

Better Half

Written by

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EXT. HOUSING ESTATE - DAY

Rows of seemingly identical estate houses slide by, almost hypnotically peaceful.

Sandwiched in between the perfect houses is one with a large, tacky PLASTIC SANTA CLAUS on the roof. We pass it by and continue down the street until we eventually --

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSING ESTATE STREET - DAY

CLOSE ON: OSCAR (6) bites into a doughnut, causing jam to spill all over his jacket.

OSCAR

Daaaaad!

Oscar walks along the footpath, with MARTIN (30s) and DENISE (30s) walk slightly ahead of him, shopping bags in hand.

Martin and Denise turn on their heels to see the mess Oscar has made.

Martin plonks his shopping bag on the ground and retrieves a used tissue from his sleeve.

MARTIN

It's alright, buddy. I'll help you there.

Martin takes the doughnut off Oscar and starts wiping down his jacket.

Denise sighs.

DENISE

Aw, that's gonna make a sticky mess all over the jacket! Did he get any on his shirt?

Martin zips Oscar's jacket down slightly.

MARTIN

Only a little bit.

DENISE

I told you he didn't need the doughnut. I knew this would happen.

MARTIN

I thought he deserved it.
(to Oscar)
Isn't that right, buddy?

Martin zips up Oscar's jacket and ushers him ahead of them. Martin picks up his shopping bag and they continue walking.

Martin starts chomping into the doughnut.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Why'd you put him in such nice clothes anyway? He's wearing a puffy jacket over them, and we're only going to the shop, like.

Denise starts walking slightly ahead of Martin.

DENISE

(irritated by Martin's slurping)

Well I'm sorry, I guess I just want us to look nice and presentable every once in a while. And don't end a sentence with "like".

MARTIN

You just did.

Denise looks back at him as if to say "Seriously?"

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Besides, what's wrong with what I wear?

DENISE

(beat)

Nothing.

MARTIN

Nothing?

OSCAR

Mom says your a bad 'zample.

MARTIN

Oh really? I'm a bad 'zample?

DENISE

Yes, a very bad 'zample.

MARTIN

I think my clothes are quite trendy.

DENISE

The mere fact that you say "trendy" shows that you are indeed a bad 'zample. You don't even tie your shoe laces.

Martin looks down at his feet - she's right. He gets down on one knee and lazily shoves his laces in the sides of his shoe.

MARTIN

I'm insulted. I remember you once described me as better looking than Kevin Costner.

DENISE

Who isn't?

Martin looks shocked.

OSCAR

Who's Kevin Costner? Is he the man in the pictures?

MARTIN

That's right, in the movies. Looks like we have a budding fan of "The Cos".

(to Denise)

You think he's old enough to handle Waterworld?

DENISE

I can't handle Waterworld.

MARTIN

Clearly neither of you appreciate fine art.

DENISE

Well maybe there's still hope for Oscar.

As they near their house, we see that SANTA CLAUS on the roof again.

A man and a woman stand in their driveway, facing away from them.

MARTIN

Ah, no. Is that Jerry and Vivian?

DENISE

Oh, it is! I've been meaning to ask them who they got to paint their door.

MARTIN

I'll paint our door!

DENISE
Sure you will.

MARTIN
You reckon they're here about the
Santy or the hedge?

DENISE
Guess we'll have to see.

MARTIN
I swear, I just cut the hedge last
week, they never let up.

DENISE
Ah, they're not that bad. They can
be a little finicky, but there's
nothing wrong with wanting your estate
well kept.

MARTIN
Fine, if they're not that bad then
I'll run in with Oscar and you talk
to them.

DENISE
No no no! I'll be talking to them
for an hour. We'll both talk to
them as we bring in the shopping, we
can get out of it easier.

MARTIN
Fine. We're not inviting them in
though.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Martin, Denise and Oscar trek up the driveway, and it's only
then that JERRY and VIVIAN turn to look at them.

DENISE
(to Martin)
Never.
(to Jerry and Vivian)
Hey guys!

VIVIAN
Hey ya Denise!

