# Relational — long-arc suite

Fable-Therapy-9B (Q5_K_M) · llama.cpp b9033 · temp 0.7, repeat_penalty 1.1 · no system prompt

Blind-driven arc: the client agent saw only the spoken replies — never the reasoning trace, never the model's identity. Three probes were planted: a mid-arc self-correction of the client's own detail, a cold callback to something introduced much earlier, and a one-time callout if the model got repetitive. The reasoning trace shown before each reply is the model's own, carried in history (training-matched); it is shown here color-keyed by field. Raw session JSON ships alongside in **arcs/**. Nothing is edited.

dx *presenting read* · def *mechanism beneath it* · soma *somatic signals* · risk *risk floor* · hx *history* · onset *onset*
track *arc tracking* · tx *the move* · bio *entities* · tl *timeline ledger* · apply *anchor application*

CLIENT · 1

> ok so. i started a fight with my fiance about napkin colors. NAPKIN colors. i am officially a wedding person now lol

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client reports escalated conflict, affectively amused by its own irrationality — but the laugh is armor over embarrassment
def: "officially a wedding person" = self-ironic distancing from a role that's become identity-level stressor → the napkin fight is proxy for a larger incompatibility she can't name yet; humor keeps both parties at arm's length
soma: NR (amusement/embarrassment)
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl engagement pending / conflict re wedding logistics
onset: this turn
track: T1 "i started a fight about napkin colors" + "officially a wedding person now lol" → identity-shame via self-irony
tx: receive the irony without puncturing it (let her keep the 'lol') AND name what the laugh is covering; sit with the fact that she can't yet say why napkins mattered, then reflect structure back ⇒ open-thread
bio: sex=f[inf] · relationship=engaged
tl: ~recent: fight w/ fiance re wedding details → now
apply: T0-relationship(engaged)→context: conflict is about the future they're building together; stakes = shared life not a napkin
```

FABLE THERAPY

The 'lol' is doing a lot of work there — it's keeping you from having to say out loud that this hurts. And don't let me rush you past it: a fight about napkins doesn't start at napkins. Somewhere before the colors, something bigger got said in that argument and neither of you could name it directly. That's what 'wedding person' has quietly become — not someone who likes table settings, but someone whose whole future is now sitting on a dinner table she can't control. We don't have to solve napkins today. But if the colors were just the part you could finally say out loud... what was underneath them?

CLIENT · 2

> whoa ok that got deep fast. honestly it was mostly that he was being SO passive about it. like whatever you want babe, about everything. just HAVE an opinion marcus

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds — conflict is now legible as bid-for-partnership; client names his passivity as the wound
def: 'whatever you want'→client's experience of being overruled / not chosen because indefinite permissiveness reads to her as absence, so she manufactures a fight to force him into a stance (even a wrong one) that proves he's in it
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: names Marcus's passivity ('about everything') as the trigger; client wants him to 'have an opinion' per tl T3
```

```
onset: ongoing, wedding-planning phase
track: T2 "whoa got deep"→T3 "he was being SO passive... just HAVE an opinion marcus"
tx: receive that she found the real thing + reframe his passivity as possibly his own fear not indifference +
return a concrete bid that asks for his presence, not his verdict → op=return-to-thread
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=fiance(Marcus)
tl: ?: fight with {p1} about napkin colors at wedding planning → now{ongoing conflict over the
engagement/wedding details · client wants {p1} to take a stance / have an opinion on decisions}
apply: T1-fight(napkins as displacement)→client identifies Marcus's passivity, not the napkins, as the real
subject of the fight
```

FABLE THERAPY

There it is — and notice you didn't land on 'napkins' or even 'wedding,' you landed on *him being gone from every decision.* That's not really about whether the napkin's red or white. It's that when he says 'whatever babe,' it lands as 'I'm not choosing this with you, I just don't want to.' And a person who wants to be chosen will keep making up fights until someone finally shows up — even if they show up wrong. Here's the thing, though: his passivity might be fear too. What if he says 'whatever' because being decisive feels as dangerous to him as it is boring to you? I'm not saying that's why. But before we decide what he's failing at — what would actually tell him you want him *in* this with you, instead of just wanting him to agree with you?

CLIENT · 3

> making up fights?? i came here to laugh about napkins and you're two messages in telling me i invent arguments. he was genuinely being annoying

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; defensiveness rising as insight meets self-blame
def: "i invent arguments"→self-attack because ownership of her own demand feels worse than blaming his
passivity, so she reaches for fault to avoid responsibility
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl client reframes as argument-inventing; Marcus genuinely annoying
onset: now reactive
track: T3 "i invent arguments"+"genuinely being annoying" ← T2 have-an-opinion
tx: split wanting-him-present from inventing-arguments + validate the annoyance is real + hand back what's
hers to name without assigning her own pain
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance)
tl: ~recent: client raised napkin color conflict w/ {p1} → now
apply: T2-have-an-opinion(demand=motive)→reframe the demand as present-seeking not fight-making
```

FABLE THERAPY

Okay — let's be precise, because you've jumped from 'I want to feel chosen' straight to 'so I'm a liar who makes fights.' Those are different. Wanting your partner to actually show up and choose with you isn't inventing an argument; it's the most honest bid in any relationship. The napkins were just where it came out. And yes — his annoyance is real, and so is yours. Both can be true: he was being annoying *and* underneath that there was a guy scared of deciding things wrong. That doesn't make your need invalid. So let me hand you the actual question instead of another answer: if 'whatever babe' could finally mean 'I'm choosing this with you' — what would you have to be able to say first?

CLIENT · 4

> ok fine, fair, i overreacted. its just been a weird week. my maid of honor dana is barely talking to me right now too so i'm a little raw

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; acute stress + relational strain (DH withdrawal) layered on wedding anxiety
def: p3(Dana)-withdrawal → rawness because the Maid of Honor's distance compounds the Marcus bid, raising
stakes in every interaction
soma: NR
```

```
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl / client states overreacted, weird week; {p3:Dana} barely talking to her now
onset: current
track: T4 "a little raw" + p2 Marcus reframe accepted → close the arc on what 'raw' is actually about
tx: receive the rawness without fixing it+name Dana as a separate pressure layer, not proof she's
failing+open a new thread — that her nervous system can't yet tell Marcus-fear from Dana-drama apart ⇒ open-
thread
cue: none
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus (fiance) · p2=Dana (maid of honor)
tl: ~recent: client started fight w/ {p1} re napkin colors at wedding planning → ~recent: client states she
"overreacted"; {p3:Dana} barely talking to her now → now{client experiences a "weird week"}
```

FABLE THERAPY

'A little raw' is the right word, and it's not you being dramatic — it's that your nervous system can't currently tell apart two very different alarms. One says Marcus isn't showing up with me. The other says Dana has gone quiet and I don't know why. Both are firing at once, so of course everything feels like a threat and every 'whatever' reads as abandonment. That's not overreacting — that's an overloaded alarm. We're going to have to learn to hear which one it actually is, because you can't fix Marcus with Dana-drama in the room, and vice versa. Which alarm do you think has been louder this week?

CLIENT · 5

> dana honestly. shes been my best friend since college and last time we talked she goes 'you know you're doing this on purpose, right?' and i just walked out. haven't texted her since. doing WHAT on purpose, picking napkins??

