

More and Less

by

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1

OPEN ON:

1

A rural highway in central Virginia. The dusk sky glows through the maple trees. Rolling fields stretch along either side of the cracked asphalt, with chipped wooden fences bordering the road.

A woman (JANE: mid 20s - sensuous but solitary) trudges through the crabgrass on the side of the highway, hugging grocery bags to her chest. We see her breath in the thawing spring air.

She sets down the bags and rubs her hands to warm them. A sizable diamond ring rests on her left hand.

When she drops her arms to her side, the ring glides off her finger and into the grass.

She finds it after a moment, but fights the instinct to put it back on her finger. She rises to her feet and places it in her back pocket.

She picks up the grocery bags and continues on.

We watch JANE march away. A car or two zooms past, straight into the night.

CUT TO:

2

EXT: FRONT YARD OF COUNTRY HOME

2

JANE turning onto a long, gravel driveway. An unkempt, open field swells around the wooden house in the distance.

Various colors from an old TV glint through a window. JANE approaches the front door, and turns the knob.

3

INT: COUNTRY HOME

3

Fumbling with her bags, JANE pushes through the door. ADA (early 70s: hardened, but compassionate) reclines in a patched up La-Z Boy in the living room. The TV is blaring.

JANE sets the bags down in the kitchen. She puts the food away into the pantry.

ADA

They take all those coupons I gave you?

JANE

Some.

(CONTINUED)

ADA

Some?!

JANE

Three expired in February, Ada.

ADA

Hm. They don't care about the date with me.

JANE

Well.

ADA

They have the Jalapeño ones?

JANE

One left.

JANE tosses ADA a bag of Lay's Jalapeño chips, then goes back to putting groceries away.

JANE

I could work on the flower beds tomorrow.

ADA

... If you want. I won't stop you.

JANE

And your truck, I could take it in for an oil change.

ADA

You're earnin' your keep, girl.

JANE

It's the least I can do.

ADA

Careful, or I won't ever let you leave.

JANE flashes a quick, precarious smile. ADA watches her as she makes herself busy in the kitchen.

ADA

You sure you're alright out there in that shed?

JANE

Oh, yeah. It's fine. Great.

(CONTINUED)

ADA

The springs in this couch are shit,
but s'alright for sleeping... a few
nights anyway.

JANE

No I'm-- I'm good, for the time
being.

ADA turns the TV down and turns in her chair to face JANE.

ADA

Listen, Jane, I don't know what all
your plans are, but I like whatever
this arrangement seems to be. And I
don't need to know nothin' you
don't want me to, 'less it's
something that makes me some sorta
accomplice. Then a head's up'd be
nice.

JANE shakes her head.

ADA

I didn't think so. But you gotta
have some people. Anyone know where
you're at?

JANE looks at her straight on. Doesn't answer.

ADA

Well, you can fix up that yard in
the morning. Get rid'a those weeds.

JANE nods, and exits through the front door. ADA looks after
her for a moment, then turns the TV back up.

CUT TO:

4 EXT: COUNTRY HOME 4

We track JANE as she surges off the front porch. She passes
a rusty old truck, then reaches a small shed behind the
house.

5 INT: SHED / JANE 5

Part storage shed, part makeshift guest room. A futon in the
middle of the room with JANE's belongings on the quilt.

JANE undresses to her underwear and throws on a t-shirt.
There's no bathroom, so she pours water from a plastic
bottle onto her toothbrush, then brushes intensely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

4.

She pulls a map of the East Coast out of her backpack. A few cities in the South are circled in pencil, with question marks dappling various routes between them.

CUT TO:

6 INT: COUNTRY HOME / ADA 6

ADA turning off the TV.

She sits, taking in the silence.

After a few moments, the telephone in the kitchen rings. She hobbles over to answer it.

No Caller ID.

ADA

Hello?

A short, crackled response, mostly static.

Hello? Speaking?

The line goes dead. Perplexed, ADA hangs up the landline.

She turns off the lights and limps down the creaking hallway.

CUT TO:

7 INT: SHED / JANE 7

JANE opening the shed window, biting down on her tooth brush with her molars.

Still STUDYING her map, she spits out the window. Gargles. Spits again.

