

EXT. HIGHLAND PARK TRAIN STATION - DAY

A train pulls off. A rush-hour crowd swells toward a ramp to the street. Heads down. Hands in pockets. Eyes on screens.

As the mass moves on SMITH strolls behind it at a leisurely pace. He's OVERBURDENED with a travelers rig.

Scruffy stubble. Tan skin. Humongous ruck-sack, sleeping bag, camping pots RATTLING, duffel bag over one shoulder.

He takes his time. He looks around at the stone tree, the parking lot, the HIGHLAND THEATER sign.

Deep breath as he hits the ramp. It's good to be home.

EXT. AVENUE 59 HEADING TOWARDS FIGUEROA - DAY

Smith continues his stroll. He stops to stare at the HP CAFE for a hot second.

The pale green facade stands out like a beacon of fine dining against a drab concrete background.

There's a hustle. There's a bustle. A line snakes down the street. A CRISP WHITE FLASH moves around the corner.

Smith smiles wide and picks up the pace.

EXT. THE HP CAFE - BACK - DAY

Smith and JENNA - and her crisp white catering shirt - sit in the back of a catering van.

Their legs swing with a friendly syncopated rhythm.

JENNA

You reek, brother. You reek like a hobo who lost his bindle in a huge pile of cow turds.

SMITH

I can live with that.

She throws her arms around him sideways.

JENNA

I can't believe you did it. You rode the shit out of those rails.

He leans his head in to hers. They have a nice moment.

JENNA

OK. So. I promised myself I wouldn't be one of those jerks that was all "How was it?" and expect you to tell me about two months of your life in one convo. So why don't you tell me one super specific thing. Like...

She presses her finger to her lips. To help her contemplate.

JENNA

(eureka)

...where's the weirdest place you took a leak?

He immediately knows the answer.

SMITH

Off the side of a runaway tractor.

JENNA

Fuck off.

SMITH

It's true. I mean. I don't know how to drive a tractor. Hold up. There's a video.

He reaches into one of the pockets of his duffel and pulls out a SMART PHONE. It's in quite a state.

The screen is cracked. Part of the case is chipped off. There are stickers all over the back.

JENNA

Get the fuck out of here.

She grabs the phone.

JENNA

This is yours?

SMITH

Yup.

JENNA

Like. You have a bill in your name and a data plan and everything?

He grins at her. Another CATERER in a crisp white shirt heads for the van. Jenna hops out.

JENNA

If I didn't have to get to set you'd be in so much trouble, mister.

SMITH

Wuddup with that? I thought you were done slinging hash.

JENNA

It's a secret plan. I have a secret plan I can't tell you about. Because. You know. Secret.

SMITH

Cool, cool. You sure it's OK if I leave my shit here? I want to go for a little stroll before I head home.

Jenna quick-hugs him and heads off to get in the van.

JENNA

Come on, doll. Like Max could ever say no to that smile. Oh.

She tosses him the phone. He catches it one handed.

JENNA

Welcome back.

EXT. FIGUEROA AVENUE - DAY

Smith STRUTS. Yeah. Head up. Chest out. Jaunty steps. It's a major strut. He looks around at everything.

He -

BUYS SOMETHING FROM A FOOD TRUCK

- and -

CHECKS OUT WHAT'S PLAYING AT THE HIGHLAND THEATER

- and -

PLAYS WITH A DOG OR TWO OUTSIDE THE PET CLINIC

- until he finally ends up at -

INT. USED BOOKSTORE/MAGIC SHOP - DAY

- where he, not surprisingly, looks through used books. It's a small shop. There aren't many books.

A FLASH OF PINK moves through a curtain to the back, where the magic shows are. He offers the pink a sideways glance.

SASHA, pink dress flashing left and fucking right, fans herself with a MAGIC SHOW PROGRAM.

Smith does a small and subtle double take. She moves to the shelves and turns her back to him.

He moves a little closer. She turns and he turns. Her back is to him again. He tries to get a look at her face.

He steps closer for a more prolonged glance. She turns around faster than he expected. They make eye contact.

SASHA

Are you staring at me or the books? I hope it's the books but also, between you and me, I hope it's me too. Little bit.

SMITH

Is your name - are you Penny's friend Sasha? You're kind of all over her Instagram. Is that wackadoo? I mean. I know Penny pretty well. We worked together at the cafe. So it's not weird. That I know you. Or not that weird. I don't think.

They take steps closer to each other. Sasha smiles.

SASHA

Keep pointing out how weird it isn't. That'll sure make it less weird.

He shoves the book he holds under his arm and extends his hand. She steps even closer to shake it.

SMITH

Sorry. Smith.

She holds on to his hand after they shake.

SASHA

Ohhhhhhhh. I totally know who you are. The Luddite. Hi.

