The Last Sermon He'll Hear

The Last Sermon He'll Hear — Pastor Appreciation Skit for Church

WHAT

A flash-forward. It is the pastor's farewell Sunday years from now. The cast is the congregation, lined up on stage to give one-line tributes — what one thing he taught them that they are carrying forward. A man says he taught him to forgive his dad before his dad died. A woman says he held her hand the day her daughter relapsed. A teenager says he told her the gospel was for her too. The final beat is the lights snapping up. The cast turns to the actual congregation and says — we made all this up. He is not leaving today. But he will, eventually. So we are not waiting. The pastor is invited to stand. The congregation gives the tributes again — for real this time.

THEME

> *Tell your shepherd what he means to you while he is still standing in the building. Don't wait until the only chance left is a eulogy.*

WHO

MARCUS — Late forties; the framing speaker; opens and closes the skit; warm and steady

CARMEN — Sixties; church mother; talks about her daughter who relapsed

JAY — Mid-thirties; talks about forgiving his father before his father died

LIBBY — Seventeen; first to speak as a teenager; voice catches

PATRICK — Eighties; the oldest member; grew up under the pastor's father

DREW — A man in his fifties; was once on the verge of leaving his marriage

KELSEY — Mid-thirties; was once in trouble with the law; the pastor showed up at her arraignment

SANDRA — A widow in her seventies; talks about the funeral the pastor preached for her son

RAY — Mid-fifties; the man who used to disagree with the pastor every elders' meeting

HONORA — The pastor's wife in this flash-forward; speaks once, near the end

PASTOR JEFFREY — Heard offstage twice in younger memory; never seen on stage in present tense

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

Stage as a sanctuary mid-service. A simple raised platform downstage right with a pulpit and a microphone. The cast lines up across the rest of the stage — eleven of them — facing the audience like a gospel choir but speaking instead of singing. Each tribute is one short paragraph. The pacing is unhurried. There is no music.

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The emotional charge comes from the cumulative weight of one tribute after another. In the final scene, the lights snap to bright house-lights and Marcus breaks the fourth wall.

PROPS

- A simple wooden pulpit
- A handheld microphone Marcus passes down the line
- A folded farewell banner (rolled up; we do not unroll it)
- A small framed photo of the pastor as a young man (Patrick holds it)
- A folded letter Honora carries in her hand
- An empty pulpit chair behind the lectern that stays empty the entire skit

TIME

20 minutes

Scene 1 — The Premise

(Lights up. Marcus walks to the pulpit. The cast is offstage. The pulpit chair is empty)

MARCUS (to the audience)

Imagine it is Pastor Jeffrey's farewell Sunday. He is retiring. He will preach his last sermon today. After that, he will sit in the third pew like a regular member, and watch somebody else stand here for the first time.

MARCUS

He has asked us — the congregation — for one favor. He has asked us not to bring a gift. He has asked us not to put together a slideshow. He has asked us, instead, to tell him one thing.

MARCUS (slower)

What is the one thing he taught you that you are carrying forward.

MARCUS

We are going to come up to this microphone, one at a time. We are going to tell him.

Scene 2 — Carmen

(Carmen enters. Walks slowly to the pulpit. Marcus hands her the microphone. She takes a breath)

CARMEN

Pastor. The day my daughter relapsed — the second time — I did not call my sister. I did not call my prayer group. I called you. You were at my kitchen table in twenty minutes. You sat there for four hours.

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CARMEN

I asked you what to pray. You said — Carmen, when you don't know what to pray, pray her name. Just her name. Over and over. Until the Spirit takes the prayer and finishes it for you.

CARMEN

She has been clean now for nine years. I prayed her name for the first three. I am still praying it now. I am carrying that forward, Pastor. I will teach my granddaughter to pray her mother's name when she is old enough.

(She hands the microphone back. Walks to the line. Marcus nods)

Scene 3 — Jay

(Jay enters. Mid-thirties. Hands in his pockets. Walks to the pulpit slowly)

JAY (clears throat)

Pastor. I never told you this. My dad and I had not spoken in eleven years when you came to my office that Tuesday.

JAY

You did not know I was thinking about my dad. You came to my office because of something else entirely. I forget what. But you sat down across from me and you said — Jay. Forgiveness is not a gift you give the other person. Forgiveness is the only way you put down the rock that's been crushing your shoulder.

JAY

You said — call your dad before one of you can't pick up the phone anymore.

JAY (voice cracking)

I called him that night. He picked up. We talked for two hours. He died eighteen days later.

JAY

Pastor — you handed me the phone call I will hear in my head until the day I die. I am carrying that forward. I will tell my own son to call me before it gets to be eleven years.

(He hands the microphone back. Walks to the line)

Scene 4 — Libby

(Libby enters. Seventeen. Hoodie. Hands shaking. Marcus hands her the microphone)

LIBBY (small)

Pastor. I'm probably the youngest person up here. I'm sorry. I'm really nervous.

