

BEN & SARAH
By
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INT. CUBICLE - DAY

BEN (41), care-worn and rail-thin in non-ironic Buddy Holly specs, works at his computer on the right side of the cubicle. The rectangular double-cubicle looks like two singles pushed together with the dividing wall removed.

SARAH (37), bony, brainy and uncommonly pretty for any cubicle job, removes her coat as she enters the cubicle and sits at the computer on the left, opposite Ben's.

BEN

(shaking head in mock
disapproval)

Late again? And still your first month
on the job.

SARAH

Which means I'm still learning. We
can't all be like Ben.

BEN

Maybe one day you'll come to appreciate
the sacrifice the rest of us make to
get here on time. It's called
responsibility.

SARAH

Shouldn't you be giving a seminar
somewhere?

Ben opens his mouth. Nothing. Closes it.

BEN

Damn.

Sarah laughs and sits down at her computer. Ben, grinning, returns to typing. Moments later, Ben looks back at Sarah. He gazes at the back of her head, then turns back to his screen.

Ben's eyes fall on a surfer bobble-head next to his keyboard. He bounces the head with his finger. Ben turns

back to the computer and opens a web browser, pulling up TravelZoo.

INT. CUBICLE - EVENING

Sarah punches a few final keystrokes and gets to her feet, pulling on her coat. Ben follows suit.

SARAH

I thought responsible people worked late?

BEN

Those are just stupid people.

Ben and Sarah leave the cubicle together. A phone vibrates: BUZZ BUZZ. Ben removes a cell from his pocket.

CLOSE ON PHONE: "HOME CALLING . . . "

BEN GLANCES UP AT SARAH BRIEFLY AND REJECTS THE CALL.

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

Ben and Sarah cross the asphalt toward a group of cars.

BEN

. . . you know with work and life and everything. To just want to check out. Run away from stuff for a while.

Sarah adopts a look of exaggerated horror.

BEN (CONT'D)

But seriously, you're no good to people if you just crack one day. Sometimes the responsible thing to do is take a break.

SARAH

Sounds like a great sound-bite from your seminar.

Ben shoves Sarah away. Sarah sniggers and intentionally crashes into him as she bounces back.

Ben inconspicuously fixes his dislodged glasses.

SARAH (CONT'D)

It's true, though. I could already use a break from this place.

BEN

Then let's take a break. I've got some vacation time I can cash in and you've got . . . um, sick days.

Sarah laughs.

BEN (CONT'D)

I even have some Sky Miles I haven't used yet that could take the edge off.

Sarah studies him, as if for the first time.

SARAH

You're really serious.

BEN

You said it, we could both use a break.

A smile begins at the corners of her mouth.

INT. BEN'S HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Ben walks into the kitchen. His daughter LAURA (16), pretty in a pony tail and Evil Dead t-shirt, cooks dinner. The two youngest BENNY (3) and RACHEL (4) play behind the window curtains against the far wall. His wife ANNIE (39) shells peas very slowly into a bowl. She's in a wheelchair. She looks older than she is.

LAURA

(working at the stove)

Hey, Dad.

Ben steps to the table and rests a hand on Annie's shoulder.

BEN

Has Mom had her medicine yet tonight?

LAURA

On Tuesdays and Saturdays she only doses in the morning.

BEN

Oh, that's right.

Laura comes around and takes the bowl in front of Annie.

LAURA

That's enough, Mom.

Annie stops shelling, her hands hover where the bowl was.

After a beat Annie's hands lower to the table. Her right hand reaches up slowly toward Ben's, resting on her shoulder. Just before her hand touches his, Ben withdraws silently. Annie's hand lands on her own shoulder. She turns slowly to see Ben disappear into the other room.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Ben sits on the edge of his bed. He takes out his phone. A new e-mail. He checks it.

CLOSE ON PHONE: A picture of an island paradise with white sand, palm trees, and hula dancers is preceded by a brief line of text: "What do you think?"

Ben smiles.

CLOSE ON PHONE: Ben types, "When do we leave? :)"

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Sarah's office chair touches Ben's as they talk and point at Ben's screen. The computer has two browsers open: one with flight details and the other with pictures of exotic locales.

BEN

It makes more sense to leave at the beginning of the week when flights are cheaper and airports are less crowded.

SARAH

You can't start a Caribbean vacation on a Monday! And we have the Adobe project to finish.

BEN

Fine. We finish the project Monday and

leave after work. Here, why don't we
run it by our travel agent. The
impartial judge.

Ben turns to the surfer bobble-head on the desk between
them.

BEN (CONT'D)

Do you think we should leave next
Monday?

Ben bops the surfer head. It nods vigorously. Sarah rolls
her eyes.

FOOTSTEPS approach. Ben pulls up a spreadsheet and
continues talking with a serious expression. Sarah plays
along. A man walks past the cubicle entrance and glances
in.

The man passes and Sarah bursts into silent laughter. She
leans forward laughing and steadies herself on Ben's arm.
Ben steals a glance down at Sarah's hand as her hair
brushes against his nose.

She pulls back, still laughing.

SARAH

I feel like a teenager!

Ben's office PHONE RINGS. He answers it, grinning.

LAURA (O.S.)

Dad? It's Laura.

Ben's smile vanishes. His eyes flit to Sarah.

BEN

(loudly)

Oh! Hey, how's it goin'?

LAURA (O.S.)

Can you come pick me up?

Ben covers the receiver and mouths "Sorry" to Sarah. Sarah
mouths "No problem" and wheels back to her computer.

Ben spins around and huddles low to the desk.

BEN
Sweetheart, what's wrong? Something
happen at school?

LAURA (O.S.)
Um, no. I'm not at school.

Ben's features harden.

BEN
Why aren't you at school, Laura?