CUT TO:

8 INT: COUNTRY HOME / ADA 8

Water gushing from a faucet.

ADA, in a nightgown, STUDIES herself in her bathroom mirror. Her frail HANDS clutch the sides of the sink.

CUT TO:

9 INT: SHED / JANE 9

JANE's HANDS holding her map, taut.

We see a decision in her eyes. She crumples it up and throws it aside.

With new assurance, she takes in the room, then turns down the BED.

We stay on her back as she strips naked.

She crawls into the middle of the BED and drapes the covers lightly over her body. She stretches her arms and legs to full extension, reveling in the space.

CUT TO:

10 INT: COUNTRY HOME / ADA 10

ADA standing above her BED in her nightgown. With effort and a sigh, she turns down one side of the sheets; the other remains crisply tucked.

As she's about to crawl in, the glow of headlights filters through the shutters. Tires grind against gravel.

ADA staggers to the window and peers through the blinds. A car lingers just at the head of her driveway, the engine running.

CUT TO:

11 INT: CAR 11

Hands gripping the wheel. ADA's yard and house are dark shadows in the windshield.

After a beat, the hands reach for a piece of paper in the passenger seat. Written on it: "Ada Baxter: 540-698-9012. 11 Old Acres Rd, Calverton, VA 20119."

Driver's POV of the mailbox: 11 Old Acres Rd.

PAN to the shed by the side of the house. Light seeps through the window, then goes out.

CUT TO:

12 INT: COUNTRY HOME / ADA 12

ADA's POV of the car backing out, then speeding off down the highway.

Irritated, ADA shuts the blinds and leans against her bedroom wall.

WIDE on ADA as she sighs in the darkness, then fixes her gaze on the empty bed.

CUT TO:

13 EXT: FRONT PORCH - NEXT MORNING 13

JANE working in the garden under a bright sun.

ADA sits in a chair on the porch. She watches the distant highway. JANE hoists herself up on the stairs and takes a long swig of water.

JANE

Those azaleas really went to shit.

ADA

Was either them or me.

JANE smirks. A beat.

ADA

Didn't think a Yankee'd know how to get their hands dirty.

JANE

Ha.

ADA

Your daddy make you play with mulch instead of Barbie?

JANE

My mother did.

ADA

Huh. We'd get along then. Some fathers got a whole different idea about all that.

JANE

I wouldn't know.

(CONTINUED)

ADA

Hm?

JANE

I wouldn't know. It was always just me and Mom.

ADA

That takes a tough lady. Two of 'em, at that.

JANE contemplates. A pause.

JANE

I'd... like to stay here, Ada.

ADA

Idn't that what you're doin' already?

JANE

I mean, I don't have a *somewhere* I'm really going. And... I like this arrangement, too.

ADA

Hm.

JANE

But I know that's a lot to ask, and I don't want to intrude--

ADA

(laughing quietly)
Intrude. On what?

Silence. Still sitting, JANE shifts and leans her back against the exterior of the house. She feels the place on her finger where her ring used to be. ADA notices.

ADA

Didn't lose it, I hope.

JANE

What?

ADA looks to JANE's hand, raising her eyebrows.

ADA

Could spot that thing even a mile down the road.

JANE pulls her engagement ring out of her back pocket. She looks to ADA, pursing her lips into a half smile.

(CONTINUED)

ADA
(with jest)
S' nice. Little flashy for my taste.
But nice.

Beat.

ADA
Whoever gave you that-- seems like
they oughta know if you still got
it on.

JANE
He knows.

ADA
Knows...?

JANE
It's off. It's done.

ADA
Just like that?

JANE
It was a long time coming. For me,
anyway.

ADA
How'd he take it?

JANE
Don't know. I left without really
telling him I was going.

ADA
Hm. He at least know where you ran?

JANE
No. But he knows why.

ADA raises her eyebrows and cocks her head: "Care to tell me?"

JANE
It just got to the point where I
could see everything, all these
patterns we kept falling deeper and
deeper into, and... I don't know. I
was making myself smaller, less
awake, all the time. And then, one
day I just knew, that no matter who
he was, no matter how decent, or

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JANE (cont'd)
good, or how much I felt like I
should need someone... I didn't.
Everyone will eventually be--

ADA
The same.

