

CUTTER

(Short)

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1 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

1

Large sewing scissors QUIETLY SLICE through expensive fabric. Worn but still razor sharp, the shears cut the delicate cloth cleanly and easily.

CHLOE, a 32-year-old woman, small and weary, works alone in the dimly lit room. She wears a simple, 1930s work dress, a thin, long-sleeved canvas apron, and clunky work boots.

Chloe CUTS and SEWS, making alterations to a fancy blouse. She pushes the folded fabric through a dieselpunk sewing machine. It CHUGS NOISILY.

After a NASTY CLUNK, the sewing machine stops. Chloe tries to get it going again. Nothing. She frowns, annoyed.

2 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

2

Chloe lays on the floor and DIGS AROUND inside the bottom of the open sewing machine. She is surrounded by tools and an old, rusty toolbox.

She holds an odd scanning device, also dieselpunk-inspired. A segmented tube snakes into the sewing machine. A circular display shows a lit, magnified view of the machine's innards. Chloe WORKS on the jam.

The front door SQUEAKS open. It taps a hanging bell which DINGS HAPPILY. A 58-year-old beat cop, OFFICER FORBES, enters the cleaners. He takes off his hat.

Chloe doesn't even look up.

CHLOE  
Good night, Officer.

Forbes glances around, surveying the area.

FORBES  
'Night, Chloe.

He sees her legs sticking out from under the sewing machine.

FORBES (cont'd)  
Any troubles?

CHLOE  
Nope. Smooth.

Putting her whole body into it, Chloe YANKS hard on a stuck bolt. She SLIPS and slices her knuckle but barely reacts.

Forbes notices a dieselpunk camera on Chloe's work table.

FORBES  
You carry this all the places?

Chloe shrugs. Forbes looks into a cardboard shoebox beside the camera and sees dozens of photograms -- small, square, Polaroid-like photographs. He SIGHS.

FORBES (cont'd)  
You are a bit obsessed. Haunted,  
might say.

After some more STRUGGLING, Chloe tries the pedal. The machine RATTLES TO LIFE. She stands up, smiling.

Chloe grabs the camera and points it at Forbes. Flash! The camera WHIRRRS and EJECTS A PHOTOGRAM.

CHLOE  
Folk ought be remembered.

FORBES  
Not most.  
(beat)  
Anycase, ain't your burden.

She repeats it, more seriously.

CHLOE  
Folk ought be remembered.

Forbes' image begins to appear. She smiles and shows him.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
Gaze on that. Almost handsome!

FORBES  
Nearly.

Chloe thinks.

CHLOE  
You wish you had more of Teague?

FORBES  
Photograms? Nah, got plenty. I was  
a good grandpa.

CHLOE  
Was? He might still...

FORBES  
Snatched a year back. He is long  
perished.

Chloe regrets bringing it up.

CHLOE  
I overstepped.

Forbes shakes his head and hands back the photogram.

FORBES  
Come by after? 'Cakes and bacon.

CHLOE  
A certainty.

Forbes leaves. DING. As soon as the door shuts, Chloe turns toward a broom closet. Her expression changes to DISGUST and STEELY DETERMINATION.

3 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

3

Chloe OPENS the broom closet. The empty closet contains shelves of cleaning equipment. Unremarkable except for the STEEL BAR PRISON-STYLE CELL DOOR BEHIND THE ACTUAL DOOR.

She pulls a string with a single iron key from around her neck. She LOCKS the cell door then SHAKES it to double-check. Satisfied, she closes the closet door and puts the key back around her neck.

Back at her table, Chloe slips off her apron revealing BANDAGES ALL OVER HER ARMS.

She pulls a dingy, canvas, black-and-white striped shirt from under her table. "SEVERSTONE PRISON" is printed across the back in large, blocky letters. Patches sewn on the right shoulder and left breast read "D8J37".

The prison shirt is SPLATTERED WITH DRIED BLOOD.

Chloe holds the scissors to her arm. She pauses briefly then slices. Blood oozes. She snips the prison shirt.

Chloe opens the broom closet and stares. STEFAN, 49, stands in the closet. He wears a Severstone Prison shirt, also with "D8J37" patches. He stands upright, somehow still asleep. Chloe walks away.

As she wraps a clean bandage around her arm, Chloe picks up a large wrench and hurls it at the closet. It CLANGS LOUDLY against the steel door, waking Stefan.

Briefly startled, he looks around.

CHLOE  
Prisoner D8J37.

He sees Chloe and looks disgusted. Chloe looks at the bloody prison shirt.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
This your blood? No. Ain't mine.  
Some fella there missing a pint?

She looks again.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
Or two?

He ignores her.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
You look tired. Did I interrupt?