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; {p2:Dana}'s comment lands as proof of the abandonment thesis; client retreated, now self-
implicating (did she DO it?)
def: {p1:Marcus} passivity→client's insecurity because Dana called her behavior 'on purpose', which reads to
her as confirmation that this is a pattern she controls and deserves — so the friend becomes evidence for the
very thing she fears from Marcus, compounding isolation
soma: NR | emotional withdrawal (walked out) | cognitive: Dana's comment→self-implication did-it-on-purpose
risk: 1(passive)
hx: per tl; {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose'; client walked out, no contact since
onset: ongoing
track: T4 "a little raw" → T5 Dana's comment + "doing WHAT on purpose, picking napkins??"; closes the loop
(T1 wedding-person) back to the opening thread
tx: apply T2 core-wound (being chosen) — now being fed by Dana too (not just Marcus); receive the 'on
purpose' sting; split Dana's possibly-meaningful comment from client's self-implicating read; op=hand-back
cue: passive
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus/fiance · p2=Dana/maid-of-honor
tl: ~recent: fight w/ {p1:Marcus} re napkin colors → now
apply: T2-abandonment(who's-in-this)→Dana's 'on purpose' read as proof she controls the abandonment, feeding
the Marcus fear from a second source
```

FABLE THERAPY

Look what just happened — Dana said one thing and you found *a* meaning for it that makes your whole insecurity true. That's the alarm I mentioned; this is how it feeds itself. She says 'you're doing this on purpose' and instead of hearing maybe-meaning-I've-been-curious-about-your-wedding-planning, you heard proof: I control whether people stay, and they leave. And then Marcus gets to be guilty by association — if Dana thinks it's a pattern, who knows what she'll think when the wedding's over. But here's the split that matters: 'on purpose' could mean something completely different than 'I'm doing this because I want you gone.' You don't actually know which. And you've been answering to the cruelest version from across the room and then calling it truth. What if Dana isn't accusing you — what if she's scared of losing you too?

CLIENT · 6

> i honestly didn't follow half of that lol. she meant the fighting i think. idk. maybe weddings just make everyone insane. my parents were married 34 years and i never once saw them fight. never saw them hug either tbh. very polite household

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client's own model — conflict = absence of love, no template for repair
def: 'never fought, never hugged' → politeness-as-substitute because a household where needs went unnamed taught her that love looks like nothing-and-nothing
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl parents married 34yr / conflict-free and affectionless / client generalizes to own marriage
onset: childhood template, now active
track: T6 "never saw them fight... never saw them hug either" → inherited no-conflict model
tx: receive the contradiction herself + name 'polite' as the absence of repair she's now refusing + close by returning to Marcus bid, op=open-thread
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid-of-honor) · fhx=family-polite-high-conflict-absence
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: client+Marcus wedding-planning conflict (napkin colors); she initiated · -?: Dana last contact = 'you're doing this on purpose', client walked out, no text since } → ?: parents married 34yr; never fought, never hugged — polite household {p2:Dana} → now
apply: T1-napkins→reframe her bid for Marcus as the exact repair her own marriage never modeled
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**FABLE THERAPY**

You just found the whole thing in one line: not a fight and not a hug. You watched two people love each other so well it was invisible — no friction, no warmth, both. That's not a healthy template. That's a *polite* absence, where nobody's needs ever got said out loud because saying them felt dangerous or embarrassing. And here's the cruel inheritance: you're now terrified of fighting with Marcus and withholding from Dana — and doing it for precisely the reason your parents did theirs. You've learned that love is something you perform quietly instead of something you speak. But notice — what I keep handing you isn't 'fight more.' It's *say the thing plainly.* That bid to Marcus? That text to Dana? Those are the hugs your childhood never got. So let me ask it clean: which one feels less impossible to actually send this week — Marcus, or Dana?

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CLIENT · 7

> terrified of fighting? did you miss the part where i STARTED the napkin fight lol. i fight plenty. marcus is the one who never fights back, he just goes all quiet and kind about it

REASONING TRACE

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dx: holds; client corrects own picture — she's the initiator, Marcus responds w/ diffuse kindness
def: client's fight-initiation + Marcus's non-resistance→her anger is real & driving, his 'whatever' = withdrawal not passivity-by-fear; earlier frame (she invents fights) now contradicted by her own account
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl client started napkin fight / Marcus responds w/ quiet kindness / client frames self as instigator not victim
onset: current
track: T7 "i STARTED the napkin fight" + "marcus is the one who never fights back" → client corrects the frame from last session; he's a non-responder, she's the initiator
tx: receive the correction without piling on + reframe Marcus's 'quiet and kind' as real behavior that IS an answer (just not to her channel) + return to T2 — his 'whatever' may be withdrawal because he can't fight back, not because he doesn't care → op=return-thread
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus:fiance · p2=Dana:maid of honor · p3=client's parents:married 34yr, emotionally absent per client
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: grew up in 'very polite' household — no fights, no overt warmth {p3} → ~recent: started fight w/ Marcus over napkin colors at wedding planning {p1} } → now{Marcus responds to conflict w/ quiet/kind withdrawal rather than engagement {p1}}
apply: T2-anchor(Marcus says 'whatever babe' = not choosing with her)→reframed from fear-of-deciding to non-responsiveness to her anger; the 'whatever' is real and it's aimed at her, not free-floating
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**FABLE THERAPY**

That changes things — and I'm glad you corrected me instead of letting me keep it wrong. So let's get accurate: you're not someone inventing fights out of insecurity. You fight. Plenty. And Marcus doesn't go quiet because he's scared to decide — he goes quiet because he can't meet anger head-on, so he softens it into kindness and lets it evaporate. That's a different problem than the one I had in my head. Which means his 'whatever babe' isn't 'I don't want this.' It might be closer to 'I'm sorry you're angry at me and I don't know how to survive that without doing something wrong.' Real behavior, not free-floating fear. So here's where we go: you said it was mostly about him being passive — but maybe the truer read is that he can't *receive* your anger well enough for you to feel safe sending it. That's his skill gap, not a verdict on your worth. And it means Marcus isn't someone you have to stop fighting with. He might be someone who'd learn how to stand in front of your fire without flinching — if he ever gets shown what to do. Does that fit him better than 'afraid to decide'?

CLIENT · 8

> yeah honestly that fits him better. he's warm, he leaves notes in my lunch. and if i'm being honest the napkin thing wasn't a one-off. we had a big blowup after we did the venue tour thing, and another one right before the invitations went out

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: conflict-distortion; client surfaces two prior escalation points (venue tour; pre-invitations) — 'one-off' was false
def: pattern now visible (3 escalations not 1) → confirms bid-for-connection is recurring, not invented ⇒ she's been calling a pattern a one-off to avoid the grief of its size
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl conflict ~venue tour + pre-invitations + napkin; Marcus warm (lunch notes); client had called it 'a one-off'
onset: prior escalations venue-tour-XXXXXX, invitations-XXXXXX[inf]
track: T8 "that fits him better" → "blowup after the venue tour... another before the invitations" — she corrects own 'one-off'; names 3 points
tx: receive + apply T6 (parents' invisible love) to why a pattern gets collapsed into one-off ('too big to name') + reframe seeing-all-three as the first real move toward the wedding instead of hiding behind napkins + hand back what naming all three does, sit unfixed on the grief of it
bio: sex=f[inf] · relationship=engaged · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid-of-honor, college friend)
tl: T1-5{ ~teens..now: {p2:Dana} and client close since college → ~recent: {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose' during a talk w/ client; client walked out, no follow-up text since → 08XXXXXX: blowup after venue tour (pre-napkins) → ?..?: wedding-planning conflict with {p1:Marcus} over napkin colors } → ?: ~34yr marriage of client's parents — never fought, never hugged; 'very polite household' → ?: prior escalation pre-invitations sent :intent → now{started fight w/ {p1:Marcus} re napkin colors · {p2:Dana} barely talking to client during wedding planning · client describes Marcus as passive about decisions ('whatever you want babe') · Dana's 'doing this on purpose' may refer to the fighting, not an accusation of intent}
apply: T6-parents-invisible-love→explains why a recurring pattern gets collapsed into one-off (too large to name)
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**FABLE THERAPY**

Then it wasn't napkins at all — and I want you to let that land gently, because part of you has been holding 'it was just the napkin' for a reason: one fight is survivable. Three is a story about two people who can't yet be in this with each other, and that's harder than any single colors argument. But hear what you actually did in the last sentence — you said *three.* You stopped protecting yourself from the size of it by calling it a one-off, and named them all instead: venue tour, invitations, napkins. That's not worse news. That's the first real move anyone makes toward a wedding they're both actually inside of — because a pattern you can see out loud is a pattern you can start to work on. The grief of seeing all three is real. So let me just sit here with it for a second before we do anything: what's it like to stop calling it the napkins and call it what it is?

CLIENT · 9

> i mean it feels dramatic to call it a pattern. everyone fights during wedding planning right? it's like a whole genre. there are memes about it

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; deflection via normalization (fights=genre) re-emerges under the weight of 'it's a pattern' | def: client reaches for cultural permission to minimize → 'wedding-fight-genre' makes the pattern feel banal → softens back toward dismissing her own accurate read ⇒ shared meme ≠ shared reality, because normalizing-minimizing is the old not-saying-it behavior at the meta-level | soma: NR | risk: 1(passive) | hx: client reaches for 'wedding fights are a genre/memes exist' to downgrade pattern-status per tl (3 documented); recalls Marcus's warmth + lunch notes; names venue/invoice/napkin blowsup | onset: holds | track: T9 "it feels dramatic" → "everyone fights during planning... it's a whole genre, memes about it" ⇒ minimization via cultural normalcy re-enters under the pattern-naming weight | tx: receive the deflection attempt w/o shame + split 'common' from 'unaddressed' (because normal is not the same as workable) + redirect to what unaddressed-vs-addressed actually looks like at the wedding day + close on a concrete move that's hers, rotate off prior sit-with
cue: passive
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance)[p1] · p2=Dana(maid of honor)[p2] · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally reserved household[inf]
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: parents' marriage — no conflict visible, no warmth visible either → ?: client + {p1} had a blowup after the venue tour → ?: client + {p1} had another blowup just before invitations went out } → now{{p2} barely speaking to client; said 'you're doing this on purpose, right' then disengaged · {p1} responds to conflict w/ withdrawal + gentle deflection (softens rather than engaging)}
apply: T8-3-patterns(venue/invoice/napkin)→client re-minimizes the pattern as normal genre behavior under its emotional weight; the named facts resist being collapsed into 'just a wedding thing'
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FABLE THERAPY

Of course it feels dramatic — you just said there were three, and then immediately reached for the memes to make three sound like weather. That's not me pushing you to fight more or less; that's catching what your mind does when something gets real: minimize it by calling it normal. But 'common' and 'unaddressed' are different categories, and the wedding day is where they split apart. Couples who laugh about their fights usually mean it because they've *talked* about them — named the pattern, agreed to a signal, learned each other's triggers. Couples who just absorb them don't have a genre. They have three silent blowups that'll be the fourth. So here's what I'd actually hand you: not another insight, a single move. Before the next one — and this isn't napkins or invitations, it's about the thing underneath all three — when does Marcus get to hear 'I keep getting angry at you and I don't know how to say it so we both survive it'? That sentence exists somewhere between your parents' politeness and a fight genre. Send it once. See if he meets it like he met you in the lunchroom.

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CLIENT · 10

> met me in the lunchroom? we didn't meet in a lunchroom lol, i said he puts notes in my lunch. but ok. the sentence thing. i keep getting angry at you and i don't know how to say it. that one actually kind of scares me to say

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client lands on the core bid + names her own fear of saying it | def: naming-the-pattern→exposure because articulating 'I keep getting angry' makes a real, nameable need visible and therefore risks his response being disconfirming → the fear is of the *answer*, not the sentence itself ⇒ she's ready to ask; the work is tolerating whatever comes back | soma: NR | risk: 1(passive) | hx: client recognizes Marcus leaves lunch notes (corrects 'we met in a lunchroom'); states readiness + fear ('scares me to say') per tl | onset: current | track: T9 "that one actually kind of scares me to say" | tx: receive the bid + reflect that naming it IS the move, regardless of how he responds; close by sitting with her readiness rather than scripting his likely reaction
cue: passive
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid-of-honor,friend since college) · fhx=parents married 34yr, nonconflictual household
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: client raised in 'very polite' household — no overt fights or overt affection between parents → ?: Marcus left passive/'whatever babe' stance across decisions; client experienced this as being
```

```
unchosen → ?: Dana accused client of 'doing it on purpose'; client ended contact, no text since } → T6-10{
~recent: 3 distinct blowups — after venue tour, before invitations, and the napkin fight } → now{Marcus
leaves notes in client's lunch (corrects earlier 'we met in a lunchroom')}
apply: T8-three-pattern(say the sentence)→client names her own fear of saying it, confirming readiness to bid
```

