

LOVE, NORMAN

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CHARACTERS:

Norman Weller – early forties.

Estelle Weller-Holden – late thirties.

Frank Weller – mid seventies.

Jerome – sixteen.

TIME:

Present Day.

SETTING:

Norman's Apartment.

Lights up on Norman's apartment. It is small, very small. One could almost remain in the center of the apartment and have access to every amenity inside, not unlike a spider in its web. At the center of that proverbial web is Norman. A tired and disheveled looking man of seemingly no importance. Norman stands behind a small desk, with some crumpled up pieces of paper garnishing a fresh one. This one has writing on it. Some knives and razor blades rest alongside the sheet of paper resembling silverware at a fancy restaurant. Norman looks up, as if to speak to the ceiling, which of course is low.

NORMAN

I don't really know what to do with my hands.

(He clasps his hands together in a praying motion, but drops them.)

Not really experienced with this sort of thing, but you knew that already. Just wanted you to be aware of what's going on. Not sure why, but I felt inclined to tell you. Although, again, I'm sure you already knew that. Good day for it, too. Early enough so that gives everyone plenty of time to clean up the mess and make it home in time for supper. Don't want to inconvenience anyone. I know what you say about this sort of thing. But maybe there's an off-chance that you might think differently in my case. You've proven forgiving and allowing of tons of other things so maybe, just maybe, insignificant me won't be too hard to sweep under the rug? Not saying you hide anything. Just an expression. Only one I could think of.

Pause.

Nothing? Shall I take your silence as permission?

Pause.

You know, people go on and on about this grand plan. Tremendous scheme you have stewing for all of us and that one day, one very fine day, all that we want collides with everything that we are and life becomes nothing but cheeseburgers and walks on the beach. A little hard to see that right now. Always has been, come to think of it. Your scheme wasn't meant for me. And I hate cheeseburgers anyway. But you knew that already.

Pause.

Last chance, Vance. You have some sort of objection to all of this speak up. Show me something. Or just give me shit about it after. If there even is one.

Norman's phone rings. He turns to it, then back up to the ceiling before walking over to the receiver. He glances at the number on his caller ID, moves away, and looks back up.

A phone call from my sister doesn't count. Fifth time she's called today.

Pause.

Here I go. I'm sitting back down now. No changing my mind on this. You had your shot. Asshole.

The phone stops ringing. Norman walks back to his desk and sits in front of his 'platter' of paper and blades. He picks up a pen from beneath the crumpled up paper and puts it to his letter. He writes:

Love. Norman.

He lets that sit a bit, scratches out a word. It now reads:

Norman.

He sets the pen down, turns back up to the ceiling slightly, then takes in a deep breath and picks up one of the knives. Too big. He puts it back down and opts for one of the razors instead. He checks its sharpness with his fingertip. Perfect. He brings the razor to his wrist and closes his eyes. Another deep breath. Holds it. This is it.

A knock at the door interrupts him. Norman lets out his breath and turns to the sound, not moving from his desk. He looks back up to the ceiling.

First on the scene.

He brings the razor back to his wrist, shuts his eyes and holds his breath. Here it comes.

Another knock. Louder this time. Norman lets out his breath, opens his eyes, and turns back to the door. He stares at it.

Even louder knocking. Upset, Norman sets his blade down and gets up from the desk. He shuffles to the door.

Can't a guy kill himself in peace?

When Norman gets to the door, he looks through the peephole. Then after a bit:

Help you?

JEROME (O.S.)

Depends.

NORMAN

On what?

JEROME (O.S.)

You Norman? Norman Weller?

NORMAN

Whose asking?

JEROME

Look, you Norman Weller or not?

Norman pulls away from the door.

NORMAN

Nope. Sorry.

Norman looks back up at the ceiling.

Creditors? Really? That supposed to be your sign? Aren't those things supposed to consist of, I don't know, reasons I shouldn't go through with this? Been dodging these pricks for months and now you just send them right to my doorstep? Poorly played, sir. Poorly played.

Norman returns to the task at hand. He sits back down at his desk and picks up his razor blade. He brings the blade back to his wrist and takes in his final breath...

His front door comes swinging open. Jerome emerges with a bobby-pin in one hand and a

butterfly knife in the other. Jerome is a kid of sixteen, with baggy clothing and a backpack. Norman stops his suicide once more and turns back to him, shocked. Jerome is looking around the apartment.

JEROME

What a dump this place is.

Jerome turns to Norman.

You're a rude motherfucker, you know that?

Norman shoves the papers and blades to the ground in a piss-poor effort to conceal his plans. He then stands quickly and turns to Jerome. Points the razor blade at him.

NORMAN

Who the hell are you and how did you get in here?

JEROME

Chill, Michael Myers. All I did was pick the lock. Simple shit, too. Who the fuck runs this place? Prolly some cheap bastard can't afford the good knobs.

NORMAN

Get out.

Norman throws the razor blade at Jerome. It doesn't do much.

JEROME

The fuck was that for?

