Dogwood Dying

Written by

Max Kaplow
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.
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)
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.
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.
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?

(CONTINUED)
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 then 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)
CONTINUED: 12.

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)
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.
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, stabling 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 Schalia 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 Schalia, 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 lead 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.
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 Hydeltrasol 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 funnieres 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 gernies. 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
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
D'mmit. 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)
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)
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)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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 – CONTINOUS

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 - CONTINOUS

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.
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?
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
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.
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.
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)
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 one Maddie, and at one point in the night I guess we just lost track...
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)
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?

CLAIREDALE
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.

CLAIREDALE
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.
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.
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.
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?
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?
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?
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.
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.
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)
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.
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)
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.

Needless to say he wasn’t able to get rid of me.

Suddenly Dale catches what he just said.

At least, he wasn’t rid of me then.

Don’t say it like that.

It’s true.

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)
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, 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.
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.
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.

(continuing)
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.
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, fingerling 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.