

FIELDER'S CHOICE

Screenplay

By

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Rewrite 9/01.

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"FIELDER'S CHOICE"

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY (SPRING, 1945).

From a B-29 Superfortress flying a combat mission at 25,000 feet, the Pacific Ocean passes slowly underneath to the drone of bomber engines.

RUN CREDITS

The crew converses sparingly on the bomber's intercom as they approach the target.

PILOT
(o.s.)
Anything Wilson?

WILSON
(o.s.)
No, sir.

More ocean passes.

PILOT
(o.s.)
Okay, final approach ...
McDill?

McDILL
(o.s.)
Ninety seconds to target.

More ocean.

PILOT
(o.s.)
Wallace?

WALLACE
(o.s.)
Check.

The Japanese coastline appears.

PILOT

(o.s.)

The 343rd reported light flak
at the target, a few fighters
after. Let's keep our fingers
crossed.

WILSON

(o.s.)

Any kamikazes, captain?

PILOT

(o.s.)

No such thing, Wilson.

CREDITS END

The Pacific Ocean is replaced by Japanese countryside which
now passes underneath.

PILOT

(o.s.)

Fielder?

INT. FUSELAGE MACHINE GUN TURRET - CONTINUOUS.

Jax Fielder, a thin airman in heavy bombing uniform and
oxygen mask, mans his blister gun, scanning the skies. To
respond he holds his throat microphone against his Adam's
apple. The leather glove on his right hand has been
amateurishly cut and sewn to fit his partially amputated
right index finger. He speaks with an Ozark accent.

JAX

I know, sir. It won't happen
again.

PILOT

(o.s.)

Fielder, it doesn't matter how
many planes the Japs throw at
us. Your job is to pick one
at a time and shoot at it.

JAX

Yes, sir. I was waiting for a
good shot.

PILOT

(o.s.)
Indecision will kill us all,
son.

JAX

(o.s.)
Yes, sir. Sorry.

BOMBARDIER

(o.s.)
Bombs away.

EXT. JAPANESE COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS.

As Japanese countryside rolls by, incendiary bombs fall from the bomber. The faint pop and thunder of anti-aircraft flak can be heard ahead.

PILOT

(o.s.)
We've got flak. Not heavy.
What is that just north of the
airfield?

WILSON

(o.s.)
The Japs must have stole it.

BOMBARDIER

(o.s.)
Damn yellow bandits.

PILOT

(o.s.)
Fielder ought to know. He
played in the major leagues
one afternoon.

A Japanese city appears underneath as carpet bombing begins to destroy it.

PILOT

(o.s.)
Fielder, it's on your side,
just north of the north-south
runway.

JAX
 (o.s.)
 Looks like one, sir.

A baseball stadium appears encircling a familiar green diamond. Flak gets more intense and the image of the stadium jerks with each concussion.

PILOT
 (o.s.)
 How's that compare with Yankee stadium?

JAX
 (o.s.)
 The Japs have so far give me a much warmer welcome than I ever got from the New York fans.

INT. JAX'S BLISTER TURRET - CONTINUOUS.

Jax looks down again, more intently, almost pressing his nose to the plastic blister. We see the stadium, from Jax's point of view, then it's as if we are free-falling from the plane, first towards the diamond and, as we near the ground, towards a backyard near the diamond.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE (BACKYARD) - DAY (EARLY SUMMER, 1934).

As we fall we see more closely the backyard--not in a Japanese suburb, but in a modest neighborhood in Depression Era Smackover, Arkansas. We continue to fall towards a pear tree on the edge of the Fielder backyard. As our descent slows, Mr. Fielder, a middle-aged man in dress pants and an undershirt, pulls a hose across the yard. Mr. Fielder is haggard from his daily fight with the Great Depression which is sucking him back into hillbillydom. Jude (10 years old), youngest of Mr. Fielder's three sons, reluctantly helps his father. As the odd-brother out, Jude has become his parents' henchman.

We fall into the pear tree to reveal a young Jax (12 years old), and his older brother Jugs (13 years old) lying on branches, conducting recognizance on Mr. Fielder and Jude. Jax is as nervous as Jugs is composed.

Jax, dressed in faded coveralls, holds the fat part of the pear like a baseball. As he turns the fruit it is obvious that he is missing the last joint of his right index finger.

His hand trembles slightly. Jugs, physically more mature but less handsome than his brothers, appears hardened, like a young Resistance fighter. He waits patiently for his target to move into range.

The brothers whisper to avoid detection.

JUGS

All this guy's got is a thumb
and a number one finger but
he's the world's champion
cricket ball pitcher.

JAX

You lying once again. I read
every newspaper you read and I
seen every Ripley's you ever
seen and ...

JUGS

Quiet corporal, General Grant
and his aid d'camp approaches.

Mr. Fielder angrily jerks on the hose. Jude, sensing his father's building anger, shrinks back.

JAX

(o.s. whispering)
Jugs, don't do it. Let's go
throw or somethin'.

Up in the pear tree Jugs loads his huge slingshot with an opalescent marble.

JUGS

Listen, Jax. Nobody made you
climb up here. If the
mission's too dangerous for
you, just go play yard monkey
with Jude there.

JAX

You listen. You and me read
Ripley's. Not Paw. He ain't
never gonna believe he got
struck by a meteorite.

Jugs sights in on Mr. Fielder's rear-end as Mr. Fielder, sweating profusely, screws the garden hose onto the faucet.

JUGS
 (as if reading a
 newspaper column)
 On June 28th, 1924 Mrs. Ellen
 Wintergarden of Caterbury
 England was struck by a ...

JAX
 For God sakes Jugs, don't do
 it.

JUGS
 ... with a six pound meteorite
 while she was lying on her
 sofa reading Chaucer. She was
 only slightly injured.

JAX
 For God sakes.

JUGS
 Nobody forced you to
 volunteer, corporal.

JAX
 You're supposed to say ahead
 of time if it's a suicide
 mission.

JUGS
 Trust in the judgment of your
 superior officers, my son.

Jugs fires his slingshot. Mr. Fielder, bent over while struggling with the faucet-hose connection, is struck in the rear-end with such force that his head hits the wall of the house. He bellows but quickly recovers and looks accusingly at Jude. Without hesitation, Jude betrays his brothers, pointing to the pear tree.

JAX
 He sees us.

JUGS
 Steady men.

JAX
 He sees us. Jude ratted us
 out. I told you we should've
 let him play with us.

With great flourish, Mr. Fielder unleashes his belt and starts towards the pear tree, shading his eyes.

MR. FIELDER

Damn you boys, this is the last straw.

JAX

We're trapped. He'll chop the tree down.

JUGS

He don't know for sure it was us.

JAX

Well he dang sure ain't guessed meteorite. He'll burn the tree down.

JUGS

Better get your chute on corporal.

As Mr. Fielder reaches the pear tree he puts his belt between his teeth and, with a growl, begins climbing the trunk. He gets two steps up when

JUGS

Geromino!

Jugs and Jax bail out of the tree and hit the ground running. They race for the safety of the back screen door. Jude is already at the door, banging and squalling for his Maw.

JUGS

(yelling back over his shoulder)

It weren't us Paw.

JAX

Dang you Jugs and dang Ripley's!

JUGS

Dang you, Jude!

JUDE

Maw!

INT. FIELDER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Mrs. Fielder, a 300-pound, thirty-year old woman, is roused by the commotion outside, turns from the stove and eclipses the back doorway. Uncharacteristically for a Smackover housewife, she dresses quite fashionably with heels and fake pearls. She would have been attractive several hundred pounds ago.

Jugs and Jax shove Jude off the back steps and squeeze through what remains of the doorway. Jude has started crying. Mrs. Fielder motions for Jude to hurry in and, as Mr. Fielder reaches the back steps, Mrs. Fielder's fat hand latches the screen door.

MRS. FIELDER

You just count to ten,
Gaynell.

Mr. Fielder stops and rubs his behind.

MR. FIELDER

Why I ever let you talk me
into kids I'll never know. I
could have been a scientist.

MRS. FIELDER

You could still be on your
pappy's farm pluckin'
chickens.

MR. FIELDER

Them boys of yours hurt me bad
this time, Mrs. Fielder.

MRS. FIELDER

What do you expect to come
from years of Fielder
inbreeding. You think you'd
father a couple of choir boys?

MR. FIELDER

I thought I'd had a stroke.

MRS. FIELDER

A stroke don't generally
strike that far south.

MR. FIELDER

Who's gonna mind the Furniture
Emporium if I get disabled?
You ever stop to think of
that?

MRS. FIELDER

I'm sure Mr. Roosevelt has
plans for such a national
emergency.

MR. FIELDER

That oldest son of yours is a
bad apple. And Jax would eat
a manure pie if Jugs told him
to. Sometimes I think Jugs is
runnin' things rather than me.

Mrs. Fielder unlatches the screen door and Mr. Fielder
enters, still rubbing.

MRS. FIELDER

Now, I'm lettin' you in. And
you can whup Jugs for all I
care. But Jax is nervous
enough without you walin' on
him. And don't you dare touch
my baby.

Jude cowers under the sink.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Three beds (bunk beds and a twin) crowd a messy boys' room.
The walls are adorned with homemade pennants. Jax paces
while Jugs sits calmly on the bottom bunk.

JUGS

Jude has crossed me for the
last time.

JAX

Maybe you can come back and
haunt him after Paw kills us.

JUGS

Come on Jax. It's just a lickin'.

JAX

Just a lickin' to you. It don't hurt you. It kills me.

JUGS

It hurts me too. You just got to learn how to take it like a man.

JAX

A meteorite. How stupid I am?

JUGS

Look. Just tighten your butt muscles and your stomach muscles and growl like this.

Jugs demonstrates, bending over the bottom bunk. He tightens up and growls.

JAX

And it don't hurt?

JUGS

It hurts but the pain never reaches your brain.

JAX

It must rattle around in your empty head.

JUGS

I swear. When is the last time you seen me crying?

The boys freeze at the sound of Mr. Fielder's approaching foot steps on the hardwood floor. The bedroom door opens and Mr. Fielder fills the doorway, clutching his belt.

MR. FIELDER

You boys shoulda learned at Sunday school it was a sling shot what killed Goliath. And he was a damn sight bigger and stronger than your Paw.

Jugs and Jax sit on the bottom bunk. Jax rocks nervously.

JUGS

I'm sorry Paw. I was trying to hit Jude.

MR. FIELDER

You boys ever think what happens if I get hurt and we have to close the Furniture Emporium? I sure couldn't count on you boys for nothing unless it involved knockin' a baseball through a window or shavin' a pet or blowing up melons. Dang, look a here ...

Mr. Fielder turns and pulls down one side of his dress pants to reveal a huge bruise already forming on his buttocks.

MR. FIELDER

Look what you boys did to your old daddy.

Jax's eyes widen. Jugs stifles a laugh. Mr. Fielder turns around to face the boys.

MR. FIELDER

You boys know the drill. Shuck them drawers.

The boys slowly stand, turn and pull down their pants and bend over the bed, side by side. As Mr. Fielder gets in a position to spank the boys with his belt, Jugs tightens and growls. Jax attempts to imitate Jugs. However, unexpectedly, the first few notes of "Dixie" play through what sounds like a pinched balloon neck. Jax pops up surprised. Jugs looks at Jax and then at Jax's buttocks.

JAX

Paw, it's whistling Dixie!
Call Mr. Ripley!

Mr. Fielder looks down at Jax's buttocks in disbelief.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Jude cowers under the kitchen sink peering from between Mrs. Fielder's stout legs as she washes dishes. They listen to

MR. FIELDER
 (o.s. screaming
 from the boys'
 bedroom)
 You'll wish you were in the
 land of cotton. Look away.
 (SWAT) Look away your damn
 self ...

MRS. FIELDER
 (to Jude, through
 Mr. Fielder's
 o.s. screaming)
 You're a good boy Jude.
 You'll be your old Maw's
 comfort in her dotage.

EXT. SMACKOVER TOWN WATER TOWER - LATER THAT DAY.

Smackover is a poor town, with dirt roads and unpainted buildings. Under the rusting Smackover water tower lies a stack of 30-inch steel pipe. Jugs and Jax meander towards the pipe stack, wearing their baseball gloves. Jude follows 20 steps behind, obviously excluded. Following Jude is a mutt.

JAX
 So help me if you tell Dixie,
 I'll kill you in your sleep.

JUGS
 I think any gal would take it
 as a compliment if her beau
 was to play ...

JAX
 I ain't her beau. She lives
 next door to you same as me.

JUGS
 Jackson. If I started
 whistling "Oh Marie" out of my
 butt, I wouldn't blame you for
 thinking I was sweet on a girl
 named Marie.

Jax motions for Jugs to go to the other side of the pipe stack.

JAX

To me it sounded more like
(singing) "Hold That Tiger."

Both boys laugh. They hear Jude laugh and turn angrily toward him.

JUGS

Go home Jude!

Jax raises the baseball threateningly.

JAX

Get out of here before I bean
you.

JUGS

Damn Yankee traitor.

Jude turns and walks away. He kicks at the dog which barely avoids his wrath.

EXT. PIPE STACK - MINUTES LATER.

Jugs and Jax stand on opposite ends of a stack of 20-foot long, 30-inch diameter pipe. Jugs throws a ball through a pipe. The ball bangs on the inside of a pipe and Jax catches it as it exits the other side. Jax then returns the ball through the pipe. They play catch, back and forth. As they play

JUGS

When we play for the Cardinals
or the Browns, you think
everyone is gonna drive up to
St. Louis to see us?

JAX

I ain't playin' for the
Browns. I wouldn't get caught
dead wearing a uniform with a
brownie on it.

JUGS

You ever notice that brownie
looks just like Newt Rogers'
little brother.

JAX

Which one? The retarded one
or the other one?

JUGS

I thought they both was
retarded.

JAX

No, the one that set the
collie on fire ain't retarded.
He's just awful fond of
flames. You're thinkin' of
Hootie. I ain't playin' for a
team that wears a likeness of
Hootie Rogers on its shirt.

JUGS

For a ticket out of Smackover
I'd wear a picture of Paw's
blue butt on my cap.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE, FRONT VIEW - NIGHT.

Crickets chirp loudly competing with hillbilly music wafting
from the open windows. The house is one story, wood-frame.
A naked bulb illuminates the front steps and door.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' ROOM - NIGHT.

The three brothers lie in their beds in the dark bedroom.
The sound of crickets is heard through the open window.
They talk softly.

JUGS

Did you see that kid who came
down from Little Rock for
Walter's mom's funeral?

JAX

That freckle-faced kid?

JUGS

Yeah. He said at the state
fair there's a pig with two
peckers.

Jude snorts trying to stifle a laugh.

JUGS
I ain't talkin' to you snitch.
Squealer.

JUDE
I ain't a squealer.

JUGS
You a squealer and a mama's
boy.

JUDE
I ain't neither.

JUGS
Maw's boy. Maw's got your
whole life set. You're gonna
work in the Furniture Emporium
till you die or go nuts, one.

JUDE
Am not.

JAX
I'm afraid so, Jude.

JUGS
You better like pullin' fat
women up out of lounge chairs
because that's what you're
gonna be doin' for
forevermore.

JUDE
I'm gonna be a hydrostatic
engineer.

Jugs and Jax laugh.

JAX
You'd sooner be a pig with two
peckers.

Jugs and Jax howl.

MR. FIELDER
(o.s. screaming)
Boys. Settle down and go to
sleep. Your Paw has a busy
day at the Emporium tomorrow.

JUGS
(whispering)
Squealer.

JUDE
I hate y'all.

INT. FIELDER KITCHEN - MORNING.

Mr. Fielder is sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper with his bruised bun hanging strategically off to one side of the chair. Mrs. Fielder cooks at the stove in a strikingly stylish dress, protected partially by an apron that should be wider. The three boys sit at the table waiting for their plates to be filled.

MR. FIELDER
Look a-here, will ya. Another kid drowned at the bar pit. So help me, if I catch you boys swimming down there, you'll be askin' me for a lickin' like you got the other day.

Jax and Jugs look guiltily at each other.

JUGS
We ain't gonna drown. Down to the bar pit they call me Tarzan.

MR. FIELDER
They'll be calling you a striped-assed baboon if I catch you.

MRS. FIELDER
Gaynell, you're workin' yourself up over nothin'. The older boys swim good and Jude can float like a balsa wood pigmy.

Jude smiles proudly. Mr. Fielder thinks a minute then attacks from a different angle.

MR. FIELDER

I hear it ain't so much the water what's causing the boys to drown. It's them crystal snakes.

The three boys look at each other.

