THE ASHES BETWEEN US

Written by

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INT. HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE - CLASSROOM - DAY

ELLIE (50s) stands in front of a small class. Notes are scribbled on a whiteboard and STUDENTS (30s-50s) have open notebooks. A STUDENT raises their hand.

STUDENT
So can we hear it? The transmission, I mean?

There is a small murmur that waves over the class. Ellie squirms uncomfortably.

ELLIE
Sure. I'll be taking a call if anyone needs me.

Ellie searches the company computer for a file. Her cursor hovers over an audio file labeled 'Eventide_DistressCall.' She eyes her escape and then clicks the file.

Ellie leaves the room and sits down near the closed classroom door.

INT. HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

There is a plaque that says 'Atmospheric Communications' on the wall. From the outside, she hears a muffled recording playing inside the classroom.

RECORDING:

A WOMAN'S labored breathing bleeds in on the recording... She steadies. Calmer, calmer, calm. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK: she's rifling with something. A long HISS.

WOMAN (V.O.)
No! Come on!

Static crackles on a radio.

She hyperventilates...

END OF RECORDING.

Ellie fumbles to find the phone in her suit coat pocket. Her hands shake as she scrolls through her phone. She hovers over a contact and then the line trills. SYDNEY answers the phone.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
Hey Honey, what's up?

ELLIE
I just- I can't remember if I turned the stove off.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
It's off! I left after you did today, remember?

ELLIE
No, I don't think I did. I think I left it on and, and, and I think I should probably go home to check on that.

Ellie's breath gets shallow and quick.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
Shh, hey, it's okay. Everything is okay. I'm with you. We're gonna breathe, ready? In... 2, 3, 4, and out... 2, 3, 4. In... 2, 3, 4...

INT. SEMI CAB - NIGHT

The CB/HAM radio snaps and crackles. Bits of a transmission are heard: the digital fragments of a Woman's muffled screams and labored breathing.

INT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - CONTINUOUS

EVERETT (30s) sits at a diner booth, staring at his plate. There are a few customers scattered across the large diner as MUSIC from a jukebox plays overhead.

Everett gets up and walks over to the machine. He crams his hand into his pocket and straightens some crumpled bills on the side of the machine. After the machine accepts the bills, he selects a song and walks back to his seat.

The juke plays out the last song and switches to Everett's.

MUSIC: UNFUCKTHEWORLD by ANGEL OLSEN.

FLASHBACK - INT. SEMI CAB - DUSK

Everett drives in the West Texas desert. In the passenger's seat, the glow of twilight shines upon DELIA's (20s) cheekbones. She mouths the words to the song, her feet on the dash as she stares out of the window. Everett drives the semi through a canyon. She rolls down the window after lighting a cigarette. He watches her hair dance in the wind.

She smiles at Everett once she feels his gaze. She hands him the butt of the cigarette. He cracks his window and takes a drag of the cigarette.

Delia kisses the side of his face passionately and then takes back the cigarette.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Everett hides in a stall, lighting a meth pipe with a pocket torch. On his way out, he looks at his haggard reflection. His jaw is clenched, multiple scabs on his face.

INT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - CONTINUOUS

A WAITRESS (40s) double takes, walking by Everett.

WAITRESS
Everything okay, sweet pea? Need any sauces or—

EVERETT
Can I just get a to-go box?

WAITRESS
Sure thing, I'll be right back.

Everett turns his phone on. A bunch of alerts pop up on his phone.

BZZT, BZZT, BZZT, BZZT: a call from Jimmy. Everett looks out of the diner window, at his semi truck. He looks back at the phone. Then back again at the semi before it finally goes to voicemail.

EXT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - CONTINUOUS

BZZT, BZZT, BZZT, BZZT: another call from Jimmy.

EVERETT
Hey Jimmy... I know, I know, I'm two shipments behind, I-... Yes, sir. Yes, sir... I do know I'm out of compliance. Just gimme a couple more days, I'll be there. Where am I? I'm close. Hey, look, I'll talk to you once I get there... Yes, I'll keep my phone on.

Everett hangs up and looks at his phone: hundreds of missed calls and texts. All of them either in relation to where he and Delia are or from Jimmy demanding to know where he is.

INSERT - PHONE

He powers his phone off.

INT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - CONTINUOUS

Everett walks to his table. His food has been boxed up. He takes a couple of bills out of his pocket and leaves them on the table.

Outside the window, he notices a dirty, scantily-clad OLD WOMAN (60s). He picks up his leftovers and leaves.

EXT. SOARING JAY'S REST STOP DINER - CONTINUOUS

As he is walking to his semi, Everett passes the Old Woman and hands her the to-go box.

EVERETT
Hungry?

OLD WOMAN
I don't do trades. There's an ATM in the diner.

EVERETT
I'm tryna do you a favor.

OLD WOMAN
Well, I ain't a fuckin' charity case.

EVERETT
Last time I ever try to fuckin' help somebody.

Everett keeps the to-go box and continues walking to his semi.

OLD WOMAN
Hey wait— that's your rig right there?

EVERETT
Yeah. Why?

OLD WOMAN
Some girl was on your radio. Sounded like a goddamn murder house, all screamin' and breathin'.

EVERETT
A girl?

OLD WOMAN
I mean, that's what it sounded like.

EVERETT
What did she say?

OLD WOMAN
I don't know, that's all I could hear.

EVERETT
Okay? Thanks, I guess.

The Old Woman looks cautiously at Everett as he gets into a company semi truck labeled 'Apex Overland Logistics.'

INT. SEMI CAB - CONTINUOUS

Everett puts his to-go box on the passenger seat.

Inside of the semi cab, there is a busted device that looks like a broken iPad sitting in the passenger seat (his Electronic Logging Device). Copper wires hang from the dashboard.

He cracks open an energy drink and takes a gulp, when suddenly his modified CB/HAM radio begins to crackle again.

ELLIE (V.O.)
C… one— me?

He puts down his energy drink.

EVERETT
(Into radio)
This is Diesel Demon, you're breaking up, gimme one sec…

Everett adjusts the radio.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Come back.