

Smart Work v6 - aug 20, 2011

By

Kelly-Marie Murtha

Adapated from the short story "Smart Work" by Thomas Murtha

Copyright: 2007

kms1@sympatico.ca  
416-752-7070

INT. 1930S OLDER HOME/KITCHEN IN BACK OF BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

Cliff, 28 years old, dark hair, dark eyes, is on his hands and knees. Behind him an open window gives the only light into the room.

The wind can be heard blowing through the open window.

Cliff remains still. He puts his hands out around him, feeling into the darkness. He touches the greasy, gas stove beside him.

The sound of a streetcar is heard rumbling past.

The sound of a clock ticks away on the wall. A gleam of light shines on the grandfather clock as it chimes. It is 2:30am.

Cliff freezes.

The streetcar rumble fades away.

The sound of his heart beat rises, blood pumping in his veins.

The wind continues through the cracks in the windows.

Cliff stands and moves softly forward. He opens the curtain that divides the back of the shop to the front and peers through with one eye.

INT. BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

A light from an outside street lamp shines through a window above blinds. A row of chairs and a couch are visible. The shop is brighter than the kitchen.

Cliff moves the curtains aside quietly.

He steps forward, silently, comfortably out of the darkness.

He sighs.

A board creaks under Cliff's left foot and he moves quickly off it.

A second board creaks under his rapidly moving weight.

Cliff stands still as the creak sound dies away. He tries to swallow.

(CONTINUED)

There is a creak that comes from the front of the shop and a shadow flickers in the glass above the blind. It is just the awning outside flapping in the wind.

Cliff sighs.

Cliff moves alongside the stairway toward the shop's counter where the till is visible.

A noise comes from above him.

Cliff looks up and moves silently underneath the stairway and crouches.

He looks at the curtained doorway.

The wind continues to howl as the creaks in the floor grow louder.

A figure appears at the head of the stairs. Cliff's heart beats louder, his breathing increases.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY (FLASHBACK/INTERCUT)

BURNS the barber grabs Cliff as Cliff puts his hand in the till. A slip of paper falls.

BURNS

i don't think that's a good idea  
Cliff!

CLIFF

What are you going to do? Call the  
cops? Maybe they should know you do  
more than cut hair? Do you really  
want them knowing about your other  
business?

BURNS

You bastard! You wouldn't?

CLIFF

Try me.

INT. BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

Light footsteps are heard in the kitchen.

Cliff holds his breath. The curtains move and a cat emerges, purring.

Cliff remains still, watching the cat.

(CONTINUED)

Water splashing in a sink upstairs. A glass clinks. The floorboards begin creaking with the sounds of footsteps.

Cliff looks up and listens.

The sounds end very suddenly. Cliff waits and watches the cat.

IMAGE FLASH OF: Burns standing, listening, wiggling the ends of mustache.

Cliff's legs begin to ache from the cramped position. He shifts uncomfortably, clenching his teeth to muffle the sound.. The cat comes over purring and rubs against him.

Cliff waits, half-stooped over, breath held, heart pounding.

A car passes outside. The noise of a streetcar is heard approaching.

The light on the wall from the upper part of the window is steady except for the one corner which is the shadow of the awning in the breeze.

The distant sound of the striking bell is heard.

Cliff panics and looks at his watch. It says 2:35am.

The cat is now laying at his feet. Cliff steps over it on his way to the till.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY (FLASHBACK/INTERCUT)

BURNS

(to Cliff - grinning)

Sorry Cliff, but I - I didn't get it in time. I didn't get your bet placed. Too bad really. Would have paid out big for you. Maybe next time, eh?

INT. BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

Cliff gets the till open with some difficulty. He grabs the rolls of bills and stuffs them into his pocket.

The floor overhead creaks.

Cliff moves quickly and quietly under the stairs. He looks up at the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

He starts to breath heavily and his heart starts to pound as he touches the wad of money in his pocket.

The sound of approaching footsteps becomes louder. Cliff's heart pounds faster and louder.

The approaching footsteps stop very close to Cliff at the head of the stairs.

All is silent except for the the sound of Cliff's heartbeat. The person descends the stairs with every heartbeat.

Cliff remains crouched, muscles tense. The cat gets up and rubs against the stairs.

