

Dogwood Dying

Written by

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INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

DALE STURVEN, 59, is sitting alone in a doctor's office.

An INTERN is sitting at the sign-in desk chewing gum obnoxiously loud. Dale checks the clock and his watch until a NURSE comes through a door with a clipboard.

NURSE  
Dr. Sturven?

DALE  
Yes.

NURSE  
Dale Sturven?

DALE  
Last time I checked. (beat)  
Finally, I've been sitting here  
for-

NURSE  
Oh no, I'm sorry the doctor isn't  
ready for you yet. I was wondering  
if I could have your autograph.

DALE  
Is that why I'm here? Do I even  
have an appointment today?

NURSE  
Oh of course Mr.- Dr. Sturven, it's  
just you treated my grandmother a  
few years ago-

DALE  
What's her name?

NURSE  
Juliana Alvarez.

DALE  
That was a simple case of  
hyperalgesia, nothing a steady  
monitoring of tricyclic  
antidepressants couldn't fix.

NURSE  
I wanted to thank you. You saved  
her life.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

If I cured some fatal illness  
unbeknown to me then you're  
welcome. But her life was never in  
jeopardy.

NURSE

Could I still have your autograph?

DALE

Is there actually a doctor here  
who's going to see me? Or are there  
more nurses waiting for  
autographs?

NURSE

Dr. Tendleton will be ready for you  
shortly.

DALE

Do you have a pen?

The nurse pulls a piece of paper and pen out from under the  
flap on the clipboard and hands it to Dale. She turns and  
looks at the intern behind the desk and flashes a smile.

DALE

So who is this Dr. Tendleton? Is he  
any good?

NURSE

Oh yes. He's wonderful.

DALE

Where'd he go to school?

NURSE

I'm sorry?

DALE

Just tell the doctor that he has a  
patient waiting, and if he wants to  
see him he'd better come and do his  
job.

NURSE

Yes, sir.

The nurse leaves. Dale sits back in the chair.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY - LATER

TERRENCE TENDLETON enters. He is a handsome 30 something with an aura of confidence oozing from him.

TERRENCE  
Dr. Sturven! Dr. Terrence  
Tendleton, great to meet you.

DALE  
Are you the doctor?

TERRENCE  
Yes, sir. Should we head back into  
an examination room?

DALE  
That'd be ideal.

TERRENCE  
Shauna could you put my calls  
through to Dr. Miller for the  
afternoon?

The gum chewing intern smiles.

SHAUNA  
Sure thing, Terry.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Terrence ushers Dale into a cramped examination room with a small medical table. The room is a window short of a solitary confinement chamber. Terrence sits on a small wheeled chair and clicks a ballpoint pen and begins writing on a sheet of paper.

TERRENCE  
Alright Dr. Sturven. What seems to  
be the problem?

DALE  
Where did you go to school?

TERRENCE  
Medical school or where I got my  
Bachelors?

DALE  
Medical.

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE  
John's Hopkins.

DALE  
Not bad.

TERRENCE  
I'd hope so. Spent a lot of money  
and time to be here right now.

DALE  
How many years of residency?

TERRENCE  
Four.

DALE  
Where?

TERRENCE  
University of Washington Hospital.

DALE  
Did you enjoy it?

TERRENCE  
Is this some kind of test?

DALE  
You could say that.

TERRENCE  
I can promise you you're in good  
hands. But I have to be honest,  
having one of New York's greatest  
doctors as my first patient in  
private practice is a little  
nerve-racking.

DALE  
Am I going to be a problem?

TERRENCE  
No, sir.

DALE  
Because my body works the same as  
everybody else's.

TERRENCE  
Let's hope.

A beat.

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE

Right, so what's the problem?

DALE

I sat in your waiting room for a half hour.

TERRENCE

I have patients.

DALE

Well then I guess I don't.

TERRENCE

I'm sorry, I have a lot going on right now.

DALE

It didn't seem that way to me. I was the only person waiting out there. You realize, Dr. Tendleton, that I also run a medical institution and I never let somebody wait the way you left me today.

Terrence is stung by this

TERRENCE

I am truly sorry you feel that way Dr. Sturven. I am doing the best I can.

DALE

That's no excuse.

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven, if I could please continue with my examination. What has been bothering you?

DALE

A persistent ache running down my lower back. Most likely a side effect of old age, but it was recommended I get a second opinion.

TERRENCE

You're not old Dr. Sturven. And you certainly look healthy.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Looks can be deceiving, I am both unhealthy and old, or at least I feel it.

TERRENCE

What about your overall health?

DALE

That's why I'm here.

TERRENCE

Great, then I'll take a look.

Terrence wheels his chair over to a wall unit, opens a small door and pulls out a pair of blue rubber gloves. Dale cringes at Terrence's touch. Terrence lifts up the bottom of Dale's shirt, squeezes, pokes, listens, pushes...

DALE

The pain is right at the base of the thoracolumbar fascia.

Although we have no idea what Dale is talking about, Terrence instantly moves his hand positioning in the lower right corner of Dale's back.

TERRENCE

Right here?

DALE

Yeah! That's it!

Terrence stops examining Dale and sits back on his chair.

TERRENCE

Does the pain-?

DALE

I feel it early in the morning when I first get up, occasionally when I cough. Pain medication has not gotten rid of the discomfort, I have tried icing, heating, and massaging the problem area but it has as of yet to subside...

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven-

DALE (CONT.)

...but at this point I'm almost certain it's an early sign of a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (CONT.) (cont'd)  
mild spinal arthritis. I'd suggest  
a stem treatment and maybe even an  
ultrasound.

A beat.

Terrence looks like Dale slapped him in the face. He clicks shut his pen and puts it back into his jacket pocket. He leans in towards Dr. Dale as if he is a four year old kid who needs a firm talking to.

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven, I am aware that you are a very storied and successful physician. But this is my job, and in spite of all the awkwardness you may feel coming to another doctor, you need to let me do my job.

DALE

That has nothing to do with knowing how to treat myself with mild back pain. I might have pinched a nerve or pulled a muscle, I'm not on the slab. You think your first patient is going to be some old doctor whose life you have to save?

TERRENCE

I never said that-

DALE

I hate to ruin your exciting dreams of playing doctor but the worst thing you're likely to come across is a mild case of mono from some sixteen year old who just got his first girlfriend.

TERRENCE

What?

DALE

I don't need you to tell me what I should do to my body. I've been a doctor for 35 years and I know how to treat myself. I just need somebody to administer the stem treatment.

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE

I don't want you to receive stem treatment.

Terrence's firmness impresses Dale.

DALE

And what do you suggest, Terry?

TERRENCE

There is a fair bit of swelling running down into your pant-line-

DALE

I am aware of that.

TERRENCE (CONT.)

-and I believe that we should do a quick MRI to figure it out.

DALE

Then why not just an ultrasound?

TERRENCE

They're not as accurate.

DALE

I'm going to have to disagree with you on that one.

TERRENCE

You're not the doctor.

DALE

Right, I'm the patient. Shouldn't that count for something?

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven, this is a world of medicine, a world of experts and people who need the expertise of those experts. We are not selling health, we are administering it. This is not a Wal-Mart. In medicine the customer is not always right.

DALE

Well, the cashiers at Wal-Mart rarely ring up customers who have been cashiers themselves twice as long as the person handing them their change.

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE

Alright then, here's what we'll do. You do the stem treatment, if you want me to administer it then I will, but I'm sure you can handle that at your own convenience. And if in two weeks you aren't feeling any better, then we go for the MRI.

Dale is intrigued by this deal-making, something new, something he has never done before.

DALE

Ok.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - DAY

Dale walks into a building with "Sturven Health" emblazoned on the front. He is instantly met by a short, fidgety, bald man with glasses, it is his assistant GREG POWELL.

GREG

Dr. Sturven, I have several messages to give you. Without breaking stride

Dale walks past Greg, who falls in line with him and begins reading off a small pad.

GREG

The Wall Street Journal called you twice this morning; your brother sent you a package; a Natalie Rhodes hopes to get a moment to talk with you; and Stephen Graham is waiting for you in your office.

DALE

Graham, why'd he stop by?

GREG

You two are friends from college.

DALE

Very good Greg, but why did he stop by out of nowhere? Did he have a reason?

GREG

Yes, sir. He wanted to ask you a favor.

(CONTINUED)

Dale is receiving admiring looks and praising greetings as he walks through his own office, he is in his own world.

DALE  
What's the favor?

GREG  
I don't know, sir.

DALE  
He didn't mention anything?

GREG  
No.

DALE  
Interesting.

GREG  
Are you going to call back the Wall Street Journal, Dr. Sturven?

DALE  
Did you leave the number on my desk?

GREG  
Yes, sir.

DALE  
Then I guess I'd better call them. Probably just another piece on me. You know how they do their little medical journal every few months or so. Is my brother's package also up there?

GREG  
Yes sir. And Natalie Rhodes, sir?

DALE  
Who?

GREG  
A Natalie Rhodes wants to have a word with you. About her son.

DALE  
Does she know I'm not a pediatrician?

GREG

I'm sure she knows sir, but-

DALE

Of course she knows, so why would I meet with her?

GREG

Well I don't know how old the son is-

DALE

I'm too old to take every meeting someone wants to have with me, Greg. Let me sort out my issues first and I'll get back to you on the woman.

GREG

Yes, sir. They round a corner and head down a long hallway which leads to elevators.

DALE

And Greg put me through to Dr. Ian Griffiths, I need to set up an appointment for stem treatment.

GREG

Yes, sir. Are you going to grant Mr. Graham his favor?

DALE

Is it the day of my daughter's wedding?

GREG

What?

Dale walks into an elevator and turns to face Greg, as the doors close:

DALE

It's a joke, Greg.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Dale's office is more of a trophy case than a work space. Awards, certificates, medals, and pictures with famous people line the walls and scale to the ceiling. There are no pictures of family. Tacky furniture is scattered about the room in front of a large mahogany desk.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN GRAHAM, 61, is sitting in a chair in front of the desk. He is looking about the room with divided interest. He leans in towards one of the pictures and sees DALE shaking hands with a man in a wheelchair and a small note that reads: You saved my life! God bless you, Dr. Sturven.

He stands and looks at more of the pictures, all of which read something similar to the first. Dale enters and the men shake hands.

DALE

Stephen, how's it going? Great to see you again.

STEPHEN

You too. (re: pictures) You've become quite the hero.

Dale sits.

DALE

Might have cured a patient here and there.

STEPHEN

(sitting)

These people seem to think so.

DALE

I've been fortunate enough to earn a few accolades in the process.

STEPHEN

I can see that.

A beat.

STEPHEN

You remember the last patient you lost?

DALE

Yeah, but it turns out he was on the third floor-

STEPHEN

I'm serious. Do you even remember the last patient you lost?

DALE

Of course I do.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN  
Who was it?

DALE  
Stephen, what's this got to-

STEPHEN  
Who was it?

A beat.

DALE  
Richard Rena, nine years ago.

STEPHEN  
So you really do beat death don't  
you?

DALE  
What, what I said before?

STEPHEN  
Nine years is a damn good track  
record. That would explain all of  
this.

He points to the medals draped off the cabinet.

DALE  
Steve, it's great to see you again,  
really, it's been too long. Is  
there anything I can do for you?

STEPHEN  
Yes, actually.

DALE  
This isn't going to be me dog  
sitting for you is it? I'm not  
getting myself into that again.

STEPHEN  
Jesus, Dale, that was thirty five  
years ago, we still wrote for The  
Crimson at that point. Besides the  
dog died years ago...This is a  
little more personal, this is  
serious.

DALE  
What's going on? Stephen stands  
again.

He walks over to the collection of awards.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

You are quite the celebrity around here. You certainly have made a name for yourself.

DALE

I hope it's made its way up to Bean Town with you and your guys.

STEPHEN

It has Dale, that's why I'm here. My wife came up here a few months ago to help our daughter find an apartment, she's moving in with her boyfriend and they want to rent a place on the upper west side. They hired a real estate agent to show them a couple places around town that fit what she was looking for. For whatever reason, my wife struck up a rather strong friendship with the woman showing them apartments. Since then, my wife's come up here every couple weeks or so to spend the weekend here with her friend. I don't really understand it, it's like Claire's a teenage girl again, the way she talks about her visits with the real estate agent.

DALE

What's her name?

STEPHEN

Betty Stewart. I don't really see what sense there is in befriending a Manhattan real estate agent, but you know Claire. But then about a month ago something happened-

DALE

You don't think they're-

STEPHEN

No, no, nothing like that... About a month ago, Claire told me that Betty found out she was sick, some skin infection. She went to see a family doctor in Jersey, and they said there wasn't much they could do to help her. Now, I understand how crazy this is going to sound, you haven't heard from me in five

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (cont'd)  
years, and I don't even know her,  
but it would mean the world to my  
wife if you could treat this woman.  
Can't you say anything?

DALE  
I'm sorry this has happened to this  
woman. But if her physicians in New  
Jersey don't think they can do  
anything further, what do you want  
me to do? Contrary to popular  
belief, I am not the only competent  
doctor in the world. You also seem  
to have forgotten that I have  
announced my retirement to be  
within the next year and a half.

