

The Obits
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Older sections of a small town scroll past. Small houses with small yards, big trees. Neighborhood businesses, old and dated. It's all on the backside of its prime, succumbing to the years.

EXT. CAFE - SIDEWALK - MID-MORNING

JOSEPH "Joe" GUFTASON, retired, 60ish, is dressed like the bottom-middle-class, blue-collar worker he is, wearing a well-worn Dallas Cowboy ballcap.

He stops on the sidewalk, looks in a window. He leans back to look up at sign. Nods to himself, walks up to the door and pulls.

INT. CAFE - FRONT DOOR - SAME DAY

He walks in, looks around.

Two empty tables by the window. One has a fresh newspaper lying upon it.

He sits down at the one closest to the door, settles in.

MARLENE JOHNSON, an outgoing, 30-something waitress, trots over quickly. She's nervous - very nervous.

MARLENE

Hey, hun. Wouldn't you be more comfortable away from the window?

Joe looks around the diner, shrugs.

JOE

With my eyes, I need all the light I can get. Readin' gets tougher every year.

Marlene cringes as she watches Joe pop the paper open and fold it. She glances at her watch.

MARLENE

What can I getcha, hun? Sumpun' quick?

JOE

Just coffee. First day at bein' retired. I'm gonna savor it.

Marlene disappears. Instantly a cup of coffee is by his elbow.

(CONTINUED)

JOE (CONT'D)

Wow. Now that's service.

Marlene steps next to the window, looks down the street.

MARLENE

Yeah. Well. Gotta keep things goin'. Keep movin' along.

Joe takes a swig, nods.

JOE

Good coffee. And a brand new paper. Retirement's gettin' off on the right foot.

Marlene looks at her watch, mutters to herself.

MARLENE

That won't last long.

Marlene starts to leave, stops to look out the window again. She turns to Joe.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

What's your name, hon?

JOE

Joe. Why?

MARLENE

Joe, I got a long-time, regular customer comin' in here real soon and with all he's been through, he's become kinduva creature of habit.

JOE

Okay...

Marlene starts to fidget then comes clean.

MARLENE

You're in his seat. At his table. And he'll be here in about a minute.

Joe nods.

JOE

So...

MARLENE

If you'd just move over to this other table, the world's gonna be a whole nicer place to live in.

JOE

And what -

MARLENE (INTERRUPTING)

And hey! The coffee's free!
Whaddaya-

Marlene glances up at the window.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

Oh, crap.

EDGAR "Eddie" GLENFORD ROBINSON, about the same age as Joe, dressed in the same blue-collar style but sporting a new Mavericks ballcap, struggles into the window view. He sees Joe. His eyes go wide. He flails his hand as unintelligible words leak through the window. He rapidly staggers past window.

The sound of the front door opening, quick wheezing and cane thumping.

Eddie stops by Joe.

EDDIE

Whadda ya doin'?

Joe looks up, bewildered.

JOE

What?

EDDIE

Whadda ya doin' in my seat?

Eddie glares at Joe, whose eyes narrow. Marlene steps up quickly.

MARLENE

Now, Eddie, don't blow a fuse. The nice gentleman was just movin'. Right, nice gentleman?

Marlene is behind Eddie with her hands clasped in prayer-like pleading, begging with her eyes. Joe slowly releases the breath.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE
You...you get the-

JOE
Sorry, man. Didn't know it was yours.

MARLENE
Now, Eddie, just calm down.

Joe forces a smile.

JOE
I'll, uh, move.

Joe stands up, gets his coffee and the paper, settles in at the next table over.

An exhausted Eddie plops into his chair. A disgusted Marlene puts a cup of coffee in front of him. He looks down at the table, gets worked up again. He stabs his cane in Joe's direction.

EDDIE
Dang it, Marlene - he's got my paper!

Marlene holds Eddie in a long stare then steps between the tables. She turns to Joe who looks over the paper at her.