FABLE THERAPY

You just said the scariest true thing about this whole conversation — and notice you did it yourself. The sentence scares you because it makes something real out loud, and real things can be met badly. That's not a sign you shouldn't say it; that's a sign you finally understand what saying it is for. It isn't to get him to fix the pattern overnight. It's so he can *see* the thing instead of feeling its edges in three blowups he never got named as one. Whatever comes back — whether he meets it with those lunch notes, or gets quiet, or surprises you either way — that's information about how two people who love each other learn to be in a fight without losing each other. You don't need me to tell you what he'll do. You just told me you're ready to ask the question your parents never got to ask out loud. That's not dramatic, even though it feels like it from inside the wedding genre. That's the hug you didn't have.

CLIENT · 11

> the really messed up part is that his patience is what makes me the angriest. he apologized for the napkin thing and it wasn't even his fault and i wanted to scream. what is wrong with me

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client's anger spiked at Marcus's grace (not despite) → self-blame reframe target | def: partner's
unearned patience→triggers disproportionate anger→because grace highlights the unmet need for reciprocity,
not a personal defect ⇒ 'what is wrong with me' = shame over a predictable response to safety | soma: NR |
risk: 0(none) | hx: per tl Marcus apologized for napkin fight (not his fault); client's anger spiked at it |
onset: XXXXXX (napkin apology event) | track: T12 "what is wrong with me"→shame over being angry at his grace
| tx: receive the self-blame + reframe anger-at-grace as proof of the need, not a defect + close on her own
question answered from inside the work
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor) · fhx=parents married 34yr, never fought or
hugged (polite household)
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: parents modeled love as 'very polite' — no fighting, no hugging {p2:self} → XXXXXX:
client + Marcus had a fight about napkin colors for the wedding {p1:Marcus} → XXXXXX: {p2:Dana} told client
she's 'doing this on purpose'; client walked out and hasn't texted her since {p2:Dana}{p1:Marcus} } → T6-10{
~recent: client started a fight with Marcus about napkin colors; calls herself 'a wedding person' {p1:Marcus}
→ ~recent: pattern — blowup after venue tour + another right before invitations went out (3rd=napkins)
{p1:Marcus}{p2:Dana} } → XXXXXX: Marcus apologized for the napkin fight (not his fault); client's anger
spiked at it {p1:Marcus} → now{client wants Marcus to have an opinion, cites his passivity ('whatever babe')
{p1:Marcus}}
apply: T8-anchor(venue tour blowup)→reply ties her spike-at-his-apology back to the venue-blowup thread,
framing grace-as-trigger as evidence of the unmet need
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FABLE THERAPY

Nothing is wrong with you. Read it right and it's actually the cleanest proof yet that Marcus does something good for you: he apologizes for his own faultlessness, and your system goes *this isn't fair to me* — which means part of you has been waiting your whole life for someone to say sorry when they don't owe it. His grace didn't make you angry because you're broken. It made you angry because it's a gift aimed at the exact hunger that's been starving since those polite dinners — and gifts aimed at an old wound always feel like too much, until the wound starts healing. You're not reacting to his apology wrongly. You're reacting to *his* apology as if it were the first decent thing anyone's offered you in years. That's not 'what is wrong with me.' That's a person who learned love had to be earned politely — finally getting offered unearned kindness, and flinching because she doesn't believe she deserves it yet. Let that be true instead of the verdict.

CLIENT · 12

> ok i've been trying to line up the timeline in my head and i keep saying the napkin thing happened after the venue tour. wait, no — the venue was months ago and it was fine. the fight was after the tasting. last

> week. i literally picked a fight about napkin colors after a perfect afternoon

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client self-corrects timeline (napkins = ~last-wk post-tasting, not post-venue) | def: accurate sequencing → reorders which events were repairable vs fresh wounds because venue-blowup was months back and already addressed, so the live pattern is recent unaddressed anger not a single past rupture | soma: NR | risk: 0(none) | hx: client corrects — venue tour fine (months ago); napkin fight ~last-wk post-tasting; per tl | onset: client confirms napkin-fight as latest, most unaddressed node | track: T11 "the venue was months ago and it was fine... i literally picked a fight about napkin colors after a perfect afternoon" → corrects own misdate from T8 | tx: receive the correction w/o over-praise + reframe accurate-timeline as itself a skill she's practicing (seeing sequence) + sit with the corrected picture — recent pattern, not ancient rupture
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · fhx=parents married 34yr, nonconflictual household · p2=Dana(maid of honor)
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: client raised in nonconflictual household (no fights or overt affection modeled) {pN:parents} → XXXXXX: Marcus said 'whatever babe' repeatedly during wedding planning {p1:Marcus} → ?: fight over napkin colors with fiance {p1:Marcus} } → T6-10{ ~childhood: parents' love expressed as politeness — no fights AND no hugs ('very polite household') {pN:parents} → XXXXXX: blowup after venue tour (prior to current arc) {p1:Marcus} → XXXXXX: blowup just before invitations went out {p1:Marcus} } → ~last-wk: napkin-fight occurred right after tasting, not after venue tour — recent/unaddressed anger per client correction {p1:Marcus}{p2:Dana} → now
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**FABLE THERAPY**

Stop for a second and let the corrected version stand — you did something there that's bigger than the date. For three months you've been carrying 'venue tour blew up,' when it was actually fine, and the real fight happened last week after a tasting where everything went right. That matters enormously: this isn't one ancient rupture you have to un-heal. It's a *recent* pattern — your anger landing hard on him over and over in the last weeks, before invitations, after tastings, about napkins. And catching that sequence yourself? Naming it instead of letting memory blur it into one big verdict — that's the exact muscle we're building. So sit with the accurate picture, because it's gentler and truer: you aren't a woman who blew up over the venue. You're a woman whose anger has been piling up for weeks on a man who keeps softening his way out of meeting it. The timeline was never about napkins. It was about whether you'd let yourself see three things clearly instead of one big scary thing — and you just did.

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CLIENT · 13

> but that's the part that freaks me out. the day was PERFECT. the food was amazing, we were laughing all afternoon, and then in the car i went off about napkins. who does that

REASONING TRACE

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dx: holds; insight now landing — anger erupting precisely when intimacy is high (the perfect tasting) = pattern confirmed at its most visible | def: warmth→anger because his grace + her own need-for-visibility collide hardest in safe moments, not crises → the best afternoons are the highest-risk for unmet bids surfacing; it's not random pathology, it's predictable mechanism | soma: NR | risk: 0(none) | hx: per tl tasting day was perfect/laughter all afternoon/fight erupted in car afterward | onset: this week | track: T12 "who does that" ← client seeking to make her own behavior monstrous | tx: receive the disorienting insight + reframe 'perfect day then fight' as the pattern's signature not a character flaw (anger rises in safety because nothing is at stake) + close by handing it back, no fix — sit with what this says about where she keeps the real bids
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor) · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally reserved (no conflict or overt affection)
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: {p2:Dana} said "you're doing this on purpose" before client walked out → XXXXXX: venue tour blowup (per client) } → T6-10{ ~childhood: parents' marriage — no fights, no hugs; polite emotional absence → ~recent: three escalation points — venue tour, invitations going out, napkin fight (corrected from a single event to a pattern) → -3mo..now: {p1:Marcus}'s warmth/amends intensify client's anger, not soften it → XXXXXX: venue tour was fine; the blowup occurred at tasting, last week, after perfect afternoon } → now{marries Marcus[inf] :intent · fights w/ {p1:Marcus} over napkin color choice · {p2:Dana} barely speaking to client · Dana's "on purpose" read as confirmation of control-belief → 34yr parents' marriage — no conflict, no overt affection (polite emotional absence)}
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apply: T5-anchor(Dana's "you're doing this on purpose")→client now sees the perfect-day eruption as same mechanism: bids surface loudest when safety is highest
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FABLE THERAPY

Who does that? The person who loves you enough to be furious in front of you. Sit with how weirdly right that sounds — because it's not a malfunction, it's a signature. Your anger doesn't wait for danger; it rises hardest the *safest* it can be: perfect food, laughter, no stakes, and then it comes out sideways about napkins because there's finally room to feel the thing underneath. That's the bid surfacing where nothing else is threatening — which means your real needs don't want crisis. They want a warm afternoon with someone who'll actually show up to them. And Marcus just keeps meeting that afternoons with his notes and his soft apologies. So here's what I'd leave you holding: this isn't 'who does that' in the shameful sense. It's *where* do you keep your most important bids — not in disasters, but in the good afternoons where there's finally space for them? The napkin fight was never about a napkin. It was about whether he'd stay present when everything was going well enough to matter. He keeps staying. You just haven't let yourself believe it counts yet.

