

THE CALLBACK

Written by

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FADE IN ON

INT. BATHROOM - TRAIN - DAY

ALEXANDRA (19, pretty, long dark hair, jeans/trainers, and a chip on her shoulder so large her posture is often stooped) is on her knees on the floor of a bathroom in a moving train.

She HUMS tunelessly as her hands search quickly through a PURPLE SUITCASE of neatly folded clothes.

A DING of a message on a phone. She gets it out, reads: "Sorry - they passed - didn't want someone who did reality TV. It's time to re-evaluate how this agency can help you. M."

Alexandra writes a reply: "Maybe I need to re-evaluate when was the last time I earned a fucking penny with you as my agent?". Presses Send.

Another DING: "Cannot Send: no credit".

She takes a deep breath, unfurls her hair and rebinds it.

Alexandra rummages carelessly now, finds a perfume, sprays a bit in the air, sniffs, then throws it back in the case, not bothering to replace the top.

At the bottom she finds a SILVER LOCKET. She grins.

Engraved on the inside is "Love, Dad". A grimace.

Alexandra shoves the locket in her small backpack, closes the mused-up case - forcing the clasps shut- and opens the door.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Alexandra checks she's not being watched and returns the purple suitcase to the floor rack she took it from.

She clocks an empty isolated seat with a bag and coat on it.

Sitting a few seats away from the empty seat: an elderly lady RUTH ABRAMS(65, elegantly-dressed, looks like she might need help lifting her luggage, but you might be scared to offer). Her eyes are closed.

Alexandra walks by, humming to herself, smoothly lifts the coat as she passes.

In the pocket she finds a wallet, takes some money but not all, does an about turn - and the coat is replaced precisely.

Alexandra falls into a nearby seat, across the aisle from Ruth. Ruth's eyes are closed.

Alexandra gets the Actors and Performer's Yearbook out of her backpack, and peeks from behind it at the seat she's just stolen from. A man returns to it, clearly none-the-wiser. Alexandra visibly relaxes.

She realizes that Ruth is awake and staring at her. Alexandra puts the book down.

RUTH
Are you an actor?

Ruth points at the book.

Alexandra sighs, gestures at the book as if to say it's obvious she is.

Ruth waves her elegantly manicured hand.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I don't mean to pry--

ALEXANDRA
You're not prying. Yes I'm an actor.

Alexandra flicks through the book quickly.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)
A skint one.

RUTH
Still waiting for the big role?

Alexandra smiles wryly.

ALEXANDRA
Had the big role. TV series.

RUTH
And...?

Alexandra gives Ruth a suspicious look.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I apologise, professional curiosity that's all. My name's Ruth Abrams, I run a drama school.

ALEXANDRA
Oh. A drama school.

Alexandra laughs wryly - but also appears more interested, more focused.

RUTH
What's wrong with drama school?

ALEXANDRA
I wouldn't know.

RUTH
Why didn't you go?

ALEXANDRA
Money. Other things, the usual.

RUTH
Ah.

It goes quiet for a few beats. Alexandra is still keeping an eye on the guy down the carriage she stole from.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(tentatively)
You must have got an agent from the TV show.

ALEXANDRA
I did - the producer's agent.

RUTH
Well that's...great. What an opportunity.

ALEXANDRA
The producer was a dirty old fuck.

RUTH
Well...some of them are --

ALEXANDRA
I didn't work out for him. Not the way HE wanted.

Alexandra makes a masturbation hand-gesture.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)
So it didn't work out for ME.

RUTH
(nodding)
I see.

Thoughtful for a moment.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (nodding)
 Things ARE changing--

ALEXANDRA
 (interrupts)
 metoo? Bullshit.

She laughs cynically.

RUTH
 If you call it bullshit--

ALEXANDRA
 (does a Ruth-impression)
 It's OK to have two X chromosomes,
 if you speak like you.

Both are silent for a couple of beats.

RUTH
 The most common way people give up
 their power is thinking--

ALEXANDRA
 (interrupts)
 ...they don't have any. Yes I've read
 Alice Walker too. You know she's
 anti-semitic right?

This takes Ruth by surprise. She has clearly jewish features.

RUTH
 Yes. I know.

But she is made of stern stuff.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 My parents were working class. I
 had to train on a scholarship. How
 do you think I came to speak like
 this?

Alexandra's body language softens.

ALEXANDRA
 (calming)
 Oh, look, I--

RUTH
 (interrupts)
 That's one of the reasons we have a scholarship, so people from my background could attend top drama schools.

A beat. She continues.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 People with YOUR background.

ALEXANDRA
 Ha! People like me at your drama school?

RUTH
 We'd want people with EXACTLY your family background to apply.

A pause. This sinks in. Alexandra is more erect and hopeful. She visibly gathers strength to say the next thing.

ALEXANDRA
 Should I...apply?

A longer silence, Ruth looks out of the window and speaks without facing Alexandra.

RUTH
 I can't have a petty public transport thief risk the reputation of our school.

Alexandra looks like she's been slapped in the face.

ALEXANDRA
 (whisper)
 You were awake.

Ruth looks through the gap between the seats. The TRAIN CONDUCTOR has entered first class. Ruth raises her hand to wave to the conductor.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)
 (hisses)
 I'll return the cash.

RUTH
 You'll steal it again tomorrow. You think the world deserves it.

Alexandra gets up. She moves away from the conductor. Then stops.

She sighs, raises her head and looks right at Ruth and straightens up. She walks quickly towards the conductor and leads him by the arm to where she and Ruth are sitting.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Excuse me--

Alexandra stands between them. Her face is a mask of worry.

ALEXANDRA

Please...

Her voice is just loud enough for Ruth and the conductor to hear.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

(ever so middle-class)

Please don't call the police. She didn't mean to harm anyone.

RUTH

Excuse me, I think--

Alexandra turns to Ruth and takes her face in her hands.

ALEXANDRA

(miserable, begging)

Ruth, please just be quiet, if I just tell the truth I'm sure all will be forgiven.

She hugs Ruth who doesn't resist, so astonished is she. Alexandra turns back to the conductor, hushed tones, desperate.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

My step-mother gets so upset because of her condition. She's had so much trauma in her life it's made her unwell. Her age, you know...

Alexandra's pleading voice and demonstrative grasping of the conductor surprises him into silence.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

I promise it won't happen again. She's not a bad person, she didn't want to steal. She gets upset, agitated.

A tear falls from Alexandra's eye.

CONDUCTOR

Don't worry. Is she ok? Why would I call the police?

Alexandra takes the money from her backpack. Thrusts it into the conductor's hand. Ruth is silent now - watching. Alexandra can certainly act - in fact her performance is luminous.

ALEXANDRA

I have to watch her constantly. But I had to leave her for two minutes - I needed the loo.

Alexandra points at the gentleman she stole the money. She is crying fully now.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

She took it from his coat. She didn't mean any harm. She's not herself anymore. Please can you explain to him?

The conductor is entirely on her side. He is shocked but wants to comfort her. Alexandra looks him in the eyes deeply, then looks straight into Ruth's eyes.

Pleading eyes.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

Please. I'll make sure nothing else happens for the rest of the journey.

The conductor nods and squeezes her arms.

CONDUCTOR

It's ok. I'll explain. Do you need anything? Some water?

He looks at Ruth questioningly too, she doesn't respond. The conductor walks up to the man who was stolen from, and crouches beside him, discretely returns the money, explains in hushed tones. The man looks back shocked, but nods in understanding.

Alexandra sits back down, wipes her face. Ruth sighs.

RUTH

If that was an audition my dear, it would have clinched a scholarship. Out of professional courtesy, I will not call back the conductor.

Alexandra takes a deep breath and holds it for a few moments of silence.

RUTH (CONT'D)

But really...you could never apply to my school. You're a thief who doesn't want to get caught.

A beat.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We'd have to pass.

Alexandra eyes close, she looks like someone has taken the wind out of her. She almost struggles to stand.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Don't go too far from your step-mother.

Alexandra sits and stares out of the window away from Ruth, a defeated stance. A single tear falls down her cheek out of sight of Ruth, not an act for anyone.

Some time later, the train pulls into Ruth's station. Ruth gets up and walks past Alexandra without a glance. Ruth picks up from the rack the PURPLE SUITCASE Alexandra stole from earlier.

Alexandra is shocked when she realises whose case it is.

She wipes her cheeks, she rummages through her backpack and finds the beautiful silver locket. She stares at it and looks out at Ruth walking away, repeats this cycle a couple of times. The BLEEPING doors spur her into action.

Alexandra sprints and stands at the train exit, just inside the door.

ALEXANDRA

(to Ruth)

Hey!

Ruth looks back - Alexandra lets the locket fall into sight beneath her hand while holding the chain.

Ruth's eyes go wide. Her face sets in anger.

She strides back towards Alexandra and takes the locket.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

I've had every opportunity. I don't need any more.

The door bleeps.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)
But I am truly sorry.

Alexandra takes a step back and raises her hand in a goodbye. The door shuts in front of Alexandra, separating them.

The WHISTLE goes and Alexandra sees the platform conductor waving off the train.

Alexandra watches Ruth start to press the button, but the door won't open, it's too late, the train's ready to go.

She sees Ruth look up the platform and raise her arm, her lips moving. Alexandra can't hear through the glass. She sighs resignedly, unfurls her hair and starts to smooth it. Doesn't try to run away. The cries get louder, so they can be heard through the glass.

RUTH
Stop! Stop the train! Help me!

Alexandra looks out the side of the door window, and sees the train conductor has got off the train and is approaching Ruth. Alexandra sees Ruth pointing at her. Alexandra nods her head, puts her hair band back on.

There are tears on Ruth's face. The conductor looks very worried and presses the button to open the door in front of Alexandra.

ALEXANDRA
(to conductor)
It's true, I'm sorry. I didn't take anything else.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
It's ok. How did you get separated?

RUTH
(sobbing)
I don't know. I didn't mean to get off without her. I'm sorry.

Alexandra realises that Ruth is not reporting her, but is continuing the earlier performance. A smile flickers on her face, that she quickly hides it from the conductor. Ruth is as good an actor as Alexandra.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Alexandra steps off and pulls Ruth into her arms.

ALEXANDRA

It's ok, it's ok, I'm here now,
sorry I lost you...

After a few moments, Alexandra nods at the train and platform conductors.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

Sorry, we got separated. She'll be
ok now. Thank you so much. This is
our stop. I'm sorry.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR

You're sure? Have you got
everything?

Alexandra nods.

The train conductor boards and the platform conductor whistles again and waves. Alexandra hugs Ruth while the train pulls out.

FADE TO BLACK.