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Forrest Gump



*The phenomenal novel that inspired the
Academy Award®-winning film*

Winston Groom

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*The Novel by
Winston Groom*



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LET ME SAY THIS: bein a idiot is no box of chocolates. People laugh, lose patience, treat you shabby. Now they says folks sposed to be kind to the afflicted, but let me tell you—it ain't always that way. Even so, I got no complaints, cause I reckon I done live a pretty interestin life, so to speak.

I been a idiot since I was born. My IQ is near 70, which qualifies me, so they say. Probly, tho, I'm closer to bein a imbecile or maybe even a moron, but personally, I'd rather think of myself as like a *halfwit*, or somethin—an not no idiot—cause when people think of a idiot, more'n likely they be thinkin of one of them *Mongolian idiots*—the ones with they eyes too close together what look like Chinamen an drool a lot an play with theyselfs.

Now I'm slow—I'll grant you that, but I'm probly a lot brighter than folks think, cause what goes on in my mind is a sight different than what folks see. For instance, I can *think* things pretty good, but when I got to try sayin or writin them, it kinda come out like jello or somethin. I'll show you what I mean.

The other day, I'm walkin down the street an this man was out workin in his yard. He'd got hissef a bunch of shrubs to plant an he say to me, "Forrest, you wanna earn some money?" an I says, "Uh-huh," an so he sets me to movin dirt. Damn near ten or twelve wheelbarrows of dirt, in the heat of the day, truckin it all over creation. When I'm thru he reach in his pocket for a dollar. What I shoulda done was raised Cain about the low wages, but instead, I took the damn dollar an all I could say was "thanks" or somethin dumb-soundin like that, an I went on down the street, waddin an unwaddin that dollar in my hand, feelin like a idiot.

You see what I mean?

Now I *know* somethin bout idiots. Probly the only thing I do know bout, but I done read up on em—all the way from that Doy-chee-eveskie guy's idiot, to King Lear's fool, an Faulkner's idiot, Benjie, an even ole Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—now he was a *serious* idiot. The one I like best tho is ole Lennie in *Of Mice an Men*. Mos of them writer fellers got it straight—cause their idiots always smarter than people give em credit for. Hell, I'd agree with that. Any idiot would. Hee Hee.

When I was born, my mama name me Forrest, cause of General Nathan Bedford Forrest who fought in the Civil War. Mama always said we was kin to General Forrest's fambly someways. An he was a great man, she say, cept'n he started up the Ku Klux Klan after the war was over an even my grand-mama say they's a bunch of no-goods. Which I would tend to agree with, cause down here, the Grand Exalted Pishposh, or whatever he calls hissef, he operate a gun store in town an once, when I was maybe twelve year ole, I were walkin by there and lookin in the winder an he got a big hangman's noose strung up inside. When he seen me watchin, he done

thowed it around his own neck an ^{left} jerk it up-like he was hanged an let his tongue stick out an all so's to scare me. I done run off and hid in a parkin lot behin some cars til somebody call the police an they come an take me home to my mama. So whatever else ole General Forrest done, startin up that Klan thing was not a good idea—any idiot could tell you that. Nonetheless, that's how I got my name.

My mama is a real fine person. Everbody says that. My daddy, he got kilt just after I's born, so I never known him. He worked down to the docks as a longshoreman an one day a crane was takin a big net load of bananas off one of them United Fruit Company boats an somethin broke an the bananas fell down on my daddy an squashed him flat as a pan-cake. One time I heard some men talkin bout the accident—say it was a helluva mess, half ton of all them bananas an my daddy squished underneath. I don't care for bananas much myself, cept for banana puddin. I like that all right.

My mama got a little pension from the United Fruit people an she took in boarders at our house, so we got by okay. When I was little, she kep me inside a lot, so as the other kids wouldn't bother me. In the summer afternoons, when it was real hot, she used to put me down in the parlor an pull the shades so it was dark an cool an fix me a pitcher of limeade. Then she'd set there an talk to me, jus talk on an on bout nothin in particular, like a person'll talk to a dog or cat, but I got used to it an liked it cause her voice made me feel real safe an nice.

