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"BUTTON, BUTTON"

Based on the short story by Richard Matheson

Written for the screen by Adam J. Nadworniak

FADE IN:

INT: Apartment- Morning

We open to reveal a package lying on the front doorstep of an apartment . The package is a cube-shaped carton sealed with tape, the name and address printed by hand: "Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, 217 E. Thirty-seventh Street, New York 10016. We see the door behind the box open up and we pull out and we can see a young women standing in the doorway. The women is NORMA. She looks around and then down at the package on the doorstep.

NORMA
What's this?

Norma picks it up, opens the door, and went into the apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-KITCHEN-MORNING

Norma dumps some dry ramen noodles into a pot to boil them, she sits down to open the package. Inside the carton was a red push-button unit. A plastic dome covered the button. Norma tried to lift it off, but it was locked in place. She turns the unit over and she sees folded piece of paper Scotch-taped to the bottom of the box. She pulls it off and we zoom in on the piece of paper and it reads "**Mr. Steward will call on you at 8:00 p.m.**"

Norma puts the button unit beside her on the couch. She reread the typed note, smiling. A few moments later, she went back into the kitchen to make to stir the noodles. We pan over to the button-unit and we zoom in.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-DINNING ROOM-DUSK

We open to reveal Norma and her husband ARTHUR. The lovely couple eats there noodles in silence with a sense of tension between.

ARTHUR

I'm going to have to work late tomorrow night.

NORMA

Arthur, you said we were going to have dinner with my parents.

ARTHUR

I know, but Mr. Sterling wants me to finish up the T.P.S reports.

NORMA

We were planning this for months.

ARTHUR

I know, I'm sorry Norma but I'll make it up to you. Next Friday I'll take you guys out to that new cheese cake restaurant.

NORMA

You know we can't afford to eat out at places like that.

ARTHUR

Norma, don't worry I think I'm due for a promotion.

NORMA

You said that six months ago Arthur.

ARTHUR

Honey, trust me everything will be fine.

Suddenly the doorbell rings and we pan to the clock that reads eight o'clock.

NORMA

I'll get it!

Norma gets up and Arthur continues to eat the noodles.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-FRONT DOOR-NIGHT

Norma walks to the door and opens it and we can see a tall thin man wearing a fedora and a long black coat. We can see he has a prosthetic arm. He removes his hat with his real arm.

 STEWARD
Mrs. Lewis?

 NORMA
Yes?

 STEWARD
I'm Mr. Steward.

 NORMA
Oh, yes!

 STEWARD
May I come in?

 NORMA
I'm rather busy right now. But I'll
get your whatchamacallit.

She goes to turn to grab it.

 STEWARD
Don't you want to know what it is?

 NORMA
No, I don't think so.

 STEWARD
It could prove very valuable.

 NORMA
Monetarily?

 STEWARD
Monetarily!

 NORMA
What are you trying to selling?

 STEWARD
I'm not selling anything.

Arthur walks in from the dinning room.

ARTHUR
Something wrong?

STEWARD
Hello Mr. Lewis my name is Steward.

ARTHUR
Oh, the button thing. What is that gadget anyway.

STEWARD
It won't take long to explain. May I come in?

ARTHUR
If you're selling something.

STEWARD
I'm not.

Arthur looks at Norma.

NORMA
It's up to you.

ARTHUR
Well, why not?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-DINNING ROOM-NIGHT

We open to reveal Steward sitting across from Arthur and Norma. In the middle of the table is the button. Steward reaches into his coat and he pulls out a small sealed envelope.

STEWARD
Inside here is a key to the button-unit.

He puts the envelope on the table.

STEWARD (CONT'D)
The button is connected to our office.

ARTHUR
What's it for?

STEWARD

If you push the button Mr. Lewis, somewhere in the world someone you don't know will die. In return for which you will receive a payment of \$500,000 tax free.

The couple just stare at Steward as he starts to smile.

ARTHUR

What are you talking about?

STEWARD

But I've just explained.

ARTHUR

Is this a practical joke?

STEWARD

Not at all. The offer is completely genuine.

ARTHUR

You aren't making sense, you expect us to believe...

NORMA

Who do you represent?

STEWARD

I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to tell you that. However, I assure you the organization is of international scope.

Arthur stands up.

ARTHUR

I think you'd better leave.

STEWARD

Of course.

Arthur picks up the button-unit and hands it over to Steward.

ARTHUR

And take your button unit with you.

STEWARD

Are you sure you wouldn't care to think about it for a day or so?

Arthur thrusts the button and envelope at Steward. And walks to the door and opens it.

STEWARD (CONT'D)
I'll leave my card.

He places it on the table by the door. And Steward puts his hat back on and waves with his fag arm. Arthur slams the door and he grabs the card and rips it in half and tosses them on the table.

ARTHUR
Oh god!

Norma leans against the wall and looks scared.

NORMA
What do you think it was?

ARTHUR
I don't care to know.

NORMA
Aren't you curious at all.

ARTHUR
No!

Arthur walks away into the other room and Norma grabs the dishes and walks into the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-BEDROOM-NIGHT

Norma is sitting down on the edge of the bed while Arthur brushes his teeth.

