

ANYWAY

by

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FADE IN:

INT. SHOE STORE IN A SHOPPING MALL - DAY

A shoe store—or shoe department in a large sporting goods store—in a mall. It is after the Fourth of July; there are streamers, bunting, etc. A sign reads: AFTER HOLIDAY SPECIALS. Music filters in from the mall.

A family on a shopping trip. Vince is in his casual clothes, which for him means a cleaner, newer set of the clothes he wears to work as an electrician—khaki shirt, jeans, ropers. His wife Myrna wears a plain white T-shirt hanging out over her thin, formless jeans, flat shoes. The boys also wear plain white Ts hanging out, three of a kind. It all seems ordinary enough.

But something's amiss; something's not quite right. There's tension in the air, though Vince and Myrna—especially Myrna—are working hard not to admit it. Vince sits across from his family; he spends a lot of time looking off, looking away. Ronnie stands between them, looking down unhappily at the basketball shoes on his feet.

MYRNA

Make up your mind, Ronnie.

STEPHEN

Come on, Squirt. Take 'em so we can get out of here and get back to our game.

Ronnie rocks back and forth, watching the shoes in the floor-level mirror. He walks over to the display of shoes on the wall and looks forlornly at the pair he really wants.

RONNIE

Do you think they'll get some in my size later?

MYRNA

Honey, they don't make them in your size. You heard the man. Your feet are too narrow.

Ronnie moans a little. Vince stands up, a signal; the boy looks helpless to his mother. Myrna stands too.

MYRNA

Take them off then. I'll try to run you up to Pittsburgh next week. Maybe we can find what you want up there.

VINCE

Why can't he just take those?

MYRNA

Because he doesn't like them and they'll sit in his closet while he goes on wearing his old ratty ones. He's like his father.

Myrna smiles at him knowingly as she gathers up her purse. She touches his arm with the flat of her hand before turning away, but her smile now is to herself.

MYRNA

Come on, boys. Your father's got to get going.

Myrna makes the explanations to the salesperson and they leave.

INT. PROMENADE OF THE SHOPPING MALL - DAY

For a moment the family pauses in front of the store, out of the flow of traffic, looking a bit out of their element. The boys start trading punches on the upper arm, each one harder than the last.

VINCE

Anything else?

MYRNA

I can't think of anything. Unless you need some more underwear for over there.

VINCE

I've got enough to last a week at a time.

They look at each other and something unsaid passes between them. Myrna sends the boys on down the mall, then she takes Vince's arm, smiling, the bad moment avoided.

As they continue toward the outside door, there are

two elderly men sitting on opposite ends of a bench, both waiting for something, one with his arm thrown back looking lost, the other leaning forward looking exhausted. A trio of attractive, teenage girls in shorts and halters overtakes them; Stephen and Ronnie don't even see them, watching the demo of a video game in a window; Vince and Myrna ignore them, but there is the sense that each is aware of them. A woman argues with her headstrong child. Myrna is happy; Vince seems the good father and husband. Satisfied. Content.

EXT. THE MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

A sunny day in Western Pennsylvania though there are clouds that could develop into rain later. Near the mall entrance are a number of cars, but Vince's pickup truck sits away by itself in the rest of the empty lot. The boys run ahead across the concrete, Vince and Myrna making a half-hearted attempt to run after them, hand-in-hand.

INT. THE CAB OF VINCE'S PICKUP TRUCK

The four of them crowd into the cab, Myrna scrunched close to her husband. As Vince starts the engine, a flashy car passes them on the right and parks.

EXT. THE MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

An attractive woman their age climbs out with much flashing of long tan legs. She is stylishly dressed—mini-skirt, high-heeled sandals. As she heads toward the entrance, she sets her long hair down her back.

INT. THE CAB OF VINCE'S PICKUP TRUCK

Vince looks at the woman, then lowers his head, looking at Myrna's hands folded in her lap; he makes a point not to look at the woman again. Myrna grips his arm, snuggles closer.

EXT. THE MALL PARKING LOT, ETC. - DAY

The pickup leaves the mall, travels briefly through a suburban shopping district. Then along a country winding road, turning down the hill into the valley. Through the trees we see the streets of the mill town below along the river, the roofs of the small frame houses stacked up along the streets.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. THE DOWNSTAIRS OF THE FAMILY'S HOUSE – AFTERNOON

A small house in a small mill town outside of Pittsburgh. It is after a late lunch, early dinner; Vince and Myrna are still at the table; visible in the next room, the boys are playing a video game on the TV. On the table are the leftovers of a picnic-style lunch—potato salad that's beginning to crust; coleslaw that's seen better times; a pot of baked beans that seems slightly fecal. Ears of corn nibbled down to the last kernel; half eaten hot dogs, grease congealing on the plates.