Laura begins to cry. Ben softens. He massages his forehead.

BEN (CONT'D)
Where are you sweetie?

EXT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Ben pulls up to a red-eyed Laura. She gets in. He drives.

INT. BEN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Ben stares ahead. Laura gazes out the passenger window.

BEN
What happened?

Laura rubs her nose with a shirt sleeve.

LAURA
I'm just an idiot. I left school with
Derek and his friend.

BEN
Is this the Derek?

LAURA
Yeah.

BEN
And the gas station?

LAURA
They thought it would be funny to leave
me there.

BEN

I thought you and Derek were kind
of . . .

LAURA

We are. We were.

The tires on the asphalt HUM against the road.

BEN

You know, Laura, the kind of
irresponsible guy who asks you to ditch
school and then leaves you at a gas
station is probably not the kind of guy
—

LAURA

Could we do this part later, Dad.

Ben looks at Laura for a beat, then turns back to the road.

BEN

Yeah. Sure.

INT. BEN'S HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

The family eats around the dinner table.

BEN

So there's a work conference next
week . . .

Laura pokes at her food. Rachel steals a crinkle-fry from
Benny.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's on the coast, so I'll have to fly.
It's a week-long thing, but it could
move me up for a promotion.

Ben turns to Annie. She nods and slowly clasps his hand.
Ben smiles and takes his hand back, occupying it with a
utensil.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'll bring you all back something.

TITLE CARD: "NEXT MONDAY MORNING"

MONTAGE - BEN GETS THROUGH MONDAY

-Alarm goes off. Ben sits up and stops it. He smiles.

-Ben zips shut a suitcase. He glances at Annie sitting up in bed. He gestures questioningly at a collapsed wheelchair between the night-stand and the bed. Annie shakes her head slowly. Ben half-leans down, stops, squeezes her hand, and strides out of the room, suitcase rolling behind him.

-Ben strolls down a cubicle filled corridor at work like he owns the place.

-He skips into his own cubicle. Sarah is on the phone. As he passes, Ben lightly kicks her chair's height lever, suddenly dropping it several inches. An involuntary shriek escapes her. Sarah looks up at Ben, who winks. Sarah apologizes into the phone.

-Ben and Sarah get up from their chairs in unison at the end of the day. They smile at one another and leave together. Ben doubles back into the cubicle, snatches the surfer bobble-head off his desk, and pockets it.

END MONTAGE

INT. PARKING GARAGE - EVENING

Ben pops the trunk and silently removes suitcases while Sarah collects her things from the passenger seat. His phone BUZZES once. Ben checks the new text.

CLOSE ON PHONE: "Could you pick up milk on your way home? - Laura"

Ben stares down at the text.

EXT. AIRPORT - EVENING

Ben and Sarah stroll toward a terminal entrance, pausing for a teenage girl and middle-aged woman in a wheelchair to pass.

Ben stares after them.

INT. AIRPORT - CHECK-IN COUNTER - EVENING

Sarah chats with the airline attendant and presents ID.

Another BUZZ. Ben checks his phone.

CLOSE ON PHONE: "Oops! Sorry, I forgot you were leaving tonight. Have fun! - Laura"

Ben stares numbly down at his phone.

TEENAGE GIRL (O.S.)

Damnit!

Ben looks up. The teenager who passed them entering the terminal struggles with the older woman's wheelchair brake.

BEN

Here.

The TEENAGE GIRL starts slightly, surprised to see Ben at her side. Ben kneels and works deftly with the brake. It un-jams.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ours sticks too.

TEENAGE GIRL

Thanks.

The girl pushes the woman and the wheelchair off down the corridor. Ben watches.

EMPLOYEE (O.S.)

Excuse me, sir?

Ben turns.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Any baggage you'll be checking?

Ben stares for a beat, then gazes back down the corridor.

Sarah looks up from rummaging in her purse.

Ben turns back to Sarah. He takes her by the arm and pulls her away from the desk.

BEN

I'm sorry, Sarah. I can't.

SARAH

You don't have to check the bag, Ben;
carry-on is fine.

BEN

No. I mean I can't.

SARAH

What? This was your idea.

BEN

I'm sorry, it's complicated.

SARAH

Why? Because you're married?

Ben freezes. He blinks. He blinks again.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I know what it's like to not feel
appreciated at home. To feel trapped by
a life you don't recognize anymore.

Sarah's fingers interlock with his.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I like you, Ben. I don't expect you to
leave your family for me or
anything . . . but you deserve this.

Ben gazes at Sarah.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Sometimes taking a break is the
responsible thing.

Sarah smiles softly up at him.

INT. BEN'S HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Laura dances between stove, cupboards, and counter
preparing dinner. Annie sits at the table slowly peeling
carrots. Benny and Rachel play with toys underneath the
table.

The FRONT DOOR OPENS and CLOSES. FOOTSTEPS cross from the
entryway into the kitchen.

Laura glances up briefly.

LAURA

Hey Dad.

Ben opens the fridge, holding a new gallon of milk.

LAURA (CON'T)

Oh! Wait. What about your trip?

BEN

(holding up the gallon)

Milk right?

Ben leans down into the fridge. Two full gallons of milk fill the space.

LAURA

Yeah, I already got some. Was the flight canceled?

Ben gazes down at the milk.

BEN

Yeah.

Ben stares for another beat, then finds a place for his milk.

He opens a drawer beside Laura, kisses her on the head, and removes a peeler. Ben walks back to the table and pulls out the chair next to Annie. He pauses before sitting, leans down, and kisses Annie on the head.

Annie stops peeling for a beat, then continues.

Ben sits, grabs a carrot, and starts peeling.

A plastic CLATTER.

Ben looks down. The surfer bobble-head lies face down on the tile. Benny reaches out from under the table and grabs it.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.