

INT. THE COLLECTIVE - NIGHT

BROOKS (63), sincere and nearing retirement, sweeps the floor and closes his diner, The Collective. Brooks pauses his cleaning routine to sit at a booth and reflect.

Brooks sits in booth.

BROOKS

Well, we did it, honey. The whole town can't get enough of your world-renowned lemon meringue pie. Of course, my grilled cheese is what keeps customers coming through the doors.

Brooks laughs.

BROOKS (CONT.)

Our dream. I lived it. You inspired it. I wish I could have given you your other dream. No one would have made a better mother...

Tears gather in the corner of his eyes.

What do I do now? Throw it all away at some stranger. The place that we built...

INT. THE COLLECTIVE - DAY

Brooks visits with the guests at the diner. Customers pour in and out of the doors. CHARLIE (26), a regular customer, chats with Brooks.

BROOKS

Well, well, well. Wild bunch we have over here.

Charlie chuckles.

CHARLIE

How's it going, Brooks?

BROOKS

As long as I keep happy customers, like yourself, coming through the door, I reckon I'm about as good as good comes.

CHARLIE

Who said I was happy?

BROOKS

Lucky for you, I happen to know the perfect recipe for happiness. A big slice of Evie's lemon meringue pie coming right up.

Brooks leaves to head to the kitchen.

CHARLIE

No, no. It was a joke. I don't think I have room for pie today. I'm saving up for a ring...

BROOKS

It's on the house!

Brooks winks playfully at the man. He returns with the slice of pie as promised.

CHARLIE

You're one crazy old guy, you know that?

BROOKS

That's what my wife used to say, too. Mind if I sit?

The man motions for Brooks to sit at the booth.

BROOKS (CONT.)

I don't know what I'm going to do with the place, Charlie. You don't think you and the lady would have any interest in running a diner?

CHARLIE

As thrilling as that sounds, I think we're comfortable with where we're headed. Have you tried putting it up for sale to see what happens? Maybe a nice family will show interest.

BROOKS

I don't just want any old family in here. This was our place, Charlie. Evie and I created this together. We placed every one of the tiles on this floor. We picked the paint and

wallpaper for a diner when it should have been for a nursery. We put our love toward creating a place for families and children to gather and escape. We lived vicariously through the parents who restlessly wandered in here after a long workday and then survived their child's soccer game. You see, Charlie. This isn't just a building. This isn't just a business. This is my family.

CHARLIE

You're right. But think of the new life that this place could hold under new hands. I can picture it. It's not hopeless. Just think about it.

Charlie slides a business card to Brooks on the table for Charle's Construction Co.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

I don't want to see this place gone, but maybe a little revamping isn't such a bad thing.

INT. THE COLLECTIVE - NIGHT

Brooks wipes down the counters when JO (38), a kindhearted and exhausted mother, frantically enters the diner with her three children, SHAWN (16), CHLOE (12), and BLAIR (8).

BROOKS

Welcome!

JO

I'm so sorry to be a bother. Are you closed? I googled the hours and it said you guys were open. I'm so sorry. We can...

BROOKS

No, no. I was just getting ready to throw a burger down on the grill for myself. It's nice to have guests for dinner.

Jo smiles and sighs of relief.

BROOKS (CONT.)

Should I make that five burgers, then?

JO  
Yes, please.

BROOKS  
Coming right up.

Brooks returns from the kitchen with food for five.

JO  
Thank you so much!

BROOKS  
No problem. If you don't mind me asking, what brings you in at ten o'clock on a Wednesday night?

JO  
Well, we just moved to town. The kids are finally settling in to their new school and getting involved in extracurriculars again. We're heading home from Shawn's basketball game... which I had to leave during the fourth quarter...to pick Blair up from play rehearsal. Then I ran home to grab Chloe so that none of my kids went hungry tonight.

SHAWN  
Mom, did you just lie to a stranger? She ruined dinner tonight.

JO  
Okay, I forgot to plug in the Crock-Pot this morning.