VINCE

Oof. I won't have to eat for a week.

MYRNA

I don't want you to forget what a home-cooked meal is like. While you're over there.

Vince looks at her with a look that says, Don't start again. But she doesn't say anything more; she cuts him a piece of Angel Food cake marbled with Jell-O. He watches her cut it and picks at it, despite himself, as he finishes his coffee. She takes a few dishes to the kitchen and sits again across from him. She plays with her cup, twisting it in the saucer 90 degrees one direction, then back again.

MYRNA

I only wish you didn't have to go back so early.

VINCE

I don't want to chance it. They're saying there might be rain coming in. And I can use the time to go over some drawings.

MYRNA

How long do you think the job will last?

VINCE

It's probably good for another four, maybe five months. Till winter, I'm hoping.

MYRNA

That long.

VINCE

I'm lucky to have it at all. You should see all the guys still sitting in the union hall. The jobs just aren't out there.

MYRNA

Oh. I know.

VINCE

You think I like it? That building shell is like an oven at this time of year, the sun on the roof with no ventilation or nothing. My hands get so sweaty and sticky, I can hardly make the connections.

MYRNA

I miss you, that's all.

VINCE

You want Christmas this year, don't you? And there's Ronnie's braces, you're going to need a better car. What can I do?

MYRNA

It's just that Mary Tatasio said that Bill used to—

VINCE

Christ, Myrna. We've been through all this. Tatasio's job was this side of Pittsburgh. And it was last spring, not the summer.

He stands up abruptly, knocking his chair over without meaning to but he lets it stay where it is. The boys look in from the living room, and just as quickly turn back to the game. Vince looks at them, looks at her, his voice calmer now, quieter, but deadly.

VINCE

I told you. I'm not going to work overtime, twelve, fourteen hours a day, and then drive an hour-and-a half, two hours just to get home

in all the heat. I'm not doing
that.

Vince steps over the boys in the living room and goes
up the narrow stairs, slamming the door to the
bathroom.

INT. THE BATHROOM - DAY

Vince finishes urinating, washes his hands. He hears
her come up the steps beyond the closed door but takes
his time, drying his hands, gathering up his shaving
things and putting them in his travel kit. He takes
the damp towel and washes it down over his face; he
avoids his reflection in the mirror over the sink.

INT. THE BEDROOM - DAY

Myrna is sitting on the edge of the bed beside his
open suitcase. She is acting as if nothing has
happened; she's smiling. As she watches him put the
last things in his bag, she begins to swing her legs a
little, pretending to chew gum like a young girl.

MYRNA

Hiya, mister.

Vince grunts, not looking at her.

MYRNA

You're new in town, ain'tcha?

VINCE

Just passing through.

MYRNA

You wouldn't have room in that
li'l ol' bag for li'l ol' me,
wouldcha, huh, mister?

VINCE

Nope, 'fraid not.

He's still not looking at her. He looks around the
room to make sure he's got everything, then closes the
bag and sets it on the floor. Now he's having trouble
finding places to look.

MYRNA

Well then. Suppose I told you that
I had room in li'l ol' me for big
ol' you?

Vince is still looking around, then it dawns on him what she's saying. When he looks at her, she mimics his look good-naturedly with open-mouthed surprise.

VINCE

What about the boys?

MYRNA

You know they're dead to the world when they're playing a video game. How about it, huh, mister?

Vince cocks his head at her, a smile playing on his face despite himself. He goes over and closes and locks the bedroom door. When he comes back, she begins to unbuckle his pants.

VINCE

What about your diaphragm?

MYRNA

I've been wearing it all day. In case something happened to come up.

Now he can't help but grin. She slides her hands under the waist of his pants and slides them down to his knees, then looks up at him.

MYRNA

Honey, I'm sorry about downstairs.

VINCE

It's not like I like spending my life in cheap motels. And I'm coming home on the weekends.

MYRNA

I know. It's just that things weren't going so good for us for a while there. And now that they are going good again, it seems a shame we can't be together.

VINCE

There's no reason why things can't stay good.

