

Knowin' Yer Place

EXT. GIZZLER'S GULCH GENERAL STORE - DAY

Establishing shot of this standard issue Old West general store, which of course sits on a dusty and desolate Main Street. Two horses stand idly out front, tied to a hitching post.

The camera moves forward, up onto the front porch and then pushing in through the front door.

INT. GIZZLER'S GULCH GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

ZEB MULLINS (the owner) stands behind the counter, where he's playing chess with regular customers DALE MCGEE and EARL WHEELOCK. All are in their 40's.

Young shop assistant HAMID enters from the rear and begins quietly stocking shelves.

ZEB
(noticing Hamid's
entrance)
Git a loada this, fellas -- we're
nearly finished closing up last
night, okay? And boy wonder here
(flings a thumb toward
Hamid)
up and announces 'Meesta Zeb - one
day I own store of my own.' Now
ain't that some ambition for ya!

All three men laugh uproariously. Hamid just continues working, while looking sheepishly over at the men.

DALE
(to Hamid, still laughing)
It don't hurt to dream!

EARL
(to the other two men,
also laughing)
Yeah, but try and keep it something
that's got a reasonable chance-a
ever happinin!

Hamid nods amiably. Then, as the laughter dies down:

EARL
(to Hamid)
Now where you from again, son?

HAMID
Pakistan, sir.

More riotous laughter.

EARL

Pakistan! Wherever 'n the hell that is, I suppose they produce some natural born shopkeeps, huh boys?

ZEB

(in faux-grave tone)

'Course, ain't no bank over here gonna loan them seed money, suppliers sure'z hell ain't gonna 'stend them no credit, and they kain't nearly speak the danged lang-eej...

Dale and Earl nod sagely.

ZEB

(beat, then facetiously)

Yep, sounds to me like solid grounds to let'm run their own stores!

Another eruption of hearty laughter among the three men. Zeb stops laughing, however, once he notices Hamid's wounded expression. He moves over to him and gives him a friendly nudge on the shoulder.

ZEB

Now don't go getting all out of sorts, son. You're a fine worker, you earn your keep plenty well here. Just gotta, you know

(pause)

know your station in life, that's all. A Pakistaniman like yourself, running a store like this, over here? Son, that'll happen jess 'bout as soon as, well

(beat)

soon as them injuns over th' reservation start ope-nin' up their own nightclubs and casinos!

His buddies get a good chuckle out of this ludicrous scenario.

EARL

Kain't make possum stew if yer fixins is only squirrel.

This throws Hamid a bit, while the other two nod understandingly.

HAMID

Y-yes sir. I -- I understand.

EARL

(helpfully)

I mean, dincha once tell me yer daddy made rugs back home? Well you don't see none of us speculatin' on moving to Pakistan and opening our own rug emporium, do ya?

HAMID

No, sir. I see your point.

ZEB

Well alrighty then.

(glances at clock)

And I do believe you've got yourself a break right 'bout now. Run along then.

HAMID

Yes, sir.

With a tentative sort of bow to all three men, Hamid moves toward the front door and then out it.

EXT. GIZZLER'S GULCH GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

As Hamid exits, we hear a last strain of jovial conversation from within.

ZEB (O.S.)

Normal folk goin' to a Pakistaniman fer their goods -- try and picture that!

The resulting off-screen laughter fades as Hamid moves sullenly off the front porch and down the street. As he passes MERL'S LUNCH, he stops, then walks around to the back.

EXT. REAR OF MERL'S LUNCH - DAY

Hamid finds young Chinese FONG peeling potatoes on the back steps. Fong perks up at seeing his friend.

FONG

Hamid, my friend. How are you!

HAMID

I am well. And you?

Fong looks down dejectedly at the potatoes.

FONG

I am not so good.

HAMID

Why? What troubles you?

FONG

My work. It does not suit me.

HAMID

Your work is difficult?

FONG

I am happy to find work here in USA, but I not belong here. At Merl's.

HAMID

What do you wish to do?

FONG

Laundry, that what! I ask Mrs. McLoughlin to work at her laundry -- she say no. She say 'What a chinaman know about laundry'!

HAMID

(pause, with a quizzical look)

But what does a chinaman know about laundry?

