessing, but it doesn’t have to ruin your marriage. We can all be one big family.”  
**Arnold**: “You think you can run away from your problems? You owe us an apology, man. Grow up.”

I read them with mounting disgust. I blocked them all eventually, refusing to let their madness intrude further. My father moved in with me for a short while after I arranged his travel, so he could see that I was building a new life. Having his presence helped me cling to some semblance of normalcy.

Meanwhile, I found a better job using my mechanical engineering background. It paid well enough that I could live in a comfortable loft in Montreal. I moved again, wanting to put more distance between me and any of Sandra’s attempts to locate me. Canada became my refuge and my battlefield for forging a new identity.

A few months later, I finally filed for divorce. My lawyer, an old friend of Elliot’s, was shocked by my story but agreed we had a strong case—Sandra abandoned the marriage, left to conceive a child with another man, and had the nerve to come crawling back for financial support. We submitted her handwritten note as evidence, along with screenshots of the vile WhatsApp messages. The process took time, but I was resolute.

Then, a twist of fate: I received word from Elliot that Sandra had miscarried. She lost Arnold’s baby, either from stress or some complication. Isabella was furious, blaming me for causing her emotional turmoil. Serena, apparently, had a massive falling out with Sandra, blaming her for everything. The entire fiasco was imploding.

One afternoon, after nearly a year of silence, I got a video call from an unknown number on my new phone. On a whim, I answered—and there she was. Sandra’s face filled the screen, eyes sunken, complexion sallow. She looked older, as though a decade had passed.

“Alex,” she breathed, tears glimmering. “Please don’t hang up.”

I said nothing, keeping my own camera off.

She swallowed hard. “I lost the baby. The doctors… they had to remove my uterus. I can’t ever conceive again.” Her voice broke. “I’ve cut ties with my mother, and with Arnold and Serena. None of it was worth it. I’m… I’m so sorry.”

A wave of conflicting emotions rushed through me. I felt no pity. If anything, I felt a bitter triumph. *She lost everything,* I thought. *That’s the cost of betraying me.*

I let the silence stretch before speaking in a low, measured tone. “Let’s keep this brief. You made your choices, Sandra. You confused my love for blind obedience. You wanted to please that harpy mother of yours, and you expected me to nod along. Now you’re reaping the consequences.”

Her tears started to fall. “I know,” she choked out. “I made a terrible mistake. I was arrogant, I was cruel, and I let them control me. Can’t we… fix this? Could you ever—?”

I cut her off with a cold laugh. “Forgive you? No. I hope that vile mother of yours never sees any grandchildren. She manipulated you into that insane scheme, and you, in your entitlement, went along. That’s on you. You’ll carry that guilt forever.”

She sniffled, sobbing into her hands. “Alex, I—”

“Enough,” I snapped. “I’m done. Our divorce will be finalized soon. Once that happens, I won’t owe you a thing. I don’t care about your uterus or your regrets. You *chose* this.” I paused, letting the dagger sink deeper. “When Isabella finally dies, I promise I’ll find her grave and piss on it. That’s how little she means to me.”

Sandra let out a wounded wail, tears rolling down her cheeks in torrents. Perhaps once upon a time, I might have felt a pang of pity. But now, I only felt emptiness.

In a trembling voice, she managed, “The doctors say my health might never fully recover. I have no one. I—”

I ended the call. Just like that. She tried calling back a few times, but I blocked the number.

In late 2019, the divorce went through. My lawyer secured a dissolution that left Sandra with almost nothing. I paid alimony for a single year—court orders—but that was it. Then the pandemic hit in 2020, and the world locked down. I spent a lot of that time reflecting on my mistakes. Make no mistake, I was far from an innocent victim. I relished controlling Sandra with money, insulting her when she didn’t meet my expectations, lashing out at her family—even though they were absolutely vile too. But, ironically, none of that changed the fact that her entire family’s betrayal was the final straw.