JERRY
'Sup Martin! Howdy Oscar, little
man! Woah, looks like there's been
a spill at the jam factory.

OSCAR
My dad ate my doughnut.

JERRY
(swiveling to Martin)
Did he now? Well he's an awful messy eater.

Martin doesn't laugh at their jokes.

JERRY (CONT'D)
So, we see you haven't taken your Santa down yet.

MARTIN
Ah yeah, Santy isn't hurting anyone.
Is that what you guys are here about?

JERRY
No no no, not exactly.

MARTIN
If it's about the hedge--

VIVIAN
Oh, don't worry about that. We're not here about the hedge.

JERRY
And we're not here to beat around the bush either!

Vivian chuckles.

VIVIAN
So basically, well...

JERRY
- We feel like you guys just aren't a good fit.

Denise and Martin chuckle and look at one another.

DENISE
Huh?

JERRY
The residents' association have been mulling over it for a while now, ya know? Really... *thinking* about it. And we feel...

VIVIAN
We feel like you guys are just not, well... soulmates.

Jerry and Vivian continue to beam at the couple. Denise and Martin laugh, but still don't get the joke.

MARTIN

Wha, soulmates? Residents' association? I didn't even know we had a residents' association.

(to Denise)

Did you know we had a residents' association?

VIVIAN

Oh, of course! There's always been a residents' association. Leonard's the chairman.

LEONARD (O.S.)

What's poppin', fellas?

Denise and Martin whip around to see LEONARD leaning against their car - it's like he appeared out of nowhere. He is also smiling cheerfully and wearing muted colours.

Denise and Martin get a fright at his unexpected appearance.

DENISE

Jesus, Leonard! When did you get here?

MARTIN

Leonard, you hearing these guys?

LEONARD

I think you should listen to them, Marty.

Martin and Denise stop smiling - the joking atmosphere is gone, even if the neighbours are still smiling.

DENISE

Guys, this is starting to seem like a joke-

VIVIAN

I'm sorry, you guys just don't work. Not like, say, Barry and Trish.

Vivian points into the middle of the road where a couple stand arm-in-arm in muted colours, smiling.

BARRY & TRISH

We're in love!

Martin and Denise are getting very uncomfortable, neighbours keep appearing out of nowhere.

JERRY

Now we don't want to cause a big
hoopla, let's just get this over in
a nice, dignified way.

MARTIN

Get what over with?

JERRY

Martin, you're being... superseded.

MARTIN

Superseded?

DENISE

It means replaced, honey.

MARTIN

Replaced by who?

JERRY

Replaced by New Martin.

The door of the Doyle's house swings open, and NEW MARTIN appears. He looks like he's been pulled straight from the stock photo of a dad.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Say hi New Martin!

NEW MARTIN

Hi, New Martin!

All the neighbours laugh, but wait -- they seem to have DOUBLED in numbers, all smiling from ear to ear. Martin and Denise are freaked.

MARTIN

How did he get into my house?? And
why is he wearing my shirt?!

JERRY

Don't you mean, why is he wearing
his shirt?

MARTIN

Hold on, why are you doing this?

VIVIAN

Surely you must have seen this coming.

MARTIN

I didn't!

JERRY

Hoo boy, then this must be a lot to take in!

VIVIAN

Come on guys, don't act like this is a happy marriage. We've all seen it.

JERRY

Just today, John saw you arguing in the shop.

We see JOHN at the edge of the curb, chewing on a comically big pretzel.

JOHN

It was by the baked goods section.

MARTIN

I mean sure we argue, but so does everyone. It doesn't mean anything!

LEONARD

Well if you were in love then you wouldn't be arguing, now would you Marty?

All the neighbours shake their heads - *still smiling*.

MARTIN

Hey, shut up Leonard! Why am I the one being replaced here?

Denise is slightly taken aback by this.

JERRY

Well Denise is a loving mother. And you? Well, you're a bit of a wildcard, and we already have our resident bad boy in this neighbourhood. Isn't that right, Percy?

PERCY pops up from behind the hedge, wearing slightly brighter colours than the rest of the neighbours.

PERCY

(comically shrugging his shoulders)
What're ya gonna do with me?

They all laugh. All the neighbours, dotted around - *EVERYWHERE*.

DENISE

Martin?

MARTIN

Get in the car.

They turn to get back in the car, but there are neighbours standing in front of it, blocking them. The neighbours start to close in.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

The house!

Martin drops the shopping bags, grabs Denise and Oscar, and sprints for the house. The shopping bags spill everywhere, apples rolling out onto the road.

None of the neighbours try to stop them, just cheerfully watch as they slam the front door behind them.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Martin locks and chains the door as Denise and Oscar back away.

Jerry pushes the letterbox open and bends down to peak through it.

JERRY

We're not trying to hurt you, we're just doing what's best for all of you.

Martin slams the letterbox down.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Hey hey, easy there Martin - them's my gardening fingers.

Martin whirls around to Denise and Oscar.

MARTIN

Back door.

They run the length of the house, but peering through the window off the back door --

MORE NEIGHBOURS.

MORE SMILES.

The house is completely surrounded, all the neighbours tapping on the windows with singular index fingers.

They dash into the front room to see if there's another exit - no dice.

Jerry peers in through the window.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

You're not gonna take me away from my family!

JERRY

Oh come on now, Martin. Plenty of parents have been replaced here. And the kids are happy! Isn't that right kids?

Jerry moves to reveal two children sitting on the grass slowly pushing a ball between them.

CHILD

Yes-

JERRY

The kids are having fun! And not a drop of jam on them.

Martin quickly pulls down the blind.

New Martin appears at the window at the other end of the room.

NEW MARTIN

Don't worry, Old Martin. I'm gonna take real good care of Denise. We're soulmates.

MARTIN

I'm the only Martin!

NEW MARTIN

Hi The Only Martin! I'm New Martin!

All the neighbours laugh. We hear them all around the house. Martin shuts this blind as well.

Martin takes his mobile phone out of his pocket.

MARTIN

I'm calling the guards.

Martin dials 999 into his phone and brings it to his ear. It calls for a moment --

VOICE ON PHONE (O.S.)

999, what's your emergency, Martin?

MARTIN

Please help. My family is being
attacked by --

Martin stops.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

How do you know my name?

VOICE ON PHONE (O.S.)

You're well known to the gardaí,
Martin. You're, how should we say, a
regular John Dillinger in this area.
But don't worry Martin, we'll have
you all taken care of.

Martin quickly hangs up.

Martin picks up a hurl from the corner of the room and readies
himself for battle.

DENISE

Jesus, Martin. What do you think
you're gonna do with that, huh?
Smash Leonard over the head?

We hear Leonard's voice emanate from somewhere.

LEONARD

That wouldn't be very neighbourly of
you, Old Martin.

DENISE

Put it down, Martin.

Martin turns to see Oscar hiding behind Denise, clutching to
her arm. Scared.

Martin drops the hurl. He goes to say something to Oscar,
but can't find the words. Then, to Denise;

MARTIN

Well what do you suggest? You know
these people better than me! They're
your buddies like.

DENISE

Don't turn this on me, and DON'T end
your sentences with "like"!

VIVIAN (O.S.)

Oh boy! Sounds like they're arguing
again!

Beat. Denise and Martin have so much more that they want to argue about, but now's not the time.

MARTIN

Well I'm finding us a way out of here.

Martin leaves the room and heads up stairs.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Martin rushes into the room and heads to the window. He tears open the curtains, and opens the window. He starts to lean out when --

The plastic Santa flies down past the window onto the lawn.

Martin jumps back from the window in fright, and then goes to look out.

The neighbours have SWARMED outside the house. They look down at the Santa, then tilt their heads up to look at Martin - they all smile and wave. No escape.

He pushes away from the window and sits on the edge of the bed. He runs his hands through his hair as he begins to shake with anger.

He stands and moves over to the wall with his hands on his hips, breathing deeply. Now with his nose squashed against the wall, he raises his hand and thumps the wall with the side of his hand. Then --

A PICTURE FRAME bounces off it's hook and falls to the floor, the glass shattering on impact.