JUGS

No such thing as a crystal snake, Paw.

MR. FIELDER

You can believe it or not. Crystal snakes was brought to Smackover by the gypsies. They're clear like a jellyfish and the coldest of all the cold-blooded animals.

Jugs is skeptical; Jax and Jude are wide-eyed.

MR. FIELDER

About this time of the summer they swarm in big mating balls. Bigger than your ...

Mr. Fielder looks at the backside of Mrs. Fielder but decides quickly on another comparison. He knocks on the table.

MR. FIELDER

... bigger than this table.

JUDE

(stuttering)

Are they p... p...

JAX

Poisonous?

MR. FIELDER

They say it's about four seconds of the most excruciating pain known to man. Then death by pain overload.

All three boys now have their mouths open.

MR. FIELDER

If it weren't for their cold
blood, a man wouldn't have no
warnin' at all.

JUDE

What you mean?

MR. FIELDER

The water gets real cool
around a crystal snake swarm.

JAX

I've felt such a cool ...

Jax's confession is arrested by Jugs' kick under the table. Mr. Fielder raises his newspaper. The boys look at one another as the bacon sizzles.

EXT. BAR PIT - LATER THAT DAY.

The bar pit is a pond with a mud bank, surrounded by trees, abandoned appliances and junk cars. Jax sits fully clothed on the bank. He squints as his face is lit by the reflection off the water. He anxiously watches Jugs tread water about 20 feet from the bank.

JUGS

Come on, Jax. Paw is just
jerking your ham. There ain't
no such a animal as a crystal
snake. It would've been in
Ripley's.

JAX

You ain't read every Ripley's.
I felt such a cool spot before
near the bottom right there
where you are.

JUGS

When are you gonna learn to
think for yourself. I ain't
gonna be around all your life
to tell you ... (stops
suddenly).

JAX

What?

JUGS
It's cool right here.

JAX
Please Jugs, don't.

Jugs looks surprised, then terrified. He screams and disappears under the surface. Jax screams and instinctively runs into the water but gets only shin deep before he has second thoughts and circles back to the bank. Jax screams over and over again for his brother. Eventually the surface of the pond smoothes.

Jax stands on the bank, fearing the worst.

After several anxious moments, Jugs resurfaces and calmly walks towards the shore laughing.

JAX
That ain't right. It ain't.

JUGS
Don't blame me. I told you there weren't no such a thing. Your Paw is who you ought to be mad at. Crystal snakes is bunk. Paw is full of bunk. He's gotta whip me. All he's gotta do is tell you a lie.

EXT. ROAD FROM THE POND - MINUTES LATER.

Jugs and Jax walk down the dirt road. Jax finally breaks the silence.

JAX
What do you mean you ain't gonna be around? I thought we was gonna play pro ball together.

JUGS
That's kids talk. And that's okay cuz we're kids. But look at the facts. I'm batting .257 in Smackover Junior League. I might not even make the high school team.

JAX
You're plenty good Jugs.

JUGS
I ain't sayin' I am or I
ain't. I am sayin' I gotta
get outa here. And I ain't
always gonna be around to hold
your hand.

JAX
Well what am I supposed to do
then?

JUGS
Just decide something and
stick to it. You can't go
through your life waiting for
someone to tell you it's time
to throw a lit cherry bomb.

Jax holds out his right hand. Both boys look at the missing joint of his index finger.

JAX
I don't know. I just froze.

JUGS
You weren't froze after it
went off. I never seen
someone run in so many
directions so fast.

Jugs jumps up and spins around, waiving his arms. Both boys laugh.

JUGS
Hey. What do you say we teach
the old man that it don't pay
to fool with the Fielder
brothers.

JAX
How about we just go throw at
the water tower.

INT. FIELDER GARAGE - LATER THAT DAY.

The Fielder garage is a graveyard for dead furniture parts.

Jugs and Jax have a cardboard box on the workbench. The boys have cut a six-inch hole in the top of the box and covered it with a piece of screen. Across the top of the box they have painted: "Danger! Crystal Snake!"

JAX

Jude, go get one of Maw's stockin's. And if you say anything to her, you ain't coming with us.

To emphasize the warning, Jugs flashes the knife he is using to cut the box.

JUGS

Yeah. And I'll cut off your head and shrink it like they done on Tarzan.

Jude scampers off on his mission.

INT. FIELDER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Jude flies through the kitchen past Mrs. Fielder who is reading a dime novel at the kitchen table. She starts to call to Jude when a knock at the back screen door redirects her attention.

At the screen door is Dixie, a neatly dressed twelve-year old beauty. As Mrs. Fielder motions for Dixie to come in, Dixie enters. One leg is weighted down by a polio brace and boot. She limps heavily.

DIXIE

Hey, Mrs. Fielder.

MRS. FIELDER

Hey, Dixie. You sure look nice today.

DIXIE

Thanks. You do too. Where are the boys?

MRS. FIELDER

How are Dr. and Mrs. Finch?

DIXIE
They're fine.

MRS. FIELDER
Are y'all having your house
painted again? I declare,
y'all have painted your house
five times and I still can't
get Mr. Fielder to hose the
locust hulls off the side of
my house.

DIXIE
Are the boys in the garage?

MRS. FIELDER
Your paw gonna be able to do
anything for your leg anytime
soon?

DIXIE
I'm seeing a medical doctor in
Shreveport.

MRS. FIELDER
Such a shame. Such a pretty
girl.

Jude comes back through the kitchen trying hard to conceal
his mother's stocking.

MRS. FIELDER
Jude, say hello to Dixie.
Don't she look ...

Dixie follows him out of the screen door.

MRS. FIELDER
(to herself)
Such a tragedy.

EXT. FIELDER GARAGE - CONTINUOUS.

Jude enters triumphantly followed by
Dixie.

DIXIE
You boys ain't dissecting
another poodle?

JAX
Hi, Dixie.

JUGS
(mocking)
Hi, Dixie.

DIXIE
No one said anything to you,
Jugs Fielder.

JUGS
We got us a crystal snake.

Dixie walks cautiously towards the box. Jude runs past her and hands Jugs an extremely large stocking. Jugs puts his arm in the stocking and pushes his hand down to the toe.

JUGS
You're a girl. Paint me the
meanest snake face you can
where my hand is here.

Dixie glares at Jugs then takes the brush and paints eyes on the stocking.

JUGS
(to Jax)
Cut another hole in the bottom
of the box right there.
(pointing)

On the stocking's toe Dixie paints a crude snake face with many teeth and angry eyebrows.

JUGS
Perfect.

JAX
Perfect.

EXT. FIELDER'S FURNITURE EMPORIUM - CONTINUOUS.

The Emporium is a small, cinder-block building with a large plate glass window in front where Mr. Fielder is currently exhibiting depression era furniture and some unusual looking pieces. A hand-painted sign in the window reads:

"Furniture. New, Used and Handmade." The sign above the

window, "Fielder Furniture Emporium" is too big for the modest store.

INT. FIELDER'S FURNITURE EMPORIUM.

Mr. Fielder is attempting to sell an ugly piece of furniture to an uglier middle-aged woman.

MR. FIELDER

These here knot holes give it what they call character. The French artisans are paid by the number of knot holes they can work into a piece. That's what they pay the big francs for in Paris.

LADY CUSTOMER

Looks like our old outhouse door.

MR. FIELDER

I could customize it with an electric lamp attachment.

LADY CUSTOMER

(sarcastically)

Oh. An outhouse door that lights up.

Jude and Dixie enter the furniture store smiling followed by Jugs and Jax carrying the box.

JUGS

Paw, you was right! We caught us a crystal snake.

LADY CUSTOMER

(backing away)

Oh my Lord!

MR. FIELDER

What do you mean a crystal snake?

JAX

It's in the box here. Look.

MR. FIELDER
What's in there? You ain't
pullin' your old daddy's leg;
him with a customer just about
to buy a shif-a-robe.

Jax looks in the screened hole.

JAX
Look!

DIXIE
Mind it's got a temper Mr.
Fielder.

Obviously confused, Mr. Fielder slowly approaches the box. He pauses and smiles at the kids hoping they will betray themselves. They are deadpan. He pauses to read.

MR. FIELDER
(reading)
Danger. Crystal snake.

Mr. Fielder cautiously bends to get closer to the screened hole. When he gets six inches away from the box his eyes widen with amazement.

MR. FIELDER
I'll be a ...

Jugs, whose stocking-clad arm is inside the box, punches it through the screened hole from the inside and strikes Mr. Fielder's nose. Startled, Mr. Fielder falls back cursing.

MR. FIELDER
(screaming)
Damn it to hell!

The kids run out of the store laughing. As he runs, Jugs slings the box off of his stocking-clad arm.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE AND DIXIE'S HOUSE - LATER.

Dixie's house sits on the same side of the street, a few yards away from the Fielder house. A gravel driveway separates them. Dixie's house is larger and much better maintained. The contrast is striking. A painter works on Dixie's house.

Dixie and her mother watch from their front porch as Mr. Fielder storms up his front walk. As he gets to his front steps he fumbles with his belt buckle trying to loosen his belt. As he takes off his belt he opens the front door and yells

MR. FIELDER

Where are they? Them two
snake charmers? I've got a
leather mongoose for 'em.

We continue to pan across the exterior of the Fielder house following the progress of Mr. Fielder as he searches for his sons. Almost simultaneously we hear Mr. Fielder shout, the boys scream and then the sound of slapping leather. Suddenly, a window flies open and two baseball gloves fly out. As Jax and Jugs bail out of the window, rubbing themselves where they have been hit, Mr. Fielder yells

MR. FIELDER

You go out of that window you
better keep goin'.

As Jax and Jugs run away, we hear Mr. Fielder direct his attention to Jude exclusively, who was unable to escape. Mr. Fielder rails as Jude squeals. The leather continues to pop.

Dixie looks to her mother for permission then jumps off her front porch to follow the boys.

MS. FINCH

(calling after
Dixie)

Mind you don't get overheated.

Mrs. Finch shakes her head.

EXT. SMACKOVER WATER TOWER PIPE STACK - DUSK (LATER THAT DAY).

Jax and Jugs throw the ball lazily through the pipes to each other as Dixie watches. As the ball passes through a pipe, it makes two or three distinct bongs and a rolling sound before it reappears. Dixie sits on the pipe, between the two brothers, and listens to Jugs' yarn.

JUGS

... and I said "Here, you're old enough to participate in your country's birthday celebration." And I see Jax just sitting there holding the dang thing and watchin' the fuse burn down. (to Jax) Jesus, Jax, what were you thinking?

The ball is caught by Jax. Jax looks down at his shortened finger holding the baseball. He is embarrassed by the memory of his accident and angry. He bends over and looks through a lower pipe. Jugs' crotch is framed perfectly. He winds up and, almost underhand, throws the ball as hard as he can through the lower pipe.

JUGS

Ka-boom! (imitating Jax)
Maaaw!

Jugs howls at his own comedy routine. Noticeably, the ball Jax has thrown does not bang as it travels through the pipe but travels straight through, seemingly defying gravity. The ball hits Jugs in the crotch, dropping him. Jax, surprised at the pitch he's just discovered, looks down with amazement at his hand.

BOY'S VOICE

(o.s.)
Gooseball. Gooseball.

MORE VOICES

(o.s.)
Gooseball. Gooseball!

Jax's hand metamorphoses from that of a 12-year old in the pipe yard to that of a 17-year old on the mound.

EXT. INFIELD (SMACKOVER HIGH SCHOOL) - DAY (SUMMER, 1939).

Jax looks at his hand. He is 17 now. We pull back to see him on the mound of a high school baseball game. Jugs (18), the Smackover High catcher, squats behind the plate and gives Jax the signal for a gooseball -- an index finger curled up towards his own buttocks. Jax takes his windup and throws underhand as he did in the pipe yard when the pitch was discovered. The batter watches as the ball seems to rise as it reaches him. Jugs catches a perfect strike.

The umpire calls the batter out. The batter gives Jax a military salute as he smiles, turns and walks back to the visitor's dugout. The Smackover fans chant

FANS
(continuing)
Gooseball! Gooseball!

In the bleachers Dixie (17) sits with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fielder and Jude (15). Dixie is as pretty as ever but still wears the heavy leg brace.

DIXIE
Keep mixing 'em up Jugs. Keep
the ball low Jax.

Jax, in a demonstration of leadership not seen off the field, repositions his defense.

JAX
(to shortstop)
Play up on the grass.
(to third baseman)
This guy bunted last time.
Play up.

Jax throws. The batter bunts. Jax fields the bunt cleanly and throws the batter out. The crowd cheers. Back in the stands

MRS. FIELDER
(to Dixie, but
loud enough for
everyone in the
stands to hear)
Dixie, you need to see the
souvenir lamp Jude designed.
It's currently in the window
at the Furniture Emporium.
You need to go by and bring
your folks.

MR. FIELDER
How am I gonna sell a lamp
with a shade that says
"Smacko"?

JUDE
I ran out of room. O.K.?

MR. FIELDER

You want to design furniture
you gotta think ahead.

JUDE

(under his breath)
I don't want to design
furniture. I want to be a
hydraulic engineer.

MR. FIELDER

(to Mrs. Finch)
Jude will make some girl a
fine husband.

MRS. FINCH

(politely)
I'm sure he will.

MRS. FIELDER

Wouldn't it be something if
Jude and Dixie got married?
Her you-know-what has never
bothered Jude. He don't
remember her any other way.

MRS. FINCH

(to Dr. Finch)
Are they changing catchers?

MRS. FIELDER

Wouldn't it be interesting to
merge your chiropractic
practice with our furniture
empire?

MR. FIELDER

(to Dr. Finch)
Doc, my boys tell me there's a
pig at the state fair with a
curly pecker growin' out of
his forehead. Is that
medically possible?

DIXIE

Mom. Here's the new boy who
moved here from El Dorado.
He's been so nice to me. He
catches same as Jugs.

MRS. FINCH

Oh, he's a nice looking young man, too.

MRS. FIELDER

(whispering to Mrs. Finch)

Bless her heart. I guess all girls are boy crazy no matter what.

EXT. HOME PLATE - CONTINUOUS

The game stops momentarily as another Smackover catcher, Bubba Broadax, comes in to replace Jugs. Bubba is a very handsome, thick-necked young man who towers over Jugs. Jugs reluctantly hands Bubba his catcher's mask and glove. They exchange angry looks.

UMPIRE

(to scorer)

Bubba Broadax now catching for Fielder.

EXT. PITCHER'S MOUND - CONTINUOUS.

Bubba comes out to the mound to check signals with Jax.

BUBBA

One, two, three?

JAX

One, two, three, four. Three is a gooseball, four is a change up. The gooseball is tailin' today.

BUBBA

You just throw it and let me worry about catchin' it.

Bubba heads back to home plate to take his position. Jax looks down at his hand. It has started to tremble slightly. He takes the signal from Bubba, winds up and throws. The batter clobbers the ball.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DUSK (LATER THAT DAY).

Jax, Jugs and Dixie walk slowly back from the game. Jax and Jugs are still in uniform. Dixie walks between the brothers, arm in arm with both.

JAX

He can hit okay but he can't stop a ball in the dirt. Not like you.

DIXIE

Every team has at least two catchers. The major league teams have three or four.

JUGS

We've never had two catchers since I've been catching. We don't need another catcher now.

DIXIE

Jax Fielder, when you're on the mound you are a different person altogether.

JAX

Somebody said Paul Ivey's little sister swallowed her tongue.

DIXIE

That's just horrible. Can she still talk?

JUGS

Bubba Broadax ain't gonna beat me out of my position. You got another season. This is all I've got.

JAX

He ain't gonna beat you out.

JUGS

You bet he ain't. I'm gonna take him down a peg. You don't fool with a Fielder.

DIXIE

If you're gonna fight Bubba,
you better pack a big lunch.

JAX

You better pack lunch and
supper.

JUGS

Why don't you just shut your
mouth before I shut it for
you.

DIXIE

Jugs Fielder, you just watch
your own mouth.

JUGS

Dixie Finch, you're just as
stupid as me. You ain't goin'
nowhere. I ain't goin'
nowhere. Only Jax is ever
gonna leave this god forsaken
boil on the butt of the
confederacy. Next year he'll
be playing pro ball across the
country and we'll be here in
Smackover countin' cricket
chirps to tell the
temperature.

JAX

I ain't goin' without y'all.

JUGS

Yes you are. You got
something special. Nothin'
special about me and Dix.
Smackover is all we deserve.
We would just slow you down.

DIXIE

(to herself)

They say in the city, folks
don't stare.

