

RONI

(She approaches Paw Paw slowly because he has fallen asleep. Lights go down in the shop, lights up on Paw Paw and Roni.)

(In a whisper, gently touching his shoulder.)

Paw Paw, your car is ready.

PAW PAW

(With eyes closed and head tilted, but in a normal voice.)

I'm not sleeping. I heard everything they said.

RONI

Well, I thought you--

PAW PAW

Do you realize how much work I avoid by just pretending I'm asleep?

RONI

Well, I never thought about it.

PAW PAW

Those boys are pickin' on you again, aren't they?

RONI

Ugh, the story of my life!

PAW PAW

I heard what happened to you on the racing team. Everyone says you got fired, but that doesn't sound like the young lady who grew up playing in my garage.

RONI

I know that's what they're sayin', but it ain't true.

(She sits next to Paw Paw on the park bench.

She puts her head down. There is a pause.)

And, they all think I'm stupid.

PAW PAW

I know the truth. I saw you adjust the lifters on a 454 big block when you were 10 years old. You were so little you had to sit under the hood with both feet on the manifold. That's the day you stole my heart.

RONI

Oh, Paw Paw.

(Paw Paw pats her hand.)

It was my first season as lead mechanic. The Number 13 Black Beast was running great! We'd won at Daytona and Pocono and were leading in points. But, those pit guys were filthy, foul-smellin' morons. They'd bring their groupie girls into the garage at night just to party. Sometimes I was still working, so, I ran 'em off!

PAW PAW

Uh huh. And, what did they do?

RONI

They set me up!

(Roni stands up.)

They put the wrong fuel mixture in the car when we ran during happy hour... I know I had it right. And, it caused two pistons to burn. I worked all night putting in the backup engine. Then, during the race the suspension tech put in the wrong spring wedge. The car spun out and hit the wall. We didn't finish the race.

PAW PAW

Honey, you're working in a man's world and you went and stirred up a hornet's nest.

RONI

Then, the big famous driver "Chuck Champion" ... and you know his real name is Marion Whipple ... went psycho and blamed me for everything. The next day I was gone.

PAW PAW

Come here darlin'.

RONI

That's when I came home to Hokes Bluff.

(Roni sits down again.)

To tell you the truth, I didn't have anywhere else to go.

PAW PAW

You got good reasons to be upset.

(He puts his arm around her as song starts.)

RONI

Those guys were so hateful.
Sometimes I want to run and hide from 'em.
Sometimes I want to hit 'em square in the mouth.
Sometimes I just... I just want someone to hold me.

SKIP SONG "IN A MAN'S WORLD"

PAW PAW

Darlin', to be in this business you need to have thick skin and be

aggressive. I think the time has come for you to take charge of the whole team. You need to be crew chief.

RONI

Crew chief? I'm not sure I'm ready for that, Paw Paw.

PAW PAW

Aw, I think you're more than ready. You're a natural leader. Just tell 'em what to do and mean what you say.

RONI

Oh, Paw Paw, you've always believed in me.

(Roni hugs Paw Paw.)

But, I'm not even near the track now.

PAW PAW

Don't worry about that, it'll happen when it's supposed to happen.

RONI

Oh, I don't know what I'd do without you.