

Rocket Summer

Written by
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Based On Allegedly True Events

EXT. MERNARD COUNTY RACE TRACK - NIGHT

It's Friday night at the fairgrounds speedway in Dawn, Missouri. A dozen muddy stock cars with more dents than paint ROAR around a dirt track under blaring lights, BANGING and CRASHING as the weekend warriors BATTLE for the lead.

The local crowd SCREAMS its approval. A beat-up old blue Chevy is battling a primer red Ford for the lead.

INT. / EXT. BLUE CHEVY ON THE TRACK - NIGHT

The driver's got a full face helmet with a muddy visor, and all you can see are steely, focused eyes when WHAM! The car is SLAMMED from behind by another DRIVER.

Those steely eyes seem to smile. The driver GRINDS gears and STOMPS the accelerator. Pressure gauges REDLINE.

The Chevy and Ford chase each other through the other cars at high speed, BUMPING and PUSHING as the crowd CHEERS. The Chevy gains the lead, BATTERING the Ford in the process.

Suddenly, the Chevy SPUTTERS and LURCHES as the engine struggles, losing speed. Pressure gauges all DROP to ZERO.

The Ford SLAMS the Chevy from behind, throwing the car SPINNING onto the infield and into the hay bales.

The Chevy driver POUNDS the steering wheel in frustration as the dead engine ticks and cools. The driver pulls off the helmet and throws it aside, revealing:

...a head of long blonde hair pulled back in a sweaty ponytail. This is DARLENE KINGMAN, (17). Under the grease and sweat hides a striking young woman who clearly has no need for makeup or dresses.

EXT. MERNARD COUNTY RACE TRACK PITS - NIGHT

The tow truck brings the Chevy in, Darlene standing on the running board. She steps off the truck as it slows to a stop.

MAGGIE SOLOMON (18), Darlene's troublemaker best friend, and Maggie's scrappy little brother DWAYNE (17), meet the truck and go to work unhitching the car.

Waiting with a soda, KENNY KINGMAN (11), Darlene's brother, a gawky, smallish boy, at the leading edge of puberty.

He wears an old army trench coat, a motorcycle helmet, and old-fashioned leather racing goggles draped around his neck.

Darlene tosses her helmet to Kenny, grabs the soda.

KENNY

You almost had 'im, Darlene!

Darlene downs the whole can. BURPS.

DARLENE

"Almost" don't get me no five
hundred dollar first.

KENNY

Yeah, well, still, it was cool.

Maggie pops the hood. Smoke billows out. She groans.

DARLENE

What'ja do this time, Maggie?
(to Kenny)
Go home Kenny, before Dad comes to.

KENNY

Awe, c'mon, D.

DARLENE

We gotta get ready for the next
race. Go on home, now.

Kenny reluctantly straddles a tiny mini bike.

KENNY

Sure you don't need me?

DARLENE

Nope.

Kenny pulls his goggles over his eyes, yanks the start cord on the mini-bike. Its tiny motor sputters and fires up. He looks at Darlene again, but she's engrossed under the hood.

He throttles the bike, and rides off in a cloud of dust.

EXT. LACEY JACKSON'S FRONT YARD - DAY

The house and yard are small, but in spite of an impressive collection of bric-a-brac it is neat and clean.

CHARLIE BAKER (12), a studious looking boy, is sitting in a lawn chair, writing in a beat up notebook.

Behind him, LACEY JACKSON (13), a cute tomboy with long hair and overly large glasses, her dog PUCK at her side.

Lacey poises a model rocket behind Charlie. She crawls a few feet away, pulls a battery from her pocket, and with a grin brings a long pair of wires to the battery.

Puck cocks his head curiously.

EXT. KENNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Car parts and chickens dot the trashy front lawn. CRASH! - glass BREAKS inside. The sound of Kenny's dad CAL yelling.

Kenny, in his trench coat and helmet, goggles draped around his neck, bursts out the screen door. He leans on it, back to the YELLING inside, wipes tears from his eyes.

He looks into the distance at Lacey's house a half mile down the road, and sees the vapor trail of a rocket, scribing a white line into the clear blue sky.

Kenny musters up a smile, dons his goggles and springs from the porch steps.

EXT. LACEY JACKSON'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Puck's hiding his face in his paws. Smoke drifts across Charlie. He's totally unaffected by the rocket. He looks up from his writing.

CHARLIE

Signaling Kenny, huh Lacey?

Lacey's eyes are big as pie pans as she watches the rocket go streaking into the blue sky. She nods.

LACEY

Yep. Used a "B". Oughta give me eight-hundred vertical feet.

CHARLIE

Mmmmm-Hmmm.

He goes back to his writing. Lacey watches as his nose curls in thought. She is clearly smitten.

LACEY

Hey, Charlie, how long before you gotta go back to the diner?

CHARLIE

Mom gave me the day off.

LACEY
Good. What are you writin'?

CHARLIE
Won't know till I'm finished.

LACEY
How do you know when you're
finished?

CHARLIE
When I run out of words.

LACEY
Makes sense to me.

Lacey looks toward Kenny's. There's a dust cloud rising off the road in the distance, and a sound like a lawn mower.

LACEY (CONT'D)
Here comes King Kenny.

Kenny pulls up to the house on his mini-bike, parks, removes his goggles. His face is dirty, but clean beneath the goggles. He KNEELS, tussling Puck's ears.

KENNY
Hey, Puck boy. How ya doin', pal?

He breaks into a huge smile.

KENNY (CONT'D)
Ready, Lace?

LACEY
Dad's still home.

They've got Charlie's attention.

CHARLIE
Ready for what?

LACEY
It's a surprise.

KENNY
And it ain't even your birthday.

The SLAP of a screen door.

ERNIE JACKSON (55), a serious, neatly dressed man in crisp work clothes, steps onto the porch. He's in a hurry. He passes the kids and heads over to his truck.

ERNIE

Lacey, I'm heading over to the
Potter's to fix the pump. I'll need
your help.

CHARLIE/KENNY

Hey, Mister Jackson.

ERNIE

Charles. Kenneth. Come on, Lacey.

LACEY

Aw, Dad...

ERNIE

"Aw" nothing, Lacey. Come on.

LACEY

I don't know nothin' about
irrigation pumps.

Ernie climbs in the truck, starts the engine.

ERNIE

A little work never did a man any
harm, Lacey.

Lacey's eyes narrow.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

A girl. Lady. Woman. You know what
I mean.

The kids are bummed. Kenny flops himself into a lawn chair.

KENNY

See ya later, Lace.

LACEY

Dad...

Ernie looks at their sad faces. At Lacey's big doe eyes.

ERNIE

Lacey Marie, you have got to find
something constructive to do this
summer or I'll find it for you.

LACEY

We got stuff to do.

ERNIE
More like something where I don't
have to worry about you getting
yourself into trouble. Again.

Lacey looks a little guilty. Ernie softens.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Starting tomorrow.

Lacey busts into a huge smile.

LACEY
Thanks.

He flickers a grin, puts the truck in reverse.

ERNIE
Kenneth. How's your mom?

KENNY
She's fine, sir.

ERNIE
You sure?

KENNY
Sure.

ERNIE
Okay. You say hi for me.

He gives them one last stern look.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Behave yourselves now.

He pulls away. Lacey looks at Charlie.

LACEY
We have lift off.

Kenny jumps to his feet, arms out like wings, and flies
himself to the side yard.

KENNY
Blast off!

EXT. LACEY'S SIDE YARD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The side yard is a collection of surplus farm equipment,
stacks of pipe, and a row of storage sheds.

At the back of one shed, Lacey produces a screwdriver, pries open the back panel and sets it aside. She pulls a flashlight from her pocket, FLICKS the light on.

LACEY

Welcome to the rest of your summer.

And she ducks inside.

INT. STORAGE SHED - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The shed is dark, dusty and full of junk. With flashlight in hand, Lacey leads Puck, Kenny and Charlie through the mess.

A familiar RATTLE. Lacey trains her light into a dark corner: it's an angry rattle snake. Puck growls. Charlie and Kenny let out a SQUEAL of fear. They jump back behind Lacey.

CHARLIE

This is your surprise?

LACEY

No... that's a snake. The surprise is behind the snake.

She finds a rake, gingerly lifts the snake, and flings it out the hole in the back of the shed. She turns to the boys. They still look petrified.

LACEY (CONT'D)

You guys. Seriously.

She steps over to a big crate with military lettering stenciled on the side. Looks at Kenny expectantly.

Kenny puts aside his snake-fear, pulls his goggles down over his eyes and steps to the crate. He and Lacey snap open the latches like they've done it before.

CHARLIE

This isn't like another dead armadillo, is it?

KENNY

Oh, it's way cooler.

Lacey snaps the lid back. Inside is an old Air Force blanket. She flips the blanket back with a flourish.

LACEY

Voila!

Kenny WHISTLES an appreciative wolf call. Charlie peers into the box. His eyes get real big.

CHARLIE
What the heck is that?

EXT. COUNTY ROAD - DAY

Ernie in his truck. Up ahead, a Sheriff's truck approaches. Red lights roll, and the siren WOOPS. They stop abreast.

The Sheriff's window lowers. SHERIFF BAKER lowers his sunglasses, gives Ernie a friendly smile.

SHERIFF BAKER
Howdy, Ernie.

ERNIE
Tom.

SHERIFF BAKER
I was just heading out your way.

ERNIE
Everything all right?

SHERIFF BAKER
Just following up on a call. Lacey shooting off rockets again?

ERNIE
Can't say for sure.

SHERIFF BAKER
Well, seems your neighbor saw one less than an hour ago.

Ernie looks surprised.

SHERIFF BAKER (CONT'D)
You know how I feel about those things, Ernie. They can be dangerous, especially this time of year, landin' in a dry field and all.

ERNIE
I know. I'll talk with her, Tom.

SHERIFF BAKER
I just don't need any undue excitement around here, is all.

Ernie puts his truck in gear.

ERNIE

You and me both, Tom. You and me
both.

INT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

The kids stare into the crate. Puck wants to see too. Under
the blanket is a four foot long steel cylinder, ten inches in
diameter, with a funnel affair on one end.

LACEY

This (beat) is a JATO.

CHARLIE

A What-Oh?

Kenny strokes the cylinder tenderly.

KENNY

It's a rocket. We got us a rocket!

CHARLIE

It's not a rocket. Where would you
get a rocket?

LACEY

Actually, we got us three rockets.

KENNY

Lacey's Dad used to buy lots of
junk at auction down at the base.

CHARLIE

The Air Force doesn't sell rockets.

LACEY

Somebody did and here they are.

CHARLIE

Prove it.

KENNY

Internet says...

Lacey pulls out a piece of computer printed paper.

LACEY

JATO stands for Jet Assisted Take
Off.

(MORE)

LACEY(cont'd)

They use 'em to boost jet fighters
for short takeoffs. Like on an
Aircraft Carrier.

CHARLIE

So the surprise is watching you and
the King blow yourselves to
smithereens?

KENNY

No, that's not the surprise.

LACEY

We're buildin' a car.

CHARLIE

A car.

KENNY

We're buildin' a rocket car, baby!
Zero to two hundred in six seconds!

He makes a whooshing noise, swoops his hand through the air.
Charlie rolls his eyes.

LACEY

You don't think we can do it.

CHARLIE

Nope.

LACEY

We have the rockets.

KENNY

And we have a car. The old
Firebird, at Castle Rock Quarry.
And we have a lawn chair.

CHARLIE

A lawn chair?

KENNY

The Firebird doesn't have any
seats, man.

CHARLIE

Lacey, your Dad isn't supposed to
have rockets. He needs to tell the
Air Force. If he doesn't, he goes
to jail.

LACEY

What, you gonna tell your dad?