SMITH
Yeah. Hi. Hey.

They stand there. Holding already shook hands.

EXT. FIGUEROA AVENUE - WALL BY A STAIRWELL - DAY

Smith and Sasha sit next to each other on a small ledge of a wall. The stairs next to them go up to a Madonna relief.

SMITH
You sure you don't want to sit up there? It's kind of cool. Like being in an empty pool or something.

She eyes the stairs with exhaustion. He doesn't notice.

SASHA
Walk up those stairs with these dainty little feet? Sir. You talk nonsense of epic proportions.

She sips her juice.

SMITH
Can I get in on some of that? Parched as F over here.

She hands him the juice and watches intently as he takes a sip. Like she expects him to make a face.

SMITH
That's intense. What is that? Wheatgrass and something else?

SASHA
A bunch of stuff.

She takes the juice. He stands and stretches. She watches all the different angles of his body that flex and arch.

He's in pretty fucking good shape.

SMITH
Penny showed me your blog one time. I really dug it. Kind of a lot.

He bounces on the balls of his feet. His shirt lifts above the waistband of his shorts. She notices. Big time.

SASHA

Oh, thanks. I like to eat. I like to write. It was pretty keen of the world to make food blogging so popular so I could do both for a living. Yay world.

SMITH

Food blog?

SASHA

Yeah. The Merry Madeleine. That's me.

SMITH

Penny showed me a fiction blog or something. With a bunch of vignettes?

Sasha demures.

SASHA

Oh. That. That's super old.

SMITH

All that shit was great. Super vibrant and kind of. I dunno. Clean? Kind of reminded me of musicals without songs. And. You know. On the page and not in a theater.

SASHA

That's. Wow. Thanks. Thank you.

SMITH

Sho nuff.

SASHA

I - I really love musicals.

SMITH

What kind of dead inside prick doesn't? The Superstar? Fuck.

SASHA

That's one of my favorites.

He belts out a quick verse from something in Jesus Christ Superstar. She melts. Or swoons. Take your pick.

SMITH

I had a bunch of pals that started out in classical voice at college but moved over to musical theater. They were the biggest snobs of all time.

SASHA
Musical apologists, huh?

SMITH
Yeah. Big time.

SASHA
Yeah, you find that in the "the-a-
ter" too. Blech. It's why I stopped
reviewing shows. If we all burst in
to song all the time, the world would
be a much better place. Or at the
very least it would be livelier.

He sits next to her again. A little closer this time.

SMITH
What war wouldn't be improved with
some snap-dance-fighting?

SASHA
Right?

They each drift off in to their own smiles for a second.

SMITH
Where'd you go to college?

SASHA
Oh, I dropped out of high school.

SMITH
No shit?

SASHA
Yeah. I was always really bad at
being a student. After a while I only
went to the classes that had boys I
was crushing on in them. It was a
dumb way to schedule an education.

Now he swoons a little.

SMITH
Nice. I made it through high school
but when it came time to get tangled
up in college I just majored in
getting wasted and flunked out of
everything else.

SASHA
Nice.

They lock eyes and smiles for a few breaths.

SMITH

Hey. You want to go fucking bowling?

INT. HIGHLAND PARK BOWL - DAY

CRASH. Someone at the last lane bowls a strike. CRASH.
Someone at the second to last lane bowls a strike.

In fact, everyone bowls a strike in every lane up to Smith and Sasha's. In an almost coordinated way.

Almost, kind of, sort of, like in a musical.

Smith waits for his ball at the return. Sasha holds her juice in her lap. There's still a fair amount left.

Their lane partners are STEVE & DARLENE. Two somewhat tragically hip hipsters. Or so they'd have you believe.

SASHA

I feel like I can't remember a time
when we weren't hanging out.

Smith flashes a hell of a smile.

SMITH

Boss.

He steps up to the lane. Darlene, tall and pretending she's not awkward about it, moves to the score-table.

DARLENE

I would be mortified to be seen
eating at the "Highland Park Cafe" in
the middle of the day.

Sasha keeps her eyes on Smith's backside but pricks her ears up to eavesdrop. Steve fusses with his bowling shoes.

STEVE

I'm always hungry again in an hour.

Smith rolls a good ball. Sasha claps her hands together in an adorable fashion. Darlene rolls her eyes.

Smith does a goofy little trot-dance back to the ball return. Sasha motions her eyes at Darlene and Steve.

DARLENE

I don't even care about the food. It's like. I get it, "Highland Park Cafe" - you're hipper than me. Cool. Can I go back to Silverlake and be actually hip now?

STEVE

Yeah. The first time I walked in there I was all "This is hipster. Hipster little place you got here."