Dixie drops the boys' arms and the three teenagers continue
down the road. Dixie's leg brace clunks loudly with every
step.

EXT. FIELDER DRIVEWAY - NEXT DAY.

Dixie is drawn by the loud, metallic banging emanating from under the dusty Packard in the Fielder driveway. As she approaches the noise, she sees Jugs' legs sticking out from under the front of the car. Over the banging

DIXIE

Jugs Fielder, I'm gonna buy
you a monkey wrench for
graduation.

The banging stops.

DIXIE

You know they make other tools
besides a hammer.

JUGS

I want to master the fine art
of the ball-peen before I try
another tool.

More banging.

DIXIE

What you said yesterday about
us—it's true isn't it?

JUGS

Usually what I say is only
accidentally true. So you
better remind me what it was I
said.

DIXIE

You said you and I aren't
getting out of here.

Dixie leans her back against the Packard's grill and surveys the suffocating town.

JUGS

That don't have to be a death sentence. Take, for example, the fire ant that just bit me. He probably ain't never been no further than your front yard, but you know he had fun crawlin' up my collar and biting me on the neck.

DIXIE

Biting you on the neck isn't my idea of a good time.

JUGS

He might have had a very enjoyable life. He likely had a family. He likely had little ant kids. Or else he did before he bit Thor, god of the hammer.

Jugs crawls out from under the car. Dixie grabs her skirt and walks away so Jugs isn't tempted to look up her dress.

JUGS

Dix, I'm tellin' you, there's a lot of fun in Smackover that ain't been had yet.

After a long pause Dixie smiles.

DIXIE

You got another hammer there Thor?

EXT. SMACKOVER WATER TOWER - AFTERNOON (DAYS LATER).

The entire Smackover baseball team has reassembled after practice under the water tower to witness a dual of sorts.

JUGS

(addressing his teammates)

Most of y'all seen the time I caught a baseball off this very water tower. Bubba Broadax says he can do anything I can do only more so and more better.

BUBBA
Quit yapping and start
climbing dickweed.

Jugs begins climbing the water tower ladder. He is holding a baseball. To make climbing easier he puts the baseball down the front of his shirt. On the ground, the circle of teammates widens, giving Bubba room to maneuver below the tower.

As Jugs reaches the catwalk at the top of the water tower he grabs a paper bag that's been secreted there on the walkway. Jugs kneels for a moment on the catwalk as he switches the contents of the bag for the baseball that was down his shirt. Jugs then leans over the rail and yells

JUGS
One chance Bubba. Them's the
rules.

Jugs rears back and throws a white orb almost straight up. It climbs another 50 feet so that, from the ground, it almost disappears before it starts descending. We become the ball for the last few feet of its ascent, then we begin to fall, zeroing in on Bubba.

BUBBA
I got it! I got it! I ...

When the ball gets about 30 feet above Bubba he stops in mid-sentence and his jaw drops in puzzled fear. He adjusts his mitt above his head to catch the ball. The ball hits in his mitt but its force drives the mitt into his head and his head appears to explode. Bubba falls flat on his back. Red matter splatters on his teammates and they recoil in disgust and horror. One player runs away. Bubba lies on the ground, his skull seemingly opened by the ball.

Jugs jumps from the bottom of the tower ladder, laughing so hard he can hardly walk. Their teammates, look from a laughing Jugs to an open-skull Bubba, trying to make sense of what has just happened.

We move closer to Bubba and focus on a piece of melon rind still in his mitt. The melon rind has been painted white with crude red laces in order to resemble a baseball.

Jax's short-fingered hand picks up a piece of the rind as their teammates erupt in laughter. Bubba sits up shaking

his head. Through the growing laughter, Bubba looks ominously at the Fielder brothers and points at them with two fingers. Jugs laughs at the threat but the look in Bubba's eyes sobers Jax.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MINUTES LATER.

Jugs and Jax walk back home, the water tower in the background.

JUGS

That sure looked like another pro scout watchin' you at practice today.

JAX

Yeah. Tie, clipboard, and a big red nose that you don't get from drinkin' buttermilk.

JUGS

Don't joke. That's your ticket outa here.

JAX

Maybe.

JUGS

I think I might have figured out my way out up there on the water tower just now.

JAX

You gonna jump off.

JUGS

No, wiseacre. Answer me this: what is it that I enjoy most?

JAX

Devilin' Jude.

JUGS

No, I hafta do that. I'm telling you, Jude is evil. Mark my words. If I didn't keep him straight he'd slit our throats in the night.

JAX

Okay. Fireworks.

JUGS

Close. Think about when it was I been the happiest.

JAX

That's generally a little while before we both get whippin's.

JUGS

What does one, dropping the dead Armadillo down Mrs. Lewis' chimney; two, shooting Paw in the butt with a slingshot; and three, melonizing Bubba today, what do these three occasions have in common?

JAX

Only a true simpleton like yourself would have ...

JUGS

No. All involve raining down death and destruction on others from above. And who does that for a job?

JAX

God?

JUGS

No. Well, yeah, but His job ain't open. It's a bomber pilot. I'm gonna be a bomber pilot.

JAX

You talkin' about doin' this on your own here locally or you talkin' about joining some country's army.

JUGS

I already talked to the army recruiter in Shreveport. All I need is my diploma and I'm in.

JAX

Paw ain't gonna like it. I think he's countin' on you workin' at the Emporium.

JUGS

Jax, you know me. If I had to sell dinette sets six days a week, I'd do a swan dive into the pipe pile. Anyway, Jude is Paw's furniture flunky. You on the other hand, are the baseball prospect. I'm the bad apple.

JAX

What about Maw? What's she gonna say.

P.O.V. - TOP OF WATER TOWER

JUGS

I got a plan to package this thing so Maw gets her dream come true too.

JAX

Which dream is that?

JUGS

Wait two weeks 'til I get my diploma.

JAX

A bomber pilot.

JUGS

Bomb's away.

EXT. FIELDER'S HOUSE AND DIXIE'S HOUSE, NIGHT (WEEKS LATER).

A hard summer rain falls.

INT. FIELDER BROTHERS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Jax is lying on his bed reading the comics listening to a summer storm rage outside. Jugs' diploma from Smackover High School Class of '39 has recently been tacked to the wall. The door swings open behind Jax and he rolls over to see Dixie and Jugs enter the room laughing. They are giddy and cling to each other.

DIXIE

Shhh!

JUGS

(low voice)

Come on Jackson, let's go for a ride.

JAX

I'm reading and it's raining.

JUGS

Your comic book can wait. We gotta talk. Come on.

INT. FIELDER FAMILY PACKARD - MINUTES LATER.

Jax closes the passenger door behind him. Jugs is in the driver's seat. Dixie is between them. They drive for a minute in pregnant silence, dripping rainwater. Finally Dixie speaks.

DIXIE

Tell him or I will.

JAX

What? You signed a pro contract.

JUGS

I told you a hundred times I ain't good enough to play pro ball. Knucklehead.

Another pregnant pause.

DIXIE

Jax. Me and your brother ...

JUGS

(interrupting)

I'll do it. I joined the Army
Air Corps. I leave in two
weeks.

JAX

What about the summer league?
Who's gonna catch me?

JUGS

Bubba's better than me.
You'll do fine. I'm gonna go
fly bombers.

JAX

I ain't as good when you don't
catch me.

DIXIE

Let me tell him please Isaac.

JAX

Isaac?

JUGS

Me and Dixie got married in
Mississippi last night.
There. I'm sorry. We're
sorry. But we wanted you to
be the first to know.

We see the trio through the windshield as the wipers
struggle to keep up with the rain. Jax is gutted by the
news.

DIXIE

We'll be right next door in my
folks' spare room.

JUGS

I figure Maw's gonna be
thrilled because she gets the
merger she always wanted.
Dixie wasn't ever gonna marry
Jude anyway. She feels about
him like I do.

DIXIE

I wouldn't go that far.

Jugs is puzzled by Jax's silence.

JUGS

We'll be right next door.

The Packard travels down the country road in the rain. After an uncomfortably long silence, another car passes in the opposite direction. Jugs' expression changes to surprise as he notices something ahead in the road. He brakes and swerves violently. Dixie and Jax are thrown together. Jugs jumps from the car as Dixie and Jax awkwardly separate themselves and strain to see what Jugs is doing ahead of the car.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS.

Jugs runs wildly in the headlights, zigzagging, trying to catch something scurrying on the road. The rain has soaked him. Finally he takes off his shirt and, using it as a net, pounces on his prey.

INT. FIELDER PACKARD - CONTINUOUS.

Dixie and Jax sit silently, watching Jugs with puzzled looks on their faces. Finally,

DIXIE

Well, it looks like he got
whatever it was he was after.

JAX

He always does.

Jugs, soaked, excitedly reenters the car and puts his shirt in Dixie's lap. Dixie looks down, screams and does a back dive into the back seat, in the process kicking Jax in the nose. Jax grabs his nose. Dixie notices she has hurt Jax. His nose is now bleeding. She leans up across the seat and grabs his head and kisses his cheek. All three look down into the seat Dixie vacated to see a giant frog sitting on the seat, draped partially by Jugs' wet shirt.

JUGS

(o.s.)

I never seen a frog chase a
car before.

INT. FIELDER PACKARD - MINUTES LATER.

Jugs is driving. Jax and Jugs are in the front seat with the frog. Dixie is in the middle of the back seat.

DIXIE

Jugs Fielder, you are not eating that poor animal!

JUGS

It ain't an animal. It's a reptile.

JAX

(still holding his nose in a nasal voice)
Mr. Science.

DIXIE

Let him go right this minute!

JAX

How you know it's a him?

JUGS

Turn him over, I'll show you.

DIXIE

You're no gentleman, sir. Let him out or let me out.

JUGS

Hold on, I gotta plan.

JAX AND DIXIE

Oh no!

EXT. BAR PIT - NIGHT.

Jugs, Dixie and Jax, still in the Packard, survey a row of parked cars with their occupants too low to be seen. It is misting.

DIXIE

Jugs, what are you gonna do?

JUGS

Just doing what you told me to do darling. Frogs need plenty of water.

Jugs bundles the frog back up in his shirt and exits the car, headed stealthily toward the lake and the parked cars. Dixie and Jax watch Jugs walk quickly between two parked cars. Jugs sneaks a peak in the windows of the parked cars as he goes by. As he reaches the bank, he bends down, pretending to let the frog go. Dixie starts to explain to Jax.

DIXIE

Jax, I've been slowing people
down all my ...

Dixie suddenly stops and both she and Jax look puzzled when Jugs starts running back towards them. As Jugs passes between the parked cars, he throws the frog into one of the windows and begins to sprint back towards the Packard.

INT. FIELDER PACKARD - CONTINUOUS.

Jugs opens the door and reenters the Fielder car. From the parked car into which Jugs threw the frog there is a woman's scream followed by a man's bellow. Jugs quickly puts the car in gear and peels out.

As the Fielder vehicle speeds past the parked cars, a door to the parked car opens and a woman, still screaming, falls out onto the ground.

Jax, Dixie and Jugs laugh hysterically. Dixie climbs back into the front seat between the two brothers.

The Packard returns down the same country road. The rain has stopped.

EXT. DIXIE'S FRONT PORCH - DAY (WINTER).

Mrs. Fielder, quite animated, leads a reluctant Finch family (Dr., Mrs. and Dixie) out of their front door, across their front porch, down their front steps and across the Finch and Fielder front yards. The Finches are dressed in coats. Mrs. Fielder has on a light dress but is oblivious to the cold. Mrs. Fielder hurries as much as her size will allow and struggling for breath says

MRS. FIELDER

... Especially you Doctor, being a man of medicine and all. You'll recognize the therapeutic potential. Someone comes to your chiropractic clinic with lumbago or a pinched nerve or something. You do your usual manipulation and then write out a prescription for one Electric Posture-Practic. They take your prescription to the Fielder Furniture Emporium ...

Having now entered the Fielder yard, which contrasts sharply with the well-manicured Finch lawn, Mrs. Fielder points to and avoids a car battery camouflaged by tall, dead grass.

MRS. FIELDER

... Mind that battery. If I stump my toe on one more car part I'm gonna, well ... never mind. I almost forgot Dixie was with us. Your patient brings us the prescription and we sell them the chair, and we pay you for the referral. It's a win-win situation. Win-win-win if you count the patient. The perfect merger of our two empires.

Mrs. Fielder labors up the Fielder front steps, one at a time, pauses to catch her breath, and turns to the reluctant Finches.

MRS. FIELDER

Ladies and gentlemen, the invention that will make it fun to have a bum back, sold only at the Fielder Furniture Emporium by its inventor, Mr. Gaynell Fielder, behold the Fielder Posture-Practic. Ta-dah!

With great fanfare Mrs. Fielder throws open the front door. The door hits something inside the house, stopping it in mid swing. Mrs. Fielder sticks her head in.

MRS. FIELDER
Get out of the way, Jude. Dr.
Finch is here.

The Finch family slowly squeezes past her into the Fielder living room.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

In the center of the room is an electric chair of sorts, which most closely resembles a barber chair with an electric motor mounted to its base. Chrome, flowered upholstery and several fan belts dominate the contraption. Jude grabs a rag and polishes the chrome.

MRS. FIELDER
Imagine Doctor, you've done
all you can in the office to
relieve your patient's
suffering. But you feel good
knowing that when he gets home
he is gonna head straight for
his Posture-Practic.

Mrs. Fielder walks up to the chair and throws a toggle switch on the electric motor. The fan belts turn and the chair begins to vibrate, then shake.

MRS. FIELDER
He turns it on then reclines
for an evening of heavenly
electric massage, all in the
comfort of his own home.

Mrs. Fielder eases into the chair. Her body begins to shimmy then, as her full weight is brought to bear, the chair slows. The fan belts squeal as they begin to slip and the electric motor strains against her mass.

MRS. FIELDER
Dixie, Jude helped his Paw
with the wiring. The geniuses
of Smackover.

Mrs. Fielder closes her eyes to better savor the ride. The living room lights dim as the chair attempts to draw extra current.

MRS. FIELDER
 Child, if they had these
 chairs when I was your age, I
 don't know if I would have got
 married. What bout it, Doc?
 How about a ...

A spark shoots from the electrical outlet as the chair stops. The current continues through the chair causing Mrs. Fielder's body to stiffen and her hands to lock around the chair's chrome arms. She convulses and stutters.

MRS. FIELDER
 Ju!... Ju!... Ju!...

Jude reaches for the chair's electrical plug and, as he bends over and grabs it, he also receives a healthy shock which locks his hand on the plug. He convulses with his mother for several seconds before Doctor Finch, calmly and with an air of disgust, walks over to Jude and kicks him in the butt, sending him sprawling but, at the same time, causing Jude to unplug the chair. The lights brighten and Mrs. Fielder slowly loosens her grip. Smoke rises from the chair.

EXT. FIELDER FRONT STEPS - MINUTES LATER.

Dr., Mrs. Finch and Dixie exit the Fielder front door. As Mrs. Finch pulls the door behind her, she calls to Mrs. Fielder.

MRS. FINCH
 Get some butter on those
 burns. It'll take the sting
 right out.

As Mrs. Finch takes Dr. Finch's arm to descend the front steps,

MRS. FINCH
 For a man of medicine I think
 you enjoyed kicking that young
 man a little too much.

Dr. Finch tightens his lips but only his eyes smile.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE AND DIXIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT (SUMMER, 1940).

The crickets chirp. The lights at the Fielder house dim. A radio show fades in and out. Mrs. Fielder yells for all the neighborhood to hear

MRS. FIELDER
 Gaynell, I'm trying to listen
 to my show. Quit messin' with
 that chair.

INT. FIELDER BROTHERS' ROOM - MINUTES LATER.

Jax sits at his desk, facing the wall. On the wall in front of Jax, next to Jug's high school diploma, is a photograph of Jugs in military uniform. It is dated 1940. There are now only two beds in the room. There is a soft knock at the door. Jax turns to see Dixie enter.

DIXIE
 Hello, Mr. Fielder.

JAX
 Hello, Mrs. Fielder. What's
 the word from Airman Fielder?

DIXIE
 He thinks he'll be here in
 time for your game.

JAX
 I got something to tell him.

DIXIE
 That makes two of us.

DIXIE AND JAX
 (simultaneously)
 You first.

JAX
 Here.

Jax holds out a contract. Dixie walks across the room, takes it and starts reading. She starts to tear up.

DIXIE
 I thought you said you'd as
 soon die as wear a jersey with
 a brownie on the sleeve.

JAX

And I remember your saying
you'd kiss a razorback hog
before you'd kiss a Fielder
boy.

