

TALKING TO CLAUDINE

THE BIBLE BELT 1930's

MOVIE SCRIPT

EXT. CARLSTON TOWN - DAY

Nineteen thirty's Bible belt small town. A scattering of humble homes on both sides of dust roads where mongrel dogs scavenge for leftover morsels.

In the main road a horse in front of a buggy, whinnies his objection to being tied to a cross beam in front of the town's sell-all shop, a Model T Ford next to it.

A church with a large cross towers above everything. Dust behind a model T Ford entering the town, billows up and settles on the already dusty surroundings. Next to the church the only school.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Play break. Boys and girls, between six and thirteen noisily play catch, others toss the remaining fragments of an old tennis ball around. SUZI, 8, and Kevin, 9, more vigorous and noisy than anyone else.

We close in on a sad and lonely small figure.

WALLY, 8, sits on a low wall watching the hurly-burly and fun of the other kids, the only one excluded, and he feels it. His lunch box unopened next to him.

The battered tennis ball spirals through the air and stops against Wally's feet. He stares at it, unable to move. The ball is from another realm, one he does know, does not understand, it frightens him.

Kevin, shouts, gestures for him to throw it back.

KEVIN

Here! Throw it to me!

(beat, frowns)

Throw it back, Jerk!

Wally glances at him, then at the ball, unable to react.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Throw it back, Stupid!

Suzie runs for the ball, stops in front of Wally, eyeballs him.

SUZIE

What's wrong with you? You stupid
or somethin'?

Wally stares at his feet, feeling stupid.

SUZIE (CONT'D)

Freak!

She grabs the ball.

SUZIE (CONT'D)

(frowns, over her
shoulder)

I hate you. We all hate you.

She throws the ball to Kevin.

Wally cringes, body jerks in silent tears, he knows it is true.

INT. CLASS ROOM - DAY

Wally sits alone at a desk intended for two, the rest of the desks are occupied by two kids. TEACHER, 25, at the black board.

Teacher's pointer goes down a row of three and four letter words on the black board.

TEACHER

(emphasises each word)

cat... mat... fat...

CLASS

(in unison)

Cat...mat...fat...

CLAUDINE, 6, and her mother enters and interrupts the lesson. Claudine is frail, small for her age, blond and blue-eyed. Both her legs are in metal braces, a polio victim. Anxious eyes peeps from behind her mother's skirt at the threatening new world that awaits her.

A bell shrills, the kids jostle each other out of the door. Wally remains seated, he hates breaks. He looks curiously at Claudine's leg irons.

Teacher reaches out to take Claudine's hand, she withdraws behind her mother.

TEACHER

(to mother)

There, next to Wally, that will be her seat.

(to Wally)

What are you still doing here, Wally? Go play outside.

Claudine stares from behind her mother's skirt at Wally, fearing rejection. The story of her short life.

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAY GROUND - DAY

Claudine, watches the games, a forlorn outsider. She spots...

Wally alone on his wall, lunch uneaten, a kindred spirit.

With leg braces clanking, Claudine weaves through the kids towards Wally. They all stop to look at her. She shrinks.

She reaches Wally and the kids resume their play with occasional curious glances at Claudine and Wally.

She stops uncertainly in front of Wally, they gaze in uncomfortable silence at each other before Claudine manages to speak.

CLAUDINE

(tentative, uncertain)

Will you be my friend?

Wally overcomes can only manage a nod. With clamped legs uncomfortably spread out in front of her, leg braces clanging against each other, she sinks down next to him. They exchange shy glances.

INT. SCHOOL - CLASS ROOM - DAY

Claudine next to Wally, he whispers something inaudible to her. She giggles.

Teacher looks sternly at them.

TEACHER

Wally, pay attention or you'll fail for the third time at the end of the year.

Wally diminishes back into a nothing. Teacher continues with the lesson.

CLAUDINE

(whispers)

I'll help you.

EXT. MIDDLE-CLASS HOME, GARDEN - DAY

A late Friday afternoon. The house is next to the school, a boarding house for out of town children. In the shade of a large tree in the unfenced front garden, Wally waits for his father.

DADA, 43, broad shoulders, premature grey hair, neatly trimmed short beard, kind face, and MAMMA, 38, handsome but carries a little extra weight, in their Model T, stops in front of the house,

Wally goes towards them. Stops when a horse-drawn buggy approaches.

Claudine, in the back of her father's buggy, waves at him, enthusiastic, they've bonded. He waves back with a wide enthusiastic smile. Dada and Mamma looks at who he is waving to, smile relief and satisfaction at his happiness.

INT. DADA'S MODEL T - DAY

With a gap-toothed grin Wally gets in, Mamma gives him a loving kiss.

DADA

Hello Wally, who were you waving at?

WALLY

Claudine, my bestest friend, she helps me.

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAY GROUND - DAY

Wally and Claudine, heads close together, happy and contented, examine and share the contents of each others lunch boxes. They start to munch away on Claudine's.

INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

ON THE BLACK BOARD: "3X7 = ?" underneath are another five sums. "11x3 =? 2x4=? 2x10 =? 3x2 =? 3x5 =?"

The teacher marks papers at her desk.

Wally is the only one not working on the sums, he is unsure of what the answers are. Kevin counts the answers out on their fingers.

TEACHER

No fingers, Kevin!

Teacher returns to her work.

With her eyes remaining on her book, Claudine whispers to Wally...

CLAUDINE
The first one, twenty one.

Wally writes it down.

CLAUDINE (CONT'D)
The second...

FADES

The test done, Teacher in front of the class.

TEACHER
Suzie, read your answer to 3x7?

SUZIE
Twenty one.

TEACHER
Wally the next one 3x11, what did you write.

WALLY
(glances at the book)
Thirty three, teacher.

TEACHER
Well done, Wally. Now Kevin...

Wally flashes a conspiratorial little smile at Claudine, she smiles back.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

In front of the pulpit a small, white coffin with an open lid, surrounded by flowers. Grieving family members and friends file past for a last look.

INSIDE THE COFFIN is Claudine's peaceful little face with an artificial powdered blush on her cheeks, a white rose in her hands.

FORWARD THREE WEEKS

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Wally, alone at his desk, his life is over.

MONTAGE OF WALLY'S DISTRESS OVER CLAUDINE'S ABSENCE