

ROOTING FOR YOU BRO
EPISODE 3
"We see you"

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FADE IN:

1 **INT. HOSPITAL - DAY - FLASHBACK**

1

Bright. Emotional. A hallway lined with nurses, family members, and hospital staff. Applause echoes down the corridor.

NADINE(54), warm, radiant in a headscarf) rings the CANCER BELL triumphantly, her hand trembling with emotion. The bell clangs three times each one full of meaning.

NURSES cheer. A YOUNG GRANDCHILD claps in excitement. FAMILY members hug and cry.

CLIFF (58) stands beside her, holding her hand, his other arm around her shoulder. He grins wide, tears forming in his eyes. This is joy, pure..

 CLIFF
 (to his wife, quietly)
 You did it, baby... You really did
 it.

She leans into him. A private, knowing look exchanged, decades of marriage seen in a glance.

 WIFE
 I couldn't have done it without
 you.

He kisses her temple, holds her tightly as the celebration swirls around them.

2 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER THAT DAY**

2

Muted. Stark contrast. No celebration. Just silence.

CLIFF sits at a long, cold boardroom table. Still dressed in his janitorial uniform. His smile is gone. Now he's just... there.

He signs a set of documents, his hand slow, methodical. No music, no sound except the scratch of pen on paper.

He slides the papers across the table.

In the blurred foreground, we see the back of a MAN IN A SUIT and a WOMAN IN BUSINESS ATTIRE. We can't hear them. We barely see them. Then we see a hand atop of his. We pan up, its NADINE his now ex wife.

NADINE

Thank you. I'll see you around.

The man glances at the papers. Nods.

They stand. Quietly exit the frame. The click of the door is soft but it might as well be a gunshot.

Now it's just CLIFF.

He sits there, staring straight ahead. Blank. Still.

A beat... then two... then three. Centered in the middle of the screen. Deep breaths, deep breaths, then exhales, his head hangs low.

CUT TO BLACK.

3 **INT. CLIFF'S KITCHEN - ONE YEAR EARLIER - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

Dimly lit. Lived-in. The clink of keys on the counter. CLIFF enters, uniform slightly wrinkled, his face sagging with fatigue. He loosens his tie, walks straight to the fridge.

Grabs a beer. Pops it open. No TV. No phone. Just the kind of silence that gets inside your bones.

He moves to the table and sinks into his seat with a sigh that sounds like it's been held in for 26 years.

Then he notices her.

His WIFE, already seated across from him. Neat. Calm. Distant. The kind of look that tells you everything before a word is spoken.

A long pause.

WIFE

We need to talk.

Cliff doesn't respond. Just watches her, eyes slowly sharpening from tired to alert.

WIFE (CONT'D)

Cliff... I haven't been happy for a long time.

He freezes, holding the bottle halfway to his lips. A storm begins behind his eyes.

CLIFF

You tired? Something happen at work?

WIFE

This isn't new. I've felt this way for years. I just... couldn't say it. Then the cancer then you stepped up. Like always. You were there.

(beat)

But it didn't change what's inside me. I love you. But I'm not in love anymore.

He leans back slowly, like trying to prevent the whole room from collapsing on him.

CLIFF

So... that's it?

WIFE

It's not about something you did wrong. You gave me everything. You've always done right by us. But I can't keep living a life that feels like we're just roommates. Like we're both ghosts in this house.

A long, slow silence.

Cliff looks down at **MILDLY DIRTY & DRIED HANDS**. They've worked hard their whole life. For her. For the kids. For a family.

CLIFF

I gave you all of me. Good and bad times. I gave God my word. Damn.

WIFE

I know.

(beat)

And maybe that's part of it. Somewhere along the way, you gave up pieces of yourself to keep this going.

He doesn't argue. Doesn't explode. Just nods, barely.

CLIFF

You waited till I got tired enough to hear it. I'm exhausted.

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I can't give life to our marriage when I'm working my ass off. We just paid the house off seven months ago.

NADINE

I know Cliff. But this is for our kids to inherit. Not me, not you.

CLIFF

Shitting me. You're still living in it aren't you. This shit is ridiculous Nadine. I'm drained Got dammit. I have nothing else to offer anyone, but I look forward to coming home to my wife regardless to good days or bad days.

Nadine sits there, quiet for a beat.

NADINE

Look, I'm sorry okay. My therapist just says it's something I need to be honest about.

CLIFF

So you listen to a therapist. Is she married? Huh! You know therapists are human too. They're not God, I don't care how much book knowledge they grab. It's still man's word or thoughts. Who's to say she told you thought that and wasn't having a bad relationship herself.

