

THE VALUE ENGINE

by
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EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

THOMAS CULVER (56), with dark tanned arms and sinewy strength, takes off his ballcap as he approaches the back porch of his aging home. His jeans start bluish at the waist and blend to the color of dirt by his ankles.

He stops, wipes his brow, then opens the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Thomas enters the simple kitchen and hangs his hat on a hook by the door.

THOMAS
What are you doing?

At the kitchen table his son, PATRICK CULVER (20), with a dark mop of roughly combed hair and thrift store clothing, sits in front of a disassembled radio. His chin rests in his hands and he stared at the neatly spaced components. He doesn't respond.

Thomas approaches him. Patrick takes one piece from the table and runs out of the room.

Thomas places the components into the empty shell of a radio.

THOMAS
You can't keep doing this.

He carries the pieces out of the room.

INT. UTILITY ROOM - DAY

Thomas sets the broken radio onto a shelf next to the skeletons of a VCR, clock radio, toaster oven, and a CD Walkman.

INT. FARMHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Thomas knocks on a door and opens it.

INT. PATRICK'S ROOM - DAY

Patrick's room is very plain with no decorations. His single bed has a faded super hero bed spread.

Next to the bed is a folding table covered with electrical components.

Patrick sits at a chair staring at them all.

THOMAS

I don't understand this Patrick. I just don't.

Patrick continues staring at the parts.

THOMAS

I didn't even know you could use a screwdriver, then one day I come in and you've taken my alarm clock apart.

Thomas steps into the room and places a hand on his son's shoulder.

THOMAS

You've got them arranged all nice. You going to put them back together?

Patrick looks up to him.

THOMAS

Come on.

Thomas turns to leave and Patrick gets up.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Thomas cooks spaghetti on the stove with his back to Patrick. Patrick sits at the kitchen table with a soldering station set up. He solders two of the pieces together.

THOMAS

You took to that pretty quick. I used to repair the odd radio for people, remember?

He turns to the boy.

THOMAS

I don't want you using that when I'm not here, you understand?

He waits for a response that doesn't come and turns back to his cooking.

THOMAS

Anyway. I like that you seem to have a hobby now, but...

Thomas stops, grips his side and bends over a bit. Patrick looks up.

THOMAS

This damned kidney stone has got to be the size of a Buick.

He straightens, winces.

THOMAS

I ever pass this thing, I'm going to have it mounted.

Patrick focuses back on his soldering.

THOMAS

Your mother was good about helping me watch the salt. I don't do as well without her.

Thomas stirs his sauce.

INT. THOMAS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thomas sits up in bed. A noise comes from somewhere in the house. He turns on a lamp.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dim lamplight glows from behind the television. Thomas flicks on the overhead light to find the television pushed away from the wall and Patrick sitting behind it with a screwdriver in his hand.

THOMAS

No. Absolutely not.

Patrick stands and sulks off to his room.

THOMAS

I mean it.

Thomas flicks the light back off.

INT. PATRICK'S ROOM - DAY

Thomas opens the door. He is fully dressed.

THOMAS

Rise and shine.

Patrick rolls over to face his father.

THOMAS
We're going to town. Can't have
you destroying the television.

Thomas leaves the doorway.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Thomas drives while Patrick leans his head against the passenger window and stares out at the passing scenery.

THOMAS
You sore about the television?

Patrick doesn't respond. Thomas smiles.

EXT. HOBBY-MART - DAY

The pick-up truck pulls into the parking lot.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Thomas places the truck in park and opens the door.

THOMAS
Well, come on.

Patrick opens his door.

INT. HOBBY-MART - DAY

Thomas holds the door open and Patrick walks in. His eyes widen and he heads for aisle upon aisle of electronic components. Everything an electronics hobbyist could want. Thomas follows him in.

SAM (O.S.)
Tom Culver?

Tom turns to see SAM (45), with greying hair and a bit of a belly, standing behind the counter.

THOMAS
Hey there.

SAM
I thought that was you. Come over
here and say hello.

Thomas walks over to him.

INT. HOBBY-MART COUNTER - DAY

Thomas checks out some electronic trinkets at the counter as
the two talk.

SAM
You start repairing small
appliances again?

THOMAS
No, it's Patrick. He has got a bug
about something. Thought this
place might help.

SAM
Gina and I were sorry to hear about
Norma. We sent flowers.

THOMAS
They were nice. I appreciated it.

SAM
My mother died of cancer, it's a
damnable disease.

THOMAS
Yes, it is.

SAM
You doing okay?

THOMAS
Oh, I'm getting by. Farm and the
boy is a lot sometimes you know,
but I get by.

SAM
How's he doing? Does he ever, you
know...

THOMAS
Talk? Not really. He has a way of
letting me know what he wants.

SAM
He graduated high school though.

THOMAS

It was special ed, but he did make it through.

SAM

He just staying with you?

THOMAS

Where could he go, a state hospital? No thanks. We're staying together until they cart me off in a box.

Thomas checks on his son who already has an arm load of components.

THOMAS

Use a basket Patrick.

Patrick heads for the baskets without looking up.

SAM

What's he doing?

THOMAS

Building something. Might just be a neat looking doorstop, but he's so focused. How much is that he's looking at?

Patrick holds up a electrical component, studying it.

SAM

We have some stuff in the back, a whole bin we we're probly just going to throw out. If he wants to look through it.

THOMAS

Thanks Sam, I'm sure he'll get a kick out of it.

Thomas places the trinket he had been holding back on the counter display.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Patrick finishes soldering a joint and sets the iron down.

A half eaten sandwich rests on a plate next to him.

Thomas eats his sandwich and watches his son.

Patrick picks up his soldered piece.

THOMAS
Finished?

Patrick holds the piece up to the door frame leading to the living room, trying different placements.

THOMAS
You're not hanging that there.

Patrick turns to his father with a slight frown.

THOMAS
It has to be a door frame?

Patrick's frown disappears.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Thomas pounds a nail into a free standing door frame in the center of the room as Patrick watches from the couch. He holds the electrical component in his lap. The sparse furniture has been pushed back to the walls to clear space.

THOMAS
Will this work?

Patrick gets up from the couch. He places the component on the frame, again trying different placements.

THOMAS
I have to go to bed, alright?
Don't stay up all night, it'll
still be here in the morning.

Thomas grips his side.

THOMAS
Damned stone.

Thomas walks out of the room holding his side, Patrick looks up to watch him leave.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Thomas comes back into the living room, dressed in his work clothes. The door frame is covered in electrical components linked together by wires.

Patrick lies asleep on the couch, still fully clothed from the night before.

Thomas pulls a quilt down over the boy and briefly places his hand on the boy's head.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Thomas enters holding his side. His clothes are dirty. He has no boots on and his white socks are stained with leather and sweat.

Patrick checks the contraption over. He looks up to his father, who still grips his side.

THOMAS

I'm fine.

Thomas slumps into the sofa.

THOMAS

I am. It's just bothering me a little.

Patrick picks up an electrical cord attached to the machine and takes a step towards the wall.

THOMAS

Whoa. What do you think you're doing?

Patrick slows down, but keeps moving towards a wall power outlet. Thomas stands up.

THOMAS

I said don't!

Patrick moves for the wall outlet. Thomas rushes him, gripping his side. Patrick plugs the cord in and the contraption buzzes to life as Thomas steps through it. Thomas takes Patrick's arm and they both freeze, then POP and the lights go out.

THOMAS

It's the breaker. Unplug that thing, I'll flip it back on.

Thomas leaves using the dim light filtering in from the windows.

THOMAS (O.S.)
You can't just do that. What if
something happened to you?

Patrick unplugs the machine and begins inspecting it, pulling something off.

The lights return. Patrick holds a component with smoke wafting from it. Thomas comes back in. His clothes are completely clean, the socks bright white. No dirt from earlier remains.

THOMAS
Do you hear me? We're getting rid
of this thing. I've indulged it
too long.

Patrick looks down at his father's pants.

THOMAS
What?

Thomas looks down at his now clean clothes.

THOMAS
What the?

He leans down for a closer look. He stands up, holds his side, instinctively. Grips it tighter, bends and twists.

THOMAS
The kidney stone. I swear it's
gone.

Patrick holds up the broken part.

THOMAS
I'll put in a heavier breaker and
we'll go back to the store.

Patrick and Thomas both look back to the machine.

INT. HOBBY-MART - DAY

Thomas stands at the counter speaking with Sam. Patrick walks the isles holding a basket.

SAM
You want to go back and look at the
free stuff again?

THOMAS

Not this time. Anything he wants
I'm putting on credit.

SAM

Seriously? You come into some
money?

THOMAS

I've got to tell you something.
This thing he's been building.
It... it's amazing.

SAM

What are you talking about?

Another shop patron FINNEY (32), with greasy hair and a thin wiry frame, overhears the conversation and carefully gets within earshot. His basket hold various parts for circumventing home alarm systems.

THOMAS

It's some sort of portal.

SAM

Like it takes you somewhere?

THOMAS

No. I stepped through it and it
changed me. It cleaned my clothes.

SAM

It's a washing machine?

THOMAS

No, it... it got rid on my kidney
stones. Like it figured out what
wasn't needed and got rid of it.