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LIBBY

I came to youth group because my best friend was going. I sat in the back the first night. I sat in the back the second night. I sat in the back for like a year.

LIBBY

You came up to me in the parking lot one night. I thought you were going to ask me to volunteer. You said — Libby. The gospel is for you. I want to make sure you know that. The gospel is for you. Not just your friend. You.

LIBBY (steadier)

I didn't believe you for two years. I told my friend you were probably just being nice. She said you said it to her too the year before. She said you said it to everybody.

LIBBY

I believed you last summer. I'm a Christian now. I am carrying that forward. I am going to tell other kids the gospel is for them too. Not just for the kid sitting in the front row.

(She hands the mic back. Wipes her eyes. Walks to the line)

Scene 5 — Patrick the Old Man

(Patrick walks slowly to the pulpit. Eighty-something. Holds a small framed photo. Sets it on the lectern)

PATRICK

Pastor. I knew your daddy. I sat under his preaching when you were running through the building in your stocking feet, knocking over flower arrangements at every funeral he preached.

PATRICK

I want you to know something. He told me once — Patrick, I don't know if my boy is going to follow me into ministry. I don't know if I want him to. It is a hard road. It is a lonely road.

PATRICK

I told him — Reverend. The Lord will decide. You just be a daddy.

PATRICK

Your daddy was a daddy. You became a shepherd. Forty-one years on this stage. You have outpastored him. He would be the first man in heaven to tell you so.

PATRICK (softer)

I am carrying that forward. I am going to tell my own grandsons about both of you. I will tell them the legacy is two pastors deep in this church. I will tell them their grandpa Patrick sat under both of them. And I am carrying the

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photo of you as a boy because I want them to know you were once just a kid running around in stocking feet.

(He hands the mic back. Walks to the line. Holds the photo against his heart)

Scene 6 — Drew

(Drew enters. Fifties. Walks heavily. Stops at the pulpit. Looks down at the wood for a long beat)

DREW (rough)

Pastor. Twelve years ago you came to my house at two in the morning. My wife had asked me to leave. My bag was packed by the front door. I had my hand on the knob.

DREW

You had no business knowing about it. She had not called you. I had not called you. To this day I do not know how you knew.

DREW (small)

You sat with me in my living room until five a.m. You did not lecture me. You asked me one question. You said — Drew. Tell me about the day you said your vows. Just tell me about the day.

DREW

I cried for an hour. You let me. You bought me a coffee at the gas station at six a.m. You drove me back to my house. You sat in the driveway until the lights came on inside. You stayed in the driveway until you saw her open the front door for me.

DREW

Pastor. We celebrated thirty years of marriage last month. The bag is unpacked. I am carrying that forward. I will go sit in the driveway of any man this church gives me to sit with. I will sit there as long as it takes.

(He hands the mic back. Voice has not steadied. Walks to the line)

Scene 7 — Kelsey

(Kelsey enters. Mid-thirties. Tattoos visible. Walks confidently to the pulpit)

KELSEY

Pastor. I'm going to tell my story fast because I will lose the words if I slow down.

KELSEY

When I was twenty-six, I got arrested. I will not say what for. The Lord and I have settled it. The court has settled it. The record has been expunged.

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KELSEY

I had no family who would come. My mom said she was done. My dad was already gone. The arraignment was on a Wednesday at nine a.m.

KELSEY

You sat in the second row of that courtroom. In a suit. You had a Bible in your lap. You did not say a word. You just looked at the judge with the kind of look that said — this one belongs to me. You are not going to forget there is somebody in this room who loves her.

KELSEY

The judge looked at you twice. He went easy. I do not know if it was you or the Lord or both. I know it was not me.

KELSEY (slower)

I am ten years sober. I run a recovery group at the church. I sit in the second row at every arraignment of every member who calls me. I am carrying that forward. I have you to thank.

(She hands the mic back. Marcus puts a hand on her shoulder as she walks to the line)

Scene 8 — Sandra the Widow

(Sandra walks slowly. Seventies. White hair pinned up. Steady. The microphone trembles a little in her hand)

SANDRA

Pastor. You buried my Robbie.

SANDRA

He was my only son. He was forty-one. He had three children who needed their daddy. He had a wife who needed her husband. He had a mother who needed her boy.

SANDRA

I will not pretend I understand it. I have not understood it for fifteen years. I do not need to understand it anymore.

SANDRA

You preached his funeral. You told the truth about him — that he was kind, and stubborn, and never folded a single shirt his wife ironed for him. You made the room laugh. You made the room cry. You did not make the room comfortable. You made the room honest.

SANDRA

I want you to know something. I came back to church the next Sunday. The next Sunday. I did not give myself a year to grieve. I gave myself a week.