DIXIE

I wish I had kept that pledge.
As it stands, I'm gonna have a
little Fielder sometime about
next February if things go
right.

JAX

You ain't kiddin! Is that why
Jugs is comin' in?

DIXIE

He doesn't know yet. He's
coming to watch his favorite
brother pitch his last high
school baseball game.

JAX

How many months y'all been
married anyway.

DIXIE

Fourteen months on the twenty-
second. And I don't like the
tone of your question.

JAX

I don't expect Jugs knows how
to raise a baby. Not that I
do, mind you.

DIXIE

He did okay raising you.

JAX

He left before he was
finished.

DIXIE

You look finished to me. When
do the Browns want you?

JAX

Not 'til next March.

Dixie looks down at her stomach.

DIXIE

It's gonna be a long winter.

EXT. INFIELD (SMACKOVER HIGH SCHOOL) - NIGHT (DAYS LATER).

A large crowd surrounds a dimly lit diamond.

INT. HOME DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS.

The Smackover coach walks in front of the dugout full of Smackover High School baseball players, including Jax and Bubba Broadax. He is fifty and wears coveralls with a Humble Oil patch. Jugs, in his Army Air Corp uniform waits for his introduction.

SMACKOVER COACH

Boys, we got somewhat of a special guest here tonight. You all remember last summer he was catching flies with you peckerwoods. This summer he's learning to fly with the Army Air Corps. They let you fly a bomber yet Jugs?

JUGS

Not yet Coach.

SMACKOVER COACH

Let me know if you ever fly around here. I'm gonna go hide out in the swamp.

Team laughs.

SMACKOVER COACH

Jugs has asked to address the team. Being that you're lousy hitting has mathematically eliminated you from the playoffs, and given the fact that with them pitchin' Odell against you tonight, I figure nothing Jugs might say can hurt our chances. Go ahead Jugs. Tell us how to hit Odell. We're all ears.

JUGS

Well, boys. I myself batted against Odell dozens of times. My advice is: first, don't look him in the eye. It gets him mad. Don't wave your bat around. That gets him mad. Last year I made the mistake of spitting on the plate between pitches and he reared back and hit me right below my fig newtons. I'm damn lucky I'm still shaving. That's all I have to say. Good luck.

SMACKOVER COACH

(sarcastically)

Thanks for your words of wisdom Coach Fielder. Get out there boys. Even the best pitcher can't beat you if his team don't score.

On his way out of the dugout Bubba makes a point of brushing into Jugs. Bubba spits.

BUBBA

I got a melon with your name on it.

JUGS

Bubba I always thought you the kind of fella who would name his fruit.

EXT. SMACKOVER SCOREBOARD - AN HOUR LATER.

The scoreboard shows Smackover High losing 7 to 0. Odell, the opposing pitcher, looks like a thirty-year old major leaguer stuffed into a high school uniform.

INT. SMACKOVER HIGH DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS.

The Smackover High bench is solemn except for Jugs who annoys one of the younger players.

JUGS

Hey Lee, you own any property?

LEE

No.

Hitting the young man in the crotch with a bat handle, Jugs shouts the punch line.

JUGS

Well here's two acres.

The coach comes down the bench to intervene.

SMACKOVER COACH

Jugs, your grab assin' is distracting my players. Go coach first base why don't you. That way you can bother the other team.

Jugs heads to the first base coaching box.

ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Broadax, catcher, now batting.

As Odell waits angrily, Jugs begins giving Bubba ridiculous hand signals. Bubba bristles. Bubba takes one pitch then, on the second pitch, hits a line drive into center field. The centerfielder has to run for the ball but catches it in the air, putting Bubba out. Jugs, in spite of the fact that Bubba is out, screams for Bubba to run to first base.

JUGS

(screaming)

Make your turn! Make your turn!

Bubba, not realizing he is out, makes his turn and starts digging for second base when Jax yells

JAX
(yelling)
Get back! Get back!

Bubba puts on the brakes and starts heading back towards first when Jax implores him

JAX
(yelling)
He dropped the ball! Go to
second. He dropped the ball!

Bubba again reverses direction and heads full speed towards second base. As he nears second

JAX
(o.s.)
Slide Bubba, slide!

Bubba slides into second. There is, of course, no play. Bubba was out before he was halfway to first base. The crowd roars with laughter. Bubba looks around and realizes that, again, he has been the butt of another of Jugs' practical jokes.

INT. DUGOUT - MINUTES LATER.

The inning is over and Smackover takes the field. The coach stops Jugs from reentering the dugout.

SMACKOVER COACH
Thank you, Sergeant Fielder.
That's all the services we'll
be needing from the Army Air
Corps tonight.

Jugs leaves now, playing to the crowd. Bubba enters the dugout to get his catcher's equipment, both embarrassed and angry. He punches an innocent Jax in the chest. Jax does not retaliate. Jugs does not see the punch that should have been directed at himself.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' ROOM - NEXT NIGHT.

Jax and Jude are in their beds reading when Jugs and Dixie walk in. Jugs is in uniform. Jax sits up.

JUGS

Hey, Jackson. Does Jude still pick his nose with his pencil?

JUDE

I hope your plane blows up.

JUGS

(to Jax)

I brung you something compliments of your U.S. Army.

Jugs throws a duffel bag on Jax's bed.

JAX

What is it?

JUGS

A official Army Air Corps life raft. You pull this cord here and it blows up. Inflates.

JAX

You sure you ain't gonna need it?

JUGS

You can paddle around the bar pit now with no fear of a crystal snake attack.

DIXIE

(to Jugs)

Now don't be giving away your parachute. You can float but you can't fly.

JUGS

(to Jax)

When you gotta report to spring training and get your uniform with a Hootie Rogers on the sleeve?

JUDE

Better than them lonely stripes on your sleeve.

DIXIE

(to Jax)

How we gonna stay in shape
'til spring training?

JUGS

Why don't you throw spears at
Jude.

MRS. FIELDER

(o.s.)

Boys! Stop devilin' your
little brother!

JUGS

(to Mrs. Fielder
in kitchen)

Brother? I thought you told
me he was abandoned by the
gypsies on account of his head
being shaped like a potato.

JUDE

Why do you even come home.

DIXIE

(to Jugs)

Stop now. You'll be leaving
in the morning. Be nice.

JAX

Why don't y'all stay here
tonight.

JUGS

Not tonight. Dixie's folks
got their extra room fixed up
real nice for us. Everybody's
excited about the baby.

DIXIE

We'll be right next door. You
boys come over for breakfast.
Good night Jude. Good night
Jax.

JUGS

(to Jax, seriously)

Take good care of my life
raft. Hear?

JAX
(surprised at
seriousness)
Sure, thanks.

EXT. BAR PIT - DAY (THREE MONTHS LATER, LATE FALL 1940).

The day is cool. The foliage has turned. Jax is dressed in long sleeves. Dixie is dressed in a maternity dress and a sweater. She is showing. Jax pulls the cord on the life raft. It inflates. Dixie and Jax look at the raft and then look at each other. The raft is a lot smaller than they anticipated.

DIXIE
Come on, we can both fit.

JAX
I ain't so sure.

DIXIE
If you make a crack about my
big butt Jax Fielder, I'll put
a pop knot on your head.

JAX
I seen bigger on Uncle
Woodley's farm.

Dixie slaps Jax playfully. They cast off, awkwardly facing each other in the crowded raft, feet and knees jammed together. Dixie's leg brace is difficult to ignore.

DIXIE
You gonna work in the
furniture store until spring
training?

JAX
Unless Paw fires me first.
Which is more likely every
day. Today I pulled a arm off
a new sofa.

DIXIE
Y'all sold any Posture-Practic
chairs yet?

JAX

No. Most penitentiaries have
a electric chair already.

DIXIE

I think it's a good idea.

JAX

Beats hangin' I guess. What
you gonna do 'til the baby
gets here?

DIXIE

I guess I'll keep helping
daddy at the chiropractor
clinic. With the war in
Europe goin' on, no telling
when Jugs will get out.

JAX

He'll get out soon. He'll
pull one of his pranks on some
general and the Air Corps will
be glad to get rid of him.
I'd be watching for a
parachute any day now.

DIXIE

(looking up)

It's hard not to know.

JAX

My whole life has been one
long not knowing. Believe me,
you get used to it.

DIXIE

At least you know baseball.

JAX

I ain't sure what I know
anymore.

Dixie shifts trying to get comfortable.

DIXIE

This here ain't working.

She takes off her sweater, turns around and leans back
against Jax. Jax smells deeply of her hair and looks down
the front of her dress. Dixie seems completely oblivious to

his interest. Jax is as nervous as he is guilty. He starts to hear his own heartbeat. Dixie speaks, temporarily relieving his anxiety.

DIXIE

Jugs says we should name the baby partly after you.

JAX

That ain't necessary. There are plenty of better names for a baby than mine. Being named after your father's favorite beer ain't necessarily something to be proud of.

DIXIE

Jackson makes a fine middle name. Ripley Jackson Fielder. We'd call him Little Rip. Or maybe Little Jax. We haven't decided. Jugs wants to eyeball him first.

JAX

Little Rip sounds like a winner.

DIXIE

If it's a girl, we would call her Riplé (rip-lay). It sounds Parisian, don't you think?

JAX

Very refined. Yes.
(with English accent)
Riplé, the butler looks hungry. Please slap him for me.

DIXIE

Riplé, your coach awaits.

After their laughter subsides, they float for some time, Dixie sleeping, Jax agonizing in his impure thoughts. Finally, Jax reaches critical mass. He pushes against Dixie and launches himself backwards out of the raft, his own version of an awkward back dive.

EXT. UNDER WATER - CONTINUOUS.

Jax floats like a drowned man under water with his eyes open, resolved to die before he lets his lustful thoughts resurface. The faint cheering of a stadium crowd gets louder.

EXT. NUEVO ROSATA, MEXICO (MINOR LEAGUE STADIUM) - DAY
(SPRING, 1941).

A boisterous crowd cheers.

INT. MEXICAN LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

CLOSE-UP -- BROWNIE PATCH ON JAX'S SLEEVE.

The brownie patch is one of many on the St. Louis Browns team inside a locker room in Mexico. The locker room is crowded and terribly inadequate. There is a chicken roost in one of the lockers. The noise from the Mexican capacity crowd is deafening. The Browns manager, Connie White, a grizzled veteran, attempts to rally his troops. He has seen it all twice and done it all once.

PLAYER NO. 1

They stole all the bats?

PLAYER NO. 2

They swat piñatas with them.

CONNIE WHITE

What are you guys worried about bats for? You might as well be waiving your grandmother's crooked cane up there the way you been batting this spring.

PLAYER NO. 3

The natives certainly appear restless.

CONNIE WHITE

You guys ought to be worried less about getting your throats slit by the crowd and more about getting your butts kicked by this Mexican team. These guys are professionals, same as you.

The team laughs.

CONNIE WHITE

A visit down to Triple A will wipe those tobacco-stained grins off your mugs. Let me remind you, this is our last exhibition game and I'll make the final roster cut tomorrow. We don't have room for everyone. Wicker will start today. Hughes and McDonnell will relieve. Let's get out there. And remember, we are guests in this God forsaken hell hole.

EXT. NEUVO ROSATA STADIUM - AN HOUR LATER (THIRD INNING).

The field is not even minor league quality. The grandstands were obviously designed by the same architect who designs bull fighting rings. Chicken wire separates a boisterous Mexican crowd from the players.

To make matters worse, the fix is in. A Browns batter is called out on a third strike even though the pitch is at least a foot high and two feet outside. The crowd cheers with approval. The Browns batter shrugs his shoulders. Connie White boils at the home-town umpiring. The score board shows the Browns losing in the third inning four to nothing.

When another Brown clearly beats out an infield base hit but is called out by the Mexican umpire, Connie White can't stand it any more. He charges out to home plate and pleads his case. The home plate umpire calls in the other umpires and the Mexican team's manager. An animated discussion ensues.

Sensing American protest, the crowd gets even more boisterous. A beer bottle is thrown into the manager/umpire conference as it disburses. Connie White comes back into the dugout and calls a quick team meeting.

CONNIE WHITE

Okay, here's the deal. We'll supply the umpires when we bat. The Mexicans will supply the umpires when they bat.

PLAYER NO. 3

Do we get to start over?

CONNIE WHITE

Just consider that four runs
their handicap. Which
pitchers have a rest day
today?

Several players, including Jax, nervously raise their hands. Connie White points to them telling them to go umpire.

CONNIE WHITE

(pointing)

Third base. First base.
Fielder, you're behind the
plate. Get some catcher's
equipment on. Let's go.

Jax looks out of place, as though he had been asked to address a joint session of Parliament. The other players hand him a catcher's mask, shin-guards and a chest protector.

EXT. INFIELD - MINUTES LATER.

Jax, now umpiring, bends down behind the Mexican catcher. The Mexican pitcher winds up and throws the ball. It's a close pitch. Jax hesitates and then calls

JAX

Ball one!

The crowd erupts in protest. Some intoxicated Mexican fans climb onto the top of the Browns' dugout and begin stomping. The Browns huddle on the bench.

The Mexican pitcher then throws a curve in the dirt. Jax signals ball two and the crowd's rabidity increases. A dead cat is thrown onto the field near home plate. Jax stops play, gingerly picks it up and tosses it towards the backstop. He notices that the grandstands behind him are roiling with unruly fans.

Jax looks towards the Browns dugout for some help from Connie White just as White is sprayed from the stands with the last four ounces of a hot beer.

CONNIE WHITE
(to the Brown's bench)
Start packing up boys. I feel
rain.

The Browns start scrambling, packing the equipment.

EXT. MEXICAN INFIEL D - CONTINUOUS.

The next pitch is hit by the Browns' batter back to the Mexican pitcher. The Mexican pitcher fields the ball cleanly but a cabbage tossed from the stands causes him to throw the ball to the home plate side of first base. The first baseman comes toward home plate to catch the ball and when the Browns runner nears him, the Mexican first baseman tries to tag the Browns runner. At that point, the Browns runner stops and begins running back towards home plate. The first baseman chases the Browns runner for a few steps towards home plate then throws the ball to the Mexican catcher. The Browns batter slides into the catcher from the first base side in a close play at home plate. Both the crowd and the teams, never having seen such a situation, wait in hushed silence for Jax to call something. After a pregnant pause, and with all the authority he can muster, Jax declares

JAX
Safe! Bat again!

After a moment necessitated by the language barrier, the crowd explodes, pushing their way through a section of the chicken wire backstop. Angry fans start pouring onto the field.

Connie White throws the proverbial white towel onto the field signaling "No mas." The Browns hightail it for the safety of the locker room as several mounted Federales ride onto the field attempting to restore order.

Inside the locker room, the players cower as they listen to the riot outside. Jax, still in full catcher's equipment including a catcher's mask, finds himself near Connie White. Connie White shakes his head in obvious disappointment. Jax and Connie White both look down at Jax's hand. It is trembling.

INT. CHIROPRACTIC TREATING ROOM - DAY (THREE MONTHS LATER, SUMMER, 1941).

Dixie sits in an examining room chair and reads Jax's latest letter. A bassinet sits beside her. A patient, lying on a table, is manhandled by Dr. Finch.

JAX

(v.o.)

Monday, July twenty-fourth,
Nineteen and forty-one. Dear
Maw, Paw, Jude, Dixie and
Little Rip. Minor league ball
ain't what it's cracked up to
be. I been pitching mostly
good but eating mostly poorly.
Some cookies or something
pickled would be welcomed. My
gooseball fools most of these
guys but I suspect the ones
that can hit it are in the
majors waiting for me.

The patient is eventually manipulated off the table onto the floor. Dixie rises to help.

EXT. DIXIE'S DRIVEWAY - LATER THAT DAY.

Dixie sits in her car and continues to read. She holds Jax's letter in one hand and strokes Little Rip with the other.

JAX

(v.o.)

Unofficially they tell me I
might will be called up to the
majors at the end of August.
As they say, time will tell.
I wish Jugs was catchin' me.
Write me on where Jugs is now.
Can Little Rip walk yet? Did
they have to lance his boil?
How in the world did Bubba
Broadax get to be deputy
sheriff? Me and Jugs will
sure have to toe the line from
now on. People here in Toledo
want us to join the war in
Europe to fight Hitler. I
think if he had a better
mustache people might like him
more.

(MORE)

JAX

(cont'd)

Tell Dixie I'm sure we won't go to war. I want her and Jugs and Little Rip to come see me pitch in St. Louis. If I get there. It ain't far on the train. Send food. Your son and brother-in-law and uncle. Jackson.