FONG

More than Mrs. McLoughlin, that what! I watch her for few minutes, she know nothing. Proper folding pattern? No. How important to finish washing by late morning so clothes dry by late afternoon? No. Nothing!

Hamid is silent for a moment as he ponders this.

HAMID

(reluctantly)

I am not sure, but maybe she has a point. I mean, chinamen, laundry -- strange combination, yes?

Fong throws a potato down in disgust.

FONG
But who make that rule!

Both mull this over seriously, until a light bulb goes off over Hamid's head.

HAMID
I got it!

FONG
You got what?

HAMID
Mrs. McLoughlan's young son Seamus comes in the store most frequently -
- I am familiar enough with him, I think, to address this situation directly on your behalf.

Fong drops potato and peeler, staring up at Hamid in wide-eyed amazement.

FONG
Is it so?! Please, whenever can, my good friend!

HAMID
(smiling proudly)
Actually, this afternoon, if it is soon enough for you. He picks up detergent at four o'clock, every Tuesday.

FONG
An excellent time! I will meet you out back of store.

HAMID
Okay. I can do this.

Both young men look equally excited.

FADE OUT.

EXT. REAR OF GIZZLER'S GULCH GENERAL STORE - DAY

Open with an extreme close-up of Hamid and Fong's faces staring straight into the camera. At first their expressions seem deadly serious, but smirks quickly spread across their faces, and they burst out with laughter:

HAMID
Your are a dreamer, man!

FONG
Ha! To dream with so much
abandon!

The two laugh like mad, almost uncontrollably.

Spin around to show a scowling 18-year-old SEAMUS MCLOUGHLAN.

SEAMUS
(noticeable Irish accent)
Ah jayzuz, what makes it such a mad
idea anyway, like?!

HAMID
(still laughing)
An Irish person, serving drinks at
the saloon -- so crazy!

FONG
(also laughing)
Mr. Walton just gonna decide 'yeah,
sure - young off-boat Irishman work
serving my customer liquor' --
never happen! Mr. Walton, Mr.
Walton son -- that who work in
saloon, silly Seamus!

Hamid and Fong continue to laugh, as Seamus sullenly and
somewhat angrily watches.

SEAMUS
Ah, you two! Pear-ticyerly you
(to Fong)
ta ask ta work fer me ma -- and I'm
the one dreamin'?!

Fong is stung, and it shows. All three are left in a sad
silence.

SEAMUS
(in a half-mutter)
Well I'm going then. Me break's
nearly up anyway.

FONG
Me also.

Both leave in different directions, none of the three even
saying goodbye. Hamid dejectedly stands and enters the store.

INT. GIZZLER'S GULCH GENERAL STORE - DAY

Zeb, Dale and Earl are back in the exact same positions around the chess board, with a game in progress. Dale is the first one to notice as Hamid enters and gets straight to work.

DALE
 (gesturing with his eyes
 to Hamid)
 Hey look, Zeb - future proprietor's
 back!

All three men laugh hard, while Hamid gamely nods in acknowledgement. They resume their game, then Earl looks up and seems to remember something.

EARL
 I dang, I gotta hit the road.
 Riding all the way out to Carson
 City t'order me a new wagon.

ZEB
 Carson City -- that's a trip.

Earl throws on his coat and heads for the door.

EARL
 Yep. I'll see you boys sometime
 tomorrow.

He's almost out the door when Dale shouts out:

DALE
 Hey Earl -- think I can save ya a
 trip.

EARL
 (stopping, turning back)
 How's that?

DALE
 Welp, hired me a new hand recently,
 and turns out the fella's got quite
 a touch buildin' wagons. Makes 'em
 a bit smaller, but lighter too, so
 less wear n' tear on yer horse. And
 the crazy thing is
 (deliberate pause)
 he come all the way from Japan.

Zeb, Earl and even Hamid look at him in amazement.

EARL

Gaw-lee -- you fer real with that?

Dale maintains his poker face just a minute longer, then breaks down in laughter.

DALE

Aw hell no, you know I'm just teasin'! Jeez, you'd believe anything, you coot you!

All four laugh. Earl brushes Dale off with a playful wave of his hand, then exits. The two men resume their game with a chuckle, and Hamid resumes stocking the shelf.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END