NORMA
Why won't you talk about it?

Arthur's eyes shifted as he brushed his teeth. He looked at her reflection in the bathroom mirror.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Doesn't it intrigue you?

ARTHUR
It offends me.

NORMA

I know, but doesn't it intrigue
you, too?

Arthur walks over to the bed and sits down.

NORMA

You think it's a practical joke?

ARTHUR

If it is, it's a sick one.

Norma takes off her slippers.

NORMA

Maybe it's some kind of
psychological research?

ARTHUR

Could be.

NORMA

Maybe some eccentric millionaire is
doing it.

ARTHUR

Maybe.

NORMA

Wouldn't you like to know?

ARTHUR

Nope!

NORMA

Why?

ARTHUR

Because it's immoral.

Norma slides under the covers.

NORMA

Well, I think it's intriguing.

Arthur lays down on the bed and slides under the covers. He
leans over and turns off the lamp.

ARTHUR

Good night.

He leans over and kisses her.

NORMA
Good night.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-FRONT DOOR-MORNING.

In the morning Norma is getting ready to head out and she sees the card halves on the table. Impulsively, she dropped them into her purse. She locks the front door and joined Arthur walking down the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT/ COFFEE SHOP-AFTERNOON

While Norma is on her coffee break she takes the card halves from her purse and held the torn edges together. Only Mr. Steward's name and telephone number were printed on the card. She takes the card halves from her purse again and Scotch-taped the edges together.

NORMA
Why am I doing this?

She pulls out her cellphone and dials the number. There is a moment of silence and then we can he a male voice come on.

STEWARD (V.O.)
Good afternoon.

Norma almost hung up but restrained herself. She cleared her throat.

NORMA
This is Mrs. Lewis.

STEWARD (V.O.)
Yes, Mrs. Lewis.

NORMA
I'm curious.

STEWARD (V.O.)
That's natural.

NORMA
Not that I believe a word of what you told us.

STEWARD (V.O.)
Oh, it's quite authentic.

NORMA
Well, whatever. When you said
someone in the world will die, what
did you mean?

STEWARD (V.O.)
Exactly that, It could be anyone.
All we guarantee is that you don't
know them. And, of course, that you
wouldn't have to watch them die.

NORMA
For \$500,000?

STEWARD (V.O.)
That is correct.

NORMA
That's crazy.

STEWARD (V.O.)
Nonetheless, that is the
proposition. Would you like me to
return the button unit?

NORMA
Certainly not!

She hangs up the phone angrily.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-FRONT DOOR-AFTERNOON

Norma makes her way to the apartment and we can see the
package lying by the front door.

NORMA
Well, the nerve!

She walks past it and starts to open the door.

NORMA (CONT'D)
I just won't take it in.

She unlocks the door and walks past the box and enters the
apartment and slams the door.

a few moments pass and the door opens again and Norma leans over and picks the box up and brings it into the apartment and she slams the door.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM-DUSK

Norma walks over to the kitchen holding the package and drops it onto the table. She sits in the living room, looking out the window. After a while, she went back into the kitchen to pour some macaroni and cheese into a pot. She walks over to the table and she picks up the package and puts it into the bottom cabinet.

NORMA

I'll throw it away in the morning.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

Normal sits on the couch and Arthur is getting dressed to go to work.

NORMA

Maybe some eccentric millionaire is playing games with people.

Arthur buttons up his shirt.

ARTHUR

I don't understand you.

NOMRA

What does that mean?

ARTHUR

Let it go!

There's a moment of silence.

NORMA

Suppose it's a genuine offer?

Arthur stares at her as he puts his tie on.

ARTHUR

All right, suppose it is? What would you like to do? Get the button back and push it? Murder someone?

NORMA

Murder?

ARTHUR

How would you define it?

NORMA

If you don't even know the person?

ARTHUR

Are you saying what I think you are?

NORMA

If it's some old Chinese peasant ten thousand miles away? Or some diseased native in the Congo?

ARTHUR

How about some baby boy in Pennsylvania? Or how about some beautiful little girl on the next block?

NORMA

Now you're talking crazy!

ARTHUR

The point is, Norma what's the difference who you kill? It's still murder.

NORMA

The point is if it's someone you've never seen in your life and never will see, someone whose death you don't even have to know about, you still wouldn't push the button?

ARTHUR

You mean you would?

NORMA

Five hundred thousand dollars, Arthur. A chance to take that trip to Europe we've always talked about.

ARTHUR
Norma, no!

NORMA
A chance to buy that cottage on the
Island.

ARTHUR
NO!!!

NORMA
All right, take it easy, why are
you getting so upset. It's only
talk.

Arthur gets his shoes on and before he exits the apartment he
walks over and kisses Norma on the forehead.

ARTHUR
I'd rather not discuss it anymore
if you don't mind honey.

NORMA
Fine with me.

ARTHUR
I'm going to be home late again
tonight. Don't wait up. I love you.

Arthur leaves the apartment and Norma looks at the cabinet
where the button is.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-KITCHEN-MORNING

Norma is cooking breakfast. We can see her making toast and
eggs and pancakes. Arthur walks in and smiles.