EXT. DIXIE'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT.

Dixie and her mother shell peas on her front porch by the light of a naked light bulb. Swing music plays on the radio. They smile and Dixie shakes her head as she watches Mrs. Fielder struggling to climb the Fielder front steps next door. Mr. Fielder stands two steps behind Mrs. Fielder, attempting to speed her up the steps with his body English.

JAX

(v.o.)

P.S. If you send food, don't write "food" on the box. The city boys on the team would steal your false teeth and try to sell them back to you. Jackson.

The faint cheering of a stadium crowd gets louder.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT (TWO MONTHS LATER, LATE SEPTEMBER 1941).

Yankee stadium is filled to capacity.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS.

Jax throws his underhand goseball but as we move back we see that he's only in the bullpen.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Connie White has a left-hander, Echols, and the rookie right-hander, Fielder, warming up now. Maxwell takes ball three.

INT. FIELDER FAMILY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Mr. and Mrs. Fielder, Jude, Dixie, Little Rip and Dixie's parents are in the Fielder living room around the radio. Mr. Fielder sits in the dormant Posture-Practic which, from the parts surrounding it, is obviously in the process of being overhauled.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

If the Browns walk Maxwell, the bases will be loaded with one out and Burns coming up. The Yankees are one run from winning the American League pennant and the Browns are that close to losing the pennant that looked to be theirs only two days ago.

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS.

Jax swats at insects with his glove between pitches.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

No relief pitcher in his right mind would want to be put into this spot.

INT. YANKEE INFIELD - CONTINUOUS.

The Browns' pitcher throws a pitch.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Here's the windup and it's outside. That loads the bases. And here comes Connie White.

Connie White approaches the mound. On the way he signals the bullpen for the right-handed relief pitcher.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Let's see who he'll bring in to pitch to Burns. Burns is a right-hander batting three ten.

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS.

In the bullpen Jax looks shocked and dismayed. The bullpen catcher gives Jax the thumbs up indicating it's his turn in the lion's den. Jax takes a deep breath and starts out of the bullpen.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Remember fellas, the folks at Burma Shave want you to enjoy tomorrow's shave as much as you enjoyed today's game. Tell your wife not to bring you back any old brand. Tell her to ask for Burma Shave.

One of the bullpen catchers grabs Jax by the belt as he walks out, appearing to wish him luck. Under the guise of some last-minute advice, the player attaches a 3-foot long piece of toilet paper to the back of Jax's belt as a kite tail. Jax doesn't notice it as he trots to the mound. The Yankee crowd howls at the joke played on the rookie.

INT. YANKEE INFIELD - CONTINUOUS.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Men, that raw throat could be a thing of the past. Ask your friends who smoke Pall Mall. One, two, three packs a day and your throat feels none the worse. Remember to reach for the red pack. Remember to ask for Pall Mall.

When Jax reaches the mound, Connie White hands him the ball and snatches the toilet paper, glaring back at the bullpen. He leaves Jax to warm up.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

As a public service of this station, the Department of Agriculture has asked us to announce that Agricultural Bulletin No. 242 should refer to ground hog meat rather than groundhog meat. They apologize for the error. Hope that didn't ruin your Sunday casserole.

Jax throws several warm-up pitches then the umpire signals for play to resume. Jax adjusts himself on the mound. The bases are loaded. An ominous batter digs in.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Andrew Jackson Fielder will come in to relieve Broderick. Fielder is only 19 but he tore up Triple A pitching for the Toledo Mudhens this summer. Since he was called up in late August he's pitched 18 innings, all in relief and has given up two earned runs. There's not much of a book on him yet. Apparently he's a submarine pitcher that the batter's hate. I'm sure Burns will see what Fielder calls his gooseball.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Mrs. Fielder crosses her fingers. Dixie runs her hand through Little Rip's hair as he sleeps on the couch.

INT. INFIELD - CONTINUOUS.

Jax looks at his hand as it shakes.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Fielder starts his windup.

The runner on third base is running up and down the baseline distracting Jax. Jax, nervous and disoriented, starts his

windup then stops, loses his footing and stumbles off the mound.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

Oh, no! He balks! Fielder balks. The Yankees win the pennant. What a boner.

The ump signals balk and the Yankee runner trots to the plate, winning the game.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The Fielder and Finch families sit in stunned disbelief. Jude smiles.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM INFIELD - CONTINUOUS.

Jax lies face down in the infield grass as the fans storm the field. A Yankee fan kicks the baseball out of his hand. Someone steals his hat off of his head. Someone else takes his glove. Jax doesn't move.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(v.o.)

What an improbable ending. The Yanks get the pennant handed to them on a silver platter. Where's my mother? She's not going to believe this. Oh, my! Stay tuned for the Pabst Blue Ribbon score card on most of these radio stations.

The sound of a steam locomotive stopping.

EXT. SMACKOVER TRAIN STATION - NIGHT (LATE).

Steam locomotive pulls into a vacant station.

Jax gets off the train. He's still in his Browns uniform. He has no hat. He carries his cleats. He is in his stockings. Station Manager Wheeler is also in a railroad uniform sweeping the platform. He has no teeth.

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

Jackson, you got half the country looking for your simple ass. Everybody wants to know where on earth is Goofball Fielder.

JAX

Bounty hunters?

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

A fella from one of the New York papers called up and told me he'd give me \$50 if I called when I seen you.

Jax looks defeated at the thought of more embarrassment.

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

I'll call him Tuesday or Wednesday. Go home. See your folks. They won't tease ya ... tonight.

A phone rings.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' BEDROOM - LATER.

Jax lies in bed staring at the dark ceiling. Jude angrily rearranges the pillows over his head in an attempt to escape the incessant ringing.

JUDE

I'm not answerin' the phone anymore. Them reporters are a nasty bunch.

Jax sits up on the side of the bed and, after a few more rings, shuffles to the phone in the hall. Taking a deep breath, he answers

JAX

Hello?

Jugs is in a phone booth in an almost empty bar. He is in uniform and his wings are conspicuous.

JUGS

Is this Goofball Fielder?

JAX
Jugs? You wiseacre.

JUGS
I listened to the game. What
in the hell happened?

JAX
I short circuited again, I
guess.

Jax looks down at his shortened finger.

JUGS
We had a guy in our training
squadron short circuit. The
flight instructor started
yelling at him while he was
trying to fly and this feller
opened the cockpit and bailed
out at ten thousand feet.

JAX
What happened to him?

JUGS
He's O.K. He's now a latrine
specialist, first class.

JAX
Does he need a helper?

JUGS
He needs the same thing you
need. He needs a rudder.

JAX
A brother?

JUGS
A rudder. The thing that life
raft I gave you didn't have.

JAX
The one place I always knew
what to do was on the mound.
Now what?

JUGS

You're asking the wrong guy.
I always made all my decisions
based on what was funner.

JAX

Your rudder was fun.

JUGS

I'm not recommendin' that
necessarily. I'm on report
right now for strafing a heard
of buffalos.

A sleepy-eyed young woman taps on the phone booth glass.
Jugs blows her a kiss and signals that he will be one more
minute.

JAX

Real buffalos?

JUGS

At the time it seemed like the
thing to do. Look, don't get
down. Look at the bright
side. You still got nine
fingers. Hah!

JAX

I still got all my marbles.

JUGS

Hey, you can always fly
bombers with me. I ain't ever
had so much fun.

Jugs' date slaps the phone booth door angrily and walks
away.

JUGS

Look. I gotta go. Hug Maw
and Paw and Dixie for me. And
slap Jude.

JAX

Be careful.

JUGS

Roger.

Jax sits on the floor in the dark hall, staring at his hand.

EXT. DIXIE'S FRONT PORCH - DAY (THREE MONTHS LATER, LATE DECEMBER 1941).

Jax is dressed in a heavy coat. He knocks on the door. Dixie answers holding Little Rip, now almost a year old.

JAX

Ripper! How many teeth does he have now?

DIXIE

What's the matter?

JAX

Nothing. I just come to tell you....I'm joining up too.

DIXIE

Jax Fielder, you're the last person they need trying to revenge Pearl Harbor. You're gonna stay here until next spring training and you're gonna get back on that baseball horse.

JAX

Even if they was to have spring training next year, I'm sure nobody's gonna tell me where it is.

DIXIE

You don't have any business fighting Japs. You couldn't hurt a flea. You might fool a recruiting officer but you're not fooling me. Don't we have enough to worry about with Jugs in the fightin' now.

JAX

Maybe I can link up with him.

DIXIE

Jugs has enough to do with taking care of himself, thank you.

JAX

Well it's wrote, signed and stamped in ink. I'm leaving Tuesday.

DIXIE

I've got a mind to write to Mr. Roosevelt himself.

JAX

Don't you think he's got more than enough to do without having to read some fool letter from a girl in Smackover?

DIXIE

You and your brother. Damn you both for leaving me in this briar patch. If you see him ... I hope you both live happily ever after.

She slams the door leaving Jax alone on the front porch.

Jax walks back to his house.

EXT. ARMY AIR FIELD, STATESIDE - DAY (SUMMER, 1942).

A busy airbase is awash with movement of men, vehicles and planes.

INT. QUENSET HUT - CONTINUOUS.

Jax walks into an Air Corps office dressed in uniform. He speaks to the enlisted man pecking slowly at the typewriter.

JAX

I was told to report here for a phone call.

The enlisted man points to a telephone with the receiver off the hook. Jax picks it up somewhat anxiously.

JAX
Hello?

MR. FIELDER
(o.s.)
Who is speaking now?

JAX
Paw?

MR. FIELDER
(o.s.)
Who is speaking now? I need
my son.

JAX
Paw, its me. What's the
matter?

MR. FIELDER
(o.s.)
I have to close the Emporium
Thursday.

JAX
O.K. Why is that?

MR. FIELDER
(o.s.)
Mrs. Fielder says I have to
close up. I haven't closed up
on a weekday in twenty years.

JAX
Why is it that you have to
close up? ... Paw, why are you
closing the Emporium on
Thursday?

MR. FIELDER
(o.s.)
Mrs. Fielder says we close for
funerals.

Jax has to wait for a formation of planes to pass overhead
so he can hear.

JAX
Whose funeral? Who died Paw?

MR. FIELDER

(o.s.)

Why does he always do exactly
what I tell him not to do?

JAX

What are you talkin' about?
Put Maw on the phone. Or
Jude, or somebody.

MR. FIELDER

(o.s.)

I told them: "I'll whip your
little butts 'til the cracks
don't show."

JAX

Paw, what is the matter?
Whose funeral?

MR. FIELDER

(o.s.)

Mrs. Fielder says I have to
close the store Thursday. She
wants you to come home.

JAX

Paw, hang the phone up and
don't answer it when I call
back.

Jax taps on the disconnect then asks the operator

JAX

Please connect me with the
Smackover operator.
Smackover. It's in Arkansas.

The Fielder's phone rings.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - DAY (DAYS LATER. SUMMER 1942).

The phone is ringing. In the background someone answers it. People of all ages in their Sunday clothes fill the Fielder living room. They talk loudly and eat the mountain of food laid out on the dining room table. Several men admire the Posture-Practic which dominates the living room. Mrs. Fielder, dressed in black, sits on the couch, softly crying. Mr. Fielder, also in black, sits by her mumbling to himself.

Jax, in an Army Air Corps uniform with black armband, sits alone in the corner, staring blankly at the comic pages. The room gets quiet as the screen door opens and Dixie, also dressed in black, enters the room. Jude, sporting the beginnings of a Clark Gable mustache, leads Little Rip by the hand.

Dixie makes the mourners uncomfortable. All except Bubba Broadax who, dressed in a deputy sheriff's uniform, almost knocks an old lady down getting to Dixie. Bubba attempts to console Dixie, looking terribly empathetic. Eventually, Dixie spots Jax who is watching her. She pulls herself away from Bubba and walks slowly to Jax, who stands.

DIXIE

When did you get in?

JAX

Late.

DIXIE

How are your folks?

JAX

Tore up. They say Maw's quit eating. I can't see that lasting. But Paw is scaring me. He acts like those old fellers what sit on the dead pecker bench in front of the barber shop. What about you?

DIXIE

Bubba Broadax hadn't said a word to me since I married Jugs. Yesterday he called me three times and came by once.

JAX

I try not to speak poorly of people who have threatened my life and carry a pistol.

Dixie smiles for what is probably the first time since she got the bad news.

DIXIE

You never ran into him?

JAX

Jugs was actually fighting.
I'm still earning my merit
badges.

Dixie looks around at the mourners who again seem to be
trying to relieve their grief through binge eating.

DIXIE

Come on. Walk me back next
door.

Dixie coaxes Little Rip away from the Posture-Practic and
walks out arm in arm with Jax. They walk across the lawns
to Dixie's house. Little Rip plays with the same battery
that Mrs. Fielder complained about years earlier. Dixie's
limp seems to be worse.

DIXIE

Jugs seemed excited about
raisin' the baby.

JAX

He would've been a great dad.
You should see what he could
do with a slingshot.

DIXIE

The funeral's tomorrow. I
don't know if I can stand it.

JAX

Me neither.

DIXIE

I didn't expect it to last. I
thought I'd be better
prepared. All my life I've
been told not to expect much.
Cripples can't be choosers.

JAX

Don't talk like that.

DIXIE

Your brother Jude has been a
great comfort to me and your
folks.

JAX

Is he trying to grow a
mustache or been drinking
chocolate milk?

DIXIE

Stop. He's trying to be tough
because you and your brother
teased him so. I don't blame
him for being a little mean.

JAX

We didn't make him mean. He
was hatched mean.

DIXIE

I'll never forget all those
games where I was trying to
watch you and your mother was
pestering me, telling me what
a catch Jude was.

JAX

I'd like to catch him. Catch
him in the temple with a
fastball.

DIXIE

I guess he'll be the next one
to leave me to go fight in a
war. Makes a girl feel real
special.

JAX

I'm leaving myself tomorrow
night. We're shipping out
soon.

They reach Dixie's front porch. Dixie picks up Little Rip
and hugs Jax like a sister would.

DIXIE

So help me, if you get killed
I'll raise Little Rip to be a
Yankees fan.

JAX

See you tomorrow. Bye Ripley.

Dixie and Little Rip go inside, leaving Jax alone on the porch.

The faint drone of bomber engines gets louder.

EXT. B29 OVER JAPAN - DAY (THREE YEARS LATER, SUMMER 1945).

Jax's Superfortress is in formation encountering heavy flak. Jax sits ready at his blister gun scanning the skies for Japanese planes. Jax sees bullet holes rip through the wing of his bomber. The sky is suddenly full of Japanese zeros. The B29's intercom erupts as does machine gun fire. Zeros swarm in and out of the bomber formation, firing as they go.

VARIOUS CREWMEN

I got six, eight zeros at two o'clock high ...

I got four, no five coming head-on ...

Get him when he comes around Ross ...

You get him. I've got plenty enough to do ...

Short bursts ...

He's smoking ...

Fielder, catch him. Catch him coming under.

Jax fires at a zero heading away from him. A muffled explosion jolts the plane.

PILOT

What was that? Report!

FIELDER

It's aft of me. I think ...

PILOT

(interrupting)

Fielder. Unhook and go see.

Jax unhooks his safety belt just as his blister is hit by machine gun fire and pops outwards. The air pressure sucks Jax out of the plane.

EXT. JAPANESE SKIES, 25,000 FEET - CONTINUOUS.

Suddenly there is silence. Jax is free-falling. He looks back momentarily as he falls away to see his B29 trailing smoke and leaving the formation. Jax pulls his ripcord and his parachute opens. As Jax descends he sees another baseball diamond, more a sand lot than a stadium field. For a second he sees his brother as a 13-year old behind the plate. But the earth, and reality, are approaching.

EXT. JAPANESE RURAL CROSSROADS - CONTINUOUS.

Three Japanese soldiers squat in the back of a small flatbed truck playing cards. A bottle of sake is passed among them. Their appearance is a strong indication of why they are on the mainland rather than at the front. They are disheveled. One is old. One is cross-eyed. One is sumo fat.

The sumo soldier happens to look skyward in an animated moment and sees Jax's parachute descending nearby. The soldiers scramble, first looking for their rifles. The old soldier and the cross-eyed soldier jostle at the door of the truck, arguing about who will drive. Finally, they both jump into the cab. The sumo soldier almost rolls off the bed of the truck as the old soldier peels out towards Jax's anticipated landing spot.

EXT. JAPANESE SKY - CONTINUOUS.

Jax watches the military truck racing to meet him.

INT. JAPANESE TRUCK - CONTINUOUS.

