

SPITFIRE

FADE IN:

EXT. BALTIMORE - DAY (1952)

Various shots of Baltimore. But this is mid-20th century: no National Aquarium, no Inner Harbor pavilions. Instead, the Phoenix Shot Tower; Patterson Park Pagoda; the Block, with lights blazing; Bromo-Seltzer Tower; Memorial Stadium; a winking Natty Boh man in neon; lighted Dominos Sugar sign.

We move into residential Baltimore, from the tony Guilford and Roland Park to working class - Hampden, Canton, Westport - to Madison-East End, a poor African-American community (we will see this neighborhood later) and then, looking similar in housing stock, but less down and out, its white equivalent, Highlandtown: long rows of brick houses with marble stoops where the only thing distinguishing one home from another is a coating of Formstone or a splash of paint.

We settle on a modest but tidy brick house, the end unit in a long row with an alley between it and a tall building anchoring the next block. The building has a very prominent advertisement for a mattress company on the exposed brick: a man happily asleep on a cloud.

It's sleeting.

INT. PANSKI HOUSE - DAY

CAROLINE PANSKI, 12, sits in front of a bay window, staring forlornly at the awful weather. In the spic-and-span house behind her are the sounds of the radio and clanging dishes.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FILTERED)

'It's 30 degrees Fahrenheit in
Baltimore. Rain and sleet
continue.'

The radio blasts tinny music, followed by a stentorian voice:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FILTERED) (CONT'D)

'Now, Edward R. Murrow and the
voices of President Harry S.
Truman, Senator Robert Taft,
General George C. Marshall, and
more than forty other men and women
in this evening's performance of
Hear it Now.

(MORE)

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FILTERED) (CONT'D)

Later, an editorial: Children in Asia are dying of starvation and the bestselling books in America are about how to get thin. But first, a Mutual Broadcasting System bulletin from the front lines of Korea.'

Caroline's ears perk up at this. She heads to the kitchen.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FILTERED) (CONT'D)

'Supreme Commander of U.N. forces Gen. Matthew Ridgeway addressing a joint session of Congress . . .'

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MRS. PANSKI, early 30s, stares into space, a dish towel clutched in her hand and held near her face. Mrs. Panski wears a typical 1950s dress: tight at the waist, flared at the legs, etc. She hasn't noticed Caroline.

RADIO VOICE (FILTERED)

'I want to speak specifically of the Twenty-Third United States Infantry Regiment, which sustained two of the severest attacks of the entire Korean campaign. Twice isolated far in advance of the general battle line, twice completely surrounded, in near zero weather--'

CAROLINE

Mama?

Mrs. Panski jumps, dropping the towel to the floor.

MRS. PANSKI

Don't do that . . . You scared me half to death.

CAROLINE

I didn't mean to.

(beat)

Is that about Daddy?

Mrs. Panski lunges to the radio, snapping it off.

MRS. PANSKI

Of course not. You've finished your studies?

CAROLINE

Mm-hmm. I want to go play.

MRS. PANSKI

You can't go out in this mess.

Just outside the kitchen window, Caroline can see two Boys horseplaying on the sidewalk as they pass.

MRS. PANSKI (CONT'D)

Not while it's sleeting. Supper in one hour. Find something to do.

Caroline shuffles out of the kitchen.

INT. PANSKI HOME - CONTINUOUS

Back to the window seat, Caroline stares once again at the sky. But there's a slow change taking place: the sleet's turning to fat snowflakes. Caroline's eyes brighten. She smiles and runs up the stairs.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caroline reaches into her closet and pulls out a pair of ice skates. A flurry of energy, she quickly changes. On her dresser sits a photograph of a handsome man in an Army uniform: DAVID PANSKI, her father. Leaning against the dresser is a hockey stick. She grabs this, too, and runs out.

EXT. PANSKI HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Skates tied together and flung over her shoulder, Caroline bounds through the front door. The snow is thick now.

