

OFF TO THE RACES

Written by

Louis Cox

Based on, If Any

The Race Track: Saratoga Exit by Audax Minor
(The New Yorker magazine, September 4, 1971)

FADE IN:

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Two men walk up the steps of a subway stairwell entrance: One skips up the stairs with a sense of excitement, the other drags behind in pouty defiance. The first man reaches the top of the stairs and turns back to wait for his friend. As the other nears street level: a bright sun shines across his eyes. The young man blinks.

EXT. STREET - DAY

ELDER MAN

You ready for this DANIEL?

YOUNG MAN

Shut up, VINCENT.

VINCENT

Jeez, still a bit touchy, are we?

DANIEL

You never told me where we were going.

VINCENT

That would ruin the surprise...
(points ahead)
...Have a look for yourself.

Daniel looks up the road to find a giant racetrack shaped like a pantheon: Daniel smiles at Vincent; Vincent grins at Daniel.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You ready to forget her?

DANIEL

Maybe.

VINCENT

Fair enough.

INT. RACETRACK (ENTRANCE) - DAY

The two men enter the stadium with the excitement of boys. They make their way over to the ticket booth where they find a line of people waiting:

VINCENT

You grab the beer; I'll get the tickets.

DANIEL

Roger that.

Daniel disappears up a tunnel leading towards the track.

Vincent waits on line at the ticket booth and smiles at a young woman standing in front of him. She turns away. Vincent starts whistling to himself.

A large bell RINGS and the sound of doors SNAP open as a race begins on the big screen television located above them in the lobby.

An enthusiastic voice narrates the race over a loudspeaker:

RACE CALLER (V.O.)

And we're off! Taking an early lead is Shuvee, followed closely by Rest Your Case... Their neck and neck, Rest Your Case pulls in front, no, it's Shuvee...

Vincent is so captivated by the race on the screen that he fails to notice he's made it to the front of the queue.

TICKET SELLER

Hey! You! What's it gonna be?

VINCENT

Huh? Oh...

Vincent returns his attention to what's in front of him to notice a young, freckled, red-haired ginger boy who doesn't appear old enough to buy his own tickets. On his white button down shirt, clipped onto his red tie, is a name tag which reads: CHARLIE ROSEN, Ticket Sales, Office Manager.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

(raising eyes up towards big screen)

Who's that?

CHARLIE

Oh, that's Shuvee. She's amazing... Competing in the Diana Handicap today. She won it last year.

VINCENT

Then she's a sure thing?

Charlie shrugs. Vincent taps his fingers on the counter of the ticket window with a rhythmic anxiety.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Well, if you were the one making the bet. Who would you bet on?

Charlie shrugs.

CHARLIE

I don't bet.

Vincent looks up at the screen, then down to the ticket window, then up the tunnel, then back to the ticket window. TAP. TAP. TAP.

VINCENT

Fuck it -- give me two for Shuvee to win.

Tickets print. Charlie's hand rips them. Vincent's hand grabs them.

EXT. RACETRACK (TRACK SEATING) - DAY

Vincent appears and sits down in the stadium folding seat in one quick motion:

VINCENT

Hey douchebag, where's my beer?

DANIEL

Right here, asshole.

Vincent smiles; Daniel laughs and hands him a pint of beer.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

So, who are we betting on?

VINCENT

So, when are you going to forget about that stupid bitch?

DANIEL

Hey! Don't call her that.

VINCENT

Whatever.

DANIEL

I'm serious, it's not funny.

VINCENT

Jeez, gentleman to the end, you are.

(hands him his ticket)

We're betting on Shuvee to win. She won last year, guy at the ticket window said she's amazing, so I think we have good chances.

DANIEL

Oh yeah? What's so great about her?

Vincent raises his arms, tilts his head sideways, and shrugs:

VINCENT

I dunno. But apparently... She's "amazing".

DANIEL

I'm not sure I buy it.

VINCENT

Well, that's your choice.

Daniel takes a chug of his beer and then opens a bag of peanuts he bought. He shares them with Vincent and cracks a few open himself: throwing the empty and broken shells downward toward the track.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

So, you have any new prospects going?

DANIEL

You talk about it like it's some kind of safari hunt or gold mining operation.

VINCENT

Well, isn't it? After all, finding the right one usually requires equal parts luck and persistence.

DANIEL

This is not a game.

VINCENT

No, but it often operates like one. And the only way to avoid playing it: is to know what the rules are.

Struck by the comment, Daniel takes a moment: looking down at his shoes.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Right, I forgot. You're Lancelot: the chivalrous gentleman knight who always remembers to hold doors open when he's not busy saving women from themselves.

DANIEL

Jackass.

VINCENT

What about that girl you met last week.

DANIEL

Cindy?

VINCENT

Yeah, her, why not call her?

DANIEL

But that would betray--

VINCENT

(interrupting Daniel)

Don't speak her name. And by the way: the two of you aren't together anymore, and that's her fault. Oh, and it's the modern age man. Get with it. She's with someone else--

DANIEL

But...

VINCENT

(speaking over him)

...If she wasn't already, during your relationship. Respect it. Don't be a doormat. Just do your own thing.

RACE CALLER (V.O.)

We have a bright and sunny day today at the track. And coming up is the Diana Handicap... That's Shuvee entering the track now, followed by Double Delta, Them's The Breaks, and Rest Your Case.

VINCENT

You excited for the race?

DANIEL

Yeah, I guess so.

VINCENT
You ready for another bet?

DANIEL
Depends.

VINCENT
If we win, you call Cindy.

DANIEL
And if we lose?

VINCENT
God, you're depressing. Who cares.

Both men turn their attention to the track as the horses line up in their gates while the announcer introduces them. The gates close. They both wait with anticipation. RING! SNAP!

RACE CALLER (V.O.)
And they're off!

The horses bolt out of their gates and begin thundering around the track.

RACE CALLER (V.O.)
And it's Shuvee in the lead,
followed closely by Double Delta...
Double Delta passes, no, Shuvee,
no, Double Delta...

Screaming and shouting and throwing their fists in the air, the two men turn to one another with apprehensive excitement: Daniel bites his thumb; Vincent grits his teeth.

RACE CALLER (V.O.)
And, and and... IT'S SHUVEE BY A
NOSE!

The friends leap into the air with joy: Vincent shouts obscenities, and Daniel gets so excited he throws his cup of beer into the air in celebration. It lands on an elderly woman with gray curls sitting in front of them.

DANIEL
Eek! I'm sorry, miss!

The woman frowns at him. Vincent shoves his cellphone into Daniel's hands:

VINCENT
A deals a deal: do it.

With nervous excitement and shaky fingers: Daniel dials a number and places the phone to his ear.

It rings, and rings, and rings... Finally going to voicemail.

DANIEL

Hey Cindy, this is Daniel. We met a few weeks ago at a friend's party... and well, I was just wondering: would you like to have dinner with me sometime?

Daniel hangs up the phone and hands it back to Vincent with a wide-eyed expression of shock on his face.

VINCENT

You did it!

DANIEL

Whew, I did. But what do I do now?

VINCENT

That's for you to decide.

BEEP, BEEP. The sound of the phone indicates a message. Vincent pulls it out of his pocket, glances at it, and hands the phone back to Daniel.

On the screen is a text message, which reads:

"Hi Daniel! This is Cindy. I'm happy to hear from you. What's up?"

CUT TO BLACK.