The old soldier, driving, and the cross-eyed soldier, in the cab next to him, crane their necks to keep Jax in view. They argue about which way to proceed, pointing in opposite directions.

EXT. JAPANESE FIELD - CONTINUOUS.

Jax lands in a grain field. The truck screeches to a halt on the nearby road. Jax sits cross-legged in the field awaiting his fate. Above him there are only contrails.

The old and cross-eyed soldiers bolt from the cab towards the rear of the truck. The sumo soldier is standing on the flat bed fumbling with their three rifles. As he hands the first rifle down to the cross-eyed soldier, the gun accidentally discharges, barely missing the old soldier and

deafening the cross-eyed soldier. As the cross-eyed soldier holds his ears in pain, the old soldier scrambles up onto the flat bed and starts slapping the sumo soldier.

Jax watches the curious events at the nearby truck. He looks at his hand. It is curiously steady.

The three Japanese soldiers finally arrive at Jax's location. They are out of breath and even more disheveled from their short run through the field.

They begin shouting instructions to Jax. The old soldier screams and motions for Jax to stand up. The cross-eyed soldier screams and motions for Jax to lie down. The sumo soldier screams and motions for Jax to put his hands behind his head. Jax looks from one to another without moving.

Finally the old soldier yells at and slaps the other two and they shut up and defer to him. He lifts Jax by the collar and they march him toward their truck.

As the armed guard arrives with Jax at the truck, the three soldiers obviously disagree again. Then the sumo soldier has an idea. They huddle and talk quietly, pausing to look around. Jax senses the change in plans and becomes visibly concerned for the first time.

The cross-eyed soldier heads toward the cab of the truck. The old soldier motions with his rifle for Jax to walk back into the field.

Jax and his armed guard march into the field. The old soldier finally stops Jax and turns him around. The old soldier says something to the sumo soldier who fixes his bayonet to his rifle. The old soldier and the cross-eyed soldier also fix their bayonets.

The old soldier then approaches Jax with bayonet drawn. Jax swallows hard. Then the old soldier hands Jax his rifle. Jax is puzzled. The old soldier demonstrates the proper bayonet-charge stance to Jax. Jax doesn't move. The cross-eyed and sumo soldier approach Jax with bayonets drawn. They strike fearsome but ridged poses.

CLOSE-UP - OLD SOLDIER WITH CAMERA.

The old soldier gives his final directions then snaps a photograph.

FULL SCREEN PHOTOGRAPH OF

The sumo soldier and cross-eyed soldier in hand-to-hand combat with a puzzled American airman.

CLOSE-UP - SUMO SOLDIER WITH CAMERA - CONTINUOUS.

The sumo soldier snaps a photograph.

FULL SCREEN PHOTOGRAPH OF

Old soldier grabbing a puzzled looking American airman by the arm as the airman is about to bayonet the prostrate cross-eyed soldier.

CLOSE-UP - CROSS-EYED SOLDIER WITH CAMERA - CONTINUOUS.

The cross-eyed soldier snaps a photograph.

FULL SCREEN PHOTOGRAPH OF

Cock-eyed picture showing only legs.

EXT. PRISON COMPOUND GATE - DAY (LATER).

The military truck enters the compound. Jax rides in the back guarded by the sumo soldier.

INT. JAPANESE COMMANDANT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER.

The commandant sits behind a table in a Spartan office. He is a square-jawed veteran. He has lost an arm. He takes off his reading glasses as the armed guard escorts Jax into the office. The armed guard salutes the commandant.

Subtitles:

COMMANDANT

Another American airman. They
fall like rain.

OLD SOLDIER

This one put up much
resistance.

SUMO SOLDIER

He shot at us as he fell to
earth.

CROSS-EYED SOLDIER

He captured a village. We had
to liberate it.

The commandant is now skeptical.

OLD SOLDIER
It was more of a hamlet. No
lives were lost.

COMMANDANT
Where is his gun?

The three soldiers look at each other, then

CROSS-EYED SOLDIER
It blew up.

COMMANDANT
Blew up?

OLD SOLDIER
It was booby-trapped.

SUMO SOLDIER
It destroyed a barn.

OLD SOLDIER
A small barn.

The commandant puts on his reading glasses.

COMMANDANT
You brave soldiers obviously
want a medal?

The three look at each other and smile.

COMMANDANT
I am going to make that
possible. (calling)
Corporal.

A Japanese corporal enters the room and salutes.

COMMANDANT
Corporeal, please take down
these soldiers' names and be
sure they are transferred to
the front. They want a medal.

The corporeal bows and he and the three soldiers, visibly
shaken by this development, exit the office, leaving only

the commandant and Jax. The commandant takes off his glasses again and stares at Jax. In broken English he warns ominously:

COMMANDANT

Welcome to civilization.

EXT. JAPANESE PRISON COMPOUND - DAY (DAYS LATER, SUMMER 1945).

American soldiers loiter behind barbed wire.

INT. POW BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS.

A dingy Quonset hut houses a dozen or so American prisoners of war. Colonel Cole is the ranking American officer. He has the most complete uniform of any prisoner except Jax. He lectures Jax in front of the other POWs.

COLE

It's our duty Sgt. Fielder to continue to offer resistance to the enemy any and every way we can. All we need for you to do is to provide a temporary diversion.

JAX

Sir, if it's all the same to you I'd just as soon not be part of your plan. I mean no disrespect but as far as I'm concerned the Japs have won. They killed my brother. They shot down my plane and captured me. I've been taken out of a game before and I know what it feels like. That ain't to say you fellers need to feel the same way. I wish you luck. But I've surrendered.

COLE

That's pretty close to desertion Sargent.

Jax shrugs and walks out.

COLE
(to remaining men)
He'll supply a diversion
whether he wants to or not.

INT. QUONSET HUT - THAT NIGHT.

Jax is sleeping on a bamboo mat alongside several other POWs. Four Japanese guards enter. Their shouting wakes the POWs. One Japanese soldier tells Jax to get up. When Jax is slow to rise, another Japanese soldier grabs him by the hair and pulls him up. A third soldier rolls back Jax's bed mat to expose a knife. Jax is the only one in the hut surprised by the discovery. One Japanese soldier picks up the knife and two others grab Jax roughly and manhandle him outside. Again, Jax offers no resistance.

INT. 30-INCH PIPE - NEXT MORNING.

Jax comes to in almost total darkness. He is in solitary confinement which means he's been sealed in a piece of 30-inch diameter pipe, ten feet long, which is suspended horizontally off the ground by braces at each end. There is a single six-inch hole in the bottom of the pipe. It is both the ventilation hole and the defecation hole.

Jax becomes claustrophobic very quickly. Jax panics, banging his head, elbows and knees on the pipe. His screaming results in Japanese guards banging on the outside of the pipe with railroad spikes. The noise deafens Jax.

EXT. MUCK UNDER PIPE - DUSK.

A stream of urine hits the soaked ground under the pipe.

INT. PIPE.

Jax stays in the pipe day after day. Periodically, guards bang on the pipe to signal that the end-cap will be pulled and a bowl of thin rice soup will be provided.

Jax tries to keep his sanity by pitching games in his head.

EXT. IMAGINARY YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT.

Jax strikes out the best players from 1941 including Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams. His brother Jugs is catching him and they smile when Jugs gives Jax the signal for a gooseball. Dixie is in the stands watching.

Jax even pitches against Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito.

JUGS
 (while Hitler
 is batting)
 Come on batter. Hey, hey. Is
 that a mustache or is your
 nose bleeding? No stick. No
 stick.

Jax brushes Hitler back with a high fastball before striking him out on a gooseball. Dixie cheers. The cheers are drowned out by the incessant banging on the pipe.

INT. PIPE - DAY.

Jax remains in the pipe for days. Using the scant light from the hole in the bottom of the pipe, he watches ulcers forming on his hands and forearms. In fact, there are sores over his entire body.

EXT. MUCK UNDER PIPE - DAY.

Instead of a urine stream, a weak dribble barely disturbs the flies underneath the hole. Flies, attracted by the latrine below, enter the pipe and cover Jax. Soon, Jax is too weak to brush the flies from his face. Maggots crawl in his sores.

Jax's dreams turn to hallucinations.

EXT. IMAGINARY SMACKOVER WATER TOWER - NOON.

Jax stands under the Smackover water tower. He shades his eyes in an effort to better see toddlers crawling around the catwalk that runs around the water tank. A baby falls and Jax runs to catch it. But as he is about to catch one baby, he sees another one fall. He runs to catch the second baby and the first one hits with a thud. A third baby falls and Jax abandons the second which also crashes to the ground. The scene repeats itself again and again. Each time, Jax is incapable of saving a baby because of his indecision. Babies hitting the ground sound like distant bombing.

INT. PIPE - NIGHT.

Jax is shaken from his hallucination by the sound of actual bombing. These are real bombs dropped nearby by real American Superfortresses. Jax smiles.

EXT. PIPE - DAYS LATER.

The pipe is opened by the Japanese guards. They reach in and jerk Jax out by the ankles. He falls lifeless to the ground. His skin is ulcerated. He is emaciated. The guards grab him by the wrists and begin dragging him.

EXT. JAPANESE HOSPITAL - DAY.

A Japanese man with one leg uses crutches to hobble down the sidewalk. A red cross and a Catholic crucifix appear on the outer wall.

INT. JAPANESE HOSPITAL WARD - CONTINUOUS.

Japanese nuns scurry around a Red Cross hospital ward. Jax is sitting up in a bed, heavily bandaged. He is the only American. As the nuns pass, he bows out of deference.

Jax has nothing to do but look around at the other patients. Each patient's face seems to echo the horrors of war. Those patients who are able, stare back at Jax with much interest.

A diminutive nun brings Jax a bowl of rice and vegetables. He sits up with excitement. Everyone gets a bowl of rice which temporarily stops the staring.

Jax grimaces with his first bite and then gingerly pokes at a molar with his finger. He begins slowly feeling all of his teeth, top and bottom.

The nun who gave him the soup returns and, in Japanese, asks him why he is not eating.

JAX

Loose teeth.

Jax grabs his front teeth and pretends to wiggle them. The other patients stop eating to again watch Jax. The nun indicates with a shrug that she doesn't understand him so Jax repeats his pantomime. Finally, an elderly Japanese man offers his interpretation and the nun scurries off. The other patients smile and nod at Jax and he reciprocates. The Japanese faces that were so sullen a few minutes ago now seem brighter.

The nun returns with a large pair of pliers and offers to pull Jax's teeth. He covers his mouth with his hand. The nun shrugs at the elderly patient and he shrugs back.

The drone of American bombers is heard and all eyes turn towards the ceiling, then back towards Jax. They are sullen again.

EXT. JAPANESE CITY (FROM 25,000 FEET) - CONTINUOUS.

Carpet bombing from American B-29's begins to destroy the city.

INT. JAPANESE HOSPITAL WARD - DAWN (DAYS LATER).

The hospital is much more crowded. Jax sleeps on his hospital mat. He has been moved from his bed. Jax has fallen asleep reading a Japanese comic book. He is wearing only his boxer shorts and bandages. He has noticeably fewer bandages now.

The ward door is kicked open violently, startling the nuns and patients. A child starts crying. Jax slowly rolls over to see a fat Japanese soldier who looks a lot like Curly on the Three Stooges. Curly carries a large sword. He barks a question and the nuns look at Jax. Curly walks up to Jax, kicks him and orders him up. As Jax rises Curly draws his sword. Jax looks to the nuns for help but they turn away. For a second it appears Curly will execute Jax on the spot. Then Curly pokes Jax with the sword motioning for him to leave the ward.

EXT. JAPANESE HOSPITAL DRIVEWAY - SECONDS LATER.

A Japanese Admiral's staff car, flags mounted above the headlights, is double-parked. The back windshield of the car has been shattered. Curly orders Jax to start walking. Jax is puzzled but obeys. Curly follows in the Admiral's car.

EXT. STREET IN A JAPANESE CITY - MINUTES LATER.

Jax, still in his shorts and bandages, walks in front of the Admiral's car. He is a curiosity to the Japanese on the street. Except for Curly, Japanese men are conspicuously absent. If Jax slows Curly is quick to honk his horn and race his engine.

Jax walks through the smoldering devastation left by American bombing. One lady sits in the road crying, holding a baby that looks dead. As Jax passes she reaches for him. It scares Jax.

The Japanese city eventually turns into suburbs. The suburbs appear to have been spared by the bombing. Curly honks and motions for Jax to walk up the driveway to a large western style home.

At the house Curly exits the Admiral's car and roughly escorts Jax inside, using his sword as a prod.

INT. ADMIRAL'S HOUSE - SECONDS LATER.

Jax finds himself in a home decorated with Western furniture. At first glance, it could well be the home of a wealthy Long Islander.

Curly shoves Jax inside a room that is an office. The Japanese Admiral sits behind a western-style desk. In Japanese, the Admiral orders Curly to leave him alone with Jax. Curly hesitates then obeys. The Admiral studies Jax for a long time. Jax looks around the office filled with military commendations and photographs evidencing an obviously successful career. Finally

ADMIRAL

Gooseball?

Jax is puzzled.

ADMIRAL

Gooseball? Is that correct?

Again Jax says nothing. The Admiral reaches in a desk drawer and pulls out a Yankees cap and puts it on.

ADMIRAL

You are Gooseball Fielder.
Pitcher for the Saint Rouis
Browns. I saw you bark in New
York City.

JAX

You saw me balk. Wouldn't you
rather ask me about military
secrets or something?

ADMIRAL

Before the war I lectured at the Naval Academy. I was a big Yankees fan. I would take the train from Annapolis. DiMaggio was like a winged god.

JAX

Yeah, he was O.K. I didn't know you fellows liked baseball 'til I got over here. We used to count baseball diamonds on our bombing runs. When there weren't any fighters we would ...

Jax catches himself and the Admiral turns away, possibly to save Jax from embarrassment; possibly out of anger.

ADMIRAL

This terrible war will not last forever. Some day the baseballs will fly again.

JAX

(to himself)

And the pitchers will bark.

The Admiral turns around to face Jax again.

ADMIRAL

But I have a son. Yoshi. A good boy. A fast pitcher. I want you to coach him to pitch like a major leaguer.

JAX

Here?

ADMIRAL

You would work in my gardens and in the afternoon you would coach Yoshi.

JAX

I think the rules are that I'm not supposed to help the enemy, no offense, sir.

ADMIRAL

Rules are for simple men who cannot make their own decisions.

JAX

Would I get to throw some myself?

ADMIRAL

All I ask is there be no talk of war.

JAX

And I would stay here?

ADMIRAL

You would be my guest.

JAX

Would I have to be locked up. I been locked up and I ain't well suited for it. I get nightmares something fierce.

ADMIRAL

You would be on your honor.

JAX

You wouldn't have to worry about me. I don't think I could find my way back to Arkansas from here even if I had shoes.

ADMIRAL

I'll get you shoes.

The Admiral calls for Curly who is waiting outside the door. Curly comes in and snaps to. The Admiral gives Curly an order. Curly shows Jax out.

EXT. ADMIRAL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

As soon as Curly and Jax are out of the house Curly slaps Jax in the back of the head.

Curly marches Jax out of the Admiral's home and into what was once an elegant garden. It has obviously been neglected

for several years. Its beauty is not lost on Jax. He is particularly taken by the pear trees which bear ripe fruit.

Curly and Jax arrive at a tool shed, a lean-to open on one side, containing garden tools. Curly motions for Jax to enter the shed. Curly takes up a sentry position nearby. He glares at Jax.

EXT. ADMIRAL'S GARDEN - NEXT DAY.

Jax lies on his back pruning a bush. The small branches he cuts are falling in his face. Curly walks up quietly and kicks Jax's legs. Jax rises to meet the Admiral's son, Yoshi. Yoshi looks only to be slightly younger than Jax. He is handsome but very slightly built. Jax extends his hand in friendship.

JAX

Hello. I'm Jax Fielder.

Curly shoves Jax away and throws a baseball glove in his direction. Jax picks it up slowly as if it were a delicate relic of immeasurable value. He savors its touch as he puts it on.

Jax and Yoshi begin to throw to each other. Curly stands between them glaring at Jax. Curly's presence makes Jax apprehensive, preventing him from enjoying the moment. Jax throws softly, rolling his shoulder between pitches. Yoshi throws much harder. So hard Jax has difficulty catching his pitches.

JAX

You pitch, huh? Your Paw said
you are some good.

Yoshi does not respond. They continue to throw. After a few minutes, the sound of the Admiral's car starting up causes Yoshi to look towards the house.

Upon seeing his father leave Yoshi stops throwing, drops the glove and walks back towards the house. Before following Yoshi, Curly directs Jax to continue gardening.

Jax puts the baseball glove over his face and takes a deep breath, smelling deeply of the leather.

EXT. - JAPANESE GARDEN - DAY (SEVERAL DAYS LATER).

Jax is working with a hoe finishing off a pitcher's mound he has constructed. Curly walks up from behind and hits him.

JAX

Hey! You better hope you all win because if not, you may well find yourself haulin' furniture in Smackover.

Yoshi steps forward and orders Curly back.

YOSHI

Seaman Tonata is angry. He has lost many of his family to fire bombing.

JAX

(rubbing where he was hit)
Tell him I surrendered already. Unconditionally.

YOSHI

My father says of Seaman Tonata that such complete hate can only come from the loss of complete love.

JAX

Except for the fact that he pulls for the Yankees your paw seems like a smart feller.

They throw.

YOSHI

I know my father has asked you to coach me. But I have no longer need for baseball. I will become a kamikaze on my birthday.

JAX

The guys that crash their planes into ... those guys? Well, I can see where he'd probably rather see you out playing ball.

YOSHI

He thinks I am a child.

JAX

Look, I've tried war and it ain't all it's cracked up to be. It's pretty final. But in baseball the worst that can happen to you is you do something stupid and pretty much ruin your life. But if a feller's got any sense at all, playin' ball beats most jobs I know about. Including kamikaze flying. Look, when is your birthday?

YOSHI

Three days.

JAX

Okay, let's do this. Throw with me for the next couple of days. Make your Paw happy. I can pretend I'm back in Smackover, before the world slipped off its axle. I'll teach you how to throw the world-famous gooseball. Only you and my ... my brother will know how to throw it. You can be the star of the kamikaze pickup games. And maybe if you act like you're havin' fun, Seaman Slap Happy here will maybe give me a break.

Yoshi shakes his head and walks away. Jax is disheartened that he has failed. Jax drops his hoe and surveys his work on the pitcher's mound that has been in vain.

But Yoshi stops about 20 steps away and puts his glove back on. Jax excitedly retrieves his glove from the garden and they begin to throw again. Jax has made a wonderful little bullpen in the garden complete with home plate and batters' boxes. Jax stops momentarily to remove the last bandages from his forearms. He begins to throw harder. Curly stands at attention.

EXT. JAPANESE GARDEN - DUSK.

Curly sleeps with his back against a pear tree. Jax and Yoshi have worked up a sweat. They stop to get a drink of water from a bucket.

JAX

How'd you learn to talk English so good?

YOSHI

My father loved America before the war. I've had English tutors as long as I can remember.

JAX

If you can talk English, I don't know why you couldn't play in the U.S. of A. When I was with the Browns we had a kid from Puerto Rico, Miguel, and all he could say was:
(imitating)

"Please do not leave me. I do not have a watch."

YOSHI

Our countries will always be enemies.

JAX

No, that's the great thing about human beings. They get old and senile and forget. We had a Civil War not a hundred years ago and I've got friends from as far north as Chicago.

YOSHI

Who do you think will win this war?

JAX

Well I promised your Paw I wouldn't talk war, but I assure you, it ain't me.

YOSHI

What will you do after the war?

JAX

I don't know. I never thought
past the next ballgame. What
d'ya say we throw a little
more before it gets dark.

They pick up their gloves and start to throw again. At the renewed sound of leather popping, Curly attempts to raise his eyelids but can't.

EXT. - JAPANESE GARDEN - DAY.

Jax and Yoshi are throwing in the newly constructed bullpen. Yoshi laughs in amazement as Jax throws him one gooseball after another. Curly watches but seems to grow angrier the more Yoshi enjoys himself. Yoshi tries but is unable to throw a gooseball. Jax motions for Yoshi.

JAX

Come see.

Yoshi meets Jax between the mound and home plate. Jax shows Yoshi how to hold the ball. Yoshi notices something odd about Jax's grip.

JAX

I have a short finger.

YOSHI

Did you lose it in battle?

JAX

The battle of Smackover, yeah.
You need to shorten up your
finger like this.

Jax grabs Yoshi's hand. At that moment Curly angrily knocks Jax down with his rifle butt. Yoshi is furious at Curly. They argue heatedly in Japanese. As Jax struggles back to his feet, Curly retreats a dozen yards away.

JAX

That's okay. If I was short,
fat, bald and ugly I'd be mad
too.

YOSHI

There is no excuse for
treating a guest in that
manner.

JAX

Look. I got a idea. You need
to throw to a batter. Let's
see if you can strike out the
Seaman here. Where's the bat?

Jax retrieves the nearby bat and puts in the batter's box.
Yoshi takes his place on the mound and, in Japanese, orders
Curly to take his place in the batter's box.

JAX

(squatting behind
the plate)
I'll get down.

Curly, obviously not a baseball aficionado, picks up the
bat awkwardly. Yoshi laughs at Curly. Jax smiles. This
angers Curly and he swings the bat at Jax knocking Jax's
glove off his hand. Yoshi again yells at Curly from the
mound. Yoshi motions for Curly to stand at the plate.
Angrily Curly bangs the bat on the plate like he is trying
to destroy it. Then, in an unorthodox batting stance, Curly
turns to face the mound, legs spread, toes pointing directly
towards Yoshi, waving the bat over his head like it is a
sword.

CURLY

Bonsai!

Jax gives Yoshi the signal for a gooseball. Yoshi nods.
Yoshi takes a windup and fires the ball. The ball passes
between Curly's legs just below crotch level and is caught
cleanly by Jax. However, Curly drops the bat, grabs his
crotch and falls to the ground. Yoshi and Jax burst out
laughing.

EXT. JAPANESE PEAR TREE - DUSK (TWO HOURS LATER).

Yoshi and Jax rest with their backs up against the pear tree
trunk. They are eating pears. Curly is several yards away
still lying face down in the batter's box. He has not
moved.

JAX
(looking at his
hand which holds
the baseball)
Maybe getting my finger blown
off was lucky. It sure didn't
feel lucky at the time.

YOSHI
Do you believe you feel pain
after you die?

JAX
No tellin'. Looking at your
seaman there, I would say that
passin' out don't stop pain.

Curly's face is frozen in a grimace.

YOSHI
Were you afraid to die?

JAX
Dying is way down on my list
of fears behind pipes and
short-fused cherry bombs and
Yankee stadium.

Awkward silence.

JAX
I heard a kamikaze joke once.
I can't remember how it goes.
Something about the guy's
parachute opening on impact.

More awkward silence.

JAX
Yoshi, I really think you've
got some potential as a
pitcher. Honest to god. This
war won't last forever.
Whoever wins, there will still
be baseball. A couple of
fireballers like us, we got it
made after the war.

YOSHI

If we lose the war we will
lose everything.

JAX

That ain't necessarily so.
When I was a kid I believed in
crystal snakes, snakes that
was invisible. Then a wise
man told me its easier to
control somebody with a lie
than with a belt.

YOSHI

I don't understand "with a
belt."

JAX

Don't your Paw whip you?
Look, what does he do when he
gets really mad at you?

YOSHI

He hires someone to play
baseball with me.

JAX

He's a good man. You need to
do what he says.

YOSHI

My birthday is tomorrow.

JAX

Get Curly to pack your lunch
and we can picnic out here on
the mound. For my gift to
you, I'm gonna show you how to
throw a knuckleball that'll
dance the hootchie cootchie on
the way to the plate. An old
pitcher showed me how to throw
it when I was with the
Mudhens. He could drink a
beer and burp the alphabet.

YOSHI

We better help Curly get up.

As they rise, they look up. Contrails from American bombers stripe the sky.

EXT. ADMIRAL'S GARDEN - NEXT MORNING.

Jax is high in the Japanese pear tree, picking pears. Yoshi, carrying a duffel bag, walks the garden below searching for Jax. He is not dressed for catch. Curly backs the car out and waits for Yoshi. Yoshi calls for his friend.

YOSHI
Jaxson. Jaxson.

Jax watches silently as Yoshi passes directly under the tree. Yoshi is upset that he cannot find his friend to say goodbye. Yoshi is also worried that Jax may have escaped house arrest. Jax says nothing.

Suddenly, the Admiral appears. He holds two baseball gloves and a ball. He tosses one glove to Yoshi. Instead of catching it, Yoshi lets the glove fall. Yoshi looks at his father then picks up the glove. They back away from one another and start to throw. They do not speak. They are expressionless.

At first the Admiral throws awkwardly, but gradually he regains his form. As they throw back and forth the speed of the pitches gradually increases. Eventually, they strain angrily with every pitch.

Finally, the Admiral is unable to catch a pitch and it sails past him. The Admiral and his son look at each other for a long moment, then bow. Yoshi puts his glove on the mound, then walks to the car and is driven away.

The Admiral is motionless for a long time. He watches his son drive away. Finally, he turns to retrieve the errant ball. He picks it up near the base of the pear tree. For the first time he notices Jax and realizes his intimate moment has been shared.

ADMIRAL
Gooseball, it is love
that makes war so
terrible.

The Admiral tosses the ball up to Jax.

CLOSE ON BALL

Jax holds the ball. Near the end of his shortened finger are distinctive Japanese markings.

We ascend skyward out of the pear tree as we had descended into the Fielder pear tree earlier. Jax looks up at the drone of bomber engines. The Admiral walks back to his house.

EXT. JAX'S QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING.

Jax wakes up and finds he is alone. He checks but no one is in the house. He doesn't know what to do. He sits in his tool shed.

EXT. JAPANESE GARDEN - LATER.

Jax begins gardening but cannot figure out why he is alone.

INT. ADMIRAL'S KITCHEN - DUSK.

Jax reenters the deserted home and searches the Admiral's cabinets for food, eating what little he finds.

INT. ADMIRAL'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

Jax wanders into the Admiral's office. He turns on the light. He studies the military awards and pictures on the walls.

Behind the Admiral's desk, Jax notices a radio. He turns it on and scans the dial but there is only Japanese programming. He turns it off.

Jax decides to sit in the Admiral's desk chair. There is a photograph album opened. The photos are of:

- Yoshi as a child;
- Yoshi and an older brother, as children;
- the Admiral coaching Yoshi and his older brother in little league;
- the Admiral, Yoshi, his brother and their mother;
- pictures of their mother;
- picture of the Admiral and Yoshi holding a baseball trophy.

There are a number of blank album pages. Jax closes the photo album. He notices some stationery and a pen. He

places a piece of stationery before him and begins to print.

JAX

(v.o.)

Dear Dixie. I hope this letter finds you and Little Rip very fine.

INT. - DIXIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Dixie is in a dark living room sitting on a sofa reading by the light of a dim lamp. The background is black.

JAX

(v.o.)

I am O.K. I got shot down and captured. But I have met some nice people. Mostly I have had time to think. I don't remember ever thinking much before. And I think I figured out what was wrong with me. I didn't have a rudder. Like what the life raft Jugs give me didn't have. But I have come to several decisions. I am going to try to play pro ball again. And I would sure like to marry you if you will have me and if it is not illegal to marry your brother's wife. Please check on that. I would be proud to raise Little Rip as my own also. I am thinking we could all three move to St. Louis or wherever I play for. I know you never liked Smackover. That is if I get home. But if you get this letter that will likely mean I will follow. Yours truly. Jackson.

A male hands comes from out of the darkness and takes the letter out of Dixie's hand. Dixie cries.

EXT. ADMIRAL'S GARDEN - DAY.

Jax is in the pear tree eating pears when a speaker truck drives by blasting out some official edict in Japanese.

EXT. JAPANESE GARDEN - LATER.

Jax is under the pear tree again eating pears. Six pear cores are evidence of a pear diet. Jax is puzzled as an American flag passes down the road. Jax stands to see that the flag is affixed to one of three American jeeps. Jax takes a few minutes to survey the garden one last time. He walks over to his lean-to and picks up the baseball he and Yoshi had used. He studies the distinctive Japanese writing on it. Then he walks towards the road.

EXT. SMACKOVER TRAIN STATION - LATE NIGHT (A MONTH LATER, SEPTEMBER, 1945).

Jax, in Army uniform, gets off the train with a duffel bag and holding the Japanese baseball. The station is deserted except for

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

If it ain't Goofball Fielder
back from the war. Come back
with all your parts son?

JAX

Most of what I left with Mr.
Wheeler.

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

Your folks know you're coming
home tonight?

JAX

No, I thought I'd surprise
'em.

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

You know that New York paper
never sent me that \$50. Some
Army investigators been here
looking for you.

JAX

They probably have the Medal
of Honor I ordered.

STATION MANAGER WHEELER

Probably. You want me to tell
them you're here?

JAX

I don't care. Just make sure
you get paid up front.

Jax, carrying his duffel bag and baseball, walks towards
home.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE AND DIXIE'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER.

Both houses are dark. Jax gets to Dixie's house first.

EXT. DIXIE'S FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS.

Jax excitedly drops his duffel bag and bounds up the front
steps of Dixie's house holding the Japanese baseball. He
opens the screen door and knocks on the front door. From
inside, shuffling feet are heard as is a man's voice. The
voice is familiar but not that of Dixie's father. A light
is switched on. Jax closes the screen door and steps back a
step in case it's Dixie's father who opens the door. Dixie
appears in a bathrobe looking very tired. She turns on the
porch light but says nothing. Jax is shocked at her haggard
appearance but lies well.

JAX

Hello Dixie. You look great.

DIXIE

I'm sorry Jax, I thought you
were dead. Your letter came
too late.

JUDE

(o.s.)

Who is it?

Jax now recognizes the man's voice but is puzzled.

DIXIE

I'm so stupid. So damned
stupid.

JAX

That ain't Jude in there.
What's he doing?

DIXIE
 (whispering)
 Don't make him mad.

JAX
 (raising his voice)
 Don't make who mad?

Jude appears in his pajamas.

JUDE
 (embarrassed)
 Hello Jax. How was the war?

Jax looks at Dixie. Dixie is looking down, devoid of life.

JAX
 I brung Little Rip a Jap
 baseball.

JUDE
 We got your letter.

Dixie stiffens and walks back into the house.

JUDE
 A day late and a dollar short.
 I guess y'all left me behind
 one too many times. Dixie and
 I are living here until we can
 afford to build.

Jax sees but doesn't fully understand what has happened and
 begins to leave. Jude calls after him.

JUDE
 I guess Dixie is the Fielders'
 Choice. Unanimous now. Does
 Maw know you're back?

JAX
 (as he walks away)
 It's a surprise.

EXT. FIELDER HOUSE AND DIXIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the dark Jax walks from Dixie's house towards his own
 carrying his duffel bag and baseball. The crickets chirp
 loudly. In the dark, he trips over the abandoned car
 battery and falls face down in his yard. He does not move.

He lets out a mournful scream at the top of his lungs that is muffled by the ground. The crickets stop chirping.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING.

Jax sleeps on his bed, above the covers, still in his army uniform. Suddenly, the drone of bombers causes him to bolt upright. Disoriented, he flies to the window and scans the skies. Then he looks around his room to orient himself. He follows the sound out of his room, into the hall.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Jax enters the living room to find Mr. and Mrs. Fielder reclining in side-by-side, Posture-Practic chairs. Mr. Fielder's chair is shimmying and the source of most of the noise that startled Jax. Mrs. Fielder's chair is straining more than moving.

MRS. FIELDER

Good morning, son. How's it feel to be back home.

JAX

Good. I stopped by the Finches on my way in last night. Did Dixie marry Jude?

MRS. FIELDER

As it was meant to be. Those kids was meant for each other. They just didn't realize it.

JAX

How is Little Rip?

MRS. FIELDER

Jude has about got him straightened out. He had gone so long without a father he had become a little hellion.

MR. FIELDER

(with vibrato)

Just like his father.

MRS. FIELDER

Jude is running the Emporium now. Your father is working almost full time on the Posture-Practic. But we have a job for you in the shipping department.

JAX

You have different departments?

MR. FIELDER

(with vibrato)

That's some of Jude's nonsense.

MRS. FIELDER

Everyday someone from the Army calls looking for you. I have their number in the kitchen.

JAX

I made a few promises to myself overseas and one was never to talk to anyone in a uniform again.

MRS. FIELDER

Does that mean deputy sheriffs too? Bubba Broadax's been comin' by. He says he wants to ask you some questions.

MR. FIELDER

(with vibrato)

If Jugs was still alive I'd be suspectin' that y'all were in some kind of trouble.

MRS. FIELDER

Jax is too trepidatious to get into trouble on his own. Go get you some of your Maw's good biscuits, son. Jump start me Gaynell.