At first, when I's growin up, she'd let me go out an play with everbody, but then she foun out they's teasing me an all, an one day a boy hit me in the back with a stick ^{YAP} ^{8/12/75} while they was chasin me an it raised some fearsome welt. After that, she tole me not to play with them boys anymore. I started tryin to play

with the girls but that weren't much better, cause they all run away from me.

Mama thought it would be good for me to go to the public school cause maybe it would hep me to be like everbody else, but after I been there a little ^{while} they come an told Mama I ought'n to be in there with everbody else. They let me finish out first grade tho. Sometimes I'd set there ^{while} the teacher was talkin an I don't know what was going on in my mind, but I'd start lookin out the winder at the birds an squirrels an things that was climbin an settin in a big ole oak tree outside, an then the teacher'd come over an ^{use it} fuss at me. Sometimes, I'd just get this real strange thing come over me an start shoutin an all, an then she'd make me go out an set on a bench in the hall. An the other kids, they'd never play with me or nothin, cept'n to chase me or get me to start hollerin so's they could laugh at me—all cept Jenny Curran, who at least didn't run away from me an sometimes she'd let me walk nex to her goin home after class.

But the next year, they put me in another sort of school, an let me tell you, it was wierd. It was like they'd gone aroun collectin all the funny fellers they coud find an put em all together, rangin from my age an younger to big ole boys bout sixteen or seventeen. They was retards of all kinds an spasmos an kids that couldn't even eat or go to the toilet by theyselves. I was probly the best of the lot.

They was one big fat boy, musta been fourteen or so, an he was afflicted with some kinda thing made him shake like he's in the electric chair or somethin. Miss Margaret, our teacher, made me go in the bathroom with him when he had to go, so's he wouldn't do nothin wierd. He done it anyway, tho. I didn't

know no way of stoppin him, so I'd just lock myself in one of the stalls and stay there till he's thru, an walk him back to the class.

I stayed in that school for about five or six years. It wadn't all bad tho. They'd let us paint with our fingers an make little things, but mostly, it jus teachin us how to do stuff like tie up our shoes an ^{the way} ~~not~~ ^{just} ~~slobber~~ food or get wild an yell an holler an thow shit aroun. They wadn't no book learnin to speak of—cept to show us how to read street signs an things like the difference between the Men's an the Ladies' rooms. With all them serious nuts in there, it woulda been impossible to conduct anythin more'n that anyway. Also, I think it was for the purpose of keepin us out of everbody else's hair. Who the hell wants a bunch of retards runnin aroun loose? Even I could understand that.

When I got to be thirteen, some pretty unusual things begun to happen. First off, I started to grow. I grew six inches in six months, an my mama was all the time havin to let out my pants. Also, I commenced to grow *out*. By the time I was sixteen I was six foot six an weighed two hundrit forty-two pounds. I know that cause they took me in an weighed me. Said they jus couldn't believe it.

What happen nex caused a real change in my life. One day I'm strollin down the street on the way home from nut school, an a car stop longside of me. This guy call me over an axed my name. I tole him, an then he axed what school I go to, an how come he ain't seen me aroun. When I tell him bout the nut school, he ^{asked} axed if I'd ever played football. I shook my head. I guess I mighta tole him I'd seen kids playin it, but they'd never let me play. But like I said, I ain't too good at long conversation, an so I jus shook my head. That was about two weeks after school begun again.

Three days or so later, they come an got me outta the nut school. My mama was there, an so was the guy in the car an two other people what look like goons—who I guess was present in case I was to start somethin. They took all the stuff outta my desk an put it in a brown paper bag an tole me to say good-bye to Miss Margaret, an alls of a sudden she commence to start cryin an give me a big ole hug. Then I got to say goodbye to all the other nuts, an they was droolin an spasmoin an beatin on the desks with they fists. An then I was gone.

