

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Episode 157: PAPER CUTS

Written by
John Strong

www.johnstrongpresents.com

ACT ONE

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Shot of the sky...the various nebulae and planet bodies stand out in sharp, sparkling relief. As the CAMERA begins a SLOW PAN across the Heavens--

NARRATOR'S VOICE (V.O.)

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow -- between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of a man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call The Twilight Zone.

The CAMERA has begun to PAN DOWN until it passes the horizon and is flush on the OPENING SHOT.

INT. WRITER'S ROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON the tick tick ticking secondhand of a clock. The hour hand is on two -- the disposition of those in the room hint at 2 a.m. not p.m. We are in the writer's room seated at the table. This table, that magical place where man and mind meld into the visual medium we call television.

These WRITERS are spent, running on e. Their dead brain cells have been resurrected, reincarnated and buried again.

SLOW PAN past disgusted face after disgusted face -- land on NORMAN EVANS (30's), seated at the head of the table. Norman's eyes are closed, they JOLT open and he smiles.

Norman is one of those people GOD spent a little more time on. Tall, with modelesque good looks. Born with the mind of a savant and a heart of gold. That one guy who always manages to one up you without even trying.

NORMAN

(confidant, assured)

Alright let's do this...raise your hand if you're ready to put episode 139 to bed and get the hell out of here?

A surge of energy overtakes the room. The writers perk up, they stare at Norman with expectant faces.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

It's simple all we have to do is...

As he continues to talk. Over his idea we hear the narrator's voice--

NARRATOR'S VOICE (V.O.)

Hollywood California...Tinsel Town. Fame, celebrity, bright lights, beautiful people. That's the dream Norman Evans dreamt -- a dream the universe predestined could come true. His career...fast tracked. No time wasted dealing with shoddy managers or agents. He didn't pay a dime hoping to win a buck prize at some festival. No degree...from a school run by has-beens who never were. Norman earned his stripes the old fashioned way, talent. He made a habit of committing himself to a task and seeing it through. A real live go-getter. The kind of guy that serves as a testament to what could be...he makes the impossible possible. Norman's existence is both an inspiration and a mirror to all who see him. And the very reason he is both loved and hated.

DISSOLVE TO:

OPENING BILLBOARD

INT. WRITER'S ROOM - MORNING

Dramatic pause between Norman's last words and the door SLAMMING offscreen. Enter KEITH EDWARDS (65), show runner extraordinaire. Keith is extra plus two, a male diva. Keith APPLAUDS--

KEITH

(re: Norman)

Bra-fucking-o!! Him gets it...him gives me life.

(to Norman)

I swear the name Norman Evans should be on that door. Clearly you're the only writer in the room.

WRITER ONE

(mutters)

Funny...you'd think you were based on all your series credits.

KEITH
 (flourishes)
 Oh mister IMDB...we're being both
 cute and clever today? But you
 couldn't translate that energy into
 coming up with something to add...to
 your pages?

The writer back peddles.

WRITER ONE
 Whaaat I was saying...

KEITH
 Whaaa...whaaaa!?! Norman is getting
 your by-line. BOOP!

NORMAN
 (surprised)
 Wait...what just happen?

KEITH
 (re: Norman)
 You earned it. It's yours.

The other writers gasp.

WRITER ONE
 Hell no!? I have been point on the
 first two drafts. I did the grunt
 work. I towed the line.
 Contractually...

KEITH
 Contractually you're obligated to
 get credit for a show. One, this
 season. When and only when I deem
 said offering suitable. You have
 yet to meet this requirement. Thus
 you have not gotten that coveted by-
 line...which still renders you
 ineligible for full WGA benefits.
 POW! So very close but yet so far.
 My suggestion...read the fine print
 next time.

WRITER ONE
 What fine print?!?

