

He woke up on a beautiful Sunday morning. The sun was shining on his pale face, enveloping him in golden rays. He grabbed his glasses and ran his fingers through his long flaxen hair. As his doctor had prescribed, he slowly raised himself on his side and stretched his arms above his head in a mighty circle. He slid his feet into his fluffy slippers and stretched his legs before him. Opening the door to the balcony, he stepped out. A cool breeze sent the young leaves rustling with a swish, the branches swaying lightly. The grass in the yard lay glistening with the early morning dew, and the water droplets shined and bounced off each other like mercury. From the other end of the street, several middle schoolers came shouting and racing on their bikes and skateboards. A few caught sight of him looking down from the balcony and tipped their helmets. Some yelled, "Good morning Mr. Norman!" He shyly nodded, and went back inside.

The house was quiet. He was the only one awake. After smoothing out the blankets, he trudged downstairs into the kitchen. Humming the song *Yesterday* by the Beatles, he opened the refrigerator and took out the remaining pancake batter from yesterday's breakfast. While he left the pan to heat, he cut a grapefruit in two and placed each half on a separate plate. Seeing the heat waves atop the pan, he poured in all the batter and lowered the fire. He turned on the Nespresso machine, popped in an Americano capsule, and let the water run.

His son came into the kitchen, scratching his back like a monkey. Unlike Mr. Norman, his son was short, stout, and maintained chubby, cherubic cheeks even in high school. The only similarity between them was their dark, brown eyes. The son sat down at the table, and Mr. Norman silently slid one plate of grapefruit over to him. The son looked up with a disgusted face, revealing his skewed front teeth caused by a premature attempt at the clarinet. Mr. Norman frowned and pushed the fruit towards his son. When his son looked away and ignored his offer, Mr. Norman shrugged, took the fruit back, and began to eat it himself. The son walked to the stove and flipped the pancake with a deft flick of the wrist. After a couple minutes, he slid the pancake onto his plate and began to eat. A moment later, he stopped. "Where's mom?" Mr. Norman paused for a moment, then bitterly smiled. The son put down his fork. "Dad, where's mom?" Mr. Norman got up, retrieved his cup of

Americano, and sat back down. "Dad?" Mr. Norman continued to smile between his short sips of hot coffee, blowing at the surface and making small ripples that crashed against the edge of the cup. Alarmed, the son catapulted from his chair and ran upstairs to his parents' bedroom. Coming back down, his face as red as the inside of his father's grapefruit, he shouted, "Again!"

With a jingle of her car keys, the mom opened the door to the house with the morning paper in hand. She expressed no surprise at the scene before her, her husband quietly eating a grapefruit and her son apparently fuming about something or another. She smirked at her son's questioning stare, and the son glared at his mom. "Mom, where have you been?" The mom said nothing. Slithering into the house, she threw her Gucci bag on the couch. She pulled out one of the stools by the kitchen table and hoisted herself up. Mr. Norman placed the other half of the grapefruit before her, and she snatched it from his hands. She motioned for a spoon, so Mr. Norman passed her one from the drawer. The son stared at this silent exchange, and nodded towards the mom's bag. "Did Dad buy that for you?" When he received no reply, the son stormed back to his room. The mom put down her spoon and looked at her husband. Mr. Norman glanced at her. "You aren't going to ask where I've been? Why I didn't come home yesterday?" Mr. Norman calmly sipped his coffee, his eyes observing the murky surface of the bitter liquid. In the silence, she could feel the temperature of the room drop, until her skin tingled from the burning cold. "Well fine," she said, smugly grasping the spoon, "Suit yourself."

A shriek from the back of the house pierced the ice, and the mom jolted up in shock. Mr. Norman dropped his coffee in surprise, and it shattered as it fell to the floor. The mom rushed out of the kitchen and into the hallway, only to collide with her hysterical daughter. "Shit! Dad! You forgot to wake me up! I told you I had a date today! Shit, I'm already late. Oh, hey mom." Whipping her tangled mass of hair around her narrow shoulders, the daughter thundered back into her room. The mom stood in shock. "She has a boyfriend?" Mr. Norman quietly retrieved the dustpan from the closet and scraped up the shards. The mom pointed towards the back of the house. "Did she just say the s-word in my presence?" He threw away the shards into the trash, mopped up the coffee, and resumed eating his grapefruit.