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Because the man who buried my son was preaching, and I needed to hear him say it again — that the Lord has Robbie.

SANDRA

I am carrying that forward. When my own funeral comes, I want it preached in this room, by you if you are still standing, and by your replacement if you are not. The honest version. The kind version. The version that gives the room hope without lying about the loss.

(She hands the mic back. Walks to the line slowly)

Scene 9 — Ray

(Ray walks up. Mid-fifties. Grumpy expression that softens as he goes. Stands at the pulpit a long beat before speaking)

RAY (gruff)

Pastor. I do not like to do this kind of thing. You know that.

RAY

I disagreed with you in fourteen elders' meetings. I voted against you in eight building decisions. I told you twice in the parking lot that I thought you were wrong. I am pretty sure I was right at least once. We will let the Lord settle which one.

RAY (quieter)

But I never once heard you talk about me behind my back. Not once. I asked around. I tried. I was looking for it. There was nothing to find.

RAY

Pastor. The thing I am carrying forward from you is — when somebody disagrees with you, fight them with your face, not behind their back. You can be wrong with somebody to their face and still be friends. You can never be right behind their back and still be brothers.

RAY (almost smiling)

I am going to be a hard man to take advice from for the rest of my life. But I will not slander another man over coffee. Because I never once heard you do it.

(He hands the mic back. The line laughs softly. Ray is the most surprising tribute. He walks to the line)

Scene 10 — Honora

(Honora enters. The pastor's wife. Holding a folded letter. Walks to the pulpit)

HONORA

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Pastor. They asked me last so I could close the line.

HONORA

Forty-one years ago I married a young preacher. I did not know the half of what I was marrying. I do not regret a minute. I would marry him again tomorrow. I would marry him again on the day I die.

HONORA

I have heard him preach more sermons than this room has heard him preach. I have heard him pray more prayers than this room has heard him pray. I have heard him cry into his pillow more nights than any of you can guess.

HONORA (softer)

I want to tell you the one thing he taught me. He taught me — Honora, the work is the love. The love is the work. They are the same thing. Stop looking for the love that arrives separately. The love is in the prayer at three a.m. The love is in the casserole returned to the right widow. The love is in the third pew where you sit on Sundays. The love is the work.

HONORA

I am carrying that forward. To my daughter. To her daughter. To the next pastor's wife who is going to sit in the third pew when I am gone.

HONORA (steady)

Pastor — I love you. The work is the love. I see it. I have always seen it.

(She hands the mic to Marcus. Walks to the line. Stands at the end. Folds her hands)

Scene 11 — Marcus Returns

(Marcus walks back to the pulpit. The full line of cast members stands behind him. He looks at the audience. The pulpit chair is still empty)

MARCUS

Imagine that. Imagine an hour like that. Imagine the privilege of giving your pastor an hour like that while he can still hear it.

MARCUS (slower)

Now I have to tell you something.

MARCUS

We made all of this up.

MARCUS

Pastor Jeffrey is not retiring today. He is not preaching his last sermon today. He is sitting in his usual seat, in the second row, on the aisle. He has no idea this was coming. We rehearsed in the basement for three weeks.

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MARCUS

But — and this is the only point of tonight — he will retire eventually. He will preach his last sermon eventually. And when that day comes, every word we just spoke will still be true.

MARCUS (clear)

We are not waiting until then to say it.

Scene 12 — The Pastor Stands

(The lights snap to bright house-lights. Marcus turns to face the audience)

MARCUS

Pastor Jeffrey — would you stand up please.

(A long pause. The cast holds. The audience holds. The empty pulpit chair stays empty. The pastor — wherever he is sitting in the actual sanctuary — stands)

MARCUS

We are going to give the tributes again. For real this time. Not the made-up version. The real version. Anybody in this room who has one — come up here. Or stand up where you are. Pastor Jeffrey is going to listen.

MARCUS (softer)

Pastor — sit back down. Or stay standing. Whatever you want. We are going to talk to you for as long as you can stand it.

Scene 13 — Final Moment

(The cast steps back, leaving the microphone open at the pulpit. Marcus exits to the front row. The lights stay up)

NARRATOR: Hebrews thirteen, verse seven. 'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.' Remember them. While they are still standing in the room. While they can still hear it. While the imitation is still possible. While the thank you is still a sermon and not a eulogy.

NARRATOR: We made up the farewell Sunday. We did not make up the love. We did not make up the years. We did not make up the prayers at three a.m. or the second-row arraignments or the casserole returned to the right widow.

NARRATOR: If you have a pastor in this room — or watching online — or somewhere else this week — say it to him. Say it tonight. Don't wait for the day when the only chance left is a eulogy.

(Lights stay up. The microphone stays open. The pulpit chair stays empty. Hold for as long as the room needs)

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