

FADE IN:

EXT. DETROIT, MICHIGAN 1950'S - AFTERNOON

A distant green dot. We speed in, closer and closer, until the green has form, a rectangle, with icicles.

It becomes a DETROIT CITY LIMIT sign, then rollercoasters us up and away along the ice-chunked Detroit River to an aerial montage of Motor City landmarks:

SUPER: "DETROIT 1957"

Frosty Olympia, the Detroit Zoo, Belle Isle, Bob Lo, and finally the shiny Penobscot Building creases the brisk sunny skyline. Manholes spew steam in the busy streets.

Vibrant, a city full of ant-like activity. Factories pump out shiny cars filling pristine highways to new neighborhoods where fresh homes sprout like dandelions.

Mount Carmel Hospital pops out babies to families who come and go like a human assembly line, everything bustles with growth, success, and boundless optimism.

We descend now, a slow float into a snowy Tiger Stadium where long lines of bundled up football fans cram the gates to get in to see their beloved DETROIT LIONS!

The crowd noises soften and we hear two clear voices:

OLDER VOICE

Dee-troit! What a city! My city!

EXT. TIGER STADIUM - AFTERNOON

The corner of Michigan and Trumbull, where Tigers and Lions pennants snap on towering light gray walls trimmed in green.

These guidons guard the Americana smells inside - foamy beer, mustard slathered red hots, roasted peanuts, and caramel corn.

INT. BRIGGS FIELD - AFTERNOON

A scruffy VENDOR (40's) with a Santa hat flips a peanut bag down the row, knocks a fan upside his head, just before the crowd stands and ROARS as the Lions smack into the Cleveland Browns in a mud-snow battle below!

VENDOR

(rhythmic)

Red Hots! Getch yer Red Hots! Musty or
plain. Red Hots! Getch yer dogs here!

YOUNGER VOICE

Excuse me, but it's our city. Not your-

OLDER VOICE

(ignoring)

Mighty Dee-troit shifted its fabled gears
from the capitol of car production to a
war machine metropolis that saved Europe
and defeated Adolph and his Nazi thugs.

YOUNGER VOICE

And the Japs, and it's not Dee-troit.
It's Dah-troit already. And the men who-

OLDER VOICE

Thanks to the Ford Motor Company...Jeeps,
trucks, tanks, and that also owns the
World Champion Dee-troit Lions!

The rough play continues, helmets and pads collide with
bone-cracking cringes as grimacing men comically throw
each other around the sloppy torn up sludge that was a
gorgeous field at kickoff, now whole strips of sod roll
away like carpet.

YOUNGER VOICE

...Who worked those assembly lines? Don't
forget him, sweating for his family. The
same grunts who drove those trucks and
tanks. Men like Calvin Pickett and Stan
Kowalski.

OLDER VOICE

Yes, of course, Calvin and Stan...but it
was industry that built our-

The Lions, about to score, make a mad dash to the end
zone. It ends in a slooshing road-grading sludge pile
of turf at the goal line. Goofy gnashing faces mash up
in the collision.

YOUNGER VOICE

Men were the industry. Men who left home
and hearth. The common man, the same
palookas who after defeating the threat
to their way of life came home and filled
this stadium to see these men fight...for
a world championship!

The next play. A Lions player dives over the goal line as two Browns sandwich him mid-air. His face distorts.

OLDER VOICE

Now hold it then.

The play obediently freezes with the ball carrier's face locked in anguish suspended over the end-zone!

OLDER VOICE

No one is discounting the contributions of the working man, or their favorite team, the Dee-troit Lions-

YOUNGER VOICE

Who should have won a dozen Super Bowls already if not for their stupid owner!

OLDER VOICE

Let it go. A curse is a curse.

YOUNGER VOICE

And a vow is a vow.

OLDER VOICE

Yes, we should bring everyone up to speed on that particular point then or we'll have no story to tell.

YOUNGER VOICE

No, you poop. Let them see our story.

OLDER VOICE

Quite right, quite right. Uh, let's see.

The frozen play reverses and everything goes backwards.

YOUNGER VOICE

No, not that switch! The other one! The other one!

OLDER VOICE

Oopsy Daisy! Sorry. Here we go then.

Now the play stops and goes forward...a touchdown!

