

THE LAST SLICE

written by
IdeaM

Draft: October 19, 2026

FADE IN:

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Martha Miller (72) drags a string mop across yellowed linoleum. Each pull brings a dull pop in her right hip.

Through the plate glass, a late-model electric sedan hums down the damp asphalt. Silent as grease. Blue LEDs from the curbside charging pedestals bleed across the rain-streaked window.

In the back, a steel putty knife scrapes charred bacon fat off the griddle. Metal on iron. One stroke every three seconds. Gus.

Martha wrings the mop head in the bucket's rusty squeezer. The water sloshes dark gray.

She reaches for a bleached rag, working the laminate counter in small circles around the pie case.

The cast-brass chime above the entrance hits a heavy, cast-iron CLANG.

Martha stops mid-stroke. Her rag sits dead on the formica.

Over the kitchen door, the vintage Telechron wall clock reads 10:45.

CLANG. The brass clapper swings twice, ringing out hard against the cold glass.

Martha does not turn around right away. Her knuckles lock around the edge of the counter.

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The aluminum frame door rattles back against its rubber stop.

Artie Miller (22) ducks in sideways, wide-shouldered, wiping road grime off his knuckles with a red shop rag. His green mechanic's jacket is stiff with dried Quaker State motor oil.

He crosses the wet floor in scuffed Red Wing boots, blind to the glowing square iPad register beside the pie dome.

Three pre-1965 silver quarters smack the counter.

ARTIE
Boysenberry, doll. Two inches
thick. And fill the cup black
before my eyes cross.

Martha's rag drops to the floorboards.

She stays frozen. Artie's ears stick out beneath thick,
grease-black sideburns. His neck smells of leaded exhaust
and clove gum.

ARTIE (CONT'D)
Any day now. Marty's sitting on the
porch counting headlights.

Martha's breath catches in her throat. Her tongue sits thick
and dry.

GUS (O.S.)
Burner's on. Pot's fresh.

Artie ignores the kitchen pass-through entirely, tapping
his dirty nails on the laminate.

ARTIE
She told me sell the Nova. Four-
barrel Rochester carb, three-
twenty-seven small block, and she
wants a half-carat on a band. Who
gives up twenty extra horses for a
rock?

Martha's hand twitches toward his coat sleeve, then jerks
back.

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Artie pulls a soft pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes from
his pocket and taps a cylinder loose.

Martha reaches across the counter, snatches the pack out of
his fist, and drops the loose cigarette straight into a
half-empty water glass.

It hits the water with a tiny hiss.

ARTIE
Hey! That's thirty-five cents,
lady!

MARTHA
Thirty-five cents off your
funeral. Keep your hands on the
counter.

She rips a coarse brown napkin from the chrome dispenser
and clicks a blue Bic pen from her apron pocket.

ARTIE
You got some nerve. I got fifteen
minutes before the third shift
starts stamping cores.

MARTHA
Marty gets that twitch under her
left eyelid when you're five
minutes past ten. Then she throws
your laundry down the stairs.

Artie freezes, cigarette lighter held open in his hand.

ARTIE
...How the hell do you know that?

MARTHA
Because she's got eyes, Arthur. And
she knows you're ten seconds from
putting that Nova into a bridge
abutment on Route 108.

She writes two words on the napkin in heavy, gouging
capitals: SAVE. APPLE.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Ten dollars every Friday into a
passbook. When you hear the word
Apple, you don't think pie. You
buy the shares. All of them.

ARTIE
Apple? Like the orchard down in
Pulaski?

MARTHA
Like staying out of the back room
at the State Street pool hall.

A low, industrial whistle echoes three miles off, flat and
sour against the rainy night.

Artie looks from the grease-smeared napkin to Martha's
face. The cockiness leaves his shoulders all at once.

ARTIE
That's the blast whistle.

MARTHA
Run, boy. Run till your chest
burns.

Artie scoops up the paper, backs away three paces without blinking, and bolts out into the rain.

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

No floral armchair. No knitted afghan.

Beige wall-to-wall carpet, vacuumed into razor-straight tracks.