NORMAN

Who sent you? Global Client.

JEROME

Global what? No one sent me.

Norman reaches for another blade.

NORMAN

Bullshit.

Norman throws the new blade at Jerome. It is equally unsuccessful.

JEROME

Knock that shit off. Look it, I came here on my own.

NORMAN

Why?

JEROME

To talk.

NORMAN

Plenty of other people to talk to around here. Not all of them requiring breaking and entering to do so either.

JEROME

But I wanna' talk to you, Norm.

NORMAN

It's Norman. And I'm not really in the mood for talking right now. Just take what you want and get the hell out.

JEROME

I don't wanna' take nothin' from you. Prolly ain't got shit worth my time anyway.

NORMAN

You here to rattle me up then?

Norman reaches for the big knife. He points it at Jerome.

Try it.

Jerome folds his knife and puts it in his pocket.

JEROME

I ain't gonna' hurt you.

Jerome reaches into his backpack and removes a pack of cigarettes and lighter. He takes one out and lights it. Offers the pack to Norman.

Name's Jerome.

NORMAN

You can't smoke in here.

Jerome puts the pack back in his backpack while looking around the apartment.

JEROME

I don't see any signs.

NORMAN

Put it out.

JEROME

So chuckin' blades at your guests is okay but smokin' squares ain't?

NORMAN

You're not my guest.

JEROME

In your place, ain't I?

NORMAN

Put the cigarette out.

Jerome takes one last, deep drag. He blows the smoke in Norman's direction.

JEROME

Fine.

Jerome puts the cigarette out on the bottom of his shoe before putting the butt in his pocket.

You gonna' lower that shit or what? I did mine.

Norman looks down at his knife then back up at Jerome.

I ain't gonna' do nothin'.

Norman lowers his knife.

NORMAN

Too young to be Global Client, anyway.

JEROME

Bitch I ain't young.

How old are you?
NORMAN

Why?
JEROME

You look young.
NORMAN

I'm not.
JEROME

You can't be more than eighteen.
NORMAN

Jerome doesn't respond. Norman sets his knife down on the desk.

What, don't feel like talking anymore?

I'm sixteen, okay.
JEROME

Sixteen? Shouldn't you be picking pimples instead of locks right now?
NORMAN

Yeah, well what're you like sixty? Shouldn't you be like, livin' in some house with a, a wife and dog and shit? Talkin' about, like, pottery shoppin'?
JEROME

Pottery?
NORMAN

Or whatever.
JEROME

You have a girlfriend?
NORMAN

The fuck that come from?
JEROME

Just a question.
NORMAN

JEROME

You ain't a pederass or nothin', are you?

NORMAN

A what? No. What's that?

JEROME

You like talkin' about pottery? That your game?

NORMAN

You brought it up.

JEROME

I saw the way your eyes lit up when I did, though.

NORMAN

You came in here. If anything, you're the peder...ass.

JEROME

Can't be a pederass if I'm the younger one. 'Sides I'm all about the pussy, man.

NORMAN

That's disgusting.

JEROME

Disgusting?

NORMAN

The way you...never mind. This is weird. You need to get out.

JEROME

You're making it weird.

NORMAN

You broke in.

JEROME

You threw a razor blade at me.

NORMAN

Because you broke in.

JEROME

I didn't break anything.

NORMAN

I don't really care. You need to leave. I have important things to do and talking with a foul-mouthed teenage criminal isn't high on my priority list.

JEROME

Doesn't look like anything important happens here at all.

Norman moves to Jerome.

NORMAN

What business is it of yours what it looks like? Leave now or I call the police.

JEROME

Relax, Pop.

Norman stops dead in his tracks.

NORMAN

What did you just call me?

JEROME

You prefer Dad?

NORMAN

Who are you?

JEROME

I'm your seed, man.

NORMAN

Seed?

JEROME

Your son.

Pause.

NORMAN

Get out.

Norman begins pushing Jerome toward the door.
Jerome pushes Norman back hard.

JEROME

Get your fuckin' hands off me! Nobody touches me, man. Last guy who did I put through a fuckin' wall. Feel me?

NORMAN

Sorry.

Pause.

JEROME

Nah, it's cool. And don't apologize neither. Makes you sound like a faggot.

NORMAN

I'm...look it I don't know who put you up to this but let's get one thing straight. I have no children. Understand? You need to get out of my apartment right now before I have you arrested.

JEROME

Let's talk this out, man.

NORMAN

There's nothing to talk about. You come in here uninvited with a, a knife. You, you smoke and curse and, and say crude things about women/

JEROME

/Crude?

NORMAN

You call me faggot/

JEROME

/Sound like a faggot.

NORMAN

Then you try to tell me you're my...son. No. This type of thing might work on someone else, but not me.

JEROME

What type of thing?

NORMAN

A thing I don't want any part of. You're just another street thug with nothing better to do.

JEROME

You don't even know me, man.

NORMAN

I don't want to know you.

Pause.

JEROME

Fuck you, then.

