

Rice, Sam

By

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Dawn Mallard.....30, F, reporter for the Washington Star
Sam Rice.....73, M, former star outfielder for the Washington Senators
Taylor Kaufman.....53, M, attended the 1925 World Series
Mary Keller.....57, F, attended the 1925 World Series
The Amazing Bob.....42, M, a medium

TIME AND LOCALE:

The play takes place in the rather small office of Dawn Mallard. Present is a desk with a chair behind and a chair in front. Dawn has several objects on her desk that make it look like an average sportswriter's desk.

It is February of 1963.

SYNOPSIS:

Sam Rice made a spectacular catch in the 1925 World Series. Or did he? Some insist that he actually dropped the ball and it should have been ruled a homerun. Years later, after Sam has been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame, a reporter tries to uncover the truth behind that controversial play.

."

(At rise, DAWN is found standing down center. She looks to the audience.)

DAWN

My interview with Sam Rice. February 4th, 1963.

(DAWN sits down at her desk and busies herself by looking through a notebook and jotting down a few thoughts. Presently SAM sticks his head into the room. He looks around a bit as if he's confused.)

SAM

I'm looking for Donald Duck.

DAWN

(Looking up.)

Excuse me?

SAM

I'm looking for a reporter named Donald Duck.

(DAWN stands up and crosses to SAM as he fully enters the room.)

DAWN

Mr. Rice, I'm Dawn.

(Spelling it out.)

D-A-W-N.

SAM

That's a bit deceiving. And the duck part?

DAWN

Dawn Mallard. Accent on the second syllable. Not "mallard" like a duck.

SAM

(Thinks about this a moment.)

That's still pretty funny though, isn't it? Dawn Mallard. Donald Duck.

(SAM laughs.)

DAWN

Yes, I do get that from time to time.

(Offers her hand.)

Mr. Rice, I wanted to congratulate you on your election to the Hall of Fame.

(SAM ignores DAWN's hand and wanders over to a chair in front of the desk to sit.)

SAM

About damn time, isn't it? I've been waiting years!

DAWN

You should have been in before now, I agree.

SAM

If I'd been a Yankee, oh, they would have been falling all over themselves to put me in! "Here you go, Mr. Yankee! Anything for you, Mr. Yankee! Let me escort you down this red carpet, Mr. Yankee."

DAWN

Yes, Mr. Rice, I agree. I wish I'd been on the committee.

SAM

You couldn't be on the committee. You have to be a sportswriter to be on the committee.

DAWN

I am a sportswriter.

SAM

(Studies her a moment.)

You don't look like a sportswriter.

DAWN

What makes you say that?

SAM

You have tits.

(A moment of silence.)

DAWN

Mr. Rice, if you have a problem with female sportswriters—

SAM

Oh, keep your shirt on. It was a joke. I have nothing against women sportswriters.

(A beat.)

In particular, that is. I don't like any sportswriters, men or women.

DAWN

And why is that?

SAM

You don't care about the truth! You just want to sell your papers!

DAWN

I think most newspaper writers are honest, Mr. Rice.

SAM

Not the ones I've met. You tell them one thing, they print another.

DAWN

There can be different points of view.

SAM

Different points of view. That's reporter talk if I ever heard it.

DAWN

I can assure you, Mr. Rice, that I want to tell your story.

SAM

You mean your version of my story. You're all the same. A 20-year career, nearly 3000 hits...

(Shows his ring.)

A championship ring! And what's the only question any writer wants to ask me?

DAWN

What's that?

SAM

Did you really catch that ball in the 1925 World Series?

DAWN

Oh. That question. Yes, I may have that question here somewhere...

(Looks through her notebook.)

Let's see. Okay, here on page three—

SAM

Mularkey! It was the first thing you were going to ask!

DAWN

(Sitting back down at her desk.)