MARTHA (72) stands over the coffee table. A glass vase holds three faux eucalyptus stems.

BRENDA (40s), in a charcoal pantsuit, sets a paper coffee cup on a linen coaster.

BRENDA
Oat milk, no foam. Drink it before
the skin forms.

MARTHA
My chair is gone.

BRENDA
We donated the brocade. It harbored
dander, Mom.

Brenda unzips a slim leather folio and deals out glossy brochures. Septuagenarians holding pickleball paddles in sunlit courtyards.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
The Willows at Shenango. Tiered
care. If we sign the power of
attorney by the fifteenth, they
waive the entrance fee.

Martha's eyes drift to the fireplace.

The cherry mantle is stripped bare except for a silver dual frame.

MARTHA
Take the papers. Go back to
Wexford.

BRENDA

I took a personal morning to get
the signatures.

MARTHA

The oil company delivers three
hundred gallons on Tuesday. I am
not signing into an orphanage.

BRENDA

It is an active adult campus.
Dad's municipal pension does not
outpace inflation, and you're
still working third shift for tips.

MARTHA

Gus pays five-fifty an hour.

BRENDA

It's absurd. Sign page four. We
liquidate the house while the
market in Lawrence County is still
breathing.

MARTHA

Brenda. Out.

Brenda scoops up the folio, leaving the brochures on the
coffee table.

BRENDA

Saturday. With the notary. Do not
touch the thermostat, it's synced
to my phone.

The front door clicks shut.

Martha walks to the fireplace, slippers dragging.

She reaches for the silver frame.

The 1974 wedding portrait behind the glass: twenty-two-year-
old Martha in polyester lace, twenty-two-year-old Artie in a
powder-blue tuxedo.

Artie's right shoulder twitches.

The silver gelatin grain shimmers. His fingers peel back
from hers, dropping to his side. Two inches of empty church
wall open between their hands.

EXT. EAST WASHINGTON STREET - DAY

Martha walks down the cracked pavement. The buildings are a graveyard of commerce: boarded-up storefronts, the faded paint of defunct businesses. The scent of stale cigarette smoke mixes with the exhaust of a passing modern SUV.

She stops before a vacant lot, kicking at a pile of dust that puffs up around her worn shoe.

MARTHA
(To herself)
Nothing changes. Nobody changes.

She needs the familiar grit, the fight. She needs the noise of the place when it was loud, when the air smelled like hot oil and ambition.

A sleek, dark car--a foreign model, too shiny for the street--parks parallel to her on the curb. It emits a low, expensive purr.

A man steps out. CULLY CULLIGAN (60s) is dressed in an expensive camel-hair overcoat that looks utterly out of place against the grit of the street. He exudes old money that doesn't belong to New Castle.

CULLY
Martha?

Martha straightens, instantly on guard.

MARTHA
Cully. Fancy seeing you here. You look... tailored.

Cully smiles, a practiced, gentle curve of the lips.

CULLY
Circumstances change, doll. I retired from the insurance business. Bought the car for the open road.

MARTHA
The open road? You never liked the open road. Always liked the tight geometry of the factory floor.

Cully laughs, a rich, warm sound that seems too loud for the quiet street.

CULLY

Artie and I always had the best time with a little grease and a lot of noise. Remember those times? The racing?

MARTHA

(Defensive)

The races were stupid. And the factories were always going to change.

Cully leans against the expensive sedan, crossing his arms.

CULLY

Did you know that the radiator plant downsized its entire accounting division? I used to do the ledgers for the Union Hall. I always thought Artie was too much of a wild card for a stable retirement plan.

Martha's posture stiffens. Her face drains of color.

MARTHA

What are you talking about?

CULLY

(Softly)

Things settle, Martha. People settle. You taught him to run the engine, but I saw how easy it would be to teach him the balance sheet.

MARTHA

You're not my friend, Cully. You're just another memory wearing a good coat.

Cully's smile fades, replaced by a look of deep, quiet sadness.

CULLY

Artie was always going to be reckless. You were always going to be... reactive.

He nods once, a finality in the gesture, and slides back into the car, pulling away without looking in the rearview mirror.

