

WILLOWREE

Original Screenplay by Mary M. Dalton

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WILLOWREE

WHITE LETTERS AGAINST A BLACK SCREEN:

"WILLOWREE"

The sound of cars ROARING around a speedway and muffled CROWD SOUNDS as we

CUT TO:

EXT. LOCAL SPEEDWAY - NIGHT

CROWD sits in the grandstand watching the stock cars circle the quarter mile track. The grandstand is about the size of the home team side for a medium-sized high school stadium, and the seats are mostly full. It's a hot summer night in the South.

TITLES RUN.

The loudspeaker BLARES unintelligibly, and the members of the crowd seem more interested in drinking beer and flirting than in the race. The men are mostly wearing Levis and tee-shirts. The women wear tight-fitting jeans, tighter fitting cotton shirts, and, sometimes, shorts and flip-flops. Dark tans, bold make-up and big hair are the norm. Lots of people are smoking. Some of the women are pregnant or have babies on their knees. Groups of kids run around eating concessions and playing or watching the race.

(Willowree) REE JENKINS sits near one end of the grandstand chatting with her friend LAURIE. They sit a little apart from the crowd. Ree is in her early to mid-twenties. She's pretty in an understated way...medium height, medium build with shoulder-length hair and intense eyes. It's the look in her eyes that tells us she is something special. Laurie likes the whole racing scene and thinks Ree, who is married to one of the race car drivers, has an ideal set-up. Laurie wears bolder make-up, bigger hair and tighter clothes than Ree. Notably, Laurie wears a black tee-shirt -- like those worn by members of a pit crew -- with an amateurish sketch of a race car outlined on the front alongside "#22" in a bold white splash. The back of the shirt reads "CREW" in white letters.

The CREDITS continue to run.

The cars on the track WHIZ by rhythmically with the ROARING engines accompanied by WHOOPS from the crowd. A sleek BLACK CAR, #22, WHOOSHES past. The driver takes the turn a little

too close, and the back right tire BRUSHES the wall.
There's a little SMOKE coming from the tire.

As the black car WHOOSHES past its PIT CREW, DWAYNE, a raw-boned guy who could use a shave and a haircut, notices the smoke and tries to flag down the driver, who passes by without looking over. Dwayne, who wears one of the black "CREW" tee-shirts, SLAMS his hands to his side and STAMPS his feet dramatically. The ANNOUNCER'S VOICE fades in and out amid the other sounds of the race.

ANNOUNCER

...that turn could have been a
problem for Jenkins in 22...

REE appears to stop in mid-sentence (we can't hear her over the CROWD NOISE) and looks at the pit where Dwayne is huddled with a couple of less scruffy-looking GUYS, both of whom wear the black "CREW" tee-shirts. Dwayne wears a HEADSET RADIO TRANSMITTER tuned into its twin inside car #22.

JIMMY JENKINS drives and wears a slight smile. He's near the head of the pack of cars and seems poised to take the lead. Like Dwayne, Jimmy wears a RADIO HEADSET.

ANNOUNCER

They're fannin' out comin' outta the
turn, and Jimmy Jenkins makes his
move...

Ree looks from the pit to the black car and her lips part. It's almost as if she's waiting for something to happen on the track.

The black car approaches the pit, and Dwayne runs toward the edge of the track. He shouts into the transmitter.

DWAYNE

Come in Jimmy! The back right tire
is gonna go...

Jimmy looks toward the pit but sees an opportunity to advance his position by cutting off a bright BLUE CAR.

DWAYNE

Goddammit, Jimmy!

Jimmy cuts it too close. The blue car hits him in the rear, SMASHES against the wall then RICOCHETS into ANOTHER CAR.

Try as he might, Jimmy cannot recover from the force of the rear end collision.

ANNOUNCER

(overlapping
Dwayne's line)
...too close comin' outta turn
number two...

Ree stands transfixed. Laurie jumps up and clutches Ree's arm, but Ree doesn't seem to notice her.

The black car FLIPS as other cars BREAK and SWERVE to miss the pileup.

ANNOUNCER

Looks like Chester Purvis tapped
Jenkins who went into the wall...

Laurie tugs at Ree's arm and pulls her toward the track.

The red flag comes out. Dwayne and the other guys from the pit take off toward the wreck. Sirens BLARE as a PARAMEDIC turns his TRUCK onto the track. The other stockcars have stopped around the other side of the track.

ANNOUNCER

...we might have a real mess down
there...

The black car and blue car appear to be the only two that have sustained substantial damage.

The crowd is standing. Most people are craning their necks for a glimpse of something horrific...after all, that's why a number of them have paid at the gate in the first place.

Laurie and Ree reach the SECURITY GUARDS at the infield gate.

