

BETTER TIMES

by

Steve Miles

Steve Miles 2015

stevemiles80@yahoo.co.uk

FADE IN:

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY

The cuff of a blood pressure band inflates, tightens around a thin bicep.

The dial's needle settles on a reading.

A pencil scratches the result on a clipboard.

SEBASTIAN DADE, 30s, perches on a gurney. He wears a hospital gown. His eyes bagged and defeated.

DR. PURCELL (O.S.)
Open your mouth please.

Sebastian opens wide.

INT. CALLARD'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A Yucca plant crowds what space isn't occupied by folders and file boxes.

CALLARD SNEED, 60s, pores hawklike over an open file.

Sebastian and EILEEN DADE, 30s, pale, nervous, sit facing Callard across a desk.

Sebastian now wears glasses. Eileen is visibly pregnant.

Her hand reaches across the space to take Sebastian's.

CALLARD
You've actively been seeking work?

SEBASTIAN
It's all there, on the form.

CALLARD
I've to ask. A matter of course...

Sebastian's jaw tightens.

CALLARD
One year, two..?

Sebastian's lips move, trying to form words.

CALLARD
Longer?

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

Bare feet step onto a medical scale.

A hand adjusts the slide-weights.

The room's lighting flickers as the pencil records the result.

INT. CALLARD'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Callard makes notes in the file.

Sebastian sits with his head down, restless.

CALLARD
Savings?

SEBASTIAN
No.

CALLARD
Investments, bonds--

SEBASTIAN
I've told you, we've nothing.

CALLARD
Assets?

Eileen grips Sebastian's hand tighter, senses his growing frustration.

EILEEN
We sleep on my grandmothers floor.

Callard looks up from the file, weighs this a moment.

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

Sebastian covers his right eye, stares straight ahead.

SEBASTIAN
U, I, H, L--

The lighting flickers into darkness.

DR. PURCELL (O.S.)
Shouldn't be a moment.

The light returns.

DR. PURCELL (O.S.)
And now the right.

Sebastian covers his left eye.

SEBASTIAN
C, H, O...

An eye-chart is pinned to the wall. Beside it hangs a company calender -- a photo of a smiling family illustrates 'October 2078.' A corporate logo on the calendar reads: 'Quality Enterprises.'

SEBASTIAN
...D, E, M.

A single tear runs from his eye.

INT. CALLARD'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A pen sweeps the open file, it stops.

Callard peers over his glasses to study Sebastian.

CALLARD
Your last period of employment was for Quality Enterprises, as a warehouse manager..?

SEBASTIAN
It was just Quality Foods back then. Cold storage, perishables. That was before your-- before the whole merger. Before the layoffs...

CALLARD
I see.

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

Sebastian perches atop the gurney.

Seated on a stool before him is DR. PURCELL, late 60s, a kind, tired face. He taps a pencil against his clipboard.

DR. PURCELL
Any food or alcohol in the past
twenty-four hours?

Sebastian shakes his head.

DR. PURCELL
No matter how small, it's
important.

SEBASTIAN
It's been longer...

INT. CALLARD'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Callard continues with the file.

CALLARD
Children?

SEBASTIAN
One.

CALLARD
Age?

Sebastian and Eileen stare back.

The other shoe drops for Callard. He smiles awkwardly.

CALLARD
Congratulations...

Their silence frosts...

CALLARD
It's good...

He instantly regrets it, retreats to the file.

CALLARD
They remember less, is all I--

EILEEN
That's what they say.

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

Sebastian stares at the clipboard in his hand.

DR. PURCELL

It's all there. Just a signature,
and then, well... Is there anything
you'd like to ask me? ...Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

I read the brochure.

Dr. Purcell nods. He stands, exits the room.

Sebastian slips from the gurney and makes his way to a
window. He squints, adjusting to the sunlight beyond.

INT. CALLARD'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Callard jots down notes.

CALLARD

Won't keep you much longer.

Sebastian and Eileen trade a look.

SEBASTIAN

About the money--

CALLARD

Accounts will see to the
particulars. I trust you read the
brochure?

SEBASTIAN

(terse)

I want to hear it from you.

The lights dim -- it's a moment before they return.

Callard notes the anxiety on Eileen's face.

CALLARD

Don't let the outages concern you,
our main facility is powered
internally. We're off the public
grid, mostly.

(to Sebastian)

I can assure you your family will
find a great degree of comfort from
your participation in the program.
Our remuneration package is

(MORE)

CALLARD (cont'd)
generous, the lump sum on
completion alone -- more so than
that of our leading competitors.

He offers a thin, none too convincing smile.

Eileen grips Sebastian's hand tighter.

EILEEN
And for me?

CALLARD
Your account will be credited each
month--

EILEEN
For Sebastian.

CALLARD
We've one of the highest success
rates in the industry and growing.
With your contribution of course...

EILEEN
If things were to improve, if I
found something out there, work of
some kind--

CALLARD
Mrs. Dade, let me be clear,
Sebastian's consent surrenders
power of attorney for the duration
of the trial. There can be no
outside contact, no interference.
All terms are legally binding.

Callard looks between them.

CALLARD
Is this what you want?

EILEEN
How could it be what anybody wants.

SEBASTIAN
It's what's best. We decided.

Eileen hangs her head.

Callard closes the file. Rubber stamps it.

CALLARD
Your application is approved.

They stare numbly ahead. No celebration here.

CALLARD
They're waiting for us outside.
I'll give you both a moment.

Callard exits.

Sebastian and Eileen sit in silence, unable to look at one another. The lights go out, leaving them in near darkness.

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

Sebastian forces his hand through the signature. He turns to see Dr. Purcell enter with a tray, on which rests a syringe.

DR. PURCELL
A sedative, to help the body cope.
It won't hurt.

Sebastian gives a wavering nod, distant.

SEBASTIAN
Ten years...

DR. PURCELL
You won't notice a thing.

Sebastian stretches out an arm.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY - FLASHBACK

Eileen, her eyes red and swollen. She's all cried out. She and Sebastian stand close. A last lingering moment.

He removes his glasses and presses them into her grip. Places a palm to her swollen belly. Holds it there.

She whispers something into his ear. His smile hovers between joy and heartbreak...

He kisses her forehead and breaks away to where Callard waits with Dr. Purcell.

She remains, broken and alone.

CALLARD (O.S.)
 This is Dr. Purcell, he'll be
 conducting your assessment.

INT. DR. PURCELL'S SURGERY - DAY - PRESENT

A rail-thin ATTENDANT, late 60s, aids Sebastian to a wheelchair, wraps a blanket around him.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY - FLASHBACK

Eileen fights back tears as she negotiates her way down. Slow, methodical, fearful of reaching the end.

INT. FACILITY CORRIDOR - DAY - PRESENT

The Attendant wheels Sebastian towards a thick steel door. A sign posted upon it reads: "Authorised Personnel Only."

Sebastian struggles to focus against the drugs. The wheelchair slows to a halt. TAP of a keypad, followed by a BEEP and a slight SUCK of air.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY - FLASHBACK

Eileen trembles as she makes the final few steps -- a murmur of noise increases. Lights flicker...

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

...and continue to do so as Eileen turns the corner.

Families crowd the floor-space. Thin, pale CHILDREN cling to their PARENTS, the despair of hunger on their faces.

The adults among them scribble their way through forms.

Eileen pushes on, focus on the exit, unable to bear the sad, desperate eyes watching her pass.

A tannoy CRACKLES to life:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Numbers three-seven-nine and three-
 eight-zero proceed to windows C
 please. Have your paperwork ready
 for inspection.

INT. CRYOGENIC STORAGE UNIT - PRESENT

A cavernous expanse. Impossible to discern day from night.

Cryo-chambers reach into shadow above and beyond. The reassuring HUM of some complicated technology at work.

A lab-coated TECHNICIAN, 50s, stalks the aisle ahead of Sebastian's approach. He draws a coffin like chamber from its holding, a wisp of cold smoke curls out.

Sebastian drools, no longer with the moment.

The Technician fixes a medical band to Sebastian's wrist.

INSERT: MEDICAL WRISTBAND

It reads: SEBASTIAN J. DADE. RE-EVALUATION: 22/10/2088

EXT. QUALITY ENTERPRISES - DAY - FLASHBACK

Eileen emerges into daylight. She continues away from the building. Sebastian's glasses clutched to her chest.

A hoarding behind her gradually pulls into view. Plastered across it is the same picture from the calendar: a MAN, WOMAN and CHILD face the camera, smiling in family bliss.

The caption beneath reads:

"QUALITY ENTERPRISES CRYOGENICS: WAKE UP TO BETTER TIMES."

FADE OUT