YOUNGER VOICE

Start at the butcher shop already.

OLDER VOICE

That would be this button, right, here.

EXT. KOWALSKI'S BUTCHER SHOP - EARLY MORNING

KOWALSKI'S BUTCHER SHOP is all windows, hand-painted prices and specials scribbled in whitewash, real down home, with sausage and kielbasa links hung like a New York deli. You can almost see the smells.

It sits next to PEACHY'S FRUIT MARKET, on the corner of four-lane Warren Avenue with trolley tracks and cable wires overhead, not downtown, but not the suburbs. Bushels of produce abound.

On the other side of Warren is the WARRENDALE BAKERY. It oozes Polish, an old world family feel, with Catholic relics in the windows. The smell of fresh rye, heavenly!

Grammas pull wire grocery carts, bikes with ball gloves crammed on handlebars, an old RAG LADY (74) pushes her cart. You see it in each storefront, and "it" says, this is our neighborhood, you're welcome, and it's safe.

ALLEY BACKDOOR

CALVIN PICKETT (33) steps through a doorway crowned with a KOWALSKI'S sign over it, an armload of KOWALSKI'S boxes almost hide his face...he's McQueen lean, overalls, a butcher's apron, and a winter coat.

Calvin's upbeat, a smiler, that likable guy who always makes you feel like a million bucks. And he's black.

He heaves the boxes onto the truck with ballet ease, and SLAMS down the retractable door. The noise wakes a HOBO (27) under some cardboard boxes and Calvin tosses a small brown bag of meat snacks at him like a quarterback.

Based on the catch and nod, it's clearly their routine.

The same KOWALSKI'S logo festoons the truck. He hops inside and three small boys slide over for him, MUNSON PICKETT (11), LANDRY PICKETT (12), and their pale friend EVERETT NAGURSKI (10) who's lily white.

Next door a cute little black girl hurries out of PEACHY'S carrying a small bag of trash. CARLA (11) waves at the boys who wave back except Landry who looks away, painfully past shy all the way to scared.

CALVIN

You know she ain't waving at nobody but you Landry. We all know that much now.

Everett and Munson elbow each other and giggle.

CALVIN

Why doncha' ever talk to her, son? Now she gonna think you hate her.

Landry shakes his head like a puppy. The truck drops into gear, and shudders forward.

CALVIN

Now why not? Peachy's daughter is a sweet little thing. What's her name now, Carrie?

Calvin's false puzzled face tells us he knows her name.

LANDRY

Carla. Ain't got no time for girls, Pop.

CALVIN

Now why you say that, son?

LANDRY

Can't be getting distracted from my football career by women. Maybe later, after I sign my contract with the Lions.

EVERETT

Sure. The Lions want a kid already. You're just scared of her, ain't he Munson?

MUNSON

Yeah, 'fraid Peachy'll give him the cooties or something, Pop. Maybe if she kisses-

Landry slugs him in the arm, then Everett.

EVERETT

Ow, careful of Night Train already.

A hamster wiggles up above his shirt pocket and then nuzzles back down inside.

EVERETT

You okay buddy?

MUNSON

(singing)

Landry and Peachy, sittin' in a tree....

Landry sneaks a peek. She notices, and waves again, hopeful. Both boys notice and wink at each other. Munson gets another punch. Her wave falters just as a big black limousine creeps in behind her near the alley.

The hobo rises up, protective, and the car rolls away.

CARLA

(unaware)

Morning to you, Mr Hotchkiss.

HOTCHKISS, the hobo, smiles, then follows the limo with steel eyes.

HOTCHKISS

Morning, Miss Peachy.

She smiles, deposits her bag in the car, and heads inside. He watches the alley, sure the car's gone.

EXT. TIGER STADIUM ENTRANCE - EARLY MORNING

Michigan and Trumbull, the intersection of the Detroit Tigers and the Detroit Lions. Ruth, Cobb, and Gehrig walked here. Found glory here. This is holy ground.

SUPER: "TIGER STADIUM (BRIGGS FIELD)"

Steam drifts up from the sewers in the streets where vendors back up their trucks to the storied gates to unload their wares.

LOADING DOCKS

The boys pile out, line up at the truck's gate, and take boxes from Calvin. They lug them inside and stack them onto four dollies.