EXT. CITY STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline navigates the streets of her neighborhood. She runs through an alley and emerges onto:

EXT. ABANDONED LOT - CONTINUOUS

A neglected world of glass, brick, and concrete amidst rows of dilapidated houses. In the middle of the lot sits a huge circle of frozen water.

Caroline plops down in the snow and laces up her skates. She races onto the ice and executes a perfect spin.

She stops, sets her sights on the far end of the pond, and races in that direction as quickly as she can. Racing, skating, racing . . . until she trips over a rock and sprawls headfirst onto the ice.

She gets up, wipes herself off, and runs her mitten over her chin, where little droplets of blood form. She scowls at the rock and then retrieves her hockey stick. She skates to the edge of the pond, gathers momentum, and takes off toward the rock. Without breaking stride, she pushes the rock along the ice with the stick until she slows, veers, winds up, and lets loose a mean slapshot toward some crude netting set up to approximate a hockey goal. The rock skips off the ice, shuttling through a hole in the netting, and slams into the rusted hood of an abandoned Packard: 'Thwap!'

Caroline smiles.

She looks at the stick, at the cartoon figure emblazoned there: bearded sea captain in fisherman's togs with wool cap and jacket, on skates with a stick in his hand. Caroline places a soft kiss on the stick.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. CARLIN'S AMUSEMENT PARK, HOCKEY RINK - DAY

Caroline and David Panski watch the game on the rink below them: the Baltimore Clippers and the Atlantic City Seagulls. The atmosphere is electric with hundreds of Fans in their seats, screaming and spilling beer. Banners hang from the ceiling proclaiming the league champion Orioles teams of 1934, 1936, and 1940. David Panski points to the banners.

DAVID PANSKI

The Orioles have folded. The Clippers are the new team now. And they'll win the championship this year. You can bet on that.

CAROLINE

Daddy? How come girls can't play hockey?

DAVID PANSKI

Who says girls can't play hockey? There used to be women's games right here in this building. The Spitfires and the Glamour Girls.

CAROLINE

Really?

DAVID PANSKI

Sure, and can tell you: they took their wallops and bruises just like the men. But when a girl takes a bad tumble, instead of rubbing her bruise . . . she straightens her hair.

David musses Caroline's hair.

CAROLINE

Are you telling the truth?

A Clippers player winds up and scores. The crowd goes wild; David Panski jumps out of his seat.

INT. CARLIN'S AMUSEMENT PARK, HOCKEY RINK - LATER

The game is over. Caroline and David make their way to the ice, as do a couple dozen or so other Kids and their Dads. On the ice, the Clippers Players interact with the Kids, showing them how to shoot a puck, etc.

One of the Clippers hands Caroline his stick, which she can hardly lift. He positions himself behind her, helps her wheel it back, and winds up. They let fly a spinning beauty that saucers into the net. The smile on Caroline's face is immense.

INT. CARLIN'S RINK LOBBY - LATER

Giddy and beaming, David and Caroline pass souvenir stands. Caroline stops and stares at a kiosk selling Clippers gear, including a row of replica sticks with the Clippers logo.

DAVID PANSKI

Come on, sweetie.

CAROLINE

Oh, Daddy. Please?

DAVID PANSKI

How much?

ATTENDANT

One dollar fifty.

David hesitates, then - sucker for his kid - relents.

He may as well be handing Caroline the Shroud of Turin for the look on her face.

She runs her fingers over the varnished wood, then puts it on the ground and lets it slide across the floor. She winds back, taking a few practice swings, threatening her father's shins.

CAROLINE
Thank you, Daddy.

David and Caroline walk the hall, David's hand on his daughter's shoulder, Caroline lovingly cradling the stick.

RETURN TO:

EXT. FROZEN POND - DAY

Caroline, still in reverie, doesn't notice that she's got company: about a dozen Boys, ages 12-13, have entered from the alley and are making their way to the far side of the ice. When they see Caroline, they stop. It's something of a showdown: twelve Boys on one side, Caroline on the other, each, it seems, waiting for the other to do something. Finally, one Boy, ALAN, 13, skates forward.

