

NEW BETTER MAN

Written by

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EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

DALLAS BERMAN (50) slumps in a chair in front of the doctor's desk.

DOCTOR FERBER
I'm sorry, Dallas. It's not good
news. You see here?

Everything goes quiet as Dallas stares at X-rays of his chest. The doctor points to several dark masses scattered across his lungs.

His expression is of mute acceptance.

DOCTOR FERBER (CONT'D)
Dallas? Dallas?

DALLAS
I kind of blanked out there.

DOCTOR FERBER
Understandable. You know, we have a
great counselor here. She can
really help you plan out the next
few weeks.

DALLAS
Thanks, doc, but I have a plan.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DALLAS BERMAN'S APT

He sits in a lounge chair and stares at a print of a Diane Arbus self-portrait.

An old jazz cover of a Beatle's tune plays from a turntable in Dallas' modest living room.

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Step One.

Dallas sits at a desktop computer and fills out a boiler-plate will.

He types "Stephanie Smith-Berman" into the space for a single beneficiary.

Below, in a box marked "Special Items" he lists: record collection, Playboy magazines, Rolex watch, signed copy of Double Fantasy.

He hits the "Print" button and the document spits out from his printer.

DALLAS (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
Step Two.

He has switched from the will to a Word document and begins typing a letter.

DALLAS (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
My daughter, I know we haven't
spoken to each other in...

He pauses, then remembers.

DALLAS (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
...thirty years. Has it really been
that long? I guess there's no point
in a long apology for the wasted
moments. I missed so many birthdays
and holidays, I doubt my grandkids
even know about me. Or maybe I
became a boogie man, a cautionary
tale. That's fine. At least I was
of some use to you. Shit, this all
sounds so pathetic. Don't feel
sorry for me. I've paid for my
sins. Just know, in the end, I
tried to do something good. Maybe
selfish... definitely selfish. But
good, I think. You'll hear all
about it before you find this
letter and the attached will. Sell
everything else, but keep the
watch, and always remember the
importance of time. I always loved
you. Your old man, Dallas.

He hits print and the letter spits out.

Dallas gather the papers, stacks them, slides a paperclip over the top and sets it neatly on the desk.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Dallas, clad in a trench coat, stands in the middle of the lobby.

SUPER: Buffalo, NY

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Step Three.

He whips open the trench coat and it falls to the ground to reveal him completely naked.

He begins SCREAMING, then urinates on the terrazzo flooring.

He bears down to take a massive shit but can't get anything going.

DALLAS
(sotto)
Should of had a high fiber cereal
instead of that danish.

He squats to make another attempt and is tackled by two security guards.

INT. COURTROOM

Dallas stands before a judge.

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Well, that didn't take long. And
just as I planned, they sent me
exactly where I wanted to go.

The judge slams his gavel down.

Dallas is led away in a jumpsuit and cuffs.

INT. PRISON BUS - DAY

Dallas sits alone, a guard in the seat behind.

The rural countryside of upstate New York streaks by.

The bus pulls up a service road and up to the gates of "Wende Correctional Facility".

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Step Four.

GUARD
Welcome home, fruitcake.

EXT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, THE YARD - DAY

Dallas strolls around the exercise yard, surveying the other prisoners in various activities: basketball, weightlifting, tightly knit cliques in secretive conversation.

But there's one guy all on his own, sitting at the end of a picnic table, reading a comic book, a copy of the King James Bible next to him.

Dallas approaches.

DALLAS

Hey, pal. Watcha readin'?

MARK (50) looks around furtively, expecting to be jumped. When he sees Dallas is alone, he relaxes a bit and holds up the cover.

MARK

You're the new guy. Maybe no one's told you, but I prefer solitude.

DALLAS

I had no idea, just saw you reading an issue of Deathlok the Destroyer. Oh man, that one gave me the creeps.

The man returns to reading his comic.

DALLAS

So, I'm Dallas.

He reaches for a handshake, Mark ignores it.

DALLAS

Ah, the ole' King James. I prefer the Living Bible, myself, though the Silver Bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses is interesting.

For the first time, Mark takes notice of Dallas. He sets the comic down and turns.

MARK

Are you a believer?

DALLAS

Absolutely.

MARK

There's bible study tomorrow in the library.

DALLAS
Well, count me in.

MARK
I'm Mark.

DALLAS
Good to meet you. Well, I'll leave
you to it then.

Dallas walks away. He spots a shady character near the fence
and approaches.

DALLAS
If I wanted someone dead, who'd I
talk to?

The shady character simply nods toward a group of tattooed
thugs.

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Step Five.

INT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, HALLWAY

Mark and Dallas walk together.

From around a corner, three of the tattooed thugs rush toward
Mark.

One has a shiv and stabs at Mark's belly.

Dallas intervenes and grabs the thug by the wrist. With one
twist he shatters it.

Dallas grabs the shiv and stands between Mark and the
attackers.

DALLAS
Come on!

The thugs scurry away.

Dallas slides the shiv into the waistband of his pants. He
coughs some blood into his hands.

Mark gets up, sees the blood.

MARK
Why did you do that? You're sick.

DALLAS
Seemed like the right thing to do.

MARK
That usually doesn't happen. People
here generally avoid me.

DALLAS
I'm just glad I was here to help.

MARK
Thank you, Dallas. I don't know
anyone who would've done the same.

DALLAS
I got your back.