Jerome exits. Norman waits a moment before picking up his thrown blades. He begins walking back to his desk but is stopped at the sound of a photograph being slid under the door. Norman turns to it and moves to pick it up as well, blades still in hand. He looks at the photo.

NORMAN

Cass?

JEROME (O.S.)

I call her Ma. But you can call her Cass. That's cool, too.

Norman turns back to the door and hesitates a bit before opening it again. Jerome walks back inside.

NORMAN

You want something to eat? I have some left-over nachos.

JEROME

I dig.

Norman waits a bit before going into the kitchen. Jerome walks around some before heading to Norman's desk. He goes to set his backpack down on top of it and spots Norman's letter on the ground. He bends down and picks it up. He reads it, then turns to Norman.

What kinda' gay shit is this?

Norman turns to Jerome and at the sight of his letter being read hurriedly moves to him.

NORMAN

Don't read that.

He snatches the letter back from Jerome.

And it's not gay. It's personal.

JEROME

Looked pretty gay to me. What's that shit about the 'duality of purpose'. Who the fuck talks like that?

NORMAN

I do.

Pause.

JEROME

You were gonna' take yourself out, weren't you?

NORMAN

None of your business.

JEROME

You were. You so were, man. That's why all the blades and shit. I totally stopped you. I saved your life, Pop.

NORMAN

Stop calling me that. And you didn't save anything.

JEROME

I definitely ain't leavin' now. Suicide watch, motherfucker.

NORMAN

Shut up.

JEROME

Man, I can't wait to tell Chaz about this shit. He's gonna' blow a load.

NORMAN

You're not going to say anything about this. To anyone. And clean up your mouth a bit, will you? It's rude.

JEROME

Looks to me like you got bigger things to worry about than my vocabulary.

NORMAN

Like what?

JEROME

Like me throwin' a giant-ass monkeywrench in your whole plan. All I gotta' do is pick up that little phone over there. Blow the lid off this motherfucker to the cops and they be bustin' up in here cartin' your sorry, suicidal ass off to custody.

NORMAN

Go ahead. I'm sure they'd be inclined to hear of how you came to be in my apartment in the first place.

JEROME

Nah. They ain't gonna' give two shits about me when they see all these blades lyin' around here. For all they know you nabbed my ass off a jungle gym someplace and dragged me back here to do all kinds of sick shit.

NORMAN

They wouldn't believe you.

JEROME

My word against yours. And I'm an innocent child.

NORMAN

Are you using my suicide to blackmail me?

JEROME

You goddamn right I am. Look it.

Jerome removes his butterfly knife from his pocket and places it into his backpack.

I'm just gonna' place my shit right over here in this corner.

He does so, then comes back to the desk.

And me and you are gonna' catch up on the past sixteen years.

NORMAN

Pretty slick for a sixteen year old. Where did you pick up on things like blackmail?

JEROME

The streets, man.

NORMAN

What streets?

JEROME

If you get to know me, you'll find out which ones.

They remain a bit.

You promised nachos.

I didn't promise anything.

NORMAN

Jerome begins to move for the phone. Norman stops him and makes his way to the kitchen.

Unbelievable.

Norman begins preparing the nachos in the microwave. Jerome picks up the letter again.

JEROME

Gotta' hand it to you, Pop. You a good writer, man. A little gay, but good.

Why do you say things like that?

NORMAN

Like what?

JEROME

Gay this and gay that.

NORMAN

You offended?

JEROME

It's wrong.

NORMAN

'Cause suicide is so right.

JEROME

Norman returns to the desk with a plate of half-eaten nachos. He hands the plate to Jerome.

Bon Apetit.

NORMAN

Jerome snatches the plate and tears into the nachos as if he hasn't eaten in days. He looks up at Norman, his mouth full.

You ain't havin' any?

JEROME

NORMAN

No.

JEROME

Got any beer?

NORMAN

I don't drink.

JEROME

Fuckin' figures.

NORMAN

How so?

JEROME

Live alone. Crappy digs. About to off yourself. If you let loose every now and then shit might be different.

NORMAN

You don't know that.

JEROME

I know enough.

NORMAN

Ever heard of alcoholism?

JEROME

I ain't retarded.

NORMAN

Alcoholics aren't exactly a barrel of laughs.

JEROME

We ain't talkin' about no alcoholics.

NORMAN

What are we talking about?

JEROME

Me, motherfucker. Me and you.

NORMAN

You and me.

JEROME

What I said.

NORMAN

And what makes you think there is a you and me?

JEROME

You holdin' that pic, ain't you?

Norman reaches for the photo.

NORMAN

Where did you get this?

JEROME

Ma's dresser. Was lookin' for some bud but found that instead. Under some socks and shit.

NORMAN

And you just took it? Why?

JEROME

Got me in here eatin' on your half-ass nachos, didn't it?

NORMAN

I don't believe you.

JEROME

Believe what you want.

NORMAN

This was ages ago.

Jerome surveys Norman.

JEROME

No shit. Time ain't on your side, that's for damn sure.

Norman surveys himself.

NORMAN

What are you doing here?

JEROME

You stupid or somethin'? I done told you like five times.

NORMAN

Why now?

JEROME

Got bored.

NORMAN

Bored?

JEROME

I got bored and wanted to find out. Ma told me a bit about you so I thought I'd do some detective shit and find the rest.

NORMAN

Out of boredom?

JEROME

Don't you get bored?

NORMAN

All the time. Only my boredom doesn't lead me on excursions such as yours.

JEROME

I got a pretty good idea where your boredom gets you. You plannin' on cuttin' the cake with those blades over there?

NORMAN

Cake?

JEROME

The cake for your pity-party. Gotcha, bitch.

NORMAN

Don't call me that.

JEROME

You a uptight motherfucker, man.

NORMAN

Or that.

JEROME

What, uptight?

NORMAN

Motherfucker.

JEROME

Watch your mouth.

NORMAN

You are the furthest thing from what my hypothetical offspring could be it's not even funny.

JEROME

The fuck's that mean?

NORMAN

What?

JEROME

That hypo shit?

NORMAN

Hypothetical. It means you are not my kid.

JEROME

But I am.

NORMAN

You can't prove anything. All you have is this photo,

JEROME

My birthday is November 19th. 1995.

NORMAN

And?

JEROME

Ain't you the type to fuck on V-day?

NORMAN

Pardon?

JEROME

You and Ma? Valentine's '95. She told me all about it.

NORMAN

She did?

JEROME

You guys fucked face-to-face, huh? She ain't tell me that part, I can just tell. Yyou know, you bein' you and all.

NORMAN

Me being me?

JEROME

Pathetic. You don't look the type to bend some chick over. Do that shit zoo-style.

NORMAN

Don't talk about Cass- about your mother like that. It's disrespectful.

JEROME

Alright. But you guys did have sex that day right?

Pause.

NORMAN

I can't recall.

JEROME

You did. She told me.

NORMAN

Okay.

JEROME

And nine months later, out popped lil' Norm.

He motions to his empty plate of nachos.

JEROME

Been done for a minute now.

Norman takes Jerome's empty plate into the kitchen. Jerome stands and makes his way around the apartment.

So this is how the other half lives, huh?

He notices a lone frame hanging on the wall.

Damn, killa'. Masters of Fine Arts. In what?

He looks closer.

Studio art. You draw and shit?

Norman walks back from the kitchen and sits.

Used to.
NORMAN

What happened?
JEROME

Life.
NORMAN

You got any work I can peep?
JEROME

Not anymore.
NORMAN

Where'd it all go?
JEROME

Here and there. Things get lost along the way.
NORMAN

Pause.

I draw.
JEROME

Penises in margins, I'll wager.
NORMAN

That's kid shit, man. I draw for real.
JEROME

Jerome moves to his backpack and opens it.
He removes a sketch-book. He walks back to
Norman and hands it to him. Norman opens it.

This is...really good.
NORMAN

Thanks. The line work could be touched up a bit but you get the idea.
JEROME

NORMAN

No. No the lines are fantastic. Shading might be a bit off over here.

JEROME

Where?

Jerome looks down at the book. Norman points to a part of it.

NORMAN

See here? Your light source is on this side, so a gradual shade from the left would better suit you. But other than that it's impeccable. You did this?

JEROME

What you think, I nabbed it off some art student?

NORMAN

I didn't say that. It's just/

JEROME

/Just what?

NORMAN

Impressive.

Norman flips the page.

Now this is...this is...

Norman stares at Jerome's drawing.

JEROME

It's me. Symbolism and shit, you know.

Norman looks up at Jerome. Waits a bit before handing the book back to Jerome. He gets up and moves to his desk. He pushes what's left on top aside and it all falls on the floor. Norman opens the top of the desk. He removes an old notebook. He flips through the pages frantically until landing on his desired one. He hands it to Jerome, who takes it. Jerome looks at and is as taken aback as Norman was.

JEROME

Thought you said you didn't have anything?

NORMAN

I have this.

Jerome sets his sketchbook down and begins flipping through Norman's notebook. Norman picks up Jerome's sketchbook and begins looking at it some more. They remain looking at each other's art for a moment.

Can see you prefer grayscale.

Jerome turns to Norman.

JEROME

Color's for fags.

Norman turns to him.

I mean pussies.

They go back to their respective books.

You dig on that art nouveau shit, huh?

Norman turns to Jerome. A smirk.

NORMAN

Yeah. I do. And I can see you favor the new wave?

JEROME

Art of the street, motherfucker.

NORMAN

Some of these might benefit from some color. Just a few splashes, though.

JEROME

Splashes? We ain't sippin' tea over here.

Norman moves to Jerome. They are standing close. He shows him one of his drawings.

NORMAN

Just look here.

Jerome does so.

Maybe a red accent along these back lines here. Some greens and yellows down here.

Jerome points to a piece of the drawing.

JEROME

Orange on the bottom left.

Norman looks to him.

NORMAN

Yeah. Orange. Maybe toss some blue lowlights down here for balance.

JEROME

Gotta' keep it cool, huh?

NORMAN

Exactly.

Jerome looks at Norman.

JEROME

Maybe.

Jerome turns back to Norman's book. Norman keeps his eyes on Jerome a bit more before returning to the drawings.

Can't believe you were gonna' kill yourself over these. Literally.

NORMAN

Forgot they were there.

JEROME

No you didn't.

Norman looks back to Jerome.

But your line work on this one could be/

NORMAN

/What?

JEROME

Bolder.

Norman moves to Jerome and looks down at the drawing he is referring to.

See, man. It starts out all cool up top, but then goin' down gets way to light.

NORMAN

What if I intended it that way?

JEROME

Why would you start strong and end weak? That's pussy shit, man. You gotta' bang that shit out. This piece would slam you did that.

Norman continues to survey his work.

NORMAN

I can see a few places.

JEROME

Maybe. But you ain't gonna' do shit about it, though.

Jerome sets Norman's notebook down on the desk.

NORMAN

How do you know that?

JEROME

Said yourself you don't draw no more.

NORMAN

No I didn't.

JEROME

What does 'used to' mean where you come from? 'Cause where I'm at it means no more.

Norman sets Jerome's sketchbook down on top of his notebook.

NORMAN

And just where do you come from exactly?

JEROME

I done told you already. The streets.

NORMAN

You probably play in the street, yes. But where do you sleep? Eat? Stay?

JEROME

I mostly stay at Phil the Fish's place.

NORMAN

Phil the Fish?

JEROME

My boss. Me and Chaz's.

NORMAN

Who's Chaz?

JEROME

Your other son.

Pause.

Nah I'm playin'. Shoulda' seen your face, though. Chaz is my homie, man. My road dog. Taught me everything I know.

NORMAN

This Fish guy is he Cass's...you know?

JEROME

What? New man? Hell no. She with some drunk-ass dickhead motherfucker can't hold down a job.

NORMAN

Does he...is he good? To her?

JEROME

He don't hit her if that's what you getting' at.

NORMAN

Where did the two of you meet? Chaz?

JEROME

I did a stint in the clink a while back for puttin' a potato in my principal's exhaust pipe. Didn't do nothin' 'cause the prick spotted it before he lit up the car, but it landed me five months in juvie. Chaz was doin' his time for beatin' up on some punk-ass owed him cabbage. Instant click. We got out the same time and started bombin' around together. Knockin' off gas stations and shit like that.

NORMAN

Honor among thieves?

JEROME

Whatever. Then we met Phil the Fish, and he put us to work.

NORMAN

Doing what?

JEROME

This and that, you know. B and E's. Slingin'. Real technical stuff, ain't got time to go into detail. Couple other guys too like Chaz and me, but they got pinched a few weeks ago.

NORMAN

Short handed, then?

JEROME

Skeleton crew.

NORMAN

Cass know about your...occupation?

JEROME

Yeah. She don't like it much. But she don't complain when those bills get paid every month.

NORMAN

Isn't there something else you could do?

JEROME

No.

NORMAN

I mean surely there are other jobs-

JEROME

I said no.

Pause.

NORMAN

Chaz show you how to pick locks?

JEROME

Yeah. Even took the fall for me when I set off an alarm. Told me to get the fuck out. That he got this. Met him on the other side ten months later. What about you. You done time?

NORMAN

Never.

JEROME

Don't front me, man. Everybody does some kinda' time.

Norman thinks a bit.

NORMAN

I was once held after school in the third grade.

JEROME

For what?

NORMAN

I was punched, repeatedly, in the throat.

JEROME

You got held in for getting' whaled on? What kinda shit is that?

NORMAN

Principal said I initiated it.

JEROME

Fuckin' principals, man.

NORMAN

I know. This boy, Christopher Tilley, was bullying a friend of mine. After seeing it, I marched up to him and told him to leave him alone. Try picking on someone his own size.

JEROME

You said that? You said 'pick on someone your own size'?

NORMAN

Then I called him a...punk. After school detention. Two hours.

JEROME

Two hour bid?

NORMAN

Two. Hour. Bid.

JEROME

You get back at him? This Tilley fool?

NORMAN

No. But I discovered a few years ago that he manages the grocery store on Fifth and Pine. Miserable place.

JEROME

And you sittin' high on the hog with a M.F.A in art?

NORMAN

Precisely.

Pause.

JEROME

Wanna' go ice that sucka'?

NORMAN

What? No. Were aren't icing anything. No. I'm much better off than him now.

JEROME

Yeah. I can see that.

Pause.

NORMAN

Where does this Fish guy live?

JEROME

The Cuts.

NORMAN

The where?

JEROME

The Cuts, man. Square mile spot over by Eighteenth and Little York.

NORMAN

That's seven blocks from here.

JEROME

What can I say? You live in a bad part of town.

NORMAN

I had no idea.

JEROME

Well work in and work out. You prolly ain't do much else but sit in here and bitch and moan. How you supposed to know where you at in the world?

Pause.

NORMAN

I should go see Cass.

JEROME

What is that gonna' do? Stop you from killing yourself?

Norman stares at Jerome a moment, about to speak.

Norman's door swings open and in marches his sister Estelle, and his father Frank. Estelle is a woman of business. She walks, talks, and dresses the part. Bluetooth in her ear, tight pantsuit around her body. She would be considered gorgeous if she would just unclench her face every now and then. Frank is old and crotchety. He wears an old Hawaiian shirt with shorts. Long black socks come up to his knees and into his sandals. Estelle is talking into the headset, paying no attention to those around her. Frank simply bumbles around the apartment, a grave look of disgust on his face, like he wishes he were somewhere, anywhere else.

ESTELLE

I don't care. If those reports aren't on my desk by eight tomorrow morning I will personally see to your termination and ruin in this industry. Are we clear?...Good. Happy birthday again. Take care.

She clicks her headset, then turns to Norman.

Jesus Christ, Norman I've been calling you all day. Would it hurt to pick up the phone every now and then? I know you're not that busy. And why is your door knob broken off?

(to Frank)

You okay, Dad?

FRANK

I'm fine, baby.

NORMAN

Hi, Dad.

Frank grumbles something at him, then moves to the desk and sits.

NORMAN

Nice to see you, too.

ESTELLE

Who's the kid?

JEROME

Who you callin' kid lady?

ESTELLE

Watch your mouth, young man.

(to Norman)

This is why I keep inviting you out to places. Maybe if you picked up a friend or two you wouldn't feel the need to converse with hoodlums.

(to Jerome)

Run along now, boy. Don't want your parents to get worried.

JEROME

Bitch, you don't even know who you talkin' to.

ESTELLE

Excuse me/

NORMAN

/Jerome.

ESTELLE

I know exactly who I'm talking to.

NORMAN

Don't speak to her like that.

JEROME

Why not? She your fuckin' girlfriend or somethin'?

ESTELLE

His sister.

Pause. Jerome waits a moment, and then:

JEROME

Ain't that about a bitch. Auntie. You shoulda' told a motherfucker.

ESTELLE

What did you call me?

(to Norman)

What did he call me?

Jerome moves to Estelle, preparing a hug.

JEROME

It's me, Auntie. Your nephew Jerome.

Jerome goes to hug Estelle, she quickly removes a can of pepper spray. Jerome stops.

ESTELLE

Back off./

JEROME

/Easy, girl.

ESTELLE

Norman, who is this kid?

NORMAN

I'll explain later. What's he doing here?

(motioning to Frank)

Estelle puts the pepper spray back in her purse.

ESTELLE

If you would return my calls you would have known. I'm leaving for Toronto tomorrow morning so I'm dropping him off with you.

NORMAN

Like hell you are.

JEROME

Whose old dude?

NORMAN

My father.

JEROME

Shit, Pop. We got us a little reunion up in here.

Jerome moves to Frank as Estelle moves close to Norman.

ESTELLE
(whispering)

You better start talking about this.

NORMAN
(whispering back)

Not now.

ESTELLE
(whispering louder)

Everything's not now with you.

JEROME

Guess that makes you Gramps, huh?

Frank turns to Jerome. Stares at him for a moment.

FRANK

Tony?

JEROME

Nah. Jerome.

Frank stands.

FRANK

Tony! How long has it been? You old rascal.

Frank hugs Jerome.

I'm hungry, baby girl. (to Estelle)

ESTELLE
No you're not.

NORMAN
I have some nachos. (louder) You want nachos, Dad?

FRANK
Quit yellin' at me, goddamnit. Rather eat my own shit than anything you got.
(to Estelle)
Take me someplace else.

ESTELLE
Dad, we've been through this. Norman is the only one in town while I'm away.

FRANK
Who?

NORMAN
Me, Dad.

Pause.

FRANK
I don't want to stay here. Take me someplace else.
(motions to Jerome)
What about him?

ESTELLE
He's leaving.

FRANK
Then I'm goin' with him. We got some catching up to do.

ESTELLE
No you don't. We don't even know him. And he's leaving. Now.

FRANK
Sure we do. This here's Tony. That's it. You remember Tony.

NORMAN
(to Estelle)
Who's Tony?

ESTELLE

I don't know. Been going on about him for two days now.

(to Frank)

Yes, Dad. I remember.

FRANK

Go way back, don't we Tony? Remember the handshake?

Frank takes Jerome's hand and begins performing a secret handshake. Jerome plays along.

ESTELLE

(to Norman)

He's getting worse.

NORMAN

Good for him.

Estelle slugs him in the arm.

ESTELLE

I'm serious. He can't even remember what day it is anymore.

NORMAN

Oh.

ESTELLE

Took him to the doctor this morning.

NORMAN

Okay.

ESTELLE

Some memory test thing. Like for children.

NORMAN

Cognitive.

ESTELLE

That's it. Didn't do too well. Twelve out of thirty. Past the point of slipping. Forgets who he's even talking to a lot. Thinks I'm Mom sometimes.

NORMAN

Well, keep me posted.

ESTELLE

Shut up with that.

NORMAN

What?

ESTELLE

Don't feed me that 'keep me posted' crap. You don't care.

NORMAN

I don't.

ESTELLE

Just make sure he takes these.

She fishes two bottles of pills out of her purse.

NORMAN

Stell, you know I'm no good with-

ESTELLE

No scheduling. Only when he flares.

NORMAN

Flares?

ESTELLE

You'll know. When he flares, give him the pills. Simple as that.

Norman takes the pills.

Probably spend the majority of his time in the bathroom, anyway.

NORMAN

Jesus Christ.

ESTELLE

Not like that. He likes being in bathrooms lately. Porcelain calms him, I guess.

Frank stops with the handshake and goes to the desk and sits.

NORMAN

Why did you bring him here?

ESTELLE

Where else am I supposed to take him?

NORMAN

Plenty of homes around here, I'm sure.

ESTELLE

He's our father, Norman. Your father.

NORMAN

I don't care.

FRANK

Get me out of here.

NORMAN

Yes-that.

(to Frank)

Don't worry, Dad. Estelle's going to take you away from here. Far away. You'll never see me again.

(to Estelle)

Get him out of my apartment.

ESTELLE

No. He's family. It's high time you start remembering that.

NORMAN

Him first.

Estelle slugs him one more.

ESTELLE

I'm trying here, brother. This isn't the best scenario for anyone, I know. But there's no one else. Understand? No one else.

NORMAN

He belongs in a home.

ESTELLE

He belongs with family.

Estelle's headset chimes.

Jesus Christ.

She clicks it.

What?...What do you mean it's lost?

Estelle moves away from the others to handle her phone call. Norman sets the pills down on the counter and moves to Jerome. Frank spots the razor blades and knives about the desk and begins picking them up. He surveys each one a bit before placing them in his pocket. Norman doesn't notice.

NORMAN

Listen you really should go.

JEROME

And miss catchin' up with the fam. Ain't gonna' hapn' capn'.

NORMAN

You're upsetting people.

JEROME

Who? Her?

(motioning to Estelle)

Lady proly wakes up upset. And Gramps don't seem to mind too much.

NORMAN

He's not Gramps. And you're not staying. We can continue this tomorrow.

JEROME

Ain't gonna' be a tomorrow I bounce out a here. You'll be dead.

NORMAN

Stop it with that.

Estelle comes back toward the desk, still on her headset.

ESTELLE

I don't care, Maury. You know how important this is. What's her number? Extension first.

She begins fumbling around Norman's desk for something. Norman and Jerome freeze. She spots some of the crumpled reject letters as well as Norman's final draft. She picks it up off the floor, eyeballing Norman. More involved in her phone

conversation than what's in the letter, she places it on the desk and flips it over to the blank side. Norman is freaking out.

Uh-huh...

She jots down a number on the blank side. Norman and Jerome turn to one another.

Okay. I'll call her first thing.

She folds the letter in half and places it and the pen into her purse. Jerome slowly moves to her and attempts to 'pickpocket' the paper back out. Saving Norman.

No more excuses, dammit. Eight o'clock or else.

She clicks her headset and turns, noticing Jerome who only managed to snatch the pen. He freezes a bit when she sees him. She pulls away quick.

What the hell do you think you're doing?!

JEROME

You dropped this.

He holds the pen out for her to take. Surveying it as he does so.

Estelle Weller-Holden.

ESTELLE

Give me that.

She snatches it from him. Jerome begins to laugh a bit.

What's funny?

JEROME

You a dash-bitch.

ESTELLE

Excuse me?!

JEROME

You got that line.

(draws a horizontal line in the air)

Two last names.

ESTELLE

Hyphen.

JEROME

Whatever, ice-queen.

ESTELLE

Feminist.

JEROME

Yeah, I'm sure. Never got that dash bit, though. All you man-haters get together and think you all bad and shit cause you keep both names.

ESTELLE

It's not about that.

JEROME

Oh, I know. It's about your kids. See all you dash-bitches don't understand that the more of you do that shit, the more kids' names you mess with. Dash kids fuckin' dash kids. I once knew this kid had eight last names. Ponzi scheme shit, man.

ESTELLE

Ponzi scheme? And just what do you know about ponzi schemes?

JEROME

Judgin' by that get-up and Bluetooth shit, I bet you know a lot more about 'em than me.

Pause.

ESTELLE

How old are you?

JEROME

What's that got to do with anything?

ESTELLE

Ignorance and age are often measured by the same thing.

JEROME

What kinda' fortune cookie shit is that?

ESTELLE

It's...Listen I don't have to explain myself to you.
(to Norman)

Get him out of here.

