

I Apologize for My Husband

By Ella Kim

CHARACTERS

EMILY HOFFMAN, a live news reporter in her early twenties, shaken, new to the job. Trying to be professional.

DAN BAKER, a man in his thirties, thinks he's funnier than he really is. An aspiring actor.

LAURA BAKER, a woman in her thirties, self-conscious and impulsively vindictive. Head of marketing at a baby food company.

PLACE

Outside of an apartment building immediately following a fire.

Sirens wail, horns honk, people shout: typical city noises. The sirens are harsher and more persistent than they might normally be. Red and blue lights flash occasionally across the stage. EMILY stands downstage of a half-destroyed, still-smoking apartment building, holding a news outlet microphone. Off to the side, a camera is trained on her. She's nervous and about to go live.

EMILY. Hi. I mean, hello. This is Emily Hoffman with Channel 8 News. I'm reporting live from downtown Seattle, where a major fire has just desiccated—sorry, *decimated*—this apartment building. Paramedics are on the scene, but I'm afraid this building may be beyond repair. *(She turns around to look at the building and instantly regrets it.)* Yes, it's—it's pretty bad.

DAN and LAURA wander onto the scene, arm in arm, looking shell-shocked and disheveled. Hushed and subdued, they survey the apartment building.

EMILY. Many injuries have been reported, although the death toll—um, the death toll remains low. I'm supposed to—er, we're here in search of eyewitnesses to the incident.

EMILY scans the area wildly, creating microphone feedback. She spots DAN and LAURA and gestures frantically to catch their attention. She has to raise her voice to be heard by them.

EMILY. Hi! Excuse me! Yes, you two. Were you eyewitnesses to this horrific accident?

DAN. This is our apartment building.

EMILY. Oh my God. *(She glances quickly in the direction of the camera.)* I mean, oh goodness. I'm so sorry.

DAN. *(mournfully)* I had a hundred mint-condition baseball cards in there. *(LAURA tugs on his arm.)* What, honey?

LAURA. I have to call my—

EMILY. Would you two mind being interviewed? By me? I'm with Channel 8 News. (*SHE points to the camera.*) Live television.

DAN. Um, yes, yes, we'd like that.

LAURA. Dan—

DAN. (*thrilled*) Live news!

DAN detaches himself from LAURA and crosses downstage to EMILY, surreptitiously combing through his hair as he does so.

LAURA. Dan.

LAURA jogs to catch up to him. She stands at DAN's side, uncomfortable.

EMILY. Hi. Welcome to Channel 8 News. I'm Emily Hoffman. Would you tell me your names? For the headline.

DAN. (*leaning into the microphone*) Hi. We're Dan and Laura Baker.

EMILY. Oh, are you two siblings?

LAURA. We're married.

EMILY. Right. Sorry, I should've guessed.

LAURA. It would've been more embarrassing if we'd been siblings and you'd thought we were married.

EMILY. Yes, sure, that's—that's a good point.

DAN. What news channel did you say this was again?

EMILY. Channel 7—sorry, no, Channel 8 News.

DAN. And is that a, um, a national network?

EMILY. I'm afraid we're local.

DAN. Bummer. (*EMILY laughs awkwardly; he doesn't.*)

EMILY. Right, well. Would you tell me, in your own words, a little bit about what happened?

LAURA. Sorry. I'm still trying to... to collect myself— (*She can't seem to tear her eyes from the building.*)

DAN. (*expressively*) It was pretty crazy. I mean, one minute we're fighting over what to have for dinner—

LAURA. Dan.

DAN. —the next, we're worried about *becoming* dinner. Ha. You know?

LAURA. (*under her breath*) Well, I don't think anyone was interested in *eating* us.

DAN. (*still looking right at the camera*) Figure of speech, hon.

LAURA. Never heard that one before.

DAN. *You* probably wouldn't have.