STEPHEN  
I am not asking you to do anything  
different than what you have done  
so successfully for the last thirty  
years.

DALE  
And what exactly is that, Stephen?  
Special treatment towards  
acquaintances of friends-

STEPHEN  
Of curing people! I don't know the  
severity of this woman's illness,  
but it is clearly enough to cause  
my wife great anguish over her  
friend. For whatever reason they  
have become extremely close and now  
I am asking you to help me.

DALE  
By doing you a favor by doing your  
wife a favor. I hardly see how this  
is a favor for you, if anything it  
is a favor for the sick woman.

STEPHEN  
Than do it for her. You're going to  
have to have a last patient at some  
point. At least just see her.

Dale looks at his collection of trophies and  
accomplishments.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

As it seems I am in the habit of making deals today, I'll do it. I will examine this woman and if I think I can help her I will treat her, but if I think it is beyond my capabilities than I won't.

STEPHEN

To maintain your flawless track record?

A beat.

DALE

Would you like something to drink?

STEPHEN

Sure. Water would be fine.

DALE

That's all we have. We don't start rotting our livers here until after three.

The men laugh and the mood lightens. Dale presses a button on his desk phone:

DALE

Natalie? Could you please bring myself and Mr. Graham some water?

NATALIE

(on intercom)  
Yes, Dr. Sturven.

DALE

Thank you.

A faint CLICK as he releases the button and sits back comfortably in his chair.

STEPHEN

How long have you worked with that woman?

DALE

I'd say fifteen years.

STEPHEN

And she still calls you "sir" and "doctor"?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

It's the way I expect things around here. There's a hierarchy within medicine that runs down from the chief of medicine, residents, surgeons, nurses, you name it. But maybe it's because it's the way I have done things for thirty years, I don't really know.

STEPHEN

It seems to work.

DALE

It has so far.

STEPHEN

So who's going to take your place as the "Master of Medicine"-

DALE

You read the article?

STEPHEN

I may've skimmed it- who is going to take your place as Master of Medicine once you retire?

DALE

Good question. To be honest I don't have much of a mental inventory of the city's physicians. There's this young doctor I had an appointment with today that I don't expect too much from.

STEPHEN

Where is he?

DALE

23rd and Broad I think it was.

STEPHEN

Who is he?

DALE

Doctor Terrence Tendleton, how's that for a name?

STEPHEN

You didn't like him because of his name?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

It was more than that.

STEPHEN

What then?

DALE

He's like all these young doctors today. Cocky, arrogant, think the money they spent on school and the grades they got are what makes a good doctor. You know what makes a good doctor?

STEPHEN

Curing people?

DALE

You've got nothing if you don't have the will to cure. The respect, the power, the thought that you're "doing good" is all wonderful until you have to actually get in there and fight off death with nothing but you're knowledge.

STEPHEN

Sounds pretty glamorous. Do you see yourself as a gladiator in the ring fending off the Grim Reaper?

DALE

I'm serious, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Oh I am too, Dale. A nine year span in which you haven't had a patient die is remarkable, it's why I came here to ask you about my wife's friend, but it all comes down to the fact. You have power like a god.

DALE

God has no part in what I do.

STEPHEN

Ok, sure, but you can choose who lives and who dies. And you choose for people to live.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

What are you trying to get me to say? That I've beaten death? I started getting publicity when I took people who didn't have a prayer and after six months they're home with their families, but I don't think about the possible death of my patients any more than I think about my own death.

STEPHEN

So why retire? Keep people alive forever, maybe even try it on yourself someday.

DALE

You certainly seem to enjoy conversations involving death, Stephen. I must have forgotten about you.

STEPHEN

I'm not the one with the gift of life. I walk around fearing death like everybody else, but you walk around knowing you're untouchable. Death isn't an issue for people who don't fear it, and you don't fear it because you've beaten it, on several occasions I might add. Just read the occasional Wall Street Journal.

This has a noticeable effect on Dale as his gaze falls on his mountain of success once again.

NATALIE pokes her head in the door holding two water bottles.

NATALIE

Your waters, Dr. Sturven.

Dale is lost in thought staring at his trophies. He suddenly comes back to reality.

DALE

I'm sorry, what?

INT. APARTMENT - SUN SET

Dale's apartment is a larger customized extension of his trophy-case office, and just as empty. Bigger awards, pictures, and other medical honors line his walls and shelves. It is a very expensive living area with lavish furniture and a kitchen right out of one of Gordon Ramsey's shows.

Dale enters the apartment with the package from his brother under his arm.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - SUN SET

Dale holds up the package to read it clearly. In thick marker it reads:

We hope you will open this one. It took us a while to get it all together but it's a good recap of everything you missed lately. Hope you're doing well, love Mark and the family.

Dale opens a closet door.

INT. HALLWAY CLOSET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He puts the box on top of a massive collection of ten to fifteen other boxes all addressed to Dale from his brother Bobby.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dale writhes in pain as he stands up, gripping his lower back and falling against the wall, stabilizing himself with the door frame. He attempts to move again but falls in pain into the closet knocking over all the unopened boxes from his family.

DALE

Shit!

He lies on his side in the closet. He tosses the boxes off himself and hoists himself up using the doorknob. Dale painfully limps toward the kitchen leaving the unopened family packages strewn about the hallway.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dale stumbles in and opens the medicine cabinet, grabbing a bottle of Tylenol and popping three pills, washing it down with sink water. He gazes at himself in the mirror.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

In less pain, Dale enters the kitchen and hits the button on his answering machine. He simultaneously opens the refrigerator, pours a glass of orange juice, and adds a vitamin mixture, and preparing a bowl of cereal.

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have three new voice messages.  
 First message: Dr. Sturven, this is Ed Alborz from the Wall Street Journal. I was hoping to get a few minutes with you to discuss a piece we'd be interested in writing. I'm aware that you have our contact information, please get back to us at your earliest convenience. Thank you. (BEEP) Next message: Hello Mr. Sturven, this is Lisa Farrell from Georgetown University-

Dale hits a button on the machine, causing a small red light to glow and the machine to beep.

ANSWERING MACHINE (CONT.)

-Message erased. Next message: This is Betty Stewart. I believe my friend talked to you about possibly seeing me. I hope it is not too much trouble, but I would appreciate it very much if you could find the time to see me in the next few weeks, Dr. Sturven. (BEEP) End of new messages. If you would like to change your personal options press-

Dale hits another button and the machine shuts off.

DALE

Stephen got back to her fast. Ow-!

The bowl of cereal CRASHES to the floor. Dale stumbles and grabs hold of the island to steady himself. He feels around his lower back, feeling the intense swelling protruding from his pant line.

(CONTINUED)

FADE OUT.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

No, no, no. Are you serious? He's a doctor; just bring a pitcher of water. Go!

FADE IN:

INT. WALL STREET JOURNAL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

ED ALBORZ, a skinny Iranian PR rep, is fixing his tie, shuffling papers into piles, and setting up a small table.

His assistant returns to the room with a large pitcher of water and sets it down on the table. DALE walks into the room.

ED

Dr. Sturven! Great to meet you.

They shake hands.

DALE

I've done medical articles in the Journal before, but I've never met you. Are you new?

ED

No sir, I'm with another journalism division.

DALE

Which one?

ED

I'm the supervisor of our yearly "Prestigious Peoples" list. Perhaps you've heard of it?

DALE

Perhaps not. So does this mean I make the list?

ED

Yes sir! That's the piece I spoke of over the phone. We narrow it down to five nominees, then have our analysts vote on who the most prestigious person is. But we conduct extensive interviews with each of the five finalists.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Who are the others?

ED

I'm sorry. We're not allowed to discuss that.

DALE

Alright then, let's "conduct an extensive interview".

ED

Great.

Dale sits. Ed grabs the papers he was previously organizing and sits opposite Dale; he clicks a small TAPE RECORDER.

ED

Alright. Dr. Sturven, how long have you been in medicine?

DALE

This year marks my thirty seventh year in medicine and my thirtieth in private practice.

ED

Quite an impressive resume.

DALE

I'm good at what I do.

ED

What would you say it is, exactly, that makes you so good at your profession?

DALE

I'd love to be able to tell you that it's a fair bit of luck, but it's become something of a craft that I have all but perfected. I'm not putting myself in the same league with world famous doctors, because that's for other people to decide.

ED

Your office, Sturven Health, is one of the premiere centers for medical aid on the east coast.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

But that was never my intention when I first graduated med-school. If you'd told me that after forty years I would have the most renowned medical facility in New York, I would have believed you, but it would have been quite a departure from my initial goals.

ED

That leads me to my next question. You first gained national recognition twelve years ago when Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia was diagnosed with cancer. It had been revealed in the press that he had been given ten months to live. Upon his return to his hometown in New Jersey he caught wind of a successful doctor up in New York, which was you.

DALE

That's correct.

ED

You then proceeded to treat justice Scalia, and you not only cured him, but he has reported that he has had no lingering effects.

DALE

The second part is what really amazes me, but yes, I treated him and we have remained in contact ever since.

ED

How do you explain the success you have had treating and curing so many people for such a long time?

DALE

That's exactly the point though, isn't it? I don't look at it as curing "people." I don't see it as taking someone and curing them; mind, body, soul. I do not see a person outside of the disease. I only see the ailment and proceed to treat that, not the person.

(CONTINUED)

ED

Interesting. But isn't it useful to form a kind of trusting bond with your patients?

DALE

I didn't say I disrespect or hold my patients in any less regard, but you asked me what I think my secret is, and I would have to say it's my approach that really separates me.

ED

What do you say in response to those in the media and on other circuits that claim you have, to a certain extent, lost sight of what being a physician is all about? Perhaps, that you've sold out in a business that is not supposed to be for celebrities?

DALE

I'd have to say that they better not come crying to me if they fall ill.

ED

You must feel very strongly about being criticized.

DALE

I save lives, that's all I've done for decades. If people are too stupid to see that then it's their problem. Ignorance can't be cured.

ED

It seems that your-I guess I would say- emotional detachment from your patients has kept your focus on curing, and that has led to your success.

DALE

The field of medicine is so vast, so diverse, and so perennial, that the cure can always be found. The cure exists in your effort, your commitment to the patient, but most importantly it exists in dedication to the treatment and to the medicine itself.

(CONTINUED)

ED

But it would seem, over the years, that you have a magic touch. Not losing any patients for so long is astounding.

DALE

It's all going to end soon.

ED

That's right! Your retirement is set for the end of the year, if I'm not mistaken.

DALE

I've been thinking about it for a while and right now seems like the perfect time to go.

ED

When are you planning exactly?

DALE

I've decided to treat one more patient, and then I will retire.

ED

Sounds very exclusive. Who is this final person?

DALE

That's a good question. Fate has yet to extend its hand and drop a final patient in my lap. Not to mention that whoever it ends up being, I'm afraid, will most likely receive quite a bit of publicity.

ED

I hope you'll trust us to see to that.

DALE

I always do.

ED

Perhaps it will be another Supreme Court justice? Or a celebrity, or athlete?

DALE

Who knows where we'll find them?

The men laugh.

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

A PHARMACIST reaches up and collects a bottle of pills from a high shelf. We are on the shelf watching his hand search for the bottle.

PHARMACIST  
500mg of Acetaminophen.

He places the bottle on the counter.

His hands search along the isles of medicine and eventually find to a lower shelf.

PHARMACIST  
A bottle of Xylocaine.

His hands grab another small bottle from a wooden shelf.

PHARMACIST  
Hydrocortisone 1% cream.

He grabs another bottle.

PHARMACIST  
And a bottle of Hydreltrasol and  
another of Solu-MEDrol.

He sets the last two bottles on to the counter, next to a small register.

PHARMACIST  
Would you like a bag?

BETTY STEWART, 44, smirks at the Pharmacist's joke.

BETTY  
It gets funnier every time, Jeremy.

JEREMY laughs and bends down to grab a bag and begins putting all the different medications into it.

BETTY  
How're your kids? Any new photos?

Jeremy smiles like he was expecting the question. He pulls out his wallet, flips it open and lets a collection of photos stream out.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Dale lying on his stomach reading a magazine with his shirt off and small circular pads positioned about his lower back. This is the STEM TREATMENT, Dale takes no notice of the electrical pulses surging through his spine.

Dale is alone in the room until a door opens and DR. IAN GRIFFITHS enters. He is older, and has a wise calm about him that is the opposite of Dale.

IAN

Every time I see you you're always partially naked.

DALE

That's 'cause you always come home to your wife before I can get my pants back on.

IAN

I don't think you're in much of a position to take shots like that.

The men glare at each other.

DALE

Good to see you, Ian.

The tenseness dissipates into smiles and laughter as the old friends shake hands.

IAN

(sitting)

So how've you been, Dale? My nurses got that stem treatment hooked up correctly?

DALE

Surprisingly yes. Your bumbling, moronic interns applied the stem just right.

IAN

I remember you being one of my bumbling, moronic interns.