As Mr. Norman was drying the dishes, the son reappeared with the announcement, "I'm going out." With a slam of the door, he disappeared the next second. Before the mom could stop him and interrogate him about his plans, the daughter rushed out of the bathroom. "Taking your car, Dad." Mr. Norman hurriedly reached for his keys, but his daughter snatched them away and fluttered out the door with her black coat flapping behind her like wings. Before Mr. Norman could retract his outstretched hand, with a screech and a thud against the garden fence, the daughter was gone in a whirlwind of smoke. The mom, slightly annoyed, watched the dad, finished her grapefruit, and went upstairs.

Later in the afternoon, Mr. Norman was reading the newspaper when he heard the car pull into the driveway. Peering up from his reading glasses, he lifted the curtains and looked out the window. The next moment, his daughter burst through the front door with tears in her eyes. "Dad, he just broke up with me! I need to text my friends." Mr. Norman nodded and automatically reached his arms outwards to offer her a hug. Ignoring his response, the daughter grabbed a bag of chips and locked herself in her room. The mom cautiously came downstairs. "Was she crying?" Mr. Norman did not respond, but remained staring at the closed door with his arms in the air. The mom checked the clock. "It's already six! Come on, time to make dinner."

As Mr. Norman was washing the broccoli, he heard a knock on the door. He cleaned his wrinkled, wet hands on his apron and opened it. He found his son flanked by two police officers. "Are you Mr. Norman, this boy's father?" Mr. Norman smiled. The shorter officer cleared his throat. "Well, sir, we found your son trying to shoplift alcoholic beverages. Now, since this is his first offense, we will just deliver him to you. But please, as his parents, be responsible as to your son's whereabouts." Mr. Norman peered down at his squirming son, struggling against the officer's iron grasp on his arm. When Mr. Norman continued to blankly stare, the officer sighed, pushed the son towards his father, and hastily departed with a "Well then, good night, sir." Mr. Norman said nothing as his son squeezed past him into the house. As he closed the door behind him, the mom trotted down the stairs, fully dressed. "Son, go to your room," she calmly stated. The son glared at his mom. "Mom, why don't

you go to your room with Dad?" he barked back. The mom's expression hardened. The son quickly glanced at his father. Mr. Norman smiled back. The son bounded away, glaring at his mom. The mom watched her son's retreating figure up the stairs, then turned around to face her husband. "I'm heading out." As she passed her husband, she hesitated, almost expecting him to reach out and hold her back. Mr. Norman walked into the kitchen.

He turned on the water and filled the pot, the stream cascading into the silver tub. He watched the surface of the water rise and gurgle with every passing second until it began to overflow. Mr. Norman slammed the water off and dumped out the excess. He placed the pot on the stove and turned on the fire. The blue claws flared around the rim of the pot, but simmered down to a bright, orange flower. He watched its petals wave and quiver from the slight breeze coming through the window, and the red light reflected off his dark eyes. He looked up at the windowsill lined with various trinkets from past family vacations. He wiped the dust off a volcanic rock from the Hawaii trip they had taken two years earlier and placed it next to the family photo. A strong gust of wind through the open window pushed the photograph into the sink. Mr. Norman hastily pulled out the picture, wiped it with the corner of his apron, and placed the photo back on the windowsill. The white curtains billowed in the gentle wind, the tassels flickering near the fire. A stray piece of string lightly grazed the bottom of the pot, and flames began to crawl up the fluttering tassels. Mr. Norman smiled as he watched the curtains turn black with smoke and curling ashes, the flames devouring the bleached cloth. He turned around, gathered the forks and knives, and began to set the table for dinner.