Cliff pauses for a beat, staring. Shaking his head.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

27 Years Nadine...27 years

4

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD BAR - LATE AFTERNOON

4

Lowkey spot. Dark wood, soft jazz playing Just a few regulars sprinkled around.

CLIFF walks in, slow, heavy and just sits at the bar, same stool he always does.

BARTENDER (50s, familiar, sharp but kind) clocks him immediately. This ain't just another drink.

BARTENDER
Rough day, bro?

Cliff doesn't respond.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Say less. Your usual?

Cliff nods faintly.

The bartender **POURS HIM A WHISKEY**, neat. Slides it to him gently like it's sacred. Cliff stares at it. Doesn't touch it.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
...This one's on me.

Still no words from Cliff. Just a slow, tired blink. The bartender leans forward—framed in first *PERSON POV* from Cliff's eyes, looking straight into the lens.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
You know, most people don't notice when a man's breaking. We're real good at disguises. Bills paid. Car running. Smile on command.
(pauses)
BUT I SEE YOU. You're carrying it. And still standing.
(beat)
That still matters. Even if the world don't clap for it.

The bartender slides a second glass over, pours himself a quick shot. Raises it toward the lens.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
To the men who keep showing up.

They tap glasses. Cliff finally takes the shot. Eyes still tired—but the tiniest crack of something returning.

The bartender pats the bar.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Be easy, big man.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER IMPOSE: ONE YEAR LATOR

5 **EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - ONE YEAR LATER**

5

Cliff sits on the hood of his car, parked half a block away from the home he used to share with his wife. Engine off. Streetlight flickering nearby. Smoke curls from the cigarette in his fingers—not a habit, just a momentary vice.

The house is softly lit. Curtains drawn. It looks peaceful. It looks like hers now.

Cliff takes another drag. Watching. Not stalking. Just... saying goodbye in his own way.

6 A DOG BARKS.

6

Enter JEFF (early 60s, white, windbreaker, sweatpants) walking his golden retriever. He squints through the darkness.

JEFF
(half-joking)
Well, I'll be damned. What you on a
stakeout? Been a while.

Cliff barely reacts. A ghost of a smile. Maybe.

Jeff gets closer, slowing the dog down.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Didn't mean to interrupt. After a
while of not seeing you, my wife
ran into Nadine at the store and
got into conversation.
(beat)
I heard.

Cliff takes one last drag, flicks the cigarette. Nods faintly.

CLIFF
Yeah.

JEFF
Man... I know this shit had to be
hard.
(soft chuckle)
Our Christmas lights battle ain't
been the same without you.

Cliff finally cracks a smirk.

CLIFF

I still say you cheated last year.
That blinking reindeer was AI-
powered.

JEFF

Hey, all's fair in war and wattage.
Had to save money.

(beat)

But seriously, Cliff. I miss seeing
you around. You were a good
neighbor. Still are.

Cliff nods. Appreciation in his eyes, but it's hard to say
it.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I'll be real with you, man... I'd
trade places with you if I could. I
live in misery every day—but I
stay. You know how we are. Loyal to
the end.

(beat)

Or until they decide the end for
us, right?

Cliff looks at him. No words needed. Just that knowing look
only another man can give.

Jeff offers a hand.

JEFF (CONT'D)

You need anything, man... beer, bad
advice, someone to talk shit with.
You're always welcomed.

Cliff shakes his hand firmly.

CLIFF

That's appreciated.

Jeff nods. Starts to walk off.

JEFF

Take your time. Just don't
disappear on the world, it needs
you, alright?

Cliff watches him walk off with the dog. Then looks back at
the house. Still there. But it's not his anymore.

7 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

7

The door opens to a sterile, outdated room. Faded floral bedspread. Buzzing mini fridge. Lamp with a crooked shade.

Cliff sets his backpack on the lone chair. Looks around.

Takes off his coat. Sits on the edge of the bed. The mattress sinks under his weight.

He rests his hands on his knees. Stares ahead. Then takes off his work boots and all.

Cut to black.

MONTAGE: THE NEXT MORNING9 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - EARLY MORNING LIGHT**

9

- Cliff brushing his teeth at the sink, looking at himself. A towel wrapped over one shoulder.

- Making instant coffee in the small machine. Stirring it slowly.

- Shaving carefully in the mirror. Missing a few spots. Doesn't care.

- Puts on his Janitor Uniform.

- Looking around the room: no photos, no memories. Just space and silence. He grabs his backpack. Stands at the door. Pauses. Then exits.

10 **INT. CAR - DAY**

10

- Cliff driving. In thought. Skylines, street details and more.

11 **INT. BUILDING - DAY**

11

- We see Cliff (*JANITORIAL UNIFORM*) Mopping the floors in the hallways.

- Taking out the trash, stopping and reflecting on the scenery.

- Cleaning toilets, running water for the buckets.