DALE

I keep saying your memory fades faster everyday.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

The last time I saw you, you weren't laying on one of my gurnies. Usually when you come to visit we meet in my office, but if you want to do something new-

DALE

It's my back Ian. I've had this pain for six weeks now, swelling and bloating too.

IAN

Menstrual cramps don't usually last six weeks.

DALE

I'm serious, Ian.

IAN

Let me take a look.

DALE

It's already been looked at. I spoke with some partners at my place and they suggested I get a second opinion.

IAN

Who's that?

DALE

This guy on 23rd.

IAN

So what does this make me? A third opinion? You need someone to actually look closely at whatever the problem is.

DALE

My problem is I'm running out of opinions.

IAN

Good. So let this doctor on 23rd take a closer look.

Ian begins removing the pads and feeling Dale's lower back.

IAN

I can feel exactly what you're talking about, right about the base

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IAN (cont'd)  
of the spine on your right side is  
some serious inflammation. It feels  
like it could be drained. Maybe you  
pinched a nerve, tore some  
tissue...

DALE  
Let me get up and see if it feels  
any better.

Dale rises gingerly, sliding his shirt back down on to his  
torso like it could burn him. He takes a few steps around  
the room like he is trying out a new pair of shoes.

IAN  
Well?

DALE  
I knew that if it was something  
minor the stem would treat it  
almost instantly. But it still  
hurts. God dammit!

IAN  
You'll be fine once you know what  
you're dealing with. An MRI should  
tell you.

DALE  
That's the problem.

INT. MRI ROOM - DAY

Dale is lying on a MRI table wearing a hospital gown. The  
table slowly moves him into the cylindrical machine.

TERRENCE (V.O.)  
I'm glad you finally came around,  
Dr. Sturven. Now I'll tell you what  
I'm going to do: I will wait to  
receive the MRI results, and after,  
if there is anything that we think  
needs further exploration, we will  
act accordingly. Maybe now you will  
trust my judgment. In the meantime  
you need to take care of yourself.  
I've prescribed an  
anti-inflammatory that you can pick  
up this afternoon...

INT. OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Terrence is sitting behind his desk with a prescription pad in his hand, he is waiting for Dale to take it.

TERRENCE

...at your local drug store. What's wrong? Am I not allowed to write you a prescription, too?

DALE

I'm capable of writing my own prescription.

TERRENCE

This one's from me. It's on the house. I encourage you to take it.

Terrence puts the prescription down and slides it across the desk to Dale who eyes it like it's a plate of testicles.

TERRENCE

I thought about what you said to me a few weeks ago. And I think I know exactly how you feel about me.

DALE

Don't flatter yourself. That was me being polite.

TERRENCE

No that was you being you. The media and the papers and all the people who've fallen for your little trick don't see the truth. But I do.

DALE

The truth?

TERRENCE

You're just a scared and lonely.

DALE

And you deduced this from what? One twenty minute meeting with me? What do you know?

TERRENCE

I know you insulted my education, my practice, and my pride in my own work place. You scrutinized how I run my business and insinuated that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE (cont'd)

I simply want to "play doctor." I suggested an MRI and you threw a tantrum like a child.

DALE

I've earned respect over the years, something you wouldn't know anything about, and it's a little insulting to get medical advice from someone like you.

TERRENCE

I don't care that you are who you are. Your notoriety and recognition don't mean anything to me. You're a patient, I'm a doctor, there is one way this works.

DALE

I don't come here for your opinions, I don't even want to come here for your practice in medicine. Just find out what the hell is wrong with my back and we can finish this. We can go our separate ways and I won't have to deal with your bullshit any longer.

Dale stands, moves to the door and exits, slamming the door hard behind him. Terrence grabs a pen and begins working on some papers in front of him.

TERRENCE

Prick.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dale is lying on the couch watching a Yankee game. He has a massive icepack wrapped around his mid section and as a result sits in an uncomfortable position. He pours himself a glass of orange juice and tenderly leans back.

YANKEE GAME

...and Texas has runners on first and third, one out, see if Pettite can roll a double play-

There is a KNOCK at the door.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Dmmit. One second!

Dale slowly leans forward like a turtle off his shell, sets down the orange juice and props himself up with a cane. Dale opens the door to see Stephen Graham standing there. He does not wait for Dale to speak, instead he walks past him and into Dale's apartment.

DALE

Stephen, you could have called.

STEPHEN

You wouldn't have answered.

Dale glances at his phone in the kitchen.

STEPHEN (CONT.)

Dale, if you didn't want to see my wife's friend you could have just said no.

DALE

I'm not ignoring her.

STEPHEN

What is it then? I told her to call you, and she said she did. Multiple times.

DALE

I don't know if it was multiple times-

STEPHEN

You think I'm lying to you? Or that she's lying to you? If you had wanted to say "no" then you could have! Who do you think you are keeping this woman in the dark.

DALE

Look it has nothing to do with this woman. It has to do with the fact that I'm retiring soon. She would be my last patient.

STEPHEN

What difference does it make?

DALE

I just think that whoever my last patient is, should be someone that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (cont'd)

I know I can truly help. Somebody I know I can cure.

STEPHEN

Someone you know you can help? What makes her different than anyone else you've treated?

DALE

If she has a fatal illness what can I do?

STEPHEN

You just want to know if she'll keep your record in tact.

DALE

I didn't say that.

STEPHEN

Then what is it, Dale? If you had any courage you wouldn't care what she had and you would cure her because it's your job. This is a person we are talking about, not something that will gain you more publicity.

A beat.

STEPHEN

You of all people are scared of this thing. Is that how you got this far? Is that what the last nine years have been about? Picking people just sick enough so that you could be the hero?

DALE

There were always risks.

Stephen moves in close to Dale.

STEPHEN

So you really do choose who lives and who dies don't you?

DALE

I didn't have a choice in who came to me.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

But you had a choice in dumping someone you didn't think you could help on to one of your partners. And then I come to you for help and you're scared.

STEPHEN (CONT.)

Betty Stewart is scared right now, Dale. And I thought you could help her be less scared, that you could put hope back in to her life. But I guess when the cameras stop taking your picture and the papers stop printing, you become this. You're more scared than she is.

Stephen takes a step back from Dale.

STEPHEN

It's up to you.

He turns and heads for the door.

DALE

I'll call her.

Stephen stops with his hand on the doorknob. He turns, tosses his jacket over the side of couch and strolls into the kitchen.

DALE

What are you doing?

STEPHEN

You want to call her? No better time than the present.

DALE

Right now?

STEPHEN

That's the "present," isn't it?

INT. STURVEN WAITING ROOM - DAY

Betty is writing on a clipboard in her lap. Three other people are in the waiting room with her, but they are sitting as far from her as they can manage. They do their best not to stare, but Betty knows, she is used to it.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY  
Wear sunscreen.

The woman sitting closest to her gets up and moves to another chair in the room. Betty chuckles to herself as Dale enters. He glances around the room until his gaze falls on Betty.

DALE  
Mrs. Stewart?

BETTY  
Ms. Stewart.

DALE  
Alright. Please come with me.

Dale turns and walks out. Betty gets up quickly to follow him. The other people in the waiting room unclench as Betty finally exits.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale is waiting for Betty at the entrance to an examination room.

DALE  
Ms. Stewart I want to take this opportunity-

BETTY  
I was in that waiting room for a very long time.

DALE  
Well...that is its purpose, and we intend to get the most out of it.

BETTY  
It's irresponsible.

DALE  
I had important business to see to. That's why we have a waiting room.

BETTY  
You told me 2:30 on the phone.

DALE  
I have other patients-

(CONTINUED)

BETTY  
No you don't.

DALE  
How do you know that?

BETTY  
Because I read the article in the  
Journal. I've read every line of  
ink written about over the last  
five years.

DALE  
Then you understand how busy I am.

BETTY  
You seem to be forgetting one of  
the questions you were asked during  
that interview.

DALE  
Yes?

BETTY  
About your "last patient."

DALE  
Which is you, yes. You're welcome.

Betty laughs.

BETTY  
Yes, thank you so much. I was  
hoping that my illness would be  
exploited for everyone to see.

DALE  
I didn't do that in an attempt to  
make headlines.

BETTY  
It didn't stop you from saying it.

DALE  
I was being honest. People will be  
interested. That doesn't change how  
I plan to cure you.

BETTY  
I don't want to become a celebrity.  
This is my life I'm fighting for.

A pause.

(CONTINUED)

Dale looks down at the clipboard in his hands and begins reading from it.

DALE

Betty Stewart. 44 years of age, family history of alcoholism and heart disease. And all you have recorded is an irregular heart beat on several occasions, but no persisting effects. Who in your family has had a heart disease?

BETTY

My father, my brother, and my great uncle. Oh, and my niece.

DALE

Any fatalities from it?

BETTY

No. But my brother did have a pacemaker installed.

DALE

One of the electrical ones?

BETTY

Dr. Sturven, my illness does not stem from my family's history of heart conditions. I have been diagnosed with a form of skin cancer.

DALE

We'll get to that. Have you ever been married?

BETTY

Yes.

DALE

Did you have any kids?

Betty hesitates.

DALE

Ms. Stewart, have you and your husband ever had any children?

BETTY

No we didn't.

Dale begins jotting notes down on the clipboard.

DALE

Aren't you the lucky one.

BETTY

Excuse me?

DALE

Kids are such a hassle. They whine, they moan, keep you up at night. They say it gets easier as kids get older but that's really just a way of saying, "I'm too tired to keep my eye on them all the time, now I let them do what they want." A hands-off approach becomes much more practical.

BETTY

You know this from experience?

DALE

Of course not. But I've heard it's awful. It's unwise to live your entire life for another person.

BETTY

How could you even begin to say having children is a burden if you've never had any?

DALE

When I was pediatrician a mother and father came to me with their four year old son with the highest fever I'd ever seen. We treated him, but they gave him over to us after a fatal infection had already taken a hold of his immune system. His parents were frantic, they were losing their minds. The mother stopped going to work to sit next to her son everyday. She lost thirty five pounds and the husband had to get a second job. They came to me every day begging, pleading for us to do more, to save their only son. The boy died after two months. A year later, one of our attorneys told me that the mother, after divorcing her husband, hung herself from a tree in a local park. (a beat) Could you imagine being so affected by something that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (cont'd)  
didn't even directly happen to you?  
It's dangerous to live that way.

BETTY  
It's called love.

DALE  
And it sure is wonderful isn't  
it? Where were we? Skin cancer?

Betty can barely believe what is happening.

DALE (CONT.)  
What medication are you on right  
now?

BETTY  
It's on the sheet.

Dale flips through some pages on the clipboard.

DALE  
Why are you using hydrocortisone?

BETTY  
It helps when I start itching.

DALE  
That's what's making you itch.  
You're skin is irritated all over,  
this is intended for isolated  
areas.

BETTY  
Then I won't get it anymore.

DALE  
Who told you that you should get  
hydrocortisone cream?

BETTY  
My last doctor.

DALE  
Well he was wrong.

BETTY  
She was a woman.

Dale laughs.

DALE

Alright well what I want to start with first is some blood tests to see if you'll be able to handle the treatment I have in mind.

BETTY

When?

DALE

Today.

Dale stands and opens the door. Two nurses walk into the room. One props up the examination table and the other begins preparing Betty.

DALE

(to nurse)

She's a paper cut away from becoming septic, take a fourth of a pint. That's all.

NURSE

Yes Dr. Sturven.

Dale exits.

INT. DOCTOR OFFICE CORRIDORS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Greg jogs to catch up with Dale and falls in step with him.

GREG

Dr. Sturven I just got a call from Dr. Tendleton's office. He needs to set up an appointment with you.

DALE

Did you schedule it?

GREG

Yes, this Friday at noon.

DALE

Change it to Wednesday. I want to get this over with.

Dale steps into the elevator.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

A small group of reporters wait outside the entrance. They swarm.

REPORTER 1

Dr. Sturven were you just meeting with your last patient? Who is it?

REPORTER 2

Is it a man or a woman?

REPORTER 1

What's wrong with him? Her!?

REPORTER 3

Are you going to be able to keep the streak going?

DALE

Guys please, I'm trying to go home.

REPORTER 2

You can answer a question can't you?

DALE

This is my job, why don't you let me do it.

REPORTER 1

And we're doing ours, so help us out.

Dale keeps walking and waves down a taxi. He opens the door and as he sits in the car:

DALE

It's a woman.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Dale turns on the hot water of his bath and the water fills up the tub.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale opens the refrigerator and pours himself a glass of orange juice which he downs like scotch. He pours himself another one and presses a button on his answering machine. He takes off his coat and walks with the orange juice back to the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

## ANSWERING MACHINE

Hey Dale, it's Mark. Just wanted to make sure you got our last package, ya know we haven't heard from you in a while.

Mark's message carries us through the next series of shots.

## INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A nurse rolls up Betty's sleeve and gently cleans a spot on her arm.

## ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

I know you probably didn't open it and that's ok, but calling once in a while would be nice. We'd love to hear from you. Wanted to let you know that things here are doing ok.

## INT. BATHROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale slides into the tub.

## ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

Will's going out for the varsity baseball team in the spring, and Cindy has this poetry reciting contest in January. Wish you'd been here for Thanksgiving, she read one of them to everyone... it was great.

## INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Betty lays her head back against the inclined seat and closes her eyes. The needle penetrates her arm, a trickle of blood squirts up the tube.

## ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

It was Shakespeare, it was really something.

## INT. BATHROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale carefully slides himself into the bath water leaning on his side to get his lower back fully submerged.

(CONTINUED)

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

Sarah keeps getting on me about how you weren't there but I know how busy you are. We would just really appreciate seeing or hearing from you. Bobby's getting worse, he barely recognizes his kids anymore, he had no clue who Mom was when I showed him her picture. But he still asks about you.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Betty is lying back with her eyes closed. A solid stream of blood is running up the tube, filling up a pouch.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

It's been pretty hard on everyone. It would mean a lot to Bobby if you could come and see him before he doesn't remember...

Mark breaks off.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale's eyes are closed as he sips his orange juice and listens.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

We're just thinking about you. I read the article about your retirement, maybe we'll get to see you a little more now. Take care.

Dale continues to lie still in the tub, taking it all in, enjoying the sips of juice.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A bright white screen is turned on and one by one translucent images of Dale's torso fill it.

DALE

That one's backwards.

TERRENCE

(ignoring that)

Dr. Sturven, I'm sure you can read these just fine, but I feel it's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE (cont'd)  
necessary that I explain to you  
what we found.

Dale sits back in his chair.

DALE  
Enlighten me.

TERRENCE  
We took several shots of your lower  
back from several different angles.  
Most of which revealed no alarming  
concerns. However, in the last two  
images here, you can see a small  
growth right around the 2nd and  
third lumbar vertebrae. Most likely  
because of the placement of it, the  
growth was difficult to see from  
other angles. As a result of its  
shape and position, as well as the  
symptoms you have described, I've  
concluded that it's a growing  
tumor.

Dale leans forward and grabs the image from the screen and  
scans it as if it were an alien artifact.

TERRENCE (CONT.)  
A tumor this size is not of mortal  
concern, however, it does appear to  
be growing, and therefore it could  
become malignant. I want to run  
tests to figure out where this  
tumor came from. We need to know if  
it sprouted from a particular  
organ, or if it's something  
directly stemming from the spine.

Dale sets the image back on the table.

TERRENCE (CONT.)  
We have to move fast on this.  
Tumors in this region of the body  
tend to augment their size rapidly  
after initial growth, especially if  
the tumor is cancerous. And we're  
already on the wrong side of this  
thing, so we need to do all we can  
to identify and treat this. I have  
a CT scan prepared for today. I'll  
go check on it and give you a  
moment alone.

Terrence leaves. Dale sits back in his chair.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Dale and Ian are at a small table next to a large glass window. People brush by leisurely, occasionally stopping to catch a glimpse of Dale through the window. A WAITRESS comes and places a small plate of pastries and two drinks in front of the men.

IAN

Are you sleeping any better?

DALE

No. I'm either in too much pain or afraid to close my eyes.

IAN

Why don't you get a prescription for a sedative?

DALE

I'm on enough medication.

IAN

So what's this doctor going to do?

DALE

He's actually doing exactly what I would do-

IAN

Are you starting to warm up to him?

DALE

I didn't say that.

IAN

You still feel so strongly about it.

DALE

Not as much as it might seem. I have bigger things to worry about now.

IAN

No point in losing your head before the CT scans come back.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Ok Ian, you want to have this tumor then?

IAN

Relax, I'm just saying-

The waitress comes over with two small cups of coffee.

WAITRESS

Would either of like cream, sugar, milk?

DALE

No thank you.

IAN

Do you have any Splenda?

WAITRESS

No, I'm sorry we don't. We stopped carrying Splenda.

IAN

(irritated)

Why?

WAITRESS

(shrugs)

Just what management says.

IAN

What do they say?

WAITRESS

(beat)

Management says it gives you cancer.

Ian flashes a look at Dale.

WAITRESS

I'll just bring you what we have.

IAN

Thank you.

The waitress leaves.

DALE

I'm getting that more and more.

(CONTINUED)

IAN  
What? Cancer?

Dale gives Ian a look.

IAN  
That's a coincidence.

DALE  
People think every little thing in  
the world gives you terminal  
disease.

IAN  
Maybe it does.

DALE  
I see it every day, "Don't eat  
tomatoes they increase your risk of  
Thyroid cancer," "Don't go to the  
beach the sun'll give you skin  
cancer-"

IAN  
That one's actually true-

DALE  
And the truest one of all, "don't  
be a doctor and live a healthy  
lifestyle because you can still get  
cancer from that."

IAN  
Dale we don't know that it's  
cancerous yet. You need to try to  
sleep, keep taking your  
medications, and get back to work.  
Get your mind off this for right  
now.

DALE  
Twenty four hours a day I have an  
agonizing pain in my lower back and  
you want me to get my mind off it?

IAN  
Is drowning in it going to make it  
any better?

DALE  
You don't understand, Ian, this  
isn't supposed to happen.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

You make it sound as if you could have prevented this tumor, Dale. This isn't the result of something you did or didn't do. You're a doctor. You of all people should understand that this does happen. It always has. So we've just been on the other side of it. But we never asked questions. So why are you driving yourself crazy searching for answers?

DALE

Because it never happens to me.

IAN

That doesn't change what it is.

DALE

What do you want me to do, Ian? I lie in bed sweating every night, taking medication for this thing, and I feel worse every day. This happens to other people, this doesn't happen to me.

IAN

It's happening to you right now. (beat) Look I'm not telling you to let it go. Something is wrong here, that much is certain. There's no magic shield against disease just because we're doctors. You're just like everyone else, Dale.

DALE

That's the problem. (a beat) The press would love to hear about this.

IAN

You aren't going to tell them are you?

DALE

I don't know. Not yet.

IAN

And what about your last patient?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Why does she need to know?

IAN

I just figured it might come up.

DALE

She's not a therapist.

IAN

Did I say she was?

DALE

You're telling me I should tell her I have a tumor? She's my patient, I don't need to pour my life on her. You want me to run and tell the waitress too?

IAN

You might as well she's already talking about cancer.

DALE

What, so you would tell your patient you have some kind of illness? Why do they care? Why should my patient care? Yeah, because that's what you want isn't it? A doctor to come to treat you and hey, guess what, he's sick too! Isn't that great? You can both be sick together.

IAN

I'm saying that I've found relationships with patients to be quite therapeutic.

DALE

I didn't realize you were so stressed out, Ian.

IAN

Have you ever gotten to know a patient, Dale?

DALE

It's not my job to be their buddy.

IAN

I'm not saying form an unbreakable bond, live together for years and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IAN (cont'd)  
move out to some nice little  
Caribbean island and remain pals  
forever. I mean learned who they  
are. Beyond their illness.

The waitress walks back to the table.

WAITRESS  
I was actually able to find  
Splenda, but don't tell the manager  
I gave it to you.

The waitress puts down a cup of different sugars and  
sweeteners. Ian grabs two Splenda packets, tosses one in  
front of Dale and opens the other one into his drink.

Dale snaps back to reality and looks down at his drink.  
Eying the Splenda packet suspiciously, he finally grabs it  
and tears the top off but hesitates over his drink. He  
abandons the packet and sips it.

IAN  
What are you afraid of?

Dale finishes his sip.

DALE  
That's awful.

Ian is laughing.

IAN  
Needs sugar.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dale's bed is empty, with sheets and blankets strewn about.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dale is lying on the couch in his living room. It is dark  
except for the light from the television. He sits with the  
phone in his hand and a blank stare on his face. He looks  
down at a small piece of paper that has his brother's phone  
number on it. He tosses the phone aside. He can not bring  
himself to call.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

It's 3 in the morning. Dale is pacing in his kitchen, gripping his back and breathing heavily. He is not a man who loses sleep often.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dale is sitting on the toilet, opens up the medicine cabinet and stuffs some of his medication into his mouth and gulps down sink water.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT- CONTINUOUS

Dale painfully lowers himself back into bed. He does not bother to pull the sheets back over himself. He lies awake, staring at the ceiling.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Dale is sitting behind his desk. Betty is sitting opposite him with her purse in her lap.

DALE

Your blood work came back. To be honest it looks like we won't be able to do nearly as much of the treatment as I would have liked. It would most likely affect your already deteriorating blood pressure, and would just be another blow to your immune system. So, we don't have many options.

Betty nods. She has heard this before.

DALE

But, if we start chemo now, there's a chance that you could regain enough strength for a special radiation treatment that has become popular in some circles. But because of your current strength, even chemotherapy is a little risky.

BETTY

What other choice do we have?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

We don't.

BETTY

How much time do I have?

DALE

What?

BETTY

Until you decide to pull me off chemo.

DALE

We haven't even started yet.

BETTY

Dr. Sturven, you are the third doctor to put me in chemotherapy. Each one tried it, waited, pulled me out and then gave me a countdown. If the same thing is going to happen here I'd rather we skip the bullshit and you just tell me how long I have.

DALE

Ms. Stewart, I'm sorry if you don't like what we're doing here, but if I tried these treatments without you being strong enough it would kill you.

BETTY

I'm dying anyway, what difference does it make?

DALE

There is still a chance your body can fight this infection.

BETTY

You just want to buy me some more time.

DALE

I...we can still...

BETTY

What difference does it make when I die? It makes no difference to me. I know it means a great deal to you.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Of course it does. You're my patient, I want to help you.

BETTY

Helping me is helping yourself.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dale is back in the Tendleton waiting room. He is sitting in a chair next to a table with a collection of magazines, TIME, Newsweek, The New Yorker, and the Wall Street Journal. On the cover of the Wall Street Journal is a superimposed group of people. One clearly an athlete, a scientist, et cetera, and in the middle of them is Dale, arms crossed with a slight smirk on his face. Underneath them on the front cover it reads: This Year's Prestigious People

The Intern is sitting at the front desk. She is holding a copy of the Journal.

INTERN

Is that you on the cover?

DALE

No.

INTERN

I think it is. It looks like you.

DALE

People can look like other people.

She flips through the magazine then grabs a clipboard from behind her and looks at the name.

INTERN

I knew it! It is you! Dale Sturven.

Dale has had it. He stands up and walks to the door leading to the examination rooms.

INTERN

Stop! You can't go back there yet!

Dale pulls open the door and marches down the hallway, peering in several rooms to find Terrence. He pushes open Terrence's office door at the end of the hallway. Terrence is talking on the phone while also writing something.

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE

(into phone)

-we can either reduce the dosage or consider moving to a different medication- (notices Dale) I'm sorry, we'll talk again soon.  
(hangs up)

DALE

This is why you have me fucking waiting?

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven, calm down.

DALE

It's difficult to stay calm when I'm sitting out there waiting for you to come tell me I have cancer. It feels worse knowing you don't have a fucking clue what you're doing, I'm as good as dead in your hands.

TERRENCE

Dr. Sturven sit down.

Dale grabs a chair and slings it across the room.

DALE

I'm telling you right now I have fucking had it with this. I'm not going to wait anymore. I'm not going to put up with your bullshit.

During Dale's rant Terrence stands and puts the over turned chair back in place.

TERRENCE

Please sit down.

DALE

Spare me the formality of sitting across from you and having you feed me bullshit. What'd the biopsy say?

TERRENCE

It's spinal cancer.

INT. TERRENCE OFFICE - LATER - DAY

Dale is calm. He and Terrence are sitting across from each other.

TERRENCE

I thought that it might be a primary spinal tumor, hoping that the tumor had only grown from the spinal tissue. But after taking the CT scans we now know that it is actually a secondary spinal tumor. It's metastasized-

DALE

To where?

TERRENCE

It seems it first sprouted within spinal membranes right inside the cord. Essentially we're faced with a tumor that will soon begin affecting your blood vessels and nerve roots.

DALE

It's probably best to go for surgery now. Limit nerve damage before it becomes inoperable.

TERRENCE

The only thing is a surgery on the spinal cord, especially in this case where we would have to literally sever portions of the spine, could leave you paralyzed or worse.

DALE

Not operating on it would leave me just as dead.

TERRENCE

What I want to do is start you on one cycle of stereotactic radio surgery.

DALE

That's for brain tumors.

TERRENCE

Not just brain tumors. I want to see how this treatment will affect

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TERRENCE (cont'd)  
your spinal tissue and hopefully  
we'll be able to stay away from  
chemotherapy.

Dale's silence startles Terrence.

TERRENCE  
So what do you think?

DALE  
You're the doctor.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY-

A train of railroad cars speeds down a track through  
farmland.

INT. PASSENGER TRAIN CAR - DAY

Dale is sitting alone in the car. He is reading a letter  
from his brother. This time it troubles him.

EXT. BOSTON TRAIN STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

The train pulls into an urban train station, easing to a  
halt. Dale steps off the train amidst the crowd of people.

EXT./INT. STEPHEN GRAHAM HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen Graham opens the front door to find Dale waiting to  
come inside.

STEPHEN  
Dale, great to see you again. Come  
on in. Claire!

CLAIRE (O.C.)  
I'm coming, one second.

