There's Always Next Year

An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

By

Matthew John Gauen

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Michael Q'Hara

Ball State University
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Abstract and Acknowledgements

Abstract

Everyone experiences loss in their life in some way or another. Whether it is the loss of a job, the loss of a game, or the loss of a loved one, losing is a part of life. For fans of the Chicago Cubs professional baseball team, loss is an integral part of fan culture, as the franchise has not won a World Series, the highest achievement in baseball, in over one hundred years. Yet there remains a passionate legion of Cubs fans who cheer for their team despite all of their misgivings. Most have gone an entire lifetime without seeing the Cubs win a championship, which causes a unique intergenerational experience amongst fans. Through the medium of a stage play, I seek to explore how Cubs fans deal with loss. I examine how individuals who are used to losing cope with terminal illness, such as cancer, and I seek to explore what does this do to their relationships, and how their outlook on life changes. The characters use the stage as their platform to integrate sports and life into verbal, visual and physical metaphors that can’t be captured simply by the written word.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Michael O’Hara for advising me throughout this project. His willingness to be my advisor for this project was immensely appreciated, and his insight and support, provided not only through this project, but over four years, cannot be understated.

I would like to thank Jen Blackmer for her amazing support and guidance throughout this project, without which it would never have been completed.

I would like to thank Dr. Tyler Smith for his input throughout this process. His influence on my dramaturgical work for this play proved essential for making key choices and cuttings where necessary throughout the script.

I would like to thank my grandparents, especially my grandmother Marjorie Gauen, the most passionate Cubs fan I’ve ever known.

I would like to thank my sisters, Kaitlin and Lizzie, and my wonderful parents, Mark and Kathy, all lifelong Cubs fans as well.
Author’s Statement

The purpose of this project was to explore three of my biggest passions in life: sports, theater and psychology. I sought to blend these passions by writing a play revolving around one of my favorite sports teams, the Chicago Cubs baseball team, while infusing elements of psychology into the overall product. What started out as simply an honors thesis, however, quickly evolved into something much more personal and more deeply effecting than I could have imagined, and what I feel ended up being the perfect blend of all of the elements that I have learned from my areas of study. In addition, I feel that the product that I have created will benefit my personal growth as an artist moving forward, as it has continued to foster my passion for writing and creativity.

I chose the Chicago Cubs as my area of focus for many reasons. First and foremost, I wanted a topic that I was passionate about and would be able to easily write about, and I felt that there was an inherent framework to build upon when discussing Cubs fans. There is a well-known history of futility with the Chicago Cubs, as the team has not won a World Series Championship since 1908. They have come close on many occasions, most notably in the year 2003, when the team was just five outs away from their first world series in nearly sixty years. And yet one rather infamous incident that forever lives in the minds of Cubs fans involving a fan interfering with a foul ball, denied them that chance, and Cubs fans are still looking for that championship. And yet, in the face of all this adversity, Cubs fans remain relentlessly upbeat and positive in spite of their situation. I count myself in that number, and the title of my creative piece “There’s Always Next Year” reflects the mantra uttered by Cubs fans from season to season.

Yet another reason for choosing to write this piece comes from personal experience. I chose baseball, as opposed to other popular national sports, such as Football or Basketball, because it is America’s national pastime, and the oldest organized sport within the United States. The Cubs themselves were founded in 1876 as the Chicago White Stockings (Myers 3) and dominated the nascent years of the National League, winning the league championship six out of the first ten years of the league’s existence (Myers 2). The Cubs would have unprecedented success in the early part of the 20th century, winning World Series titles in 1907 and 1908. The 1906 Cubs won 116 games, a record that still stands to this day for either league (Myers 7). The Cubs would go on to have success in the 1920s and 1930s, making the World Series every three years starting in 1929, only to lose each time. 1945 was the last time the Cubs ever made it to a World Series (Myers 9). 1945 was also a generation defining-year for most Americans, as it marked the end of World War II, and the return of soldiers from the war. My grandfather, John Leslie was one of them.

John Durfey Leslie and Marie Karlstrom were married July 1st, 1950 in Fourth Presbyterian Church in downtown Chicago. They lived in the city for a few years before moving to Riverside, Illinois, where they would have three children: Cynthia, John, and my mother, Katherine. My mom would tell me stories when I was younger about how Grandma Leslie used to go to Ladies Day games at Wrigley Field, which was a special promotion they offered back in the 1950s and 1960s. My mother even recalled the 1969 Chicago Cubs visiting a high school in her hometown to play a charity basketball game.
A sweatshirt from the 1984 Chicago Cubs divisional championship hangs in my closet back home, yet another reminder of just how deeply ingrained the Chicago Cubs are in my soul. And this love for baseball extends to both sides of the family.