The footsteps suddenly stop at the foot of the stairs. A form comes into view between Cliff and the door to the kitchen.

It's BURNS.

Cliff holds his breath watching Burns.

Burns looks suspiciously at the front window.

Cliff grimaces silently as his muscles are paining from being crouched for so long.

Burns turns and goes into the back room. Cliff can hear him moving around. Burns comes back and steps forward mid-floor and peers ahead. He cautiously walks around the chairs.

Cliff, tense and sore from crouching, shifts quietly.

Burns moves towards the back of the room. He stands not 3 feet away. His gaze is coming around the room taking in everything.

Cliff crouches further back into the corner and his heart starts to pound again. He puts his hand on the money.

Suddenly, everything snaps as Burns stoops to look beneath the stairs.

Burns slowly turns and sees Cliff.

Cliff

HITS

Burns.

Burns staggers back.

The sound of Burn's shuffling feet makes Cliff look around, to see if anyone comes running.

Burns stumbles back to the couch and slides to the floor.

Burns lies in the fetal position on the floor. Cliff looks around. There is nobody at the window. He peers at the street then walks leisurely back to the kitchen, not caring about the squeaking floor boards. He pauses before going out the window, taking one look back at the still room.

The sound of the streetcar passing by is heard.

The cat has gone.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

Cliff pulls his collar up against the piercing cold. Snow has fallen since he was inside.

The sound of the window closing with a muffled thump is the only sound heard in the silence of the night.

Cliff presses himself against the wall, looking around for anyone who may be watching him.

The creak of the gate is heard as Cliff opens it and goes through. He looks to the yard beyond which leads to the street. It provides good cover as it is crowded with moving vans.

He edges toward the street, crouching and alert. His heart is pounding, his breath labored. The fresh snow muffles his footsteps.

The street is deserted. The street lamps shine coldly and the circles of yellow light fall on the unbroken whiteness of the fresh snow.

Cliff looks up and down the street and sees nothing move. He stares into the shadows.

CLIFF

Hell, its nothing.

He moves up the street. His boots make little sound in the snow. There is no echo.

The sky is scattered with clouds and bare spots show stars poking through.

(CONTINUED)

Cliff pulls his cap lower down against the cold. He moves up to the side-street counting his footsteps while keeping an eye out for police and keeping his hand on the roll of money in his pocket.

Cliff bends down to pick up some snow in his hands to drink but realizes he will leave a mark. He looks behind him panicked, realizing his feet have left tracks in the snow.

He looks anxiously toward the sky. It isn't snowing anymore and the clouds are clearing away. His tracks are quite visible in the snow.

Cliff starts walking where there is no snow. When he gets to the corner he starts to follow the porches since they are bare of snow.

Cliff climbs over an iron fence and easily comes down onto the porch and goes along crouching, keeping an eye out for anyone that might see him.

He accidentally kicks a milk bottle and it rumbles across the porch. Cliff stops and crouches for a few minutes, holding his breath, watching to see if someone is peering out a window.

Nothing moves. Cliff continues, stopping in between porches to scrutinize the street.

Cliff finally makes it to his home. He looks behind him. Nothing is moving on the street, not a sound is heard except for Cliff's breath.

He opens the door and goes in.

INT. CLIFF'S HOUSE, FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cliff steps inside. It's the hallway of a dimly lit rooming house. All that can be heard is the sound of a tap dripping. Cliff pauses and listens for a moment.

Cliff carefully tiptoes on the hard wood floor to the stairs and steps onto the carpet. There are 14 stairs - the 11th has a squeak. Cliff steps over it and continues counting under his breath

CLIFF

11...12...13...14...

His foot comes down with a heart-stilling thump. He waits, holding his breath. No sound or movement is heard. He continues on.

Cliff opens the door to his room.

INT. CLIFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom is cold. We can see an irregular heap in the bed.

Cliff hesitates to turn on a light. He moves to the window and looks out on the street. He sees only dark columns of trees in the shine of the street lights. Nothing moves on the street.

Cliff undresses for bed, leaving his clothes on the floor by the bed. The wad of money is visible through the clothes. A picture of a new home falls from one Cliff's pockets and lands beside the pile of clothes.

Cliff slowly gets beneath the quilts and curls up.

The irregular heap stirs and turns sleepily to Cliff. This is BETTY.

BETTY  
You're late, Cliff.

Cliff pretends to be sleeping.

BETTY (cont'd)  
Cliff? You're late.

CLIFF  
I had to take a guy to Brampton.

Pause

BETTY  
What's it like out?

CLIFF  
(curtly)  
All right.

BETTY  
Cold?

CLIFF  
(remembering the snow and his  
footprints)  
It snowed a little.

(CONTINUED)



BETTY  
Snowed, did you say?

CLIFF  
(worried)  
Yah.

Cliff grits his teeth and tosses in bed.  
He hears Betty raise her head suddenly.

BETTY  
Did you want something to eat?

CLIFF  
No.

BETTY  
But after the drive?

CLIFF  
I'm alright!

Cliff tosses himself and turns his back to Betty. Betty settles to sleep.

Cliff shifts to another position. He is finding it hard to fall asleep. He looks towards the money still in his clothes. He turns back to look at Betty.

A grandfather clock chimes 4. The ringing echoes through the house.

Cliff's eyes are wide open. Betty is breathing heavily in sleep next to him. Cliff tosses, looking for a comfortable position to fall asleep.

He finally sleeps and dreams he is at the garage, dozing in a chair, waiting for a call. The guys are sitting around talking.

The sound of his chair scrapes and rumbles across the floor.  
Then it goes dark.

Cliff's eyes suddenly open. He looks around, confused, at the ceiling, the lace curtains, the tie-rack.

Cliff looks over at Betty trying to see where the sound is coming from. The sound of the chair rumbling is coming from the door. There is knocking at the door.

Cliff gets out of bed, grabs his housecoat and pulls it tightly around him.

(CONTINUED)

He opens the door and sees the sleepy-looking face of the old landlady, MRS. MCBRIDE. She is rough, untidy, not happy at being woken up in the middle of the night.

MRS. MCBRIDE  
Man to see you Mr. Barker.

She looks questioningly at Cliff.

CLIFF  
Thank you Mrs. McBride.

He ignore her questioning look. MRS. MCBRIDE shuffles off down the hallway.

CLIFF stares at the man standing in front of him now. He has a hard stare and a very carefully trimmed mustache. He is wearing a black coat with a hard collar. His eyes are hard with no friendliness in them. The voice is calm.

DETECTIVE THOMAS  
Cliff Barker? I'd like to talk to you.

Cliff tries to force a smile

CLIFF  
What do you want?

DETECTIVE THOMAS  
(with a curl in his lip)  
Take it easy. You don't want to wake the house. I'm Detective Thomas. I must say, you were certainly smart. It was smart work on your part.

Cliff gives up. He knows he's caught.

CLIFF  
How did you find me?

DETECTIVE THOMAS  
You left your tracks in the lanes and in the front of the house. Hurry up!

Cliff looks down the stairs. The sound of the landlady's steps descending down the stairs fade away.

Cliff now sees a second policeman in the stairway.

Cliff turns back to the room. Betty is still sleeping. He decides not to wake her. He starts to get dressed. He places the pictures of the new home on the dresser. He can hear the muffled voices of the policemen in the hallway. He looks to see if they are looking through the keyhole.

Cliff is combing his hair when Betty wakes up.

BETTY  
(sleepily)  
Where are you going?

CLIFF  
(not turning from the mirror)  
I got a call. I'll be back soon.  
You needn't wait. (to himself) You  
left tracks .. that was sloppy ..  
sloppy work!

BETTY  
Do you want breakfast before you  
go?

CLIFF  
No, I'm alright. Don't worry.

Cliff looks at Betty downhearted as he pulls on his cap.

BETTY  
(smiling at him)  
Pull your cap more to the other  
side. Poor Cliff. They have you  
working too hard.

Cliff kisses her and squeezes her hand.

BETTY (cont'd)  
What's it doing out?

Cliff looks outside. The sun is coming up and warm looking. A drop of water falls. The snow is melting.

CLIFF  
Don't wait for me.

Cliff goes out of the apartment.

AS THE DOOR CLOSSES, CLIFF CATCHES A GLIMPSE OF BETTY  
SETTLING DOWN.

He stares hard at the door closing for a moment and then  
turns to face the policemen.

The door closes behind.

THE END