

WILD TURKEY

a

screenplay

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FINGER LAKES RACINO -- NIGHT-DAY

In the dim, pre-dawn light, a rusty, single-horse trailer, with one back door hanging open and straw spilling out, sits in the corner of a vast parking lot. Then another, a banged-up double-trailer, COMES INTO VIEW next to it.

WE MOVE ALONG a line of trailers, all shapes and sizes, on our way to the RACINO, spread out like a beached whale at the edge of an asphalt sea, and then LIFT ABOVE the racetrack oval, which spirals below us.

EXT. BACKSTRETCH -- NIGHT-DAY

Rain streams off the eaves of a weather-beaten shed row barn, soaking a mound of dirty hay underneath.

A SMALL MAN on a cheap bicycle shoots past the barn, his poncho flapping.

WE STOP to HEAR a woman's BREATHLESS CRIES from inside one of the barn stalls, and then WE MOVE CLOSER to hear a man's VOICE.

WILD BILL (V.O.)

The future is a beckoning lover,
gentlemen.

(beat)

Lay three beauties on me.

INT. TACK STALL

FOUR MEN are playing poker on a wobbly card table. The speaker, WILD BILL CAVANAUGH, a bearish, mid-60s Vietnam vet turned lifelong non-conformist, surveys his new hand.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

Speakin' my language.

He taps one calculating finger on the small pile of chips he has left.

UNDER THE RAIN and POKER GAME, WE CAN still MAKE OUT the woman's ecstatic CRIES. Wild Bill winks at one of the other players, and takes a long pull from a bottle of WILD TURKEY.

EXT. MAMA'S CANTINA -- NIGHT-DAY

The Small Cyclist skids to a splashy stop in front of the dilapidated two-room eatery that serves the backstretch inhabitants.

In front of the screen door, a JOCKEY and a GROOM are ARGUING over a Racing Form, pulling it back and forth. Suddenly, the Jockey punches him and the Groom lands on his butt in the mud. The Small Cyclist steps around them and goes inside.

INSIDE -- a patchwork assortment of GROOMS, EXERCISE RIDERS, JOCKEYS, and TRAINERS are nursing their coffees and CHATTING.

Other JOCKEYS move in and out. Whenever one goes out, WE HEAR A TRASH CAN LID LIFT and, within a few seconds, a disturbing, unmistakable crescendo of VOMITING.

LEIGH HUNTER, an early-to-mid-20s, rode-hard-and-put-away-wet-but-still-damn good-looking woman jockey, sits alone. A copy of *Such a Pretty Fat* (One Narcissist's Quest to Discover If Her Life Makes Her Ass Look Big, or Why Pie Is Not the Answer), lies next to her as she devours a huge breakfast.

A WELL-BUILT EXERCISE RIDER in a fringed shirt ENTERS. Leigh glances up and he winks at her. He NODS his head toward the outside.

EXERCISE RIDER

Two garbage cans -- no waiting.

INT. TACK STALL

SONIA SANTOS, a mid-30s Latina knockout, is riding hard for the finish line, slapping SOMETHING BENEATH HER with a RIDING CROP and hollering.

SONIA

There it is . . . Oh, peche caramba
. . . Right there.

Underneath her, DESHAWN RHODES, a mid-40s African-American trainer, still handsome but losing the current battle with his weight, is just trying to weather the Sonia-storm. As Sonia WHIPS, HE CRIES OUT -- In PAIN or ECSTASY? -- WE'RE UNSURE WHICH.

BACK AT THE GAME, Wild Bill now lays down the hand he is certain will take the pot -- Ace of clubs. Ace of diamonds. Ace of hearts. Ace of spades -- There they are, boys. Read 'em and weep. He takes another SWALLOW of Wild Turkey and leans back in his rickety chair. Now he spreads his arms wide in victory and BELLY-LAUGHS.

Across from him, ANGEL, an ancient jockey-turned-groom, silently lays out a straight flush -- the 3 through 7 of diamonds -- and starts to pick up the pot, one chip at a time, stacking them neatly by color in front of him.

WILD BILL
No freaking way you . . .

Wild Bill stares, unbelieving, at the crappy little hand that has beaten his sure winner. In this moment of realization, Sonia's CRIES finally get to him.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Deshawn, put a bit on that filly.

EXT. MAMA'S CANTINA -- DAY

Leigh emerges from the eatery, her book under her arm, and scans the dark clouds scudding on the horizon. Business-like, she lifts a nearby trash can lid and THROWS UP into it. She replaces the cover, stretches her legs, and walks toward a shed row.