Marlene's eyes and hands go back to prayer/pleading mode.

MARLENE
Would ya give 'im the obits?
Please?

JOE
The whats?

MARLENE
The obits. That's all he needs.

Joe looks lost.

Eddie jumps in.

EDDIE
The o-bit-u-air-ez!

Joe scowls, catches Marlene's face, takes a deep breath. Joe peels off the obits, hands them to Marlene, who mouths "*thank-you-thank-you*".

(CONTINUED)

Marlene turns, slaps pages down on Eddie's table. She turns back to Joe. She nods at him, almost bowing.

MARLENE

You, sir, are a gentleman.

She turns, jabs a finger at Eddie.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

And you, you cantankerous old fart, had better leave one heckuva tip or I'll have Bubba come out here. And you can't even outrun him!

Eddie starts to say something, catches Marlene's look, changes mind. He slowly reaches for the obits.

EDDIE

Yes, m'am.

Eddie and Joe watch Marlene stalk off. They go back to their papers and coffees.

Eddie reads. He begins to nod, shakes his head. Some grunts, uh-huh's, tongue-clucks, and mmmmmmm's.

Joe looks over, rolls his eyes, goes back to his paper.

Two sips later, Joe puts the paper down, drains the last of the coffee, stands, grimaces slightly. He throws a dollar on the table.

Joe mutters softly as he passes Eddie.

JOE

Don't forget the tip or you'll be talkin' ta Bubba.

Eddie glances up, watches Joe walk away.

He pops the paper, resumes reading.

EDDIE

Shoot. Bubba moves slower'n'me. Man's a glacier.

INT. CAFE - WINDOW TABLE - MID-MORNING - NEXT DAY

Joe, limping slightly, walks past the window, disappears. Door opening/closing, walking sounds. He reappears by the window tables. There's a new paper lying on Eddie's table. He picks up the paper, ruffles through it. He pulls out the obits, lays them down, takes the rest of the paper.

(CONTINUED)

Limping slightly, he sits down with a grimace on the far side of the other table. Rubs his knee before popping open paper.

Marlene comes over with a cup and a carafe.

MARLENE

You are either the most pigheaded man I've met - or the dumbest.

JOE

Yeah. It's a toss-up.

MARLENE

Thanks for your help yesterday, hun.

JOE

You're welcome. Today, I'm lookin' for a nice, quiet cuppa coffee and the paper.

Marlene looks at her watch.

MARLENE

Remember ya said that. He oughta be here in two minutes. Less if he's got a tailwind.

JOE

He come in every day?

MARLENE

Yep. Ever since - yeah, every day.

Marlene walks off. Joe sips, reads.

Eddie wheezes up outside the window. He sees Joe. He stops, puts his head down, then looks ahead. He moves past and out of sight.

Door open/close sound. Hard breathing and cane thumping.

Eddie wearily enters, collapses in his chair. He looks straight ahead. Joe looks over, goes back to reading. Eddie glances down at the obits then looks ahead.

Marlene places a cup near the obits.

EDDIE

Thanks, Marlene.

MARLENE

Sure, hun.

Eddie picks up the obits, dips them in acknowledgement, all the time looking straight ahead.

EDDIE

Thanks.

Joe grunts, nods, not looking up from paper. They read. Eddie starts his nodding, sighing, hmm-hmms.

Joe stops to pour some more coffee. He looks at Eddie.

JOE

You know a lotta folks who died?

Eddie looks up.

EDDIE

Say what?

JOE

From the way you're readin', it sounds like ya knew a lotta folks that've died.

EDDIE

Oh. No. No.

Eddie holds up paper.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Seems like some folks do a lot more than others, according to what's written.

Joe goes back to his paper, shrugs.

JOE

Dunno 'bout that. The obituaries are like Christmas letters. Some are short and tell ya nuthin'. Others are long, brag a lot, and are full of enough b.s. to fertilize the back-40.