ALAN
What are you doing here?

Caroline doesn't answer.

BOY #2
You dumb or somethin'?

BOY #3
Look, guys: It's Sonja Henie.

The Boys laugh.

BOY #3 (CONT'D)
This ain't Rockefeller Center,
sweetheart.

BOY #2
Can't figure skate here today.

CAROLINE
I don't want to figure skate.
(beat)
I want to play hockey.

The Boys burst out laughing.

ALAN
Girls figure skate. Boys play
hockey.

Caroline's shoulders slump.

More laughter.

BOY #2

Go on.

Caroline walks away, eyes burning.

ROCK AND ROLL SOCCER

INSERT (scrolling):

"The sun never sets on the world of soccer" -- Unknown

"We are all in the gutter . . . but some of us are looking at the stars" -- Oscar Wilde

FADE IN:

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

GEORGIE MARSH, late 20s, longish dark hair, very good looking, wraps athletic tape around his ankles. On the floor sit two well-used soccer cleats. The rhythmic sound of dripping echoes through the room. Georgie stops taping and watches as rain drips through a small hole in the ceiling, adding to the growing puddle on the floor. The sound echoes mercilessly until it's interrupted by . . .

MANAGER (O.S.)

Georgie? You comin' mate?

GEORGIE

(resigned)

Yeah. I'm coming.

INT. STADIUM TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

Georgie walks the dank hallway - paint peeling, water on the floor - toward a gray light.

EXT. STADIUM PITCH - MOMENTS LATER

Georgie emerges into the most dismal day imaginable: slate gray sky, wind-driven rain, 20+ sodden Footballers "warming up," a seeming impossibility in this weather.

INSERT: Burnden Park. Bolton, England. March, 1974

Maybe three hundred Fans brave the elements - all Men, most clutching beer cans. But one Person stands out: ALAN REAMS, late 50s, tanned, watching with keen interest.

Georgie makes his way onto the pitch. As he does, his shoe sinks into a puddle. He lifts his leg, but the cleat remains.

GEORGIE

Christ.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Players slog around the pitch. Occasionally, one of them lays out for a tackle in the frozen mud. The rain lashes. "Fans" boo and whistle while Managers sit on the benches, huddled up and smoking, impassive. A somber ANNOUNCER calls the action.

ANNOUNCER

This is right tedium, ranging from humdrumity to boredom.

Georgie's doing his best - he's clearly the best Player out here - but there's only so much he can do. The weather conspires against him.

Finally he breaks free, dribbles on goal, one on one with the Keeper, and bangs a shot . . . wide. Boos rain down along with the sleet.

FAN

Get a bloody haircut, you poof!

The final whistle blows. As Georgie and his Teammates trundle off the field, drunken Fans heap abuse and chuck beer cans.

GEORGIE

Toss off, you wankers!

Alan smiles. He makes his way toward the Players' concourse where he's halted by a TEAM OFFICIAL.

TEAM OFFICIAL

Players only, mate.

ALAN

But--

TEAM OFFICIAL

You 'ard of 'earing then?

ALAN

I've come all the way from America.
To see Georgie Marsh.

TEAM OFFICIAL

I don't give a fuck where you come
from. 'E ain't interested, whatever
it is.

Team Official skulks off.

EXT. STADIUM - LATER

Georgie drives out, passing three Fans urinating on an exterior stadium wall. One of them sees Georgie and gives him the finger. Just as Georgie turns a corner out of sight, Alan runs up the sidewalk after him. Too late. Freeze on:

INSERT: Alan Reams, Owner, Tampa Bay Rowdies, of the North American Soccer League.

EXT. ROADWAYS - LATER

Georgie winds through Bolton, down increasingly narrow lanes, until he pulls up to a beige home on a dead end street.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Georgie enters, shakes off his wet jacket, and plops into a chair. It's a cozy place, but there's no escaping the gloom from the rain lashing at the windows. He heaves a sigh.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - LATER

Georgie sits in front of the television, drink in hand, watching *Sports Night*.

SPORTSCASTER (FILTERED)

A dismal showing at Burnden Park.
Host Wanderers squandered . . .

Georgie disgustedly turns the channel to *Benny Hill*. Settling back in his chair, he downs his drink and watches Hill cavorting with three scantily clad Women.

CUT TO:

EST. OFFICE TOWER, TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA - MORNING

Business district with Businessmen walking the streets carrying briefcases, cups of coffee, etc.

INSERT: Tampa Bay, Florida, USA. The next day.

INT. OFFICE TOWER - SAME

Alan, jet-lagged and tousled, enters and strides toward an inner office past his RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Reams. I thought you were in--

ALAN

I need Georgie Marsh. Bolton, England. Get him.

INT. ALAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Alan enters and closes the door. He slumps into a chair. Plaques on the walls suggest a successful and influential businessman. On his desk are several drawings of soccer balls, a soccer player, the words "Tampa Bay Rowdies" done up in differing fancy scripts, all of them in green and yellow.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Georgie eats while reading the paper. What he's reading irritates him and he tosses it in the trash. He pulls back a small curtain and stares at the slate gray sky.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - LATER

Georgie pulls on shoes and starts out the door when the phone, which sits next to a record player and an early Elvis Presley album, rings. He picks it up.

GEORGIE

Yeah?

ALAN REAMS (FILTERED)

Hello! Is this Georgie Marsh?

GEORGIE

Who's this then?

INT. OFFICE TOWER - SIMULTANEOUS

Alan stands in his office, phone cord wrapped around his finger. The sun streams through the windows.

ALAN

Mr. Marsh, this is Alan Reams,
calling from United States.

GEORGIE (FILTERED)

What's that?

ALAN

United States. We want you here,
playing soccer - football - for us.

INTERCUT.

GEORGIE

This some sort of wind up?

ALAN

I'm sorry?

GEORGIE

This a put on?

ALAN

We're looking to build our roster,
Mr. Marsh. Tampa Bay. A new club.
We're looking to add great soccer
players, like yourself. English
legends, to come play in America.

Georgie walks to a bookshelf and pulls down a thick volume.

GEORGIE

(leafing through the book)
They don't even play football in
America, do they?

ALAN

Of course we do. Haven't you heard
of the NASL?

GEORGIE

No, I haven't.

ALAN

North American Soccer League.

GEORGIE

Still no.

ALAN
 Fifteen clubs, spread across
 America. Canada, too. And we're
 expanding. That's why I'm calling.
 We want a player of your caliber
 for our new club here in Tampa Bay.

Georgie finds the page he's looking for: it's an atlas and
 he's located Tampa. *Florida*. He looks again out his window,
 at the unrelenting rain.

GEORGIE
 Tampa Bay?

ALAN
 That's right.

GEORGIE
 Let me ask you something, Mr--

ALAN
 Reams. Alan Reams.

GEORGIE
 What's the weather there right now?
 Right this moment.

Alan looks out his window.

ALAN
 Mid-70s. Uh, 24 Celsius, give or
 take. Sunny.

Georgie smiles.

GEORGIE
 Sunny, you say?

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Georgie tosses clothes into an oversized suitcase.

KING OF THE FREAKS

FADE IN:

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

A massive tent, with many hundreds of seats, all of them filled. High above the audience, JOHNNY ECK, 20s, balances on a tight rope.

The tightrope begins to sway. Johnny looks unsure of himself. He grasps tightly with both hands and then suddenly one hand slips. The audience gasps as he redoubles his grip, hanging on the tightrope. It looks like he's going to fall.

Johnny looks up and sees his hands, which are shod in coarse leather gloves. He looks down; the sea of faces melds and blurs, swaying. Occasionally, a crystal clear vision of a horrified face, but then a mass of featureless faces again as everything sways below him.

The shrieks of the audience dissolve and all is silent. Johnny hangs there - alone, in his own world - gripping the rope with both hands, the rest of his body hanging, hanging, hanging . . .