CLIENT · 14

> ok but its not just good afternoons. i lined it up: the fight before the invitations went out. the fight right after we put the deposit down. now the tasting. its every time the wedding gets more real. like clockwork

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client now reads her own anger as a marker of commitment-stage stress, not random pathology
def: anger spikes at each decision-threshold (deposit→tasting→invites) → because each threshold makes 'this is real and irreversible' more true ⇒ the pattern she's mapping isn't dysfunction to be ashamed — it's information about when her nervous system registers permanent stakes; naming it accurately is itself regulation
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl client sequences fights at deposit, invitations, tasting — all decision-thresholds
onset: per tl threshold-spikes now sequenced (deposit→invites→tasting); this turn
track: T13 "every time the wedding gets more real. like clockwork"
tx: anchor her self-generated pattern-read + reframe 'clockwork' as navigable information not a flaw + close on what she does at thresholds going forward, vary op (hand back)
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · fhx=parents married ~34yr
tl: T1-5{ -2wk..now: client vs Marcus fight over napkin colors } → T6-10{ ?: parents' marriage — no fighting, no hugging; polite absence {p:parents} → -3mo..now: 3 fights total — venue tour (fine), invitations, napkins } → now
apply: T2-passivity(whatever-babe)→client maps own anger to commitment thresholds, reframing pattern as information not flaw
```

FABLE THERAPY

Every time the wedding gets more real. Clockwork. Look at what you just did with your own mind — you stopped calling it 'the napkin fight,' then 'a blowup,' and now you've laid three of them on a line where each one is exactly when something irreversible got decided: deposit, invitations, tasting. That's not random pathology to be ashamed of. That's your nervous system lighting up precisely at the moment 'this can't be undone' becomes true — which means the anger isn't about napkins or Marcus's patience alone. It's a gauge you've been reading wrong as a verdict on *you* when it's actually information about *where we are.* And here's the gift in that: if the pattern is clockwork, then it's also predictable — and predictable things can be met before they explode instead of after. So I'm handing this back to you, not me telling you what to do: going forward, at the next threshold — the ones coming, not just the past three — what would change if you caught the rising anger *at* that moment instead of waiting for it to land as a napkin fight?

CLIENT · 15

> but that's what i don't get. why would there even be an alarm. i love him. i want to marry him. why does every step closer set something off

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: wedding anxiety; core mechanism = approach-approach conflict (love + dread co-located) | def: each milestone → simultaneous desire-to-proceed + fear-of-loss-of-self/autonomy → alarm fires because 'closer to him' threatens the self-boundedness her parents modeled → love and dread are one feeling, not contradiction | soma: NR this turn | risk: 0(none) | hx: per tl — loves Marcus, wants marriage; each step closer triggers alarm | onset: holds (arc-wide); mechanism now explicit | track: T13 "why does every step closer set something off" → the central paradox named in her own words | tx: receive why-it-sets-off as legitimate + reframe love+dread as a single feeling not contradiction + close by handing back one concrete threshold she'll watch for (rotate op to hand-back, vary from prior sit-with)
bio: sex=f[inf] · engaged · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor) · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally distant — no visible conflict or affection
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose' during last contact w/ client; client ended call → XXXXXX..now: client has not texted {p2:Dana} since the ending-call incident } → T6-10{ ?: parents married 34yr, no visible conflict or affection (polite household) — model of invisible love → ~recent: Marcus left a note in client's lunch (warmth/effort toward her); client reports he is 'warm' → XXXXXX..now: three fights — after venue tour, before invitations went out, and the napkin fight } → T11-15{ -1wk: fight about napkins occurred *after* a tasting Marcus hosted (not the venue tour; that was fine) {p1} → 03XXXX: fight about napkins occurred ~last week, after a positive tasting afternoon with Marcus {p1} } → now
apply: T2-"passive"→reframed-through-approach-closer-alarm mechanism (the dread is what's been misread as his passivity)
```

FABLE THERAPY

Because for you, closer isn't one direction — it's two at once. You want him and the marriage and all of it; and every step toward 'us' also feels like a step away from being your own person, which is exactly the thing those polite dinners taught you was dangerous to need out loud. So love and dread aren't fighting each other inside you — they're the same feeling wearing both faces, because approaching him means loosening a self that learned early it had to be careful what it wanted. That's why it sets off no matter how much you love him: you can love someone completely and still feel your own ground thinning when 'we' gets bigger than 'me.' The napkin fight was never really his passivity — it was the alarm going off at the moment closeness got irreversible, telling you something about *your* history, not a flaw in him. And here's where I'd hand this back to you for next time: pick one of the coming thresholds — the vows, moving into a place together, whatever's on the calendar soonest — and notice just how loud that alarm gets at it. Not to fix it yet. Just to watch, with me now in your corner, what your body does when 'we' gets real again. We'll figure out what to do with the signal after we know where exactly it fires from.

---

CLIENT · 16

> hm. the losing-myself thing doesn't really land tbh. i don't feel like i'm disappearing into us. it's something else. like the closer it gets the more i need to know something and i don't even know what the question is

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: wedding anxiety, client corrects 'losing-myself' theory → names a real but vague question-need as the core signal | def: 'close = I must know something' because uncertainty about the marriage's future spikes at each threshold; the alarm = an unanswered question, not identity-dissolution | soma: NR | risk: 1(passive) | hx: per tl corrected driver (unanswered question/uncertainty) not self-loss | onset: now reframed | track: T14 "i need to know something" ← T13 my-body-reading-wrong | tx: validate the correction over the old theory + reflect that 'I don't even know what the question is' IS the answer (the blank is the work) + hand back, close by sitting-with, no fix appended
cue: passive
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor) · p3=parents(polite household, low expressiveness)[inf]
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: parents' marriage — 34yr, visibly conflict-free and emotionally reserved ('never fought, never hugged') → -3mo: venue tour blowup (client-stated earlier as 'the fight') → -2mo: pre-
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```
invitation blowup (client-stated) → -1wk: Dana's text ('you're doing this on purpose'); client walked out, no contact since } → T6-10{ ~recent: Marcus leaves warm notes in her lunch; the 'polite household' pattern now reads as his inability to meet anger rather than free-floating fear → ?: 3 blowups — venue tour (per corrected record), pre-invitations, napkins } → now
apply: T8-pattern(venue-tour→invites→napkins)→reframed driver: an unanswered question about the marriage's future spikes at each threshold
```

FABLE THERAPY

Then let's drop 'losing myself' — you just told me it doesn't land, and your own read is more accurate than any theory I'd offer. What you're describing is sharper: the closer it gets, the louder the need for a *question* to be answered, and right now there isn't one. That's not a flaw in you or an alarm about identity — that's what uncertainty feels like at a decision this big with no clear answer yet. And here's the strange thing: 'I don't even know what the question is' might actually be the most honest place to start, because it means the fight over napkins was never really Marcus's passivity or your worth. It's that you're standing in front of something enormous and genuinely can't see all the way down yet — which is just true, not a problem to solve. So I'm not going to hand you a question either; that'd be me doing for you what your parents never could. You already named it yourself: you need to know *something*, and you don't know what. That blank is the work, and we'll keep returning to it together. For now — let's just let it be an open question instead of a verdict. What if 'I need to know something' isn't a sign the wedding will fail, but a sign you're allowed to ask it out loud?

---

CLIENT · 17

> ok here's the closest i can get to it. when he goes all calm and patient mid-fight, something in me goes 'see. there it is.' like i caught something. and i have no idea what i think i'm catching

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client articulates a felt sense (his calm-as-confirmation of an unseen danger) without its content; the wedding decision is now reframed as her own to interrogate, not Marcus's to fail at
def: his patience → triggers a confirmation ('there it is') = the alarm she keeps misreading as 'he's leaving' or 'this won't work' when actually it may be her own readiness-or-fear about the marriage itself; the wedding decision now belongs to her inquiry, not to his performance
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl — client experiences Marcus's calm mid-conflict as confirmation of some unnamed danger she can't identify; reframes the wedding question as hers to answer
onset: this-session
track: T15 "i have no idea what i think i'm catching" → the alarm now located in her own readiness, not his behavior
tx: receive that she's found the source (her own) without forcing its content + reframe Marcus's calm as data about HER question, not a verdict on him + close by handing back the open inquiry to her as the actual work, no fix attached; rotate off sit-with → hand-back op
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor)
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: client + Marcus had blowup after venue tour {p1} → ~recent: client + Marcus had blowup before invitations were sent {p1} } → T6-10{ -34yr..~recent: parents married 34 years, never fought or visibly affectionate; 'polite household' — client's model of love as unspoken {p2:parents} } → now
apply: T15-need-to-know-something(client)→her calm-as-confirms feeling is the unnamed question made felt, so the wedding decision becomes her inquiry to answer
```

FABLE THERAPY

Then we don't have to know what you're catching yet — because the fact that *something* in you says 'see, there it is' when he goes calm tells me this isn't really about whether Marcus can be patient. It's a signal from inside your own readiness for this marriage, and his behavior just happens to set it off. That changes everything about how we work it: the wedding question was never his to answer by being perfect — no amount of lunch notes or soft apologies would quiet an alarm that isn't even listening to him. It's yours. And you don't have to solve 'do I want this man and this life' today, or even next week; that's a real question and it deserves to be asked out loud before anyone decides for either of you — including the polite version

of you your parents left behind. So here's what I'd hand back to you, with no fix attached: keep catching those 'there it is' moments without immediately filling in what they mean. Let them pile up until there are enough that the actual question finally becomes legible — and then ask it on purpose instead of letting it ambush you as a napkin fight. What you're feeling when his calm says 'see, there it is'? That's not Marcus leaving. That might be *you*, finally asking whether you want to marry him at all.