Mr. and Mrs. Fielder reach out, lock hands and pull. The vibration from Mr. Fielder's chair, transmitted through

their locked arms, starts Mrs. Fielder's chair. The noise doubles. Jax walks out.

INT. FIELDER LIVING ROOM - WEEKS LATER.

A banner hung on the wall says "Jackson, Our hero!" Neighbors surround Jax at a coming home party. Jax is in civilian clothes. He is obviously uncomfortable with the attention. Kids scurry underfoot and ride in the twin vibrating Posture-Practics. One of the youngest is watching the waves in his glass of punch. An elderly man distracts Jax with his inane questions. He wears a civil defense helmet.

NEIGHBOR

You reckon you killed many
Japs, son?

JAX

If I didn't kill 'em I
probably ruined their day.

NEIGHBOR

I bet you did. You ever have
to go into the bomb bay and
have to kick the bombs to make
'em fall out? I seen that at
the picture show.

JAX

No, but we had a nickname for
the guys that kicked the
bombs.

NEIGHBOR

What?

JAX

The dead guys.

NEIGHBOR

Your pullin' my leg.

Jax watches Dixie across the room. She stands silently beside Jude. Jax watches for an opening to talk to her and get some answers. Jude is bragging to some trapped neighbor.

Little Rip, now four and one-half years old and looking very much like Jugs did at that age, flies through the living room holding a die-cast toy bomber. Jude stops momentarily to yell.

JUDE

Slow down Ripley else you'll
be dancing at the end of my
belt.

Jude is amused by his own wit. Jax bristles at the threat and looks again at Dixie who is obviously embarrassed by Jude.

NEIGHBOR

You bring home any Jap
souvenirs?

JAX

Just a baseball.

NEIGHBOR

Now I know your pullin' my
leg.

Suddenly a crystalline crash is followed by women's exclamations. The punch bowl has fallen to the floor and shattered. The guests are frozen momentarily. Little Ripley is standing in the punch looking very guilty.

Jude is the first to move. He rips off his belt with a flair reminiscent of his father's and swings overhanded at Little Rip, catching him across the neck. Little Rip screams and squats down in the punch. Jude rears back to strike again but his swing is interrupted when Jax grabs Jude by the throat and walks him backwards across the room pinning him against the wall. Jude is on his toes struggling for breath.

JAX

(whispering)

That's Jugs's boy not yours.
If you ever touch him again
I'll make damn good and sure
you fill Jugs's shoes.

Jax releases his grip. Mrs. Fielder tries to gloss over the event and put the guests at ease.

MAW

My boys. Always wrestling and
such. Who's the best?
Siblings they call it.

The guests laugh nervously. Jax walks out of the front
door. Knowing that Jax is out of earshot Jude baits him.

JUDE

Our hero ain't a hero. He's a
traitor.

Dixie, who has picked up Little Rip, follows Jax to the
front porch.

EXT. FRONT STEPS FIELDER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Dixie holds Little Rip, consoling him until he stops crying.
Jax pats him on the back.

JAX

I'm sorry. It ain't my
business.

DIXIE

He's crazy. You be careful.

JAX

Me? I've been to a World War.
Heck, I've been to Yankee
stadium. I ain't worried
about my little brother.

DIXIE

He's up to no good. He talked
on the phone all morning to
Army investigators. They say
you were the only one of your
B29 crew to survive.

JAX

That was just luck. Good or
bad, I ain't sure yet.

DIXIE

Jude says you got special
treatment by the Japanese.

JAX

Yeah, all the pears I could eat.

DIXIE

He kept saying to them you were aiding and abetting the enemy.

JAX

Dixie, so help me, I did nothing wrong. I swear. The most I did was taught a Jap kid how to throw a gooseball right before he blew his self up. Unless we were gonna play the Japs a best out of seven series for the Pacific, I don't see how what I done matters.

DIXIE

Jude says the Army could lock you away for the rest of your life.

Jax pauses as he recalls his confinement. The sound of railroad spikes on a pipe rings out. Jax flinches. The sounds are in his head only.

JAX

I've been locked up. I won't get locked up again. I can't.

DIXIE

Then go. Go down to Mexico and play ball.

JAX

Only if you and Little Rip come.

DIXIE

I'm a married woman. I made my choice. We'll listen to you on the radio.

JAX

I ain't goin' nowhere. I didn't do anything wrong.

Jax brushes the hair out of Dixie's face.

JAX
Sometimes you just never know
what's in the store for you.

DIXIE
Be careful, Jax. And watch
out for Bubba. Jude's been
talkin' to him too.

INT. FIELDER KITCHEN - DUSK (SEVERAL DAYS LATER).

Mr. and Mrs. Fielder sit around the kitchen table finishing their supper. Jax comes in the back door sweaty, holding his baseball glove.

MRS. FIELDER
Where have you been?

JAX
I been throwing down at the
high school with some of the
kids. I gotta report to camp
in less than three months.

MR. FIELDER
The law come by today for you.

JAX
The law? What law is that?

MRS. FIELDER
Deputy Bubba. He says it's
urgent that you come down to
the station.

MR. FIELDER
The law ain't been by since
Jugs left. Used to come by
regular.

JAX
Bubba's always had it out for
me. Did he say why or
anything?

MRS. FIELDER

Only that you was not to go
nowhere.

MR. FIELDER

Jude says you are goin' to
prison. What the hell is
goin' on?

Jax hears banging on the pipe. He winces. He hurriedly
heads for his bedroom.

MR. FIELDER

Where you going?

INT. FIELDER BOYS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Jax sits on his bed as the banging gets louder. He looks at
his hand. It is shaking uncontrollably. He gets up and
goes to his dresser.

As Jax hurriedly packs his suitcase from his chest of
drawers, he can hear his father ranting in the kitchen.

MR. FIELDER

(o.s.)

I shouldn't have spared the
rod on those boys. (mocking)
"My babies. Don't hit my
babies." I got a good mind to
go in there right now and find
out what sort of trouble he's
in. He don't have his big
brother to bail his butt out
no more.

CLOSE ON SUITCASE BEING FILLED.

The banging stops as Jax's suitcase on his bed morphs into
Dixie's suitcase on her bed.

INT. FINCH'S SPARE ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Dixie hurriedly packs her suitcase from her chest of
drawers. Little Jackson watches.

Suddenly, Jude appears in the doorway.

JUDE

Ain't you a pair. Wimpy and
gimpy. Don't think for a
minute you're limping out on
me.

DIXIE

All my life people been
telling me what I can't have.
Little Rip is never gonna feel
guilty about wanting.

JUDE

Put the stuff back in the
drawers or else I will.

DIXIE

If my father was here he would
kick your ass again.

JUDE

Or maybe die trying.

INT. FIELDER BOYS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

As Jax closes the last drawer he notices the Japanese
baseball. He hesitates, then closes the drawer. He grabs
his suitcase and walks out of his bedroom only to turn
around in the hall and retrieve the ball from the drawer.
He grabs it and, with his suitcase, walks out past his
parents, ignoring their railing.

MR. FIELDER

I want to know what trouble
you're in. You ain't too big
for me ...

As Jax passes, his father rises and takes off his belt with
great flourish.

MRS. FIELDER

Sit down and shut-up Gaynell.
It's too late.

EXT. FRONT STEPS OF FIELDER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Jax walks hurriedly out of his front door, looking nervously
down the street as he goes. He is carrying his duffel bag
and the Japanese baseball towards Dixie's house.

EXT. DIXIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Jax bounds up the front steps of Dixie's house which is still lit.

EXT. SHERIFF'S PATROL CAR - CONTINUOUS.

Deputy Bubba turns onto Fielder's street and heads towards the Fielder house. Bubba is looking for Jax. Bubba will pass Dixie's house first.

Jax starts to knock on Dixie's door but notices the patrol car heading his way. He quickly opens the screen door and places the Japanese baseball between it and the front door.

The patrol car is closing and Jax hurriedly heads off between the Fielder house and Dixie's house, attempting to evade Bubba.

The patrol car passes Dixie's house and stops in front of the Fielder house.

Jax is in the shadows between the two houses, having escaped Bubba. But as he walks past the back of Dixie's house he hears a shuffling inside. Dixie is weeping and Little Rip screaming. It is obvious that Little Rip is receiving another whipping from Jude.

Jax hesitates knowing that if he intervenes, Bubba will stop his escape. Jax makes a decision. He throws himself against the side of the house and screams.

JAX

Dixie!

Jax runs towards the front of the house. Bubba, who is now out of the patrol car, heads toward Dixie's porch to intercept Jax.

BUBBA

Hold it Jax Fielder. Where have you been?

Jax ignores Bubba and bounds onto Dixie's front porch screaming again.

JAX

Dixie!

Jax opens the screen door and attempts to kick in the front door. Bubba, not expecting such a situation, is at a loss as to what to do. He tentatively draws his pistol.

BUBBA

Jax! Stop, damn it!

Jax continues to kick at the door. Bubba reluctantly aims his pistol at Jax's back. Jax finally kicks in the front door and stands in the doorway, a well-outlined target.

INT. DIXIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - P.O.V. JAX.

Little Rip runs out of the back of the house towards Jax in terror. Jax drops to one knee and holds his arms out. Suddenly Jude appears in the hallway behind Little Rip holding a shotgun.

From the sidewalk Bubba sees the dangerous situation unfolding. Jax is in the doorway. Little Rip is running toward Jax and Jude is now aiming a shotgun in the direction of Little Rip and Jax. Bubba cocks his revolver.

Jax reaches down, grabs the baseball and, in the same motion, rises and fires the ball past Little Rip and hits Jude in the face as his shotgun goes off. Jax scoops up Little Rip and takes him out onto the front porch.

INT. DIXIE'S LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER.

Bubba, starting to perspire, still with his gun drawn, enters the house. Jude is holding his bloody face. Bubba kicks Jude's shotgun towards Jude.

BUBBA

(whispering)

Pick up the shotgun Jude.
Best we settle this right now,
once and for all.

Jude does not accept the challenge.

BUBBA

Listen to what I say Jude
Fielder because I won't say it
again. You find somewhere
else to stay tonight. You get
to the lawyer's office
tomorrow morning and sign
whatever papers you need to
divorce Dixie. You bring them
to me at the jail. Then you
leave Smackover and if I ever
hear you've re-crossed the
county line I'll shoot you
then come up with a funny
excuse for doing so.

Jude moans affirmatively.

EXT. FRONT PORCH DIXIE'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER.

Little Ripley is clinging to Jax like a pea vine on a picket
fence. He holds the Japanese baseball. Dixie embraces both
Jax and Little Ripley. Bubba walks up on the reunion.

BUBBA

Nice throw Jackson.

JAX

Not really, I was aiming for
you.

BUBBA

What were you doing over here?

JAX

I came for my rudder.

BUBBA

Your brother?

JAX

Yeah.

BUBBA

Where you been all day. I
been trying to find you.

JAX

I been hidin' from you.

BUBBA

I just wanted to tell you I'd talked to the Army investigators. They called and said they wanted to come interview you. I listened to what they had to say and then told 'em you couldn't be a traitor. I told 'em you're a simpleton.

JAX

Thanks.

BUBBA

I told them you'd been brain damaged as a kid. A melon accident.

Laughter. We draw back from the porch and start to ascend into the night.

CREDITS BEGIN

The night turns to morning.

CREDITS STOP

EXT. ADMIRAL'S GARDEN (25,000 FEET) - MORNING.

We free-fall into the pear tree in the Admiral's garden. We slow as we pass through the branches. From above we see two men with baseball caps sitting with their backs up against the trunk. The Admiral wears his Yankee cap and a baseball mitt. Yoshi wears a Japanese team's cap and his glove. They laugh.

We ascend again through the branches, back over the Pacific Ocean.

CREDITS CONTINUE

Far below we see a ship cutting through the ocean. We again fall toward what is obviously a large military ship which is passing near a very small island.

CREDITS STOP

EXT. TINY TROPICAL ISLAND - DAY (SOUTH PACIFIC).

From the point of view of a passing Navy destroyer a tropical island is seen from about a mile away. It appears too small to be inhabited, much less of any military value. There is a hum of the ship's engines. The view of the island changes slowly with the ship's movement.

ENSIGN

(o.s.)

Captain, that's an uncharted island off the port.

The destroyer plows through the blue Pacific.

CAPTAIN

(o.s.)

During the war we had to send landing parties to little islands like that to check for Japs.

The captain and ensign stand side by side at the rail surveying the island with binoculars. We see them in the foreground from behind only. We never see their faces. In the distance is the island, slowly passing.

CAPTAIN

Look just off the beach. Are those huts of some sort? There are three of them, whatever they are.

Through the binoculars three crude, thatch huts can be seen.

ENSIGN

(o.s.)

No allied crews were ever reported missing in this sector.

CAPTAIN

(o.s.)

I wouldn't have thought the war came within five hundred miles of here.

From behind, we see the captain lowers his binoculars.

ENSIGN

Maybe some fishermen.

CAPTAIN

There may not even be fish
this far from nowhere.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS - CLOSE ON DICE.

From overhead a pair of dice are tossed into the sand and make small craters. Three men exclaim in Japanese then chatter as a hand scoops up the dice. The camera angle widens and from above we see the three Japanese soldiers crouched in a circle. They are sunburned and their uniforms are tattered.

The old soldier, the cross-eyed soldier and the sumo soldier play dice in a large foxhole. They argue vehemently over the game. In the background are their pitiful huts.

In the foxhole with them is a mortar and both stacks and boxes of mortar shells. Camouflage netting is draped over the mortar, shells and boxes.

In an animated moment the sumo soldier happens to look out to sea and spots the U.S. destroyer. The destroyer is slowly passing the island.

The old soldier and the sumo soldier spring from the foxhole and begin shouting and waiving, trying to catch the attention of someone on the ship. The cross-eyed soldier stays in the foxhole with a curious look on his face. The old soldier stops waiving suddenly, realizing that the ship may not be Japanese. He pulls the sumo soldier back into the safety of the foxhole. He barks an order to the cross-eyed soldier.

The cross-eyed soldier scrambles out of the foxhole and into a nearby hut. The other two soldiers implore him to hurry. They look from the ship to the hut and back again. He runs back from the hut holding binoculars and dives back into the foxhole. He crawls to the edge of the foxhole nearest the water where the old soldier and the sumo soldier crouch so that they cannot be spotted by the ship.

The cross-eyed soldier rises above the lip of the foxhole and begins surveying the horizon through binoculars. He looks left and right, left and right until it is obvious to his compatriots that he cannot focus on the ship. The old soldier yanks the binoculars from him.

The American flag and other identifying marks can be readily identified. The old soldier begins screaming orders. The

cross-eyed soldier and the sumo soldier spring into action, stripping the camouflage from the mortar and shells.

The old soldier maintains his position on the front lip of the foxhole. Using his binoculars, he judges angles and distances and gives those coordinates to the other two, who are behind him manning the mortar.

Responding to the old soldier's shrill directions, the cross-eyed soldier hurriedly turns the aiming wheels on the mortar. As he strains to see the numbers on the mortar his nose almost touches its barrel.

The destroyer is quickly steaming out of range. The old soldier's orders and the other soldiers repeating those orders gets more desperate.

The sumo soldier stands over the mortar ready to drop a shell into the barrel. The cross-eyed soldier hurriedly spins the aiming wheels in response to the old soldier's final coordinates.

Finally, there is silence as the old soldier takes his final bead on the destroyer. Behind him, the mortar crew looks questioningly at the mortar. It is pointing straight up. The cross-eyed soldier gets one last close look at the dials then shrugs his shoulders.

The old soldier, still looking through the binoculars, gives the order to fire. The sumo soldier drops the shell into the mortar and its distinctive recoil is heard - TUNK!

At the noise, the old soldier turns around and looks at the mortar crew for the first time. He sees that the mortar is pointed straight up and screams. All three soldiers look straight up and scream.

From the point of view of the mortar shell three hundred feet directly above the foxhole we ascend a few yards as the shell reaches its zenith. As we fall we see the three soldiers scrambling out of the foxholes, still screaming, sand flying everywhere.

EXT. U.S. DESTROYER - CONTINUOUS.

On the deck the captain and ensign look at a map. In the background is the island, now even smaller on the horizon.

CAPTAIN

Go ahead and chart it.
Someone may come back this way
some ...

The island explodes and the captain and ensign are both startled and amazed. They grab their binoculars and survey the great plume of smoke that rises above the flattened island. The sound of the explosion follows.

CAPTAIN

What was that?

ENSIGN

I'm guessing maybe a
meteorite.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY.

Empty horizon

FINISH CREDITS