MONTAGE ENDS

12

INT. CITY BUILDING - BREAKROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A small, modest breakroom with a microwave, coffee pot, vending machine, and a scratched-up table. Fluorescent lights hum overhead.

CLIFF (64) sits at the table, sipping coffee from a stained mug. His city issued work shirt is worn, sleeves rolled. His hands are calloused earned.

Next to him, MARCO (30s, Latino, upbeat) and LENNY (40s, white, wiry, sarcastic) are laughing over a meme on one of their phones.

MARCO

Yo, Cliff, you ever get into TikTok?

CLIFF

Only thing I tick is the thermostat when the heat bill too high.

They laugh. Cliff cracks a small grin.

LENNY

Man, I feel that. I'm still arguing with over a damn "estimated" bill.

CLIFF

Life aint shit.

LENNY

You ain't never lie brother.

Laughter. A moment of lightness.

Just then, MR. BELL 40s, Black, calm and respected the janitorial supervisor pokes his head in.

MR. BELL

Cliff, you got a second?

Cliff wipes his hands and stands. The room gets quiet. Cliff gives the guys a nod and follows.

13

INT. MAINTENANCE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

13

A tight, windowless room with file cabinets, a corkboard calendar, and a stack of supply requests nobody's getting approved.

Sitting adjacent from Cliff.

MR. BELL
(sincerely)
Look, man... I hate doing this. You
one of the good ones. Dependable.
Never complain. But we got hit with
cuts again. Budget's tighter than a
church drum.

Cliff listens. Nods slowly.

MR. BELL (CONT'D)
Starting next week... I gotta drop
you down to three days. Just until
we see how this quarter plays out.
It's not performance it's just what
it is. It's everyone.

CLIFF
(quietly)
Understood.

A pause. Mr. Bell watches him.

MR. BELL
I know you got things goin' on.
Life don't wait on no paycheck. If
I had it my way, I'd give you more,
not less.

CLIFF
I get it, man. Appreciate the
honesty.

MR. BELL
If somethin' opens up, you'll be
first to know. Just hang in there.
Here's your check also.

Cliff forces a faint smile.

CLIFF
Yeah. I'm used to hangin' lately.

Mr. Bell hands him his check.

MR. BELL
You need anything. I mean anything
don't be too proud to ask.

Cliff nods again, then stands.

We see CLIFFS POV, of Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL (CONT'D)
Hey man. You're a hard worker and
you don't complain. You always seem
to get it done. I appreciate you.

14 INT. BREAKROOM - MOMENTS LATER

14

Cliff walks back in. The room's energy hasn't changed, but he has. He pours himself another coffee. No sugar this time. Sits back down, he opens his check and looks at it. Shaking his head, but doesn't say a word. He just sips. Slowly. And stares at the wall.

15 INT. LOCAL DINER - EVENING

15

The place is quiet. Vinyl booths.

Sunlight spills through a foggy window. Cliff, still in his *WORK ATTIRE*, sits across from NINA (33) his daughter, stylish, intelligent, with kind eyes. He drinks black coffee.

There's warmth, but something unspoken sits in the middle of the table like a third person.

NINA
You still eating your eggs like
that. Yuck. Runny eggs.

CLIFF
(soft smirk)
You know me. All I need is your
grandmother's biscuits to sop it
up.

She chuckles. They sit in that comfort for a moment.

NINA
So... how are you really, Dad?

Cliff exhales. Takes a sip. Then:

CLIFF
I'm good baby girl. Life's
different. I'm in a motel off
Broad. Just until things level out.

Nina winces. Not with judgment, just concern.

NINA
I have a friend that has a rental
coming up. Quiet block. Clean spot.
You'd have your own kitchen again.

CLIFF
(slight shake of the head)
I'm good where I'm at.
(pause)
But maybe... I'll check it out.

She nods, grateful for even that.

NINA
And work?

CLIFF
They cut back hours. My supervisor-
he's good people. Just... city's
broke like everyone else.

She starts reaching into her purse. He places his hand up.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
(dismissive but gentle)
Nah. I'm not here for that. I just
missed my girl.

She smiles, brushes her hand back across the table.

NINA
I missed you too, Dad.

A beat.

CLIFF
You heard from your brother?

NINA
Yeah. He's just been... to himself.
Ever since the divorce, he said
things don't feel right anymore.
Says he prefers the quiet—just him,
the kids, his wife.

CLIFF
Yeah, we talk now and then. I try
not to be a burden. Y'all got your
own lives to live.

Nina's smile softens. She leans forward, her voice low,
sincere.

NINA
You're never a burden. You're the
reason we even have lives to live.
You gave us everything. Even when
you were tired.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
I remember you just handing mom the money to send the entire family on vacations. You used to be exhausted.