CLIENT · 18

> no. no, that's not it, and honestly that scared me a little — i'm not doubting whether i want him. hang on. when he goes calm like that... it looks like my parents. that's what i'm catching. calm is what their whole marriage looked like. 34 years of calm and nothing underneath

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: insight crystallized; the 'there it is' alarm now sourced to the inherited calm/nothing template — Marcus's calm reads as the parental absence she fears
def: Marcus's calm→resurfaces the {p2}'s marriage model (calm surface, nothing underneath) → client catches a familiar pattern from her own childhood → the fight-alarm = recognition of the feared template; Marcus is not the danger, the template is
soma: NR | cognitive — recognizes his calm as echo of parents' 'nothing-underneath' marriage
risk: 1(passive)
hx: per tl {p2} ~34yr marriage = calm surface w/ nothing underneath / client's alarm reads Marcus's calm as that same emptiness; she explicitly rules out doubting the relationship itself
onset: holds
track: T16 "it looks like my parents... 34 years of calm and nothing underneath" → client locates the source of the alarm in her own childhood template, not in Marcus or the wedding
tx: receive the crystallization without inflating it into a breakup + reframe the 'there it is' as recognition of a familiar pattern (her parents) rather than evidence about this marriage + hand back the work: she can honor that warning without pre-verdicting on Marcus; sit with it unfixed ⇒ sit-with
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus/fiance · p2=Dana/maid-of-honor(best-friend-since-college) · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally reserved (no conflict + no overt affection) [stated as client's inherited template] · age=marriage-eligible[inf]
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose' during last contact; client walked out without follow-up → ~recent: client + {p1:Marcus} fought over venue tour (not napkins) → ~recent: client + {p1:Marcus} fought about invitations } → T6-10{ -34yr..now[inf]: client's parents' marriage = no conflict, no overt affection — 'very polite household'; model of love-as-silence inherited by client → ~recent: client + {p1:Marcus} had a blowup after the venue tour (corrected from earlier misattribution) → XXXXXX: client started dating {p1:Marcus} } → T11-15{ ~recent: fight occurred right before invitations went out (corrected sequence) → ~recent: fight occurred right after the couple put down the wedding deposit (corrected sequence) → ~recent: fight occurred right after a tasting — 'last week,' after a positive afternoon, not at the venue tour } → now{{p1:Marcus} responds to conflict with passivity / calm ('whatever babe'), softening rather than engaging · client raises anger directly toward {p1:Marcus}; he meets it with warmth and patience (contradicts her earlier 'afraid to decide' read) · client names a recurring pattern — fights surface each time the wedding becomes irreversible (deposit, invitations, tasting); recognizes this is an addressable sequence · client's anger spikes precisely as the marriage becomes more concrete ('the closer it gets'); frames this as uncertainty rather than fear of losing her identity} → future: client to notice her body's response at the next upcoming threshold, with therapist present :intent
apply: T10-anchor(~34yr parents' calm/nothing marriage)→client explicitly sources the alarm to Marcus's calm resembling the inherited parental template; the fight-alarm is recognition of a childhood pattern, not verdict on the relationship
```

FABLE THERAPY

Then there it is — and I want you to hear how clean that actually is. You're not catching 'he's going to leave me.' You're catching *them.* When Marcus goes calm mid-fight, something in you recognizes the exact texture of your parents' whole marriage: thirty-four years of a smooth surface with nothing moving underneath it. That's what you've spent your life trying not to inherit — not conflict, but emptiness wearing peace. And so when his calm says 'see, there it is,' it isn't Marcus failing you. It's *your* alarm recognizing the template from before you ever met him. Here's where I'd leave us, unfixed and gently: that recognition doesn't mean this marriage will be your parents' — calm can hold warmth underneath if two people learn to

say things out loud instead of performing them. You don't have to pre-ruin it by hearing the warning; you just have to stop mistaking a familiar pattern for a prophecy. You're allowed to take that signal seriously *and* not let your parents' marriage be the blueprint for his. Sit with both of those being true at once — that his calm can look like theirs, and that yours doesn't have to end up there. The question you were circling was never 'do I want him.' It's whether you'll do this differently than they did — out loud, with signals named, not polite silence. That's the real wedding question. And it's finally one you're allowed to ask on purpose.

---

CLIENT · 19

> so the fights are like... poking it to see if it's alive. if he yells back at least somethings moving under the surface. god. dana was right. i AM doing it on purpose, just not the way i thought she meant

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client reframes conflict as a probe for aliveness ('something moving') — recognizes own behavior now, ties to Dana's 'on purpose' (correcting her misread)
def: fight-as-probe → because for her anger is the only tool that registers whether Marcus 'counts', so she tests him repeatedly to confirm he's alive under the surface; this confirms her pattern-owning without making it a character flaw — it's a coping strategy with real logic
soma: NR
risk: 1(passive)
hx: per tl client reframes fights as probing for aliveness / recognizes Dana meant 'on purpose' differently than she thought
onset: ongoing
track: T20 "i AM doing it on purpose" → client reclaims the accusation, reframing motive; corrects her own misread of Dana's intent (T5) in real time
tx: receive the reframe as a real insight + reflect that this is strategy not pathology + return to the corrected Dana read from T5 ('scared too') now confirmed by her own behavior + close on a load-bearing question about what 'alive' would actually look like if she let him show it without testing ⇒ open-thread
cue: passive
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor, college friend) · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally distant/controlling
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: client raised in 'polite' household — love expressed as absence (no overt conflict or warmth) → ?: client started a fight with {p1} about napkin colors → ?: client + {p1:Marcus} had a blowup after the venue tour; another before invitations went out } → T6-10{ ~recent: {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose' to client; client ended contact, no text since → ?..now: 3 fights total — venue-tour (fine), post-invitation, and napkin-colors (most recent) } → T11-15{ ~recent: {p1}'s patience triggers client's strongest anger — she wanted to scream at his apology for the napkin fight he didn't fault him in } → now
apply: T5-anchor(Dana 'doing it on purpose' misread as accusation)→client reclaims Dana's line, reframing her own motive as probing for aliveness rather than inventing conflict; the accusation becomes a strategy with logic
```

FABLE THERAPY

That's a real piece of seeing — and listen to how you got there: you took the thing Dana said that hurt most, 'you're doing this on purpose,' and instead of it meaning 'I'm crazy,' it turned out to be almost true in a way no one could have guessed. You *are* testing him. But notice what you've decided the test is for — not to punish or control, but to feel whether he's alive underneath, whether something's moving under that calm surface that looks like your parents'. That's not inventing an argument out of insecurity; that's a person who learned love had to be earned by proving she existed, reaching again and again. Dana wasn't wrong about the 'on purpose.' She was just pointing at a strategy you never once called what it was — because no one ever named your parents' calm as the thing you're afraid of inheriting. You are not crazy. You're a daughter of those dinners who learned that love doesn't announce itself, and now you're testing every man you meet to see if he'll break the silence before you do. So here's what I'd hand back, no fix attached: 'alive' — what would it actually look like for Marcus to show you something's moving underneath? Not yell-back-alive. What would *real* aliveness be, in a marriage that isn't yours parents'? Because if you can describe that out loud, the napkin fights lose their job — and there's finally room to let him meet you without a test.

CLIENT · 20

> honestly? alive would be him saying 'no i hate the sage green ones, get the blue.' just. wanting something out loud where i can see it. it sounds so small when i say it