JANE

JANE nods.

ADA
Draining.

JANE
... Yeah.

JANE looks to ADA.

JANE
But out here... I feel big, Ada.
Like I figured out some quiet
secret, with the whole bed to
myself. I sleep better in that shed
than I have in years.

ADA
It's freedom.

JANE
Yeah. But somehow it feels
like love. With no trap.

ADA
Hm.

WIDE shot of the house and porch, the two women sitting
together in silence.

ADA reaches for the keys in her pocket. She tosses them to
JANE.

ADA
Well, get on with that truck, then.
It'll rust just sittin' there.

JANE steps off the porch. She turns back to ADA, and holds
out the ring.

JANE
Could you hold on to this? I need
to find a better spot than my
pocket.

(CONTINUED)

ADA nods, a bit surprised. She takes it, and JANE steps back off the porch.

ADA

Jane.

She turns back to ADA.

ADA

It's been-- It's good. Havin' you here.

JANE smiles, relaxed.

ADA

Go on, then.

JANE bounds toward the truck and drives off. ADA watches as the gravel and dust settle over her yard.

After a beat, the telephone in the kitchen begins to ring.

She rises hesitantly and steps inside, the screen door crashing a few times behind her.

CUT TO:

14

INT: COUNTRY HOME

14

ADA standing before her landline.

No caller ID.

She glares at the phone, and as she tenses her hands, she feels the ring JANE left with her.

The house is quiet for a moment. ADA sighs, and turns toward her living room.

It rings again. No caller ID.

ADA holds the ring in her palm, looking between it and the phone. After a beat, she scans the room, and spies the distant highway through the window.

She rushes as best she can to the windows, closing all the blinds. The phone continues to ring.

A thought occurs to her. We track ADA as she staggers outside and makes for the shed. She pockets the diamond ring.

CUT TO:

15 INT: CAR 15

The car flying down the highway. One hand on the wheel, the other grips an I-Phone. "Call Failed."

The right HAND tosses it to the passenger seat.

IN TIGHTER on the phone. A photo of JANE and her fiancée flashes on the home screen.

CUT TO:

16 EXT: SHED 16

ADA shoving through the unlocked door of the shed.

She quickly hides JANE's belongings before pulling out a key from her pocket. She exits the shed and locks the door behind her.

She moves back to the main house and rushes up the porch stairs. As she reaches for the screen door, the sound of tires on gravel grows louder behind her.

ADA turns to see the car parked in the middle of her driveway.

17 EXT: FRONT YARD 17

ADA's POV of the driver (VICTORIA: mid 50s - powerful, professional) as she exits the car.

ADA recoils, surprised by who she sees.

VICTORIA looks directly at ADA as she moves toward her on the porch.

VICTORIA
(with masked politeness,
calling to ADA in the
distance)
Good morning.

ADA glares.

VICTORIA
I'm sorry to intrude--

ADA
(harsh, direct)
Yes. Can I help you?

A beat.

(CONTINUED)

VICTORIA
My name's Victoria Scott. I'm not
from around here, but--

ADA
I can see that.

VICTORIA re-sizes her up. ADA holds her ground on the porch,
looking down on VICTORIA.

VICTORIA
Well, I'm here because I'm looking
for someone. Any chance you've seen
this woman?

VICTORIA pulls up something on her phone. ADA inches closer
to see a photo of JANE.

The women lock eyes.

VICTORIA
Have you seen her? Maybe around--
town?

A beat.

ADA
(cooly)
Can't say I have.

VICTORIA
It's a small place.

ADA
Sure is. And folks 'round here
don't always take kindly to
strangers. Much less trespassers.

VICTORIA's eyes fix on ADA, hard. She takes a step up the
porch stairs.

VICTORIA
The grocer, down the road? He
pointed me your way. He said you
live alone, but some young woman
was doing the shopping for you now?
He thought maybe a niece, but--

ADA
Who are you? Some kinda
investigator? Trespassing on my
property in the middle of the--

(CONTINUED)

VICTORIA
I'm her mother.

Silence.

VICTORIA
Her last GPS locations are marked
in this town, so I need to ask you
again. Have you seen her?