Cliff looks away. Swallows hard. Doesn't want her to see his eyes watering.

She senses it. Doesn't press.

NINA (CONT'D)
You deserve to rest now. To be cared for. That doesn't make you weak. *It makes you worthy.*

A long pause. Cliff wipes his lip with a napkin. Looks back at her.

CLIFF
Your mama out there dating again?

NINA
(snickers)
Yeah. And I don't think she likes it. Some of the things she asks me about dating. Like Mom it's a different era. I tried to tell you.

Cliff chuckles, shoulders relaxing for the first time.

CLIFF
Good.

They both chuckle.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
How's Daniel? You guys doing good?

NINA
Yea. He's great and we're really doing great. Finally discussing what's next.

Cliff smiles and exhales in the moment. A beat.

NINA (CONT'D)
You ever think about therapy? Or a men's support group?

CLIFF
Therapy's what gave your mama the courage to walk after 27 years.

NINA

Fair. But therapy don't change people—it just shows them what's already broken. Some folks fix it. Some... don't.

Cliff nods, absorbing it.

NINA (CONT'D)

It might help, Dad. Just to not carry all of it alone.

Cliff doesn't answer. Just stares out the window for a moment.

NINA (CONT'D)

Next year's your 60th. I was thinking maybe... somewhere out the country? Just us. You pick the place.

CLIFF

Baby, I can't afford nothin' like that. I'm still in rebuild mode.

NINA

Then let me help you build. Let me love you the way you loved us. Quietly and Steady. All those years when you didn't get anything back but a pile of bills.

CLIFF

You guys smiles is what I got back. To hell with them bills. That's what keeps me going. Those memories.

Cliff breathes in, chest tight, jaw clenched. Then—nods.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I'll think about it.

She stands and walks around the table, wraps her arms around him from the side.

NINA

You don't have to finish this part alone, Dad. Not unless you choose to.

Cliff rests his hand on hers and smiles.

NINA (CONT'D)
I'll call you later. And this is on
me.

She places the money on the table with the tip. Cliff looks
at it and lightheartedly smiles.

16

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

16

It's late. The kind of quiet where even the neon motel sign
seems to buzz louder than it should.

CLIFF (64) sits on a plastic chair outside his room. A
styrofoam cup of motel coffee rests in his hand, steam barely
rising. He stares into the night, body still, only his eyes
moving.

Just across the lot, a car is parked near the vending machine
above. Its engine is off, but the tension inside is revving.

Cliff watches without meaning to. The voices rise. The couple
is mid-argument.

MAN (O.S.)
I don't know what else you want
from me. I keep showing up, doing
what I can—

WOMAN (O.S.)
Yeah, but you never change. You
show up tired, silent, with that
same look like the whole damn world
owes you something.

MAN
Because I work! I give everything
and still come home to this—like
it's a war zone!

WOMAN
And I come home to a ghost! A man
with a paycheck and a pulse, but no
presence. You think that's love?

Cliff sips his coffee. Eyes narrowed just slightly. Like he's
hearing echoes.

MAN
I can't ever make you happy. It's
always an excuse. Always a
comparison. I'm tired.

WOMAN

You're tired? I've been emotionally single in this relationship for three years, just waiting for you to come back. But maybe this is all you've got. You're not a real man anymore. You're half a man.

That one lands like a gut punch. Even from across the lot, it hangs in the air. Cliff stares ahead.

Still. His hand tightens around the cup just slightly—then eases.

The man opens the passenger door. Steps out slowly. Doesn't slam it. Doesn't look back.

He walks past Cliff without a word, without eye contact, shoulders slumped.

Cliff watches him disappear into the darkness. The woman drives off. Tires crunch over loose gravel. The tail lights fade. Silence returns. Cliff leans back in the chair. Takes a long, slow sip.

CLIFF

(quietly, to himself)
Half a man...

He stares out into the night.

17 JOB INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

17

A modest, sterile office. An INTERVIEWER (40s, clean-cut, polite but rushed) sits across from CLIFF, who's dressed in his best—clean shirt, ironed slacks, tie slightly frayed.

INTERVIEWER

So, why'd you leave your last position?

CLIFF

Cutbacks. City contracts got chopped in half. Nothing personal.

INTERVIEWER

And what kind of hours are you looking for?

CLIFF

Whatever's open. Nights, weekends, part-time, double shifts...

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)
I show up. That's one thing I don't
play with.

INTERVIEWER
Do you have experience with
inventory software?

CLIFF
Not exactly. But I learn fast. Give
me a week and I'll know it better
than the folks training me.

The interviewer nods, types a note.

