

MY FRIEND NORM

Written by

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Based on:

"My Friend Norm" - An Audible.
By Fred Stoller.

Submission Copy.

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1 **INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON - SEPTEMBER 14, 2021**

Bored, FRED (61) sits on a sofa, looking for something to do.

He stares at himself on the cover of his memoir: *Maybe We'll Have You Back*, sitting on the coffee table. He lifts it, removing Issue 329 - July/August 1994 of MAD magazine from underneath.

Fred briefly flips through it before tossing it back onto the table. A quick flick through daytime television proves fruitless. He checks his phone... nothing.

Fred looks up at the clock... 2:00 PM.

Giving up without too much of a fight, Fred leans forward. Peeking down the hall toward his bed, he shrugs. *Why not?*

2 **INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Fred lies on his bed. He places his phone down on a bedside table, starting to get comfortable.

He closes his eyes.

"BUZZ.... BUZZ..." - His phone vibrates. He ignores it.

"BUZZ... BUZZ... BUZZ..." Fred's phone starts blowing up.

Fred reaches for it, barely opening one eye to look at it. He suddenly JOLTS upright like he's been electrocuted.

3 **INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Fred's laptop sits on the kitchen table. He rushes to it. Typing feverishly, he HITS enter. Fred's jaw drops slightly.

DEADLINE.COM - "**NORM MACDONALD DIES - INFLUENTIAL COMEDIAN WAS 61.**"

4 **EXT. ROOF - FRED'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

Fred steps out, dazed, confused, processing. He looks out at the Hollywood Hills.

Fighting back tears, he pulls out his phone to learn more.

"DIED PEACEFULLY...", "NINE YEAR CANCER BATTLE...",
"DETERMINED TO KEEP HEALTH STRUGGLES PRIVATE..."

Having read enough, Fred closes the article.

NEW TEXT MESSAGES - 28, NEW EMAILS - 32, NEW DMs - 82, NEW VOICEMAILS - 24. The numbers continue to increase...

TEXT MESSAGES:

Lisa: *"Fred... I don't know what to say... You and Norm had your ups and downs..."*

Jeremy: *"I am so sorry for your loss... I know you two hadn't spoken in a long time..."*

Emma: *"It's so sad... I know your friendship could be rocky... but God, I'm so sorry!"*

Fred stares at the sky, taking a moment to recall his own memories.

Not long after, he shrugs again. *Why not?*

5 INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

This time turning his phone off. Fred lies on his bed. He closes his eyes, relaxing.

FADE TO BLACK.

6 TITLE CARD: MY FRIEND NORM.

FADE IN:

7 INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - 2015

Fred JOLTS awake on the same bed, in the same apartment.

Even though it's only SIX YEARS EARLIER, Fred appears YOUNGER (40-50s). More hair, less wrinkles, and a hint of leading man charm that only loosely resembles the original.

He pulls himself upright, settling on the edge of the bed. Fred turns to the camera to call out the obvious discrepancy.

FRED

What? You're not better looking in your memories?

He looks around the room. Everything looks grey and dreary. A little messier and less organized than usual.

Despite the drastic transformation, younger Fred looks depressed and severely so.

8 INT. FRED'S BATHROOM - DAY

The water RUNS, steam rises. Behind the shower curtain, Fred SOBS.

FRED
Help me. Please, help me!

9 INT. CORRIDOR - FRED'S APARTMENT - LATE AT NIGHT

Fred pokes his head out.

From his door, he checks for signs of human life... CREAK!
Fred panics. He quickly closes it, still inside.

Fred leans against the door. He looks to be in PAIN. One leg begins to JITTER. A small, anxious bounce that SPEEDS UP as the PAIN INTENSIFIES.

Fred closes his eyes, holds his breath. He TENSES all the muscles in his body, trying to stop them BURSTING out from beneath his skin. His leg still JITTERING RAPIDLY, his heel TAPPING the floor.

Fred PUSHES all the air out of his body. His leg slows before finally coming to a stop. He slumps against the door, exhausted.

He starts taking deep, controlled breaths. Slowly standing, he braces himself.

Fred pokes his head out.

10 INT. SWINGERS DINER - LATER

Fred hides in a booth, staring out the window.