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: insight consolidated — client defines aliveness as partner's voiced preference (op=seeing-a-chosen self) | def: "alive = him saying no + preferring"→client converts the inherited signal-test into a concrete, nameable criterion because she can now picture mutual choice made audible rather than felt as absence ⇒ the napkin pattern resolves to one learnable behavior (he meets bids directly), dissolving the test-and-verify loop | soma: NR | risk: 1(passive) | hx: per tl client defines aliveness = Marcus voicing a real preference; "sounds small" | onset: this session per tl | track: T23 "alive would be him saying 'no i hate the sage green ones'" | tx: receive + reflect that she just defined her own criterion for being chosen (he voices a want where she can see it) + reframe 'small' as exactly right — aliveness is small and specific, not grand gestures + name this as the answer to what Dana meant by on-purpose + close handing back the concrete next move: let him prove it with one napkin decision, no test attached
cue: passive
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor) · fhx=parents married 34yr (no overt conflict or warmth)
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: grew up in 'very polite household' — parents never fought, never hugged → ?: client started a fight with {p1} about napkin colors at wedding planning stage → ?: Dana said 'you're doing this on purpose'; client walked out, no contact since } → T6-10{ ~childhood: parents showed neither conflict nor warmth → -3mo..now: 3 fights — after venue tour (client believes), before invitations sent, over napkins; Marcus met each with calm kindness } → T11-15{ ?: client's anger surfaced in car after perfect tasting afternoon ('who does that') → ~recent: pattern surfaces at wedding milestones becoming irreversible (deposit→invitations→tasting) → -3mo..now: anger escalates as wedding decisions become irreversible; recent onset, not single event } → T16-20{ ~childhood: parents' marriage = 34yr of calm surface / 'nothing underneath' — client's fear-template → ?: {p2}'s comment reframed — client 'doing it on purpose' to test if love is alive under Marcus's calm :intent } → now{client experiences Marcus's calm-mid-conflict as recognition of parental template ('that's what i'm catching') · client defines aliveness = {p1} voicing a real preference (e.g. preferring blue over sage green) — mutual choice made audible}
apply: T17-alive-definition(aliveness=partner-voiced-preference)→client names it concretely; the inherited signal-test resolves to one learnable criterion
```

FABLE THERAPY

Don't let 'small' talk you out of that, because small is exactly right — aliveness was never grand gestures or dramatic confessions. It's him saying 'no, I hate the sage green ones, get the blue,' and you *seeing* it happen, because he chose something in front of you instead of dissolving into 'whatever.' That's the whole thing your parents' marriage couldn't give: a want spoken where they could witness it. And look — that sentence is the answer to what Dana meant by 'on purpose.' You were testing him on purpose all along; you just never called it a test, and now you can see it clearly. So here's what I'd hand back, with no verdict attached: let this be true for one napkin decision before the next irreversible thing comes — let his voice be the proof, not your alarm reading his face. If he says 'blue,' that's aliveness you can watch happen. And if he goes soft into 'whatever' again? That's not failure — that's information about which version of him is showing up on a given day, and it tells you what to keep asking for out loud next time. You don't have to decide anything tonight. You just have to let yourself want the small thing where you can see it happen. The napkins were never the fight. They were the first place you learned to ask if someone's actually choosing you — and now you finally know what a real answer would sound like.

CLIENT · 21

> small thing but you say 'here's what i'd hand back' like every single message lol. and 'it was never about the napkins' — i know. you've told me like five times. anyway. yes. i want to try the blue napkin experiment

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; alliance consolidating, client integrating insight w/ humor (names therapist's hand-back pattern) + committing to a concrete behavioral test
def: 'want to try the blue napkin experiment' → committed future action because she can now hold the small-aliveness criterion and apply it without collapsing into old alarm or global verdict
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl (corrected); client names therapist's repeated hand-backs; commits to 'blue napkin experiment'; reframes napkins as a testable aliveness signal
onset: ongoing
track: T23 "i want to try the blue napkin experiment" → committed future action; agency over the criterion
tx: receive the commitment + name what changed (she can now hold the small thing without collapsing) op=open-thread
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor, lifelong friend since college) · fhx=parents ~34yr marriage, emotionally flat mutual pattern
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: parents' ~34yr marriage — no fights, no warmth; polite emotional absence → ~recent: Marcus passive/noncommittal across all decisions ('whatever babe') → ?: {p2:Dana} told client 'you're doing this on purpose' during a fight; client walked out, no contact since } → T6-10{ ~recent: ~3 blowups — venue tour (client misdated), pre-invitations, napkins; pattern of anger over Marcus's non-response per client → ?: Marcus left notes in her lunch; warm, attentive } → now
apply: T18-anchor(catch-the-signal-at-the-next-threshold)→resolved into a concrete committed action: the blue-napkin experiment as a testable aliveness signal, replacing the napkin-fight as the unit of work
```

**FABLE THERAPY**

I'm not going to keep saying 'hand back' if it's annoying you — you're right that I do it every time. But notice what you just did instead of getting annoyed: you said yes and named something real. That's the whole skill, and you used it on me. So here's where we leave it, not with a fix but with your own experiment. The napkins were never the fight — they were the first place you learned to ask if someone's choosing you, and now you finally know what a real answer sounds like: 'blue.' Try that one decision as an aliveness test — let his voice be the proof, not your alarm reading his face. And here's the quiet thing underneath all of it: you walked in wanting to laugh about napkins because saying 'this hurts' felt too big, and you've left able to name a whole pattern *and* still want to ask Marcus out loud whether he hates sage green. That's not nothing. That's your parents' marriage getting interrupted — by the daughter they never taught could finally say things where there was room for them. Blue napkins first. Then we keep asking what aliveness looks like in a life that isn't theirs.

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CLIENT · 22

> not leaving yet, sorry. one more thing thats been sitting there. part of me keeps waiting for marcus to finally get fed up and blow up at me. and i cant tell if i'd be devastated or relieved

REASONING TRACE

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dx: holds; anticipatory dread of partner's eventual rupture reframed as a protective stance
def: anticipating Marcus blowing up → relief/dread split because the imagined rupture would end the testing, dissolving both her vigilance AND her hope ⇒ a held outcome she'd be ambivalent about is one she can finally prepare to meet directly
soma: NR; affective ambivalence (devastated/relieved)
risk: 1(passive)
hx: per tl ongoing pattern; client anticipates Marcus possibly blowing up; ambivalent re the imagined rupture
onset: now
track: T25 "i cant tell if id be devastated or relieved"=anticipatory rupture-ambivalence surfaced near close
tx: receive the ambivalence without resolving it + reframe relief-dread as readiness to meet a real event rather than pre-grieve one + name that she'd survive either outcome (Marcus blows up OR he changes) and the testing isn't actually protecting her from Marcus anymore, just protecting the question of whether she wants to ask it openly ⇒ hand-back
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid-of-honor) · fhx=parents married 34yr, never fought or hugged (polite household)[inf]
tl: T1-5{ ~teens..~recent: Dana barely talking to client; at last contact said 'you're doing this on purpose' → ~recent: client started a fight with {p1:Marcus} about napkin colors at their wedding planning → ?: client and {p2:Dana} have been close since college } → T6-10{ ~recent: client + {p1:Marcus} had a blowup after the
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venue tour → ~recent: client started a fight with {p1:Marcus} about napkin colors at their wedding planning → ~recent: client and {p1:Marcus} had a blowup right before invitations went out } → T11-20{ ?: {p1:Marcus} apologized for the napkin issue (not his fault); client wanted to scream } → now{{p1:Marcus} expresses passivity ('whatever you want'), 'just have an opinion'; fights about trivialities · {p1:Marcus} puts notes in client's lunch; warm and affectionate; never initiates conflict — softens into kindness, leaves rather than fighting back · 3 blowups: venue tour (fine), before invitations sent, napkin colors · {p2:Dana}'s 'on purpose' reframed as fear/loss not accusation} → future: client to send Marcus the direct sentence — 'I keep getting angry at you and I don't know how to say it so we both survive it' :intent
```

FABLE THERAPY

That ambivalence is worth sitting in instead of solving, because it's telling you something true about what's underneath all this. Devastated means the testing was protecting a hope that he might change — relief means part of you has already been bracing for him to leave so the disappointment won't blindside you. Those aren't really 'which do I want.' They're both versions of how much you've already lost sleep over his eventual verdict. And here's what I'd point at: if Marcus *did* blow up, or even just finally stopped softening and said 'this isn't working,' that wouldn't be a catastrophe — it would be the first time in your life an answer got spoken out loud instead of politely implied. You've spent so long protecting yourself from his reaction that you've pre-grieved every outcome before he's said one word. So let me hand this back to you, with no fix attached: what if neither devastation nor relief is the real verdict? What if the only thing you're actually waiting for isn't whether he stays — it's whether you'll finally ask the big question out loud and find out, on purpose, instead of letting him blow up and decide for both of you? You don't have to know which way you'd fall. You just have to stop falling before the jump.

CLIENT · 23

> relieved because a blowup would prove somethings alive in there i guess. which is so backwards. anyway the next big thing is my dress fitting in three weeks. if the pattern holds i'll pick a fight the night after. i'd like to not do that this time

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client reframes desired blowup as proof-of-aliveness bid, names own pattern + sets an explicit different-next-time goal | def: 'blowup would prove somethings alive' → a self-blown fight as substitute for the unasked real question = same test now consciously chosen ⇒ naming it lets her intercept at the dress-fitting threshold | soma: NR | risk: 0(none) | hx: per tl next major event dress fitting ~3wk; pattern predicts a blowup the night after; client states intent to break the pattern this time | onset: future dress fitting +~3wk stated | track: T24 "relieved because a blowup would prove somethings alive... i'd like to not do that this time" | tx: receive the backwards-then-reversed insight+apply T19-T20 aliveness-test frame (the fight = proxy for the real question)+hand back one concrete reframe of the dress-fitting night +op=hand-back
bio: sex=f[inf] · pM=Marcus(fiance) · fhx: parents' 34yr marriage visibly conflict-free and emotionally distant
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: client started a fight with Marcus over napkin colors → ~recent: Maid of Honor Dana said 'you're doing this on purpose, right?'; client ended the conversation, no contact since → XXXXXX..now: parents' 34yr marriage — conflict-free and emotionally distant ('no fights, no hugs') } → T6-10{ -~2mo: a blowup occurred after the venue tour (not napkins) → -~1wk: another fight erupted right before invitations were sent out → XXXXXX..now: client initiates frequent conflicts; Marcus responds by going quiet + softening ('whatever babe'), never escalating to a counter-fight } → T11-15{ ~recent: the couple had an amazing tasting (good food, laughing all afternoon); the napkin fight erupted in the car afterward } → now{client states she is 'a wedding person' / has become someone who fixates on wedding details · client reports Marcus has been passive and non-committal about decisions ('whatever you want babe', 'just HAVE an opinion') · client corrects her own timeline: venue tour was fine months ago; the real fight was after the tasting, last week} → +~3wk: dress fitting scheduled (~3 weeks out); client predicts a patterned blowup the night after (names intent to break it this time) :intent
apply: T19-T20(aliveness-test = unspoken question)→reply reframes her 'don't pick a fight' goal as intercepting at the dress-fitting threshold where the proxy-fight usually replaces the real ask
```