MONTAGE BEGINS - CLIFF ON THE GRIND

19 **EXT. JOB FAIR TENT - DAY** 19
Cliff walks past tables, resume in
hand.

Half the recruiters ignore him. One waves him off. One points
to a QR code for an application.

20 **INT. BUS - EARLY MORNING** 20
He sits next to a teenager asleep in a hoodie. Cliff stares
out the window, eyes heavy.

21 **INT. FAST FOOD LOBBY - DAY** 21
Cliff waits to speak to a manager. Kids behind the counter
joke and scroll on their phones. Manager comes out: "We're
looking for younger energy, to be honest."

22 **EXT. TEMP AGENCY WINDOW - DAY** 22
He fills out forms at a folding table. A woman tells him the
next orientation is two weeks out. Cliff nods. Leaves his
number anyway.

23 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT** 23
He removes his boots. Sits on the bed. Stares at the ceiling.
The TV's on, but muted. He doesn't move for a long beat.

BACK TO INTERVIEW - DAY - continuous

INTERVIEWER

Well, we're still looking through applicants. You'll get a call either way.

Cliff nods. Stands. Offers a firm, practiced handshake.

CLIFF

Appreciate your time.

He exits. The interviewer immediately shifts attention to his laptop, already onto the next name.

24

INT. MOTEL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE CLIFF'S ROOM - DUSK

Cliff walks slowly down the exterior hallway of the motel. His body is tired. Clothes a bit looser on him than a month ago. The same damn buzz from that neon "VACANCY" sign flickers overhead.

He approaches his door. A folded paper flaps lightly in the wind-tucked into the doorframe.

Cliff sees it before he touches it.

He already knows. He pulls it out and unfolds it. The paper is cheap, thin. Red stamp across the top:

"FINAL NOTICE - NON-PAYMENT"

TEXT (V.O., as Cliff reads silently):

As of tomorrow 10AM, your room will be considered abandoned unless payment is made in full. No partials accepted.

Cliff exhales. Folds the paper slowly-creases it with perfect edges. No panic, Just that slow, swallowing sense of acceptance of this is his life now.

He unlocks the door and walks in.

25

EXT. VACANT LOT - NIGHT

25

A glowing white tent sits in the middle of an empty gravel lot between warehouses. A makeshift revival. Folding chairs inside. Lights strung across the top flutter in the wind.

CLIFF, walking home from another dead-end, hears the faint echo of a voice not yelling, not judgmental, just real.

He slows down. The words float through the air, slightly muffled.

PREACHER (O.S.)
 Some of y'all out here think God
 forgot you... Nah. He's just
 letting you find out what you're
 really made of.

Cliff stops. Turns.

PREACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Like Job, You lost your house, your
 job, your family maybe... but you
 still here. Ain't that somethin'?
 You're still here. Praise God.

He walks toward the edge of the tent. Doesn't go inside just
 sits on a folding chair outside, near the flap.

A few AMENS and claps from inside. The preacher keeps going:

PREACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 The world don't clap for surviving.
 But Heaven does. You hear me? Just
 waking up broke and breathing is a
 miracle they don't write songs
 about. And I need you all to
 understand one thing. Delayed
 doesn't mean denial. Look to your
 neighbor and tell your neighbor.

Cliff exhales, trembling slightly. A smile breaths within as
 he looks to an older woman and they respond to each other.

One tear falls. Then another. He wipes it quick. Still, he
 stays. Just listening.

26

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TENT REVIVAL - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

The tent lights are dimming. Laughter and soft chatter echo
 through the gravel lot as people filter out. Fold-up chairs
 get stacked. The warm glow of the revival is giving way to
 the chill of the night.

CLIFF stands to exit, suddenly

VOICE (O.S.)
 Cliff?

Cliff looks up.

JAMES (60s, clean beard, ball cap, kind demeanor) stands
 before him, that same lopsided grin Cliff remembers from way
 back. The years show, but the warmth hasn't faded.

CLIFF

James...?

JAMES

(laughs)

Look at you, man. Been too long.

Cliff stands, and the two men shake hands, pulling into a quick, meaningful hug.

CLIFF

It really has. You go here now.

JAMES

Oh yeah. I'm one of the deacons here. Me and my wife, she over there somewhere.

CLIFF

That's great man.

JAMES

Heard about everything. Divorce... Ain't the kinda updates I ever wanted to hear.

CLIFF

Well, life don't exactly send out invitations.

James chuckles, but it fades as he sees the weight in Cliff's posture.

JAMES

But you here. Still breathing. That counts for something, brother.

Just then, ANGELA (Late 50s, soft eyes, silver locs) approaches—dressed simple, with the grace of someone who's been through her own storms.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Cliff, this here's sister Angela. Lost her husband a little while back. Stronger than half the men I know.

