

THE FLICK

Written by

Max Redinger

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE - EVENING

1971. In a tiny, nondescript, idyllic Midwestern town a meager single screen cinema stands alone. It is late summer. There is a crisp breeze rustling bills in the street as the day turns over to night. The parking lot lights begin to flicker on. Artificial light spottily illuminates the stark setting.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE LOBBY - EVENING

HUDSON LAYTON, 18, the perfect mix of Daniel Desario and Richie Cunningham, sits at his usher post noticeably bored. He wears a light blue "Putney Theatres" embroidered polo tucked in to his compulsory khakis.

A COWORKER, mid-20s, walks by and slams a stack of black alphabet tiles on the desk.

COWORKER

Just took them down. You get to put up tomorrow's show. Lucky you.

HUDSON

Ughh. Maan...

COWORKER

Hey, pal, isn't coming form me. Get the next batch from the big guy.

Hudson begrudgingly stands and straightens himself. He collects the tiles and walks towards the theatre manager's office. His coworker assumes the post.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - EVENING

Hudson skillfully opens the office door with his elbow. He enters into a room painted white by all the papers strewn about. Dust lines the crooked window blinds. Popcorn kernels are embedded in the discolored carpet. Behind a desk half his size a steely round man fills his chair. He briskly motions Hudson to put the tiles down on the cabinet beside the door while he rustles through stacks of papers.

BOSS

You're going to be putting those up, there. That stack.

Hudson picks up the new stack and turns to leave.

BOSS

Woahh. Hold up. Hey, hold up. Look. You know Flick? Good. Well Flick just took a shit all over me. This guy. This fucking guy up 'n quits after 25 years or something. Can you believe that? 25 years. --

HUDSON

No, sorry to hear --

BOSS

-- Hey I'm telling you kid, the fucking nerve. Yeah yeah thanks. Well anyway, I need to train a new projectionist. Interested?

HUDSON

In projecting?

BOSS

You want to shadow Flick for a week or two, learn the ropes?

HUDSON

Sir, we had discussed my plan to leave for college after this summer. I just wanted to make sur --

BOSS

Listen buddy. We're talking a pay bump, more responsibility. I mean, this is a full time gig, kid.

HUDSON

Greg?

BOSS

He's got enough between box and the stand. You want this? I got to make a decision. You want the job?

HUDSON

Can I think a bit about it? It's just ... I thought this was temporary. Not to be diff --

BOSS

Look. Tomorrow you start training. Keep on it a week. Let me know.
(thick pause)
Put those up!

Hudson hurries out the office.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE - EVENING

He heads outside to the marquee. After propping a ladder against the illuminated blank sign he begins to put up the film title for the following day.

At first Hudson looks concerned but as he spells out more words and looks out over dusk's landscape, a wave of pleasure seems to wash over him. We can hear the wind blow through the street. Hudson closes his eyes and raises his face to greet the breeze.

After taking a pleasant break, he returns to his task. He slips a little while putting up the last few letters. They are far away and he stretches to reach them. The marquee, when revealed, spells "The Last Picture Sh."

INT. FAMILY HOME - LATE EVENING

Hudson rushes through the front door, slamming it shut, and runs upstairs. He enters his room.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Honey?

INT. HUDSON'S BEDROOM - LATE EVENING

Hudson yanks piles of clothes off his floor. He switches out his work uniform for washed jeans and a white tee. He sits at his desk.

His walls are covered in movie posters of any given genre or decade. Stickers and clippings cover any other exposed surface. A super 8mm rests on his unmade bed. Film canisters, rolls and worn notebooks constitute his desk.

We can hear a faint female voice call for Hudson again.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Honey, dinner!

Hudson stops by the full body mirror propped against his wall on his way out the door. He does a quirky James Dean-esque pose and hair ruffle, chuckles to himself, and sprints downstairs.

Taped to the corner of the mirror, displayed prominently is his acceptance letter to the University of Southern California.

INT. FAMILY HOME KITCHEN - LATE EVENING

Hudson sits down at the kitchen table, his MOTHER, late-40s, immediately serves him a plate and sits in an open seat beside him. The kitchen is filled with warm tones and features a classic red plaid tablecloth. Every surface is immaculate and every item has its home.

MOTHER

And how was work? Easy, slow down.
You are going to get a stomach
ache.

HUDSON

(face stuffed)
Good.

MOTHER

Seems like a long day.

HUDSON

They offered me a job. A full-time
job.

MOTHER

That's great! Wow, Hudson, good for
you.

HUDSON

That old projectionist, you know,
he's quitting. They want me to
train with him. To project.

MOTHER

That's wonderful. Isn't that what
you wanted to learn? I'm very proud
of you.

HUDSON

Thanks, Mom. But ... I don't know
what I'm going to tell them. USC
starts soon and I thought I could
talk to Dad again --

MOTHER

Your father will be so happy.

Hudson's FATHER, late-40s, bursts into the room. He is reading a letter inches from his face, ignoring the other two. He sits at the head of the table. Mother leaps up and promptly places a plate before him. His father is wearing generic business attire as if the outfit was plucked directly out of a Sears catalogue.

FATHER

You wouldn't believe this! Sammy sent a letter. Boy, I tell you, he's really giving it to those commies! He sounds great.

MOTHER

Wasn't that just the sweetest?

FATHER

He's heading east now. Said a couple guys in his platoon caught a bug but besides that he's good. He wants to hear about the parade. He even misses us. Misses us. Ha. He's really doing something. Swell.

HUDSON

Sam mention college? I wrote him telling him I got in.

FATHER

No. He didn't say anything.

MOTHER

No, but honey, I am sure he is very happy for you.

FATHER

Didn't we talk about this? Please, Hudson. Why are you bringing up college?

HUDSON

Well, I haven't made a decision and I wanted Sam's advice. I thought he could --

FATHER

I thought WE made the decision.

MOTHER

Love, we did tell Hudson he can make the final decision.

FATHER

It's a no. No! Hudson, son, I know this is an important decision. It's a tough one. You need to make the right choice. I am here, as a parent, to help you make that choice. To help guide you in the right direction. Alright?

(MORE)

FATHER (CONT'D)

When I say no, you better trust me
it's the right thing to do.

MOTHER

Love.

FATHER

(over her)

I do not want to hear it any more.
You need to stay focused. What do I
keep telling you? Job. Job. Job.
And family ... and God. Your
brother is already gone. We need
you here to help out. You already
have a nice girl here.

HUDSON

I know. I know.

MOTHER

Sweetie, Hudson does have a full
time job. He just got offered one
at work today! How wonderful is
that?

FATHER

Hudson, now that's what I'm talking
about. Good job, son! That's it.
You are set. Not going to college
is OK. You here? It isn't the worst
thing ever. Look at me! Christ
sake. I'm not forbidding you from
making those little films of yours.
You just need to be practical.
That's what I'm saying. Just be
realistic. And now you have a job.
The decision should be easy now.
Alright?

(pause)

OK?

Silence. Hudson quietly eats his dinner. His mother tries to
lull her husband.

FATHER (CONT'D)

OK?!

HUDSON

OK.

The family sits in silence. Father re-reads Sammy's letter.
Hudson looks as if he could die. He peers at the empty fourth
seat at the table.

EXT. PROJECTION BOOTH HALLWAY - MORNING

Hudson stands knocking at the door to the projectionist's booth. We hear him knocking louder and louder. No response. He tries the handle and walks in.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - MORNING

The booth is cramped. Large 35 mm film reel canisters line the walls from floor to ceiling. The room is dark and cavernous. Light filtering in from the projection window, when existent, shimmers off the metallic reels and reveals the dust perpetually floating around the small space.

The booth is like the haunted house at the end of the block kids dare each other to break into just to see how long they can last. It is an uncomfortably small, secluded space complete with discolored carpeting and stained walls. The room casts a cloudy blue hue over its inhabitants.

FELIX "FLICK" NORMAN, late-60s, is hunched in a corner looking for something in a pile of silver reels. The canister's shiny surface reflects his image like a kaleidoscope. Dressed like a newsboy but aged like a 14 year-old Benjamin Button, the gentle, rosy old man peers through small circular clear frames slipping down his scrunched face. Wrinkles carve canyons in his skin and his mouth is locked in a permanent grimace. He barely notices Hudson.

HUDSON

Hello? Hi, hello. I'm Hudson Layton.

Flick doesn't respond. He is caught up in his search.

HUDSON

Are you Mr. Norman?

Flick grunts.

FLICK

Flick. Just Flick. Ernie send you?

HUDSON

Ugh. Yea. I'm a ... for training.

Flick exhales with his full body.

HUDSON

So. How can I help --

FLICK

All right, listen. You are going to concentrate on following what I am doing. I don't give instructions and I don't plan on hearing your life story. Just watch. Two eyes. Sit where you can. Quiet-like.

HUDSON

I guess I should take notes?

FLICK

Want me to hold your hand?

HUDSON

I ju ...

Flick Glares at Hudson, looking directly at him for the first time.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE LOBBY - LATE AFTERNOON

Hudson is sleepily hunched over the usher stand. His coworker spots him.

COWORKER

He emerges! Look who it is. Haven't seen you in a while.

HUDSON

Huh. Aah Yeah, yeah.

COWORKER

So how is it? How's the old fella?

HUDSON

I don't know. We haven't really talked yet.

COWORKER

Talked?

HUDSON

Yeah, like he hasn't really even said a word to me. I just watch him and write stuff down.

COWORKER

Greg said he was an odd little guy.

HUDSON

It's all right though. He's fine.

COWORKER

Oh, boy. You know what else Greg said? Get this. Flick, well, he used to be in movies. Some Hollywood type. A real big shot.

HUDSON

What? No.

COWORKER

Yeah! Right. Some studio guy. Editor. Producer. Something. Married an actress too.

The office door opens and their boss hurriedly waves Hudson's coworker over.

COWORKER (CONT'D)

I'm coming. Think about that my little director. I'm coming, I'm coming.

Hudson sits there taken aback by this new information.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - MIDDAY

Hudson unpacks new boxes of reels as Flick files them away into the ceiling high stacks. The veteran projectionist seems to have his own convoluted ordering system. The rest of the booth is in a state of disarray.

Flick and Hudson work together in silence, readying the booth for the day. Hudson keeps almost breaking the silence by attempting to start a conversation. Each time he decides against it and continues working. Flick pays no attention.

HUDSON

How long have you worked here?

Silence.

FLICK

Twenty two.

HUDSON

Twenty two years?

HUDSON

Wow. Sorry you're leaving.

Silence.

HUDSON
Why are you leaving?

FLICK
(exasperated)
A girl.

HUDSON
Wife?

FLICK
It's always about a girl.

HUDSON
I have a girlfriend, Wendy, she's
real great.

Silence.

HUDSON
I think we are going to live
together. Me and Wendy, that is.
(playfully)
So who is this girl?

FLICK
Leave it.

HUDSON
I just mean ... Is she your wife?
Friend? Mistress?

FLICK
I said leave it.

Silence. Huge dark shadows cast over the two as the theatre
lighting shines through the booth's small windows.

FLICK
No, like this.

Flick corrects how Hudson was un-spooling the projector and
loading cannisters.

HUDSON
I got it. I got it.

The two continue their work in silence.

FLICK
Get into the same school?

HUDSON
What?

Flick makes no attempt to clarify or repeat himself.

HUDSON

Wendy? Oh she isn't going to school. She helps out at her sister's store. She's nice like that. I think I'm staying too. We can get a place that way.

FLICK

Think?

HUDSON

Yeah, well, I have a lot here. I mean, I got in places and was thinking about going.

FLICK

You been thinking for a while?

HUDSON

I don't know. Maybe, I guess.

FLICK

I'm sure everyone is real keen on always hearing your thinking. Kid, you need to make up your mind.

HUDSON

Yeah, well I have a bit more time.

Flick laughs to himself.

HUDSON

It's just that ... I like film right, like I make my own little ones. Nothing big right. I want to keep making them. Learn, I guess.

FLICK

So do it.

HUDSON

Do what?

FLICK

Go.

HUDSON

You don't get it. It's really not that simple.

FLICK

Oh I'm sure it isn't.

HUDSON

You see, my dad says one thing. Then another. My brother got drafted so it's just me. Plus, I got Wendy here.

FLICK

Is it your decision?

HUDSON

Yea.

FLICK

So? What's stopping you? Your dad can walk on his own, can't he?

HUDSON

It's not so black and white. You don't get it. I have to stay and help out, you know, my dad needs me. Mom too.

FLICK

Look, kid, I get it, you're young. Let me tell you this. I know a bit about this, take my word for it --

HUDSON

This?

FLICK

-- making movies. No one is going to wait for you. If you want something. Want to do something. You go do it. That is the simple part. Things change. You need to decide how bad you want this. So, how bad do you want it?

Hudson is speechless. Work resumes but he looks as if his mind has wandered too far.

INT. HUDSON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Hudson lays on his bed surrounded by his accumulated crap. He does not look present. His eyes gaze off. His arms crossed beneath his head. He is looking at a "Cool Hand Luke" poster above his bed. We can hear a radio on in the background.

O.S.

Vice President Agnew'll be in Grafton tomorrow, so all you folks turn out, chuh hear?

(MORE)

O.S. (CONT'D)

This is Cowboy Rhythms on KTRN, The Farm, here's Hank Williams' big hit tune, "Cold Cold Heart".

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

Hudson rides his bike down an idyllic cul-de-sac road. The weather is pleasant and the trees are full. Families are out playing. Hudson wears his James Dean uniform. He grins wide.

