

The Man of the House

by Danielle Fahiya

Characters

Eric Taylor, 15, eldest sibling the new man of the house.

Eugene Taylor, 13, middle son, struggling to accept his eldest brother taking over from his dad in his absence.

Ernie Taylor, 11, youngest sibling, looks up to middle brother and tries to emulate his ways.

Fred Peterson, 40s, Photographer taking Taylor brothers photographs.

INT. 232 BUTE ST FRED PETERSON'S STUDIO

Eric (eldest) and Ernie (youngest) are waiting inside Fred Peterson's studio for their brother Eugene (middle)

ERIC Do you think he's not showing up because of this morning's outburst?

Ernie throws the cricket ball down on to the floor

ERIC Ernie!

ERNIE I need to practise my hand to eye coordination, there's a cricket match on the weekend

ERIC That's not the way to do it, cricket balls don't bounce. Pick it up now!

Ernie picks up cricket ball

ERNIE Erm I think we have a problem

ERIC What?...Oh no...you've put a dent in the floor!

ERNIE I didn't mean to

ERIC Explain that to Mr Peterson then

ERNIE Fine but don't expect Eugene to be here

ERIC Why not?

ERNIE *(interrupting)* He told you he didn't want to come but you didn't listen, you never do

ERIC He was trying to wind me up but I'm not rising to it

Fred walks towards them

FRED Hello boys I'm Fred Peterson, I'll be taking your photos for today...I believe you're having them done for your father away at sea?

ERIC Yes Mr Peterson, he's serving away and it's his birthday in a few weeks. I'm Eric and this is Ernie. Eugene is late but he will be here shortly.

(Clears throat) Ernie, don't you have something to say to Mr Peterson?

ERNIE There's a dent in your floor from my cricket ball, I'm sorry I didn't mean to cause it

FRED Ah ok...well, lucky for you it's a very old floor with lots of dents so I wouldn't be able to distinguish yours from any other

ERIC He's very sorry about it

FRED Not to worry. So your mother mentioned doing this for your father's birthday. Is she not with you?

ERIC She has to work at the Avana Bakery today. She said I was old enough to come with the others.

Eugene comes rushing in

EUGENE Sorry I'm late, I err...remembered I had to run an errand for mum

ERIC Since when did you run errands for mum?

EUGENE You don't know what mum asks me to do. She thinks I'm capable too.

ERIC More like you were hanging around with that toe rag Jimmy. You know he's going to get nicked one day soon.

FRED Right ok well let's get on, good that you're all here now. If you position yourselves where you feel most comfortable.

ERNIE I'm going to stand in the middle

ERIC You're the shortest and youngest it wouldn't look right

EUGENE I'm going to stand as well

ERIC Just do as I say alright!

EUGENE Stop trying to be our dad!

Eric clips Eugene around the head

EUGENE Ow!

ERIC I wouldn't ever try to do that

EUGENE Clipping me round the head like dad would do if I ever stepped out of line...yeah nothing like Dad at all

ERIC Enough Eugene!

Fred attempts to help

FRED Ok boys let's focus on the importance of these photographs. Let's have eldest and youngest sat either side of middle sibling.

ERIC Like I was about to suggest

EUGENE Stop being smug

ERNIE And people say that I'm the immature one

FRED Well that's looking good now boys!

EUGENE How long will this take sir?

ERIC Got somewhere important to be, have you?

ERIC Take as long as you like Mr Peterson

FRED How long has your father been away?

ERIC 6 months

EUGENE He will be back soon

ERIC We don't know that

EUGENE Why have you got to say that?

ERIC I'm just saying we don't know when he will be back

ERNIE He's going to help me with catching drills

EUGENE Isn't that a little out of your reach?

Eric and Eugene laugh

ERNIE You won't be laughing when I get chosen one day to play for Wales

EUGENE Wales? You ever seen a black boy play for Wales? Not a chance!

FRED Ok boys first photo stay still

Fred takes his photo

Ernie lets out an exhale

ERIC What are you doing?

ERNIE I held my breath

EUGENE That was stupid

FRED Ok relax boys, think of how your father would wish to see you looking

Fred takes another photo

FRED That's better. What were you thinking of?

ERNIE Dad fighting hard and being brave on the front line.

EUGENE You do know he's not on the front line don't you?

ERNIE He is!

EUGENE He's not allowed, no black soldiers are.

ERIC Leave it Eugene

EUGENE I heard mum talking the other day to Mrs Hinds, black soldiers are kept doing jobs the white soldiers won't do like cutting down trees, unloading ships.

ERNIE That's not true! Eric tell him to shut up

ERIC Look we need to concentrate for Mr Peterson to take our photos.

FRED I think we got a good one there.

ERNIE Is it true though?

FRED How about we take some individual photographs as well so you have options

ERIC Ok yes, good idea.

FRED Great! Who's first?

Pause. No answer.

EUGENE He deserves to know the truth

ERIC It's not the time, why would you even bring it up like that?

ERNIE I hate you! And you suck at trying to be like Dad!

Ernie storms off

ERIC Ernie come back! I didn't mean...I'm not trying...Eugene go after him

EUGENE It's your mess to fix

ERIC I'm not asking

EUGENE Fine...I didn't want to be part of this anyway

Eugene leaves

FRED I'm sorry, do you need some time?

ERIC No it's fine, mum can bring them back for their individual photos another time. I'm done trying to help.

FRED It's never easy stepping up, being man of the house

ERIC I'm not

FRED You're taking on your father's duties, that's never easy

ERIC I don't have a choice

FRED I was about your age when my father died

ERIC My father's not dead

FRED Apologies I didn't mean to imply

ERIC Eugene is right, he will be back soon

FRED I just meant that my father's duties became mine in his absence

FRED Let's get on we don't have to...

Eric wants to talk about it, he's beginning to open up

ERIC I'm not ready

FRED That's ok

ERIC And they don't want my help even if I was

FRED They'll need you in time

ERIC What if I'm not cut out for it?

FRED I had to look after my younger brothers and mum when my father died, it wasn't easy.

ERIC How did you do it?

FRED I failed miserably at first. Your quarrelling with your brothers today took me back and got me thinking of the arguments we used to get into. Much worse than yours!

ERIC Did things get better?

FRED In time I found my feet but then as I got older I had this urge to leave, see the world

ERIC You left them?

FRED Yes. I should have handled it better, but I didn't want to get stuck in a small town.

ERIC Did you see them again?

FRED I haven't been back since

ERIC Do you miss them?

FRED Everyday. I was young, impatient and didn't want to get left behind. But being young is about making mistakes.

ERIC I don't feel I have the time to keep getting it wrong especially if something happens to Dad out there

FRED It's no good to think that way. You have just got to be there when they're ready to talk and ask for help.

ERIC And will they?

FRED In time yes. Right now all they need to know is that you're there to catch them in case they fall.

Fred takes Eric's photo

FRED Oh that reminds me...I have something for you

Fred hands Eric a cricket bat

ERIC A cricket bat?

FRED Ernie mentioned earlier and my father used to play with the Gentleman of Holland

ERIC This is too big of a gesture Mr Peterson

FRED I don't know if I'll get the opportunity to pass on to another young man so will you accept?

ERIC In that case I will...thank you Mr Peterson

FRED I was just doing my job

ERIC Yes, but

FRED It's ok...I know

THE END