KEITH
 That says shut the fuck up when grown
 folks are talking. Finished him.
 (to room)
 That's a day people.
 (MORE)

KEITH (CONT'D)

Norman will be point from here on
in...expect the yellow draft before
table reads. And episode 140 is...
(looks to Norman)

NORMAN

Done. Touching up act three now.
Get it out right after 139 rewrite.
No later than first thing tomorrow.
Maybe tonight.

KEITH

(to the room)
You heard him. Results...get and
maintain by-lines! The rest of you
peasants take note.
(to Norman)
Requesting your presence in my office.

Norman nods in agreement.

KEITH (CONT'D)

(under his breath)
After the help leaves.

And with that Keith makes his grand exit into a back office.

WRITER THREE

(packing up)
Whelp! Time to go...

The writers make haste, can't leave fast enough. One by one
they begrudgingly congratulate Norman. The room is a buzz
with activity momentarily, then silence. Only Norman and
Writer One remain.

Writer One is in no rush to leave. His gaze meets Norman's,
they exchange a nod of solidarity.

NORMAN

Shake that shit off! You know what
they say...every dog has his day.
Today just so happened to be mine.
Tomorrow...

WRITER ONE

Day? More like week, hell month.
You been best in show for the last
two years.

NORMAN

Best in show? Stop it!

WRITER ONE
 (gathering things)
 No seriously you're clutch. And
 clutch pays the bills. You eat, we
 all eat. Only a fool would question
 that.

Writer One opens the door, steps halfway outside. He turns
 to Norman--

WRITER ONE (CONT'D)
 Don't go signing no contracts without
 reading the fine print now. It just
 might say...

They speak at the same time.

NORMAN/WRITER ONE
 Shut the fuck up!?!!

Writer One forces a smile. Norman raises his hand, salutes.
 Writer One returns the gesture, exits.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The door SLAMS behind Writer One. He takes a few steps away
 from the door, stops. He steadies his nerves and walks back
 to the door.

The words, "Writer's Room" are now eye level. He traces
 them with his finger.

WRITER ONE
 (deflated)
 ...Norman Evans!

Defeated Writer One stands in the doorway, stares at the
 frosted glass.

CUT TO:

INT. KEITH'S OFFICE - MORNING

This office is a testament to the golden era of Hollywood
 glitz. Antique makeup mirror, mannequin doll heads, framed
 sequined gowns. You'd think it belonged to a show girl not
 a show-runner.

Norman appears in the doorway, awaits acknowledgment. Keith's
 eyes are downcast -- he's reading something. Keith wands
 Norman in without looking up.

Norman takes a seat opposite Keith.

BEAT.

KEITH
 (into desk)
 You know how I got my start?

NORMAN
 Uhhh...producing right? Produced an indie. Got into directing after that.

KEITH
 Managing. I Managed some of the most fierce female talents ever to do it. Actresses, singers, models. Can you believe that? It sounds crazy now, little old me 25-years young going head to head with full blown divas?

NORMAN
 (sarcasm)
 You going head to head with a couple of divas, no way.

KEITH
 (smirks)
 I'm talking big time egos honey. Women who knew exactly what they wanted. Women who were willing to do whoever and whatever it took, to get where they desired to be. Women you didn't tell no. Only how...and when.

Keith looks up for the first time.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 I learned the business inside out from these women. But more importantly I learned life.

NORMAN
 That's a thing? You can learn life?

KEITH
 I learned life is a bitch. A stone cold bitch at that! She gives you your first breath...then takes your last. Somewhere in the middle you find out you're fucked and either accept it and die. Or you adapt.

Keith pushes the paper in front of Norman.

NORMAN
 (reading)
 You're...leaving the show to start another one?

KEITH

I'm doubling down. Doubling my pleasure. Two shows on the same damn network...at the same damn time.

NORMAN

(guessing)

Annnd you want me to take over for you while you get the second show off the ground?

KEITH

No I want you to get the second show off the ground. Hire your own staff. Run the writer's room. I executive produce..but for the most part I'm hands off. The studio is hands off. You hold the reins.