Mr. Rice. We here at the Washington Star are very thrilled that you have finally been elected into baseball's Hall of Fame. Long, long overdue. Since your induction isn't until August, we thought we'd run a series of articles over the next few months highlighting your career. And I have been assigned to write the first one.

SAM

And let me guess. Your assignment is to write about that catch in the World Series.

DAWN

No, no, no.

(A long moment of silence.)

Actually, yes. It is.

SAM

It's going to be a very short article. "Yes, he caught the damn ball!" We may have won that game, Miss Duck, but Pittsburgh won the Series. After all this time, why are they still bitching about that one play?

DAWN

It's not that people are still complaining about it, as you say—

SAM

I said "bitching."

DAWN

Yes. You did. The play has become a piece of baseball lore and people want to know the truth. Some people say—

SAM

Some people say! Who cares what some people say? I caught the ball! The umpire said I caught the ball! So I caught the ball!

(A beat.)

DAWN

I understand it was a pretty amazing catch.

SAM

Only the greatest catch in baseball history!

(SAM stands and begins to act out the play using the desk as the outfield fence.)

SAM

Top of the 8th. Pirates batting. We're up 4 to 3. But Smith swings and there's a long fly ball! It might be outta here! I go back to the fence. The ball is going over but at the last moment I reach up and I catch it! Then I fell over.

(SAM falls onto the desk and makes a mess of things as he rolls off the desk and onto the floor. DAWN watches him with a look of alarm. He then stands back up. He raises up a hand as if showing that he caught the ball.)

SAM

I landed hard but I held onto the ball. I got up and showed the umpire. He yells "Out!"

DAWN

And you landed right in front of several fans, correct?

SAM

What do the fans have to do with anything? Nothing! I caught the ball and the umpire said I caught the ball! End of story! Good day, Miss Duck!

(SAM starts to walk towards the door.)

DAWN

Mr. Rice! I have the ball!

SAM

(He stops and turns to her.)

You what?

(DAWN opens a drawer of the desk and takes out a baseball. She places it on top of the desk.)

DAWN

I have the ball. The very ball you caught that day. Right here.

(SAM crosses back to the desk and picks up the ball. He looks at it reverentially.)

SAM

Where did you get this?

DAWN

On loan from Mr. Griffith.

SAM

What's he charging you?

DAWN

Charging me? Nothing.

SAM

Nothing my ass! If it's Calvin Griffith then he's charging you something. This ball should be mine!

DAWN

If you were up to it, I thought we might take a picture—

SAM

He moved the team! He moved my team!

DAWN

Yes—

SAM

He moved my team to Minnesota! May Calvin Griffith choke on his lutefisk!

DAWN

I was wondering—

SAM

If I would pose with the baseball? No! But I'd like to tell Calvin Griffith what he can do with that baseball!

(A long moment of silence.)

You know what I'd like to tell him he can do with that baseball?

DAWN

I figured that part out, yes.

SAM

Miss Duck, you have your interview! The umpire said I caught the ball! I caught the ball!

(SAM exits. DAWN looks after him for a moment, then sticks the baseball back into the desk. She looks to the audience.)

DAWN

My interview with Taylor Kaufman, February 5th, 1963.

(TAYLOR cautiously enters. He is looking at a slip of paper.)

TAYLOR

I'm looking for Donald someone?

(DAWN crosses to him and shakes his hand.)

DAWN

I'm Dawn Mallard.

TAYLOR

Dawn? You mean like—

DAWN

(Spelling it out.)

D-A-W-N. Yes.

TAYLOR

I know you! I read your columns!

DAWN

Thank you.

TAYLOR

I'm Taylor Kaufman.

(They shake hands.)

DAWN

I thought you might be.

TAYLOR

I read you all the time. You sure know your stuff. But I don't know what a sportswriter like you would want with a regular Joe like me.

(DAWN guides TAYLOR over to the chair in front of her desk and sits him down.)

