

Smart Work v8 - may 30, 2012

By

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

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EXTERIOR/DAY - WOODBINE RACETRACK

CLIFF 29, years old, dark hair, dark eyes, medium build, casually dressed, walks through the crowd to the edge of the racetrack. He stands watching the horses prepare for the race.

He has a paper in his hands with a horse's name circled.

We hear the race start - we follow the horses around the race.

C.U - CLIFF EXCITED AS HIS HORSE REACHES THE FINISH LINE

Camera pulls away as Cliff is very happy with his winning horse.

Opening credits

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

Cliff 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.

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!

(CONTINUED)

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.

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.

CUT TO: 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. That horse 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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

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.

On his way down he grabs for razor that is on the shelf beside him. He gets to his feet and staggers towards Cliff, lunging at him with the razor. Burns glances a blow with the razor off of Cliff's side. Cliff hits Burns again. Burns goes down in a slump.

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/STREET - NIGHT

Cliff pulls his collar up. He grimaces as he finally notices the wound from Burn's razor. He touches his side and sees that it is bleeding.

Drips fall to the ground unnoticed.

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

(CONTINUED)

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 street is deserted. The street lamps shine circles of yellow light, falling on the sidewalk, illuminating the blood trail behind him.

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

CLIFF

Hell, nothing there. Get a hold of yourself

He moves up the street silently.

THE SKY IS SCATTERED WITH CLOUDS AND BARE SPOTS SHOW STARS POKING THROUGH.

Cliff moves up to the side-street counting his footsteps while keeping an eye out for police.

He keeps his hand on the roll of money in his pocket at all times.

Cliff bends down to take a break and the blood drips onto the sidewalk. He looks behind him panicked, realizing he has left a trail.

Cliff starts walking on the lawns and grass to cover his tracks.

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.

(CONTINUED)

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 dark except for a bedside lamp. BETTY is propped up in bed, asleep, with a book open on her chest, *What To Expect When You're Expecting*.

Cliff 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 being careful of his cut, leaving his clothes on the floor by the bed. He puts the money in a drawer with a picture of a new home.

Cliff slowly gets beneath the quilts and curls up.

BETTY stirs and turns sleepily to Cliff.

BETTY
You're late, Cliff. Did you get the cherries?

Cliff pretends to be sleeping.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY (cont'd)
Cliff? The cherries?

CLIFF
The store was closed. Sorry.

Pause

BETTY
What's it like out?

CLIFF
(curtly)
All right.

BETTY
Cold?

CLIFF
(remembering the blood trail)
No...clear and warm.

BETTY
Warm eh?

CLIFF
(worried)
Yah.

Cliff grits his teeth and tosses in bed.

He hears Betty raise her head suddenly.

BETTY
The baby is kicking? Want to feel?

CLIFF
Yes!

Cliff puts his hand gently on Betty's stomach.

BETTY
Feel it?

CLIFF
Wow that is amazing! You know ..
we're going to be alright Betty.

BETTY
Of course we are. I have no doubt.
You will do the right thing for us.
You always do. (kisses him) Don't
worry about the cherries. I'll get

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BETTY (cont'd)
some tomorrow. (smiles, puts book
away, goes to sleep)

Cliff tosses himself, grimacing from his cut and turns his back to Betty.

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

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

The room goes dark

INT. BARBER SHOP -DAY

Cliff enters the shop from the back, the same way he entered the night before. This time he moves freely.

He comes to the front of the shop. Its quiet - no customers. Cliff touches his pocket and moves to the till. He hears sounds from behind and freezes.

BURNS
Cliff.. whatcha doin here? Told you
I had no money for you!

Cliff turns and faces BURNS. He has a cut and a bruise on his face. He doesn't look as tough as the night before.

CLIFF
Nasty looking? What happened?

BURNS
Nothing

CLIFF
Really? Cause it looks like someone
came collecting! Might want to
start paying out! Save on doctors
bills.

BURNS
Funny! What happened to your side?
Looks like someone didnt' care for
your jokes! Now what do you want?
Why are you here?

CLIFF
You know ... I'm not sure. Thought
I had to do something .. and now

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLIFF (cont'd)
... I just can't seem to remember
what it was (touching his pocket)

BURNS
Then I suggest you get out of here!

CLIFF
Not a problem .. you have yourself
a wonderful day!

Cliff leaves the store by the front door.

Smiling he takes his cell phone out, dials, touches his
pocket, looking back at the barber shop.

CLIFF
Hello.. Mr. Thomas... yes .. its
Cliff Williams... just fine.. she's
great thank you ... listen .. I
have the rest of the money for the
down payment... I know .. great
news! I was wondering when we could
come in and sign the papers? ..
that would be great.. see you then.

Cliff walks down the street, whistling.

We can hear the sounds of his horse winning the race.

The End.