NORMAN

Whoa! Wasn't expecting that.

KEITH

You should have. This is that middle part I just mentioned. But the question remains can you adapt? Do you know what you truly want? How much of yourself you're willing to compromise to get it?

Norman's expression changes.

KEITH (CONT'D)

(re: expression)

Yes, compromise. Compromise is inevitable. You don't sell your soul at the crossroads at night. You sell your soul the moment you knowingly do something that goes against your principles for gain. That's a typical Monday morning in Hollywood.

NORMAN

(eyes on paper)

I mean...I can't believe this.

KEITH

Believe it. Proposed budget. Pilot episode guarantee...all right there.

NORMAN

(thinks out loud)

Of course I'd like to do it.

(MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Sure it's what I want to do I just didn't...

KEITH

Don't need an answer right now. Sleep on it. Pray over it. Talk it over with the wife. This is a big boy decision Norman. The praise and accolades are nice. But protecting that bottom line is a whole other story. Shit gets real fast and frequent when money is involved.

And just like that Keith has lost interest, dismisses Norman with a flutter of his hand. Norman stands but doesn't leave.

KEITH (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Rewrite. Back for table reads.

NORMAN

Right, right. Thanks Keith. I will definitely be getting back to you asap.

Norman walks towards the exit.

KEITH

(into phone)

Norman.

NORMAN

Yeah?

KEITH

(looks up)

Don't disappoint me Norman.

Norman nods, turns to exit. Keith watches him leave.

KEITH (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Youth and talent...wasted on the young and dumb.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN LOFT - MORNING

It's dark, only the vague outlines of furniture visible. Norman tosses his keys this way, his bag over there. A trail of discarded clothes mark his route to bedroom.

BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Norman stands in the doorway and admires a blanketed mass on the bed. He approaches the mass--

NORMAN

Excuse me miss...I couldn't help but notice you from across the room. I saw you and I asked myself...self what would a woman like that be doing in a place like this...alone.

A muddled GRUNT escapes from beneath the covers.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I hope you don't think me forward for saying so...but you looked like you could use some company...

JANET

(beneath the covers)

"I GOT A MAN."

NORMAN

"WHAT YOUR MAN GOT TO DO WITH ME?"

JANET

"I GOT A MAN."

NORMAN

"I'M NOT TRYING TO HEAR THAT SEE."

Norman leans in, and snuggles with JANET (30's). Janet is as equally beautiful as she is brilliant. She is a trophy wife minus the shelf.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(to mass)

I see you fell asleep on the wrong side of the bed again.

JANET

(was clearly asleep)

No, I'm awake.

NORMAN

Oh waiting up on your man?

JANET

Ummm huh.

NORMAN

Sooo. You missed me...I mean him.

JANET

Nope.

NORMAN

Then...why you waiting up?

JANET

He got paid today, and needs to transfer the money for the utilities. Figure if I treated him extra extra nice...I just might get me a tip.

NORMAN

That's almost three x's.

Janet peels back the sheets, reveals she's naked.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(Uncle Jesse voice)

"Have mercy."

They kiss passionately.

DISSOLVE TO: BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. THE FILLING STATION - DAY

The line at this diner is out the door and around the corner. The would be PATRONS wait patiently.

We TRACK Norman past the line and up to the front door. He is dressed to impress. All eyes are on him. They aren't quite sure who he is but he must be a somebody.

Norman is quickly ushered inside by the HOSTESS, and seated at a booth. Moments later JAMES (30's), enters. James is clean cut and stocky. He looks like a dad. That I haven't given up on life, but I know it's not getting any better look.

Norman waves James over. They shake hands, James sits. James is obviously impressed with Norman's appearance. Dotes over him like a woman.

JAMES

I bet they didn't say anything when you sashayed your ass in here looking like new money. Some guy told me unless I was delivering Amazon packages the line starts around the freaking corner. Made me do a damn double take. Seriously? Delivering packages? Does this look like a deliver packages outfit? This is Banana Republic.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Outlet Mall Banana Republic, yes.
 But Banana Republic none the less.

