

FADE IN:

EXT. MAIN STREET (1952) - DAY

PAUL, 15, a good-looking lanky kid, bolts out of SCHRADER'S HARDWARE STORE at break-neck speed. He flies past WHITEY'S BARBER SHOP and the corner liquor store before crossing the deserted side street.

PAUL (V.O.)

When I was ten, I fell out of a tree and landed on my head. For the most part, I'm okay. I mean, I can do math and remember dates, but I have trouble with easy things... I guess I should just feel lucky I'm alive.

Paul rounds a corner and passes a sign that reads "Welcome to Mayfield, population 650." He slows down as he enters the

BALL FIELD

where a CROWD watches the LOCALS play, shirts against skins.

Paul wipes the sweat off his brow before entering the shirts' dugout. He taps the broad shoulders of JIM, 36, who eagerly watches the game. Jim's best friend and sidekick, HOD, sits beside him.

PAUL

I asked Milt for the keys to the pitcher's box just like you said, but he said there ain't none.

Jim busts up LAUGHING, slaps his knee and makes a cuckoo sign by his head.

HOD

(hollering)

Keys to the pitcher's box -- that's a good one!

JIM

The kid's nuttier than a fruit cake!

The entire dugout LAUGHS. Paul leaves, dejected and walks up to the

STANDS

and sits next to JULIE - quietly attractive, educated and in her mid-twenties.

PAUL (V.O.)
 Being laughed at is not so bad.
 Whitey says Jim's a real card, the
 funniest man in town.

Julie nudges Paul and points to a handsome BLACK MAN with his shirt off, standing out in left field.

JULIE
 There's Doc!

She waves excitedly. DOC STAIR, 30, tips his cap and hunches down.

PAUL (V.O.)
 I wonder if Julie knows how her
 eyes light up whenever she sees
 Doc.

Jim emerges from the dugout and steps up to the

PLATE

where he prepares to swing.

ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
 It's the bottom of the ninth,
 folks, and the bases are loaded.
 Shirts are down two runs, but if
 anyone can bring'em home, it's good
 ole Jim Kendall.

Jim swings and pops a fly deep into the hole between left and center field. The RUNNER on third races toward home and the shirts' FANS go crazy.

As if out of nowhere, Doc runs, dives and amazingly catches the ball. He powers it to third for a double play.

The CELEBRATION amongst the shirts' FANS ends in shock and disbelief. Jim throws his hat. The skins' FANS leap from their seats and emit a huge ROAR.

Paul and Julie join the fans flooding the field. Julie gives Doc a big hug and Doc and Paul exchange high fives. The locals shake Doc's hand and slap him on the back.

INSIDE THE SHIRTS' DUG OUT

Jim kicks a helmet. Hod sneaks up behind Jim and blows in his ear. Jim backhands him, but Hod ducks.

HOD
(chuckling)
You ain't being a sore loser, are ya?

JIM
Hod, if you weren't my best friend, I'd belt you right now.

HOD
Aw, c'mon Jim, I thought we was close.

Players brush past, hauling gear and stuff. Hod notices Julie across the field, beaming at Doc. He elbows Jim.

HOD
There goes your girlfriend. Ain't that sweet the way she hangs all over him? Bet you wish Julie'd drool all over you the way she does Doc.

Jim pinches some tobacco.

JIM
You just wait, she'll come around.

HOD
Jim, you ain't got no more of a chance with her than a rabbit!

JIM
Says who?

HOD
Says me - and your wife and four kids!

Players in the background SNICKER. Jim adjusts his cap.

JIM
Go on and laugh. Y'all just wait and see -- she'll be mine.

Hod shakes his head in disbelief.

Jim emerges from the darkness of the dug out and steps out onto the

PLAYING FIELD

where Doc is surrounded by Paul, Julie, WHITEY, 56, the barber and JOE BARNES, mid-fifties, the town marshal.

JIM

Well, if it ain't the righteous Doc Stair.

Whitey grabs Jim's hand and shakes hard.

WHITEY

(elated)

Jim! That was a beautiful ball you hit out there - had us all fooled into thinking you'd won!

JOE

He would've, too, if it hadn't been for Doc.

Doc grins.

JIM

I believe Doc thinks he's some kind of miracle worker.

WHITEY

I still don't know how he caught that ball!

JIM

I don't mean by that, Whitey --

He spits some chew. Whitey's puzzled. Everyone eyeballs Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)

That catch was nothing compared to the miracle Doc's trying to perform on this here kid's bean -- ain't that right, Doc?

DOC

(sheepish)

I'm only giving him exercises to improve his mind. Why, there are times when Paul is just as bright and sensible as anyone.

JIM
Must not have been the time he went
searching for that left-handed
monkey wrench.

The men CHUCKLE.

DOC
Give the boy a chance.

JIM
(shakes his head)
Nah, I was wrong about you, Doc.
You ain't no miracle worker. You're
one of those, what do you call them
freaks at the side shows that walk
around in their sleep?

WHITEY
A somnambulist --

JIM
Yeah, one of those somnambulists,
'cause you must be dreaming if you
think this cuckoo's got any sense!

Whitey and Joe CRACK-UP.

JULIE
You're cruel, Jim Kendall! Haven't
you got any feelings?

JIM
Yeah, I got feelings -- and they're
all for you, sweetie!

Whitey HOWLS and holds his gut.

JIM (CONT'D)
I'll tell you what's cruel --
leading a fool to believe he's got
sense when he ain't got any! I'm
not quite sure how this works.
Who's the bigger fool?... Is it the
fool who's doing the fooling, or is
it the fool who's being fooled?
Maybe it's just plain crazy, or is
it just plain foolish?... Doc, why
don't you tell us -- ain't you the
expert on this matter?

Whitey's beet red.

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