Martha stands alone, staring at the receding shine of the car, the weight of the street's silence suddenly unbearable.

CUT TO:

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The brass chime hits the plate glass with a hard, ringing CLANG.

Artie Miller pushes through the door.

His sideburns are gone. Cheeks pink and clean-shaven. He wears an ironed chocolate-brown corduroy blazer over a cream turtleneck, smelling of department-store lemon aftershave. Under his arm, a slim leather portfolio.

He drops the portfolio flat against the laminate counter.

ARTIE
Black coffee, doll. In a clean mug,
if Gus didn't drop it in the sink
first.

Martha stares. Her rag stays clamped in both hands.

MARTHA
Where's your jacket?

ARTIE
Goodwill bin behind St. Joe's.
Along with the grease rags.

He unzips the portfolio, thumbing through crisp bond paper and carbon vouchers.

ARTIE (CONT'D)
That napkin tip you gave me on the
municipal bonds out of Cleveland?
Cashed out three weeks early. Put
the Nova on the gravel lot by Route
18. Signed the pink slip over to a
pipefitter for six hundred cash.

Martha's voice drops to a rasp.

MARTHA
You sold the Nova.

ARTIE

Car shook like an open-hearth
furnace over fifty. Marty cried
into her apron. Kept talking about
the drive-in, the back seat. Told
her that's high school thinking.
Small-pond stuff.

MARTHA

Arthur.

ARTIE

I'm catching the six-ten Greyhound
out of the depot tomorrow morning.
Junior analyst track at Mellon Bank
in Pittsburgh.

He offers an easy, symmetrical, bloodless smile.

ARTIE (CONT'D)

Stopping by Marty's porch at
midnight. Give her back the high
school ring, tell her she's a
sweet girl, let her find some
grease-monkey who wants to die
coughing red dust at sixty. Clean
break. Sensible.

Martha looks down.

The worn, thick gold band on her left fourth finger dulls to
chalk.

The gold bleeds gray, thinning into a curl of dry vapor that
lifts into the neon light and vanishes.

Her finger is bare. Not even a sun line left in the skin.

MARTHA

Artie...

Artie zips his leather case shut, checking his clean gold
wristwatch.

ARTIE

Ten minutes to midnight. Ought to
let her down before the porch light
goes off.

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Martha crashes backward through the swinging stainless door.

Her heels slip on the greasy quarry tile. She grips the lip of the prep table, chest heaving against her apron, rubbing the raw, bare skin of her ring finger against her palm.

The grease vents roar overhead. Blue flame licks the bottoms of the soup pots.

GUS (O.S.)
Linoleum's paid for. Don't dig a trench.

Gus steps out from behind the dish pit. He hangs an iron scraping blade on a magnetic strip and wipes his forearm with a rag stiffened with lard.

Martha points a shaking finger toward the dining room.

MARTHA
He put on a blazer, Gus. He sold the car.

GUS
Smelled the lemon cologne through the louver vents. Stinks like an insurance clerk.

MARTHA
He's leaving her. He's walking out.

Gus tosses the rag into a five-gallon grease pail.

GUS
You gave him the book, Martha. You spent fifty years bitching about the oil on the carpet and the unpaid gas bills, so you gave him the book.

MARTHA
He was going to kill himself on Route 108!

GUS
He was twenty-two. He was supposed to be stupid. You wanted a gentleman with a retirement plan, go up to Pittsburgh and find one. They die quiet. They leave the porch light on and they don't leave dents in the drywall.

He steps up to the stainless pass-through shelf.

Above the ticket wheel, the round Telechron clock ticks with a heavy mechanical click: 10:56.

GUS (CONT'D)
Telechron don't run backwards
twice.

Gus reaches into his griddle apron and pulls out a heavy, grooved brass deadbolt key.

He slides it across the stainless steel. It stops dead against Martha's knuckles.

GUS (CONT'D)
Four minutes. Then I turn the
lock, drop the shade, and go home
to my dog. Whatever's outside that
door stays out there.

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Martha hits the swinging double doors with both palms.

Her forearm sweeps the counter. Artie's slim leather portfolio sails across the laminate, clips the soda fountain, and slaps face-down into a bus tub of gray rinse water.