In between each bite, he quietly recites his mantra.

FRED
I don't want to die. Please, I
don't want to die.

A waitress stops by to offer some fresh coffee. They hear him, offering only an awkward smile before moving on.

Embarrassed, Fred closes his eyes. He stops breathing. His muscles TENSE, leg beginning to JITTER. Repeating the process, his body purges the uncontrollable anxiety surging through it.

FRED (CONT'D)
I can't take this anymore.

11 **INT. PHARMACY - DAY**

Fred stands at the counter, passing over his prescription.
The PHARMACIST reads it.

PHARMACIST
Be about 20 minutes.

The Pharmacist smiles. Fred nods.

12 **INT. PHARMACY - LATER**

Fred browses the aisles, trying to keep entertained. His
phone rings... "*BUZZ, BUZZ, BUZZ.*"

He pulls it from his pocket. '*NORM*' is calling.

FRED
Hello?

P.A. SYSTEM (V.O.)
Gallagher, script for Gallagher...

NORM (V.O.)
Jesus, what! Are you in a pharmacy?
What's wrong!?

FRED
I pulled a head muscle...

NORM (V.O.)
A head muscle? What, your brain
went to the gym without telling
you?

FRED
(deadpan)
Hello, Norm. Great to hear from
you.

NORM (V.O.)
Hey! Where the fuck were you?
You're this guy too busy, doing all
these TV spots?

FRED
I'm not doing many guest spots
these days...

NORM (V.O.)

Oh, come on! You fucker. You're one of those aggressive, pushy guys! Putting yourself forward for every role...

FRED

Yeah, I'm just like them... That's why a few years shy of sixty, I've been living in the same apartment for fifteen years with no air-conditioning.

NORM (V.O.)

I'm kidding... So, you want to come open for me tomorrow?

FRED

Open? Open what? What's wrong with your hands?

NORM (V.O.)

I'm doing three shows this weekend in Vegas! Just off the strip...

(beat)

I've been trying to get a hold of you! You said you wanted to open for me! Come on, it'll be so much fun.

FRED

I never said that!

NORM (V.O.)

Yeah, you told me to fire my opener. Poor kid cried... got evicted. How could you!?

FRED

Norm! I would never... I haven't done stand-up in over six months and that was on the Jewish Book Festival circuit. I haven't worked a club in over seventeen years!

NORM (V.O.)

Come on! Be great to have someone like you open for me. How has that never happened? And why'd you take such a long break from stand-up? You're too good.

FRED

You know stand-up was never the end goal. I always felt like I won the lottery when any gig was canceled.

NORM (V.O.)

You got some place better to be? A big Hollywood party to schmooze all your producer friends?

Fred drags a hand down his face, exasperated. He glances toward the counter, desperate for an excuse.

FRED

No... you know I don't! I, uh... I don't know, Norm. I don't really feel like being funny. I'm not even sure I could be if I tried! I don't have any new material. It would mostly be all old, dated stuff. You know how much I hated trying to come up with new material...

NORM (V.O.)

Perfect! They'll love that. I just need fifteen-twenty minutes of your greatest hits. You set them up, I'll knock them down. Easiest five-hundred bucks you'll make.

Fred catches a glimpse of himself in a cheap, wobbly mirror. Even the distorted reflection can't hide his sadness.

NORM (V.O.)

(breaks silence)

Unless you've already made plans to lurk around Barnes & Noble, waiting to ambush anyone sad enough to buy that book of yours?

FRED

(defeated)

OK! Fine.

NORM (V.O.)

Great! I finally get to work with a real pro.

Norm ends the call abruptly. Fred looks around, dumbstruck.

13

INT. AIRPLANE - NEXT DAY

Fred sits in cattle class, aisle seat. Tray table unfolded, he scribbles in a notebook.

The Captain asks the flight attendants to prepare the cabin for landing. Fred finishes writing, circling "15-20 minutes!"

He folds the table, makes sure his seat is in the upright position.

"BUZZ..." - Fred's phone vibrates in his pocket, the surprise jolts him. Afraid of being caught, he ignores it.

"BUZZ... BUZZ... BUZZ..." Another flurry of messages.

Fred places his hand on it. Maybe that'll make it stop...

