

WHAT WE WERE TOLD – Pilot Screenplay

Written by Dwight Edward Allen

CHAPTER ONE

The Way Things Begin

The hallway smelled like floor cleaner and wet coats.

It was early spring, the kind that fooled you into thinking winter had finally decided to leave for good. The snow had melted into gray piles along the edges of the school parking lot, and the sun came through the high windows in thin, dusty strips. Lockers slammed. Shoes squeaked. Someone laughed too loud.

Sally pressed her shoulder against the cool metal of locker 214 and waited for the bell.

Her stomach rolled again.

She closed her eyes and breathed through her nose the way the school nurse had once told her to do when she felt faint during a fire drill. Slow in. Slower out. She told herself it was nothing. A bug. Something she ate. The cafeteria meatloaf from yesterday still felt like it was sitting somewhere it didn't belong.

"Hey."

Calvin's voice came from her left. Not loud. Not rushed. Just there.

She opened her eyes.

He was holding his books against his chest with one arm, his jacket slung over the other like he'd forgotten to put it on. His hair was cropped short, always neat, always like he'd checked it in the mirror even when he hadn't. He stood close enough that she could smell his soap—something clean, sharp, familiar.

"You good?" he asked.

Sally nodded too fast. "Yeah."

Calvin didn't move. He looked at her the way he always did—like he wasn't just hearing the word, but listening for everything underneath it. His eyes flicked briefly to her face, then down to the way her hand rested flat against her stomach before she realized what she was doing and dropped it to her side.

"You look pale," he said.

She smiled. It felt like lifting something heavy with one hand. "Guess I forgot to eat."

"That's not like you."

"I know."

The bell rang. The sound cracked through the hallway like a starting gun. Students surged around them, bodies pressing in, backpacks knocking into elbows and ribs. Someone shouted Calvin's name from down the hall.

Dennis.

Calvin turned his head but didn't answer right away. Sally watched his jaw tighten just a little, like it always did when Dennis was nearby.

Dennis pushed through the crowd, tall and loose-limbed, already grinning like he owned the place. His jacket hung open even though it was still cold, his tie crooked, his hair a mess that looked intentional. He clapped Calvin on the shoulder hard enough to make him rock forward.

"Man, you hear Coach's losing his mind today?" Dennis said. "Says we gotta run suicides because somebody didn't lock the equipment room."

Calvin shook his head. "You didn't lock it?"

Dennis laughed. "I didn't say that."

Dennis's eyes slid to Sally. They lingered just long enough to be noticed.

She looked away.

“Well,” Dennis said, stretching the word, “see you two lovebirds later.”
Calvin stiffened. “Don’t start.”
Dennis held up his hands. “Relax. I’m gone.”
He disappeared down the hall, swallowed by noise and motion.
Calvin exhaled slowly. “You sure you’re okay?”
Sally nodded again. Slower this time. “I just need to get through the day.”

Calvin studied her for another second, then stepped aside so she could grab her books. “Walk you to class?”
She smiled for real this time. “Yeah.”
They moved together down the hall, not touching but close enough that they could if they wanted to. They’d been like that since they were twelve—close without being loud about it, connected in a way that never needed explaining. People had tried to name it over the years. Friends. Best friends. Almost something. Almost something else.
None of the names ever stuck.
Outside the classroom door, Sally stopped. Her stomach twisted again, harder this time, sharp enough that she had to grab the edge of the doorframe.
“Sally?” Calvin said.
She swallowed. “I think I’m gonna be sick.”
Calvin’s face changed immediately. Focused. Steady. “Bathroom’s down the hall.”

She nodded and turned, barely making it halfway before the world tilted. The fluorescent lights buzzed overhead. The floor felt too far away.
Calvin caught her elbow. “Hey. Hey. I got you.”
She didn’t argue. She let him guide her into the girls’ bathroom, past a pair of juniors fixing their hair in the mirror. They stared, wide-eyed, as Sally rushed into the nearest stall.
She barely got the door closed before she threw up.
Calvin stood on the other side, one hand braced against the tiled wall, listening. He didn’t say anything. He just waited.
When it was over, Sally leaned her forehead against the cool metal divider and closed her eyes. Her mouth tasted sour. Her hands were shaking.
She flushed, then unlocked the door.
Calvin handed her paper towels without looking at her too closely, like he was giving her space on purpose. “You want me to walk you to the nurse?”

She shook her head. “No. I’m fine.”
He raised an eyebrow.
“I am,” she insisted. “I just... I think I need to go home.”
Calvin nodded. “I’ll tell them.”
She hesitated. “You don’t have to.”
“I know.”
They stood there for a moment, the hum of the lights filling the space between them.
“Sally,” Calvin said carefully, “this isn’t just nerves, is it?”

She met his eyes. For a split second, something flickered there—fear, maybe, or the beginning of it. Then it was gone.
“I don’t know,” she said.
Calvin didn’t push. He never did.
The test came from the drugstore on Maple Street, the one with the flickering sign and the bell that rang too loud every time the door opened.
Sally bought it with cash she’d been saving for new shoes. The cashier didn’t look at her. She dropped it into a brown paper bag and slid it across the counter like it was nothing at all.
At home, the house was quiet. Too quiet.

Her mother was working the late shift again. The television in the living room was off. Dust floated in the sunlight coming through the window, slow and aimless.
Sally went straight to the bathroom.

She sat on the edge of the tub, the test unopened in her lap, and stared at the floor. The linoleum was cracked near the base of the toilet, a thin line that had been there as long as she could remember. She followed it with her eyes, back and forth, like if she traced it enough times, it might tell her what to do. She thought about Calvin.
She thought about Dennis.
She thought about that night—how loud the music had been, how crowded the basement felt, how easy it had been to say yes when she'd been tired of saying no to everything else.
She thought about how Dennis had laughed afterward, pulling on his jeans, already reaching for his cigarettes.
She hadn't told Calvin. She hadn't told anyone.
Her hands shook as she opened the box.
The instructions were simple. Too simple for something that could change everything.

She did what it said. She waited.
The seconds stretched. The hum of the house settled around her like a held breath.
Then the line appeared.
Clear. Unmistakable.
Sally stared at it until her eyes burned.
“No,” she whispered, though she wasn't sure who she was talking to.
She pressed the test down on the sink between two chipped mugs she'd used to rinse her mouth. It looked small there. Almost harmless.
She slid down to the floor and pulled her knees to her chest.

Somewhere in the distance, a car passed. A door slammed. Life kept moving.
She stayed there until the light shifted and the room grew dim.
Calvin's mother listened without interrupting.
She sat at the head of the dining room table, her hands folded neatly in front of her, her back straight despite the long hours she spent on her feet at work. The room smelled faintly of lemon cleaner. Everything in it had a place, and everything was in it.
Calvin stood near the window, his shoulders tense, his eyes fixed on the yard outside. The grass was still patchy from winter, stubborn brown spots clinging where green should have been.
“So,” she said finally. “She's pregnant.”
Calvin nodded. “Yes, ma'am.”
“And she says it's yours.”

He swallowed. “She didn't say that.”
His mother tilted her head slightly. “But you believe it is.”
Calvin hesitated. The silence stretched.
“I believe her,” he said.
His mother's lips pressed into a thin line. Not angry. Thinking.
“Dennis,” she said.
Calvin's jaw tightened. “Dennis is just talking.”
“Dennis is always just talking,” she agreed. “But talk has consequences.”

She stood and moved toward him, placing a hand on his shoulder. Her grip was firm. Reassuring. Possessive.
“You're a good boy, Calvin,” she said. “You always have been. And good boys do the right thing.”
Calvin stared out the window. He thought of Sally's pale face in the bathroom. The way she'd looked at him like she was standing on the edge of something she couldn't see the bottom of.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

Sally told her mother that night.

They sat at the kitchen table, the overhead light buzzing, two plates of food growing cold between them. Sally's mother listened with her lips pressed together, her eyes tired.

"Do you know who the father is?" she asked.

Sally hesitated.

"Yes," she said.

Her mother nodded slowly. "And?"

Sally thought of Dennis's laugh. Thought of Calvin's steady eyes.

She closed her own.

"It's complicated," she said.

Her mother sighed. "When is it ever not?"

The meeting happened on a Sunday afternoon.

Calvin's mother arranged it. Of course she did.

They sat in her living room, Sally perched on the edge of the couch, her hands folded in her lap. Calvin sat beside her, close but not touching. His mother sat across from them, calm as a judge.

"We're going to handle this the right way," she said. "Quietly. Respectably."

Sally nodded, though her chest felt tight.

"You'll marry Calvin," the woman continued. "You'll have the babies. And then we'll do what's best for everyone."

Sally blinked. "The babies?"

Calvin turned to her. "Twins," he said softly.

Her breath caught. "I didn't know."