ARTHUR
That smells amazing honey. What's
the occasion.

NORMA
No occasion. I wanted to do it.
That's all.

ARTHUR
Good, I'm glad you did!

She fills his cup full of coffee.

NORMA

I just wanted to show you I'm
not...

ARTHUR

Not what?

NORMA

Selfish.

ARTHUR

Did I say you were?

NORMA

Well...last night.

ARTHUR

Oh.

NORMA

All the talk about the button. I
think you well, misunderstood me.

ARTHUR

In what way?

NORMA

I think you felt that I was only
thinking of myself.

ARTHUR

Oh honey.

NORMA

I wasn't.

ARTHUR

Norma.

NORMA

Well, I wasn't. When I talked about
Europe, a cottage on the Island.

ARTHUR

Norma, why are we getting so
involved in this?

NORMA

I'm not involved at all. I'm simply trying to indicate that...

ARTHUR

What?

NORMA

That I'd like for us to go to Europe. Like for us to have a cottage on the Island. Like for us to have a nicer apartment, nicer furniture, nicer clothes, a car. Like for us to finally have a baby, for that matter.

ARTHUR

Norma, we will.

NORMA

When?

ARTHUR

Norma!

NORMA

When?

ARTHUR

Are you, are you really saying.

NORMA

I'm saying that they're probably doing it for some research project! That they want to know what average people would do under such a circumstance! That they're just saying someone would die, in order to study reaction, see if there'd be guilt, anxiety, whatever! You don't think they'd kill somebody, do you?

ARTHUR

I don't know. I'm going to go back to sleep. It's going to be another late night.

Arthur walks away.

NORMA
Of source.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-DINNING ROOM-NIGHT

Norma sits at the table staring into her glass of wine.

NORMA
I'm going to be late Norma, It's
going to be a long night Norma.
He's always working. What's he
difference did it make. I should be
here anyway. I should be home all
the time. Not working, not making
money.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-KITCHEN-NIGHT

While Norma was stacking dishes, she turned abruptly, dried her hands, and took the package from the bottom cabinet. Opening it, she set the button unit on the table. She stared at it for a long time before taking the key from the envelope and removing the glass dome. She stared at the button. How ridiculous, she thought. All this furor over a meaningless button.

NORMA
Well here goes nothing.

Reaching out, she pressed it down. For us, she thought angrily. She shuddered.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Is it happening now?

In a moment, it had passed. She made a contemptuous noise.

NORMA ((CONT'D)
Ridiculous.

She threw the button unit and key into the wastebasket and took another sip of her wine. Suddenly the phone rings. She walks over and picks up the receiver.

NORMA (CONT'D)

Hello?

DOCTOR (V.O.)

Mrs. Lewis?

NORMA

Yes?

DOCTOR (V.O.)

This is Dr. Matheson from Lenox Hill Hospital. I don't know how to say this but your husband Arthur was killed.

NORMA

What?

DOCTOR (V.O.)

He was standing on the subway platform and there was a rather large crowd and a fight broke out and he was accidentally shoved off the platform and in front of a train. I'm so sorry for your lose. We are going to need you to come down here and ID the body.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-LIVING ROOM- LATER

We can see Norma crying and a man in a suit in tie is sitting across from her with a bunch of files and a briefcase.

LAWYER

Mrs. Lewis your late husband Arthur had a life insurance policy with us at Samaritan Insurance for a no-fault death clause. In the chance of a freak death you would be rewarded \$500,000 tax free.

Norma breaks down and cries and the Lawyer leans over and cradles her.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

It's OK Mrs. Lewis. It's OK.
Everything will work out. You will
be taken care off.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY-AFTERNOON

We can see Norma in a cemetery standing over Arthur's grave and she is wearing a black dress. She starts to cry and we can hear a voice call out from behind her.

STEWARD

Mrs. Lewis?

Norma turns around and she runs at him and slaps Steward across the face and cries.

NORMA

You lying son of a bitch. You said
I wouldn't know the one that died.
You lied to me. Why Arthur? Why
Arthur?

STEWARD

My dear lady, Do you really think
you knew your husband?

He pulls a picture from his pocket and hands it to Norma. She looks at it and cries. We zoom in and it's a picture of Arthur and another girl whose a blond hugging and kissing each other. Norma falls to the ground and cries.

NORMA

What will happen to that infernal
device?

STEWARD

The button-unit will be
reprogrammed and offered to someone
else with the same terms and
conditions.

NORMA

What?

STEWARD

I can assure you it will be offered
to someone whom you don't know."

Steward smiles and turns around and walks away.

A horrified, knowing expression crosses Norma's face once she realizes what he meant.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE/NEIGHBORHOOD-MORNING.

We open to reveal Steward dropping a new package on someone's doorstep. He puts the package down and rings the doorbell with his rubber finger and he walks away and there's a long pause and the door opens up and we can see the same blond from the picture. She looks around and looks at the package and picks it up and brings it into the house. We pan away from the house and we can see Steward walking down the sidewalk.

FADE TO BLACK.

T H E E N D