ANGELA

(smiles softly)

Pleasure to meet you, Cliff. I've heard your name in quite a few prayer circles.

CLIFF

Hope they didn't list all my sins.

ANGELA

(chuckling)

Only the beautiful ones. Like how you show up for people. Heard a lot of good things about you.

Their eyes meet. Just a look. No romance. But warmth. Recognition.

JAMES

Hey, listen. Anytime you need something, stop by my shop. Lincoln Barbershop. Still on 6th, next to the old deli. Don't need an appointment. Don't need a cut, shoot I barely cut there, it's just a space at the moment. Just come by. My lil place away from the women. I got coffee, stories, silence if you need that too.

CLIFF

(nods)

I might take you up on that.

JAMES

You damn well better. (To Angela) Now can you tell my wife, stop all the yapping. I'm tired. I done helped set up that tent. My back hurt.

Angela touches Cliff's forearm gently.

ANGELA

Take care of yourself, Mr. Cliff. Definitely a pleasure to meet you.

CLIFF

Yes it is. God bless.

She walks off with James, heading toward their car. Cliff stays behind. Watches them disappear into the night. He walks the other direction.

Same dim room. Same stale air. He tosses the folded notice on the table.

Cliff sits on the edge of the bed. Not defeated just hollow. He looks around. His cup of motel coffee, now cold.

Two neatly folded shirts on the chair. A Bible on the nightstand he hasn't opened in months.

He rubs his face. Closes his eyes. Then leans forward, elbows on knees, breathing deep. A long, still moment.

CLIFF

God I'm begging to breathe right now.

He just sits there. Surviving.

28

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFÉ - LATE AFTERNOON

28

It's one of those gentrified café spots with string lights, wooden chairs, and overpriced herbal tea. Couples and coworkers chat over laptops and lattes. The vibe is light.

Across the street, CLIFF exits a store with a small meal. He's not waiting for the bus.

He's frozen.

Across from him, seated on the patio, is HIS EX-WIFE dressed casually, hair freshly done, leaning into a conversation with a man. Well-kept, athletic build. Probably mid-50s. He's smiling. She's laughing.

Real laughter. A brightness Cliff hasn't seen on her in years. A part of her he hasn't felt in even longer.

Cliff doesn't move. Doesn't blink. Just watches.

Their table has drinks. Her hand rests lightly near the man's forearm. She's comfortable.

WE CLOSE ON CLIFF'S FACE. His mouth tightens. His eyes flicker, but no tears. Only exhaustion and displacement.

She turns for a moment, toward the sidewalk. Toward his direction.

For half a second... their eyes almost meet. But she doesn't see him. She looks past him.

Keeps talking. Keeps laughing. Cliff steps backward, fading behind the bus stop pole like a shadow.

He hangs his head and walks away.

We see him establish his sleeping quarters in his truck with a blanket and pillow.

We see him go to Planet fitness and get a membership, to shower and all.

MONTAGE BEGINS - CLIFF'S DRIVE TO THE BARBERSHOP

30 **INT. TRUCK - MOVING - LATE AFTERNOON**

30

The sun hangs low, golden light pouring in through the cracked windshield.

Cliff's face is unreadable. Stoic. But inside, a war is raging.

A flashback of his daughter laughing from the diner.

A flashback of the couple arguing at the motel.

His ex-wife's laughter through the café window.

Cliff blinks hard. Rubs his eyes. Keeps driving.

31 **EXT. STREETS - CLIFF'S POV**

31

Familiar blocks roll by. Old convenience stores. A school crosswalk. The bench he once sat at waiting for his son's game to end.

He turns the wheel slowly. No music. No noise. Just the hum of a man running out of road.

32 **EXT. LINCOLN BARBERSHOP - NIGHT**

32

The shop is modest, old-school. Cliff parks out front. James, broom in hand, is locking up.

CLIFF (O.S.)

James.

James looks up surprised. His face softens instantly.

JAMES

Damn, brother. I thought you might show up eventually.

Cliff steps out of the truck. He walks slowly, like every part of him is carrying weight. James holds the door open and motions him inside.

33

INT. LINCOLN BARBERSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

The shop is quiet now. No music, no clippers buzzing. Just that faint smell aftershave. Framed photos of past customers line the walls.

Cliff sits down in the old leather waiting chair. Doesn't say a word. James leans on the counter.

JAMES

What's going on, man?

Cliff opens his mouth. Stops. His lips tremble just slightly.

CLIFF

I lost the room. The motel.

(beat)

And I ain't got nowhere else to go.

James steps forward, alarmed but steady. Cliff stands. Like he's trying to hold it together.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I'm tryin', man. I swear I'm tryin' but... I'm tired. I'm so goddamn tired...It's not fair. All them years.