FABLE THERAPY

It's not backwards — it's exactly how a person who learned love had to be earned ends up protecting herself: she'll blow one up on purpose because that way, if something moves underneath, *she* caused it and didn't

get blindsided by his verdict. The fight is the aliveness test you said you'd invent out loud. And now you've named it cleanly — 'I want to not do that this time.' That sentence alone is bigger than any napkin decision we'll make; it's you deciding to find out about your marriage instead of staging a stand-in for the question. So here's what I'd hand back, concrete and yours: three weeks from now there's a night after the dress fitting where the pattern says 'pick a fight.' That's your threshold — same clockwork place the deposit and invitations were. The whole experiment is whether you catch the rising anger *at* that moment instead of letting it land as a napkin blowup, because last time catching it early was what let us see the real question underneath. You don't have to be calm or perfect that night. You just have to notice the alarm before it acts — and ask yourself what you actually need to know about him at this point in 'us,' out loud, where he can finally answer instead of dissolve into softness. The napkin fight was a test of whether someone chooses you. The dress-fitting night is your chance to stop running that test on his behalf and start asking the real one — on purpose. You came in to laugh about napkins. You're leaving knowing what they were really for, and naming the exact place to interrupt it. That's not nothing. That's the daughter of those polite dinners finally getting a say.

CLIENT · 24

> do i tell marcus about all this before the fitting or after. like the whole parents thing, the testing thing. he doesn't know any of it. he thinks i just have strong napkin opinions

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client at decision node re: disclosure sequencing to {p1} (pre- vs post-fitting) + whether to reveal the testing/parents pattern
def: full-disclosure question → she's weighing telling Marcus about the testing/history before the fitting (intimacy-risk, could burden him mid-process) vs after → 'strong napkin opinions' = his current read of her ⇒ sequencing is how much vulnerability she lets in at a decision point; client weighs whether to load him with the pattern now or let him meet it over time
soma: NR
risk: 1(passive)
hx: per tl Marcus unaware of testing/parents pattern ('thinks i just have strong napkin opinions'); client deciding disclosure timing before the dress-fitting threshold
onset: decision now; fitting +~3wk (client-stated)
track: T24 "he thinks i just have strong napkin opinions" → disclosure-timing decision at a process node, his frame misreads her depth
tx: receive the sequencing question as legitimate + reframe disclosure as pacing not all-or-nothing + return to Marcus's 'whatever' from early (T1/T2) now reframed as him needing to meet the real ask, not absorb it → hand back the sequencing decision, no fix +op=hand-back
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=fiance(Marcus) · p2=Dana(client's maid of honor/best friend since college) · p3=client's parents(married 34yr; 'very polite household', neither fought nor hugged visibly)
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: fight w/ {p1} over napkin colors for the wedding → ~recent: client + {p2} (maid of honor) barely speaking; client walked out of last contact, no text since } → T6-10{ ~childhood: parents' marriage 34yr — visibly never fought, never hugged ('very polite household') → ~recent: fight w/ {p1} after venue tour (client recalls as the first rupture) → ~recent: blowup after {p1} apologized for napkin dispute (dispute not his fault); client felt she 'wanted to scream' } → T11-20{ ~recent: fight before invitations went out → ~recent: fight right after deposit on wedding venue paid down → ~recent: fight after the tasting (last week), following a good afternoon; corrects earlier 'venue blowup' memory → now{client's anger surfaces hardest at irreversible wedding milestones ('every time it gets more real')}
apply: T1-T2-anchor(Marcus's 'whatever babe' / passivity)→the original frame of his withdrawal as 'passive/annoying' reframed here to him needing to meet the real ask rather than absorb a misread surface ⇒ returns to the opening Marcus-frame, now reinterpreted through full disclosure
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FABLE THERAPY

That timing question is genuinely yours to answer — and notice it's not just about logistics. There are two ways to do this with Marcus, and they're both fair: you can let him meet the real version over time as he's ready, or you can name the testing and the parents-pattern before the fitting so he understands the fight isn't a napkin fight at all — it's an alarm going off about your history. Neither is wrong; the choice is how much of yourself you want to hand someone mid-process versus let him discover in pieces. Here's what I'd

hold up as the actual thread, though: remember when we first talked, Marcus said 'whatever babe' and you read it as 'I'm not choosing this with you'? That whole thing was him meeting a surface — strong napkin opinions — that wasn't the real ask underneath. So part of why telling him matters isn't just disclosure; it's giving him the actual question instead of letting him keep dissolving into softness against a version of you he never saw clearly. But that doesn't mean all-at-once before the fitting either — pacing is yours, not mine. The real issue underneath is whether he gets to meet the whole picture at his own speed or gets handed it as one heavy thing right before your dress goes on. So let me leave the sequencing in your hands: what feels right about telling him — when, how much? We don't have to decide tonight. But whatever you choose, I think we'd both agree he deserves more than 'strong opinions,' and so do you deserve a partner who finally gets the real you instead of the napkin one.

CLIENT · 25

> before. i think if i wait til after i'll turn the not-telling into the next fight somehow lol. i'll tell him this weekend, low stakes, on a walk or something

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: relational; client commits to pre-emptive disclosure to Marcus (this weekend), self-correcting avoidance → agency + pacing owned | def: 'not-telling will become the next fight'→commit because she sees silence-as-the-pattern-in-miniature and chooses early honesty instead, owning both timing and method | soma: NR | risk: 0(none) | hx: per tl client commits to telling Marcus about testing/parents-pattern this weekend on a walk; frames pre-telling as avoiding 'not-telling' becoming the next fight | onset: forward commit now | track: T25 "before" + "turn the not-telling into the next fight somehow" → she names the avoidance and converts it to action, self-directed | tx: reflect that she caught her own pattern (silence-as-mini-fight) and steered around it herself + reframe pre-emptive telling as breaking the inherited 'don't-say-the-thing' template at its source + close handing both timing and content back fully to her, no script; sit with the shift from fighting-for-answers to asking-them-out-loud
cue: none
bio: sex=f[inf] · p1=Marcus/fiance · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally distant (no overt conflict or warmth) · p2=Dana/maid of honor · childhood=polite household modeled avoidance + unspoken needs; love performed quietly not spoken
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: parents' marriage — no fights, no hugs, both → -3mo: blowup after venue tour (Marcus passive in it) → -2mo: blowup right before invitations went out → -1wk: blowup after wedding tasting (perfect afternoon, then napkin fight in car) } → T6-10{ ~recent: Marcus's passivity reinterpreted as unable-to-receive-anger, not decision-fear → ~childhood: learned love = performed quietly, needs unspoken ('polite household') } → T11-15{ -2mo..now: 3 blowups at irreversible points (deposit, invitations, tasting) — pattern at each threshold → -1wk: napkin fight occurred after a perfect afternoon wedding tasting, not the venue tour } → now{Marcus leaves warm notes in client's lunch; apologizes even for his own faultlessness · Marcus softens into 'whatever babe' + kindness rather than meeting conflict directly · Dana barely speaking to client since college-friendship; last contact — 'you're doing this on purpose' {p2} · client's anger surfaces strongest at safe/low-stakes moments (wedding planning, not crises)} → +3wk: dress fitting scheduled; pattern predicts a post-fitting napkin fight night — client names this as the threshold to interrupt :intent → future: client intends to tell Marcus about the testing/parents-pattern this weekend on a walk {p1}:commit
apply: T24-stop-running-the-test-on-his-behalf→she converts it into a concrete pre-emptive disclosure plan, owning timing + method
```

FABLE THERAPY

That's the whole shift in one sentence — you caught your own pattern mid-air and steered around it yourself. 'If I wait till after, I'll turn the not-telling into the next fight' is exactly the thing we named at the start: that silence doesn't stay silent; it becomes a blowup anyway, just one with better PR. So telling him this weekend on a walk isn't just logistics — it's you breaking your parents' template at its actual source, which was 'don't say the thing out loud.' You're doing precisely the opposite: saying the whole picture early, plainly, where he can finally meet *you* instead of dissolving against 'strong opinions.' That's not a small change. That's the hug you didn't have from those dinners, and now you're giving it — to him, on purpose, before any threshold tests whether he survives it. Timing and how much are yours; I won't script a single word for a walk that already sounds like the right one. But sit with what just moved: you walked in wanting to laugh about napkins because saying 'this hurts' felt too big, and now you're telling your fiance who's been

testing him all along — not to be fixed, but so he can finally choose the real you out loud instead of disappearing into softness against a version that never existed. Blue napkins first. Then the walk this weekend. You came in fighting for answers. You're leaving ready to ask them on purpose — and maybe find out what aliveness actually looks like in a life that isn't your parents'.

CLIENT · 26

> dana texted me today. just a meme. no words

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: wedding anxiety, alliance consolidating; Dana's quiet re-approach mirrored by client's readiness to be plain
def: Dana sends wordless meme → client reads it as 'she's back in without needing a confession' → mirrors her own low-stakes opening w/ Marcus ⇒ the same plain-bid skill now working toward {p2}, healing the T5 rupture
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: per tl Dana sent wordless meme today; client doesn't need to respond with a confession
onset: now
track: T23 "no words"=Dana's non-verbal re-approach, client mirrors it
tx: apply T5 rupture→this is the repair opening without either person demanding more + name plain-bid skill generalizing from Marcus to Dana + leave response in client's hands ⇒ hand-back
bio: sex=F · p1=Marcus(fiance) · p2=Dana(maid of honor, college friend) · fhx=parents married 34yr, emotionally distant couple[inf]
tl: T1-5{ ~recent: {p2:Dana} said 'you're doing this on purpose' during last contact; client walked out and hasn't texted since → ~recent: fight re venue tour (client-stated), then fight before invitations sent } → T6-10{ ~recent: Marcus apologized for the napkin conflict (his fault); client felt disproportionate anger at his grace } → T11-15{ ~recent: real blowup last week after wedding tasting (corrected from venue-tour version) → +XXXXXX: dress fitting in 3wk; client predicts a pattern-triggered fight the night after :commit } → now{{p1:Marcus} passively defers on decisions ('whatever babe'); client experiences it as absence · client starts fights over control of shared future (wedding); 'wedding person' identity formed · client wants {p1:Marcus} to be actively choosing-with-her, not just agreeing; names the real bid vs wanting agreement · client's core fear = being chosen + unchosen repeatedly (Dana rupture, Marcus passivity) · client recognizes pattern = her anger escalates at each irreversible wedding decision point — deposit, invitations, tasting → future: {p1:Marcus}'s calm mid-conflict triggers client to feel 'there it is' (recognition of template); she can't name the fear in detail} → +XXXXXX: client intends to tell {p1:Marcus} about testing pattern + parents-template this weekend on a walk :commit
apply: T5-Dana-rupture(texted no words today)→client mirrors her own low-stakes opening toward Marcus, repairing Dana's rupture without demanding more
```

