

About Face

By

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EXT. RURAL GAS STATION, DAY

JESSICA, late 20s, exits a rural gas station carrying a case of beer. MARK, early 20s, follows with his case of beer. They are wearing military fatigues. SHANNON, a woman in her 20s, holds a baby and walks up to Jessica, excited to see her. Mark keeps walking to a pick-up truck.

SHANNON
Hey Girl! You back?

Jessica looks over as Shannon walks up to hug her. Shannon hugs Jessica. Jessica breaks away quickly.

JESSICA
Yeah, I'm back, for now anyway. We have to go back sooner than we thought...assholes.

SHANNON
You coming out to the party at the lake tonight? It's gonna be a good one.

JESSICA
Hell, yes. That is exactly what I need. I'll be over to hang out soon. My buddy Mark is giving me a ride to Joe's.

Shannon gives her a look.

JESSICA
I know, girl. But he owes me money and you know how it is.

SHANNON
Totally.

Jessica walks over to Mark's truck, puts the beer on the the seat, and hops in. She waves at Shannon as they drive off.

INT. CAB OF PICK-UP TRUCK, DAY

The two soldiers careen down the curvy country road in the battered pick-up truck. They are smoking cigarettes with the windows down. Classic rock is blaring from the busted speakers. They have military issued duffel bags and packs in the truck bed.

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JESSICA

It's around the next curve.

Mark nods and starts slowing down as he drives around the next curve. They come to a small cinder block house that is set in a clearing in the trees. He pulls off the road and into the dirt driveway. The truck idles.

JESSICA

Thanks for the ride. I can't believe my car is still fucked up.

MARK

No big deal. See you soon. Too fucking soon.

JESSICA

No shit.

She opens the door and steps out. A dog is barking. She grabs her pack from the back of the truck and then reaches in to get her case of beer. She shuts the door and nods at him. He backs out as she turns to look at the house. She drops her pack, takes out a beer, twists off the top, takes a sip, and flicks the top to the ground. She hoists her pack to her shoulders, picks up the case of beer, and walks toward the house.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, DAY

Jessica drops her pack, opens the screen door, and knocks on the front door. She waits as she hears shuffling footsteps inside. TRACY, a rough around the edges woman in her fifties, opens the door.

TRACY

Well, now, look who it is. Did you finally come to your senses?

WOMAN

What? Joe owes me. He said to come by when I got back into town.

TRACY

Joe's at work. He should be back soon. You can wait out here.

She shakes her head and she sees Jessica's half-empty beer bottle.

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TRACY

Looks like you'll be fine.

Tracy shakes her head and walks away, muttering to herself.

TRACY

...been gone for months and she
just comes back in for money...

Jessica rolls her eyes and puts her beer down on the porch railing. She lights a cigarette and flicks the ash down on the porch and starts drinking her beer again.

Tracy steps out of the house and onto the porch with keys in her hand.

TRACY

I gotta go to town. I'll be back
soon.

Tracy gives the woman a disparaging look.

TRACY

Now, I'm leaving the door unlocked
since Joe is on the way. Don't make
me regret it.

She limps past Jessica and gets into her old sedan that is parked in the yard. She pulls out of the driveway and slowly drives down the road towards town.

Jessica sighs and puts her cigarette butt into her empty beer bottle. She twists off another as sweat rolls down her face.

She takes out her cell phone, dials, and holds it to her head.

JESSICA

Hey, girl. Naw, he's not here
yet,...I texted him that I was on
the way. Can you pick me up in
twenty? I can't stay here
long...Thanks. I cannot wait to
party tonight. It's been too
fucking long...Ok, see you then.

A few moments later, she puts another butt into the first empty beer bottle. She opens the screen door and then the front door and walks inside the house.

INT. HOUSE, DAY

She walks further into the small cinder block house. It is a clean and simple home with an open floor plan. It has a slightly messy, lived in, look to it. The linoleum is worn in places. She walks through the kitchen, smirking at the ceramic rooster figurines on the wall. She stops to open the fridge. She closes the door and is surprised to see a picture of herself on the fridge. She picks up a box of Little Debbie brownies and takes one out and starts eating it as she walks through the house.

She stops to stand in front of the window air conditioning unit. As she cools off, she notices the baby toys strewn around the living room. She steps away from the A/C unit and walks towards the room at the end of the hall, stopping short at the door to that room.

She looks in the room. The walls are bright pink and there is a well worn white crib, a rocking chair, and a million stuffed animals. White letters spelling AMANDA are nailed onto the walls. Before she can stop herself, she steps into the room and turns in a 360 degree motion, transfixed by the pink. She picks up a baby dress and holds it out, examining it. She puts it back. She picks up a stuffed hippopotamus and stares at it for a few moments. She shakes her head. She squats down and picks up a baby blanket and is about to press it to her face when she hears the dog barking and a car pulling up outside. She freezes. She pops up and turns to look out of the window in the baby's room and sees that a police car has pulled up to the house.

