

ENDURANCE

Based on a True Story

By

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ON BLACK:

"More than that, we rejoice in our SUFFERINGS,
knowing that suffering produces ENDURANCE,
and endurance produces CHARACTER,
and character produces HOPE."
Romans 5:3-4

The words fade leaving only ENDURANCE and HOPE.

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN COMMON, HOPKINTON MASSACHUSETTS - MORNING

SUPER: APRIL 21, 2014

The first rays of sunrise accent the outline of the Presbyterian Church in this otherwise sleepy Boston suburb.

But no one is sleeping in today.

MEN and WOMEN of all ages wearing warm up suits, running gear, and numbers pinned to tank tops mull about. TENS OF THOUSANDS of them. The park bursts at the seams.

A large wooden sign at the corner of the green reads "BOSTON MARATHON. WELCOME TO HOPKINTON. IT ALL STARTS HERE."

A group of women help each other stretch and prepare, a sickly silence in the air. Another group of men stretch nearby. Others mill about, #BOSTONSTRONG on their sleeves.

CEDRIC KING (36), a well-built African-American with wrap around shades, stares over the church steeple across the street. He's motionless, calm. Peaceful.

A MALE ATHLETE eyes him up and down. A look of awe and respect. CEDRIC turns his head towards him and nods.

MALE ATHLETE

Good luck, man.

CEDRIC

Yeah. You too.

The shadow of Cedric's body projects onto the grass behind him. His barrel-shaped torso narrows down to two thin prosthetic blades balanced on the lawn.

Cedric, in his bright jersey to honor one of the victims of the 2013 Boston bombing, gazes back to the steeple, the reflection of the sun glimmering in his glasses.

Cedric's running partner SCOTT JOHNSON (35, short, athletic), approaches wearing a matching jersey.

SCOTT

We're up next. You ready to do this?

CEDRIC

Do I have a choice?

SCOTT

We all have a choice.

Cedric's eyes narrow to a squint. A smile across his face.

CEDRIC

Then I choose to run.

Scott and Cedric proceed toward the starting line with the other partnered-athletes, and wait for their race to begin.

An ANNOUNCER's voice booms over the loudspeaker.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Athletes, take your mark.

Cedric's gaze turns to the rows of WHEELCHAIR ATHLETES at the starting line for their race.

PRELAP - A GUNSHOT rings out.

SMASH TO:

FLASHBACK: EXT. ARMY BARRACKS OUTPOST - AFTERNOON

SUPER: HR2 OUTPOST. KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN. JULY 24, 2012

A lone GUNSHOT rings out in the distance, as two SOLDIERS walk toward heavily secured buildings at the outskirts of the village.

ARMED SOLDIERS dot the corners of the outpost, while large concrete barriers surround the structure which are linked together to provide cover for the Command Center.

ELECTRONICA MUSIC rises.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

A group of young men in ARMY tank tops goof around during a low-moment, some play cards, others exchange 'punchies'. JONES shakes his hand after striking RAMIREZ's shoulder hard.

JONES
That's gunna leave a mark.

RAMIREZ
(chuckling)
On your hand, maybe.

JONES
Bite me.
(turns around)
You almost done, Master Sergeant?

Cedric (now 34), sits in front of the communications module and packs three water bottles in a freezer. He waves Jones off, as Ramirez catches him off-guard. THWACK!

JONES (CONT'D)
OWWW!

Jones tackles Ramirez and a wrestle battle ensues.

Cedric chuckles as he talks into the Army mobile unit.

CEDRIC
I'm fine, baby, I promise. We're
all good over here. How's Khamari?

CUT TO:

INT. KING HOME - MORNING

Cedric's wife, KHIEDA (33), prepares breakfast for their daughter, KHAMARI (7), who runs around the kitchen in a constant pink blur of activity.

KHIEDA
Running around here like crazy.
(to Khamari)
Sweetie, stop your nonsense and
come say hi to Daddy.