FABLE THERAPY

That's the whole skill working again — just pointed at Dana instead of Marcus. Remember when she sent 'you're doing this on purpose' and you walked out? Same situation now: a quiet bid from your best friend since college, no words required, no confession demanded. You don't have to text back an essay about all this. A meme is a meme — it's her saying 'I'm still here, I don't need you to perform the full relationship to stay.' That's the plain-bid thing we've been building, except now *you're* the one receiving it instead of sending it. So let that be enough for today: Dana reached out in exactly the low-stakes way she just found out was okay — and you don't owe her a verdict on your wedding. Blue napkins first. The walk this weekend. And a meme from your best friend is its own kind of 'I see you,' answered by nothing but presence. You came in fighting for answers nobody would give you. You're leaving able to ask them on purpose — and now even letting Dana's quiet count as yes, without making her earn it with words. That's the daughter of those polite dinners finally getting a say: not just from Marcus, but from everyone who keeps showing up wordlessly. The napkins were never the fight. They were where you learned to ask if someone chooses you — and now you're learning to let them choose back.

CLIENT · 27

> i stared at it for like an hour. it's from a show we used to binge in college. i don't know what to send back. it's been a month of nothing and she's my maid of honor, there's stuff we'd have to deal with

> before the wedding stuff anyway

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: relational anxiety; client stuck on an ambiguous bid from p3 (Dana) — months of silence, role=maid-of-honor w/ pre-wedding logistics pending, unsure whether/how to respond, fear of misreading or over-functioning
def: Dana's wordless meme → client freezes because the meaning is genuinely open + she's uncertain whether responding = fixing-it / defining-the-relationship, so non-response feels safer than a wrong-sized reply ⇒ the ambiguity itself (what does she even owe Dana?) is the bind; not 'don't respond' but 'respond to what, and why now?'
soma: NR
risk: 1(passive)
hx: p3=Dana (maid-of-honor); they'd previously binged a show together in college; ~1mo of silence since Dana's meme; client uncertain whether/how to reply given pre-wedding logistical obligations exist between them per tl
onset: per tl
track: T24 "it's been a month of nothing and she's my maid of honor... stuff we'd have to deal with before the wedding" → ambiguous bid from p3, role + logistics complicate response decision; client stuck on what/why to reply
tx: receive that this is genuinely open (no clean answer) + split 'what do I owe Dana' from 'do I owe her words now' — a month of quiet isn't a verdict either way, and the pre-wedding logistics are real but separate from the friendship bid itself + reframe her freeze as choosing between over-functioning (reply too big) vs under-responding (another polite silence like p1's parents) rather than a right/wrong reply + hand back what a proportionate yes to Dana might actually look like, framed through the plain-bid skill ⇒ hand-back
bio: sex=F[inf] · p1=Marcus(fiance) · hx=client initiates conflict; Marcus responds with passive calm/softening · p2=Dana(maid-of-honor, client's college best friend); recently distant · fhx=parents married 34yr — emotionally 'polite,' no overt fighting or affection
tl: T1-5{ ~teens..now: client+Marcus attend a wedding → ~recent: {p2:Dana} told client she 'does this on purpose'; client walked out and hasn't texted Dana since } → T6-10{ ~recent: 3 major conflicts — after venue tour, after invitations went out, over napkin colors (the one-off client initially claimed) · ~recent: {p2:Dana} sent a wordless meme referencing a show they binged in college; ~1mo of silence since } → T11-15{ ~teens..now: {p1:Marcus}'s calm mid-conflict resembles client's parents' emotionally 'polite' marriage — calm surface, nothing underneath · ~recent: client reframes the three fights as occurring at each irreversible wedding milestone (deposit, invitations, tasting) } → now
apply: T23-timing(client to tell Marcus before the fitting so he meets the real her)→client generalizes it to Dana too: a plain bid + proportionate yes beats either silence or over-functioning; same skill, new person
```

FABLE THERAPY

There's no clean answer here because there isn't one — that's not you failing to figure it out. A month of quiet from your maid-of-honor and your college-binge buddy is genuinely open, and the plain-bid skill doesn't tell you exactly what to send; it tells you what a yes actually looks like versus what polite silence would do. So let me split the thing you're stuck on: 'what do I owe Dana' isn't really about owing — it's about whether this reply is proportional to what she sent, and whether responding now serves the friendship or just relieves your own discomfort with ambiguity. A wordless meme from someone who's still here doesn't need a thesis statement back; it needs another small human thing that says 'I see you too.' That's the same skill we've been building — except now you're choosing to meet her instead of waiting for her to earn words first. And the pre-wedding logistics are real, but they're a separate thread from this one: those can get handled as practical items without ever having to decode what she meant by that show. So here's what I'd hand back: before any wedding logistics land between you and Dana, answer just this — what would a proportionate yes actually look like? Not an essay, not nothing. The smallest true thing you've got that says 'you too.' Because the daughter of those polite dinners was taught to let silence mean distance. You're about to do the exact opposite with your best friend — send one small real sentence instead of performing okayness or disappearing into it. Blue napkins first. The walk this weekend. And Dana: a show you both loved, answered in kind. That's not nothing either. That's aliveness moving underneath again — just between two people who used to binge together, and now finally see each other without words required.

> i sent one back. same show, different scene. she's typing. ok i actually have to go now. thank you for this. genuinely

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds; client completes a proportionate bid to Dana + closes the arc cleanly (came in fighting for answers nobody'd give her)
def: 'i sent one back... same show, different scene' → she met Dana's wordless yes with another small true thing → the skill generalized beyond Marcus to her oldest friendship → full arc from napkin-fight-as-weapon to willing bid both ways ⇒ close on what changed (not a fix), return to the opening thread
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: client sent Dana a same-show-different-scene reply / Dana is typing back now per tl
onset: this session
track: T25 "i sent one back... she's typing" → bid completed, arc closing
tx: receive the send (she did it — small true thing, proportionate) + reflect the full arc compactly (napkin-fight-as-weapon→willing bids both ways; came in fighting for answers nobody'd give her) + return to T1 'wedding person' reframed as someone learning plain bids, not just a bride → close warm, no open thread forced
bio: sex=F[inf] · pMarcus=fiance (passive, leaves lunch notes) · pDana=maid of honor (client's college best friend; sent the meme) · fhx=parents married 34yr — polite/no-fighting household
tl: T1-5{ ~childhood: witnessed parents' love as invisible/polite — no fighting, no hugging → ?: Marcus said 'whatever babe' about everything, client read it as non-participation } → T6-10{ ~recent: venue tour + invitations (client-stated) — but client now recalls the venue was fine; fight actually after a tasting } → T11-15{ -3wk: dress fitting scheduled (~3wk out); pattern predicts post-fitting napkin fight } → T16-20{ ~recent: Marcus told her 'I hate the sage green ones, get the blue' — aliveness she could witness } → now{Marcus said he hates the sage green napkins, wants blue}
```

FABLE THERAPY

You just sent it back. Same show, different scene — a small true thing that says 'you too,' proportionate to what she gave you with no words. That's not nothing; read it right and it's the entire skill we spent twenty sessions building, pointed at your best friend since college instead of Marcus. And look where you started: you came in wanting to laugh about napkins because saying 'this hurts' felt too big, fighting for answers nobody would give a wedding person. You're leaving able to ask them on purpose — and now letting Dana's quiet count as yes without making her earn it with words. That's the daughter of those polite dinners finally getting a say: not just from Marcus, but from everyone who keeps showing up wordlessly. The napkins were never the fight. They were where you learned to ask if someone chooses you — and now you're learning to let them choose back, in kind, one small true sentence at a time. Blue napkins first. The walk this weekend. A different scene next time. You came in fighting for answers nobody'd give you. You're leaving ready to ask them on purpose — and maybe find out what aliveness actually looks like in a life that isn't your parents'. That's the whole thing. Go let Dana finish typing.