STEPHEN  
Come in, come in! I'm glad you  
came. Hope the train wasn't too  
bad.

CLAIRE GRAHAM, 54, but undoubtedly gorgeous earlier in her  
life, enters before Dale can answer.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

Dale! It's so wonderful you came to see us! How have you been?

DALE

Just keepin' on.

INT. GRAHAM LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Claire, Stephen, and Dale are sitting around a fireplace, chatting and drinking, enjoying each others company.

STEPHEN

...and for whatever reason Claire and I take Maddie to this party at one of our friends house. She was probably, I don't know, five or six at the time. So we get there and we're saying hello to all these people, some of which I knew, most of which I didn't, and in the middle of this party there were these two people. One was a midget-

CLAIRE

He was a little person.

STEPHEN

Right, right, midget, small person. Little guy. We walk into the party and immediately Maddie picks out this guy and starts asking me, "Dad is that a little boy?" Of course I'm telling her, "No, that's a grown man, he's just not very tall" I didn't want to make a big deal of it. So this small person is among the party guests, and so is this wonderful woman I worked with a few years ago, except she has this huge birthmark from her neck up all the way across her face. So later I'm talking to her and she tells me that she's actually got a surgery scheduled to have it removed from her face by some facial reconstructive doctor in Virginia. So Claire and I are taking turns keeping an eye on Maddie, and at one point in the night I guess we just lost track...

(CONTINUED)

Dale is listening to the story but is not laughing. Although only partly into the anecdote, Claire and Stephen are cackling with laughter as it unfolds.

STEPHEN (CONT.)

...so I realize I haven't seen Maddie around in about a half hour, so I go and find Claire and I'm asking her where Maddie is. She doesn't know, so our first instinct is that someone took her, naturally as a parent you always assume your kid's been kidnapped, but we start looking around. Now they had one of those, uh, sliding door, balcony like things, and Claire and I see that the door is cracked open a little bit. First thought is she got out there and fell off the railing. So we bolt across this great party, Claire's drunk-

CLAIRE

I was not!

STEPHEN (CONT.)

...and we finally get to this door, slide it open all the way and we see Maddie out there...

He breaks off for a moment, it's too much.

STEPHEN

...and she's standing there talking with the midget! She's saying, "Are you a little boy or a grown man? Why are you so short? You look like a little boy." And this guy is just stunned.

Dale can't help but smirk a little, he might actually be enjoying himself.

STEPHEN

So we run up to her, grab her, apologize like crazy, telling him she's just a little kid, she doesn't understand, yada yada. So we bring her inside and go back to talk to this guy, and after we get back she's not in the place we left her! We start looking all over and then we see her across the party

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (cont'd)  
and she's talking to the woman with  
the birthmark across her face!

They are all laughing now.

STEPHEN  
We run over and hear her screaming,  
"What's that thing on your face?!  
You should wash that off! Did you  
know you have that stuff all over  
your face?!" The woman's handling  
it a lot worse than the other guy,  
she's standing there yelling back,  
"For your information I'm getting  
it removed!" Maddie couldn't  
believe it! "You're getting it  
REMOVED?! How? Oh my, it's so  
gross!" So we do the same thing.  
Grab Maddie, apologize, and got the  
hell out of there.

Everyone takes a moment to calm down and catch their breath.

STEPHEN (CONT.)  
And that was what? Fifteen? Sixteen  
years ago? We haven't been invited  
to one of their parties in a while.

DALE  
Can you blame them?

CLAIRE  
We went to one about ten years ago  
when Maddie was twelve. And even  
then as soon as she walked in Patty  
and Doug looked at her like they  
expected her to do something again.

DALE  
How is she doing by the way?

STEPHEN  
Well she and her boyfriend finally  
settled on an apartment in  
Morningside Heights.

DALE  
Good, good, that's a nice area.

CLAIRE  
My friend Betty showed us  
apartments all over the city.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE (cont'd)  
Speaking of which, how's she doing,  
Dale?

DALE  
I can't say.

CLAIRE  
You can't say because you don't  
know? Or because you're not  
allowed?

DALE  
A little bit of both.

CLAIRE  
But Dale she's my friend. A close  
friend. I suggested you to her in  
the first place, I'm not asking you  
about some random patient.

STEPHEN  
Claire, please.

DALE  
No, Stephen, she's right. Betty's  
getting weaker. Her skin infection  
is beginning to cause  
discolorations in her fingers and  
toes. I started her on chemotherapy  
last week. Hopefully we'll be able  
to try other methods.

CLAIRE  
Please Dale, do everything you can.  
She is a wonderful woman. Every  
doctor she's seen has told her she  
has three months to live, four  
months to live, maybe half a year.  
It's been terrible.

DALE  
They're not being rude, they're  
being honest.

CLAIRE  
All they've done is tell her she is  
going to die.

Dale begins to answer, but holds his tongue.

CLAIRE

Oh goodness, and after all the things she has been through. Nobody deserves this less.

DALE

Why, what happened?

CLAIRE

Well a few years ago she went through a bad divorce-

DALE

Is there such thing as a "good" divorce?

CLAIRE

Her husband beat her, wasted their money, and *he's* the one who left *her*. Can you believe that?

STEPHEN

Any kids?

CLAIRE

All Betty wanted was to be a mother, then her husband leaves her and she gets this terrible sickness.

STEPHEN

What do you think, Dale?

DALE

About what?

STEPHEN

Betty.

DALE

I don't know. I...how she responds to the chemo will tell us a lot.

STEPHEN

Are you alright?

DALE

Fine.

STEPHEN

You seem like something is really bothering you.

(CONTINUED)

Dale downs what is left in his glass and sets it on the coffee table.

DALE  
I've got cancer.

Stephen and Claire look at each other.

STEPHEN  
Christ, Dale. I don't know what to say.

DALE  
What can you say?

CLAIRE  
I'm so sorry.

DALE  
It's not your fault.

STEPHEN  
I shouldn't have brought it up.

DALE  
You didn't know.

STEPHEN  
How does it feel?

DALE  
Like how you'd imagine cancer feeling.

CLAIRE  
Is it bad?

DALE  
It could be. I don't know yet.

CLAIRE  
How did your family handle it?

DALE  
My family? I, I haven't told them.

CLAIRE  
Oh. Well how long have you known?

DALE  
About three weeks.

CLAIRE

And you haven't told your family?

DALE

It's difficult. I haven't exactly kept touch.

STEPHEN

How's Bobby doing?

DALE

From what I hear he's getting worse.

STEPHEN

I thought you didn't keep touch?

DALE

That hasn't stopped Mark from trying.

CLAIRE

Really, Dale, this is something they should know.

DALE

It's not that simple.

CLAIRE

Then you should tell Betty.

DALE

That's the second time I've heard that. Why?

CLAIRE

It would make her feel better.

DALE

I highly doubt that.

CLAIRE

I know how scared Betty is. You might not, but I do. All she wants is someone to relate to, someone to be there for her. You can do that. You can go beyond just being her doctor.

DALE

That's not my job.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

Then what is your job? Aren't you supposed to help her?

DALE

Not like that.

This strikes a cord with Claire.

CLAIRE

You might learn you're sick and want to shut yourself in from the world, Dale, but not everyone is like you. If you want to cure this woman you'll have to use more than medicine.

STEPHEN

Claire, calm down.

CLAIRE

Why are you so afraid of helping her? Is it because of what happened with you and Danielle?

STEPHEN

Claire! Stop it.

Claire lies back on the sofa silently, but she said what she wanted.

DALE

This has nothing to do with me and Danielle. (beat) But never, in the history of medicine, has someone been cured by kindness.

CLAIRE

Then you would let her die alone.

The remains of the logs in the fire slowly trickle as the embers burn out.

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY ROOM - DAY

A room with beds, patients, IVs, nurses, and all assortments of different medical equipment. Betty is lying reclined on a hospital bed with an IV in her arm. Her hair is thinning; clumps are beginning to fall out. Dale approaches Betty like you would a cobra. She is not exactly out of it, but she doesn't seem to be completely there either. Her gaze is away from Dale and out the window.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Come to join all the fun?

DALE

I just came to see how you were doing.

BETTY

Another ten minutes of chemo and I set the world record. I think I win a trophy and a lifetime supply of toothpaste.

They laugh.

BETTY (CONT.)

I've never won a trophy before though, so that'll be nice.

Dale takes a clipboard hanging off the end of the bed and checks it, then walks and adjusts something in Betty's IV.

DALE

In a perfect world I'd leave you ten minutes short.

BETTY

Ha, a perfect world. In a perfect world we'd never have met.

DALE

In a perfect world there'd be no disease, so I guess I'd be out of a job.

BETTY

And that'd mean no publicity, no newspaper or magazine articles, no famous Dr. Sturven.

DALE

This "world" doesn't seem so perfect anymore.

BETTY

At least the real world gives me something to do every Tuesday for three hours.

DALE

Hopefully it'll be over soon.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Being terminally ill changes your perception of statements like "it'll be over soon," so I hope that's not what you mean.

DALE

I mean the chemo.

BETTY

Good. So why have you come to see me today? I've been in here every Tuesday for almost two weeks.

Dale grabs a chair and slides it next to the bed.

DALE

Like I said, I just wanted to see how you're doing.

BETTY

Now I don't know what to think. You haven't seemed to enjoy treating me.

DALE

What gave you that idea?

BETTY

It's just how you are. But for all the articles I've read, all the interviews I've seen, I still don't know anything about you. I get the feeling nobody does.

DALE

Maybe that's the way I want it.

BETTY

That's the wrong way to live.

DALE

What's the right way to live?

BETTY

Live so you can let people in. So you can care about people and so they can care about you.

DALE

From what I've heard that didn't work out so well for you.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

I could say the same thing.

DALE

What's that mean?

BETTY

It's funny how talk shows, magazines, newspaper articles, and books don't have the same juicy information as some of your closest friends do.

DALE

Was it Claire?

BETTY

You think you were the only asking questions? I wanted to know more about you too.

DALE

So what'd you find out?

BETTY

Tell me about Danielle.

DALE

Why?

BETTY

I'm curious. I want to learn more about you.

DALE

Why do you want to do that?

BETTY

There's more to you than what the world sees.

DALE

What if there isn't?

BETTY

Then that would be very upsetting. But there is, I know it. What happened with you and Danielle?

DALE

My ex-wife ran off with my best friend. Or, I guess my wife ran off with my ex-best friend.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Was that it?

DALE

I just told you what happened,  
didn't I?

BETTY

Tell me about her. What was she  
like? Was she beautiful?

DALE

She was. Green eyes with long,  
brown, curly hair that ran down her  
back. But she was tiny; her hair  
was half as tall as she was. When  
she'd put her hair up I'd always  
tell her she looked like Cleopatra.

BETTY

I'm sure she enjoyed the  
comparison.

DALE

She used to always say "You don't  
even know what Cleopatra looks  
like. What if she was actually  
ugly?"

BETTY

And what would you say?

DALE

(laughing)

I used to tell her, "If Cleopatra  
was ugly then you look like the Liz  
Taylor Cleopatra."

BETTY

Did you love her?

DALE

Of course I loved her, she was my  
wife. What kind of question is  
that?

BETTY

Love is harder to come by then you  
might think. It's just nice to  
know. Then why did she leave you?

(CONTINUED)

DALE  
Combination of things.

BETTY  
Like what?

DALE  
Life mostly.

BETTY  
What else?

DALE  
What else is there?

BETTY  
There had to be something more.

DALE  
When I started doing all the talk shows and the interviews, she couldn't really handle it. She said I made her feel less important.

BETTY  
Did you?

DALE  
If I did I didn't mean to. I always loved her. It just wasn't enough.

BETTY  
I'm sorry, Dale.

DALE  
Don't be.

A beat.

BETTY  
You never had any children.

DALE  
Nope.

BETTY  
Oh Dr. Sturven. Why wouldn't you have children?

DALE  
We never really got around to it.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

But didn't you ever want a child? A small piece of you that you raised and taught and cared about. Didn't you ever want to be a parent?

DALE

What good would that have done? If we'd had a kid I'd be fighting and, most likely losing, a trial over the custody of our child. Who, for that matter, would grow up in a broken home, only seeing me on weekends, always resenting his parents for splitting up. He'd see relationships differently because if his own parents can't do it right, then how could he? (a beat) Danielle wanted to have children and I didn't. And I'm glad that I didn't.

Betty is hurt.

BETTY

If there was anything on this earth I could do, it would be to have a child of my own. To have something that I could care for, and that would care about me. To create someone whose happiness depended on me, someone that could always look to me for support...And I'll never have that.

A grave moment.

DALE

You would have been a great mother, Betty.

She catches her breath and calms herself, she's done this before.

BETTY

"What if's" will drive you crazy.

Dale smiles.

BETTY (CONT.)

If I'd had a boy, I would have named him Gavin. If it'd been a girl, I would have named her Gina.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BETTY (CONT.) (cont'd)  
We could have walked through  
Central Park, fed the ducks along  
the pond, had a picnic. Or gone ice  
skating, Gina could have been an  
ice skater like I was when I was  
younger. Maybe even go to a Yankee  
game, Gavin might have liked  
baseball.

Dale matches her grave stare.

BETTY (CONT.)  
They could have been anything, but  
they would have always been my  
children.

Betty laughs.

BETTY  
You must think I'm just a sob  
story. I do.

DALE  
I don't think that. I think you've  
been unlucky. But there was nothing  
you did to deserve any of this.

BETTY  
Maybe. I still have my family, or  
what's left of it. What about you?

DALE  
My family?

BETTY  
You have one don't you?

DALE  
Doesn't everyone?

BETTY  
You'd be surprised.

DALE  
I don't have much to say about my  
family.

BETTY  
Don't you see them?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

They live in Virginia . It's not the easiest trip to make; 95 is a nightmare.

BETTY

Doesn't seem like much of a reason not to see your family. Did something happen?

DALE

When I moved to New York, I stopped talking to my mother after she'd gotten remarried, we never saw eye to eye again. But that was years ago. I thought, I'm out on my own, I have my own career, I didn't need them anymore. I thought there was some level of inevitable separation between me and my family. They felt differently.

BETTY

What happened?

DALE

My mother's husband already had a son, Mark, and since my parents died he's been trying to keep the family together.

BETTY

What's wrong with that?

DALE

He's always tried to pass off that he grew up with me and my brother, Bobby. We were already adults when my mother got married so I never thought of him as a brother. It would have been one thing if we had all been younger.

BETTY

It sounds like all he wants is to be another brother to you.

DALE

I have one brother.

BETTY

Were you close with Bobby?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

We were best friends. Growing up we always did things together. Maybe that's why I resent Mark for acting like he was a part of all that. I don't know.

BETTY

How does Bobby feel about Mark?

Dale hesitates.

DALE

Ten years ago Bobby was diagnosed with dementia. I wanted to treat him and take care of him, to work with him, set up the necessary procedures. Mark wanted to take a whole different direction, he tried taking over the entire thing, saying this is what "mom" would have wanted. Bobby was my older brother; I'd grown up with him, lived with him, I'd been there the entire way. Then he gets sick and suddenly this stranger wants to decide what to do with my brother. Mark and I fought relentlessly, and Bobby suffered. So out of my anger I left.

BETTY

When was the last time you saw Bobby?

DALE

It's been eight years.

BETTY

Why so long?

DALE

The last time I saw him it had been a year after I'd first let Mark have his way, but I'd gone back to try and convince him we could do more. I wasn't prepared for how much worse Bobby had gotten in just a year. He'd already forgotten his entire career, he began to have trouble talking, and he'd forget when he'd eaten breakfast, stuff like that. I couldn't handle it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (cont'd)

Somehow through all of it, I blamed Bobby. But it was my fault. I left him there to get sicker.

BETTY

How bad is it now?

DALE

For a while he was relatively stable, but it's starting to get worse. He remembers me though, he asks about me.

BETTY

Dr. Sturven you should see him. You need to see him before-

DALE

Don't. (a beat) I can't. I've hurt him too much, whether he knows it or not.

BETTY

Dr. Sturven, trust me. I won't live long enough to right all the wrongs in my life. The worst thing you can do is live with regret, but I don't have a choice in changing any of it. You do. You have the ability to save yourself from regretting what you've done. It's an insult to me.

Dale stands up and walks out.

INT. STURVEN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale opens the hallway closet door and stands there staring. There are more boxes and mail from his family than before. The boxes are stacked waist high. He takes a package out and looks down at it. He is about to tear off the tape and break the seal of the box but tosses it back into the closet. He shuts the door.

INT. RADIATION ROOM - HOSPITAL - DAY

A medical room lined with all sorts of radiation equipment and an observation window. Terrence is on a computer on the other side of the window; he is controlling what is happening in the room. Dale is lying on a mechanical table as several different mechanisms converge on him doing tests.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale's arm is pricked with a needle and a healthy amount of blood is drawn out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dale sits on an examination table. Terrence holds up a light to his eyes checking dilation.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Terrence pulls Dale's shirt to look at his lower back. Dale is lying on his stomach. His back is bruised and puffy. As Terrence touches the area Dale cringes in pain.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Terrence gives Dale a shot a few inches to the right of the bruising area.

INT. TERRENCE'S OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Terrence and Dale examine more scans of Dale's spine, also analyzing arthroscopic photographs of the tumor. Dale's spine looks like an uncooked piece of steak with regions of white discoloration. They put down the scans and photographs and sit.

DALE

It's looking like we're heading in the wrong direction.

TERRENCE

It's not pretty, but it's not malignant. Even though it's gotten bigger, we won't know until the blood work comes back.

DALE

That means more time on this medication that's tearing me apart.

TERRENCE

What would you suggest?

Dale pauses for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

It's your call.

TERRENCE

You're still not taking to it very well?

DALE

This stuff would knock out an elephant. I'm exhausted all the time; I can barely keep food down. It's hard to think I haven't even started chemo yet.

TERRENCE

Hopefully you won't have to.

A beat.

DALE

You're doing a good job with all this. You've done everything the right way.

TERRENCE

(smiling)

Is that an apology?

DALE

I never said that.

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

Betty is combing over books in the aisle of a scarcely populated book store. She slides her fingers across the backs of a row of famous literature works, CATCHER IN THE RYE, OF HUMAN BONDAGE, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, and THE GREAT GATSBY. Her appearance has grown worse. It is almost grotesque.

Three obnoxious teenagers pass by the end of the aisle and spot Betty, an easy target. The tallest of the teenagers saunters down the aisle like he is an employee of the book store.

TEENAGER

Excuse me, may I help you?

BETTY

No thank you, I'm just looking.

(CONTINUED)

TEENAGER

No, I think I can help you. Let's see. I think you were looking for Frankenstein, right?

His friends, watching at the end of the aisle, struggle to contain their laughter.

TEENAGER

No wait. The Masque of the Red Death, by Poe.

The friends are on the floor.

TEENAGER

Love in the Time of Cholera, by Marquez? No, what am I thinking! You look like you are looking for Henry Miller's masterpiece Tropic of Cancer.

He spits the last word like venom. His friends can not control themselves. Betty is starting to catch on.

TEENAGER

Or if you're looking for non-fiction, there's a fascinating book on leper colonies I can find for you.

Betty is mortified. The teenager makes his way back to his friends, laughing. Betty is close to tears. She angrily takes off her sweater as she reddens and begins to sweat. She loses her balance and stumbles against the wall of books, several fall to the floor. She is drenched with sweat and begins to itch. Her purse slides off her shoulder and hits the ground, sending her pills every which way. She falls to the floor unconscious.

INT. HOSPITAL FOYER - AFTERNOON

Hospital entrance with waiting patients and families. It's busy. Dale runs in and is bombarded by several REPORTERS and PAPARAZZI alike.

REPORTER 1

Dr. Sturven are you here to see your last patient?

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Who is it?

(CONTINUED)

REPORTER 2

Have you decided to tell the public?

REPORTER 3

You seem to be in hurry, is something wrong with your patient?

PHOTOGRAPHER 2

Are you in danger of losing your last patient? Why wasn't your patient brought to your facility?

Dale brushes past them and comes to the check in counter. The NURSE behind the desk is confused at all the commotion and looks accusingly at Dale.

DALE

What floor is-

Dale turns and sees the press over his shoulder.

DALE

Lean in closer.

The nurse hesitantly moves in.

NURSE

What now?

DALE

Has a woman named Betty Stewart been admitted?

The nurse checks a computer and some papers.

NURSE

No Betty Stewart has been admitted. A woman of that name is in the ER, though.

Dale immediately heads for the emergency room, the press follows.

DALE

Why don't you all get out of here? This is none of the press's business.

REPORTER 1

You're business is our business.

(CONTINUED)

Dale knows he will not be able to get rid of them but tries to move faster down the hall. His back prevents him from moving fast enough.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Is the stress of your patient the reason for your noticeable weight loss?

REPORTER 2

How hard have you been working to treat this person?

Dale turns a corner at the end of the hallway and comes to

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Dale stands searching for a sight of Betty, but the emergency room beds are all taken and the entire wing is bustling with hurried nurses, cries, and shouts from doctors. Weaving in and out of people, Dale checks everywhere for Betty, constantly breaking apart the groups of nurses and doctors surrounding each bed. The press follows him closely, checking each bed just as Dale does. They all come to the last bed on the right; it is Betty's.

There are paramedics and nurses all working on Betty. Betty is lying on the bed, drenched in sweat, convulsing slightly. She looks terrible. Dale pushes some of them aside and stares down at Betty. The press try frantically to peer over the heads of the crowd to catch a glimpse of Dale's last patient. Some hospital personnel try to usher them away but they are not going anywhere. Two paramedics continue to work on Betty as several nurses assist.

DALE

What happened?! Nobody is paying attention. Dale turns to one of the paramedics.

DALE

What happened to her! I'm her doctor, tell me what happened.

No notice. Dale grabs a paramedic preparing to put an IV into Betty's arm and brings him in close.

DALE

What happened?

The paramedic shakes free and tries the IV again.

(CONTINUED)

PARAMEDIC

You'll have to wait a second, sir!

DALE

(grabbing paramedic)

Tell me what happened right now.

The press loves every second of this. They relentlessly snap pictures.

PARAMEDIC

Do you even know what you're doing right now?

DALE

Do you have any idea who I am? This is my patient, why the fuck wasn't she taken to my hospital? I'm her emergency contact.

PARAMEDIC

(disbelief)

What?

A mid-40s doctor comes to the bed and releases the paramedic from Dale's grasp. The paramedic goes back to tending Betty.

DOCTOR

This is your patient? What are you talking about?

DALE

Who are you?

DOCTOR

I'm the physician on call. Are you-?

DALE

What happened to her?

DOCTOR

She was found unconscious in a book store. So far all we know is she's isotonic and hypovolemic. We'll get her up to an IV and run some tests-

DALE

No you won't. As soon as she's hydrated I'm taking her out.

Dale turns and leans over Betty. She is barely conscious, but seems to notice that it's Dale. She mouths something he can not understand.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

I'm going to get you out of here,  
Betty.

He brushes the hair out of her face. The press swarm forward. Flash after flash is taken of Dale comforting Betty.

REPORTER 1

What's your name? What's her name?

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Betty! Betty what?

Dale tries to shield the press away from Betty. He looks down at her and sees her struggling deeply. She is too dehydrated to cry.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY - LATER

The doctor and Dale are talking on the other side of the door leading into the emergency wing. We can see Betty sleeping through the door window. Dale finishes explaining the situation to the doctor.

DOCTOR

I hope you'll forgive me. I was a  
little stunned when I saw you in  
there.

DALE

Don't worry about it.

DOCTOR

Is this the first time this has  
happened to her?

DALE

Since I've been treating her, yes.

DOCTOR

So then this is your last patient?

Dale stares at him.

DALE

Does that matter?

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, you're right. One  
professional to another, what's  
wrong with her?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

She has a rare skin disease. That's all I'm going to tell you.

DOCTOR

Fair enough.

DALE

If anybody asks you anything about what happened today-

DOCTOR

I won't talk to anybody. I wouldn't know what to say if I did.

DALE

I'm sorry I put you in a bind like that. I didn't know they'd be here.

DOCTOR

How did they know you'd be here?

DALE

My only guess is someone in your staff saw me as Betty's emergency contact and leaked it.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry-

DALE

Enough apologizing. It was a shitty day, no point in reliving it.

DOCTOR

She was dehydrated enough to kill a camel. Given her condition I'm surprised her vitals were as good as they were.

DALE

That isn't saying much. She's barely got any electrolytes to begin with.

DOCTOR

So what do you think caused it?

DALE

Maybe a blood clot, possibly a hematoma. One of her organs could have failed. Exhaustion, I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

DOCTOR  
Her body won't survive another  
cycle of chemotherapy.

DALE  
I'm not going to give up on her.

A beat.

DOCTOR  
So then where do you go from here?

Dale looks in at Betty.

INT. APARTMENT FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dale is walking down the apartment complex hallway. Not much time has passed, but he is noticeably weaker and looks very drawn out and he is limping. He is carrying a bag of groceries. Down the hallway in front of his door he sees a small package. This stops him dead in his tracks. He gets to his door, neglecting to even look at the box on the ground, grabs his keys and unlocks the door. The door closes, leaving the package outside his door.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Dale is reading in a chair in his living room. There is a KNOCK at the door.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dale's neighbor, an attractive 33 year old woman named SARAH, is standing in the threshold of Dale's apartment holding the package.

SARAH  
Hi Mr. Sturven. This was sitting  
outside your door.

DALE  
Is it addressed to me?

SARAH  
(checking)  
Yeah, it says right here.

DALE  
Are you sure?

(CONTINUED)

SARAH  
(confused)  
Yes. It says your name right here.  
It's from (checks again) Mark  
Sturven, Falls Church, Virginia.

Dale relents and takes the package.

DALE  
Thank you, Sarah.

He closes the door.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - NIGHT

The package is on the island in Dale's kitchen. He is watching it suspiciously, like he expects it to get up and do something. But he is really just trying to decide if he is ready.

