

1.12.23

# BEN CALLBACK

LEAF

The first two were on the phone. I heard them. Oh my God, I just keep talking. Nothing matters, my bird is gone.

(He whirls back to the wall. BEN crosses to LEAF.)

BEN

What do you mean you heard them?

LEAF

I was here! You should just assume I'm always here!

BEN

No! We should not assume that!

(BEN whirls around to KATE)

Maybe you're right! Maybe we don't need to have a kid! We have one! It's forty years old and it never moved out! *Why are you always here?* Why? Nights, weekends? *Why?*

KATE

Don't yell at him!

LEAF

I'm fixing stuff!

KATE

He knew about me and the IUD too. He knows everything.

BEN

Are you kidding me? Well, we see whose secrets he kept, didn't we?

LEAF

If I can just say, as a life coach--

KATE AND BEN

SHUT UP, LEAF.

LEAF

Yup.

(He turns back to the wall scone.)

KATE

How is this your third interview? When was the first one? When did you even apply?

(A long moment.)

BEN AND LEAF

January.

START

1.12.23

(BEN shoots LEAF a look, and LEAF scurries out of the room. KATE sinks to sit on the arm of the couch.)

KATE

January? *Four months ago*, January?

BEN

Yeah.

KATE

But...you *just* told me about this job. You applied for it before you even told me about it?

(Beat.)

BEN

I told you about it when I got the second interview.

KATE

*Second?* Oh, my God!

BEN

I didn't know if it was going to come to anything, and I didn't want to--

KATE

See, I was willing to assume that this was my fault, because you applied after finding out what I did. But it seems these events are...unconnected.

(Beat.)

BEN

Yeah.

KATE

And you were going to let me keep thinking it was my fault.

(BEN shifts uncomfortably.)

Are you kidding me, Ben? You've been laying it on about what a horrible person I am, and what a terrible thing I've done, when you were doing the exact same thing?

BEN

Whoa, whoa. These are not the same *at all*.

KATE

They're lies, Ben! Lies to each other about our future!

BEN

Don't act like what I did was as bad as what you did! You kept us from having a family. I applied for a job.

KATE

Behind my back! And it's a job that would tank everything I've been working for, and you knew that! What was your plan if you got it?

BEN

Well, then I'd have to try to talk you into what I wanted! Just like you were going to *dupe* me into what you wanted.

KATE

Don't give them different labels! It's the same thing.

BEN

No, because mine was going to be a conversation—

KATE

After you already had the job? That's not a conversation—we already *had* the conversation and you just didn't like how it went and barreled on ahead anyway--

BEN

--and yours was going to be an "omission of the truth" until I could never have a family.

KATE

You have a family. You *have* a family! *This* is the family we agreed to!

BEN

Well, then my *family* just sat there and watched me not have kids, hate my job, hate this town. I'm *drowning* here, Kate—my God, you watched me reach for anything—*anything*—to buoy me up and give me something to hold on to! Rock collecting? Roasting coffee? Bird watching?! I mean, thank God that IUD worked, right, because you would be a shit mother.

(Beat. BEN can sense that that was too far, but holds his ground.)

KATE

You want to play that game? How about this. It's your own fault you hate your life now, because you got yourself fired. And I'm tired of dancing around it for your ego.

BEN

You know that—

KATE

*You* made a *series of choices*—including some lies--that got you fired. But you know what? Maybe you wouldn't have had to tell those lies if you were a good engineer.

(A moment. KATE can sense that she, too, maybe went too far, but decides to barrel on ahead.)

You didn't ever seem to care that much about having a baby until you lost your job.

BEN

That's not true.

KATE

It's like you had to replace your identity with *something*, and picked a baby. You're always just floundering around, looking for the world to slap a label on you and tell you who you are. "Well, if I can't be an engineer, I'll be a rock collector. I'll be a bird watcher. I'll be a dad." That's not a good enough reason to have a baby, and it's sure as hell not a good enough reason to turn my life upside down too.

BEN

Don't tell me how I feel, or what I want. Especially while you're over here with your identity so wrapped up in your job that you'll detonate your whole life to protect it! And mine too!

KATE

Oh, I'm sorry, I seem to remember that getting *my job* is the thing that saved us when we were left with nothing. And I didn't even want to teach, Ben! I was doing this for *us*! But you know what? Along the way, I found out that I *love* it and I'm *good* at it, and I have a future in it. And I'm sorry it's not in New York or California, but this is where I got hired.

BEN

Yeah, I guess they save the good teaching jobs for people who actually sold copies of their books.

KATE

I'm busting my butt for us, and you want me to have a baby *and* bring home a salary while you dick around at Best Buy.

BEN

I am offering a solution! We go to California! I make the money! You can go back to writing your little books and I'll support you *and* a baby.

KATE

That. Right there. The fact that you can call them my "little books" shows that *you don't get it*. You're right—you don't know who I am.

BEN

What do you want, Kate? This is a good life I'm offering—it's the life everybody wants! And you act like I'm some kind of villain for offering it!

KATE

You aren't offering it, you're forcing me into it. And no, that isn't the life I want, and you know that. I cannot just be tossed around in Tornado Ben, being thrown all over the country whenever you get hired or fired, with no regard for my life or my feelings or my dreams!

(Beat.)

BEN

If you want to have a conversation about regarding other people's lives, and feelings, and dreams, I am *happy* to have that conversation with you. I would *love* to have that conversation with you, Kate. I would love to hear your thoughts on that topic, and on putting yourself first. But I have a plane to catch.

END