Mama rode up in the front seat with the guy an I set in back in between them goons, jus like police done in them ole movies when they took you “downtown.” Cept we didn’t go downtown. We went to the new highschool they had built. When we got there they took me inside to the principal’s office an Mama an me an the guy went in wile the two goons waited in the hall. The principal was an ole gray-haired man with a stain on his tie an baggy pants who look like he coulda come outta the nut school hissef. We all sat down an he begun splainin things an axein me questions, an I just nodded my head, but what they wanted was for me to play football. That much I figgered out on my own.

Turns out the guy in the car was the football coach, name of Fellers. An that day I didn’t go to no class or nothin, but Coach Fellers, he took me back to the locker room an one of the goons rounded me up a football suit with all them pads an stuff an a real nice plastic helmet with a thing in front to keep my face from gettin squished in. The only thing was, they couldn’t find no shoes to fit me, so’s I had to use my sneakers till they could order the shoes.

Coach Fellers an the goons got me dressed up in the foot-

ball suit, an then they made me undress again, an then do it all over again, ten or twenty times, till I could do it by mysef. One thing I had trouble with for a wile was that jockstrap thing—cause I couldn't see no real good reason for wearing it. Well, they tried splainin it to me, an then one of the goons says to the other that I'm a "dummy" or somethin like that, an I guess he thought I wouldn't understand him, but I did, on account of I pay special attention to that kind of shit. Not that it hurt my feelins. Hell, I been called a sight worse than that. But I took notice of it, nonetheless.

After a wile a bunch of kids started comin into the locker room an takin out they football stuff and gettin into it. Then we all went outside an Coach Fellers got everbody together an he stood me up in front of them an introduced me. He was sayin a bunch of shit that I wadn't followin real close cause I was haf scared to death, on account of nobody had ever introduced me before to a bunch of strangers. But afterward some of the others come up an shook my hand an say they is glad I am here an all. Then Coach Fellers blowed a whistle, what like to make me leap outta my skin an everbody started jumpin around to get exercise.

It's a kind of long story what all happened nex, but anyway, I begun to play football. Coach Fellers an one of the goons hepped me out special since I didn't know how to play. We had this thing where you sposed to block people an they were tryin to splain it all, but when we tried it a bunch of times everbody seemed to be gettin disgusted cause I couldn't remember what I was sposed to do.

Then they tried this other thing they call the *defense*, where they put three guys in front of me an I am sposed to get thru them an grap the guy with the football. The first part was easier, cause I could just shove the other guys' heads down, but

they were unhappy with the way I grapped the guy with the ball, an finally they made me go an tackle a big oak tree about fifteen or twenty times—to get the feel of it, I spose. But after a wile, when they figgered I had learnt somethin from the oak tree, they put me back with the three guys an the ball carrier an then got mad I didn't jump on him real vicious-like after I moved the others out of the way. I took a lot of abuse that afternoon, but when we quit practicin I went in to see Coach Fellers an tole him I didn't want to jump on the ball guy cause I was afraid of hurtin him. Coach, he say that it wouldn't hurt him, cause he was in his football suit an was protected. The truth is, I wasn't so much afraid of hurtin him as I was that he'd get mad at me an they'd start chasin me again if I wadn't real nice to everbody. To make a long story short, it took me a wile to get the hang of it all.

Meantime I got to go to class. In the nut school, we really didn't have that much to do, but here they was far more serious about things. Somehow, they had worked it out so's I had three homeroom classes where you jus set there an did whatever you wanted, an then three other classes where there was a lady who was teachin me how to read. Jus the two of us. She was real nice an pretty and more'n once or twice I had nasty thoughts about her. Miss Henderson was her name.

