

Rain Check

EXT. FARMYARD - DAWN

Corroded tin structures and weather-worn stone buildings scatter the half acre yard.

Wood pigeons call out to one another as the first rays of sunlight infiltrate a cloudless sky.

Machinery whirs from inside a dimly lit cattle pen.

OSCAR, a skittish Border Collie whose best years have passed, watches eagerly from the comfort of a disused digger bucket.

His ears perk as a tractor reverses out the pen.

He fixates on the iron giant as it slugs towards a stack of bales, secures one with its hay spear and heads back inside.

He settles down.

INT. TIE-STALL BARN - DAWN

A yard scraper makes its way through the centre of the barn under the watchful eye of around two dozen dairy cows.

Behind the wheel sits ADGE, fifties, eyes sunken by sleepless nights, skin seasoned by a lifetime of hard labour.

MOMENTS LATER

Adge moves the remaining muck with a handheld scraper. Stops to wipe the sweat from his brow and is straight back to work.

INT. FREESTALL BARN - DAWN

Adge pours a bucket of grain mix into a feeder. Much to the excitement of ten giddy dairy calves.

They tuck into their meal while Adge moves along to a neighbouring trough and repeats the process.

EXT. FARMYARD - DAWN

Oscar watches as Adge steps out of the freestall barn.

This clearly excites him but he remains in the digger bucket.

OUTSIDE FREESTALL BARN

Adge closes the gate behind him. Leans against it.

He stares up at the featureless sky.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAWN

Adge turns the key. The engine reluctantly kicks into life.

EXT. FARMYARD - DAWN

Oscar watches like a hawk as the beat-up Land Rover rolls towards him. Stops a few feet away.

He waits patiently as the passenger door swings open.

Adge stares at him. Oscar stares back.

Adge smiles, slaps the passenger seat twice.

Oscar springs into life. Runs towards the wagon and leaps inside. Adge pulls away down a dry dirt track.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAWN

Adge's Land Rover climbs steep uneven terrain, following in the tyre tracks of previous voyages.

It reaches an isolated STONE OUTHOUSE around two thirds of the way up and comes to a halt.

EXT. HILLSIDE - TOP OF THE HILL - DAWN

Oscar turfs up a giant puffball mushroom.

Adge trudges past. Tackles the last few metres of the ascent.

He stands beside a large pole topped with a static WINDSOCK.

He takes a breath. Stares into the distance.

The morning sun breaches the horizon, complimenting the already stunning view of rolling fields and meadows, rich with agriculture and wildlife as far as the eye can see.

He scans the clear skies, searches for something. His face suggests he hasn't found it. A deep sigh confirms this.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Adge's Land Rover sits outside an ivy-clad farmhouse, built sometime in the nineteenth century and by the looks of it, hasn't been renovated since.

INT. FARMHOUSE - RUSTIC KITCHEN - DAY

Adge sits alone at a solid oak dining table. Slouch in his posture and fatigue in his face.

He prods away at breakfast - two slices of cremated toast topped with a sorry-looking slop of scrambled eggs.

He turns to Oscar who watches keenly from a blanket below.

Tears a piece of toast in two and shares it with him.

He chuckles, instinctively looks to the empty chair opposite.

His expression returns to nothingness.

He stares at the chair for a moment longer. Sits up straight. Lifts his elbows from the table and continues to eat.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PATHWAY - DAY

Oscar runs rings around Adge as he struggles to carry a roll of stock fencing to his Land Rover. He lays it down. Takes a well-deserved breath. Opens the boot.

His eyes are drawn to something inside.

He remains still. Almost frozen.

He leans in and pushes whatever it is to one side. Then lifts in the fencing and slams the boot shut.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Adge sits in the driver seat. Something on his mind.

He stares at a set of keys in the palm of his hand with some sort of leather pouch keyring attached to them.

Oscar studies him from below through the open passenger door.

He pines, snapping his owner out of his trance.

Adge turns to him, slaps the seat twice. Oscar hops inside.

Adge slots one of the keys into the ignition.

EXT. FALLOW FIELD - DAY

Adge hammers staples into posts to secure a length of stock fencing which borders the barren land.

Beneath his feet, cracks run deep into the bone-dry ground.