CHLOE  
That poor pot roast gone to waste.

They all laugh.

BROOKS  
Well maybe it was all meant to be, so you folks could keep this old guy company tonight.

BLAIR  
Would you like to come watch my play, sir? I'm a fairy!

JO

Blair, I'm sure this man is very busy,  
and he's practically a stranger...

BROOKS

What's your name, little miss?

BLAIR

Blair.

BROOKS

Hello, Blair. My name is Brooks. It's  
been a pleasure to meet you.

Brooks holds out his hand to Blair.

BLAIR

Nice to meet you, Mr. Brooks.

Blair shakes Brooks hand and turns to Jo.

BLAIR (CONT.)

Okay, Mom. We're not strangers  
anymore.

JO

Honey, eat your food please.

Jo reaches for her wallet.

JO (CONT.)

It is way past her bed time.

BROOKS

Please, don't worry about it. Those  
fries would have been thrown out if  
you guys didn't stop by.

JO

You can't run a restaurant by giving  
handouts. I insist. How much is the  
bill?

BROOKS

I'll tell you what. I'll let you pay  
for my ticket to Blair's school play  
and we'll call it even.

Jo reluctantly puts her wallet back in her purse.

JO  
I'll swing by on Saturday to pick you up. 6:00 sharp.

BROOKS  
I'll have to check my calendar, but I think that should work.

The family prepares to leave and nears the door.

BLAIR  
Bye, Brooks. See you Saturday!

JO  
Thank you for the burgers.

BROOKS  
Thank you for the company. Welcome to town.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Brooks and the family find their seats in the school auditorium to watch Blair's performance.

JO  
She's a nervous wreck. The girl has been running through her lines all day.

SHAWN  
She knows the lines backwards, Mom.

BROOKS  
She'll be great.

Brooks opens the playbill to recognize Blair's name, Blair Watson.

BROOKS (CONT.)  
Watson...

JO  
What was that?

BROOKS  
Oh, uh, Johnson. I recognize some of the other names in the show. A lot of the regulars at the diner have children that are in the show. It's nice to see familiar names.

JO

I'm glad you joined us tonight,  
Brooks. It means a lot to Blair. She's  
struggled with settling in here, but I  
have a feeling she found a new friend.

BROOKS

Yeah, I love this kind of thing. My  
wife and I loved musicals.

JO

Are you able to join us for dinner  
after the show?

BROOKS

Yeah, I don't see why not. I have  
someone closing down the diner  
tonight. I would be honored.

INT. THE WATSON HOME - NIGHT

The family enter their home after the play. Jo shows Brooks  
to the living room and introduces him to her father, Barrett  
(63).

JO

Brooks, I'd like you to meet my  
father, Barrett. Dad, please behave  
yourself.

Jo exits to the kitchen.

BARRETT

So, you're the old fella I hear so  
much about these days?

BROOKS

I guess that'd be me.

The men share laughter.

BROOKS

Your daughter has raised a beautiful  
family. I imagine you didn't do so bad  
yourself, given how she's turned out.

BARRETT

I'm not sure how much of the credit I  
can take. She certainly takes after  
her mother. How about you?

BROOKS

What about me?

BARRETT

Your folks. What are they like?

BROOKS

I, uh...Evie, my wife. She was...beautiful. There's no one that holds as much grace and kindness as she did. It's criminal that one person can be that perfect. She put all the rest of us to shame.

Brooks pauses.

BROOKS (CONT.)

We never had children. Prayed for them for years, but the Lord had other plans I suppose. I guess that's why I hold on so tightly to the diner. It's the one thing we had together that other people still see.

BARRETT

I've got to say you're a better man than me. I don't know if I could keep up with a project that big while mourning the love of my life.

BROOKS

It's what she would have wanted. I do it all for her. But enough about me. What keeps you going? Aside from your family of course.

BARRETT

I don't know exactly. Well, I do. It's someone that...I've never met. My brother disappeared when were young. My parents didn't know how to cope. They blamed themselves. They thought it was best for everyone if they just erased him from existence completely.