LAURIE

That's her husband in that car! Let
us go!

One guard makes a half-hearted effort to detain the women, but Laurie jerks her arm free and rushes with Ree in tow toward the wreckage.

Close to the cars Dwayne reaches out and stops the pair from going any closer to the black car. When Ree tries to pull away, Dwayne pulls her close. There's no danger of fire

from the wreck - this is just Dwayne's excuse to get his hands on Ree. She struggles against him and breaks away in short order.

The DRIVER of the blue car is pulled from the driver's window and walks stiffly toward the black car. He POUNDS on the roof looking in the passenger window.

Jimmy, with the help of B. J., a stocky guy from the pit crew, pulls himself from the black car. He throws his helmet to the ground.

B. J.
You okay, Jimmy?

Before Jimmy can reply, the other driver walks up behind him from around the car. The driver GRABS Jimmy by the shoulder and SPINS Jimmy around to face him.

Then the driver SHOVES Jimmy hard. Ree looks over toward Jimmy and covers the ground between them as the other driver starts laying into her husband.

DRIVER
You goddamn sonofabitch! What the hell do you think you're doin' tryin' to cut me off! I had the line! You tryin' to kill me to win a goddamn race?

The driver pushes Jimmy hard toward the guard rail, and B.J. jumps in to keep them from going at it. Ree latches on to Jimmy, who initially pushes her away then clutches her.

The paramedic tries to take a look at the other driver, but the guy is still pissed. He brushes off the paramedic and stalks from the racetrack. The paramedic looks from the retreating driver over to Jimmy. Dwayne, Laurie and the pit crew look on, talking amongst themselves.

Ree's initial shock is replaced by anger. She rolls her eyes and starts walking away from Jimmy. He reaches out to her and pulls her back into his arms. She tenses.

JIMMY
Hey, baby, it's all right.
I'm all right.

REE
This is crazy!

JIMMY

SHHHHHHHH!

Ree relaxes in his arms. Crews begin to remove the wrecked cars from the track, and Jimmy and Ree walk away in the other direction. His arm is draped across her shoulder, and her arm encircles his waist. Her head is inclined to him. The crowd CHEERS as they leave, and the remaining cars line up for the flag signaling the race to resume. The pace car leads the line of stock cars around the track. Dwayne watches the couple as they walk from the track then he looks over at Laurie. The cars begin to ROAR around the track once again.

INT. TRAILER BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ree lies in bed alone, thinking. She wears a simple cotton nightgown. There is a BOOK open on her stomach; she's been trying to read but can't concentrate. The SHOWER RUNS in the bathroom nearby. Ree closes the book, which we now can see is a biology textbook, and puts it on the bedside table then turns off the LAMP. The room is now lit by a crack of light from the bathroom door and by an exterior light shining through the bedroom window.

The shower TURNS OFF. A moment later Jimmy walks into the bedroom toweling dry his cropped hair. He looks different than he did at the track in the racing suit. Now he's in underwear and a white tee-shirt. He has a compact, leanly muscled body, and his face has a boyishness that sometimes clings to men long past the objective markers of adulthood.

JIMMY

Still awake?

REE

Yeah.

Jimmy tosses the towel into the bathroom and FLICKS off the light. He is pumped from the race and the wreck. Ree is pensive. There is something on her mind, but Jimmy doesn't notice. He slides into bed and takes Ree into his arms. He begins to kiss her neck then her ear. Ree is not responding. Her eyes remain open.

REE

Jimmy?

Jimmy doesn't stop.

JIMMY

Hummmm?

Ree wriggles away slightly.

REE

Jimmy, you don't know how I felt tonight...with what happened. It was like I knew it before...

He's a little irritated but playing along because he wants to get laid.

JIMMY

You've been watchin' too much of that crap on TV.

REE

No. Not like that. Not some spooky shit.

He starts kissing her again.

REE

Jimmy, could you hold still for just one minute and listen to me!

He rolls his eyes.

JIMMY

(brusquely)

Yeah. What? I'm listening.

REE

You said you'd give it two years, and if you didn't make it racing, we'd move on. That was what we agreed. (pause) It's been three, and...

JIMMY

(interrupting)

Baby, that's just your fear talkin'. Yeah, I could buy it on the track, but I won't. I know what I'm doin'.

REE

That's only part of it, Jimmy. I can't just forget about everything...about all of our plans...

JIMMY

I know how to make you forget.

He rolls on top of her and begins to kiss her more intensely. Ree is only half there. She considers their conversation unfinished but knows she is fighting a losing battle.

REE

We'll talk later?

JIMMY

Sure, baby. You know, sometimes I like it when you talk during.

REE

(lightly)

I don't mean that kind of talking.

JIMMY

SHHHHHH.