In his hand, while he rides, is his super 8mm camera. He records his surroundings, stopping every once in a little while to replace the film and take a breather.

Every street looks the same but he navigates through them effortlessly. People occasionally recognize him and wave. This is his neighborhood.

He spots a shiny, new black car pull up to a neighbor's house. Two men dressed in conventional military garb walk to the door. Hudson starts shooting. The men are cheerless and rigid.

Hudson is closer now and the two officers are speaking with the family at the front door. A middle-aged couple stand in the door way. All of a sudden, the woman, drops to her knees, wailing. She grabs at the legs of the gentlemen. The man takes the folded triangular object in both hands and clutches it to his chest.

The officers salute the family and return to their car. Kids run to the front door from inside the house. The couple embrace each other. Cries drown out the once merry sounds of the suburban street.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - MIDDAY

Hudson finally has his hands on the projector. He is fiddling around with it. Flick stands beside him watching and helping where he can. The two silently load film and get the machine going.

FLICK

Good.

HUDSON

This?

FLICK

Mhmm.

HUDSON

Forgot.

Hudson hits one last thing. Then he starts running the projector. The reels start spinning and a shaky, ancient image spurts out. The light casts shadows on the duo's faces. They gaze out the booth's window to watch the scene unfolding on the silver screen.

The reflection off the glass of the image is projected onto Flick's face. The two stand hypnotized simply by the opening credit text.

"Norman Production" can be read across Flick's face. Hudson's eyes are transfixed and wide. The whites of their eyes cut through the blackness.

INT. PUTNEY THEATRES AUDITORIUM - MIDDAY

On the large screen, in black and white, a woman is shown walking down a road, around a field, tending to a stable, as a credit sequence rolls. A catchy tune plays. She is clearly beautiful, jovial and young.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - MIDDAY

The two men stand side by side, arms crossed, peering through the small window. The film's colors reflect, abstract, and flutter around the room.

HUDSON

Not too bad for my first go. I was thinking. Now that I know how, maybe I could bring in some of my own stuff and throw it up on the screen? Maybe you could take a look?

Flick doesn't respond. After awhile Hudson looks at him. Flick looks like he has seen a ghost. His eyes locked on the screen.

FLICK

Wh ... wh ... why did you pick this? Who said ... how?

HUDSON

I was just looking around --

FLICK

Hudson!

HUDSON

I swear! I was just looking for any old reel I could use for practice.

Flick's voice breaks apart. He becomes more frantic.

FLICK

Where did you find this?

HUDSON

Over there. Was a little tricky. The place isn't organized, Flick!

FLICK

You don't know who -- what -- this is?

HUDSON

No, Flick. Swear.

Hudson, concerned, goes to stop the projector. Flick quickly shoves his hand away. Hudson can see him trembling.

Hudson looks at Flick, a little taken aback. His cheeks glisten in the light. His eyes are wet. Eventually tears run through the deep wrinkles on his face as if they were rivers.

FLICK

(softly)

No...

The two stand there for some time just watching the film unfold.

HUDSON

Flick, I'm sorry if I did ...

FLICK

L ... love should never stop someone. Love doesn't hold someone back. It pushes you. Shoves you right in the chest.

Flick slowly and quietly gathers his things and moves towards the door. Hudson remains fixed on the screen.

FLICK (CONT'D)

Love uproots itself.

(pause)

It always has the worst timing. That's life. You do what you have to do. Don't be fooled.

Eternity passes by. Flick stands facing the door. His head slowly looks upwards. His eyes appear to be closed.

HUDSON

Flick, the girl you were talking
about ...

FLICK

My wife.
(pause)
She's gone. She's all gone.

And with that, Flick exits leaving Hudson trying to grasp what just transpired. He flicks the projector off and sits for a moment in silence and in darkness.

INT. STATION WAGON - MORNING

Hudson and his father drive along a quiet road. Father drives his dated yet proudly maintained wagon. Every surface in the car is clean enough to eat off of. Father holds one hand on the huge wheel and the other grips Hudson's left shoulder. Hudson sits straight up in the large leather bench seats and looks straight ahead.

FATHER

I don't want you going off, running
to your Mother, telling her all
this. She's softer.

HUDSON

I know, Dad.

FATHER

Good. You heard the Anderson's kid
was killed. Fucking gooks didn't
even leave a body to bury.

HUDSON

I saw.

FATHER

(over him)

But Sammy, Sammy'll be all right. I
know my boy. That's a good kid.
Your brother is a good kid. He's
going to be just fine, I know it.

