

Changing Views

by

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FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

JEFF SMITH, 35, tense and irritable, is in front of the class writing math problems on the blackboard. The students are chattering away behind his back -- no one more so than MICHAEL, 17, black hoodie pulled tightly over his head as he jokes and laughs with the kid seated beside him.

Jeff whips around, glaring fiercely at Michael.

JEFF

Michael, how many times do I have to tell you? Enough is enough!

MICHAEL

(looks up at Jeff)

What's your problem? Just go and finish your little teaching thing.

Jeff grabs Michael by the shirt and pulls him to a corner of the classroom.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(straightens his shirt)

Aye man, don't be grabbin' on me like that!

JEFF

What the hell is wrong with you? Why must you keep disrupting my class?

MICHAEL

(in an angry voice)

Man, I ain't wit all this school nonsense.

JEFF

Well you don't have to be here if that's what you want. It's your life, Michael, your choice.

Michael starts to head out the door. Before he does, Jeff grabs him by the arm.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Remember, once you leave you're not my problem anymore.

MICHAEL

Like I ever was.

Michael shakes off Jeff's arm and storms out defiantly. Jeff just watches him go with a sad look.

INT. JEFF SMITH'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jeff is sitting at his desk intently looking through a brochure. His wife LISA, 30, enters with a cup of coffee. She lays it down on his desk.

JEFF

Look at this, honey. The brochure says they've got dozens of the latest handhelds, laptops, tablet computers.

LISA

(without enthusiasm)

That's nice.

JEFF

Nice? More like a dream come true.
(looks up at Lisa)
Think I should call Charlie and bug him again about a job opening?

LISA

Sure, why not? If changing schools is what you really want...

JEFF

You're kidding me, right? The chance to teach in a place where kids give a damn about learning? Where the campus doesn't feel like a bombed-out battlefield?

LISA

You once said you liked the challenge.

JEFF

That was when I was a new soldier going off to war. After eight years of combat, enough is enough. I surrender.

LISA

And let your students fight on without you there to lead them in battle.

JEFF

Give me a break, Lisa. Those kids don't care one way or another whether I leave or stay. I'm sick of the constant struggle of trying to teach kids who don't want to learn.

LISA

Well, what about the ones that do want to learn?

Jeff just shrugs.

LISA (CONT'D)

You cant just give up on the whole group just because of a few. Besides, it's your job to try reach them all, whether they want to learn or not.

JEFF

I've tried, Lisa. I've tried and it's pointless, so now I'm going to go where life will be easier and my work will have some meaning.

LISA

An easier life for you maybe, but for the kids you're leaving life is only going to get harder. Especially without you.

Jeff rises and begins pacing back and forth. Obviously this is more difficult for him then it appears.

JEFF

Ever since I was a kid, all I ever wanted was to teach. That's all I ever dreamed about. Helping to shape young minds and watch them grow. So why shouldn't I have what I worked for all my life? Don't I deserve a chance to make my dream come true at last?

LISA

Of course, Jeff. Whatever decision you make, you know I'll support it.

Jeff returns to his desk and begins thumbing through the school brochure.

CUT TO:

INT, CLASSROOM - DAY

There is a bunch of chitter-chatter as Jeff walks in and quiets the class Down.

JEFF

Ok ok everybody quiet down now. You all heard the bell ring, right?

Jeff notices that Michael's seat is empty.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Has anyone seen Michael?

STUDENT #1

Nope, I don't think he came to school today.

STUDENT #2

Told me yesterday he was never comin' back.

JEFF

Well, all right. Let's all turn to page 120 in your lesson books.

Jeff takes a final look at Michael's empty chair before turning to the blackboard.

INT. TEACHERS LOUNGE - LUNCHTIME

Jeff is sitting on a chair in the lounge. He is on his cell phone, chattering excitedly.

JEFF

(into phone)

I don't believe it, Charlie, I was just calling to remind you that I'm still interested in a staff position... Well, sure, you bet I'm still interested. Sure, I could start by teaching summer school classes. It'll give me a chance to get to know the campus... Okay, done deal, Charlie, I'll keep in touch... Believe me, I'm looking forward to it too.... Thanks again.

(hangs up, then)

Yess!!!

BERT SLADE, 45, a rumpled-looking biology teacher, approaches.

SLADE

What's all the excitement about?

JEFF

I got it, Bert. I finally got a job offer.

SLADE

Congratulations. What's the lucky school?

JEFF

Santiago High.

SLADE

Santiago, eh? Congratulations, that's quite a step up from San Quentin here.

JEFF

Don't I know it.

SLADE

I couldn't be happier... Unless it was me getting the job.