Eddie smiles in spite of himself. He lays the obits down.

EDDIE

I hear that.

(CONTINUED)

Eddie takes off the Mavs hat, runs a hand over a shaved head. Gently brushes fingertips at the hat before snugging it back on. He picks up the obits again, reads.

A few minutes of muttering and nodding pass. Eddie drains his cup, puts the Obits on table, gets up with effort.

Looks straight ahead, touches the bill of his hat.

Joe never looks up from his paper. He touches his bill, too.

Eddie leaves. Joe keeps reading.

INT. CAFE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Joe walks by window, limp more pronounced, Cowboys ballcap in place, disappears.

Door sound open/close. Joe walks to Eddie's table, takes the paper, pulls out the Obits, lays them down. He goes to the far table, sits down with a grunt, grimaces, rubs a knee.

Marlene brings over a cup and a carafe.

MARLENE

What's with the knee, hun?

JOE

Oh, a history lesson that gives me a test once in awhile.

MARLENE

I got some aspirin -

JOE

Nah. Thanks anyway. It wakes up a little later than the rest'a me. It'll come around.

Joe pops, folds the paper. He reaches for the cup just as Eddie comes by outside on sidewalk, tired and slow-moving. He disappears.

Door open/close sound. Eddie reappears by his seat. Joe looks up, nods. Eddie sighs heavily, plops down.

Marlene delivers a cup and a smile.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

Thanks.

Eddie takes a cautious sip, picks up the obits. He looks over at Joe, tips paper in Joe's direction.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Joe nods, puts the paper in one hand, gets up, walks to Eddie, extends his hand.

JOE

I'm Joe.

Eddie looks at it, pauses, then takes it. His defenses crumble as he relaxes.

EDDIE

Nice to officially meet'cha. Name's Eddie. Well, to most folks it is. My mama called me "Edgar" and my daddy called me "Hey-YOU!".

Joe smiles as he goes back to his chair, sits down, grimaces.

JOE

Yeah. I had an old man like that, too. Every once'n'awhile, I swear I still hear 'im.

EDDIE

Ain't it the truth? I just remember I never wanted to hear Mama use my middle name.

JOE

Yeah?

EDDIE

Meant the water was *boilin'* and I was in it *deeeeeeep*.

Both men chuckle. The quiet gets comfortable.

JOE

Here's an obit for ya. Swenson's is closin'.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

Ahhh, man. The old 5 & 10 store? Shoot, that's a landmark. Been here since...uh...

JOE

Says here, 1969. Yeah. They opened my senior year of high school. The next year I was gonna go to college. Spent my freshman and sophomore years in 'Nam.

Eddie's voice gets very soft, a 1,000 yard stare appears.

EDDIE

Lord knows that'll give ya an education.

JOE

Yeah. Yeah, it will. It's somethin' folks shouldn't hafta learn. (beat) The tests are - tough.

Joe absently reaches for his knee, rubs it. Both men are pensive, quiet.

JOE (CONT'D)

You in the Service, Eddie?

EDDIE

No. No. They didn't want me. Tried. They took my boy, though.

JOE

Oh?

Joe reaches for his coffee, leans back.

EDDIE

Yeah. He went to I-rack. Never came back.

Joe's cup stops in mid-air. He looks at Eddie.

JOE

Sorry, man.

EDDIE

Yeah. Those tests are tough.

Eddie half-smiles, flutters the paper in his hand.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

That's when I started readin' the obits. Readin' what folks leave behind. What they'd done, who loved 'em, what folks'll remember 'bout 'em.

Joe nods. They turn back to their papers. Eddie makes a few noises, a few head shakes, nods before setting the paper down on the table. Drains the coffee, struggles to get up.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

You have a good day.

JOE

You, too, Eddie. Sorry 'bout your boy.

They touch their hat brims in unison. Eddie leaves.

