

Mojo Hand

Story synopsis of Screenplay by Ted Davis and Doug Hand. Optioned with Joe Morton as Director and James Earl Jones as Jimmy Burns, but never produced.

In a Vermont V.F.W. Hall, JIMMY BURNS, itinerant local country blues musician, plays another one-night gig with his band, the Red Ramblers. At home, CORRINA, his wife of 35 years, looks in a mirror and examines the effects of her illness. On this particular autumn night, they receive two visitors -- one long absent, the other long dead. LONNIE B., their son, now a rock celebrity in New York City, comes home for the first time in 17 years. With him arrives the specter of WILLIE WOODSIDE, Corrina's first husband and Lonnie's father, who was killed in an East Texas juke joint. Thus begins a story of betrayal and loss, redemption and reconciliation.

Jimmy, gentle natured and hard as flint, loves his music and Corrina. Since moving north from Texas with the infant Lonnie in tow and Willie freshly buried, it has been a musician's life of surviving from gig to gig. Now, facing illness and age, that life might not be enough. It is a life that Lonnie scorns. When he returns, he is filled with rage -- rage at Jimmy for being "a shit-kicker," rage that he was never able to know his father. Willie, he thinks, would have been the man Jimmy is not. Willie, he knows, passed on to him his considerable gifts with the guitar. Lonnie begins to investigate his father's life and death, rifling through stacks of old letters, cards and flyers and calling people in East Texas. At the same time, recognizing the family's difficult circumstances and encouraged by Corrina, he invites Jimmy to play in a blues revival concert at New York City's House of Blues. Jimmy reluctantly accepts.

Lonnie imagines it as a test. At first, Jimmy fails miserably. He is out of his element and his performance is hick. Lonnie is, predictably, furious, and smug. At the second concert, though, Jimmy -- accompanied by a street musician he met and jammed with on 8th Avenue -- reverts to the music he knows and brings down the house, while subtly revealing that he is the source of Lonnie's guitar gifts. Having cracked a tough New York audience, Jimmy heads for Corrina and home on his 70th birthday. Lonnie, feeling mocked and betrayed, literally chases him back to Vermont. Outside the entrance to the old and apparently deserted V.F.W. Hall, Corrina confronts Lonnie with the truth about his father -- Jimmy killed Willie, to save Lonnie's life, when Willie, in a drunken rage, went after the infant with a knife. The first truth paralyzes Lonnie, but the second and larger truth, about the value of Jimmy's life as a musician, still waits inside. Corrina leads a stunned Jimmy into a hall, filled with dozens of former Red Ramblers from all through the years, now gathered for the birthday celebration and playing his music. Jimmy joins the current band on the stage, and is followed by Corrina and at last Lonnie as their voices blend in reconciliation and song.