JEFF

This means better hours, and no more students from hell like Michael Redmen. You know Redmen, don't you?

SLADE

I've got him in third period.

JEFF

I mean, he comes to class late everyday, or not at all, and when he does show up he's either disruptive or defiant or just falls asleep altogether.

SLADE

I know he's a troublesome kid but give him a break.

JEFF

Why should I? He's never given me a break. He's made my life miserable since day one.

SLADE

I take it you haven't heard why he's absent from school today.

JEFF

What, he had to go save a group of children from a burning building?

SLADE

He's in the hospital, Jeff. He was admitted last night. His father beat him up.

JEFF

(shocked)
What?!

SLADE

Pretty severely, from what I hear. Apparently this has been going on for a while.

JEFF

God, I didn't know...

SLADE

We never usually do until it's too late.

(rises to leave)

Look on the bright side, Jeff -- You won't have to worry about this kind of thing at Santiago.

Slade walks off, leaving Jeff clearly troubled by the news.

INT. JEFF SMITH'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lisa walks in as Jeff finishes buttoning his shirt. Staring at himself in the mirror, his thoughts are somewhere else.

LISA

Honey, are you ok?

JEFF

Uh, yea. Couldn't be better.

(kisses her cheek)

Are your ready to go?

LISA

Pretty much. What about you?

JEFF

Well, actually before we go, I have to make one little stop.

LISA

Want me to go with you?

JEFF

No, it's all right, go on without me. I'll meet you at the restaurant.

(Lisa looks confused)

I promise I won't be long.

INT HOSPITAL - MICHAEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Michael lies in bed, his face scarred and bandaged from the beating he took. He's reading a sheet of paper when suddenly a NURSE enters the room.

NURSE

Michael, you have a visitor.

MICHAEL

Who is it? The police again?

NURSE

N, I don't think so. He says he's a friend.

MICHAEL

Uh, send em in.

The nurse exits. Moments later, Jeff enters the room.

JEFF

Hey Michael.

MICHAEL

Oh man, she said it was a friend.

JEFF

I don't know, I'd kind of like to think I am.

MICHAEL

What do you want!?

JEFF

I'm here on a good note, Michael.
Are you ok?

MICHAEL

Yea I'm kool, you ain't gotta worry 'bout me. I'm not yo problem, remember?

JEFF

No, you're not my problem -- you're my student. And that runs a whole lot deeper. Michael, what do you want to do with your life?

Michael shrugs, then hands the paper he'd been reading to Jeff.

JEFF (CONT'D)

What's this?

MICHAEL

Something my sister brought me.

Jeff eyes widen as he reads --

JEFF

Your P.S.A.T scores... You took the test?

MICHAEL

That's right. Just for laughs.

JEFF

Wow, Michael, you scored well. I mean, really well.

Jeff looks up at Michael with newfound admiration. And respect.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I am so proud of you.

MICHAEL

I didn't do it to get your approval, okay? Not for you or my parents or nobody -- I did it for me. To prove to myself that I've got potential.

JEFF

Yeah, you do, Michael. Are you still planning on leaving school for good?

MICHAEL

Don't know. I might just stick around now. How about you? Word is, you're going off to teach someplace where there's nice little boys and girls.

Busted, Jeff smiles sheepishly.

JEFF

Think I should?

MICHAEL

Man, it'll sure be easy street for you. Nobody givin' you no trouble, everyone looking to learn...

JEFF

Easy street, huh...

MICHAEL

Sure, man. You get to be a good teacher there.

JEFF

And if I stick around Crenshaw, who knows? I might even get to be a great teacher.

MICHAEL

(smiles)

Hey, anything's possible.

FADE OUT/FADE IN:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Lisa is at a table, nervously checking her watch. Suddenly Jeff enters and approaches with an excited look on his face.

LISA
It's about time. I was starting to
get worried about you.

JEFF
No worries, honey. In fact, I've
come to a decision about my life.

LISA
And your decision is...?

He then takes out his cell phone and dials.

JEFF
(into phone)
Hello-- Charlie? Jeff here. Listen
Charlie, about that job opening at
Santiago... I just wanted to thank
you for helping to get me the position
and everything. I really appreciate
all you did for me, I mean you really
came through for me... So what I'm
calling to tell you is, Charlie,
that I will not be taking the job
after all.

He looks at Lisa. She can't believe her ears.

JEFF (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Yeah, you heard me right. I changed
my mind... You really want to know
why, Charlie? I took a test tonight
that made me realize something about
myself... I've got potential... Bye,
Charlie.

Jeff hangs up. He turns to Lisa, who's grinning from ear to
ear.

LISA
I'd say a lot of potential.

Jeff kisses her and we:

FADE OUT

THE END