When Calvin comes in with the last box, a huge one marked with a red X and OWNER'S SUITE on it, only two dollies are stacked properly. He notices, smiles approvingly to Landry with a head-shake, and takes one of the two.

Everett's an Oscar Mayer commercial...plump and juicy, and doesn't look younger than the Pickett boys who seem nearly identical, both lean and athletic. Despite his younger age, Everett is much bigger than them.

Landry has an air about him, a natural leader, and already leans into the heaviest dolly without being told. Munson...not so much. He picks up one smaller box, without a dolly, and follows his brother.

VENDOR

Dogs for the boys? On the house, Cal.

Calvin smiles and hands him a dollar as the two brothers file by and take their steaming lunch.

CALVIN

Thanks, Big Mike. Appreciate it, but
paying our way, as always.

(yelling back)

Everett! Hustle it up now.

Everett eyes the two heavy dollies and their Pisa Tower lean, then grabs just one box from the top instead, and bumbles after Munson. He smoothly snatches his dog, crams a bite into his mouth, and pockets the other half.

BIG MIKE

Slowly, Everett. We'll make more.

LANDRY

Hey Pop, we gonna' get to watch the game?

CALVIN

Gave you my word, didn't I now?

LANDRY

I know. 'My word is my bond.' But they're kicking off soon, and we'll miss-

Calvin gives him the 'word is my bond' look.

CALVIN

Have I ever broken a promise to you?

LANDRY

No, sir.

CALVIN

Your daddy ever lied to either of you?

MUNSON

No, sir.

CALVIN

My word is my bond. Now then, first off get these boxes over to the main stand kitchens, and the kielbasas to the suites. I'll take this big box up to the Owner's Suite next.

Everett has caught up to them now.

EVERETT

I got five bucks sez the Lions win by two touchdowns or better.

MUNSON

And I got five bucks says you ain't got
no five bucks. And if you did, you prolly
ate it all up anyway.

Everett shrugs, pulls out the hotdog, and sticks the
rest of it into his mouth with a a no-apology-smirk.

LANDRY

C'mon guys. Hustle it up if ya' wanna'
see some of the game once.

INT. TIGER STADIUM RAMP - AFTERNOON

All four watch the game below with Big Mike while
standing on the ramp. Torn turf, muddy ruts, and filthy
players collide in puffs of frozen snorts as the snow
turns to rain, then sleet. The boys hang on every play!

The previous "frozen play" that went for a touchdown
has all four react with wild cheers, which also stops
them freeze frame just like the goal line play, and
just before their celebration upsets Big Mike's tray.

Each face gets zoomed in on individually. Calvin first.

YOUNGER VOICE

Calvin Pickett, good as gold, a real bud
to all. Dogs just love him to death.

OLDER VOICE

A World War II vet who did plenty, despite
not being allowed to fight because of his
race, terrible, but still says little
about it.

YOUNGER VOICE

A stellar dad too, built his own business
up from scratch. A man of few words.

OLDER VOICE

Still water runs deep. That's Calvin.

YOUNGER VOICE

Dah-troit was built by men like him.

The next face, Calvin's son, Munson. He's mid-roar,
like someone stuck a stick in his eye.

OLDER VOICE

Munson Pickett. A good boy, deep down,
but he's a little slow on the uptake.

YOUNGER VOICE

Or maybe just acts like he's slow to do less work. Smarter than he lets on.

OLDER VOICE

You may have something there. Either way, a good son, but no ribbons for going the extra mile.

YOUNGER VOICE

Or the extra dolly. One-box-only Munson.

Landry Pickett is next. His cheering face instantly likable with that "first pick on the playground" appeal.

YOUNGER VOICE

Something special about Landry. He has the goods to really go places. Good hands.

OLDER VOICE

You can see it in his eyes. He has that spark that rallies everyone to him!

YOUNGER VOICE

Yes! That touch of greatness just waiting to be released! And what a winning smile!

OLDER VOICE

Shame he's going to waste it then. Just terrible.

Finally, Everett, looking like a swarm of bees want out of his fat face, now pink with exhilaration. The crammed hotdog stops his cheer which we can feel in his crazy eyes and contorted mug. He may be choking.

OLDER VOICE

And last, but definitely not least...Everett. His name says it all.