Jimmy begins to make love to Ree. At first her eyes remain open, but as Jimmy begins to move more quickly, Ree wraps her legs around him beneath the covers, moves her body against his, and closes her eyes. A smile begins to play at the corners of her mouth.

EXT. EUREKA SPRINGS - AROUND LUNCH TIME

Eureka Springs is a sleepy Southern town near where Ree and Jimmy live. We see a couple of establishing shots of the Town Square and Main Street. The small businesses seem to have been part of the local landscape forever.

The courthouse and local library give Eureka Springs a traditional, small town USA sensibility. We see a lot of pick-up trucks and large American-made cars.

EXT. DANETTE'S RESTAURANT - AROUND LUNCH TIME

Danette's Restaurant faces Main Street in Eureka Springs. The restaurant looks pretty much like the other aging brick store-fronts lining the street. The name "Danette's Restaurant" is stenciled across the glass in faded red letters.

CUSTOMERS, mostly white men in work clothes, come in and out of Danette's RINGING a little bell attached to the top of the door as it opens and closes. There are a few WOMEN

coming and going on the sidewalk and an occasional MAN in a suit.

INT. DANETTE'S RESTAURANT - AROUND LUNCH TIME

Ree and her friend PATRICIA are busy waiting tables. They wear close-fitting pink dresses with white aprons reminiscent of the uniforms worn by the waitresses on the old TV sitcom "Alice." Patricia is a "hometown girl" about ten years older than Ree.

Danette's Restaurant has vinyl booths lining the walls and fourtop tables in the middle of the floor. There is a counter with vinyl-topped stools opposite the large window. An ancient looking JUKEBOX sits against one wall, not far from an equally dated CASH REGISTER. Other than that, the place is nondescript, clean but beginning to look worn around the edges. A MAN puts a quarter in the jukebox, and a COUNTRY SONG comes on. The sound merges with the CLATTERING plates and MUFFLED CONVERSATION. Ree and Patricia stand behind the counter ready to grab their orders as they come up.

PATRICIA

Jimmy comin'?

REE

I guess. Hadn't heard any different, but he's late.

PATRICIA

Just as well...busy as we are.

REE

Yeah.

Patricia takes off with a couple of plates of food. Ree brushes her hair from her forehead as she waits. She looks tired.

INT. QUALITY GARAGE - AROUND LUNCH TIME

The Quality Garage used to be a full-service gas station and garage. Now it's impossible to tell if the station was once an Esso or a Shell or a Phillips 66. The pumps are gone, though the concrete pedestal remains. The sign is hand painted and reads "Quality Garage." Lots of older model cars and trucks sit around the front of the building. At one end, we see the familiar black car with the white #22 painted on the side. The car has obviously been wrecked, but it doesn't look as bad as we might have thought given

the accident at the track. Jimmy, Dwayne and B.J. are tinkering with the wrecked car. A little transistor radio CRACKLES in the background, but the tune is practically indistinguishable from the TRAFFIC and OUTDOOR NOISES.

B. J.
Think ya can have 'er running by
Saturday night?

JIMMY
God, I don't know. We'll hafta bust
our butts if we do.

DWAYNE
What about lunch? Won't Ree be
lookin' for ya?

JIMMY
Yeah.

DWAYNE
Are we goin'?

JIMMY
Give me a minute.

Jimmy never takes his eyes off the car.

DWAYNE
I could pick us up something. I'll
tell Ree yer workin' on the car.

JIMMY
Yeah, okay. I'll take a
cheeseburger and fries.

DWAYNE
B. J.?

B. J.
What's the special?

DWAYNE
How should I know. Do I look like a
waitress?

B. J.
Burger sounds good. Git me two all
the way and fries.

Dwayne turns on his heel to leave. Jimmy and B. J. remain focused on the car.

INT. DANETTE'S RESTAURANT - AROUND LUNCH TIME

The bell on the door RINGS and Ree glances at the door expectantly. Dwayne finds her with his eyes and touches his hand to his forehead in a sort of mock salute. He sits at the counter alone, and Ree goes back to writing an order on her ORDER PAD barely acknowledging him. She's disappointed that Jimmy isn't with him. Dwayne sees her begin to turn away and is desperate to get her attention.

DWAYNE

Hey, Ree!

She looks over her shoulder, agitated.

DWAYNE

This one's for you.

He walks over to the jukebox and puts in a quarter. In a moment the David Lee Murphy song "Every Time I Get Around You" begins to play. Ree rolls her eyes and nods her head as if to say "Oh, no" to nobody in particular as she pointedly ignores Dwayne. He walks back to the counter where Patricia now waits.

PATRICIA

You wanna order?

DWAYNE

I'll wait for Ree.

PATRICIA

Where's Jimmy?