CUT TO:

EST. BALTIMORE - DAY (1911)

Lots of construction as the city rebuilds from the Great Fire of 1904. Moving to:

The Light Street Wharves -- a jumble of horse-drawn carriages loaded with goods and a series of garages leading to the harbor, where cargo ships await loading.

INSERT: Baltimore. 1911

EXT. LIGHT STREET WHARVES - DAY

The area is crawling with sweaty, straining Men hauling bundles onto waiting boats. ROBERT ECKHARDT, 30s, is among them. He's a barrel-chested man with a permanent grin on his face, even as he's buckling under heavy loads.

Carrying a crate, he makes his way from the low-slung warehouse to a waiting boat.

DOCK WORKER

Hey, Bob.

Robert nods his head.

DOCK WORKER (CONT'D)

How's Emilia coming?

ROBERT
Any day now.

DOCK WORKER
If it's a girl--

ROBERT
Caroline will have a sister to
dress up.

DOCK WORKER
And a boy--

ROBERT
He'll take my place down here soon
enough.

Robert unloads the box, stretches his back.

FOREMAN (O.S.)
Let's keep it moving, boys!

CUT TO:

EST. N. MILTON AVENUE, MCELDERRY PARK, EAST BALTIMORE - DAY

A street of rowhomes, each with its distinctive Baltimore
stoop. Neighbors loiter outside, part of a vibrant community.

INT. 622 NORTH MILTON AVENUE (ECKHARDT HOME) - DAY

EMILIA ECKHARDT, 30s, very pregnant, waddles through the
living room. She stops, rubs her hand over her belly, winces,
then sits down.

CAROLINE ECKHARDT, 12, enters.

CAROLINE
Mama?

Emilia doubles over in pain.

EMILIA
Ooooh. I think it's time.

Caroline bursts out the door . . .

EXT. ECKHARDT HOME - CONTINUOUS

. . . and along Milton Avenue. She runs into a grocery.

INT. GROCERY - CONTINUOUS

FEMALE WORKER is behind the counter when she sees Caroline run in.

FEMALE WORKER

Is it time?

Caroline nods and Female Worker steers her to a telephone.

INT./EXT. DOCK WAREHOUSE - LATER

Foreman picks up a ringing telephone. Nods. Hangs up. He turns to a Worker.

FOREMAN

Eckhardt?

Worker points to a wharf.

EXT. WHARF - MOMENTS LATER

Foreman says something to Eckhardt, who nods, wipes his brow, puts down a box, and takes off. One of his co-Workers slaps him on the shoulder as he runs off.

EXT. ECKHARDT HOME - DAY

Emilia is helped into a cab by a female Neighbor.

NEIGHBOR

Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Caroline runs up.

CAROLINE

I called, Mama.

Emilia nods. The cab takes off.

EXT. ECKHARDT HOME - LATER

MRS. RYSCZECK, a thick older Woman, approaches the Eckhardt house, where Neighbor and Caroline sit on the stoop.

MRS. RYSCZECK

Is she inside?

NEIGHBOR

They took her to Johns Hopkins.

MRS. RYSCZECK

Oh, lord. Who goes to a hospital to have a baby? Child should be born at home.

Neighbor and Caroline steal a glance at each other, roll their eyes.

MRS. RYSCZECK (CONT'D)

Nothing but trouble in hospitals.

Mrs. Rysczech points across the street.

MRS. RYSCZECK (CONT'D)

Had all nine of mine right there. Never had any need for a hospital. Doctors don't know a thing.

CAROLINE

Mama and Father say the new Carnegie Foundation report--

MRS. RYSCZECK

Said that medical schools should be shut down, and that doctors are poorly trained.

CAROLINE

But it also said that Johns Hopkins was the best. And it said that hospitals with trained doctors are safe places for babies to be born. Mama had trouble with me, here, when I was born. So . . .

MRS. RYSCZECK

Something goes wrong there, I won't be the one to say I told you so.

NEIGHBOR

No, of course you won't, Mrs. Rysczech.

MRS. RYSCZECK

I pray she makes it out of there alive. With her baby alive, too.

Caroline blanches.

Robert comes running up the block. He kisses Caroline on the head, nods to the Neighbor.

MRS. RYSCZECK (CONT'D)
I had mine right over there, Mr.
Eckhardt.

ROBERT
Yes. All ten of them, right?

MRS. RYSCZECK
Nine. And each turned out fine.

Robert takes a quick look across the street, where a dull-looking Boy holds a hose as water dribbles onto the street and into the sewer. He has a look of complete vacancy.

ROBERT
Yes, indeed. If you'll excuse me.

MRS. RYSCZECK
No good in hospitals. I only pray--

Robert has gone inside.

INT. ECKHARDT HOME - MOMENTS LATER

MONTAGE: Robert runs a washcloth over his face, torso, and hair; he combs back his brilliantined hair; he slaps on a fresh shirt; he's about to leave when he opens a cigar box, snatches a few, and places these inside his pocket.

EXT. ECKHARDT HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Robert comes back outside.

NEIGHBOR
Godspeed, Robert. We'll be fine
here.

Robert smiles, kisses Caroline again, and takes off running down the street. Mrs. Rysczeck watches him.

MRS. RYSCZECK
I only pray . . .

EST. JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL - DAY

A few cars line the street: Royal Model G, Auburn Coupe, etc. Men in suits and high top hats, Women in long petticoats and wide-brimmed hats and carrying umbrellas.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

A DOCTOR, looking a bit bored, coaxes along Emilia, who is sweating, screaming, and grunting her way through childbirth. A NURSE holds her hand and dabs at her forehead.

Finally, the baby is coming. Doctor leans in, ready to deliver.

DOCTOR
You're doing fine, Mrs. Eckhardt.
Keep pushing. Like that. Good.

Doctor reaches down and takes the Baby. Nurse looks down.

NURSE
It's a boy, Mrs. Eckhardt. A
beautiful boy.

Nurse takes the Baby and places him in a warmer.

DOCTOR
We're not done here.

Doctor reaches again.

NURSE
It's twins, Mrs. Eckhardt.

EMILIA ECKHARDT
Twins.

DOCTOR
Oh.
(beat)
Oh, God.

Nurse looks down. A look of bewilderment crosses her face. Then, she faints.

Doctor is ashen.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Sweet lord in heaven.

Emilia positions herself, looks down. She screams.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - SIMULTANEOUS

Two Men sit uncomfortably in chairs, looking nervous. One of them gets up and starts pacing. Robert bounds into the hallway. The Men nod at each other.

After a beat, Robert watches the other two, bemused. He pulls one of the cigars out of his pocket and offers it to the PACING MAN.

PACING MAN
Aren't we supposed to wait? Until they're born?

ROBERT
Seems you could use it now.

PACING MAN
Isn't it bad luck or something?

The OTHER MAN rushes over, greedily takes the cigar and lights up. The Pacing Man, seeing this, takes another that Robert has pulled from his inside pocket.

Robert laughs and pulls out a third, which he lights for himself.

ROBERT
First time, gentlemen?

PACING MAN
I've had plenty of these before.

OTHER MAN
He means for a baby.

PACING MAN
Oh. Yes, first time.

OTHER MAN
Me, too.

ROBERT
My second. 'Course, last one was twelve years ago, and it was in our house.

OTHER MAN
My wife insisted on doing it here when she read that--

PACING MAN
Carnegie report. Here, too.

Robert laughs.

ROBERT
Sign of the times, boys. Won't be long before the ladies are running things here, too.
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(beat)

At any moment, a young nurse will come around that corner and announce that you have a beautiful baby--

OTHER MAN

Boy. Please let it be a boy.

NURSE #2 enters. Robert turns to her.

ROBERT

Ah, you see?

(to Nurse #2)

Which one of these lucky fellas is a new daddy?

NURSE #2

Mr. Eckhardt?

ROBERT

That's me.

Beat.

NURSE #2

Will you come with me please?

ROBERT

Boy or girl?

OTHER MAN

Yeah. Boy or girl?

Nurse #2 hesitates, stammers, looks at her shoes.

NURSE #2

If you'd please come with me.

INT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Robert and Nurse #2 walk down a series of hallways.

ROBERT

Don't want to make the other guys jealous?

Nurse #2 keeps walking, doesn't make eye contact.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Say, can you at least tell me the sex?

NURSE #2
Your wife has been anesthetized.
She's had quite a shock.

Robert grasps Nurse #2's forearm, arresting her progress.

ROBERT
What's going on. What shock?

Beat.

NURSE #2
You have twins, Mr. Eckhardt.

ROBERT
Oh. Well, okay. You had me scared.
Twins, you say? Boys? Girls? One of
each? I bet it's one of each.

NURSE #2
Boys, Mr. Eckhardt. But--

ROBERT
I'll be. Two boys. At once.

Robert reaches into his pocket and pulls out a cigar.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Gave my other two to the fellas out
there. Guess I have to rip this one
in half, huh?

Nurse #2 winces.

Doctor walks up.

DOCTOR
(to Nurse #2)
This him?

NURSE #2
Mr. Eckhardt, Dr. Munson will
explain to you--

ROBERT
Explain what?

DOCTOR
Please, Mr. Eckhardt. Please - come
with me.

EXT. ECKHARDT HOME - SIMULTANEOUS

Caroline and Neighbor sit on the stoop. By now, a small crowd has gathered.

TEEN GIRL

You going to get a baby sister?

CAROLINE

I don't know.

TEEN GIRL

My mama says if you're craving sweets, it's a girl. And if you're craving salty foods, it's a boy.

CAROLINE

My mother ate everything that would stay down.

TEEN GIRL

I hope it's a girl. We can dress her up and do her hair.

Caroline shrugs.

CAROLINE

I wouldn't mind a brother.

INT. HOSPITAL - SIMULTANEOUS

Doctor leads Robert to the "maternity ward" - really just a small room with a few Babies in cribs. This is 1911, after all. Nurse #2 is there. Seeing Doctor and Robert, she leans down and unwraps a baby.

Robert smiles wide as the moon.

ROBERT

Robert Junior.

(beat)

And where is his brother?

Nurse #2 hesitates. Doctor nods at her. She slowly unwraps the second baby to reveal: he has no lower half.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What the--? Where's the rest of him?

DOCTOR

He's healthy.

ROBERT

How can he be healthy? Where are his legs? How do you even know it's a boy?

DOCTOR

He's breathing normally and appears to be healthy. He has legs. And feet. They are just malformed. He has male genitals.

ROBERT

How did this happen? What is this? What kind of--

DOCTOR

We made a call to Massachusetts General. They had a case two years ago. A boy, like yours.

Robert just stares ahead, bewildered.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Doctor takes several x-ray images off his desk and holds them up. Robert sits across the desk from him, pinned to his chair. Two grim Nurses stand by, listening.

DOCTOR

It's what's called hypoplasia of the sacrum.

Doctor traces his finger along the edges of the bones on the half-baby's trunk.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

The development of the lower spine is affected. In this case, suspended.

ROBERT

Will it grow? Will it be normal?

DOCTOR

It does not grow, no.

ROBERT

So he's going to be like *that*? His whole life?

DOCTOR

Well, with the use of a rolling chair, the subject could conceivably adjust to the condition.

ROBERT

Where's my wife? Has she seen?

NURSE

Mrs. Eckhardt is resting comfortably.

ROBERT

These damned hospitals. I knew it.

DOCTOR

Mr. Eckhardt, where your son was born had no effect on this. I assure you of that.

Robert looks around, exasperated, dazed.

NURSE

By all other accounts, Mr. Eckhardt, you have two healthy boys. Count your blessings.

Robert looks at her, unsure, unconvinced.