

From Brothers
By Don Zolidis

NICOLE, 23, an attractive girl.

EVAN, 23, a former stoner.

BRANDON, 21, his younger brother. A skinny criminal.)

(NICOLE is attempting to help BRANDON study for the GED in order to keep him out of jail. Her boyfriend, EVAN, waits nearby. BRANDON is sitting on the couch, a mathematics textbook open in front of him. NICOLE sits nearby in an opposite chair, the same book in front of her. EVAN hovers near the back, beer in hand.)

NICOLE

Okay, try it again.

BRANDON

X equals five?

NICOLE

Look at it.

(BRANDON checks his equations again.)

What do you think?

BRANDON

I don't know. It's not five?

NICOLE

No. You see why?

(BRANDON shakes his head a little bit.)

BRANDON

Are you sure this shit's gonna be on the test?

NICOLE

Yes.

(NICOLE comes over and sits next to him.)

This is the square root, right?

BRANDON

Yeah.

NICOLE

So what do you have to do?

BRANDON

I don't know.

NICOLE

If this side's the square root, then the other side... what do you have to do to make it work?

(short pause)

Come on, Brandon, try.

BRANDON

I am trying.

NICOLE

All right.

EVAN

You square both sides.

(BRANDON looks at him, but NICOLE ignores him.)

NICOLE

What do you do?

BRANDON

You square both sides?

NICOLE

Yeah. So what's the answer?

BRANDON

Um...

NICOLE

What's five squared? Five times five?

EVAN

Come on, Brandon.

NICOLE

Evan, do you mind?

(BRANDON gets out his calculator, but NICOLE stops him.)

No—you can do it—five times five.

BRANDON

Twenty-five.

NICOLE

Yeah. Good. All right.

Jesus. EVAN

Hey fuck off. BRANDON

Guys? NICOLE

It's not like you did any better in school. BRANDON

I wasn't trying. It's not like I didn't have the rains to do it. EVAN

It doesn't matter anyway. Not like I'm ever gonna use this shit. BRANDON

Yeah—multiplication is real hard. EVAN
(NICOLE gets up)

Evan! Please. Okay? We are trying to get through this. NICOLE

Sorry. EVAN

Just go somewhere else. NICOLE

No, I'll be quiet— EVAN

Just—Leave. NICOLE

Fine. EVAN
(Evan stands there a second, then walks out.)

I'm sorry about that, um... NICOLE

You're not responsible for him. BRANDON

NICOLE

Yeah... okay, let's do the next one. It's the same process, just different numbers, right?

(BRANDON doesn't look at his book.)

Brandon?

BRANDON

There isn't really that much point in this, you know

NICOLE

It's not that hard, we got the—

BRANDON

Don't, okay?

NICOLE

What?

BRANDON

You know, even if I know it outside the head, as I get in there I'm gonna... it just like slips right out of my head. It's stupid too cause I know it, I know the shit, and then... like... like I'm sitting there, and there's like a clock ticking and some asshole up there in front watching me—and I'm thinking, 'fuck you', you know? And then it's like I wanna take the desk and smash him over the head with it.

(short pause)

NICOLE

That probably wouldn't help you on the test.

(she tries to smile weakly)

BRANDON

Can we not do this?

NICOLE

It's important—

BRANDON *(cutting her off)*

I *know* it's important! Every one of these is so goddamn important! I just—I just don't wanna do it. Okay?

NICOLE

Well what do you want to do? We don't study this, you don't learn it—the test comes along... you know?

BRANDON

Yeah. I know.

NICOLE

So?

(BRANDON is caught—he punches at the table absently)

BRANDON

It's not fair.

NICOLE

Well...