SAM

You're pulling my leg.

Finney sneaks closer.

THOMAS

I'm not. I swear to god. He's a
genius.

SAM

You realize what you're saying?
Something like that would be worth
a fortune.

THOMAS
I know. It sounds crazy.

Finney knocks something off a shelf. Thomas and Sam stop talking. Finney replaces the item on the shelf and walks away.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Patrick attaches the final components to the machine. Thomas enters the room.

THOMAS
I put the new breaker in. It'll
handle the current or burn the
house down.

Patrick continues his tinkering. Thomas watches over his shoulder.

THOMAS
You about done? Can I help?

Patrick freezes his progress.

THOMAS
Fine. Sorry, I'm going to find
something to pass through it.

Thomas leaves the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Thomas rests next to a pile of junk; tarnished silverware, an old carburetor, a set of golf clubs, etc.

Patrick takes a step back from the machine and looks it over.

THOMAS
Done?

Patrick picks up the cord once again.

THOMAS
Be careful.

Thomas picks up a flashlight. Patrick looks to him.

THOMAS
Just in case.

Patrick plugs in the machine. A sound not unlike that of a camera's flash charging up fills the room. A few lights come on, the sound peaks, then the machine evens to a hum.

THOMAS
Well, the breaker's holding.

Thomas sets the flashlight down and picks up the tray of tarnished silverware. He places it on the ground in front of the adorned door frame.

THOMAS
Here goes nothing.

He slides a brown tarnished spoon through it.

It emerges from the other side shining like new. Patrick picks up the spoon and inspects it.

Thomas laughs.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The entire pile of junk rests on the floor, all of it shined and cleaned.

The machine sits silent, its cord coiled up neatly beside it. Laughing drifts in from another room.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Thomas and Patrick sit at the table eating grilled cheese sandwiches.

THOMAS
I thought you had blown yourself up
for sure.

Thomas laughs.

THOMAS
Do you realize what you've made in
there? It could... it could cure
diseases. It could cure cancer.

Thomas puts down his sandwich.

THOMAS
Is that why do you did this?

Patrick looks down.

THOMAS

It was just a kidney stone. I'm
not going anywhere.

Patrick puts down his sandwich and walks out of the room.
Thomas looks over to a family portrait on the wall of Thomas,
Patrick, and Norma.

THOMAS

I miss her too.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A clatter sounds from somewhere in the house and Thomas sits
up. He clicks on his bedside light.

THOMAS

What's he doing now?

He turns out of bed and slips on his house shoes.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Thomas walks in and to see the lamp once again turned on
behind the television and someone working in the shadows.

THOMAS

You need to get to sleep.

Finney pops up behind the television, startled. Thomas
stumbles back.

THOMAS

What are you doing in my house?

Finney holds up a gun.

THOMAS

Whoa. Where's my son? What are
you doing?

FINNEY

Shut up! What is this thing? What
does it do exactly?

THOMAS

I don't know. I'm not helping you.

FINNEY

He might then.

Finney points his pistol at Patrick who has emerged from his room.

THOMAS
Don't! Patrick come here.

Thomas moves to shield his son.

FINNEY
Everybody stop.

Patrick takes another step.

FINNEY
I said stop! Tell him to stop.

THOMAS
Please, he's special, he isn't
doing anything.

Patrick picks up the cord to the machine.

FINNEY
What's that? What's he doing?

THOMAS
He's going to show you what it
does.

Patrick leans down to plug in the machine. Finney lowers his gun as the machine whirs to life.

Thomas lunges for him.

Patrick backs up.

The two men struggle and gun comes loose and slides across the room.

Thomas fights Finney off. He punches the younger man in the face.

Patrick picks up the pistol.

Finney pushes Thomas hard against the wall, his head slams into the wood paneling and he goes limp, sliding to the floor.

Finney wheels on Patrick.

FINNEY
What are you going to do with that?

Patrick holds the gun limp in his hand.

FINNEY

Give it here. Come on.

Patrick extends his hand.

Finney steps towards him.

FINNEY

There ya go.

Patrick drops the gun just beyond Finney's reach, through the machine and steps away.

FINNEY

That'll work too, you...

Finney steps through the machine to pick up the pistol. His clothes fall in a heap on the other side. The clothes are clean and spotless.

Finney is gone.

Patrick kicks the gun into the machine and it doesn't come out the other side.

Thomas wakes up.

THOMAS

Are you okay?

He passes through the machine to his son.

THOMAS

What happened? Where'd he go?

Thomas searches the room finding only the pile of clothes at the base of the machine.

He clutches Patrick hugging him.

Patrick hugs him back.

FADE OUT.