Eventually he pulls open a drawer and takes out a knife. He cuts the pieces of tape and opens the cardboard flaps of the box. What he sees in the box makes him immediately close it and push it away. He grabs it and walks into the hallway and stuffs it into the closet with the rest of the packages.

INT. TERRENCE OFFICE - DAY

TERRENCE  
How do you feel?

DALE  
Worse than I look. But I guess it's  
better than looking worse than you  
feel.

Terrence manages a smile.

DALE  
I'm also starting to have a hard  
time walking. My left leg is  
completely stiff.

TERRENCE  
We expected that.

DALE  
Yeah, yeah, I remember. Just hurts  
to move is all. (a beat) How's the  
biopsy look?

Terrence's smile fades.

(CONTINUED)

## TERRENCE

The tumor's growing too fast for the medication and radiation treatments to take effect. Within the next year the tumor will kill off the function of your vital organs. At this point, with the size of the tumor, surgery would have a 3% chance of success...

Terrence's voice slowly starts to fade away. All we see is Dale's reaction, sentence by sentence, word by word.

## EXT. CENTRAL PARK - MID MORNING

Ian and Dale are walking through along a path through the park. Ian walks close to Dale, who needs help despite having a cane.

## IAN

Let's sit somewhere, come on.

## DALE

It hurts more to sit. I want to keep walking.

Painfully, Dale takes Ian's arm and they move through the park. Ian waits for Dale to speak. They walk in silence for a while. They come to a bench on a hill looking out over the Central Park Ice Rink.

## IAN

You might want to walk, but I need to sit.

The men sit. Ian still waits for Dale to make the first move. They sit in silence watching the skaters on the ice below, gliding and twirling, cascading over the white landscape. It has a simple beauty which strikes Dale.

## DALE

Have you ever gone ice skating?

## IAN

Yeah I have. When I was younger.

## DALE

I never did.

Ian tries to handle this carefully.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

I probably would have been bad at it.

IAN

Most people are.

DALE

But maybe I would have been good at it. Maybe it would have come naturally. Maybe I was supposed to be a hockey player, or an Olympic skater.

IAN

You wouldn't look good in tights.

DALE

And now it's too late.

IAN

Jesus, Dale-

DALE

Ian I'm not sitting here asking you to cry for me. I'm not going to curl up and feel sorry for myself. I've just never done this before. I've never thought like this.

IAN

No one is saying you have to do anything.

DALE

I don't have to "do anything" because I can't do anything.

IAN

Dale, it's a part of everyone's life.

DALE

Explain the last nine years...I was overdue.

IAN

Don't do this to yourself, Dale. Not now.

DALE

Every single patient, Ian. Every one.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

Dale-

DALE

What good did it do?

IAN

There over a hundred people still  
alive because of you.

DALE

Then why me?

IAN

Dale, you can't-

DALE

There has to be a balance, right?  
It all has to even out at some  
point.

IAN

Thoughts like that will kill you.

DALE

Why should I be afraid of what I'm  
thinking?

IAN

Because you're not thinking right.  
You're hurting yourself. Your  
career has nothing to do with this.  
This is bigger than you, Dale.

DALE

My career is why I feel this way.

IAN

What?

DALE

Death is a Wives' Tale.

IAN

What are you talking about?

DALE

My career.

IAN

What was that about Wives' Tales?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

My career has made death a Wives' Tale! A rumor. A spook story. A fact that applies to some but not others. People believe Wives' Tales if they happen to them, but if they don't, why should they believe in them? Death has seemed less real with every patient I've treated, while the world says this will kill you or that will kill you. But they all lived. There were wars and murders, natural disasters and freak accidents, but they all lived. So why would I think about it? Why wouldn't death become a myth? It was never real.

Ian does not speak.

DALE (CONT.)

And maybe that was childish to think. But it's hard for me to suddenly accept that it *is* real. I don't like how it's forced me to look back at the mistakes I've made, like a cruel joke. Because I'm sitting here now unsure of my entire life.

He hesitates.

DALE

How do you know you've lived well, Ian? How do you know you've done anything? Money? Success? Family? Or is it as simple as knowing whether or not you're happy?

IAN

The last part makes the most sense.

DALE

How do you know if you're happy?

Ian looks at Dale.

IAN

Are you?

EXT. HOSPITAL SIDEWALK - DAY

Photographers, reporters, and magazine writers alike hover around the hospital entrance.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A nurse is helping Betty off her bed and into a wheelchair. Dale enters to take her to his facility.

DALE

Ready to go? I have a car waiting outside.

BETTY

Why do you have a cane?

DALE

Tweaked something. You have everything?

The nurse hands Betty her purse and begins rolling her down the hallway. Dale hobbles along.

EXT. HOSPITAL SIDEWALK - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The doors to the hospital open as Dale and Betty emerge, Betty still in her wheelchair. Betty covers her face with her bag as the press swarms, shouting, yelling, and taking pictures. Dale opens the door to the car and helps Betty get in.

INT. CAR - DAY

They settle in as the car leaves the curb, the press still clamoring to snap pictures. Betty stares at Dale.

BETTY

I'm sorry about what happened last week. I shouldn't have told you how to live your life, it wasn't right.

Dale looks out the window.

DALE

I didn't walk out because I thought you were wrong.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Then go see Bobby. You know he wants to see you.

DALE

But what if he-

He breaks off. He can't bring himself to say it.

BETTY

He will remember you, Dale.

DALE

Then he'll remember that I left him.

EXT. STURVEN HEALTH - DAY

One of Dale's employees ushers Betty out of the car and into the wheelchair.

INT. STURVEN HEALTH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

They enter the bottom floor to Dale's building, cross the foyer and enter the elevator.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MID AFTERNOON - LATER

Betty is situated in a large, and very lavish, hospital room. It's a cross between the Ritz and Cedar Sinai. She has the room all to herself. She rests in a bed next to the window. She enjoys it, despite having cords, IV's, and monitors beeping all around her. Dale is checking on her.

BETTY

What's the number for room service?

DALE

9-1-1.

Betty laughs.

DALE

Private practice has its perks. We serve only the wealthy and luxurious.

BETTY

I hope in my case you'll make an exception.

(CONTINUED)

Dale walks over and fiddles with a beeping monitor.

BETTY

What happened to me the other day?

DALE

That's what I'm going to find out.  
Did you feel anything in  
particular?

BETTY

I suddenly felt extremely hot,  
started sweating, spun around a few  
times, I think, knocked into some  
bookshelves and then hit the floor.

DALE

I'm going to run some tests.

BETTY

Wonderful. (a beat) Maybe you  
should run some on yourself. You  
look terrible.

DALE

Thanks, Betty, and you look great.

BETTY

(re: Dale's appearance)  
Is this the toll I'm taking on you?

DALE

You've got nothing to do with it.

BETTY

What is it then?

DALE

I think I'm getting the flu.

BETTY

Fine don't tell me. Tell me  
something else.

DALE

What do you want to hear?

BETTY

Tell me a story about you and  
Bobby.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

That's tough. I have a favorite story, but it's strange.

BETTY

Oh! Is it embarrassing? I'd love to hear it. Then I'll sell it to the Wall Street Journal, "The Real Dale Sturven"

DALE

No it's strange because I don't remember it happening. I've only heard it from my parents and Bobby.

BETTY

So you were young.

DALE

When I was first born, Bobby hated me. He'd been the only child in the family for a while and suddenly all the attention went elsewhere. Not unusual for young children to feel. (laughing) The thing is Bobby was never usual. So, unbeknownst to me my older brother hated me throughout my first few years. He'd throw things at me and do things to make me cry and then complain about how loud I was, about how my parents should get rid of me. Fortunately for me the word of a five year old doesn't carry much weight. Anyway, as the story goes, I had just started walking, been on my feet for maybe two weeks, but it was a work in progress. One day my parents were somewhere in our house, which was unusual because one of them had to be near me to make sure Bobby didn't kill me in my sleep-

BETTY

This isn't the story I expected.

DALE (CONT.)

So we're all in the house, and my parents are upstairs. Suddenly they start to hear Bobby. He's going, "Come on Dale. You can do it. Keep walking Dale! Come on, come on."

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (CONT.) (cont'd)  
They're thinking, "Bless his heart he's helping Dale walk." So instead of running down there, they stand at the top of the steps and listen to him. He kept encouraging me, "Keep going, you got it! Keep going Dale!" My parents are stunned that Bobby suddenly likes me. He went from hating me to teaching me to walk. Eventually they decide to come downstairs to see their two loving sons. And there I am, a tiny little toddler, walking and stumbling, and there's Bobby a few feet away, holding open the front door trying to drive me out yelling, "Come on Dale! You're so close! A few more steps!"

This knocks Dale out.

DALE (CONT.)  
Needless to say he wasn't able to get rid of me.

Suddenly Dale catches what he just said.

DALE  
At least, he wasn't rid of me then.

BETTY  
Don't say it like that.

DALE  
It's true.

BETTY  
Then if it bothers you so much why don't you go see him!? Some day, God forbid that it's soon, one of you or both of you will be gone, and do you want to look back and say you didn't see him? Look at me, Dale! I'm barely hanging on but at least I know that if it happens I won't be lying here telling you how much I regret not setting things straight.

## INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dale is standing in front of the hallway closet again. It is different this time. He is not afraid of what he might find on the other side, more curious, but nervous. He pulls open the door and gently sits on the floor, resting his cane against the wall. Sliding a pile of ten boxes out of the closet, he puts them in a circle around him, like he is being surrounded by his family once again.

He picks a box from the bottom, dusts it off, and slips the blade of a knife under the tape. He opens the box to find a framed PHOTOGRAPH of Dale and his mother. In the picture is a much younger Dale, not particularly handsome but has a charming smile. Both Dale and his mother are beaming.

Dale carefully rests the picture upright next to him. He opens a second box and pulls out a white envelope. He opens the envelope and finds it is filled with dozens of pictures from a disposable camera. He flips through them:

- (1) Mark's daughter reciting poetry at Thanksgiving.
- (2) Mark's son running the bases and hitting and throwing at his baseball game.
- (3) Mark and his wife smiling.
- (4) Mark and Bobby decked out in Redskins gear, watching the football game.
- (5) Bobby and their mother talking.

Part of Dale wants to stop, but he continues. In another box he finds drawings of doctors and ambulances done by Mark's daughter and some of the other kids in the family. There are some assorted gifts and more pictures, cards, postcards, a few books; years of attempted communication packed into boxes.

They slowly begin to take their toll on Dale.

## INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT - LATER

Dale is still sitting outside the closet. He now is surrounded by pictures and all the items in the boxes. There is one left in the closet. He leans in and pulls it out. This one is dustier than the rest. He checks the date on it and sees that it is the oldest in the bunch: sent 8 years ago.

(CONTINUED)

He cuts open the package and takes out another framed picture. It is a photograph of Dale and Bobby, years ago, arms around each other in an aggressive bear hug, laughing hysterically. Dale numbly opens the card attached. He reads it slowly, painfully. We do not see what Bobby has written, but Dale's reaction tells us a lot.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

Dale takes a handful of pills and looks out the window.

EXT. UNION STATION, WASHINGTON DC - DAY - LATER

Dale hails a cab and gets in.

CABBY

Where to?

DALE

Falls Church.

EXT. GEORGETOWN/ROSSLYN/DC - DAY

The cab speeds along route-66 and over Key Bridge leading out of Georgetown.

EXT. ROUTE-66 - DAY

We pass a large blue sign along the side of the highway reading: *Virginia is for Lovers!*

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

The car turns onto a quaint, upper middle class street.

INT. CAB - DAY

CABBY

What's the address number?

DALE

211.

Dale looks out the window at the green yards and well kept gardens, until they come to a house with children playing in the front yard. They are running around and riding bikes. The adults are sitting in lawn chairs at the far end of the driveway.

(CONTINUED)

DALE  
This is it.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

MARK STURVEN, 44, a short, sinewy man, is helping his youngest daughter ride her bike without training wheels. He spots Dale getting out of the cab at the end of his driveway. He unknowingly lets go of his daughter's bike seat. To her surprise she rides perfectly.

LITTLE GIRL  
Dad look!

Mark is stunned at the state Dale is in.

MARK  
Oh my god. Lauren come out here please.

Dale hobbles up the driveway with a small bag. Mark walks up to meet Dale.

MARK  
Dale, it's so good to see you. Let me take that.

DALE  
Thank you.

Mark takes Dale's bag.

MARK  
How are you doing? Lauren-

Mark's wife, LAUREN, 39, tall and shockingly beautiful, steps outside. Her jaw drops.

LAUREN  
Dale!

MARK  
Let's go inside. Uncle Charles is here, I'm sure he'd love to see you.

DALE  
Is Bobby here?

MARK  
He's napping right now. (a beat)  
Hey Molly! I'm going to go inside  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARK (cont'd)  
with Dale and Mommy, don't ride  
near the street.

MOLLY  
Is that Uncle Dale?

MARK  
Yes.

MOLLY  
What's he doing here?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Mark and Dale walk in the side door of the house. It is a small kitchen with a table in the corner and wood paneled counter appliances and cabinets. UNCLE CHARLES, 82, a stocky old man, is sitting at the dinner table, talking to some other family members.