(short pause)

BRANDON

They can't... what kind of bullshit is it that if I can't get a score on a test I go to prison? That doesn't make any sense, you know? They've tested me for years. And every test comes up with me being a complete idiot. I'm like in the zeroeth percentile. And they look at me... like I'm deformed. I feel like I got this fucking number stamped on my forehead—and everyone can see it, they know it, and they like... they hate me—they hate me for it. They put me in the fucking retard class—and I gotta sit with these kids that can't feed themselves, and there's me... I remember—I remember sitting next to a kid who pissed himself every day—I remember watching him go up to the board, and there's this dark line in the carpet where he's been walking—and I just wanted to fucking crack his skull open—I almost did too, I was gonna—

NICOLE

Brandon—

BRANDON

Or else take a pencil and stab it through my hand just to get somebody's attention—that I didn't belong with them... just cause of those damn tests... and now...

(short pause while he catches his breath)

Now they've got a way to put me in prison for it.

NICOLE

You're not going to prison.

(BRANDON looks at her)

You're not.

BRANDON

Why not?

NICOLE

Because you're gonna pass this test—I'm gonna help you—we're gonna do this—what better way to get back at those people who said you were stupid than by—

BRANDON *(interrupting her sarcastically)*

Than by passing the GED and proving that I'm smart? What a great idea, Nicole! Let's get cracking!

(she's hurt)

NICOLE

I'm trying to help you. You don't have to be mean.

BRANDON

Does it make you feel good to help me? Make you feel smart? Make you feel like a part of this family? Why the hell anyone would want to be part of this family I don't know. I mean, I was born into this shit, but you're here by choice. You're like knocking down the door to get in—you see anything around here you want to be a part of?

NICOLE

I do, actually—

BRANDON

You gonna marry my brother? Have some kids? That sounds like a great life, doesn't it? But what do you think the chances are he's gonna keep that job? That he's gonna do anything? You shoulda seen him two years ago, he was stoned every single day of the week—

NICOLE

So he's getting better, he's—

BRANDON

You'll end up crazy. Anything that enters this house goes nuts. I mean, we get a dog, right? Every dog this family ever had ends up losing its shit. They're nice before we get 'em, after they live here a couple months they come down with rabies or the mange or some other disease nobody's ever heard of before, and the next thing you know, the dog's living out the rest of its days on the farm somewhere because living here made it unfit for human society. We had this one dog, Bear, oh man I loved that dog. Bear was huge, and he was mean—he used to pee on the neighbor kids and he just... Bear was like eating the house, right? You'd come home and a chair would be missing cause Bear had torn it apart with his teeth and was eating it, you know? I mean, that dog was chewing the walls. He was awesome. I loved him. Cause he was so perfect for this house, you know? I mean it totally made sense that the dog was trying to swallow the whole goddamn house—it was the logical response to this place—if I had teeth like that, I woulda done the same damn thing.

NICOLE

What to do you want to do with your life, Brandon?

BRANDON

I just told you.

NICOLE

That's what you want? You want to eat the house?

BRANDON

No, you know what I want out of life? I would take my Mom's plants—

NICOLE

Come on—

BRANDON

No I'm not done. I would take my Mom's rain forest over there and I'd take them out of the pots, and I would crucify them on every wall. Just like nail them up all over the house. As a warning to other plants who might want to live here.

NICOLE

Sorry I asked.

(Pause. BRANDON is chastened.)

BRANDON

You know what I wanna do?

(she looks at him)

I wanna be smart.

(she smiles sadly)

NICOLE

You are.

(Long pause.)

You know why I'm here?

BRANDON

No.

NICOLE

I like it here.

BRANDON

See? You've already gone crazy.

NICOLE

I don't think so.

(Pause)

BRANDON

You know you're the prettiest girlfriend my brother's ever had.

(NICOLE laughs)

Seriously.

NICOLE

Thanks.

BRANDON

Mostly he dates skanks. But you're beautiful.

NICOLE

Thank you.

(BRANDON is sitting uncomfortably close to her)

You know, I should probably see what Evan's p to.

(she gets up)

BRANDON

Wait. Um...

NICOLE

What?

BRANDON

You really think I'll pass that test?

(short pause)

NICOLE

Sure.

(They stand there for a second. Lights fade. End of scene.)