"BUZZ... BUZZ... BUZZ..." Three more.

Fred looks around nervously. He slowly slides the phone out... Seven text messages! All from...

Norm: 1) "Hey, you OK?" 2) "Hellllooooo!?" 3) "WHERE ARE YOU?" 4) "Fred?" 5) "Freddie!" 6) "Did you miss your flight?" 7) "If you chickened out, tell me now."

Terrified of being caught, Fred looks around. Hiding the phone between his knees, he carefully replies...

"I got on the plane when I was supposed to..."

Norm: "What the fuck?! I'm here all alone. We should be hanging out! This is horse shit!"

"We're descending. Be there shortly."

Norm: "OK... But listen. Tonight, I'm gonna need you to do more time. I need you to do the bulk of the show."

Fred suppresses his mouth, barely. His eyes scream instead. WHAT!? He replies, frantic. Sending his own flurry out.

1) "The bulk of the show!?" 2) "How long is the BULK?" 3) "Even in my prime I had trouble going long."

No response.

4) "Hello!?" 5) "Norm?"

Silence. Fred's leg starts to JITTER.

14

EXT. AIRPORT - EVENING

Fred hurries out of the airport, phone stuck to his ear.

NORM (V.O.)

*Don't tell me you're still on that
fucking plane! What is with you and
that plane? You're like a lost boy
from Sudan who never saw a fucking
plane!*

FRED

I just stepped out of the terminal!

NORM (V.O.)

Jesus Christ!

FRED

What did you mean you need me to do
the bulk of the show!?

NORM (V.O.)

*I need you to do a little more
time. You need to carry the show.
I'm tired, I can't do a whole set.
(beat)
Just tonight... I need this.*

FRED

How long are they expecting from
you?

NORM (V.O.)

About an hour.

FRED

And how much of that do you need
from me?

NORM (V.O.)

About an hour.

FRED

An hour!? Norm, I... don't think
I've ever done a full hour? I told
you... I'm pretty out of shape.

NORM (V.O.)

*(angrily)
What?*

Fred doesn't want to speak, afraid Norm feels deceived.

NORM (V.O.)
 (calmly)
OK... If forty-five minutes is your wall, I accept that. Forty-five.

FRED
 It's been forever since I did my entire act. I'm not even sure I can remember all of it!

A BLACK SUV pulls up. A SECURITY GUARD from the casino hops out of the driver's seat, smiling.

NORM (V.O.)
Don't worry! I remember your act. When we hang out, I'll help you remember it!

FRED
 Uh... OK?

NORM (V.O.)
OK. Great... Hurry the fuck up!

The Security Guard opens the door for Fred.

15 INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Fred is rather stressed. He makes a desperate call.

FRED
 Hey, Mike, it's Fred. I'm in town last minute opening for Norm Macdonald. Be great if you could do a few minutes for me...
 (beat)
 Uh, also, be so good to see you, too... Please, call me back. Please.
 (sighing)
 Damn, hope you're not sleeping.

Fred shakes his head, a little ashamed.

16 EXT. CASINO - CONTINUOUS

Fred gets out of the SUV.

"BUZZ... BUZZ... BUZZ..." Norm's calling.

Fred thanks the Security Guard for his bag. He races to the check-in desk, urgently.

FRED
Norm, gotta call you back. I hate
being the rude guy on the phone
while I'm-

NORM (V.O.)
(interrupting)
No! You gotta get me stuff!

Fred nods at the DESK CLERK.

FRED
(cupping phone, quietly)
I'm opening for Norm Macdonald...

The Clerk smiles. Tinkers on the computer.

NORM (V.O.)
I need razors and shaving cream!

Fred notices his leg starting to JITTER.

FRED
I don't know where to look for
shaving stuff!

He holds his breath, hoping the clerk will hear his plea.

CLERK
Tell him to call me. I'll send up
what he needs.

The Clerk winks at Fred reassuringly. Fred breathes.

FRED
He said to call-

NORM (V.O.)
I heard him....

CLERK
Could I please have your credit
card for the-

NORM (V.O.)
(loudly)
*No, no! Tell him all incidentals go
under my card. You don't pay for
that shit! All right?*
(beat)
Get your ass up here!

The Clerk nods, he understands.