None of them can believe Dale is there. Dale walks in and crosses the room awkwardly and sits at the table opposite Uncle Charles. The whole room is silent, staring at Dale, waiting for him to do something.

Lauren looks concernedly at Mark and then Dale.

DALE  
The girls have gotten big.

LAUREN  
You've never even seen them before.

DALE  
I'm sorry.

LAUREN  
None of us have seen you for years.

DALE  
I'm sorry.

LAUREN  
What are you doing here?

MARK  
Lauren, he's our family-

LAUREN  
So because he's here now we're  
supposed to forget that he hasn't  
been here for almost a decade?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

I don't expect any of you to forgive me. I don't know if I'll ever forgive myself.

LAUREN

You abandoned your entire family. What would drive you to come back?

Despite trying to tame his wife, Mark looks to Dale gravely. This is the million dollar question.

DALE

I'm dying.

If the mood in the room wasn't tense before, it certainly is now.

DALE

If it wasn't apparent enough from my appearance, I'm sick. It's been a tough few months. I came here today to apologize...for everything. When I left here I was angry, and I promised myself I'd never come back. Somewhere along the way that didn't seem as important anymore. I should have been here, and not just for Bobby.

MARK

Bobby missed you a lot.

DALE

I know he did. How is he doing?

Mark looks at Uncle Charles, then at Lauren.

MARK

Not good, Dale. He's really just...he isn't there anymore.

DALE

And he still asks about me.

Mark frowns.

MARK

Like I said he's napping right now, he usually naps this time of day.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

What does he do everyday?

MARK

We usually keep him here. A few months ago he worked with Ms. Enright at Potomac Overlook. I think he liked being outside. Then after a while he didn't know who Ms. Enright was so he never went back.

UNCLE CHARLES

He has flashes of remembering. Small windows of clarity. But most of the time he struggles.

MARK

One day he'll know someone or remember something, and the next it's gone. This makes it tough to know when he really doesn't remember something.

DALE

How long has he been asleep?

MARK

Maybe an hour.

DALE

I'd like to go up and see him.

Mark looks around the room again.

MARK

Go.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Dale hikes up the final steps and turns to walk down the hall. He stops outside of a closed door. After a breath he turns the doorknob.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

BOBBY STURVEN is not much older than Dale but he looks like it. Bobby is facing away from Dale, drowning a potted plant on the windowsill.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Bobby.

Bobby turns around. There is no acknowledgment of Dale in his face. His expression is calm but attentive, wondering what this stranger could want.

DALE

My name is Dale.

The brothers shake hands.

BOBBY

(happily)

It's nice to meet you, Dale. I'm Bobby.

DALE

Nice to meet you.

BOBBY

Please sit down.

Dale sits in a chair next to the door. Bobby sits on the edge of the bed and tends to his plant.

DALE

How are you, Bobby?

BOBBY

I'm very well, Dale. How are you?

DALE

I'm alright.

BOBBY

Where are you from, Dale?

DALE

I'm from here.

BOBBY

Oh from-

Bobby stops abruptly.

BOBBY

It sure is beautiful here.

DALE

Yes it is.

(CONTINUED)

BOBBY

Do you like my flower?

A closer look reveals that Bobby's flower is dead, and has been for some time.

DALE

(smiling)

It's very nice. What kind is it?

Bobby looks down at it. He doesn't know.

BOBBY

A Dogwood.

Bobby takes a huge whiff of the "Dogwood."

BOBBY

Would you like to smell it?

DALE

Sure.

Bobby hands the plant to Dale. The wilted and rotting plant is downright unpleasant.

DALE

It's great.

Bobby takes the plant and sets it back in the sunlight on the windowsill. Dale stares at him, shocked at the shell that used to be his brother. Bobby returns his stare with a pleasant smile.

DALE

So what have you been up to, Bobby?  
Have any kids?

BOBBY

I wish, but no. No children.

Dale notices a picture on the book shelf of Bobby's three kids.

DALE

You married?

BOBBY

Me? No. No, no, no.

Dale glances down at the ring on Bobby's finger.

(CONTINUED)

DALE  
Have much family?

Bobby tries to remember.

DALE  
Have any sisters?

Bobby shakes his head, still trying to remember a name, or a face.

DALE  
(painfully)  
Any brothers?

Bobby looks into Dale's eyes.

After a long silence:

BOBBY  
No.

This hits Dale like a bullet.

BOBBY (CONT.)  
Do you have any brothers, Dale?

DALE  
I do.

BOBBY  
What are their names?

Dale stares at Bobby. He stands and looks out the window. After a while he turns.

DALE  
I wish I had been a better brother,  
Bobby. I shouldn't have left you.  
I'm so sorry, Bobby. I'm sorry for  
everything.

Bobby stands to console Dale.

BOBBY  
(unknowingly)  
It's ok, Dale.

Dale hugs Bobby. Bobby gingerly returns the embrace.

DALE  
(into Bobby's ear)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DALE (cont'd)  
I'm sorry I wasn't there for you,  
Bobby. You were always a great  
brother.

Bobby's grip tightens.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY - LATER

Dale and Mark sit in lawn chairs watching the kids play.

MARK  
I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I  
thought maybe once he saw you in  
person he would remember.

DALE  
I should have known he wouldn't  
recognize me. It was wishful  
thinking.

MARK  
I'm glad you came, Dale.

Dale nods.

DALE  
Bobby had this flower with him.  
Actually I don't know if I can even  
call it a flower. Have you seen it?

MARK  
Yeah, I've seen it.

DALE  
What does he call it?

MARK  
He thinks it's a Dogwood.

DALE  
Why is he still trying to take care  
of it? Doesn't he see that it's  
dead?

MARK  
He doesn't think it's dead.

DALE  
But he has to see that-

(CONTINUED)

MARK

He doesn't see what you and I see.  
We see something lost, gone,  
forgotten. But to him it still has  
life, it still matters.

Dale turns back toward the playing children.

MARK (CONT.)

I know it makes him happy. And I  
know you coming here made him  
happy.

DALE

I'm just trying to tie up some  
loose ends before things get worse.

MARK

Will it get worse?

DALE

It's not getting any better. (beat)  
I'm not going to kid myself or  
anyone else about what's happening.  
I don't mean to be so blunt, but  
I'm being realistic, not a  
pessimist.

MARK

What's the difference?

DALE

Either way, I think I'm starting to  
come to terms with it all.

MARK

How do you do that?

DALE

(hesitates)

At some point you just accept that  
it's the next step.

MARK

Towards what?

DALE

I guess I'll find out.

INT. TERRENCE OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Terrence is frowning over scans of Dale's tumor. He checks other work and samples of Dale's file, none of it promising. He wants to figure something out.

DALE (V.O.)

I'd like to believe I'm headed  
somewhere nice, somewhere where  
there's no doubt, and no worry. But  
I don't know for sure.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY- CONTINUOUS

Betty sleeping. She is still hooked up to wires and cords and an IV.

DALE (V.O.)

At least I do know I won't be going  
with regrets, and despite the  
things I have or haven't done, the  
people I've helped or hurt, I've  
found peace with myself.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Bobby is tending to his plant as if it were a baby. Checking it, gazing at it, and taking care of it.

DALE (V.O.)

Even though it's easy to forget  
what's truly important, eventually  
you realize embracing the moment is  
the only way to create a past worth  
remembering.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

DALE

Even if you only have those  
memories for a short while.

The men sit in silence.

DALE

I should go.

Dale stands and Mark follows.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

It was good to see you, Mark.

MARK

You too, Dale.

INT. TERRENCE OFFICE - DAY - MONTAGE

A montage with no sound of Terrence explaining recent developments in Dale's case. Terrence shows Dale scans and information from biopsies, Dale nods in understanding.

INT. TERRENCE OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Terrence is at the end of his long explanation.

TERRENCE

Given that the tumor is not responding to any treatment, chemotherapy would only serve to make your body weaker, which is why I want to pull you off chemo.

DALE

That's it then.

TERRENCE

There's nothing else I can do. I want to give you as much time as possible. The tumor is out of control. I've taken measures to see that you're taken care of.

DALE

I appreciate it.

TERRENCE

Everything will be transferred to your facility so you can do it all on your turf.

DALE

Good.

A beat.

TERRENCE

You were right about me. I wasn't good enough.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

No, you were more than good enough.  
This is part of what we do.

TERRENCE

Why now? Why all of this?

DALE

In a stranger way, those questions  
become a lot less troublesome when  
you realize you'll never find an  
answer.

TERRENCE

(after a moment)  
Either way, it's over.

DALE

No. This is just the beginning

Terrence tries to make sense of it all.

DALE (CONT.)

There's one more thing I need to  
talk to you about.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Betty is in chemo, reclined in a largely cushioned chair,  
receiving an injection. She is weaker than ever. Dale enters  
and pulls out one of the large chairs and sits next to  
Betty.

DALE

Mind if I join you?

BETTY

Can't see why you'd want to.

DALE

Because I need to tell you  
something important.

BETTY

Alright.

DALE

I'm sick. Sicker than you.

BETTY

Why didn't you tell me?

(CONTINUED)

DALE

What good would that have done?

BETTY

I don't know.

DALE

I wanted to tell you now because soon you're going to be turned over to another doctor.

BETTY

What about you?

DALE

I've got other plans.

Nurses enter and begin making up the hospital bed next to Betty's. One of them helps Dale out of his chair and into the bed.

DALE (CONT.)

I'm treating myself now.

Another nurse walks into the room and places a vase of Dogwood flowers on the table between the two beds.

DALE

Even if it's a lost cause.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Dale and Betty lie in their beds; Dale has his eyes closed and appears to be in pain.

BETTY

(casual)

...but after that my brother never stopped talking about it- Are you ok?

DALE

Back's acting up.

BETTY

Why don't you call-

DALE

Tell me something to take my mind off it.

Betty gingerly lifts the covers of her bed and pulls a chair up next to Dale's.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Seems like our roles have changed.

DALE

Seems like it.

Betty takes Dale's hand in hers.

BETTY

What do you want to hear?

DALE

Tell me more about your kids. Tell me about your son the baseball player.

Betty closes her eyes, as if to ascertain the memory of her the son she never had.

BETTY

Gavin is left handed. He's a pitcher. He has a good curveball, I keep telling him he should wait until he's older to throw them, but he won't listen, he likes striking out the other boys too much. He also likes to hit, but he rights handed, not left handed. Other people think it's strange, but it just makes him more different. He has a big leg kick and swings so hard it spins him around. When he hits the ball it goes so high none of the other children move, all they do is turn and watch sail over the fence. James runs around the bases, jumping and shouting, and I'm in the stands jumping and shouting, cheering for him. His sister is there too. She's jumping up and down with me. We scream his name and he searches for us among the faces in the stands. He waves to us as he jumps onto home plate. Then we laugh because it's only the first inning. Dale is losing touch with reality more and more. He is dying.

DALE

(weakly)

I wish I could meet him.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

And you're at the game too.

DALE

Am I?

BETTY

Yes. And after the game you meet Gavin and Gina. They're shy at first, because they've seen your picture everywhere, seen you on the talk shows, and heard your name in the newspaper, but then they open up. They ask you what it's like being a doctor and you tell them it is fun, but hard work. We go to dinner, and all of your patients over the last nine years are there. It's a party for you-

Dale grips her hand tighter.

BETTY (CONT.)

Everyone is there. They all smile and laugh and thank you for everything you've done. And Bobby is there. He is the happiest one to see you. He smiles and hugs you, telling stories of when you two were boys. You laugh because you see all these people you've helped, and they're all here. For you. It's amazing. People start bringing you gifts. All different kinds. "Thank you"s that people have no other way to say. They bring you flowers, and set them all around the tables, filling up the room. Daffodils, Daisies, Tulips, Roses, Carnations-

DALE

(faintly)

Dogwoods...

BETTY

And Dogwoods too. They're all there. The flowers and the people, and they're all so happy to see you. They're the people who love you.

(CONTINUED)

DALE  
The people I love...

Dale's voice trails off and he is still.

Betty takes her hand away from Dale's. Nurses enter the room and the sound dissipates. She points to Dale and the nurses quickly tend to him as she gets back in bed with a slight smile on her face.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Betty is alone in the room. Dale's bed is empty, re-made, and tidy. Betty is standing looking out the window, fingering the petals of the Dogwood on the windowsill.

After a while a man walks into the room.

MAN  
Excuse me?

Betty doesn't turn to see who it is.

MAN  
Are you Betty Stewart?

BETTY  
(without turning)  
Yes.

The man stops approaching her. He understands her tone.

MAN  
I'm...I'm your new doctor.

Betty turns to find Terrence standing there.

TERRENCE  
It's nice to meet you, Mrs.  
Stewart.

BETTY  
(mutters)  
Ms. Stewart.

Terrence nods with a smile that soon fades.

TERRENCE  
Are you alright?

Betty wipes her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

BETTY

Yes, I'm ok. I lost a friend last  
night.

Terrence looks at her deeply. He can see the pain in her  
face, the pain that exists only when a person loses someone  
they love.

TERRENCE

So did I.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS.

END.