Myrna lays back and starts to pull him with her. He resists in order to unbuckle her jeans and pulls them down far enough to free one leg—there is something

startling about her sudden flesh, its paleness, something truly uncovered. He enters her easily, their rhythm smooth and effortless, much practiced. He watches her work her head methodically into the pillow; then he looks away, at nothing in particular, the items on the dresser, the pictures on the wall, not trying to sustain himself or because he's bored but because he realizes this is good, this is really good, this is as good as it's ever going to get.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. ANOTHER MILL TOWN - DUSK

Vince's pickup truck travels along an old highway close to the river. The valley's hills rise up in the growing darkness. It pulls into a small, privately owned motel and parks in front of a unit at the end. Vince gets out, stretches, and walks back along the empty parking spaces to the office. The neon sign in the window glares in the afterglow: Available.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - DUSK

As Vince steps to the counter, Mrs. Bridger, the owner, comes out of the living quarters in the rear. She is wiping her hands on her apron and seems genuinely glad to see him.

MRS. BRIDGER

The rain's been holding off, so you could make it back to us all right.

VINCE

I'm glad. I can use all the help I can get.

MRS. BRIDGER

I'll bet your family was glad to see you. For the holiday and all.

VINCE

It was great.

MRS. BRIDGER

It's all ready for you. We didn't touch a thing. I mean, Jody made the bed and all....

VINCE

I'm sure it'll be fine.

MRS. BRIDGER

You go get yourself settled in now. I'll bet you're worn out after the drive.

VINCE

It's not bad at all. But you're right, I want to go get settled in.

Vince takes the key Mrs. Bridger has placed on the counter and leaves.

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT - DUSK

Vince walks back across the lot toward his truck. In the evening gloom there are the sounds of occasional distant fireworks, leftover celebrations. He takes his bag from the passenger side of the truck and heads toward his door.

INT. VINCE'S MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

A small room, paneled in cheap veneer to try to make it look rustic. An uncomfortable-looking chair, the upholstery well-worn and stained; a spindly desk; a nicked-up dresser and nightstand. There is barely enough room to walk around the foot of the bed to the bathroom. The bed is covered with a thin damask spread. Over the bed is a cheap lithograph landscape.

Vince puts his bag on the bed and opens it. Turns on the lamp beside the bed and turns off the overhead. Turns on the window air conditioner; the TV. On the screen is the rerun of a game show. He takes a few things from his suitcase; stares at the TV for a long moment without really watching it. Then he takes his cell phone from his pocket and hits a speed-dial number. It rings a few times.

CARLA'S VOICE

This is Carla. Leave me a message.

Vince snaps the phone shut.

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT - DUSK

Vince carries the phone outside and stands in front of

his door. He lights a cigarette and flips open the phone again, hits another speed-dial number.

VINCE

Can I speak to Carla, please. Oh yeah, hi Ernie...yeah, I just got back a little while ago.... Yeah, it was great, just great. Can I speak to Carla, is she busy?

INT. ERNIE'S BAR AND GRILL - DUSK

Carla picks up the receiver from the counter. She looks at the phone for a second, considering something, before she speaks

CARLA

You're back early.

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT - DUSK

VINCE

Yeah. I just got in. Can you talk a minute?

INT. ERNIE'S BAR AND GRILL - DUSK

CARLA

Only a minute. We're pretty busy. People trying to get away from all the picnics and family outings, I guess....

She waits, wondering if she's said too much, or not enough.

I didn't know if you'd call or not when you got back. You left sort of in a hurry. How was the trip down?

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT - DUSK

VINCE

It was okay. Look, can you come over when you get off?

INT. ERNIE'S BAR AND GRILL - DUSK

She waits again. Ernie's looking at her, motioning her to hurry up. She waves him away.

CARLA

I didn't know if you'd want to see me. After being home again like that.

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT – DUSK

VINCE

I'm asking you, aren't I?

CARLA'S VOICE

Baby, you okay?

VINCE

Yeah. I'm tired, that's all. Come over when you can, will you?

INT. ERNIE'S BAR AND GRILL – DUSK

CARLA

I'd have to call around and try to get a sitter. You really want to see me, don't you?

She waits as he says something not quite intelligible. I can tell. Your voice sounds different. You sound like you found out this time how much you love me. That you want to be with me anyway.

EXT. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT – DUSK

VINCE

Just make it as soon as you can.

Vince snaps the cover of the cell phone shut and stands there in the darkness. The light from the window of the cell phone illuminates his face momentarily—he appears ghostly. Then it goes out. There is only the small red glow of his cigarette. Moving to his mouth and away again. In the darkness, across the river, there is the sound of an occasional firecracker. The whistle of an unseen skyrocket.

FADE TO BLACK