NORMAN
 I keep telling you it's not the
 clothes.

JAMES
 Yeah, yeah..."It's the man in the
 clothes." You probably wearing Armani
 underwear or something.

NORMAN
 Touche'.

JAMES
 What you do? You spot them a twenty?
 I know you didn't give up a grant
 for smoked turkey sausage and grits.

NORMAN
 (laughs)
 Nope. The hostess is an actress.
 She was a day player on the show a
 while back...

JAMES
 And...what?

NORMAN
 I met her on set.

JAMES
 And?

NORMAN
 And I was nice to her...what else
 could there be?

JAMES
 Duh? You work in Hollywood in
 Hollywood. It can be whatever you
 want it to be. What a waste. The
 gift horse bursting it wide open and
 you don't want to saddle up.

Norman shakes it off, laughs. James dissects him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Look at you all he-he ha-ha gitty.
 All enjoying life and what not.

NORMAN

Yes I'm enjoying life! What's wrong with that?

JAMES

Life ain't meant to be enjoyed. It's something you just get stuck with like crabs.

A WOMAN at a near by table shakes her head in disapproval.

NORMAN

Well, I just so happened to have gotten stuck with a good life and I'm he-he haha gitty about it.

JAMES

(disgusted)
You had voluntary sex this morning didn't you?

NORMAN

Voluntary sex?

JAMES

Voluntary sex. You had voluntary sex this morning and you enjoyed it.

NORMAN

(signals waiter)
No idea what you're talking about.

JAMES

Can't even remember the last time I had voluntary sex. Where I looked at my wife and the thought crossed my mind...hey I would enjoy being intimate with this woman right now. Damn I miss that!

NORMAN

Dude...where is this going?

JAMES

(lost, distant)
Bruh, don't ever have kids.

NORMAN

How are the boys? D has a birthday coming up right?

JAMES

Don't do it. I'm telling you...do not do it.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Either I got a time restraint. "Quick
 put it in...do it right now." "Go
 ahead and cum." Or a noise
 restriction.

NORMAN
 A noise restriction?

JAMES
 (whispers)
 "Did you hear that?" "What was that?"
 As a man, part of your soul dies the
 first time you get a good stroke
 in...and have to listen to see if
 someone who doesn't even know what
 they're hearing heard you!?!
 www.johnnyjohnpresents.com

NORMAN
 Damn...you need a hug?

JAMES
 Damn a hug. I need some...

The WAITRESS PAMELA (19), walks over on cue. She's an
 extremely cute girl with a banging body.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (eyes on waitress)
 Amen. He does listen.
 (re: name tag)
 How are you doing today Ms. Pamela?
 Bet they call you Pam?

PAMELA
 No, they do not.

JAMES
 Well I think I will...Pam. Unless
 you object?

PAMELA
 No, not at all. In fact I think I
 like it...kinda cute. What can I
 get you gentlemen to drink?

NORMAN
 Water with lemon.

She turns to James.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
 (interrupts)
 A Sprite.

JAMES
A water will do jut fine...Pam.

PAMELA
(smiles)
Coming right up.

James leers as she walks away.

NORMAN
Dude seriously she could be your
daughter.

JAMES
But she not.

NORMAN
She could be.

JAMES
Where was I?

NORMAN
At the corner of don't have kids...
and fuck my life.

JAMES
You do know what they do to a woman's
body...right? Her stomach goes from
a carry on to check in luggage
overnight. And the frequent flier
miles they put on the...

CLANK CLANK Pamela puts the drinks on the table.

PAMELA
I'll be right back to get you guy's
orders.

James is in lust, she looks even better leaving.

NORMAN
But, you love your wife and kids.
And can't imagine life without them.

JAMES
Oh, but I can...I do. Every time I
see Home Alone I try and wish their
asses away. But they won't go...