INT. TACK STALL

Deshawn and Sonia step arm-in-arm from behind the hanging blankets. Sonia, a jumble of clothes under one arm, wears only a towel, boots and a jockey's riding helmet. She KISSES a sullen Wild Bill on the forehead, then playfully twirls her riding whip.

SONIA
Buenos dias, Wild Bill.

All the Men watch Sonia sashay out of the tack stall. Deshawn, in his underwear, pulls a folding chair over to the table and sits down.

DESHAWN
Who wants to give me his money?

EXT. SADDLING PADDOCK -- DAY

Still raining.

A grubby little Paddock. As they WADDLE and SHUFFLE toward the newly-refurbished RACINO, SENIORS and other SEEDY CUSTOMERS walk by and stare at or RAZZ the horses and Jockeys.

Deshawn is holding a CHESTNUT COLT'S reins while his groom, Angel, cinches the saddle in place. The horse is SNORTING and PULLING, and Deshawn looks nervous holding him. He SHIES AWAY. Sonia, in her jockey's silks, looks on.

DESHAWN

Angel, take him, will you?

Angel grabs the reins and Deshawn, stepping quickly away, looks relieved.

SONIA

You are liking fillies more, yes?

DESHAWN

This colt's a little . . . I don't know.

Deshawn takes Sonia's arm and moves farther away from the colt.

DESHAWN (CONT'D)

When you come out of the gate . . .

Sonia is staring at someone past Deshawn.

DESHAWN (CONT'D)

Sonia?

She looks at him again.

DESHAWN (CONT'D)

Don't rush him to the front, okay. Keep him mid-pack until the far turn.

SONIA

Then I am smacking the crap out of him?

DESHAWN

No, Sonia. He's high-strung. A tap is all he needs. If you hit him too hard, he might--

SONIA

Deshawn, no. I am tapping, he is falling asleep like all your horses.

DESHAWN

Sonia, give me a break. It's a sloppy track. This colt loves the slop. He'll be flying today.

(MORE)

DESHAWN (cont'd)

Just relax. I don't want you to get hurt.

SONIA

Don't be saying "hurt" and going again to your pelican.

She taps him on the butt with her riding crop. He simultaneously SMILES and WINCES.

SONIA (CONT'D)

And you should be knowing I never relax.

PETER GAVIN, SERIOUS BINOCULARS around his neck -- a big-time jockey's AGENT in a polyester sport coat you can hear coming a block away -- walks arrogantly around the paddock and finally stops in front of Sonia.

He looks her up and down, smiles, then CARVES her away from Deshawn. He backs her into her mount, until he's just about TOUCHING HER, standing much-too-close to her as he talks.

GAVIN

I saw you ride yesterday.

DESHAWN

Excuse me there, fella. I'm the trainer. We're getting ready for this race.

GAVIN

(continuing to Sonia)

I like the way you ride. I'm Peter Gavin, Jockey's Agent. Nice to meet you.

He offers his hand, which Sonia takes.

GAVIN (CONT'D)

I work Saratoga . . .

(Sonia smiles)

And Belmont. The Florida tracks. I like the way you're determined to win.

(smiling harder)

And the way you look . . .
Senorita.

All FREEZE for a MOMENT. Sonia and Gavin, still shaking hands, are lost in each other for a second or two. Deshawn BURNS, but then steps in and pushes Gavin out of the way.

DESHAWN

Hey, pal, she's gotta ride now. You mind?

He gives Sonia a LEG UP.

INT. FINGER LAKES CLUBHOUSE -- DAY

Deshawn joins Wild Bill, who sits DRUNKENLY before a glass of Wild Turkey, in the RACINO CLUBHOUSE, such as it is. A SPARSE and FORLORN CROWD idly wanders around them. USED TICKETS litter the floor. Bill sits on a plastic chair at a plastic table. Deshawn pulls up another and joins him.

WILD BILL

Hey hey, Deshawn, you gotta winner this race?

Pause.

DESHAWN

No.

WILD BILL

Gonna finish in the money?

DESHAWN

Doubt it.

WILD BILL

Deshawn, son, did you forget what life's about again?

DESHAWN

Bill, I know . . . Okay, what?

WILD BILL

Having fun, winning . . . You're not thinking like a winner. You keep thinking like a loser, you'll always be a loser.

DESHAWN

Thinking like a winner?

(beat)

Listen, we've been friends, what, nine or ten years? You know I want to win as much as anybody, but I've got nothing left to work with. Two horses, that's it. One of them, Thunderbolt, is lazier than frozen Crisco.