ADA can't answer. VICTORIA takes this as a yes, and presses forward.

The following is interspersed with a few quick cuts to JANE in real time: driving along the rural highway, the window down, her hair whipping across her beaming face.

VICTORIA
Look. I'm not here to drag her back
anywhere. I get it. I know what
she's running from. He showed me
the note she left in their kitchen
the morning she ran, and a part of
me was proud. The woman I raised
chooses herself before anyone else.
But more of me's sorry, because she
has no idea what it means to be a
woman alone at an age when even
freedom gets old. She needs to
know, and I couldn't find a way to
tell her.

CUT back to VICTORIA and ADA on the porch.

VICTORIA takes out a piece of paper from her pocket and hands it to ADA.

VICTORIA
This is where I'm staying. For
whenever you *might* see her.

VICTORIA looks to the shed. She knows.
Just... let her know I'm here.

VICTORIA descends the stairs and makes for her car. She drives off down the highway.

ADA looks off after her, torn and bewildered. After a long beat, she limps to the shed.

CUT TO:

18 INT: SHED 18

ADA pulls out the items of JANE's that she'd hidden around the space. She packs them carefully in JANE's backpack.

CUT TO:

19 EXT: FRONT PORCH - EARLY EVENING 19

ADA sitting in her chair on the porch. Stoic. JANE's backpack sits at her feet. She watches the highway.

JANE pulls up in the truck. She waves to ADA as she parks it by the shed.

ADA takes a deep breath.

JANE rounds the corner with grocery bags in her arms.

JANE

Sorry I'm back so late. Took them longer than they thought with that thing. But the store had more of your chips!

She reaches the porch, looks into ADA's cold expression, then notices her own backpack. JANE's face sinks as she realizes.

JANE

Why?

ADA

You can't stay here.

JANE

Why?

ADA

This isn't what you want. Not really.

JANE

You can't decide that for me.

ADA

I know.

ADA rises to her feet.

ADA

But I wish someone'd told me. There *is* a difference between being alone

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ADA (cont'd)
and being lonely, but eventually
they become the same.

ADA reaches into her pocket and pulls out the diamond ring.
She tucks it into JANE's palm.

ADA
Your mother. She found out you were
here. She's at the motel down the
road... Let me at least drive you
that way.

ADA reaches for the keys in JANE's hand. JANE roughly grabs
her backpack.

JANE
(bewildered, hurt)
It's alright. You've done enough.

JANE turns down the porch with her backpack over her
shoulder, making for the highway.

ADA is left alone on the porch, with the two bags of
groceries spilling over on the deck.

CUT TO:

20 EXT: RURAL HIGHWAY 20

Against the purple sky, JANE drifts along the side of the
road. Every so often cars zoom past her, head on, whipping
her hair across her face.

CUT TO:

21 INT: MOTEL ROOM 21

VICTORIA lying propped up on one side of the bed. A dim lamp
flickers beside her. She scrolls through a few photos of
herself and JANE before tossing the phone aside. She closes
her eyes and rests her head against the wall.

CUT TO:

22 INT: COUNTRY HOME 22

ADA struggling to put groceries away in high corners of her
kitchen. She gives up and moves to her recliner in the
living room. She sinks in, sighing in the silence.

CUT TO:

23 EXT: RURAL HIGHWAY 23

JANE running one hand along a splintering fence, pricking her fingers on the shards. The other holds her diamond ring limp between her fingers.

She gazes across an open field just beyond the fence line. After a moment, she grips the top rail and hauls herself over.

24 EXT: OPEN FIELD 24

The grass brushes her shins, her calves. She walks on, toward the center of the open expanse, the trees ahead shaking in the wind.

In the middle of the field, JANE stares at the ground. She clenches the ring in her fist, then lets it drop in the grass.

She looks to the sky, all around the vastness, then turns back to the road.

CUT TO:

25 EXT: RURAL HIGHWAY 25

JANE's back, trudging along the highway.

CUT to her profile, eyes to the ground, short breaths. After a moment, she stops mid stride. A full, steady inhale. She looks up, straight ahead, and walks on.

FADE OUT gradually on her back as her silhouette grows smaller in the distance.

END.