DWAYNE

Workin' on the car. Wants it ready for Saturday night.

Patricia shrugs. Dwayne taps a laminated menu on the counter to the beat of the MUSIC on the jukebox. Ree comes up behind him with her ORDER PAD out and PEN ready to go.

REE

Take out?

DWAYNE

Hey, Ree. Yer lookin' good.

REE

I guess I'm looking good 'n tired.
Least that's how I feel.

DWAYNE

You just don't know how to take a
compliment.

REE

I just know when I'm hearing a line.
I thought Jimmy was coming in.

DWAYNE

He's workin' on the car. Wants to
get 'er running for the race
Saturday. (pause)
He's crazy...crazy to keep you
waitin'.

REE

Ya wanna takeout?

DWAYNE

(teasing)

You don't wanna talk to me...

REE

I'm workin', Dwayne. Lemme get your
order in.

DWAYNE

Okay, okay. One cheeseburger and
fries. Two burgers all the way and
fries. And, I'll take the special.

REE

Biscuits or cornbread?

DWAYNE

Cornbread.

Ree turns on her heel to put the order in. Dwayne just
watches Ree as she goes about her work.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Jimmy and Dwayne are huddled over the wrecked car. The
garage is otherwise deserted.

DWAYNE

I think we can get through tech with
a larger carburetor.

Jimmy looks carefully at Dwayne.

JIMMY
We'll git caught.

DWAYNE
I don't think so.

JIMMY
Are you sure?

DWAYNE
I'm sure.

Jimmy takes a look at his WATCH.

DWAYNE
Go on home. I'll take care of it.

The two men share a look before Jimmy nods and walks toward
his PICK-UP TRUCK. Dwayne goes back to work in silence.

INT. TRAILER LIVING AREA - EVENING

"Roseanne" is on TV. Ree is stretched out on the sofa
trying to read the same BIOLOGY BOOK we've seen before. She
is lit mostly by the TV. Her feet are propped on a PILLOW.

She doesn't move at the sound of a KEY UNLOCKING the front
door. Jimmy comes in and makes a beeline for the sink to
wash his hands.

JIMMY
Got any supper?

REE
Your plate's in the stove.

He pulls out the plate, gets a beer from the refrigerator
and walks over to the sofa.

JIMMY
Whatcha watchin'?

REE
Nothing. (she TAPS the book)
Thought you'd be in earlier.

JIMMY
Workin' on the car.

She doesn't respond. Jimmy looks over at her and puts his plate aside. He slides her feet into his lap and begins to rub them.

JIMMY
Tough day?

REE
Long. And, I'm not in the mood.

Without saying anything Jimmy lets go of her feet. He picks up his plate and his beer and goes to the dining table to eat. After a moment, Ree SIGHS. She looks over at Jimmy.

REE
Honey, I'm sorry. I guess I'm just tired.

They share a look. Ree CLICKS OFF the television, gets herself a glass of water then sits at the table with Jimmy. She puts the book down on the table.

REE
How's the car coming along?

JIMMY
(between bites)
I think she'll make it.

REE
(tentatively)
Did you consider that this might be a good time to move on...to stop with the car...

Jimmy SLAMS down his fork.

JIMMY
Why don't you just git off my back? Nag, nag, nag. That car is the best thing I got goin'.

Ree is hurt, but before she can say anything, the PHONE RINGS.

JIMMY
Hello. (pause) Yep. (pause) I'll be up directly after I eat. (pause)

Yeah, in a few minutes.

Ree looks over at Jimmy. She's fighting against her irritation, but she can't keep a lid on it.

REE

It's bad enough that we live right here...do you hafta run over to the house every time your Mama calls?

Ree looks at Jimmy, who pointedly ignores her. After a moment Ree takes her book over to the sofa as Jimmy finishes his meal in silence.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Ree stands at the bathroom sink and looks at herself in the mirror considering the faintly dark smudges underneath her eyes. She isn't pleased with what she sees.

INT. THE HAIR HUT - DAY

The Hair Hut is a traditional, small town beauty parlor. This is not a highfalutin salon, but it does serve the needs of the blue haired old ladies, the matronly helmet head moms and the streaked, permed and teased racing track set indigenous to Eureka Springs. Ree doesn't precisely fit any of those groups, but neither is she out of place here.

Laurie is at work styling a client's hair. She is chewing gum and talking a mile a minute. At first we can't see whose hair she is finishing up.

LAURIE

Omigod. You have it made. Made in the shade. He is such a sweet guy...and so cute. Why can't I find anybody like that?

We see that the client is Ree.

REE

He's not perfect, Laurie.

LAURIE

You'd better hang on to 'im. It's slim pickins out there, girl. You've seen some of the specimens I've brought home for Sunday dinner.

REE