

The New Normal Trilogy

Characters

Sera: Middle Eastern-American woman in her 30s
Manny, a Middle Eastern-American man in his 30s
Dick, a scruffy Southerner in his 40s
Don, a slightly built man in his 30s

ACT II
SCENE 1

It is 2009, a year after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the election of President Barak Obama. SERA and her husband MANNY, a young Middle Eastern-American couple who own the Oasis Cafe, are cleaning up at the end of the night. The café is decorated with fake palm trees strung with lights. There is a large American flag hanging on the wall behind the counter. The couple is anxious to close and go home.

SERA

I can't believe we're still here at midnight ... again! Manny, you have to start making people leave! How many times do I have to tell you?

MANNY

I know. I know. What can I do? They still think it's like Lou's. I can't get them out of here.

SERA

What you mean is you *won't* get them out of here. Big difference.

MANNY

Sera, we need the business. We're lucky people still come in with this crappy economy. So don't be so dismissive of customers willing to spend their cash here.

SERA

And don't be so dismissive of me! When I agreed to this arrangement, I didn't agree to work all day *and* all night.

MANNY

It's not all night. Don't exaggerate.

SERA

You think I'm blowing it out of proportion? Manny, our kids never see us. They're starting to think my mother and father are their parents. Not to mention the fact that I don't like leaving after midnight in this neighborhood. It's scary. This has to change

MANNY

It will. I promise. I'll get tougher. Ten o'clock. That's it. Everyone out! Starting tomorrow.

SERA

Yeah, yeah. Same story. Okay. We'll see ... Did you clean the grill?

(SERA points to the back kitchen.)

MANNY

I'm getting there.

SERA

You haven't even cleaned the grill yet? Manny!

(SERA walks to the doorway to the kitchen and stops.)

Well, come help me! I need some muscle.

MANNY

Okay, okay. Let's get it over with.

(SERA and MANNY exit to the kitchen. After a few beats DICK and DON, two long-distance truckers enter the cafe.)

DICK

Are you sure this is the right place?

DON

Yeah, positive. Lou's was 24/7. I always stopped here on my overnight runs to Albany ... Looks pretty much the same to me, except for these fucking lights and plastic palm trees

(He looks at the sign behind the counter.)

Oasis ... Maybe it's a Caribbean joint now. Who knows?

DICK

Neighborhoods change so fast you never know who the fuck is running things anymore.

DON

You can say that again. Jesus Christ, look at Down Neck in Newark. Used to be Pollocks and Dagos. Now it's Little Portugal. There's a fuckin' slimy octopus in every window. It's disgusting.

DICK

That, my friend, is why I love West Virginia. Nothing ever fucking changes there. I could fall asleep in any of those shit kicking towns tonight, wake up in 2050 and we'd still be the drunkest-ass state in America ... Thank you Lord God.

(DICK reaches into his back pocket,
takes out a flask and takes a big
swing.)

Yaaa Haaa! ... *Jesus* loves your mother.

DON

Here, let me have some'a that.

(DON reaches for the flask and
DICK pulls back.)

DICK

Hey, you've had enough. I don't need you falling asleep on me.

DON

What are you, a fuckin' Nanny now, like the rest of the country? Besides, I'm up all night gettin' happy with these babies.

(DON reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a couple of pills. He grabs DICK'S flask and takes the pills with a big gulp.)

Ahhh ... Freedom's just another word for fuck it!

(DON starts laughing hysterically, highly impressed with his own joke.)

DICK

Come on. Gimme that. It's gotta last us to New London.

DON

You're no fun anymore.

(Just as DON is handing the flask back to DICK, MANNY enters the room from the back kitchen.)

MANNY

Oh, wow, you guys scared me!

DICK

Ain't you seen customers before?

MANNY

I'm sorry. I thought I had put the closed sign on the door. I'm getting ready to lock up.

DON

Say, this place used to be Lou's, right?

MANNY

Yeah, I bought it from him about five years ago.

DON

I knew it. But you ain't open all night no more?

MANNY

Oh no. Nothing good ever happens on the overnight.

DICK

Well, we're on our way up to New London to drop a load and there ain't nothing else open. Think you could just cook us up some eggs?