STEFAN  
You call me in the blackest hours. I  
doze on occasion.

CHLOE  
Not if I got a say.

She walks to her table and begins tending to her wound. He looks past her, at nothing.

STEFAN  
Glorious dream, that.

CHLOE  
That a fact?

STEFAN  
A certainty. Clear mountain lake.  
Dawn.

She fastens the bandage with a piece of white medical tape.

CHLOE  
Picturesque.

STEFAN  
Smokey campfire. Pine trees-

Chloe interrupts, dragging a stool over to sit in front of him. SQUEEEEEEEEEAAAAAK.

STEFAN (cont'd)  
Autumn. A bite in the air.

CHLOE  
Evocative.

STEFAN  
I was gutting a fish for brek. Tiny thing. White belly. Blood everywhere. Guts spilling. Felt good. Satisfying.

He looks directly at Chloe.

STEFAN (cont'd)  
'Cause, weren't no fish.

CHLOE  
Charming, that. Astonishing they locked you.

Stefan POUNDS the cell door, more to scare Chloe than out of frustration. Neither the door nor Chloe budes.

She points her camera at Stefan and SNAPS a picture. Flash! The camera WHIRRRS. She removes the photogram.

STEFAN  
What are you intending? You called me a dozen times already, I ain't spoke.

CHLOE  
And I'll call you a dozen more. And a dozen after that. I mean to keep you from decent sleep 'til you speak true.

Stefan glares at her.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
Ain't no bustle. A little slice on me. A little snip on your very fancy uniform. And poof, you appear.

Stefan grits his teeth.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
I got plenty skin. And plenty shirt.  
You will tell me who perished that  
boy.

Stefan sneers. Chloe CLOSES the closet door. When she  
opens it again, Stefan is gone. THE CLOSET IS EMPTY.

4 INT. FORBES' HOUSE, DINING ROOM - DAY

4

Chloe sits at the table. Two cups of steaming coffee and  
two empty plates are laid out.

In the next room, Forbes finishes COOKING BREAKFAST.

A CHILD'S BASEBALL GLOVE sits in the middle of the table.

Chloe's camera and empty shoebox sit off to the side. She  
moves photograms around, grouping and re-grouping.

Forbes SETS DOWN a plate with a stack of pancakes and  
another with a pile of bacon. He sits.

Chloe looks at him expectantly. Forbes looks at the stacks  
but doesn't know what he's supposed to say. Chloe gestures  
at the photograms.

CHLOE  
Does this make sense?

FORBES  
It really does not.

CHLOE  
I mean the grouping.

She points to two stacks.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
Those are from school. That one is  
friends. That one is teachers. But  
mayhap they ought be all together?

Chloe picks up a bundle tied together with pink yarn.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
First dates. Never. Went.  
Anywhere.

FORBES  
Well, obsession ain't as attractive  
as you might reckon.

Forbes notices another pile. The people are all standing, eyes closed, in the closet.

FORBES (cont'd)  
They asleep??

She answers without thinking.

CHLOE  
Most. I call 'em at night-

Busted. She stops and quickly moves those photograms away.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
Don't worry on it.

She points to a large, messy pile.

CHLOE (cont'd)  
These are the problem real.

FORBES  
Oh, they ain't the problem.

CHLOE  
I don't even know their names,  
actual. There ain't no connection.  
I can't remember them each. Too  
many.

FORBES  
Chloe, stop.

CHLOE  
Forbes, they'll be forgot!

FORBES  
We will all be forgot! All of them.  
And me. And you.

Chloe glances at the baseball glove. Forbes notices.

FORBES (cont'd)  
Even him.

He picks up the glove.

FORBES (cont'd)  
I keep it in the other room, usual.  
Tough to look on. But some the  
times...

He raise the glove to his face.



FORBES (cont'd)  
Some the days I just need a reminder.

Chloe turns away.

CHLOE  
I don't want be forgot.

Forbes speaks gently but firmly.

FORBES  
Folk will be remembered until they  
ain't. That is the way of the  
'Verse.

Chloe sulks.

FORBES (cont'd)  
What matters is your choices. Deeds  
live on.

CHLOE  
I am trying do some good.

FORBES  
Well, *that* is the way of Chloe.

Chloe turns back to him and grins.

5 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

5

Chloe OPENS the closet door. Stefan stands inside. He slowly wakes up. Chloe just looks at him.

STEFAN  
Nothing you can say-

CHLOE  
Truthsome. So I'm done speaking.

She closes the door, sending Stefan back to prison.

Chloe begins a series of calling Stefan over and over. Non-stop, she slices herself, cuts the prison shirt, opens the closet door, sees Stefan, then closes the door.

The constant pulling and pushing to and from the closet takes its toll. Stefan looks dizzy then sick. Eventually, blood trickles from his ears and nose.

The pain and effort make Chloe weak. She struggles but pushes through. Stefan finally collapses.

STEFAN

Wait! Please. He... He ain't  
planted.

Chloe stops, shocked.

CHLOE

What??

STEFAN

He still breathes. The lawman's  
grandkid.

CHLOE

Teague.

Stefan nods.

STEFAN

He ain't perished.

Chloe gets close. She grips the bars of the cell door.

CHLOE

You tell me right immediate. Where  
is that boy?

Stefan shakes his head.

STEFAN

I spoke plenty. Any more and folk  
will peel me slow.

Chloe looks at the scissors and thinks a moment. She  
glances back at Stefan.

CHLOE

Don't need you.

She CLOSES the closet door.

Chloe walks to her work table, thinking. She picks up the  
prison shirt.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Just need... something Teague wore.

Chloe balances in an open window. Half in, half out, she  
looks around the dark room and sees STACKS OF FILES AND BAGS

OF EVIDENCE. Everything involves the disappearance of Teague Forbes.

She wiggles and FALLS into the room, landing in an ungraceful heap on the floor. THUD.

She quickly sits up and listens. Silence.

Chloe looks through the piles of evidence.

CHLOE  
*I'm obsessed. I'm haunted.*

No clothing. Nothing useful. She leaves.

7 INT. FORBES' HOUSE, TEAGUE'S BEDROOM

7

Chloe looks around. She notices a shelf with baseball trophies. Adult and child baseball gloves sit beside them.

Chloe pulls the scissors out of her apron and grabs the smaller baseball glove. She looks between the two.

CHLOE  
*Ought work.*

The lights SNAP on.

Forbes stands in the open doorway. He wears a long nightshirt and his police hat. He holds a scattergun -- a short, one-handed shotgun.

FORBES  
*Chloe?!*

He lowers the gun. He sees Teague's glove in her hand.

FORBES (cont'd)  
*What...? Why bustle me??*

She holds up the glove.

CHLOE  
*I can bring him home.*

FORBES  
*Who? Teague??*

Chloe nods excitedly.

CHLOE  
*Two quick cuts.*

FORBES  
He's gone, Chloe.

CHLOE  
He ain't. I can prove. A slice, a  
snip. He'll be back. In the closet.  
At Helena's. I can bring him home!

Angry, Forbes STORMS across the room.

FORBES  
He. Is. Perished.

He grabs at Chloe. Panicked, she backs away, TRIPS, and  
FALLS into a rocking chair. The chair leans back. Chloe  
GASPS and her eyes roll in pain.

THE SCISSORS ARE PLUNGED INTO HER LEG.

Forbes stops and stares, horrified.

Chloe takes a breath. With one hand she holds the scissors  
tight. With the other, she grabs a handful of dress near  
the scissors.

CHLOE  
I'll show you. Find me.

She yanks. The embedded scissors TEAR her dress. Chloe  
disappears. The empty rocking chair SWINGS FORWARD.

Forbes blinks, unsure of what just happened.

8 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

8

Chloe CRAWLS out of the closet, in terrible pain. She DROPS  
Teague's glove and the scissors then COLLAPSES.

She curls up, holding her leg, and SOBS.

9 INT. HELENA'S CLEANERS - NIGHT

9

Chloe sits up and slowly, painfully WIGGLES OUT of her  
apron. She hikes up her dress, grabs a piece of cloth, and  
ties it around her leg.

DING.

Forbes, now dressed, SHUFFLES into the cleaners, still  
dazed. He sees Chloe's arms covered in bandages.

FORBES  
Oh, Chloe.

She slowly stands and shakes her head.

CHLOE  
I am healthy.

FORBES  
Gaze on you!

CHLOE  
I am trying do some good. The way of  
Chloe.

She raises the shears and slices her upper arm.

FORBES  
Stop!

She cuts the baseball glove. Forbes crosses the room. He  
takes her by the shoulders. His eyes plead.

FORBES (cont'd)  
Enough.

A SMALL VOICE from the closet grabs Forbes' attention.

TEAGUE  
(O.S.)  
Hello?

Forbes recognizes his grandson's voice and lets go of Chloe.

Chloe LIMPS to the closet. She opens the door and unlocks  
the cell door. Weak and emaciated, TEAGUE, 8, lays on the  
floor. He wears iron shackles. Forbes RUSHES to help him.

TEAGUE (cont'd)  
Grandpa.

At first, Forbes looks Teague over, concerned about his  
injuries. But then he just hugs and kisses the boy.

Forbes looks back to Chloe, grateful.

Chloe leans against the wall and SLIDES to the floor,  
completely drained.

THE END