INT. CAFE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Joe is at his window table, sipping, reading, Cowboy ballcap in place. A form moves behind him, the tapping of a cane. Joe smiles at the door sound and the cane taps.

Eddie almost whispers a greeting.

EDDIE

Mornin', Joe.

JOE

Mornin', Eddie.

Eddie plunks into his chair. Marlene puts a cup near the obits. Eddie's voice is labored, thin.

EDDIE

Thanks.

MARLENE

You okay, hun? Havin' one of those days?

EDDIE

Yeah. But...nuthin coffee and...a...pretty smile...can't fix.

Both Eddie and Joe read and sip, the occasional murmur coming from Eddie. Eddie looks at the ceiling, thinking. He looks over at Joe, forces a deep breath. His voice comes out strained and soft.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

You married, Joe?

Joe glances over at the noise, sees Eddie looking at him.

JOE

I'm sorry, what?

Eddie takes another big breath, motions with his paper.

EDDIE

Might as well sit over here. I
ain't got the air to yell today.

Joe pauses then nods. He grimaces slightly as he stands up. Grabbing his cup and paper, he parks across from Eddie who takes a swig and a deep breath.

EDDIE

You married, Joe?

JOE

Yeah. 39 years now. You?

EDDIE

Was. She'd been fightin' cancer
off'n'on for, oh, 15 years. Found
out she had it when the boy was
about 5. It'd go away, come
back. Did that twice.

JOE

When she pass?

Eddie looks ahead, squinting his eyes against memories.

EDDIE

It was about a year after we got
the news 'bout Johnnie. That, uh,
that took the fight right outta
'er.

They both look back at their papers, neither one reading.

JOE

How long you know each other?

Eddie's face breaks into a grin.

EDDIE

Joe, she was the first girl I ever
walked home from school. The first
girl I ever held hands with,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE (cont'd)
hugged, or kissed. And on our
weddin' night-

Eddie and Joe both laugh and nod.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
She was a parta me for a long, long
time. The *best* part.

Eddie drains his cup, sets it down along with the obits.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Good coffee.

JOE
It is, innit?

Eddie fights to his feet.

EDDIE
Enjoy the day, Joe.

JOE
You, too, Eddie.

They brim touch in unison.

INT. CAFE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Montage of Joe and Eddie sitting, talking, reading,
laughing. Marlene talks to them, they all laugh. Clothes
change but never the hats.

INT. CARE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Joe is at Eddie's table in the other chair, sipping and
reading. The obits are neatly folded on the table near a cup
and a carafe. Eddie wheezes in, groaning as he sits down.
Joe pours him a cupful.

EDDIE
Thanks, Joe. Need it today.

JOE
Tough day?

Eddie taps his chest with some agitation as he takes a deep
breath.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

The carburetors ain't workin' for a darn this mornin'. Makes the motor work a bit harder'n'usual.

Joe lowers his paper to his lap.

JOE

How long ya been like this?

EDDIE

Oh. 7...8 years. Gets kinda old.

JOE

So why walk? Ya got anyone to take ya around?

Eddie stretches his legs while arching his back.

EDDIE

County services has a pickup and delivery service, but...do I look like a doggone pizza to you?

Joe laughs as Eddie waves his hand.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Went in for my final appointment today. Doc said keep walkin' if I can, if I want to. So, I walk.

Eddie swigs the coffee, puts the Obits on his lap.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Say, Joe. Anything in the sports page 'bout the Mavericks?

JOE

Well. Let's see. (beat) Nope. You a fan?

Eddie pulls his hat off, scratches a stubbled head. He turns the hat over in his hands, smiling.

EDDIE

Our boy, Johnnie, was around 5 when the Mavs started playin'. Yeah. He had dreams of playin' for 'em. And he practiced hard. Oh my. Dribblin', shootin'. Memorized all the names, the stats.

Eddie shakes his head, chuckles.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

But the boy resembled a fireplug.
No, the Lord built him for the
Marines, not the NBA.