About the only class I liked was lunch, but I guess you couldn't call that a class. At the nut school, my mama would fix me a sambwich an a cookie an a piece of fruit—cept no bananas—an I'd take it to school with me. But in this school they was a cafeteria with nine or ten different things to eat an I'd have trouble makin up my mind what I wanted. I think somebody must of said somethin, cause after a week or so

Coach Fellers come up to me an say to just go ahead an eat all I wanted cause it been "taken care of." Hot damn!

Guess who should be in my homeroom class but Jenny Curran. She come up to me in the hall an say she remember me from first grade. She was all growed up now, with pretty black hair an she was long-legged an had a beautiful face, an they was other things too, I dare not mention.

The football was not goin exactly to the likin of Coach Fellers. He seemed displeased a lot an was always shoutin at people. He shouted at me too. They tried to figger out some way for me to just stay put an keep other folks from grappin our guy carryin the ball, but that didn't work cept when they ran the ball right up the middle of the line. Coach was not too happy with my tacklin neither, an let me tell you, I spent a lot of time at that oak tree. But I just couldn't get to where I would thow myself at the ball guy like they wanted me to do. Somethin kep me from it.

Then one day a event happen that changed all that too. In the cafeteria I had started gettin my food and goin over to set nex to Jenny Curran. I wouldn't say nothin, but she was jus bout the only person in the school I knew halfways, an it felt good setting there with her. Most of the time she didn't pay me no attention, an talked with other people. At first I'd been settin with some of the football players, but they acted like I was invisible or somethin. At least Jenny Curran acted like I was there. But after a wile of this, I started to notice this other guy was there a lot too, an he starts makin wisecracks bout me. Sayin shit like "How's Dumbo?" an all. And this gone on for a week or two, an I was sayin nothin, but finally I says—I can't hardly believe I said it even now—but I says, "I ain't no Dumbo," an the guy jus looked at me an starts laughin. An Jenny Curran, she say to the guy to keep quiet, but he takes a

carton of milk an pours it in my lap an I jump up an run out cause it scares me.

A day or so later, that guy come up to me in the hall an says he's gonna "get" me. All day I was afraid terribly, an later that afternoon, when I was leaving to go to the gym, there he is, with a bunch of his friends. I tried to go the other way, but he come up to me an start pushin me on the shoulders. An he's sayin all kinds of bad things, callin me a "stupo" an all, an then he hit me in the stomach. It didn't hurt so much, but I was startin to cry and I turned an begun to run, an heard him behind me an the others was runnin after me too. I jus run as fast as I could toward the gym, across the practice football field an suddenly I seen Coach Fellers, settin up in the bleachers watchin me. The guys who was chasin me stop and go away, an Coach Fellers, he has got this real peculiar look on his face, an tell me to get suited up right away. A wile later, he come in the locker room with these plays drawn on a piece of paper—three of them—an say for me to memorize them best I can.

That afternoon at the football practice, he line everbody up in two teams an suddenly the quarterback give *me* the ball an I'm sposed to run outside the right end of the line to the goal-post. When they all start chasin me, I run fast as I can—it was seven or eight of them before they could drag me down. Coach Fellers is mighty happy; jumpin up and down an yellin an slappin everbody on the back. We'd run a lot of races before, to see how fast we could run, but I get a lot faster when I'm bein chased, I guess. What idiot wouldn't?

Anyway, I become a lot more popular after that, an the other guys on the team started bein nicer to me. We had our first game an I was scared to death, but they give me the ball an I run over the goal line two or three times an people never been kinder to me after that. That highschool certainly begun

to change things in my life. It even got to where I *liked* to run with the football, cept it was mostly that they made me run aroun the sides cause I still couldn't get to where I liked to just run over people like you do in the middle. One of the goons comments that I am the largest highschool *halfback* in the entire world. I do not think he mean it as a compliment.

Otherwise, I was learnin to read a lot better with Miss Henderson. She give me *Tom Sawyer* an two other books I can't remember, an I took them home an read em all, but then she give me a test where I don't do so hot. But I sure enjoyed them books.