YOUNGER VOICE

Whaddya' mean? That's a football name.

OLDER VOICE

Everett is not a football name. Terrible.

YOUNGER VOICE

Everett Nagurski. It's got real pigskin appeal already.

OLDER VOICE

(sighing)

If you say so. That should do it then.

The freeze frame releases them.

All four thrill in that magic moment when your team's everything a boy needs it to be...an unbeatable winner!

Big Mike recovers his hotdogs with acrobatic skill, and shares the touchdown moment with them, not aware Everett managed to grab an errant airborne hotdog.

INT. GOAL LINE - SAME TIME

The freeze frame touchdown play resumes and the grimy Lions celebrate in the end zone. The pandemonious fans adore their hardened, grubby heroes with slaps and claps.

INT. TIGER STADIUM RAMP - CONTINUOUS

CALVIN

That's enough now. Browns ain't coming back from this licking. Best be gittin' on home now then, boys. Beat the crowd.

The boys file out reluctantly behind Calvin, a quiet-in-charge man who we sense knows his business, his place, and that no man will tell him either. Calvin pulls a purple rabbit's foot out of his pocket.

INSERT - GOLD BAND

It says: "S.K. - MY WORD IS MY BOND"

BACK TO SCENE

Calvin gives it a quick rub and deposits it in his pocket.

The boys trail behind Calvin, all jacked up on the fresh scent of victory, they bounce into and onto each other.

EVERETT

When we get big, and we all have like a hundred or so dollars, I say we go to every one of the Lions' championship games.

MUNSON

All of them? We'll be real broke with all the titles these cats are gonna win.

LANDRY

Maybe so, but that's a good idea. Let's do it! No matter where the game is, no matter the cost, no matter what, we go to all of the Lions' Championship games.

EVERETT

Swear it already!

All three solemnly stop amidst the victorious crowds who head for the exit ramps, and stick their left hands into the circle and raise their right hands.

EVERETT

No matter what the cost.

LANDRY

No matter how many times.

MUNSON

No matter where the game is.

EVERETT

No matter why we can't go.

MUNSON

No matter who we become.

LANDRY

Or marry.

Everett and Munson scowl and hesitate at the thought.

LANDRY

Or whatever. We go no matter what happens.

EVERETT

Well, anyway...we all swear a vow to go together to every Lions' Championship game, no matter what. We make sure all three of us go together! To-geth-er!

Calvin hears the 'no matter what' and stops to consider it. He's lost in another place, deep in thought, rubs his cheek, looking at black limos in the player's lot.

LANDRY

Unless we're playing for the Lions!

The boys laugh, cheer, and slap each other around. Calvin stops, and waves them to catch up as they all raise their pledge arms again into the air and shout, "GOOOOOO LIONS!"

OLDER VOICE

That was then.

YOUNGER VOICE

The Lions were good, real good, but that was before the owner traded their best player, Bobby Layne, and he cursed them for 50 years. Owners!

OLDER VOICE

Let it go then! Bobby Layne needed trading.

INT. LIONS LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Dark and empty, only balls of tape and towels on the wet floor are lit by a solitary light from an office at the end of the hallway.

SUPER: "DETROIT 1958"

BOBBY LAYNE (32) springs from the doorway and slams the door to the coach's office, shattering the glass window!

Aryan handsome, mostly sober, a rough-looking drill sergeant chin with a boxer's nose fosters Layne's All-American QB image, along with his expensive suit that hides most of his almost middle class Texan pedigree.

LAYNE

Ya'll jus' traded a championship quarterback and got nothin' but heartache back! Ya'll see. Guaranteed!

He SLAMS the bouncing door again for good measure and the remnants clinging to the frame give up and TINKLE to the floor.

LAYNE

Ya'll won't win a piss pot for the next 50 years! Mark my words. The Layne family curse is on this club for the next 50 damn years! Curse you damn Yankee Lions!

COACH (O.S.)

Yessir, Mr Ford. Took it swell, real swell. He's just packing for Pittsburgh now. Gonna sure miss Layne's leadership.

Layne slams several wire locker doors as he leaves, kicking the last one fiercely, sending a Lions' logo locker tag flying down the aisle, it spins slowly, round and round, before falling over, face down. The curse has landed.