His breathing gets shaky. Fast. Shallow.

JAMES

Cliff, sit down. Hey breathe, man.

Cliff stumbles back into the chair. His eyes dart. He grasps his chest. His chest heaves now. He grips the armrest like it's slipping away. James **DROPS THE BROOM.** Crosses the room quick.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You're alright. You're okay, Cliff.
I got you.

Cliff slumps forward, **HAND ON HIS CHEST.** Face pale. Sweat forming on his brow.

James grabs his phone.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Hang on. I'm calling someone. Just keep talking. Stay with me, bro.

CLIFF

I didn't... I didn't think it'd ever get this bad.

JAMES

It's gonna get better. But you
gotta stay here with me first. You
hear me? You stay here.

James dials. His voice fading into background noise as the
camera lingers on Cliff's trembling body—

A strong man, broken in public for the first time.

CUT TO BLACK.

34

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

34

It's quiet. MACHINE BEEPS LOW AND STEADY. A sliver of
sunlight creeps in through the blinds.

Cliff lies in a hospital bed, breathing steady, chest rising
gently. He looks... small, but not weak. Like someone who's
finally allowed to rest.

In a chair beside him sits JAMES still in yesterday's
clothes, elbows on his knees. He watches Cliff with the same
energy a brother in arms would.

CLIFF

(low rasp)

...That was a first.

James smirks, shakes his head.

JAMES

That wasn't no breakdown. That was
a release. You been holding in ten
years of grief and thirty years of
silence. It had to come out
somewhere.

Cliff stares at the ceiling. Breathes in. A single tear
slides from the corner of his eye.

JAMES (CONT'D)

And now that you're still here... I
got an offer for you.

(beat)

Shop's got a back room. Ain't much
just a couch, hot plate, small
shower. But it's dry, clean, and
it's yours till you get back on
your feet.

Cliff doesn't speak. His throat's too full.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You've done good by people your whole life, Cliff. You showed up for folks who forgot to even say thank you. Let this be the part where some of that good comes back around. All the years, you were there for me in the end.

CLIFF

I don't know how to... take that.

JAMES

You don't gotta take it. Just rest in it.

MONTAGE BEGINS

NINA (Cliff's daughter) enters the hospital room, sees him sleeping. Her face crumples, but she holds it together.

James steps outside with her, gives her a cup of hospital coffee. She cries softly. James puts a hand on her shoulder.

36

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - SAME TIME

36

They sit.

NINA

I didn't know it had gotten this bad. He never said...

JAMES

We don't. Men like your father... we weren't taught how to raise our hand and say I'm drowning. We were taught to swim til we sink.

(beat)

Sometimes the best thing you can do for a man like that... is give him a place to land without calling it help.

NINA

I offered him a place. Money. Options. He always said he'd figure it out.

JAMES

Because that's all he knows. Providing. Surviving. Your dad ain't prideful.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
He's just used to being the answer
not asking the questions.

NINA
You think he's gonna be okay?

JAMES
He's been on empty for a long time.
But this? This was the first time
he didn't try to fight it alone.
He's going to be alright.

37 **BACK IN THE ROOM - DAYLIGHT INCREASES**

37

Cliff slowly wakes. Sees Nina sitting quietly now beside him.
She's holding his hand.

He squeezes it faintly.

CLIFF
Hey baby girl.

She leans in. Kisses his forehead.

NINA
Hey, Daddy.

She doesn't say anything else. She just holds his hand
tighter.

MONTAGE - SEQUENCE BEGINS

39 **INT. BARBERSHOP BACK ROOM - EARLY MORNING**

Cliff wakes on the shop's small cot. Light from the sunrise
cuts through the blinds. He rubs his face and sits up slowly

40 **INT. BARBERSHOP - LATER**

40

Cliff buffs the shop floors. Laughs with James. Teaches a
young kid how to sweep properly.

A client dap-hugs him on the way out.

CLIENT
Glad to see you back around, OG.

41 **INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY**

41

Cliff walks into the school where he once helped as a janitor substitute.

The school admin hands him a new badge and keys.

CLIFF'S NAME BADGE: "Custodial Team - Mr. C"

42 **INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER**

42

Cliff buffs the gym floor using a floor machine. He smiles as he watches Maurice in the distance, joking with kids in the bleachers.

A kid runs up and hugs Cliff on the way out

43 **EXT. PARK - DAY**

43

Cliff walks with ANGELA (60s, elegant, grounded). She's laughing at something he just said. She playfully nudges him. He nudges back.

They sit on a park bench, sharing ice cream He hasn't laughed like this in a long time.

ANGELA

You have a big day coming up.

CLIFF

And what's that?

ANGELA

You're 60th crazy.