Barrett reaches for a picture from his shirt pocket and shows it to Brooks.

BARRETT (CONT.)

This is all I have of him. His left arm, around my shoulder. I've spent my

whole life determined to find the other half of this picture. I have a feeling I'll know it as soon as I find him.

Brooks freezes in shock at the photo.

JO

Pizza's here. Let's eat!

INT. THE WATSON HOME - DAY

Jo prepares dinner and gets disrupted by her phone ringing. She picks up the phone to speak with DR. COLINS (45), who breaks tragic news to her regarding Brooks' health.

JO

Hello?

DR. COLINS

Good evening, ma'am. This is Dr. Colins from Green County Hospital. I'm looking for a Mrs. Watson.

JO

This is her. What's going on, doctor? Is everything okay?

DR. COLINS

We have admitted a patient that appears to be an elderly man. He is in an unconscious state and the patient had no emergency contacts that were living.

JO

I...I'm sorry Dr. Colins. I'm having a hard time following. How did you find me? This man cannot be of any relation to me. My father has me listed as an emergency contact. I know that for certain. I wish I could help, but I don't think I know who this man is.

DR. COLINS

Well, Mrs. Watson, due to the fragile state the man is in, we are urgently seeking to inform his loved ones. We searched the patient's belongings to gather any information we could find. Your number was a recent contact on

his phone.

Jo scrolls to her recent text messages on her phone and finds Brooks' name. She collapses to the floor.

JO  
Brooks...oh my...

DR. COLINS  
Mrs. Watson...Mrs. Watson, are you  
there?

JO  
I'll be right there.

Jo ends the phone call and grabs her keys to head out the door.

INT. GREEN COUNTY HOSPITAL - DAY

Jo frantically enters the hospital. She stops at the front desk to request to see Brooks. A nurse points her to the correct room.

JO  
Brooks...

Jo approaches the hospital bed and reaches for Brooks' hand.

JO (CONT.)  
I'm right here. There's someone here.

Brooks' eyelids flicker open. A slight grin appears on his face.

BROOKS  
My brother...I want to see him.

JO  
You've never mentioned a brother  
before. I think you're still a little  
bit out of it.

Brooks' hand shakes as he lifts it to point at Jo.

BROOKS  
Your family.

A tear falls down Jo's cheek.

JO  
I'll go call the kids out of school.

INT. GREEN COUNTY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Barrett visits Brooks in the hospital.

BARRETT  
Thanks for getting me out of the house, old man. This hospital trip is the first time I've been out in weeks.

BROOKS  
Just a friend helping a friend.

BARRETT  
How are you feeling?

BROOKS  
Eh, don't you go worrying about me.

BARRETT  
Oh, I'm not worried. In case you haven't caught on, my daughter does all the worrying around here.

BROOKS  
I think worrier is the wrong word. I think she just over cares. She reminds me a lot of my wife. Always making sure everyone is content and comfortable.

BARRETT  
That's my Jo.

BROOKS  
Which is why I want her to have the diner.

BARRETT  
Brooks, I thought you dreamed of keeping The Collective in the family.

BROOKS  
Yes, which is why I want Jo to have it. Your daughter...my niece.

Barrett stops speaking to process what Brooks is saying.

BROOKS (CONT.)

At dinner after the play...I know where the other half of the picture is.

Brooks motions to his wallet on his side table. Barrett retrieves a wrinkled photo.

BARRETT

You're the missing piece.

BROOKS

You found me.

Brooks joyfully grins.

BROOKS (CONT.)

Tell Jo to take care of her. That's mine and Evie's baby.

Brooks coughs and struggles to breathe.

I'll tell Evie all about it.

The monitors start beeping as Brooks flatlines.

INT. THE COLLECTIVE - DAY

Jo stands behind the counter in the diner. Families and groups of teenagers laugh. The crowd enjoys each other's company.

JO

Well, we did it, Uncle Brooks. Can't keep people away from your baby. Look at what you've built. She's beautiful.