DARLENE

It's B.S. You can't try to be that hipster and actually end up being hipster, you know? It's a magnificent thing to be. Sorry, "Cafe" - you didn't earn it.

SMITH

You guys talking the HP Cafe?

They both look at him like he slapped their faces.

SMITH

Cool place, right? I used to work there. The foods awesome.

Darlene gestures at Smith.

DARLENE

See what I mean? You can't claim street cred when you have all that going on. It's anti-hipster.

She makes a circle in the air in Smith's general direction. He rolls his eyes and grabs his ball.

SMITH

Cool. Good talk.

Sasha is on her feet and at his side. Her (pale, pale) cheeks have some color in them. Her nostrils flare.

SASHA

You guys aren't hipsters. You're dorks. You want so desperately to be the tribe everyone else wants to be a part of, it never occurred to you that no one gives a shit about you. They're too busy living their lives. You. Absolute farts.

Sasha overturns a basket of mostly empty cheese fries to punctuate her mini-rant.

Both Darlene & Steve shrink into themselves. Not an ounce of moxie on either one of them. Smith?

Smith swoons. Again. He grabs Sasha's hand & pulls her away.

INT. HIGHLAND PARK BOWL - BAR - DAY

Sasha sits at a little two-seater table. Smith leans on the bar across the room.

She keeps her eyes firmly planted on his back and lets out a long series of staggered coughs. Her eyes water.

One hand flexes on to the table. The other presses to her chest as hard as it can. The coughs grow harsher & harsher.

Her head lowers. She gulps down air and forces herself steady. It works after a few gulps.

Smith drops into the chair across from her, a pint of fine looking lager ale in each hand.

He slides one in front of her.

SMITH
Those guys were pricks, huh?

He holds up his glass. She grabs hers and CLINKS a toast. Her first sip goes down like hot needles.

But she smiles.

EXT. FIGUEROA AVENUE - NIGHT

They walk down Fig at the exact moment the street lights become necessary. The sky is a light bruise on the horizon.

Smith holds the last couple bites of a chili cheese dog. He shoves it in front of Sasha's face.

SMITH
Sure you don't want in on this?

She forces her lips closed and puts a hand on her belly.

SASHA
Uh uh.

He shoves the whole thing in his mouth. Her pace slows. She slips her arm in his.

SASHA
(weakly)

So.

She clears her throat.

SASHA
So, you get all the mad poonani on
the road, or what?

He leans into her. She holds on to him to stay upright.

SMITH
Nah.

SASHA
Nah?

SMITH
The trip wasn't about that. It was
about connection. This country is
such a huge, beautiful mess. Living
out here I felt myself losing sight
of the beautiful part and getting
caught up in the mess part. So I took
kind of a vow of chastity. Sort of. I
dunno, I know it's lame. But I wanted
to let go of all the desires that
weighed me down so I could focus on
the experience itself.

SASHA
That's not lame.

She stops walking. He takes a step forward before stopping himself. She looks at his face. He steps closer.

She THRUSTS HER FACE INTO HIS ARMPIT and takes a huge whiff.

SASHA
Sorry. Your odor has been driving me
bonkers all day. It's earthy and
intense and like honey all at once. I
like it, is what I'm saying.

She sips her juice and walks down the street. He stares after her.

EXT. THE HP CAFE - BACK GATE - NIGHT

Smith stands with all of his bags at his feet. Sasha sways next to him. He has his phone out.

SMITH

Your Uber's on it's way. Because I can do that now. With this.

He waves his phone in the air.

SASHA

Keen.

SMITH

Hey. So. Can I say this was a date? Like. When I tell people about it, can I say "The day I got back I had this really amazing date with this awesome girl named Sasha?"

SASHA

Pfft. More like three dates.

SMITH

Cool.

They face each other. Their faces hover. Her hands clench into fists at her sides as she tries to steady herself.

The HEADLIGHTS of her arriving Uber blast their shadows on the long brick wall. The shadows kiss - very quickly.

Sasha's shadow rushes to the car.

INT. PENNY & SASHA'S - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Penny sits on the couch, reading a script. She takes off her glasses and checks her phone. No new text.

Her eyes shoot to the door when it CLINKS open. Sasha rushes into the room. Her mouth opens.

Foamy vomit spills through her lips and down the front of her dress. Penny hops to her feet. Sasha clears her throat.

SASHA

Holy shit. I just had the best day.

EXT. AVENUE 59 - BOTTOM OF A STEEP HILL - NIGHT

Smith looks at a picture of Sasha on Instagram. He TAP-TAPS his cracked screen. The little heart appears.

He readjusts all his CLANKING and CLANGING bags and looks up the hill at the full moon.

Despite the weight on his back he does a little soft-shoe, happy-guy, musical-number dance up the steep incline.

CUT TO BLACK: