“BUTTON, BUTTON”

Based on the short story by Richard Matheson

Written for the screen by Adam J. Nadworniak
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 woman standing in the doorway. The woman 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.
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 hear 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!

NOMRA
A chance to buy that cottage on the Island.

ARTHUR
NO!!!

NOMRA
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 mine 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.

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

ARTHUR
Not what?

NOMRA
Selfish.

ARTHUR
Did I say you were?

NOMRA
Well...last night.

ARTHUR
Oh.

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

ARTHUR
In what way?

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

ARTHUR
Oh honey.

NOMRA
I wasn’t.

ARTHUR
Norma.

NOMRA
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. Lie 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 course.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT-DINING 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?

NOMRA

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 accidently 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.

THE END