Khamari runs over and grabs the phone.

KHAMARI
Hi Daddy!

INTERCUT BETWEEN CEDRIC AND FAMILY - CONTINUOUS

Cedric beams. He leans in close to the earpiece.

CEDRIC
Hey Baby. How's Daddy's girl?

KHAMARI
Good. Can we go to Disney World
when you come home?

CEDRIC
Disney World? Is that where we're
going now?

KHAMARI
Can we, please?

CEDRIC
Put it on the list.

Khieda takes the phone again as Khamari runs off.

KHIEDA
Is two months still in play?

She tenses, waits for the answer.

Cedric closes his eyes. Pauses. Waits a beat.

KHIEDA (CONT'D)
You said you were sure this-

Cedric chuckles and interrupts.

CEDRIC
- We're ahead of schedule here so
it looks locked in, babe. I'll be
home before you know it.

KHIEDA
You said that about Ranger School.

CEDRIC
Yeah, well third time was the charm
then, too.

KHIEDA
Don't be joking about that.

CEDRIC
Quick prayer before I go?

Khieda smiles and looks at Khamari.

KHIEDA
Prayer time, sweetie.

Khamari hears those words and runs over to her mom. She closes her eyes and clasps her hands. Khieda closes her eyes.

KHIEDA (CONT'D)
Ready when you are.

Cedric closes his eyes and cradles the receiver against his neck as he folds his hands in prayer.

CEDRIC
Dear God. Thank you for all of the blessings you provide, and for the challenges you present. We ask that you protect us, watch over us, deliver us from evil, and keep us safe. In your name we pray. Amen.

KHIEDA
Amen.

Khamari hears that word and her eyes spring open, sparkling at her mother. She SHOUTS the refrain.

KHAMARI
AMEN!

CEDRIC
Okay, babe, gotta roll. Love you.

KHIEDA
Love you, too.

Ramirez and Jones whoop it up in the background.

RAMIREZ
I love you, too, Jonesy.

JONES
Give us a kiss, kiss, kiss.

Jones puckers up as Ramirez hams it up and puts Jones in a headlock. Cedric chuckles as he leaves the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARMY BARRACKS OUTPOST - AFTERNOON

The company of nearly forty men stands at attention just outside the command center. Jones runs out, last.

Cedric stands at the ready and addresses the company.

CEDRIC

For someone who's always running,
why are you always running late?

Ramirez chuckles. Jones straightens up, eyes front.

JONES

Saving the best for last, Master
Sergeant.

The troop chuckles. Cedric smirks as he paces.

CEDRIC

That's enough. Azikzhai is one
click down the road. It's been
abandoned for months and is overrun
with Taliban. Elders say there may
be bombmakers present. Our mission
is to find evidence and clear the
area. Expect hostiles.

(turns to men)

Saunders, Rinaldi: you'll stay back
at OP. Everyone else, get your gear
ready. We leave at 0500.

(to Jones)

Jones, let's review the plan.

The company stands in unison.

COMPANY

Yes, Sir.

The company springs into action, whooping and hollering as
they disappear into the barracks.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - MORNING

The platoon of forty walks two-by-two slowly down the gravel
road, M-4 rifles in hand, as the front men scout for
Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) along the route in near
one-hundred degree heat.

Cedric adjusts the water bottles from earlier in his vest,
now frozen solid, as he walks next to Private REYES (20,
glasses, gangly) near the front of the pack.

Reyes looks side to side, repeatedly. Nervous. Anxious.

CEDRIC
Stay close to me.

REYES
Yes, Sergeant.

Cedric pulls out one of the bottles and hands it to Reyes. Shows him where to store it. Reyes complies. Instant relief overcomes him. He nods in appreciation.

CEDRIC
You're new. You'll learn.

Cedric points to the edge of the road, near tall grass nearly eight-feet tall.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)
Keep your eyes open for ant trails,
and if there are any hostiles, stay
close to me.

REYES
Ant trails, Sergeant?

CEDRIC
Wire remnants buried just under the
dirt. Looks like an ant trail.
Possible IED. Especially in grass.

Reyes gulps. Nods.

Jones calls out from up ahead.

JONES
Marsh approaching. Spread out.

The platoons split and spread out, then disappear into the grassy area.

Gunfire ERUPTS from up ahead, and the platoon flattens into the grass. Cedric takes control, talks into his mic.

CEDRIC
Stand your ground! Return fire and
maintain course!

On command, the platoon acts as one, a barrage of fire toward the sound of the oncoming gunfire. Bullets WHIZ by randomly from all directions. The platoon stays put, fires back.

Cedric turns to Reyes.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)
We're doing fine. Follow my lead.

He lifts up his M4 carbine assault rifle and FIRES toward the enemy. Reyes watches and then instinct sets in. Eyes steeled. He fires.

Cedric advances slowly through the tall grass then stops. He taps Reyes shoulder and points to the ground, where a subtle but distinct line of soil trails across the grass. Takes his knife out, and uncovers a wire from the ground.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)
Here. See what I mean?

REYES
(Eyes wide)
Whoa.

CEDRIC
(into mic)
Ant trails confirmed. Advance slowly and give cover.

Then slowly, as one group fires toward the enemy, the other advances through the tall grass then stops to return fire, as the group from the rear advances.

CUT TO:

EXT. AZIKZHAI VILLAGE - LATER

The gunfire ceases as Cedric reaches the edge of the grass at the southern end of the village.

CEDRIC
Be cool.

REYES
Trying, Sergeant.

Gunfire ERUPTS again as the platoon takes their positions at the edge of the grass, and a call comes across the mic.

JONES (O.S.)
(on mic)
We've got eyes on activity behind a hut at your six o'clock.

CEDRIC
Copy that. Have engineers set off controlled detonations. We'll provide cover.

JONES (O.S.)
Roger that. Out.

Cedric signals his team toward a sunbaked, mud and straw structure with eight-inch thick walls ahead in the distance.

Gunfire continues from that area, and at once, the platoon opens fire in that direction.

CEDRIC
(to Reyes)
They're just taking pot shots to
stir us up. We're cool.

As the platoon sprays gunfire across the hut, a series of controlled EXPLOSIONS detonates along the road near several other huts down from where the gunfire comes from.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)
Let's go.

Cedric leads his team out from the edge of the grassy marsh and hustles across an opening. He fires toward the manned hut as the squad follows behind.

Cedric holes up behind an empty hut structure several hundred feet from the enemy. He waves to an ENGINEER to come up to the front.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)
Clear these buildings one by one.
Avoid doorways, too many IED's.

ENGINEER
Roger that.

The engineer removes C-4 ordinance from his pack and molds the adhesive in place along several sections of the back wall. He places blasting caps into the ends and unspools the wire, as Cedric moves with him around the corner for cover.

ENGINEER (CONT'D)
Fire in the hole!

CEDRIC
FIRE IN THE HOLE!

The C-4 EXPLODES as debris from the wall shoots outward and a cloud of smoke shoots through the air. As the smoke clears, Cedric follows the Advance Team through the open hole.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HUT - CONTINUOUS

This is no ordinary hut. Against every wall are workbenches scattered with dust and debris and wires and detonators. Light pours into the room through the hole in the wall.

A bombmakers paradise.

The Advance Team enters first, one SCOUT after another. Slowly, precisely, with extreme caution. The noise of the FIREFIGHT outside muffled in here, but ever present.

Each SCOUT slowly clears a path and marks the floor, workbenches, and walls clear of boobytraps. Each one calls out as they mark them safe.

SCOUT

Clear.

Several seconds pass, as Cedric waits several feet inside the newly formed hole in the wall. A SCOUT turns and signals.

Cedric gazes over his shoulder as he turns back toward the hole in the wall to communicate to the team.

His left foot comes down about eighteen inches from the chalk mark on the floor.

In an instant, events happen with both rapid acceleration and slowed to a moment's pause simultaneously.

- POV CEDRIC: A BLINDING LIGHT

- INT. HUT: An IED directly under Cedric's left foot detonates and instantly shatters his legs. Cedric is propelled up and backward behind a HUGE cloud of dirt.

- POV CEDRIC: IN BLACK. A SOUND LIKE JET ENGINES BLAST THROUGH THE DARKNESS AND THEN ONLY SILENCE. A DEAFENING ROAR.

- INT. HUT: The Advance Team traces their way back to Cedric, as they follow the cleared paths as quickly as possible. Jones leads the team and gets to Cedric first. It's not good.

Cedric's M-4 Rifle is bent back on itself like a banana, laying next to Cedric's right arm, which is torn open so badly Jones can see Cedric's rifle straight through it.

- POV CEDRIC: IN BLACK. IN SILENCE. EXCEPT FOR HIS VOICE.

CEDRIC (V.O.)

Am I okay?

Silence. A distant HUM. A singular pin-prick of light pierces the darkness and grows in brilliance.

CEDRIC (V.O.)
I'm okay. Thank you, Lord.

The light grows as does the HUM as it turns into a muted TINNY sound, like a voice through a tin-can phone.

-INT. HUT: Cedric's eyes open as Jones looks down at him. Cedric reaches out toward him with his left arm. The one that doesn't feel like it's on fire.

CEDRIC
That's going to leave a mark.

Jones shakes his head and gets serious.

JONES
It's nothing we won't get through
Sergeant.
(into mic)
Advance One over. Man down. Get Doc
up here. Over.

Cedric looks down to his right, through his arm, where his ulna used to be. It feels like it's being shoved into burning coals. Then looks down at his vest.

CEDRIC
Thank God the ammo on my vest
didn't go off. That wouldn't have
been pretty.

JONES
God knows you need all the pretty
you can get.

Jones steadies Cedric while he pulls a Medipack from the inside of his vest. Rips it open with his teeth, empties the contents. Applies pressure underneath Cedric's shattered bulletproof vest. Pulls back his hand. Blood. Lots of it.

DOC (34, thin, glasses) runs up from behind with a Skedco stretcher and he's all business.

Cedric struggles to get up and Doc yells at him.

DOC
Stay down!
(to Jones)
Help me with the stretcher.

Cedric turns toward his left and sees FIVE members of the Advance Team writhe and moan in pain across the room. Doc, Jones and a Scout lift Cedric onto the stretcher.

Jones scans the room while the dust settles. He calls over to Scout who helps a fallen soldier.

JONES

Keep pulling security! Keep your eyes open! Watch your marks!

SCOUT

Yes, Sir!

Doc straps tourniquets on both Cedric's thighs above the knee, and on both of his upper arms.

DOC

What kind of pain are you in?

CEDRIC

Like we were back in that vineyard doing ten thousand squats to keep warm. Remember that?

Doc chuckles.

DOC

How can I forget? Satan's inferno at noon. Hell's freezer at night. Three days at the spa.

CEDRIC

Embrace the suck, right?

As Doc tightens the straps, Cedric's pain amplifies. Burns. He grinds his teeth and GRIMACES.

Jones looks at the SCOUT up ahead, who receives signals.

SCOUT

Bird's inbound, Sir.

Jones and Doc pick up the Skedco and lift Cedric toward the hole in the wall, following the cleared chalk markings.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - CONTINUOUS

Once clear of the entryway, the duo hug the side of the hut while GUNFIRE erupts around them. Bullets WHIZ by. RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT.

They follow a line of huts away from the firefight toward a clearing on the southern edge of town, perfect for a makeshift landing pad.

Cedric looks down at his mangled legs, as part of one hangs off the edge of the stretcher. He wriggles wildly.

CEDRIC

My leg...my arm...the blast. What-

Is suddenly aware of his surroundings. Springs into Master Sergeant mode. Beast Mode.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)

Turn around! Jones, get back there and pull security! You hear me?

Cedric lifts his left arm, the one that doesn't feel like it's now a useless deadweight to him. Turns to Jones as the helicopter touches down ahead. Noise drowns out the words.

CEDRIC (CONT'D)

Tell Lieutenant to take care of the platoon. Bring them home safe.

They hustle toward the Medevac helicopter and load Cedric into it. Doc takes over from there as Jones steps back and pauses. Salutes to Cedric.

CUT TO:

INT. MEDEVAC HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

Cedric watches as Jones rushes back toward the village. Doc blocks his field of view, hooks up an IV and unwraps a small orange lollipop. He extends it to Cedric.

DOC

Suck on this, Sergeant. We'll get you out of here.

Cedric takes the morphine lollipop in his mouth. Feels a numbing sensation wash over him like a blanket, as sound falls away through the tin can again. Eyes blink slow.

POV CEDRIC

As the Medevac lifts off, darkness collapses all around him, his field of vision narrows.

An oxygen mask is placed over Cedric's nose and mouth as the sounds around him filter through the tinny underwater noise filling his head. Fades away.

The light blurs and shrinks to a single point.

CEDRIC (V.O.)
Thank you, Lord.

SILENCE. Except for the dullest of ringing. Then darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

SUPER: WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER, BETHESDA MD.

A brilliant light bursts through the darkness as window curtains get pushed aside to let in the outside view.

A white sanitary room. At least what can be seen behind countless family photos, hand-drawn pictures, messages from loved ones, scripture, and in the center, three words:

"I'M STILL ME"

Monitors BEEP regularly while fluids drip from multiple IV's next to a hospital bed. Large foam blocks prop up Cedric's right arm wrapped in bandages, while wraps and sleeves cover what remain of Cedric's legs at the knees.

Cedric lies motionless on the bed, hoses across his nose and mouth where the breathing tube exits.

Khieda tapes a picture of Cedric in his military uniform amongst others in the montage of memories of his life, while Cedric's mother SANDRA (61, tough as nails) prays bedside with her hand gently on his head.

SANDRA
"...heal his body, and make his
mind whole. In your name, Amen."

KHIEDA
Amen. Thank you, Sandra.

SANDRA
Of course. Need help with those?

KHIEDA
Sure.

Sandra rises to cross the room and takes Khieda's hand.

SANDRA
He is whole and healed. Say it.

KHIEDA

Cedric is whole and fully healed.

Khieda clasps her hand around Sandra's. Sandra pats her hand and toughens out a wry smile. Picks up a picture.

SANDRA

We say that every day, hear me?
(looks at picture in hand)
Khamari is so pretty in this one.

Sandra tapes the picture to the montage on the wall, as MAJOR FISHER (48, baby face) walks into the room. Picks up Cedric's chart and checks the monitors.

FISHER

Let's see how our patient is today.

KHIEDA

It's been over a week. How much longer until he wakes up?

FISHER

Should be any time now. We've been reducing his dosage to bring him out. Let's keep a close eye on him.

Khieda sits bedside and holds his left hand. Looks at him.

KHIEDA

We've got that covered.

FISHER

Has the liaison office worked with you on the transition after ICU?

KHIEDA

(confused)
Transition?

FISHER

As his Commanding Officer, I'll be looking after Master Sergeant King. He will be here for quite some time. There are many operations ahead, as well as daily physical therapy. The liaison office will coordinate living arrangements for you and your family here at Walter Reed. To aid in the transition.

A tear falls from Khieda's eye as Sandra stands behind her and squeezes her shoulder. She smiles at the doctor.