CLIFF

That's just a regular day, nothing special.

ANGELA

Too modest. You've never celebrated your birthday.

CLIFF

No. Even as a kid. It was too many of us kids in the house. Cousins and all.

He chuckles.

ANGELA
Not even as an adult.

CLIFF
Shit...I've always been working.
Making sure everyone else gets what
they want for their birthday.

ANGELA
Hmm. Wow, well hopefully that
changes. This my appreciation to
you for being Cliff.

She pulls out an envelope and hands it to him. This may be a
little earlier but this is for you. He grabs and opens it.
Dumbfounded. It's tickets to Puerto Rico.

CLIFF
Who's this for?

ANGELA
You silly. We're going to Puerto
Rico. I know it's a little early,
but Happy birthday.

Cliff smiles hard. Shaking his head.

CLIFF
You're something else. Going out of
the country.

ANGELA
No baby. Um, Puerto Rico is still
part of the United States.

CLIFF
Oh shit... You're right. I'll be
damned. Trump moment.

ANGELA
Yea we see.

CLIFF
Thank you very much.

He embraces her as they laugh.

Cliff sits alone in the pew, dressed clean, hat in his lap.
The choir sings softly in the background. He doesn't cry.

Doesn't speak. He just closes his eyes and lets the stillness hold him.

45 **INT. CLIFF'S NEW APARTMENT - NIGHT**

45

He turns the key. Walks in. Small but clean.

He sets up: A framed photo of Nina and his son. A Bible. His tools. A small Bluetooth speaker playing one of his old school tune favorites. Then he puts a potted plant on the windowsill green, growing. He sets up a dollar store summer lounge chair. Begins to watch TV. For the first time, we see laugh and crack up. Something he hasn't done in a long time.

46 **INT. BARBERSHOP - EVENING**

46

He dap-hugs James, packs his last bag.

JAMES

You good now.

CLIFF

Not all the way. But I ain't drowning anymore. I thank you so much. I appreciate you brother.

JAMES

No thanks needed. You were there for me. So it's only right. We as humans need to be each others angels out here on this earth.

47 **INT. SCHOOL - LATE AFTERNOON**

47

NINA (V.O.):

Hey Dad. Can you do me a favor?
Need you to fix this TV on the wall
for me at the community center.
Swing by?

Cliff hangs up. Tosses his tool box in the truck.

48 **INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - EVENING**

48

Cliff walks in slowly, toolbox in hand, thinking he's doing a favor for Nina. The main lights are dim. For a moment, he thinks he's in the wrong room.

He steps forward— CLICK. The lights flick on.

CROWD (O.S.)
SURPRISE!

Confetti cannons pop. Music cues up softly something soulful
Cliff freezes.

He blinks as the room comes into focus.

It's filled with:

NINA, tears already in her eyes. JAMES, grinning wide, arms
folded. His old neighbor. ANGELA, dressed up, warm smile.

Maurice & his coworkers from his previous job. People from
the church. His old neighbors. Community folks he's familiar
with. His nephew PETE, and the others

CLIFF'S SON walks in, holding the hand of his young daughter.
Cliff locks eyes with him.

Cliff looks around and then the emotion hits home. A mainly
breakdown of at least 55 years of emotion. He draws back.
Just studying the room.

His son approaches.

CLIFF (SOFTLY)
...My boy.

They hug. Long. Tight. No words needed.

MONTAGE OF MOMENTS IN THE PARTY

Cliff walks around in a daze, being hugged, greeted, handed a
plate of food. He engages with banter with the guests.

Angela dances with him to an old school slow jam.

Cliff's granddaughter hands him a birthday card she made
herself. He opens it. Cries silently.

49

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - LATER IN THE EVENING

Everyone is gathered. The lights dim a bit. A small, simple
cake sits in front of Cliff.

Candles lit. Nina stands beside him holding his hand.

NINA
This man right here gave everything
his time, his strength, his peace
for his family. For us.
(beat)
(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
And life tried to break him. But
here he is.

Still standing. Still showing up. Everyone claps. Some wipe
tears.

NINA (CONT'D)
Happy birthday, Daddy. We see you.
We love you.

CROWD
WE LOVE YOU!

Cliff can't speak. His throat tightens. He looks around at
all the faces, his past, present, and what remains of his
future.

CLIFF
...Thank you. All of you.

He leans in. Blows out the candles.

Cliff dancing with his daughter. His son throwing his arm
around his shoulder.

Cliff hugging James and whispering, Thank you man. Angela
refilling his plate. We watch him take pics and more.

He steps outside as the guest laugh and dance, having cigar.
Watching them.

CLIFF (V.O.)
Quiet as it seems... there's always
someone rooting for you.
Even when you forget how to root
for yourself.

THE END