

Where are you smooth talking?

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Where Are You Smooth Talking? The saying goes the only difference between a tragedy and a comedy is the ending. Meaning no matter how tragic or comedic a story begins, the ending is what determines what type of story was told (thus what genre it falls in). This concept of endings is greatly exemplified through the comparison of the short story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been* by Joyce Carol Oates and the film the story was based on called *Smooth Talk*. Both works contain an abundance of similarities but, due to slight yet critical changes made, the two stories become very different in their underlying themes/genre. The two stories differ in aspects such as (obviously) the title, character traits (i. e. June), certain plot details and most importantly the endings. They differ completely. The difference in endings change a horror story inspired by a real serial killer to a coming of age film for the American teenage girl. The short story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been* like all short stories is short. The short story is a total of twelve pages long and begins with roughly a two page description on Connie and her family. The short yet informational background helps the reader realize Connie is the typical fifteen year old girl whose main priorities are the same as most fifteen year old girls: need for attention, boys, and looks.. One day she doesn't listen to her family and decides to stay home instead of bonding with her family at a relative's barbeque. Connie's fate begins its dark and bleak road when, like most horror stories, is home alone and a stranger comes to the house. The stranger's name is Arnold Friend and his intentions though unclear at first, become more and more evident as the conversation between him and Connie unravels. Arnold talks in a tone that is both alluring and vicious, he tells Connie information about herself that just

seems impossible for him to know giving him the characteristic of a hellish creature that sees all (like the devil). Arnold appears to have put Connie in a Dracula like dazed charm which makes her eventually get in his car where the story comes to an abrupt end. Though the ending is ambiguous, Connie is raped and killed by the monster Arnold Friend, or an old fiend (if one removes all the letter r's in his name). Though the ending is vague, it is still haunting and horrific in the way that an evil creature posing as a teenager targets/abducts a young girl, violates her then kills her. This story is every parent's nightmare and the scariest part about it is how achievable a heinous act like this is. The definition of horror is an overwhelming and painful feeling caused by something frightfully shocking, terrifying, or revolting; the ending of Oates' short story does just that. The ending is gloomy, sad, and horrific which makes this story a horror story. Like most horror stories a lesson is taught, if one lies to their parents and act naughty, they'll will eventually meet the devil. The Film Smooth Talk starring Laura Dern, revolves around the same characters from the story Joyce Carol Oates wrote about, but takes a different approach. Smooth Talk is a ninety minute film based on a twelve page short story so it's a no brainer that scenes were prolonged and added. The scenes that were prolonged/added do not focus on Oates' Arnold Friend, but rather takes a more in-depth look at Connie's family life. In the short story we are told certain characteristics of Connie's family but, nothing more than that; nothing to make the mother, father or her sister June significant characters in the story. The story by Oates briefly touches on the subject of Connie and her mother not getting along, while the film constantly revolves around this mother-daughter conflict. Smooth Talk

chooses to focus and explore more on the dysfunction between Connie and her family (especially the one with her mother) rather than for example finding out more about the character Arnold Friend. After about an hour and ten minutes watching Connie's naive adolescent persona constantly creating turmoil in her house, are we then introduced to the film's antagonist, Arnold Friend. The confrontation between Arnold and Connie go exactly as they do in the short story, with one big exception, the story doesn't end once Connie gets in the car. In Smooth talk, much like the short story, Arnold does indeed rape Connie, however, afterwards he returns her home alive. Once returned home, Connie's naïve self centered take on life seems to have been left in the field Arnold molested her at. Connie walks toward the house where she is lovingly greeted by her remorseful mother apologizing for slapping her in an earlier scene. She has experienced the horrors of the outside world and realizes the good life and safety her family provides for her. The last scene in Smooth talk ends with Connie sitting in her room, not looking outside but, looking in. Then her sister June walks in, and instead of the two butting heads like they did throughout the entire film, Connie embraces her and they start dancing. What this ending shows is that the Connie from Smooth Talk, is no longer wishing to 'be old enough to drive so she can leave her home'. She experienced the 'harsh cruel world' that Eddie from the earlier diner scene was talking about. Most importantly is this ending is not sad or monotonous, it is happy and hopeful, the complete opposite of the story it is based on. What Smooth talk ends up being isn't a horror story like Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been but, a story of a typical all knowing teenager who learns the hard way just how important family after she gets in

a situation she can't smooth talk her way out of. Although Smooth Talk is based on Oates' short story, by the end of each story and because of the end, what one has is two completely different stories. One story is for a parent to scare their daughter straight, the other is to remind them that in life no matter what, one will always have family.