NORMAN
That's just sad.

JAMES

What's good with you? Surprised you even had time to pencil me in today.

Norman looks out the window, chooses his words carefully. He turns back, James is smiling, looks genuinely interested.

NORMAN

(cautious)

I might be getting my own show.

JAMES

Your own...own show? Like your own show?

NORMAN

(nods yes)

Co-creator. But I'd be calling the shots.

James's face contorts, as if he got the wind knocked out of him.

Pamela returns.

PAMELA

You guys ready to order? Or you need a little more time?

NORMAN

(to James)

It's on you...

James is non-responsive for a beat. He SNAPS back--

JAMES

(standing)

Ummm...yeah. Give me whatever he gets. This is my first time so...yeah...I want whatever he has.

(to Norman)

Goddamn Starbucks will do it every time.

James excuses himself. He looks defeated. He looks like he's going to cry in the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSING HOME - DAY

MOMMA JAE (79), has a room full of guest. A banner overhead reads, "Happy Birthday Momma Jae." Norman's sister JESSICA (45), and her THREE KIDS are present. And so is his brother JOE (42), and his pregnant wife RACHEL and SON.

No one is talking, the television isn't on. They're all just watching Momma Jae in bed. It's quite obvious they don't visit often.

An ATTENDANT enters.

ATTENDANT
 (to the room)
 Hello all!
 (to Momma Jae)
 Look at you Momma Jae...you got a house full of folks.
 (to kids)
 Who are these handsome boys and gorgeous girls?

Momma Jae looks around the room, eyes the attendant.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
 This your family? These your grand babies?

MOMMA JAE
 (re: Attendant)
 You see them too? I wasn't gone say nothing. They wasn't bothering me...I wasn't gone bother them.

ATTENDANT
 Momma Jae...this is your family. They came to wish you happy birthday.

MOMMA JAE
 Birthday?

ATTENDANT
 Yes! Today is your birth...

NORMAN (O.S.)
 (sings)
 HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR MOMMA.
 (enters)
 HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!!!

Norman enters carrying a lit cake and a bouquet of silver balloons. Momma Jae's eyes light up like a kid on Christmas upon seeing him.

KIDS
 Yeeeessss!! Uncle Norman!

The children pounce on Norman. Each wanting a hug.

ATTENDANT

Now look at that Momma Jae. Isn't that pretty! You got a birthday cake...

MOMMA JAE

(proud)

That's my son! That's Norman!

Jessica's eyes nearly roll off her face and onto the floor. Joe isn't all to pleased either.

JOE

Impeccable timing as always baby brother.

JESSICA

(re: cake)

She can't eat it. Why would you even bother getting a cake when know she can't eat it?

Norman extends the cake in front of Momma Jae.

NORMAN

(to kids)

Come on everybody help Momma Jae blow out her candles. Use all your strength...so we can get it on the first try.

The attendant tries to assist Momma Jae. She won't have it, she fights. Momma Jae can sit up on her own, and she does.

The children all lean in close, BLOW! The candles are out.

MOMMA JAE

I'm gone eat it all to.

JESSICA

No, you definitely will not.

JANET (O.S.)

Yes...she will if she wants. It is her cake after all.

Janet is standing in the doorway wearing a lab coat and scrubs. Her arms are filled with gifts. She enters.

Momma Jae rolls her eyes at Jessica. Smiles at Janet.

JANET (CONT'D)

No sugar, salt, wheat, eggs, and no peanut butter.

(MORE)

JANET (CONT'D)
 Had it made strictly based on her dietary specifications. This cake has been Momma Jae proofed.

MOMMA JAE
 Janet Jackson! You are just so precious...come and hug my neck baby.

JESSICA
 (ready to go)
 I just can't.

Janet places the gifts on the table, dives into Momma Jae's outstretched arms.

MOMMA JAE
 (into her ear)
 Now I know that cake got a little bit of sugar in it for Momma Jae?

JANET
 (whispers)
 Yes ma'am it sure does.

