

COMING TO TERMS

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BLACK SCREEN.

SHAW: (O.S.)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
I'm Major General Colton Shaw, and
on behalf of the Secretary of the
Air Force, the Air Force Chief of
Staff, and the Vice Chiefs of
Staff...

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

COLTON SHAW, clad in an Air Force dress uniform, stands at a podium in front of a room packed with U.S. Air Force personnel, all in their own dress uniforms, sitting at round dinner tables.

SHAW: (CONT'D)

I'd like to welcome you to the 64th
annual Officer's Appreciation
Dinner. I'll be your Master of
Ceremonies for the evening.

At one of the tables sits a handsome airman, Lt. Col. WESLEY HIGGS, who is not paying any attention to the proceedings. Higgs is looking around the room to see if he recognizes anyone he knows. Camera stays on Higgs as Shaw continues.

SHAW: (CONT'D)

As many of you know, this dinner
began as an intimate affair. It
remains an invitation only event,
meant to celebrate the achievements
of the best officers in the Air
Force today.

Higgs spots the person he's looking for out on the balcony connected to the room.

Higgs stands up and walks towards the bar.

SHAW: (CONT'D)

This banquet, however, has grown in
size every year, and that's because
of the fine work that you ladies
and gentlemen do every day, both in
the skies, and on the ground.

Higgs quietly orders two drinks, making sure not to draw attention to himself, and walks to the balcony door.

SHAW: (CONT'D)
So tonight, enjoy yourselves. You
make the Air Force the strong
military entity that it is today...

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Higgs steps on to the balcony, shutting the door softly
behind him. The woman on the balcony, Lt. Col. ASHLEY
WARNER, doesn't notice that Higgs has entered.

HIGGS:
Do you still take your scotch neat?

Warner turns around, and smiles warmly.

WARNER:
That's the only way to drink it.

Higgs hands Warner the glass, and they share a hug.

WARNER:
How are you, Wes?

HIGGS:
Can't complain, what are you up to
these days?

WARNER:
Working on C-17s in Spokane.

HIGGS:
Sounds like a nice gig, do you like
it?

WARNER:
It kills time while I move up the
chain. What about you?

HIGGS:
Teaching at the academy.

WARNER:
And still a shitty liar.

Higgs laughs, Warner smiles.

WARNER:
You got Houston, didn't you?

HIGGS:
No, I didn't.

WARNER:

Well, where are you then? I mean,
Jesus Wes, you and I had something.
I thought you'd at least say
goodbye. You just left without a
word. You went incognito on me,
and no one told me where you were.

Higgs is silent. He knows that he can't tell Warner what
he's doing.

WARNER: (CONT'D)

(light bulb moment)

You got that R+D spot in Roswell,
didn't you?

HIGGS:

(guilty)

I can't confirm or deny that.

WARNER:

The same one I went for?

HIGGS:

You applied for it, yes.

WARNER:

(edge to her voice)

You were the other applicant--

HIGGS:

Ashley, I didn't even know you'd
applied until after I'd been
accepted--

WARNER:

I told you I went for it!

HIGGS:

When did you tell me?

Warner looks around to see if anyone else is on the balcony,
then steps towards Higgs.

WARNER:

(whispers)

When I was naked in your bed, after
the first time we'd fucked.

HIGGS:

Jesus, Ashley, I was asleep--

WARNER:

Great, further proof that you don't pay attention when I talk to you.

HIGGS:

Well, I can tell you right now that the job isn't what either of us wanted or expected it to be.

WARNER:

What's that supposed to mean?

HIGGS:

The job we applied for was billed as space exploration R+D, right?

WARNER:

Right.

HIGGS:

Well, it sure as hell isn't that.

WARNER:

What is it, then?

HIGGS:

Put it to you this way, the National Defense Authorization Act doesn't have a line-item for NASA, anymore. Private sector runs aerospace now. My current job has nothing to do with space exploration.

(a beat)

Ashley, I know that this is a shitty excuse for an apology, but I want you to know that if I had to go back and do it all again, I'd never apply for the job, and I'd counsel you not to either.

WARNER:

Do you get any fulfillment out of it?

HIGGS:

Well, it's still a classified project, so there's a honeymoon period that you experience when it's really cool to have access to top secret info.

(MORE)

HIGGS: (CONT'D)

But after three years of coming home to an empty condo, and having as little human contact as possible, it gets very lonely.

WARNER:

Can I ask you something?

HIGGS:

Of course.

WARNER:

You still love me, don't you?

HIGGS:

I always have. Never stopped. I'm sorry that I didn't tell you I was leaving, or where I was going, but I couldn't exactly do that when my project is classified Top Secret--

WARNER:

I know that Wes.

(a beat)

So where do we go from here?

HIGGS:

I'm getting out, and I'm going to Aerodyne Engineering. I was hoping to convince you to come with me. Don't you still have feelings--

WARNER:

Come with you?

HIGGS:

Yeah, you've put in your time. Just don't re-up next time around.

WARNER:

I'm glad the decision was so easy for you.

HIGGS:

What's that supposed to mean?

WARNER:

Oh, come on Wes. You think you're the only one with a top secret job? I'm not in Spokane. That was a line of bullshit I fed you because

(MORE)

WARNER: (CONT'D)

I knew you'd lie about what you were doing. I've got a sweet gig, and I've made myself a very nice career.

HIGGS:

So, Aerodyne's a "no," then?

WARNER:

Of course it's a "no." Why would I leave what I have now?

HIGGS:

Ouch. I guess you answered both questions, then.

WARNER:

I'm sorry, Wes. I just...I moved on, after you left.

HIGGS:

I didn't like the way I ended things between us. I'm sorry. Truly, I apologize.

WARNER:

I forgive you, Wes. I mean it.

(a beat)

But I had to force myself to forget about you, and us, for my own good, I mean, did I ever tell you how my career started? I had options before I chose the academy. And you know what ran through my head the day that you left?

(a beat)

I kept telling myself, 'you gave up a full scholarship to M.I.T. for this?

(a beat)

What a silly, stupid girl I was. To think that in choosing the academy, in choosing to dedicate my life to defending America, that I might meet an honorable man with whom I could spend the rest of my days. For a year and half, I hated myself for making that decision.

HIGGS:
Ashley, I'm so sorry.

WARNER:
Again, I forgive you, Wes. It's water under the bridge. I know you didn't mean to hurt me, but it happened. After you left, you made me question the first big decision of my life, and I've come to terms with that decision now.

(a beat)
You've gotta come to terms with the fact that I'm not coming with you.

HIGGS:
Will you take a few days to think--

WARNER:
I don't need a few days, Wes. I'm not coming with you, because I can't stand the thought of waking up alone, naked in your bed, for the hundredth time, with you already halfway across the world.

HIGGS:
So that's it?

WARNER:
That's it, Wes. Please believe me when I say that it was really nice to see you tonight, because I do forgive you, and I needed to say that because, deep down, I needed that closure.

(a beat)
You look really good. Take care of yourself.

Warner goes back inside to the dinner, leaving Higgs alone on the balcony.

THE END.