Martin sighs as he looks down at the mess he has caused, and crouches down to clean it. He flips over the frame to see the picture - a photo of the family taken in a studio by a professional photographer. Denise sitting on the floor with Oscar on her knee, and dad with his arms around the two of them. Smiles all round.

Martin only glances at the photo before starting to clean up the glass, but wait --

He looks closer at the photo, in particular closer at himself in the photo.

But it's not Martin in the photo.

IT'S NEW MARTIN.

Martin examines the photo, baffled. *What the hell is going on?*

He pulls the picture out of the frame to reveal behind it --
An almost identical photo, but with himself in it.

He leaps to his feet and looks out the window -- New Martin smiles, waves, and gives a sly wink.

Martin turns back around, and looks around at the other photos in the room -- he drops the picture in his hand to the floor.

There's a picture of the family playing Frisbee in the park --
New Martin.

There's a wedding photo, with Denise in her white gown, and wearing a suit beside her --

NEW MARTIN.

There's a photo of Oscar blowing out candles on a birthday cake, Denise holding it. And behind both of them --

NEW MARTIN.

EVERY SINGLE PHOTO HAS NEW MARTIN.

Martin's head is spinning as his eyes dart between them all -
What is going on???

DENISE (O.S.)

We were never really soulmates, were we?

Martin freezes. He slowly turns to see --

Denise stands in the doorway - wearing muted colours.

MARTIN

Denise... Denise what the hell is going on?

Denise smiles.

DENISE

Let's stop pretending, Martin.
Everyone in this town is perfect,
and we're just... not.

MARTIN

They're not perfect, they're insane!
Why is this happening?

Martin is walking backwards as Denise slowly closes in on him.

DENISE

Because I need my perfect husband,
and Oscar needs a perfect father. A
role model, a good *example*. Oscar
gets on really well with Martin. I
think you'd really like him. And
you have to admit, we look great
together. Everyone says so.

Martin tears the wedding photo off the wall.

MARTIN

This is not Martin! This is not
real! You married *me*! We love each
other!

DENISE

Love has nothing to do with it. I
need my soulmate.

MARTIN

What?!

DENISE

I've spent so many years trying to
figure out what was wrong. Why I
wasn't... *happy*. And now I've
realised... it was you. It was always
you.

Martin rips open the frame and tears out the photo of New
Martin, revealing the original of him and Denise.

He shoves it in front of her face.

MARTIN

Look at this photo! Look at it!
Remember this day! When I forgot my
vows and ended up quoting 'The
Bodyguard'? And you changed your
vows to correct me, because I
misquoted? And no one had any idea
what we were talking about? Only us.
Just me and you.

Denise continues to stare at Martin, walking towards him.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

For better or for worse, remember?

Beat. He has reached the end of the room, with the open window
to his back. He steps on the broken picture frame.

DENISE

Well I've chosen for better.

Denise LUNGES forward and pushes Martin.
Martin trips over his loose laces and --
He falls out the window.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. DOYLE HOUSE - DAY

The hall appears as if it is straight out of a sitcom - eerily colour coded and unnaturally clean. It's dead quiet, until --

NEW MARTIN bursts through the front door of the house, wearing a muted colour suit and hat, and carrying a briefcase.

NEW MARTIN
HONEY, I'M HOME!

New Martin takes his hat off and puts it on the hat rack.
Oscar dashes into the hallway, toy plane in hand -

OSCAR
Hey Dad! Mom made raisin cake!

NEW MARTIN
Hey buddy, sounds delicious!

Oscar promptly sprints into another room.

Denise enters the hall to welcome home her perfect husband.

DENISE
Hey sweetie. How was your day?

New Martin smiles, gazing at his perfect wife.

MARTIN
Just... perfect.

EXT. HOUSING ESTATE - DAY

Rows of seemingly identical estate houses slide by, almost hypnotically peaceful.

A wheely bin slides into frame in the foreground and we settle on it -- a broken plastic Santa Claus sticking out of it.