Oscar makes the most of the only sun block in sight, the Land Rover's chassis, as he waits for his owner to finish up.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Oscar's head hangs out the window while Adge drives down a dirt track between two fields. To his left, a herd of cows graze on dehydrated grass. To his right, thousands of maize plants wilt side by side in the midday sun.

He comes to a crossroads, takes a left. Then slams on the brakes. Reverses back. Frowns at what he sees up ahead.

A RAINBOW shines above ground some quarter mile away.

EXT. END OF DIRT TRACK - DAY

Adge's Land Rover skids to a stop behind a field gate.

Gallons of water spray into the air up ahead.

Oscar watches from the passenger seat as his flustered owner jumps out, hops the gate and moves through thick mud to address the problem.

EXT. SUGAR BEET FIELD - DAY

Water sprays from a split suction hose attached to a large irrigation pump.

Adge turns a lever, cutting off the water supply.

He slumps to the ground, dripping wet and caked in mud.

MOMENTS LATER

Adge inspects his crop.

He takes a knee. Crumbles a sugar beet leaf in his hand. He unearths the root, no bigger than your average parsnip. Fuck.

He glances over the rest of the field where thousands more vulnerable plants lie.

INT. STONE OUTHOUSE - DAY

Hoard of boxes, spare parts and antique-like tools litter the floor, walls and shelving units.

TWO VINTAGE DECK CHAIRS rest against a decaying lawn mower.

Adge rifles through the contents of a steel drum. Then a box. Then another. He surveys the room. Finally clocks what he's after. A spare suction hose lies atop a ten foot tall shelf.

Beside it sits a LARGE DUSTY DEMIJOHN.

MOMENTS LATER

Adge positions a rickety wooden ladder against the shelf. As it makes contact, the Demijohn above his head wobbles.

He's none the wiser and pushes on the ladder a second time to test its sturdiness. The Demijohn sways again.

He tackles the first rung, then the second, the heavy jar threatening to fall from the unstable shelf with each move.

He carries on. Third. Fourth.

As he hits the fifth, the rung buckles under his weight.

His boot tears through the rest of the rungs on the way down.

He stumbles backwards, barely managing to keep his footing.

He composes himself, stares down at his hand, now leaking thanks to a nasty wood splinter. Then back to the spare suction hose which still sits there proudly. Mocking him.

EXT. STONE OUTHOUSE - DAY

Adge sits on one of the vintage deck chairs, his hand encased in a bloody rag.

Oscar lies at the foot of the spare chair beside him, waiting for permission to aboard.

Adge pays him no attention. Too busy staring at the leather pouch keyring in the palm of his hand.

Inside the pouch lies a twelve year sobriety coin.

He removes it. Rubs a thumb over the embossed lettering.

'TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE'

He pushes himself up.

INT. LAND ROVER - INSIDE BOOT - DAY

Adge stares inside, silhouetted by the afternoon sun.

EXT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Eight brown bottles of homemade cider poke out from a milk crate in the boot. An attached handwritten note reads -

'Appreciate the top soil. Here's a little wet stuff to see you through the drought. Your grateful neighbour.'

EXT. STONE OUTHOUSE - DAY

Adge leans forward in his perch, bottle in one hand, sobriety coin in the other. He cracks open the bottle using the coin.

Just as he's about to destroy twelve years hard work, he frowns, surveys the area in front of him. No Oscar.

He places the bottle beside the crate at his feet.

Panic sets in. He looks left. Looks right. Still nothing.

Turns to the outhouse behind him.

Panic over.

Oscar cowers in the doorway.

Adge screws his face. Slaps the chair beside him twice. But Oscar doesn't budge. He slaps it again. Still no luck.

He sighs. Retrieves his bottle from the ground. Sits back.

He studies it. Lifts it to his lips.

Freezes.

His eyes widen as he stares into the darkened sky above.

A flock of a thousand or more starlings soar overhead.

He watches in awe as they pass by, vanishing into the distance as quickly as they appeared.

He turns to Oscar who seems more agitated by the second.

Looks to the top of the hill.

The now-erect windsock looks back at him.

He drops the bottle.

Jumps to his feet.

Cider soaks into dry soil as he hastily clambers upwards.

Oscar pines in the doorway. Barks for his owner to return.

In the distance, Adge reaches his destination.

He stands motionlessly at the hill's peak.

The sky above him darkens.

A faint rumble of thunder breaches the air.

FADE OUT.