DAWN

Fans are a part of the game, Mr. Kaufman. I understand you attended Game 3 of the 1925 World Series.

TAYLOR

Sure did! I had to skip school and everything!

(A beat.)

Are you a truant officer?

DAWN

No, no. I really am Dawn Mallard. And I think you're well past the statute of limitations on school skipping.

TAYLOR

Oh. I suppose so. I was a 15-year-old kid. What's more important to a kid? Algebra or the World Series?

DAWN

Not a hard choice.

TAYLOR

My Senators won the Series in 1924, but I didn't get to see any of the games. So when they got back in '25 I knew I had to go.

DAWN

Mr. Kaufman, I understand you witnessed the Sam Rice catch that day.

TAYLOR

Witnessed? I participated in it!

DAWN

Participated?

TAYLOR

Sure did!

DAWN

I would love to hear your story.

TAYLOR

I was just a 15-year-old kid, you know. At the World Series! What could possibly be better? I had on my Senator's cap, I had a pennant, I had a hotdog, I had a beer...

(Gives her a wink.)

...a root beer. I was just enjoying the game. Then I became part of the game.

(TAYLOR stands and begins to act out the play just as SAM did. He pretends he is SAM and again uses the desk as the fence.)

TAYLOR

I remember it like it was yesterday! A high fly ball! We all thought for sure it was a homerun! Rice goes back to the fence and reaches up! He makes the catch! I couldn't believe it! Then he topples over the fence and lands with a thud!

(TAYLOR has fallen over the desk and lands on the floor.)

DAWN

But he caught the ball?

TAYLOR

Sure did.

(Stands back up.)

Then he dropped it.

DAWN

He...what?

TAYLOR

When he landed on the cement the ball popped out of his glove and rolled away.

DAWN

You witnessed this?

TAYLOR

I was right there!

DAWN

Where did the ball roll?

TAYLOR

To me! The ball rolled right to me!

DAWN

You?

TAYLOR

Sure did. Then I picked it up and stuck it back into Mr. Rice's glove. Then Sam stands up and shows everyone he caught it.

DAWN

So he caught the ball but then the ball came out of his glove? Did he hold onto it long enough?

TAYLOR

Miss Mallard, I didn't have a stopwatch.

DAWN

No...

TAYLOR

But the umpire said it was an out.

DAWN

But the umpire didn't see the whole play.

TAYLOR

No. I don't see how he could have. There was a fence in the way.

DAWN

Mr. Kaufman, have you ever told anyone this story before?

TAYLOR

No, ma'am. Like I told you, I was playing hooky. Mrs. Henderson would have tanned my hide if she knew where I really was.

DAWN

This was almost 40 years ago.

TAYLOR

Mrs. Henderson has a long memory.

(A beat.)

Miss Mallard, you've got to understand. I wasn't a sportswriter like you. I was just a kid. Watching my team play in the World Series.

DAWN

Yes.

TAYLOR

I didn't want the ball to roll to me. I didn't want anything to do with it. I just wanted my Senators to win that game.

DAWN

I think I understand.

TAYLOR

They moved them, you know. They moved my team to Minnesota.

DAWN

Yes, but there's a new Washington Senators team now.

TAYLOR

Oh, I know that. But it just isn't the same. I miss my team.

(TAYLOR exits. DAWN addresses the audience.)

DAWN

My interview with Mary Keller. February 6th, 1963.

(MARY enters and sits in the chair in front of the desk. She begins to laugh quite hard.)

DAWN

Mrs. Keller?

MARY

(Still laughing.)

You're all fools, you know.

DAWN

Who is?

MARY

You are! All of you are! 36,000 people at the game that day!

DAWN

I know.

MARY

Every single person has been interviewed except the most important one.

DAWN

And who is that?

MARY

Me!

(MARY laughs some more.)

DAWN

And why are you so important?

MARY

(Trying to control her laughter.)

Because I'm the one who really knows what happened. But I also happened to be a girl! And sportswriters don't think a girl is worth talking to.

DAWN

Obviously, I have a different point of view.

MARY

Yes, perhaps you do. You know how many times I've tried to tell my story? But people automatically assume women don't like baseball.

DAWN

But you do like baseball?

MARY

Hell no! I hate it!

DAWN

But you were at the World Series?

MARY

Is that a crime? My boyfriend took me. At least he was my boyfriend at the time.

DAWN

Still, it must have been very exciting to go to the World Series.

MARY

Sure. Even more exciting would have been to stay home and watch the grass grow. Take me to a baseball game! I broke up with him during the National Anthem.

(Laughs.)

That's a joke. But I don't know why he took me to that game. "Here, just eat your hotdog and shut up, Mary!"

DAWN

Mrs. Keller. I'm offering you a chance to tell your story. Right here and now. Did you witness the Sam Rice catch?

MARY

There was no Sam Rice catch.

DAWN

What do you mean?

MARY

I caught the ball!

DAWN

You did?

(MARY adjusts her position in the chair and begins to act out her story.)

MARY

It was late in the game, like the 4th quarter I think. I was bored out of my mind. I'm reading my magazine when suddenly I notice something. Every single person in that stadium had turned to look at me. For a split second, 36,000 people were staring right at me! And I was wondering what in the— Then all of a sudden it hit me. I mean, literally. It hit me! Oooof! There was a sharp pain in my...

(Points to her crotch, but then hesitates.)

...in my lap. I look down and...there's the baseball.

DAWN

You caught the ball?

MARY

More like the ball caught me.

DAWN

Sam Rice didn't catch the ball?

MARY

Are you listening to me? No, he didn't. The ball landed in my lap.

DAWN

Then what did you do?

MARY

I said two words. The first one was "Mother."

DAWN

Let me get this straight. You aren't really watching, but suddenly, out of nowhere, the ball comes flying right at you and lands in your lap. You said "Mother Mary!" And then you...?

MARY

I'm looking around. Everybody is still staring at me. Then I look down and there is this baseball player lying on the cement in front of me. And he has these big puppy dog eyes that say "Can I have the ball? Please, please, please, can I have the ball?"

DAWN

So you...?

MARY

I gave him the ball. What did I want with it? He put the ball in his glove and he stood up and showed everyone. Like "I caught the ball!"

DAWN

But you caught the ball?

MARY

Do you want me to tell the story again?

DAWN

But this is...this is huge! Why haven't you told anyone this before?

MARY

You really haven't been listening to me, have you?

DAWN

I—

MARY

I was a 19-year-old girl. No one was going to listen to a 19-year-old girl when there were all those men to talk to.

DAWN

Were there any witnesses?

MARY

36,000 witnesses!

DAWN

I mean anyone sitting nearby? Who could collaborate this?

MARY

My ex-boyfriend.

DAWN

Are you still in contact with him?

MARY

Are you kidding? It's been 40 years.

DAWN

What's his name?

MARY

Mike Johnson.

DAWN

(Looks blankly at her for a long moment.)

That's not going to help very much.

MARY

You're just going to have to take my word for it then, aren't you?

DAWN

Mary, I'd like to show you something.

MARY

Show me what?

(DAWN takes the baseball out of her desk drawer and shows it to MARY.)

DAWN

On loan from the Griffith family. This is the very ball that you caught.

(MARY jumps out of her chair and backs away.)

MARY

You keep that damn thing away from me!

(MARY exits as DAWN puts the baseball back in the desk. She again faces the audience.)

DAWN

I had interviewed Sam Rice. I had interviewed two fans. I had three different stories. Now what? Had I done all I could do? Maybe I needed to think outside the box. There was one other soul present who most definitely had a story to share.

(A beat.)

My interview with The Amazing Bob, February 7th, 1963.

(BOB enters and he bows to DAWN. BOB carries with him a small duffel bag.)

BOB

You have contacted the correct person, Miss Mallard. I shall be only too glad to help.

DAWN

Do I call you Bob? Or The Amazing?

BOB

Please. My friends call me Bob.

DAWN

Some people call you a charlatan. They think I'm nuts for asking.

BOB

Of course. But you must have done some research before contacting me?

DAWN

I did.

BOB

And you heard testimonials? Amazing testimonials?

DAWN

You come highly recommended.

BOB

Miss Mallard. Do you know what I like about reporters?

DAWN

What is that?

BOB

You are the best type of skeptics. You are open to possibilities, but you must be convinced. I am here to convince you. I really do speak to the dead.

DAWN

Bob, the dead in this case may be somewhat unusual for you.

BOB

I look forward to a challenge.

DAWN

It's an inanimate object.

BOB

Miss Mallard, even the most inanimate of objects still have a lifeforce about them.

DAWN

It is, in fact...

(She takes the baseball out of the desk.)

...this baseball.

(BOB gazes at the ball in awe.)

BOB

Yes, yes. I see. I sense that this baseball has a story to tell.

DAWN

Are you a baseball fan, Mr...Amazing?

BOB

Miss Mallard, I am convinced that Heaven must be box seats at a baseball game.

DAWN

This is the very ball from Sam Rice's famous play in the 1925 World Series.

BOB

(Considers for a long moment.)

Yes, I very much sense that it is.

DAWN

(Setting the ball on the desk.)

Would it be possible for you to...to contact the ball and ask it...him...about that play?

(BOB cautiously approaches the ball.)

BOB

Miss Mallard, if I can make the connection, and of course I will, the ball will speak through me. You must be the one to ask the questions.

(BOB studies the ball intensely.)

DAWN

I understand.

BOB

But...before we proceed...

DAWN

Yes?

BOB

...I must set a mood.

(BOB opens up his duffel bag and takes out a swami's hat which he puts on. He then takes out some incense and proceeds to light it.)

DAWN

Is there anything I can do to help?

BOB

Just breath in deeply.

(They both take deep breaths.)

DAWN

Patchouli.

(BOB places his hands on the ball.)

BOB

I should have brought pine.

(Slowly going into a trance.)

But patchouli is liberating. Yes...yes...

(DAWN watches BOB for a long moment. Suddenly a book sitting on DAWN's desk flies off and lands on the floor. DAWN stares at the book for a moment, then turns her attention back to BOB. She hesitates a long moment before venturing to speak to him.)

DAWN

Bob?

BOB

I am...Spalding.

DAWN

Spalding. Hello. My name is Dawn Mallard.

BOB

I know who you are...Dawn.

DAWN

Spalding, I want you to think back. Many, many years ago.

BOB

Yes. I think back.

DAWN

The year is 1925.

BOB

(Thinks a moment.)

Moooo.

DAWN

A bit after that. It is October 10th.

BOB

I remember October 10th.

DAWN

What do you remember about that date?

BOB

It was the day I became a major league baseball.

DAWN

It was. Do you remember what inning you came into play?

BOB

I don't remember innings. But I remember the pitcher. Marberry. Nice, strong hands. But it stung a bit when I reached the catcher's mitt.

DAWN

I'm sure it did. There was a batter that day named Earl Smith.

BOB

Yes. I remember. I remember Marberry pitching. He threw me. I hit the catcher's mitt and I heard the umpire say "Strike one." Then I heard somebody else say "Are you blind?" Then whoosh and I was back with Marberry. He threw me again and...

(He grabs his head in pain.)

Pain! Pain! Oh, the pain! Someone hit me so hard! Pain, the pain!

DAWN

Spalding. I am so sorry to make you relive this, but this is the most important part. What happened next?

BOB

I am flying through the air! People are screaming! The air is whooshing! But the pain! The pain is so intense! I might black out. Then suddenly... Plop!

DAWN

(A beat.)

Plop?

BOB

I land in popcorn.

DAWN

Popcorn?

BOB

Popcorn flies everywhere. But it is a nice, cushioned landing for me. The butter is soothing. Although a bit sticky. Then...someone takes me out of the popcorn and sticks me in a glove. I am with...Sam Rice.

DAWN

Sam Rice's glove?

BOB

Yes. He is comforting me. I still remember the pain, but he tells me everything will be all right. He holds me up so that the whole stadium can see that I am okay.

DAWN

You felt better?

BOB

Much better. All the people in the stadium cheer for me. They are so happy that I am feeling better.

DAWN

I'm sure they were.

BOB

But no. Not everyone. Some people are mad. They are cursing. But most people are happy.

DAWN

Spalding. This is very important. If you landed in a box of popcorn, that would mean a fan caught you. Correct? Not Sam Rice?

BOB

Sam may have caught me.

DAWN

How?

BOB

Maybe he was eating popcorn.

DAWN

He was playing right field.

BOB

I do not judge.

DAWN

If what you are saying is true—

BOB

To the best of my knowledge.

DAWN

Then someone else must have caught you. In their popcorn. Then they took you out and gave you to Sam Rice.

BOB

Miss Dawn. I had a very rough day. Someone hit me very hard. But if someone else caught me, why would they give me to Mr. Rice?

DAWN

To save the day.

(BOB exits as DAWN again looks out to the audience.)

DAWN

My second interview with Sam Rice. February 8th, 1963.

(DAWN sits down at her desk and starts writing in her notebook. Presently SAM sticks his head inside the room.)

SAM

Miss Mallard?

(Noticing SAM, DAWN gets up to greet him.)

DAWN

Mr. Rice. To what do I owe the pleasure?

SAM

I was a little gruff with you the other day.

DAWN

A little.

SAM

I realize you're a reporter. You write stories that people want to read.

DAWN

It's a business. Like baseball. We both need customers.

SAM

And you're going to write an article about my catch in the World Series because...fans still talk about it after all these years.

DAWN

They do.

SAM

And I realize that the only reason that I had that long career doing what I love best is because baseball has fans.

DAWN

That's a good way of putting it.

SAM

But I wanted to ask you a favor. Could you hold off on printing that article?

DAWN

For how long?

SAM

I suppose about 15 years.

DAWN

15 years?

SAM

(Taking out a sealed envelope.)

I wrote a letter. It's addressed to you.

DAWN

(Takes the envelope and looks at it.)

It says "To Donald Duck."

SAM

Whatever. I explain everything in that letter. I go through the entire play and I reveal whether I really caught the ball or not.

DAWN

But there's...a catch?

SAM

(Laughs.)

Clever girl. I don't want you to open that letter until I die.

(DAWN looks at the envelope for a long moment, then she offers her hand to SAM and they shake.)

DAWN

Mr. Rice. Thank you for this.

SAM

Well. People want to know.

DAWN

They do.

SAM

God knows why. It's only a game.

DAWN

I will hold onto your envelope, and your secret, until that day many, many years from now.

SAM

I know you will.

(A beat.)

DAWN

My editors might want a preliminary version of the article before that date. Like next week.

SAM

Just let everybody know that the definitive answer is still to come.

DAWN

I will do so, Mr. Rice.

(SAM exits. DAWN looks to the audience.)

DAWN

11 and a half years passed. On October 13th, 1974, baseball Hall of Famer Sam Rice passed away. The letter was still sitting in my desk drawer. I couldn't bring myself to look at it right away, but on October 25th I decided it was time.

(DAWN takes the letter out of her desk drawer and opens it. She begins to read.)

DAWN

"Dear Miss Duck..."

(DAWN reads the rest of the letter to herself. The letter is brief so it doesn't take long. When she finishes, she thinks for a moment and then she laughs. The lights quickly fade to...)

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY