

SLICE

By

STEVE MILES

STEVE MILES 2018

stevemiles80@yahoo.co.uk

FADE IN:

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - HALLWAY - DAY

The swivel wheel of a cleaning cart tracks along a carpet. Bottles of glass cleaner and bleach jostle in a rack above.

A worn pair of ladies' sneakers pad close behind.

MR. RAWLEY (PRE-LAP)
The workload can vary-

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

HETTY SWAIN, late 60s, prim, alert, sits at a table. She stares straight ahead. A contract and pen in front of her.

MR. RAWLEY (O.S.)
Ten to fifteen hours per week as outlined in the contract. Well suited to your...situation.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Hetty wheels the cart into an open office. She wears an apron and rubber gloves, hair tucked beneath a net.

A handful of EMPLOYEES work at their desks. Some engaged in phone conversations. A tense bunker mentality pervades.

Hetty pauses at each desk in turn, gathering trash into a receptacle attached to the cart.

MORGAN, 30s, shirt straining his sagging midriff, hunches over an open file. He massages his temples in weary disdain.

MORGAN
(into phone)
...We're nothing to do with Paramount Medical. I'm an associate at Westlake Collections Group. You know why we're calling, it's the same reason we called yesterday, same reason we'll call tomorrow-

Morgan looks back to find Hetty over his shoulder. Her eyes shift from the file to a take-out coffee on his desk.

He covers the mouthpiece, shooing her away.

MORGAN

Not empty.

Hetty notes a trophy of a quarterback among his clutter. A former athlete - those days long gone.

She pushes on.

Morgan glowers after her. He returns to his call to find the line dead. He punches redial.

ADAM, mid 20s, slick, confident, relaxes in his chair, an open file balanced in his lap.

ADAM

(into phone)

Mr. Bryce? Mr Glenn Bryce? ...This is an attempt to collect a debt, any information obtained will be used for that purpose...

Hetty collects an empty sandwich wrapper from Adam's desk. She notes a cigarette packet peeking from his shirt pocket.

Passing PATRICIA, late 20s, bored, scrolling through Facebook. Glimpse a photo of her downing shots with friends.

PATRICIA

(into phone)

...By not attending the hearing you defaulted, that in itself incurs a further penalty... Honey, I feel you, got two of my own...

Hetty reaches a table at the room's far end. On it rests a coffee-machine and condiments.

One-by-one the employees turn to watch as Hetty SNAPS off her rubber gloves.

MR. RAWLEY (PRE-LAP)

Do you have any questions about the position? Anything at all?

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Hetty scans the contract, pen poised to sign. She looks up.

HETTY

I like to bake.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Hetty slips a Tupperware box from a cooler bag.

Adam cranes over a divider in anticipation.

Hetty pops the lid, places a sponge cake on a plate beside the coffee machine.

She draws a knife from a sheath, divides the cake with a smooth, practiced hand.

PATRICIA
(whispered)
What do we got this week?

ADAM
(whispered)
Looks like a lemon drizzle.

Hetty withdraws the cart from the room. Voices rise as the door closes behind her.

MORGAN
Crazy old broad, ain't she got
nothing better to do?

PATRICIA
You don't want your slice?

MORGAN
That's not what I said.

Through a glass panel in the door, Hetty watches them descend on the cake - not a flicker of emotion.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - HALLWAY - DAY

Hetty vacuums.

ALLAN, 40s, enters from a side room, pauses to pin a sign to a notice board before continuing past Hetty.

Hetty reaches the notice board. The vacuum's rhythm briefly interrupted as she stops to study the new sign: QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REVIEW, THURSDAY APRIL 27TH, 2PM. ALL ATTEND

EXT. STREET - BUS-SHELTER - DAY

Hetty sits alone, the cooler bag clutched to her chest, a cell phone to her ear.

An advertisement on the shelter's hoarding shows a smiling family with a slogan: PLUSLIFE HEALTHCARE. WE TAKE YOUR HEALTH SERIOUSLY.

'HEALTH' has been crossed out. The word 'MONEY' scrawled above it. 'SERIOUSLY' has just been crossed out.

The line connects, a man's voice answers:

DESSOUTTER (V.O.)
Henrietta?

HETTY
My last day is next Thursday. The
twenty-seventh. Four o'clock.

She hangs up.

INT. HETTY'S BEDSIT - NIGHT

A pair of hands crack open an egg. The yolk slops into a mixing bowl atop a mound of flour and butter.

Hetty stirs the mixture, distant, drifting into memory -

FLASHBACK**INT. HETTY'S OLD HOUSE - LOUNGE - NIGHT**

A phone RINGS O.S.

ARTUR, late 60s, worn down, sunk in a chair. A nasal cannula runs from his nose to an oxygen cylinder at his side.

YOUNGER HETTY, early 60s, seated opposite, stares off, her mind far from the moment.

The RINGING phone fills the couple's silence, ignored. Finally it stops.

YOUNGER HETTY
I could go back to work...

Artur looks away, guilty, ashamed.

His fists tighten in frustration. His breathing rises to a wheeze. He reaches a shaking hand towards a table scattered with envelopes, bills, payment demands -

Hetty intercepts it, gently restraining.

She shakes her head, 'no'.

The phone RINGS. The sound just about breaks him.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HETTY'S BEDSIT - NIGHT

An oven timer BEEPS.

Hetty looks up from the table, watches the cake through the oven's glass door. A weight of sadness in her eyes.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - SUPPLY CLOSET - DAY

A light flickers on to reveal the cart. Shelves hold cleaning supplies. Hetty loads her cooler bag, backs the cart out into the corridor.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - HALLWAY - DAY

Hetty kneels, sponge in one hand, stain remover in the other, waiting...

The far door opens, a gaggle of employees, including Adam and Patricia, file towards the meeting room.

ADAM

Does this review include lunch?

PATRICIA

It better had. He dragged the last one out to four hours.

The meeting room door closes.

Hetty waits...

Morgan barges in, flustered, hurries after them.

Foam bubbles on the carpet, eating at a stain.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - MEETING ROOM - DAY

The employees sit around a table prepping reports. Allan at its head, in charge.

The door opens, chatter stops, heads turn -

Hetty shuffles in, pauses, holds out a pair of Tupperware containers - an offering.

HETTY

Treats, for your big meeting.

Polite smiles mingled with smirks.

MORGAN

(sotto)

You're the who one told her she could bring treats.

Allan smiles, embarrassed.

ALLAN

Sure.

Hetty beams.

Two plates rest centerpiece on the table. A sponge cake on one. Hetty serves a flapjack onto the second.

HETTY

Flapjack, low fat. Very healthy.

MORGAN

We don't much like the healthy round here.

CHUCKLES from around the table.

Hetty produces a knife - a little too suddenly for comfort.

ALLAN

You know, I'm sure we can-

She takes a head count, deftly portions the sponge.

ALLAN

Thank you, Betty.

HETTY

You are welcome.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Rows of empty desks. A wall clock TICKS in the silence.

Hetty gazes from a window.

She drifts to the clock: 2:30

Hetty, rubber gloved, moves from desk to desk disconnecting the landlines.

She rifles through a filing cabinet - locates and removes a folder thick with files.

Hetty fits disposable shoe covers over her sneakers.

A pair of rubber gloves land in the trash.

She snugs a fresh pair of vinyl gloves on in their place.

INT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - MEETING ROOM - DAY

A water droplet gathers at the table's corner.

Hetty backs into the room pulling the cart. A surgical mask and headlamp have been added to her outfit.

The employees slump unconscious in their chairs. Papers drifted. The plates empty save for crumbs. Water dribbles onto the table from an overturned plastic bottle.

Morgan lies sprawled beneath the table.

Hetty plucks a cell phone from Adam's pocket -

It lands in the trash alongside a handful of others.

She sets a timer on her watch to 60 minutes.

A drop of water from the table splashes Morgan's cheek. He twitches. Blinks.

Hetty shakes a plastic tarp out onto the floor.

Taking Adam by the legs, Hetty drags him from the chair.

Hetty rolls Adam onto the tarp.

She lifts his shirt to expose his abdomen. Preps the area with a burst from a small pump spray.

Hetty turns to an open Tupperware - an array of surgical equipment lined inside.

She selects a scalpel. Clicks on the headlamp.

Blood spills over the folds as Hetty scores an incision across Adam's midriff.

She selects a surgical clamp.

Her hand pushes into the now clamped incision.

Hetty concentrates - SUCK and GURGLE as her hands work O.S.

Carefully, she places a glistening liver into a Tupperware packed with ice and seals the lid.

One eye squinted, she sutures the opening.

The battery light from a cell phone blinks from beneath a side-table.

Morgan focuses on his hand - fingers twitch.

Hetty rolls Patricia alongside Adam.

The timer shows 39 minutes remaining.

A drooling Morgan worms his way towards the cell.

Blood bubbles up from Patricia's wound.

Morgan's fingertips brush the cell. SUCK and GURGLE O.S.

Hetty, wrist deep in the clamped incision, feeling her way to the prize...

A second liver is placed inside an ice-packed Tupperware.

Morgan's finger jabs at the phone's screen - 9-1 -

The cell seems to drift from his touch. He watches it recede as Hetty drags him by the legs.

MORGAN

Polishhe...

Morgan flops onto the tarp, face inches from Patricia's sutured wound. Hetty straddles him, pulls up his shirt.

She selects a fresh scalpel.

Morgan's face reacts as his skin yields to carbon steel.

MORGAN

Pleash-

EXT. WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS - CAR PARK - DAY

Hetty, bundled in a coat, carries the cooler and trash bag across the forecourt towards an idling sedan.

INT. DESSOUTTER'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Hetty sits in the passenger seat. She stares straight ahead, the cooler bag hugged to her chest.

DESSOUTTER, late 50s, spare, studied features, glances over from behind the wheel, quietly gauging her mood.

He pulls to the curbside. An awkward silence between them.

DESSOUTTER

Henrietta...

Prompted, she sets the cooler in the foot-well.

DESSOUTTER

For us it will always be too late.

Hetty looks away, pained.

DESSOUTTER

But there are others for whom we
can make a difference.

He tilts towards the cooler bag.

DESSOUTTER

Is a good thing you do.

Her mouth tightens. She sends him a look, cold, hard.

Dessoutter thumbs the wheel, uncomfortable.

DESSOUTTER

The Natural Grocers...

He leads her eyes to a distant point.

DESSOUTTER

Blue Taurus. Bay twelve. You'll
find a plane ticket and the
Agency's regards beneath the seat.

He holds out a key fob.

Hetty takes it. Grips the door handle to leave.

HETTY
You waste your money with cars and
tickets.

He gives her a polite smile - courteous to the last.

DESSOUTTER
Henrietta... We'll be in touch.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dessoutter pulls away leaving Hetty on the sidewalk, arms crossed, as if protecting something beneath her coat.

INT. HETTY'S BEDSIT - NIGHT

On a table, wads of bank notes peek from a torn paper wrap.

Hetty's gloved hands count money into a pile.

She checks a paper invoice before banding the cash and slipping it into an envelope.

An address on the envelope reads: WESTLAKE COLLECTIONS GROUP

She adds it to a pile of others - all addressed the same.

Hetty pulls a file from the stolen folder. The file's header reads: MR GLENN BRYCE, CLIENT #657786.

She opens it, scans the page.

Hetty thumbs a steady stream of bills onto the table.

MR. RAWLEY (PRE-LAP)
Do you have any questions about the
position? Anything at all?

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Hetty, at the table, same as at the outset. She looks up from the contract -

HETTY
I like to bake.

MR. RAWLEY, 40s, regards her across the table, nonplussed.

HETTY
Treats... For your colleagues.

Rawley smiles.

RAWLEY
Well, sure. Why not?

She smiles sweetly - innocent. Harmless. Clicks the pen -

INT. PREMIUM FINANCE ASSOCIATES - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

A cleaning cart glides along the carpet, wheel SQUEAKING,
supplies RATTLING, worn sneakers padding along behind.

WORKER (O.S.)
I'm calling from Premium Finance
Associates, we're collecting on an
outstanding medical debt...

Hetty slides a knife from a sheath -

The blade slices deep into a moist sponge cake.

FADE OUT