

Alaska Ain't Got Black Lungs

Written by

Lillian Campbell

1 INT. APARTMENT SITTING ROOM - DAY

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A shy but determined young woman stands stiffly at one end of the tiny room. She is BABY. She stares, large eyes filled with love and concern, at the wilting figure seated at the window.

Stoic and sickly, the woman (few years older than Baby) engulfed by the old floral armchair is MOXIE. Dust floats in the air, illuminated by gray sunlight streaming through the glass.

Baby takes a shaky breath.

BABY

I been thinking; we should move to Alaska.

MOXIE

(softly)

Hm?

Moxie looks up from the window with sunken eyes. Her bangs fall across her face and she brushes them aside with a pale hand.

MOXIE

What'd ya say?

BABY

I been thinking we should move to Alaska. It's just— it's too stuffy here, Mox.

Moxie looks back at her emotionless. Her breath rasps in her throat as she goes to speak, but Baby interrupts.

BABY (CONT'D)

Plus... the doctor says gettin' away could be good for you.

Moxie's eyes narrow.

MOXIE

(tightly)

What I tell you about talkin' like that, Baby?

BABY

I was just sayin'— it's just too stuffy here. Heard Alaska's got clean air. 'Sposed to be so good you can taste it.

Baby shrugs, but holds the tension in her shoulders. Behind her back, she clasps and unclasps her hands.

MOXIE

Taste good...?

Moxie sighs and pushes herself up from the armchair. It leaves her out of breath a moment, and Baby visibly winces.

MOXIE (CONT'D)

Lord knows we couldn't begin to afford something like that. Not with all the damn doctor's bills piling up 'round here. Besides, I like havin' my kids nearby. I can't leave em' to chase a silly dream, Baby.

Moxie coughs into a closed fist and looks back out towards the dirty street. Her skin is so pale in the light it is nearly translucent.

Baby's eyes start to fill with tears and she chokes them down.

BABY

Thought you said you didn't like that your husband was a walk away. I thought you said you didn't look back, Moxie. Don't ya see that everything here's a terrible color?

She looks into Moxie's once-bright eyes.

BABY (CONT'D)

Them postcards you keep up on the mirror always looked so bright. And my favorite ones always said they was from Alaska.

They stare at each other for a moment, an untold, intense emotion held in the air. Then Moxie's eyes turn hard and her brow furrows with anger.

MOXIE

(accusatory)

You chasin' daydreams again?

Baby steps back as Moxie steps forward.

BABY

No ma'am.

MOXIE

You sure you ain't? Cause it seems
to me you've been livin' in one
hell of a daydream.

They are inches from each other now. Baby looks away as she
lies.

BABY

No ma'am. It's just stuffy here.
Makin' our lungs black, I'm sure.

MOXIE

(yelling suddenly)

Baby, you gotta be kiddin' me! You
seriously thinkin' of leaving?! You
think I can leave?! This is inside
of me, Baby! This isn't something
we can run away from! If you run
now, you'll have to go without me.

Moxie's voice catches on her words like a thread snagged on a
hook.

BABY

(offended)

I wouldn't leave you Mox, I'd take
you with me! I didn't leave before,
when you married him!

Baby stops herself, surprised at her own words, but only for
a moment.

BABY (CONT'D)

(yelling)

Maybe things'd be better in Alaska!

MOXIE

(Progressively louder)

This is not about him! Don't you
dare bring him into this shit. You
can't just run away from what's
been goin' on! Now sit down and
stop yelling!

Moxie does not sit down as she yells.

BABY

No, no, no no no! I will not sit
down! We can't even breathe here,
Mox! How much longer you think we
gonna last like this?!

Moxie leans back and folds her arms.

MOXIE
(soft and low)
Get over yourself and grow up,
Baby. Alaska might as well be on
the moon.

Moxie starts walking back to the window.

BABY
(each word emphasized)
Then I will build us a rocket.

She turns on her heel and storms out of the room. Moxie gestures after her.

MOXIE
You ain't ever build anything. You
couldn't even buy yourself a—

Moxie's breath suddenly runs out. She grips the arm of the chair and collapses into it. She coughs violently into a handkerchief.

When the fit ends, Baby's sobs can be heard through the thin wall.

Shaking, Moxie pulls a cigarette from her pocket and lights it. She aches for the embrace of burnt tar and nicotine. Tears slip down her face, but it's unclear whether they're from coughing or emotion.

She smokes the cigarette all the way down while Baby keeps sobbing.