LAURA. (*a bit louder*) What's that supposed to—

EMILY. Well, I think—I think we should move on. Ahem. Rhymers—sorry, *rumors*—have been circulating on social media, primarily on a platform called, um, TikTok, about potential foul play being the cause of the fire. Can you two speak to that? Have you seen anyone or anything suspicious around the area?

DAN. The other day, I saw a girl near our parking lot wearing sweatpants that said “Jesus is my husband” on them, right across the butt.

LAURA. *Dan.*

DAN. Does that count as suspicious? (*funny guy*) I think it does.

LAURA. I’m sorry, he thinks he’s funny.

DAN. (*to the camera*) I mean, that’s gotta be at least three kinds of sacrilegious. Or maybe it was just well-intentioned but unfortunately communicated. What do you think, America? Should we give her the benefit of the doubt?

EMILY. My question was more about—

LAURA. I apologize for my husband. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

DAN. Do you think she meant it figuratively? Or literally? Because I saw a girl on Dateline who genuinely believed she was pregnant with an incarnation of Jesus. So feasibly, someone could be married to him, too.

LAURA. Dan, please. Grow up.

DAN. You sound like my wife. Oh, wait. (*He laughs, proud of himself.*)

LAURA. This is *live television*, Dan.

DAN. I’m sorry—(*He throws his hands up in mock apology.*)—but it just bothered me.

LAURA. Well, *maybe*—and here’s a suggestion, *Dan*—*maybe* it wouldn’t have *bothered* you so much if you hadn’t been staring at her *ass*—

EMILY. Whoa! Whoa, okay! Maybe I should find some other—

DAN. No, wait! Ahem. Wait. Sorry. Um, I don’t think we told you about the—the thing we saw, right... honey?

EMILY. (*interested now*) What thing?

DAN. There was a—

EMILY. Oh, actually—I’m sorry. Real quick, they’re telling me to ask you about your jobs. Also for the headline. I, um, I forgot. Sorry. What do you two do for a living?

LAURA. I run the marketing department? At MushyMashy? (*DAN laughs quietly. LAURA pretends not to notice.*)

EMILY. Really?! Wow! My two-year-old *loves* MushyMashy.

LAURA. You have children?

EMILY. Yes, three.

LAURA. Wow. (*to DAN*) I guess it’s *not* impossible to have children young and still have a successful career.

DAN. Wha—

LAURA. That’s just *so interesting*.

DAN. Okay, ha h—

LAURA. (to EMILY, ignoring DAN) What's her favorite flavor? I could probably get the company to send some over.

EMILY. Oh, you're too kind! She loves the gluten-free chickpea-kale-guava.

DAN. (aside) Gluten-free kale? Wow. (LAURA glares at him.)

LAURA. You should ask Dan what he does.

EMILY. Oh! Yes. Sure. What do you do... Dan?

DAN. (glaring at LAURA) I'm an actor.

EMILY. Whoa, that's pretty cool! Have I seen you in anything?

DAN. (charming) You tell me.

EMILY. Well, um, no, then.

DAN. Yeah, I'm usually in more alternative productions. Not for the average consumer.

LAURA. He means he did one window blind commercial and four weird short films.

DAN. Well, that's not—

LAURA. Oh, right, sorry. He was also in his friend's "improv showcase." (She makes the air quotes; DAN shakes his head at her. His glare is intense now.) What? Am I wrong?

DAN. Well, I've been trying to break into the industry, but if you don't have connections, you know, it can really—(LAURA leans across him to speak into the microphone.)

LAURA. Do you know what he did in the improv showcase? He *moved chairs around*. Clap for him, America!

DAN. Okay, you know what?

LAURA. No, *you* know what, Dan? You're not getting any younger. Your mother was right—(EMILY's watching, transfixed.)

DAN. Don't you *dare* bring my mother into this, Laura.

LAURA. Why? 'Cause you love her more than me?

DAN. You're being stupid.

LAURA. Oh, good one. You could be on Comedy Central with those roasts.