DON

And some good strong coffee.

DICK

(To DON.)

You don't need nothin' else to hype you up.

MANNY

What?

DON

Oh, don't pay attention to him. He's an idiot ... So how about some service?

MANNY

I'm sorry guys. Really. My wife and I just finished cleaning everything. The grill. The coffee urns.

DICK

So, you're turning down cash money from two hard-working Americans?

DON

Yeah, under the very shadow of the Stars and Stripes up there.

MANNY

Gentlemen, believe me, we don't like to turn away business, especially in this economy. But I'm sure you can understand. I mean when *your* job is done, you like to go home. Right?

DICK

Well, if that's the case, maybe you shouldn't be calling this place Oasis.

DON

Yeah, Dick, these palm trees make you think you could come in, sit down and have a rest and a real nice meal ... But I guess we got that wrong.

DICK

Where'd your palm trees come from, Homer?

MANNY

Excuse me?

DICK

You from Jamaica? Bahamas? Cuba? You Cuban?

MANNY

Cuban? Ha! No, no, no.

(MANNY'S getting more nervous.)

Look, guys, I'm ready to go, but, um ... I guess I can throw some stuff on the grill. Please ... have a seat.

DON

Now, that's what we're talkin' about! Some local hospitality.

DICK

Say, what's your name, Homer?

MANNY

Uh ... Manny.

DON

We don't need no menus there, Manny. Just cook us up some eggs and bacon. And, like I said, some good strong coffee.

MANNY

Two orders?

DICK

Yep. Same thing.

MANNY

Okay, let me get the coffee going first.

DON

So, you knew Lou?

MANNY

Not really. We just did business.

DON

Well, you didn't miss much. Lou was a fucking asshole. Wouldn't give you a free cup of coffee if Christ came down off the cross and told him to fill'er up.

MANNY

The man didn't say much. Actually, he was kind of miserable.

DON

Yeah, that's the Lou I remember. But, man, he made great bacon. Good grease-to-meat ratio -- and crispy as hell.

MANNY

Well, for some reason, he was in a big hurry to get rid of this place. He took what I offered. And here we are.

DICK

So ... you do a pretty good business?

(MANNY stops for a beat as if suspicious about the question)

MANNY

Um, actually business is kind of slow. You know, things are really tough out there.

DON

Hey, you ain't tellin' us nothing we don't know. I used to do this New London run every month. Now? I ain't done this trip for more than a year. It's fucked up.

DICK

Yeah, now we gotta cobble together jobs from four or five different companies to keep us goin'

DON

But looks like you got somethin' good goin' for yourself here.

MANNY

Oh, well, it's hard to be the new kid on the block. Lou was here for a long time. People are still getting to know us. We try to be good citizens, blend into the neighborhood, you know.

(SERA enters the doorway and is startled.)

SERA

Excuse me, we're closed. Did you tell them we're closed?

MANNY

That's okay, honey. These gentlemen are old customers of Lou's, so I'm just going to cook something up fast for them.

SERA

What? Manny!

MANNY

Don't worry. It won't take long.

SERA

But it's *really* late. I'm sure these kind men will understand.

DON

Ma'am, excuse me, but we're not gonna take up too much of your husband's time. We're on a tight schedule to get up to New London, anyway. All we want is a couple eggs and some coffee and then we'll skedaddle real quick.

(SERA'S rage is slowly building.)

SERA

Honey, I know we want to be accomodating, but I don't think this is a ... good ... idea.

MANNY

It'll be fine. Look, just go home. Relax. I'll be along in an hour ... Please.

SERA

I see.

(SERA goes behind the counter to get her coat and purse.)

DICK

(To SERA)

Don't worry, we won't keep your husband out too late.

DON

Yeah, like I said, we're on a timetable ourselves.

(Without saying anything she moves to the door, but as she's about to leave, MANNY runs to her.)

MANNY

I'll be okay. Just call my cell when you get home so I know you're safe.

(SERA just looks at him coldly and walks out without saying a word.)

DON

Whoa ... That was pretty chilly. You got yourself a feisty woman there, Manny.