(MORE)

DESHAWN (cont'd)

And the other one, this colt, couldn't win if he was racing a baby rhinoceros. Plus, he's even crazier than Sonia. Nobody wants to ride for me. I've got to sleep with jockeys to get them up on my horses.

WILD BILL

I never thought of you as a switch hitter, but--

DESHAWN

Don't even go there.

Bill goes to throw back the SHOT of WHISKEY, but MISSES his mouth and the Wild Turkey FLIES BACK and SPLASHES the Vietnam-era Marine fatigue jacket of the SENIOR CITIZEN behind him. The Senior Citizen madly tries to gather some of the whiskey and lick it off his fingers.

SENIOR CITIZEN

Semper fi, bro.

He STUMBLES OFF, and Bill watches him go.

WILD BILL

See what I'm talking about? You never know what's about to hit you. Gifts can appear out of nowhere.

(beat)

Let's say, just for dreaming purposes, you were to win this one. How do you think it might happen?

The HORSES parade on the track just below them.

DESHAWN

(playing along)

Okay, Sonia jumps to the lead and holds it -- tries for wire-to-wire. Leigh's horse is a stalker, and he finishes strong, so I'd bet Leigh will come for us at the top of the stretch, but Sonia spots her coming, holds off on her whip until the last furlong, and wins by a nose.

WILD BILL

I like that. Could happen that way, you know.

DESHAWN

Ever since that pelican at
Gulfstream Park --

WILD BILL

Jesus, here we go again with the
pelican. One impossible piece of
bad luck in a pretty decent life.
Forget about that, will you?

DESHAWN

You don't just forget the day your
luck ran out.

WILD BILL

You luck didn't run out . . . Not
in your shorts, anyway. What about
Sonia?

Deshawn shifts in his chair, and a PAINED expression crosses
his face.

DESHAWN

Good news and bad. Great ride, but
you go back to the barn bloody.

WILD BILL

Picky picky picky. Everybody at the
track'd love to try even one race
with her in the irons. If she's too
much woman for you, buck her off
and give somebody else a chance.

DESHAWN

Who you got in mind? . . . You?

They both BREAK UP at the absurdity of this. They look down
to see:

EXT. TRACK -- DAY

A mile and a sixteenth race -- the STARTING GATE sits just
before the FINISH LINE.

The HORSES reach the gate and the ASSISTANT STARTERS are
guiding them in, one-by-one. SOME go in easily, OTHERS with
more difficulty.

Sonia sits confidently aboard Deshawn's Chestnut Colt. Leigh,
looking nervous, is up on a GREY. The BLEACHER CREATURES are
yelling at the jockeys, who yell back. Sonia sees Leigh's
GREY and FROWNS.

SONIA

Hey, Leigh, what you riding there --
a ghost?

(beat)

Caballo del diablo. Devil's ghost
luck for you, chiquita blanca.

LEIGH

Tell you what, Carmen Miranda, I'm
gonna plant so much track dirt on
your face you'll be screaming like
the godfather of soul.

Sonia sputters in Spanish RAGE, slapping at Leigh in the
STALL next to her, but just then, in BG, WE SEE the last
horse loading in. The BELL SOUNDS and the GATES CLANG OPEN.

AND THEY'RE OFF. Leigh and Sonia CONTINUE their fight all
through the first turn and along the backstretch -- Sonia's
Colt on the lead and Leigh's Grey stalking a head behind --
as the race unfolds.

Halfway through the Clubhouse turn, Sonia has widened her
lead to a length, but Leigh's Grey is STARTING TO GAIN, all
just as Deshawn fantasized earlier.

Deshawn jumps to his feet in the clubhouse, HOLLERING IN
DISBELIEF, his imaginary scenario playing out before him.
Wild Bill GRABS him.

WILD BILL

It's just like you said!

SUDDENLY, just as Leigh's Grey surges abreast of her Colt,
Sonia unleashes a frenzy of whip-strokes to his left flank.
Sonia's Colt suddenly LUGS HARD to the right and makes a bee-
line for the Grandstand.

The PACK OF OTHER HORSES is coming hard at the top of the
stretch, and when Leigh has to PULL UP, she quickly drops to
fourth place.

Sonia's Colt isn't slowing down. He CRASHES through the rail,
and sends Sonia FLYING OVER HIS HEAD.

Now the Colt heads out across the PARKING LOT, weaving pell-
mell through the CARS and STOPPING to KICK IN the odd
WINDSHIELD.

Leigh, in sixth place when her horse crosses the FINISH LINE,
is CURSING A BLUE STREAK. She looks back to locate Sonia --
the reason for her out-of-the-money finish.