DAN. Yeah, well, that wasn't much of a roast either. It was a cold brew at best.

LAURA. Oh, ha ha!

DAN. Yeah, ha ha *ha!*

LAURA. (louder now) I can see why you'll make such a great actor—

DAN. —well, *thank you*—

LAURA. —as soon as you *get off your butt* and start actually being *good* at it—(EMILY comes to her senses.)

EMILY. Excuse me.

DAN. You have got to be *joking me*—

LAURA. You're not a good actor! You're not!

DAN. —*four years* at a conservatory, studying the Meisner technique—

EMILY. Excuse me!

LAURA. Oh, the *Meisner* technique! That's just—

DAN. —and you won't even take my auditions seriously—

LAURA. *What auditions? Huh? What—*

EMILY. EXCUSE ME! (*DAN and LAURA snap back to reality. LAURA is immediately flustered and ashamed; DAN crosses his arms, defiant.*) This is *live television*. I'm going to have to ask you to—(*DAN grabs the microphone from her.*)

DAN. I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry, America. It's just been—really hard—because our apartment burned down—and—(*He dissolves into “tears.” He really isn't a good actor, but EMILY is obviously moved.*) My wife and I are just a little stressed. We lost all of our belongings, you know? (*EMILY takes the microphone back.*)

EMILY. That is devastating. Truly devastating.

LAURA. Oh my God.

DAN. It was. It was really, really devastating. I had baseball cards—

LAURA. (*sarcastic*) Collectively worth about a hundred dollars!

DAN. It wasn't about the *money*. They had sentimental value.

EMILY. (*on DAN's side*) Yes, of course, sentimental value. That's priceless.

DAN. Now, I don't know what fire does to paper—

LAURA. —I'd imagine it *burns* it—

DAN. —but I doubt I'll ever see them again.

EMILY. What a shame, to have lost such a valuable possession.

DAN. Yes, I'm absolutely heartbroken. I keep thinking, if only I'd gone back and grabbed them... they were in my grandmother's old cookie tin... (*EMILY places a hand over her heart.*)

LAURA. (*slightly unhinged*) Our *cat* died, Dan. Our freaking *cat* was in there.

DAN. We both know that Schrödinger was really *your* cat.

EMILY. What a cute name for a cat!

LAURA. Yeah, well, thank you, he's *dead, Emily*.

EMILY. (*chastised*) I'm so sorry.

DAN. (*to EMILY*) Don't worry about it. Laura's extra pissy today.

LAURA. *Maybe because my apartment burned down and my cat died and my husband's a CHILD, Dan!*

DAN. Yeah, well, you're no picnic yourself!

EMILY. I *really* think I should maybe find someone else to—

DAN. No, no, no, um, let me tell you the story of our—our great escape.

LAURA. Oh my *God*, Dan, stop *working* the camera.

DAN. No, you have to hear this, America. It was... now that I think about it, it was actually a little strange.

LAURA. It was just a fire. Fires happen. Emily's probably right; I think we've overstayed our welcome—

DAN. Well, no, I'm actually curious to hear what people think about this.

LAURA. Dan, I need to call my—

DAN. Can you wait, like, a second?

LAURA. Oh, that's rich coming from you.

EMILY. (*anxious and looking around for help*) Will you just—will you tell us your story? Quickly?

DAN. Oh, absolutely. (*dramatic now*) Fade in to us in the apartment. It's a lovely afternoon. We're arguing about something—

LAURA. I don't know why he keeps bringing that up. It's hardly the most memorable thing that's happened today.

DAN. I just think we should be true to the details of the day.

LAURA. Then maybe you should tell them the *cause* of the argument, Dan!

DAN. That's not important.

LAURA. Oh, *I think it is*.

DAN. Not now, Laura. Anyway. All of a sudden, I'm like: Is it getting hot in here? (*LAURA grabs the mic.*)

LAURA. He's been cheating on me. (*EMILY gasps.*) Yeah, that's right.

DAN. (*ignoring LAURA*) Then: flames!—

LAURA. Cheating on me!! With a *man*—

DAN. —and they seem to be coming from our kitchen—

LAURA. —a man named *Chad*, for God's sake—

EMILY. Wait. Are you saying the fire started in your apartment?

DAN. —so I screamed, “Laura! Get the kids and run—”

LAURA. We don't have kids!

DAN. It's a *figure of speech*, Laura.

LAURA. *No it's not*, Dan.

EMILY. Did the fire start in your apartment kitchen?

LAURA. (*a bit wild*) Chad? Are you watching this news broadcast right now? Because I'm here to tell you that *I know*. I know about *everything*.

DAN. You have no proof! None! You're just jealous because he's a better person than you ever will be!

LAURA. Somehow, I don't think that's it, Dan! *I think I'm more pissed* because you're cheating on me!

EMILY moves away from DAN and LAURA, but the camera stays on the couple. EMILY tries to continue reporting and realizes that LAURA still has her microphone.

EMILY. This just in. A new possible source of the downtown Seattle fire—

DAN. I couldn't take it, Laura! I couldn't take one more day with you in that apartment, coming home to dry-ass chicken and your *stupid* reality TV on full blast and having to *pretend* you weren't driving me crazy—

LAURA. Coming home from *where*? Your nine-to-five job? Or from *Chad's duplex on Fourth Street?!?*

DAN. At least I'm trying to *make something of myself* instead of just climbing the freakin' corporate ladder like another brainless worker bee with—

LAURA. Yeah, that's the real problem, isn't it? You can't *stand* being financially dependent on your *wife's* successful career—

DAN. —*MushyMashy*, what kind of a name is *MushyMashy*—

EMILY. We have two key witnesses with us who will—

LAURA. —while *you* did a short film called *poo*, in all black-and-white, and all you did in it was *eat cereal*—

DAN. —it was about *capitalism*—

LAURA. —I'll never understand how you won't *bring a child into this world* but you can bring *three* avocados back from Whole Foods when I only asked for *two*—

DAN. —that's really it, I know, the avocados, this whole thing because of *avo*—

EMILY. Dan and Laura, can you *please* speak a little bit about—

LAURA. —we only needed *two avocados* for dinner, and you just—

EMILY. (*almost shouting*) Did the fire start in your kitchen?!

LAURA. —that was the *last straw*, Dan, the *last straw*—

DAN. —*avocados! Avo-freaking-cados*—

LAURA. —it's the *principle* of the thing, Dan! You bringing back three avocados from the grocery store tells me you're sleeping with stupid Chad—

DAN. —Chad went to *Boston College* and you're trying to tell me he's *stupid*—

LAURA. Chad has a mullet!

DAN. —if anything, *you're* the stupid one!

LAURA. *You're* the stupid one!

DAN. Oh, *nice comeback*.

LAURA. *FUCK YOU, DAN!*

DAN. *FUCK YOU, LAURA!*

EMILY. *STOP! PLEASE!* Please stop! (*DAN and LAURA pause mid-argument, both of them in angry tears. EMILY herself seems to be on the verge of tears.*) I just want—the *station* just wants to know if the fire started in your apartment. Please.

DAN. How the fuck would *I* know, *Emily??*

EMILY. (*offended*) Well, in that case... (*She looks over LAURA, who appears to be reconciling something deep within herself.*) Do you have anything to say?

LAURA. (*suddenly exploding*) Oh, just that not only did Dan, here, bring home *three* avocados, but he *also* stood right there in the kitchen, *by* the three avocados, in front of the dishes he *promised* to wash but didn't—because he's just about the laziest person I've ever married—stood right in front of me and told me, “Laura, I want a divorce”??? Did Dan leave that out of his little martyr story? (*EMILY claps her hands over her mouth, horrified. She can't look away.*)

DAN. Laura—

LAURA. It's my *birthday*, Dan. My birthday!!

DAN. I couldn't wait a second longer, Laura, not when you were standing there in your dumb tacky apron in that kitchen—I'm glad, by the way, that it burned down—

LAURA. (*quite hysterical*) My *birthday*. My fucking birthday!

DAN. —it's like, you have all the money, you have all the control—

LAURA. *I knew it!*

DAN. You know what? Give me your ring.

LAURA. My *what?*

DAN. Your ring. (*She doesn't respond; His agitation heightens.*) Our goddamn eternal circle of love. (*LAURA looks down at her engagement ring.*) Yes, *that* ring. Give it to me!

DAN lunges for LAURA's ring. She jumps back, out of the way, and they commence a pathetic circular chase around the stage. EMILY runs offstage, clearly seeking intervention. While DAN and LAURA are running:

LAURA. It's mine! It's my ring! You can't take it from me!

DAN. Give me my *ring*, Laura!

LAURA. That's not how it works, Dan! You made a vow! You can't just have it back!

DAN. I'm not wasting a goddamn *fortune* on you—

LAURA. —you cheapskate! It was always about money, wasn't it—

DAN. —You can't treat me like this! I've had *enough*—

LAURA. —will you stop *chasing me*, goddammit—

DAN. —give me the *ring*!!

LAURA breaks the circle by leaping onto the remains of the building. DAN stops, shocked, and doubles over, panting. LAURA holds the ring up like a prize trophy.

LAURA. Now maybe you'll listen!

DAN. *Never!* La la la la la—

LAURA. (*breaking down now*) Dan, *listen* to me! (*DAN glares up at her and plugs his ears.*)
Dan. Listen. Listen, Dan.

DAN. Four score and seven years ago—

LAURA. You can't cheat on me, Dan, and expect me to—

DAN. (*louder*) Four score and seven years ago—

LAURA. Oh God, Dan, please just *listen* to me!

DAN. (*yelling, his hands clapped over his ears*) Four score and—

LAURA. (*about to snap*) Do you not know *any other part of the Gettysburg Address??*

DAN. (*still yelling*) MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB! LITTLE LAMB! LITTLE LAMB!
MARY HAD A—

LAURA. (*sobbing*) Dan, you won't listen! You won't listen to me!

DAN. —FLEECE WAS WHITE AS SNOW! MARY HAD A—

LAURA. (*screaming, finally*) OH MY GOD, DAN, LISTEN TO ME!

EMILY runs back onstage, beckoning to the people who are seemingly following her. SHE points to DAN and LAURA.

EMILY. That's them, please, help—

LAURA. —YOU NEVER LISTEN, DAN! ELEVEN YEARS OF MARRIAGE AND YOU DON'T LISTEN! I THOUGHT—(*She takes a deep, shuddering breath and seems to calm herself, watching DAN as he covers his ears and glares resolutely up at her.*) I thought the fire would make you listen.

DAN freezes and slowly lowers his hands from his ears. EMILY gasps audibly and extends her shaking finger toward LAURA.

EMILY. You—but—you—

LAURA tries to force a strange smile. She sinks, sitting atop the rubble, still clutching her engagement ring. She holds it up to the light, slowly rotating it.

LAURA. (*deathly calm now*) I just wanted Dan to listen. (*SHE shakes her head endearingly.*) He never listens.

DAN. (*amazed*) I don't even know you.

EMILY. I have the police. The police are coming. Stay—stay there.

EMILY dashes offstage, presumably to gather the police. DAN turns to leave.

LAURA. (*in disbelief*) It didn't work. You didn't listen.

DAN merely stares up at LAURA, more confused than scared, trying to decipher who she is. A few long seconds pass, and then he shakes his head and runs off after EMILY. LAURA laughs pathetically. She sits there for a moment, then lifts her arm weakly and tosses the wedding ring downstage. It lands with a plink and a clatter at the center of the stage, where it cycles for some time and eventually comes to a silent stop. LAURA watches it the whole time, her eyes fixed on it until the lights go out.