JOE

I had the same dream as your
Johnnie but I was playin' for the
Cowboys. Wearin' the Star. Gonna
date one of those cheerleaders.

Joe reaches up to adjust his ballcap. He shrugs, smiles.

JOE (CONT'D)

I was 19 when I realized I was too
small, too thin, and had only one
knee.

Both smile, turning back to their papers. Eddie looks up,
slowly lowers his paper, a question forming on his face.

EDDIE

Huh. Wonder why dreams are never in
the obits.

JOE

What's that?

EDDIE

The obits only tell what folks have
done, not what they wanted to do.
What they'd dream they'd be.

JOE

Hmm.

EDDIE

Just seems that the obits oughta
paint a bigger picture, ya know, so
folks would know.

They both look ahead, each seeing the same thing.

JOE

Like a person's life should be
more'n just a paragraph.

EDDIE

Yeah. Even if they wasn't famous,
they were still - sumbody.

Eddie tries to corral a thought, then catches it.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

There was this poem I heard in school. Nobody's an island. We're all connected. Somehow.

Eddie smiles as he nods.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

We all dream.

JOE

Huh. Pretty deep thinkin', Eddie.

EDDIE

Gotta be the coffee, Joe.

Eddie sets the obits and cup on the table, struggles to his feet.

EDDIE

You take care now.

JOE

You, too, man. Have a nice one.

They touch their brims.

INT. CARE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Joe sits, sipping and reading. The obits, a cup, and the carafe are on the other side of the table. Time passes. No Eddie. Joe lays down the paper and the tip. He looks out the window before he leaves.

INT. CARE - FRONT WINDOW - NEXT DAY

Everything is like the day before. Joe pours another cup, looks at his watch before going back to his paper.

There's the sound of crisp footsteps. Joe glances up.

A **WOMAN** in professional attire is standing by the table. She's holding a large, clasped manila envelope.

WOMAN

Are you - Joe?

JOE

Yes, m'am.

(CONTINUED)

WOMAN

I'm with County Services. Edgar passed away. He left you this.

She holds out the envelope. Dropping the newspaper on the table, Joe hesitates before taking it.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

He said you'd know what to do.

Joe stares at the envelope, puzzled.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Joe, are you OK?

JOE

Wha - yeah, thanks. Thank you.

Woman starts to leave.

JOE (CONT'D)

M'am, uh, didn't he have any family?

WOMAN

No, I'm afraid not. He was predeceased by his parents, brothers, wife, and son.

Joe sits staring at the envelope. Woman waits then discreetly leaves.

Joe startles, looking up. No one is there.

The envelope is opened, the papers gently pulled free.

Across the top, written in large, bold letters, is "*THE OBIT OF EDGAR GLENFORD ROBINSON*".

Joe smiles.

JOE

Heckuva middle name, Eddie.

Joe settles back. His eyes don't leave the page as he reaches for his coffee. A small chuckle escapes.

JOE (CONT'D)

So you wanted to be a superhero.

Joe is framed in the large window, the world passing by outside. He takes a swig.

(CONTINUED)

JOE (CONT'D)
A firefighter...own a brand new
Camaro.

Joe puts the obit down reverently. He reaches inside the envelope, pulls out Eddie's Mavs cap. He pops it out to normal shape, holds it up.

He gently brushes at it with his fingertips.

Joe reaches across the table, puts the Mavs cap on top of the obits. He fills Eddie's cup.

He touches the brim of his cap before taking a swig himself.

Joe settles back, continues to read Eddie's obit.

EXT. STREET SCENE - SIDEWALK - SAME DAY

The full window shows the one empty table and Joe sipping and reading Eddie's obit at the other. Joe lowers the obit, then gestures towards the Mavs cap with his cup.

The window becomes the diner front, the diner front one of the old buildings, the old buildings becoming part of an old street showing the life flowing through a small town.

JOE (V.O.)
Really? A duet with Sinatra?

FADE OUT