Dallas uses a handkerchief to wipe the blood from his hands
and from under his nose.

INT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, LIBRARY

About a dozen prisoners are seated in a circle, Mark and
Dallas next to each other.

A priest in a dark suit and collar presides.

PRIEST
Seems we have a new member of our
congregation. Would you like to
introduce yourself?

Dallas stands.

DALLAS
Sure. I'm Dallas.

He pauses, expecting a "Hi, Dallas" but no one speaks.

DALLAS
Well, I have terminal cancer.
Figured I should get right with
God. I hear it's never too late.
Hopefully I squeaked in.

A few chuckles from the assembled.

PRIEST
All are welcome in the kingdom of
god, as long as you are ready to
confess your sins and be forgiven.

DALLAS

Oh, I have every suspicion that I'll be going to Hell. I hold a great deal of hate in my heart, father.

A few of the gathered look nervous. They all expect absolution.

PRIEST

You must let it go.

DALLAS

It's meant for someone.

More murmurs from the prisoners.

PRIEST

Jesus said, "If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in Heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done."

DALLAS

Or will do.

PRIEST

Are you planning to harm yourself, Dallas?

DALLAS

No, Father. Nothing like that.

PRIEST

I hope not. I'd like to see you here again. As we all would.

A half-hearted response from the prisoners.

Dallas sits. Mark leans in.

MARK

I had similar thoughts when I first came here. And then God spoke to me.

DALLAS

Does he do that often?

MARK

Only twice. The first time, he
commanded me to strike down a false
idol. So here I am.

DALLAS

And here I am.

For the first time, Mark smiles.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, MARK'S CELL

Dallas walks up, leans at the open cell door. He looks very
pale, gaunt, dark circles under his eyes.

Mark lays on his cot, reads from a Bible.

Taped on the walls are pages from magazines showing
celebrities: David Bowie, Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor,
and Jackie O, along with a playbill from the Broadway
production of "The Elephant Man" and a hand-carved, wooden
crucifix.

DALLAS

Guess what?

MARK

What?

DALLAS

It's movie night.

MARK

Oh. I don't really go to those.

DALLAS

Come on. It'll be fun.

MARK

No, Dallas. It's not for me.

DALLAS

You won't even give a dying man his
last request?

MARK

That's not funny.

DALLAS

Please?

MARK

Are you sure you're even up to it,
Dallas? I know you are very sick.

DALLAS

Oh, I'm fine, Mark. Just meet me in
the game room a few minutes before
the movie.

MARK

I don't think so.

DALLAS

Jesus, I saved your life.

MARK

And I thanked you.

DALLAS

It's just a movie.

Dallas coughs into his shirt sleeve.

Mark thinks for a moment.

MARK

Fine. Just this once. I guess I owe
you.

He sets the Bible down. The cover slips off and Dallas sees
it's actually a copy of "The Catcher In The Rye".

DALLAS

(V.O.)
Step Six.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, GAME ROOM

Dallas waits near a ping-pong table in the deserted, dimly-
lit room.

Mark walks in.

DALLAS

Hey buddy, you're on time.

MARK

For some reason, I'm excited to see
a movie. I don't think I've seen
one since Ordinary People.

DALLAS

Woah. It's clearly been awhile.

MARK

Do you happen to know what they're showing?

DALLAS

Yes, Mark. They are showing HELP!.

Mark noticeably winces.

MARK

What?

DALLAS

HELP!, the Beatles film. Have you seen it?

MARK

A long time ago.

DALLAS

Really? I's one of my favorites. I mean, I'm a Beatles fan through and through, and I like everything they ever did, but HELP! has always been the one for me.

MARK

Oh.

DALLAS

I'm so glad they're showing it tonight. It'll make me so happy. Especially "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away", possibly my favorite Beatles tune ever. I forget who wrote that one? Was it Paul?

For the first time, Mark shows anger.

MARK

Fuck no, that pop toddler was a disgrace.

DALLAS

George?

MARK

It was Lennon. John Winston Ono fucking Lennon. And I saw it in his eyes.

Mark rubs his forehead.

MARK
(sotto)
I think I'm going nuts.

DALLAS
What did you see?

MARK
(sotto)
I saw the devil.

Mark rubs his stomach.

MARK
You know, I'm feeling kind of sick,
maybe the meatloaf coming back to
haunt me. I think I'll go back to
my bed.

DALLAS
Oh, ok, Mark. But one thing before
you go.

MARK
Yes, Dallas?

DALLAS
Just a little something from an old
friend.

Dallas raises an arm and rams the shiv through Mark's eye.

He jams it further into Marks brain with the palm of his
hand. Blood sprays his overalls and face.

Mark tries to scream but nothing seems to come out. He drops
to the ground, scrapes at his damaged socket.

Dallas kneels down and wraps his hands around Mark's neck.

DALLAS
John sends his regards.

The doomed man's eye flutters. His head falls to one side,
mouth agape.

DALLAS
(V.O.)
Step Seven.

INT. WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, REC ROOM

Dallas takes a seat in the back just as the movie starts.

In the dark, no one notices he's drenched in blood.

He reaches into a breast pocket and pulls out two pills, swallows them dry, works them down his throat while the first few notes of HELP! wash over him.

The pills work fast. His head nods and finally falls back. White foam bubbles out of his open mouth.

A few twitches and Dallas is in the numbing embrace of eternal slumber.

FADE OUT.

THE END.