JESSICA

Shit!

She puts the blanket and the hippopotamus down and looks back out of the window as a police officer steps out of the police cruiser. She looks around nervously and squints to see the figure better. She recognizes JOE, a wiry man with an arm sleeve tattoo.

JESSICA

What the...?

She moves quickly meets the police officer at the front door, laughing nervously.

JESSICA

Joe? What the hell?

Joe is taken aback by the surprise visitor in his home. He quickly recovers, displeased by the laughter. He brushes past her on his way into the house. He doesn't look at her as he talks to her.

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JOE

Mama let you inside? When did you get back?

Jessica turns and follows him into the small kitchen, sipping her beer the whole time.

JESSICA

I just got back. Came by to get the cash you owe me. I'll be gone right after.

JOE

That's all, huh?

JESSICA

When did you...

Joe walks to the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of water.

JOE

It's hard out there. I had to get a better job. The city was hiring...

He stares at her, waiting for her to give a shit. He gives up after a few seconds.

JOE

Why do you even care? You obviously don't give a shit about us. We haven't heard from you the whole time you've been gone. How long was it? Over a year! A year, Jess.

During this exchange, he takes out his wallet. Sunlight glints off his badge as he fishes out a few bills and throws them on the counter.

JESSICA

Yes, I've been gone. I've been at WAR. It's my job. I had to go.

Jessica grabs the cash and turns to go. He blocks her exit but changes his mind and lets her pass.

JESSICA

Told you I'd leave. Thanks.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, DAY

Joe follows her out of the house, closing the front door behind him.

JOE

Jess, you honestly don't care?

She stops and turns while lighting a cigarette and digging in her bag for her cell phone.

JESSICA

I can't do this right now.

JOE

What is wrong with you? What kind of mother are you?

She gives him a look while flicking her ashes onto the floor of the porch.

JOE

We sent letters and... pictures. I don't understand. I get it if you don't want to be with me anymore. That's fine. But, why cut her out?

JESSICA

You don't know what you're talking about. I'm not a mother. I never asked to be.

They stand in tense silence for several moments. Joe looks at her and shakes his head. She meets his glare. She is about to speak when she hears a car pulling up to the house. They both look and see Joe's mom, Tracy, coming back in the sedan. Jessica gets a text and she looks down at her phone. A few moments later, a red lowrider Honda Civic rushes up to the driveway blaring top 40 music and honking the horn. Jessica picks up her pack and slings it on her back. She picks up her case of beer.

JESSICA

Look, I gotta go. I've got places to be.

She nods her head toward the red Civic. The horn honks again.

JESSIA

Shannon's shift starts in thirty minutes. I gotta go.

EXT. FRONT YARD, DAY

Jessica turns and walks toward the Civic that is idling right in the entrance to the driveway. She passes the sedan, looking to see why Tracy is bent over in the back seat. She hears a child's voice but can't make out what the child is saying. She walks away faster. Tracy stands up and she is holding AMANDA, an exuberant 18 month old clutching a stuffed lamb. She helps her down to the grass and Amanda watches Jessica as she is walking towards the Civic.

AMANDA

Mama?

Tracy looks at Joe. He is standing on the porch and looks gutted. Tracy turns to walk to the house, looking back to make sure Amanda is following but Amanda turns back toward Jessica, becoming more and more overjoyed.

AMANDA

That my Mama? Mama? MAMA?

Before Tracy can stop her, Amanda takes off running as fast as she can on her little toddler legs towards Jessica.

TRACY

Amanda! Amanda come back! No,
ma'am! Come back right now! You
know not to go near the road. Joe!

Tracy tries to run but can't move very quickly. Joe jumps off the porch and runs towards the child.

JOE

Jessica!

Jessica stops walking, drops her pack, and whirls around. Visibly shaken, she drops to her knees as Amanda's little arms wrap around her neck.

AMANDA

Got you! Hold you Mama! Hold you?

Jessica buries her face in the little girl's hair, holding her as close as she can. Joe stops a few feet away, watching them. Tracy never made it past the car, leaning on it for support. It takes Jessica a few tries, but she manages to pry the little girls arms from her neck. She leans back to get a good look at Amanda's little face for the tiniest second before Amanda hugs her again. Jessica stares at Joe over Amanda's head. She waves to Shannon to drive off without her. She closes her eyes and inhales the scent of Amanda's hair. Jessica looks up to Joe.

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JESSICA
Can I stay a little longer?