After a wile, I went back to settin nex to Jenny Curran in the cafeteria, an there weren't no more trouble for a long time, but then one day in the springtime I was walkin home from school and who should appear but the boy that poured that milk in my lap an chased me that day. He got hissef a stick an start callin me things like "moron" and "stupo."

Some other people was watchin an then along comes Jenny Curran, an I'm bout to take off again—but then, for no reason I know, I jus didn't do it. That feller take his stick an poke me in the stomach with it, an I says to mysef, the hell with this, an I grapped a holt to his arm an with my other hand I knock him upside the head an that was the end of that, more or less.

That night my mama get a phone call from the boy's parents, say if I lay a han on their son again they is goin to call the authorities an have me "put away." I tried to splain it to my mama an she say she understand, but I could ~~not~~ ^{not} tell she was worried. She tell me that since I am so huge now, I got to watch mysef, cause I might hurt somebody. An I nodded an promised her I wouldn't hurt nobody else. That night when I lyin in bed I heard her cryin to hersef in her room.

But what that did for me, knockin that boy upside the

head, put a definat new light on my football playin. Next day, I axed Coach Fellers to let me run the ball straight on and he say okay, an I run over maybe four or five guys till I'm in the clear an they all had to start chasin me again. That year I made the All State Football team. I couldn't hardly believe it. My mama give me two pair of socks an a new shirt on my birthday. An she done saved up an bought me a new suit that I wore to get the All State Football award. First suit I ever had. Mama tied my tie for me an off I went.

2

THE ALL STATE FOOTBALL banquet was to be ^{held} held in a little town called Flomaton, what Coach Fellers described as a “switch up the railroad tracks.” We was put on a bus—they was five or six of us from this area who won the prize—an we was trucked up there. It was a hour or two before we arrived, an the bus didn’t have no toilet, an I had drank two slurpees fore we lef, so when we get to Flomaton, I really got to go bad.

The thing was held at the Flomaton Highschool auditorium, an when we git inside, me and some of the others find the toilet. Somehow, tho, when I go to unzip my pants, the zipper is stuck in my shirttail an won’t come down. After a bit of this, a nice little guy from a rival school goes out and finds Coach Fellers an he come in with the two goons an they be tryin to get my pants open. One of the goons say the only way to git it down is jus rip it apart. At this, Coach Fellers put his hans on his hips an say, “I spose you expect me to send this boy out there with his fly unzipped an his thing hangin out—now

what kind of a impression do you think that would make?" Then he turn to me an say, "Forrest, you jus got to keep a lid on it till this thing's over, an then we get it open for you—okay?" An I nod, cause I don't know what else to do, but I figgerin I be in for a long evenin.

When we get out to the auditorium there's a million people all settin there at tables, smilin an clappin as we come out. We is put up at a big long table on the stage in front of everbody an my worst fears was realized about the long evenin. Seem like ever soul in the room got up to make a speech—even the waiters an janitor. I wished my mama coulda been there, cause she'd of ^{happed} me, but she back at home in bed with the gripe. Finally it come time to get handed our prizes, which was little gold-colored footballs, an when our names was called we was ^{spoke} sposed to go up to the microphone an take the prize an say "thank you," an they also tole us if anybody has anythin else he wants to say, to keep it short on account of we want to be gettin out of there before the turn of the century.

Most everbody had got they prize an said "thank you," an then it come my turn. Somebody on the microphone call out "Forrest Gump," which, if I hadn't tole you before, is my last name, an I stand up an go over an they han me the prize. I lean over to the mike an say, "Thank you," an everbody starts to cheer an clap an stand up in they seats. I spose somebody tole them aforehan I'm some kind of idiot, an they makin a special effort to be nice. But I'm so surprised by all this, I don't know what to do, so I jus kep standin there. Then everbody hush up, an the man at the mike he lean over and axe me if I got anythin else I want to say. So I says, "I got to pee."

Everybody in the audience didn't say nothin for a few moments, an jus started lookin funny at each other, an then they begun a sort of low mumblin, an Coach Fellers come up