ARTIE
Hey! That's carbon bond--

MARTHA
Shut your mouth.

She snatches the crushed pack of Lucky Strikes from the pass-through ledge and shoves it against the front of his pressed corduroy blazer.

Her knuckles twist into his lapels, pulling him forward until his chin is two inches from the pie case.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
You get in that Nova. You give
that pipefitter his six hundred
dollars back, and if he won't take
it, you take a lug wrench to his
kneecaps.

ARTIE
I signed the title over. The train
leaves at six--

MARTHA

Mellon Bank can jump in the river.
You're Arthur Miller. You spill
two quarts of ten-forty on the
asphalt every Sunday morning. You
leave wet wool socks on the floor
until the baseboards rot. You drive
through every red light between
here and Mahoningtown and you park
on her lawn.

She reaches blindly behind the register, plunging her hand
into a chipped ceramic mug. Her nails scrape past grease
pencils and lead sinkers, closing around a tarnished, five-
dollar brass ring.

She grabs Artie's wrist, pries his thumb back, and jams the
brass band hard into his palm.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You get on that porch before the
bulb burns out. And you don't leave
until she takes it.

Artie stares down at his clenched fist.

The lemon aftershave catches the harsh fluorescent glare.
The junior analyst posture drops out of his spine all at
once, leaving his shoulders raw and narrow.

He lifts his eyes to Martha's face.

The color drains from his cheeks. His lips part, dry and
twenty-two.

ARTIE

(Barely audible)

Marth?

He snatches the ring to his chest, turns hard on his heel,
and crashes through the front door into the dark.

A starter GRINDS twice.

A small-block 327 V8 detonates into life with an open-
header roar that rattles the diner's plate glass.

Tires shriek against wet blacktop, throwing grit and sulfur
across the white lines of the electric charging pedestals.
The cherry taillights blast past the window and vanish down
Route 108.

MARTHA
(To the empty glass)
Go, you miserable son of a bitch.
Go.

She leans against the counter, a ragged laugh catching in her throat.

INT. SUNSET GRILLE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The round Telechron wall clock above the griddle drops its brass minute hand with an iron CLICK.

10:59.

Gus ambles out from the dish station, wiping his forearms with a flour-sack towel.

He reaches the plate-glass door, grips the heavy brass latch, and throws the deadbolt home.

The tumblers engage with a heavy, leaden THUNK.

Eleven o'clock.

Outside, the red cursive script of the SUNSET GRILLE neon sign sputters once, hums a flat B-minor, and dies into black.

A sharp pinch bites Martha's left fourth finger.

Cold, dented yellow gold snaps back over the knuckle. The wide, scratch-worn wedding band sinks deep into the permanent white groove pressed into her skin.

Martha holds her hand up to the light. Her thumb rubs the familiar scarred ridge.

The front service bell rattles on its spring.

Brenda pushes through the inner door, stomping crusty slush from heavy mud-caked boots. She wears a faded, oversized cable-knit sweater with frayed cuffs and balances a red-lidded Tupperware tub against her hip.

BRENDA
Door was unlocked. Gus is going to
get you robbed one of these
nights.

Martha slowly lowers her hand.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
 I brought the chicken soup. And
 you need to call someone about the
 cellar, because Dad's rusted
 cantilever toolbox is still
 sitting dead center on the third
 step down. I almost took a header
 over his socket set.

Martha lets out a long breath that shakes her whole frame.

She wipes her cheek with the heel of her wrist, pressing
 the cold gold band against her tear duct.

MARTHA
 He always swore he was going to
 patch that tread.

BRENDA
 He swore that in ninety-eight. You
 eating or what?

Martha pushes off the cash station. Her arthritic hip aches,
 but her footing is solid on the tile.

She pulls out stool four and sits down beside her daughter.

MARTHA
 Leave the soup in the plastic. Cut
 me the back end of the
 boysenberry.

Brenda slides the plate across the laminate.

Martha takes the fork, drives the tines straight through
 the sugary purple crust, and takes a bite.

FADE TO BLACK.