Momma Jae examines Janet's face. She giggles, squeezes her even tighter.

NURSING HOME - LATER

Momma Jae has gotten out of bed. She's sitting in a chair between Norman and Janet facing the window. They're watching the kids play outside.

The other three adults are on the other side of the room.

MOMMA JAE
 (to Norman and Janet)
 I sure will be happy to get me some grand babies.

JOE
 (interrupts)
 You have four grandchildren already momma.

RACHEL
 And one on the way.

Momma Jae looks up at Janet endearingly, she squeezes her hand tight.

MOMMA JAE
 (giggles, holds up
 two fingers)

Two.

BEAT

Norman's eyes are locked on Momma Jae's fingers--

NORMAN
 (re: fingers)
 Say what now?

Janet is at a loss for words. Her face is white, flush,
 like she's seen a ghost.

MOMMA JAE
 (louder, proclaims)
 Two grand babies.

Norman's gaze meets Janet's. He nods, anticipates some sort
 of response. Anything. He is in a daze.

Janet shakes her head no in disbelief, then says--

JANET
 Yes.
 (two fingers)
 Two.

Momma Jae giggles with excitement.

MOMMA JAE
 Yes! Yes!

JESSICA
 (re: Momma Jae)
 Oh, Lord. Behold the great Lion
 King Simba!

JOE
 (shocked)
 Absolutely impeccable!

Norman SNAPS back. He leaps to his feet, sweeps Janet off
 hers. He twirls her around.

JANET
 (laughing)
 Boy you had better put me down.

Norman composes himself, addresses the room.

NORMAN

(excited)

Well, I guess this is as good a time as any.

(to Janet)

I might be getting a raise. No not a raise, a promotion. Hell, it's not a promotion either a new position. I mean haven't actually accepted it...I've been thinking about accepting it...We were going to talk about me accepting it...but now that there's two...I mean three of us... it's a no brainer.

JANET

(re: Norman's rant)

Breathe.

NORMAN

Keith is rolling out a new show and he wants me to be the show-runner. That means getting repped by a major and a bigger salary. Residuals...that means we can move. We need to move now obviously, you're pregnant. We're pregnant. That means we need grass and a lawn mover...

(exhales, to Janet)

That means we did it.

JANET

(in agreement)

We did it.

They embrace. They stand forehead to forehead, gaze into each other's eyes. They are the only two people on the planet that matter in this moment.

BEAT.

Norman turns and faces his siblings. They are gone.

Jessica, Joe and his wife can now be seen walking outside in front of the window.

FADE TO BLACK:

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON Norman on his back in bed. He's still wearing the smile he slept in last night. His eyes JOLT open.

He extends his arm, blindly sweeps his hand across the covers. Nothing but empty space. Norman sits up, no sign of Janet.

NORMAN

(calls out)

Babe? I thought you were off today?

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

This place doesn't look anything like you'd imagined. Nothing about it says upwardly mobile or successful. It doesn't even say mediocrity, it is a dump.

Norman steps over a pile of dirty clothes on the floor.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(calls out)

Babe?

Norman stands at the hallway's end. He can see the dump in its entirety from here. He is alone.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Norman stumbles into the kitchen. No message on the fridge. He checks his phone, nothing.

Now fully awake, he looks around as if seeing for the first time. He has absolutely no recollection of this place.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(re: apartment)

Where the hell am I?

His eyes land on the microwave clock--

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Shit!?! The table read.

CUT TO:

INT. WRITER'S ROOM - DAY

Norman is disoriented but functioning. He looks nothing like the well-dressed man we were introduced to. Just an average Joe now.

Ever confidant still, Norman struts inside the room. He pulls out the seat at the head of the table--

NORMAN

(unpacking)

Don't panic, do not panic...I am here and I come baring gifts. Both episodes 139 yellow and 140 are done. We just need copies. Everyone comfortable reading the same characters they read last time?