Hudson does not react. He still stares straight ahead.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Work has been good, no? You like it
right? A job is a job.

HUDSON
Sure, Dad. It's OK.

FATHER
Son, the family needs you here. I do 'n your mother sure does now. I know Sammy does.

HUDSON
He say so?

FATHER
I know so. He always does what is best for us. Don't you think I know what is right for us?

HUDSON
No, I know. I was talking to Mom and she was saying --

FATHER
(getting easily worked up)
I'm saying! Hudson. Son. You can't run off at a time like this. With Sammy over there and now the Anderson boy. Didn't that kid give you even a bit more perspective? Look, if its about the job --

HUDSON
It's not.

FATHER
(over him)
-- I can talk to someone about maybe getting you shifts at the market.

HUDSON
It's not the job, Dad!

FATHER
Watch it.

HUDSON
It's all of this. It's this, here.

Tensions rise in the car. Father reddens and puffs up.

FATHER
You show some respect.

HUDSON

(unleashed)

I respect you, Dad! I respect everything you do for us. I just can't handle constantly being told what I need, what's right. I feel like a child. I can't make these --

FATHER

Adult. You know, by the time I was your age I had my first real job. I was living with your Mother.

HUDSON

That's the problem, Dad. I don't want to end up ... I don't want to live in Putney all my life.

His father is infuriated. The road the two drive on now seems busy all of a sudden. The car seems to be moving faster to Hudson.

FATHER

So, what, you want to end up like some old hack at a movie theatre? You better find some manners. He's a fucking failure, Hudson.

HUDSON

At least he went after something.

Suddenly, the road is quiet again and the day, back to being noticeably beautiful. It is as if every bit of oxygen had been removed from the car. A deadly silence takes its place.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - MORNING

Hudson walks in to find the booth empty. The little cave is more dishevelled than ever. The projector is still loaded.

HUDSON

Flick?

Silence.

HUDSON

Flick? Oh c'mon, Flick?

With Flick nowhere to be found, Hudson begins the day's work. He starts with the same general activities he and Flick performed to get ready each day.

Hudson finishes what he was doing, takes a small film print reel from his pocket and places it on the window sill by the projector. He moves over the machine and readies it.

Flick enters the booth. He wears all black though the reasoning behind the color choice is not evidently clear. He is wearing his normal attire just every piece is a shade of black. Hudson does not notice or comment on Flick's clothing.

HUDSON

Morning.

Silence. Flick undresses a bit and puts down his typical belongings: a thermos, pamphlet, his hat, eyeglass case, prayer card (not easily identifiable).

HUDSON

The other day you said maybe we could ... I thought we could watch one of my shorts before the first show.

HUDSON

The booth is all set up, projector too.

Flick waves him to stop. He slumps down on a stool. His eyes are closed. He looks defeated.

FLICK

Sure, kid.

Barely keeping in his excitement, Hudson takes his reel from the window sill and loads the projector delicately and competently. He takes a few steps back and a moment to breath. He runs the projector.

You can see the gleam in his eyes as he stares intensely at his own work on the large silver screen.

Eventually, Flick slowly opens his eyes and over the course of watching the short film, leaves his stool and lightly walks over to Hudson.

The film begins to sputter to an end and the reel slows, distorting the image. Flick grips Hudson's left shoulder. He clears his throat.

HUDSON

I mean, some of that I just got the other day and still edited it t--

FLICK

Good, kid.

Silence.

HUDSON
Only Wendy has seen --

FLICK
Shhh. Sh. Shh. Let it sit.

Flick, now beside the projector, analyzes the actual print, holding it over his eyes under what little light he can find.

FLICK
Powerful stuff. You got something here.

Flick then turns only his head and looks directly at Hudson, the rest of his body poised like a statue. His glasses fall down further onto the bridge of his nose.

FLICK
YOU might have something.

INT. FAMILY HOME KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Father walks into the kitchen and throws the day's paper onto the table before exiting briefly. Mother lays a single breakfast plate down at the head of the table. She then returns to what she was doing. Father comes in, sits and dries his hands on the tablecloth.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE - MORNING

Coworker is up on the ladder propped against the marquee. He is taking down the lettered tiles we initially saw Hudson put up. The theatre does not look so decrepid in the early morning light. It looks rather charming.

BOSS (O.S.)
Get in here!

EXT. PUTNEY COUNTY BUS STATION - MORNING

Hudson is sitting. There is nothing but clear skies and palm trees behind him. He looks warm and happy. It is revealed he is sitting in front of travel poster. A large coach bus pulls in front of the bus station bench and hides Hudson.

CUT TO BLACK.