Estelle turns to leave. She stops by Frank and kisses him on the head.

NORMAN

Where are you going?

ESTELLE

Trouble at the office. I'll swing back by on my way home. Have dinner maybe before I leave tomorrow.

JEROME

Sounds good, Auntie.

ESTELLE

And if you are still here when I get back I will make sure you're hauled away in handcuffs and never heard from again.

(to Frank)

Be nice, Dad. I'll see you soon.

FRANK

I'm gonna' die, you leave me here.

Jerome chuckles a bit. Norman turns to him. He stops.

ESTELLE

And clean this place up, Norman. Someone can hurt themselves walking around in here.

She begins to exit.

Norman suddenly remembers the razor blades on the ground and quickly moves to the desk. Not there. He looks at Frank, who simply stares back.

FRANK

Problem?

He turns to Estelle. The letter. She can't leave.

Wait.

NORMAN

Estelle turns to Norman.

You should stay. Let's have dinner now.

FRANK

Dinner.

NORMAN

See?

ESTELLE

He's not hungry. He ate on the way over. And I have to take care of this. I'll see you soon.

She begins to leave again.

NORMAN

He's my son.

Estelle stops.

Maybe. I think.

Estelle clicks her headset.

ESTELLE

Maury. Figure it out yourself or you're fired.

She clicks the headset once more. A bit of silence.
Then:

Start talking. Now.

NORMAN

Okay. Earlier today-

ESTELLE

How earlier?

NORMAN

I don't know. Maybe thirty minutes? Forty?

Norman turns to Jerome, who shrugs.

JEROME

Forty-five?

Jerome looks around a bit.

There a clock in this motherfucker?

ESTELLE

If this is some kind of sick joke-

JEROME

It ain't lady.

ESTELLE

Not talking to you. Norman, if this is some kind of sick joke then one, it's not funny. Not at all and you're wasting my time. Two, it needs to stop right now and this little delinquent needs to get out so we can talk.

NORMAN

Talk about what?

ESTELLE

About you.

NORMAN

What about me?

ESTELLE

Everything. We don't talk anymore. I call and call and call and you never answer. You're too evasive these days.

NORMAN

I'm sorry.

JEROME

Cut that shit out, man.

ESTELLE
(to Jerome)

Why are you still here? Those magazine subscriptions aren't going to sell themselves.

NORMAN

Stop it, Stell.

Pardon?

ESTELLE

Don't talk to him that way.

NORMAN

Why? Because he's your son? Am I supposed to act all auntily now? What proof do you have that he belongs here?

ESTELLE

Well. Nothing really. Just-

NORMAN

Get out.

ESTELLE
(to Jerome)

This.

NORMAN

Norman retrieves the photo and hands it to Estelle. She takes it and surveys it a bit. A hushed gasp escapes her, as if she's fighting emotion. She hands it back to Norman.

ESTELLE

This means nothing.

Norman takes the picture back.

Twenty-first century big brother. I'd bet five people in this building alone have access to that photo.

JEROME

It ain't no copy, lady.

NORMAN

No it ain't.

Estelle and Jerome turn to him.

It's not. Not a copy. This photo is an original. Look at the back.

Norman hands the photo back to Estelle. She doesn't take it.

ESTELLE

You need help.

NORMAN

I'm fine.

ESTELLE

Obviously you aren't. You need to talk to someone Norman. If you're not going to talk to me you need to talk to someone.

Estelle brings up her purse and rummages through it. She removes Norman's letter, once again not noticing what is written on the front. Norman and Jerome turn to one another in a panic. She places it down on the desk and brings out a pen. She begins jotting something down.

This is the number for Doctor Schmidt. Will you call her in the morning and set up an appointment? I'll pay for the sessions.

Norman moves to her and attempts to grab the letter.

NORMAN

Not necessary.

Estelle pulls away. Letter in hand.

ESTELLE

Please. I trust her.

She rips the letter in half and hands Norman the number, who quickly pockets the paper. She places her half back into her purse.

Call her. Tomorrow. Or I will.

She turns to Jerome.

And as for you. I don't care how you got that photo but you need to take it and yourself out of here this instant. I don't know how many times I have to say it.

JEROME

I ain't goin nowhere.

ESTELLE

You will or I'll call someone who can make you. Your choice.

Jerome moves to Estelle.

Bitch you don't scare me.

JEROME

/Why is everyone yelling?/

FRANK

Estelle moves to Jerome.

And you don't impress me/

ESTELLE

/Stop/

NORMAN

Frank stands.

/Yelling.

FRANK

Frank moves to where Estelle and Jerome are. They don't turn to him.

Margaret! Margaret! The kids are yelling again!

I ain't even tryin to do that shit. Fuckin' stuck up, ice queen!

JEROME

If you call me ice queen one more time/

ESTELLE

/Stop it/

NORMAN

Margaret!

FRANK

What. You gonna' spray me? I'll have CPS crawlin' all up your ass/

JEROME

/You are not his son!

ESTELLE