Dead silence. Norman looks up, the room is staring at him.

KEITH (O.S.)

Excuse me...yoo-hoo! Miss ma'am... what are you doing?

Keith and Writer One emerge from the back office. They join the rest of the group at the table.

NORMAN

(re: Keith)

I know. I know. I'm usually the first one in, last one out...but I'm in a bit of a funk today. My apologizes Keith. We just need to get copies of 139 yellow and 140 and we're good to go.

KEITH

Oh, we just need to get copies of 139 yellow and 140 and we're good to go!? And who exactly do you suggest get those copies?

NORMAN

(to Writer One)

You mind?

Writer One sits in the very seat Norman is standing beside.

WRITER ONE

(eyes bag)

If you pull drafts of 139 and 140 written by you...out of that bag. Not only will I go and get copies. I will go and get lunch and pay for it...out of my pocket. What do you guys think about Mr. Chow's today?

WRITERS

Hell yes!

The room erupts in laughter.

NORMAN
(hand in bag)
I got the pages right here.

Norman pulls out a stack of menus. The table laughs even harder. Norman searches the bag intently, no scripts.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
(panicked)
I was up half the night doing those edits. They were in here. They were right here!

WRITER ONE
Seriously Norman you might be missing your calling. Hell you almost convinced me they were in there. And I really was up last night doing the damn edits.

The room is in stitches.

KEITH
Too bad this isn't central casting. And we're not looking for day players and stand ins. This here is the writer's room. Key word writer. You are not a writer...you are the help.

SFX of a high pitched SHRIEK. Norman's vision blurs. He feels dizzy. He braces himself against the wall.

NORMAN
(to Keith, desperate)
What about the show? The second show? We talked about the second show...

Keith shakes his head no.

WRITER ONE
(re: Norman)
How did you? Hell I didn't even know...he just told me.

KEITH
(center stage)
Well, it looks like the kitty cat is up out the closet. We have big news! Big, big news! The network has given me the go to produce another show... and I've decided that our very own resident work horse here...

Keith wands his hand over Writer One.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 ...will be moving on up from first
 chair to co-creator.

The room erupts in applause and cheers.

Moments later, complete darkness. Norman has blacked out.

CUT TO: BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. THE FILLING STATION - DAY

Norman walks past the extended line of waiting PATRONS.
 They aren't having it. They protest and hurl insults at him
 all the way up to the hostess station.

The Hostess sees him and immediately ushers him inside.

NORMAN
 Thank you so much. I can't even
 begin to explain the day I'm having.

She smiles warmly.

THE FILLING STATION - CONTINUOUS

Norman follows her, he motions towards his usual booth but
 she isn't going that way.

BEAT

A hesitant Norman follows her to the counter. She busies
 herself--

NORMAN (CONT'D)
 (to her turned back)
 Doesn't seem like anyone is sitting...

The hostess spins around. She's holding a carrying case
 filled with steaming coffees.

HOSTESS
 Here you go.

Norman shakes his head no, backs away.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)
 (confused)
 What? You don't want them?

Norman back peddles.

He high-steps out of the diner and right smack into James. This, a new and improved James. This James is wearing the exact outfit Norman had on yesterday.

JAMES

Hey, hey...where you going? Look at this line. You know I don't do lines.
(waves to Hostess)
Hey sweetie you know the drill. I need a booth.

Norman steadies himself. He studies James.

NORMAN

Whaaat what are you wearing? That jewelry, those shoes...

JAMES

Oh, this? You like? I was in an Armani kind of mood. Armani everything down to the drawers baby.

James waves his wrist in front of Norman's nose.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That's that Armani Code. Women love it!

NORMAN

(erratic)
I got up this morning and she was gone. Gone, gone. No trace of her like she wasn't never even there. And she wasn't...because I hadn't been there. I don't even know where there was.

If PEOPLE were not looking before they are looking now. Norman is causing a scene.

JAMES

Who wasn't where?
(under his breath)
You not making any sense Norm. And folks are starting to notice.

NORMAN

I had the pages in my bag. I know they were in my bag, because I put them there. But they weren't in their because I didn't write them. Because I'm not a writer.

(to hostess)

I'm a fucking adult errand boy.

JAMES

(to crowd)

It's so damn hot out here! Hell I need something cool to drink or I think I'm gonna lose my shit too!

James takes Norman under his wing, pulls him to the side.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You take something? Ate a couple edible gummies? You smoked out of somebody's e-pen didn't you? You can't be doing that shit. These folks out here smoking crack, meth...all out in the open now. Fuck around and end up on Crenshaw all ashy selling cheeseburgers.

Norman pushes James away.

NORMAN

Get off! You got my clothes on. Acting like me. Hell you even sound like me!

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Not only don't we have a table. But we're arguing outside in public like common folk.

Norman turns, sees Janet. The positioning of the sun at her back makes her look like she's glowing. Angelic even.

NORMAN

(relieved)

Janet! Janet!

He extends his hand to her.

JANET

Didn't know if I should take my camera out and record. Or walk bye as if I didn't know you two. What's going on?

Janet walks right past Norman and up to James.

Janet kisses James on the lips. James puts his arm around her waist, pulls her close. They're a couple.

JANET (CONT'D)

What did I miss?

They both stare at Norman. The GROUP of bystanders stare at Norman. Norman takes a deep breath, and blacks out.

CUT TO: BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. NURSING HOME - DAY

A defeated, half dead zombie Norman slinks up a deserted hallway. He is man apart, a man that has has bottomed out.

Norman stands in the door of Momma Jae's room, he watches her. Her eyes are closed tight, she's resting.

BEAT

Momma Jae's eyes JOLT open. Norman motions to walk away, no time she sees him.

MOMMA JAE

Norman!

She motions for him to come inside. He reluctantly obeys.

Norman sheepishly approaches the bed. He keeps his eyes cast down on the floor, afraid to let her see him.

Momma Jae reaches for Norman, he takes her hand.

MOMMA JAE (CONT'D)

(smiles)

My boy Norman!

NORMAN

Hey momma. How you feeling today?

MOMMA JAE

Fine. I'm fine. How are you?

NORMAN

(tearing up)

That's good. Real good momma. I just wanted to see you...

MOMMA JAE

You been on my mind all day. I knew you was coming to see me.

NORMAN

Oh, you did?

MOMMA JAE

Sure. I willed it so...

NORMAN
 (contemplates)
 You willed it so?

MOMMA JAE
 Yes I did! I thought about you all
 day long and here you are. Wanted
 to thank you again for my birthday.
 I just enjoyed everything sooo much.
 My cake, my balloons...

Norman looks right--

SLOWLY PAN right reveal silver balloons bobbing up and down
 on the ceiling. There's a stack of gift boxes on the table.
 And an empty cake box draped in a birthday banner.

SFX of a high pitched SHRIEK.

We hear the narrator's voice over a montage of previous scenes--
 as characters inflict their own self hatred onto Norman.

CUT TO:

- A.) Writer One outside the writer's room looking in.
- B.) Keith watches Norman as he exits the room.
- C.) James excuses himself from the table in the diner.
- D.) Norman's family standing together in the nursing home.

NARRATOR'S VOICE (V.O.)
 Many a man have theorized and
 pontificated the power of suggestion.
 The belief that spoken words and
 thoughts can materialize manifest
 themselves. That the universal thread
 of life's tapestry somehow venture
 from the predetermined preordained
 to being tailored to our liking. If
 this is true and positive energy can
 be wielded to insight good. Then
 the same must be said of negative
 energy wreaking havoc and causing
 misfortune. As was the case with
 aspiring writer Norman Evans...undone
 not by foe, but by those he called
 friend...in The Twilight Zone.

Norman lays his head on Momma Jae's lap and sobs.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END

www.johnstrongpresents.com