My dad’s mother, Marjorie Gauen, is quite possibly the biggest Chicago Cubs fan that I know, and has been her entire life. In addition to also going to Ladies Day games, Grandma was at Wrigley Field in 1967 when the Cubs went into first place in the standings for the first time since 1945. My grandpa bought tickets to the divisional series in 1984 against the San Diego Padres for him and grandma, both in Chicago and in San Diego. The Cubs triumphantly won the first two games then proceeded to lose the two games in San Diego. Grandma was so upset that she refused to go to the final game back in Chicago (which the Cubs would ultimately lose). For her birthday a couple of years ago, we bought Grammy a brick with her name on it that would be used to pave the new walkways around Wrigley Field, with Cubs great Ernie Banks famous line, “Let’s Play Two!” Both of my grandmothers have had a profound influence on my love of the Cubs, and both served as the inspiration for my protagonist, Leona.

Leona Carpenter is eighty-five years old, and has lived in Chicago all of her life. She spends her days in her assisted living facility watching Cubs games on her rickety old television, taking momentary breaks to berate the kitchen staff on their slow service. I drew bits and pieces from both of my grandmothers, as well as my own inspiration, to create the character that is Leona. Choosing an 85-year-old character as your lead can be difficult, and I chose to make the situation even more severe by diagnosing her with terminal cancer. Adenocarcinoma is a cancer of the lungs that is the most common form of lung cancer found in women, especially in non-smokers (National Cancer Institute). I made the decision in the script to make Leona a former smoker, as smoking was common in the 1950s and 1960s until the damaging health effects were made apparent. There are five stages of cancer, ranging from 1 being the least intense to 5, which is the most severe. Leona is at stage 4 in the play. Her counterpart at her cancer treatment facility is 25-year-old Clark, who has just been diagnosed with Gonadoblastoma, which is a form of testicular cancer. Testicular cancer is common among young men, and has a very high cure rate, but at the start of the play, Clark is dealing with his uncertainties and the very real fear of loss and death as a result of his disease.

I chose cancer as a disease to focus on because it affects so many people throughout the world. I wanted something that an audience could instantly connect to, and something with a scope much broader than simply being a Chicago Cubs fan. Within this context, I sought to explore the idea of how people who are used to losing deal with loss, and in particular, mortality. Does being more accustomed to a losing baseball team better prepare someone for adversities that they face in life, or does it simply make them bitterer in the face of their adversity? I applied ideas learned from my motivational psychology class to help get into the minds of my characters. Motivation class informed me that losses loom larger than gains. When we lose things in life, we have a stronger emotional reaction than when we win things. So, naturally, fans of losing teams become more frustrated as their team loses. Individuals with better coping skills, however, and who can handle their emotions with more grit and determination, are more likely to
succeed and achieve their goals. Leona and Clark are not the only characters dealing with loss, however.

Harold as a character was originally supposed to be Clark’s father, and Leona his mother. Of that original setup, I decided that it was much more compelling for Clark to be outside of the family dynamic, and so only Harold and Leona remained related. Harold is a recovering alcoholic, and his addiction was so severe that it caused his wife to leave him with his children nearly nine years ago. He hasn’t spoken to his mother since. Addiction is a powerful disease, and intervention shows on television demonstrate to us, often in painful detail, the emotional toil that addiction can have on a family. In this particular case, it was vital to the plot of the play that Harold and Leona have not spoken in nine years, because it allows Clark to become the go-between, or the catalyst that gets them talking again. My theater classes have taught me that stories about boring characters do not get written. Early on in the writing process, Harold was missing any conflict that would compel a reader or an audience member to feel any need to connect with him. By creating a flawed character, we see a glimpse of ourselves in Harold, and a mirror with which to view our own struggles. We also get to have the opportunity for redemption throughout the course of the play.

Seeing ourselves through the characters eyes is what makes theater so accessible and so compelling. But to make theater accessible, we have to allow the audience to connect with someone onstage. For the non-sports minded individuals among the audience, I wrote the character of Yvonne. Yvonne is an art student studying at a local college who has picked up a job at Leona’s nursing home on the side. She knows about sports but doesn’t really care for them, and asks seemingly rational questions to both Clark and Leona about their obsession with sports. I felt her importance as a character was to provide a contrast to Leona, and to allow a love interest to happen between herself and Clark. In the same way that Clark becomes the go-between for Harold and Leona, Leona in turn becomes the accomplice in managing to get Clark to ask Leona out on a date. Because this play deals with difficult topics and complex themes, I needed a character that could provide some comic relief, brevity, and a down-to-earth mentality that would have an effect on the characters around her.

Looking at the first draft of my play, the current version bears little resemblance to the original product. This project has taught me the value of collaboration, of coming up with big ideas and then scaling them down so that they are more manageable and accessible, and the value in scrapping original ideas in favor of different ones. My years as a Theatrical Studies major have taught me that collaboration is the key to any artistic endeavor, and that artists do not exist in a vacuum. We must be willing to collaborate, juxtapose ideas together, and be willing to take criticism constructively, and also meet deadlines and produce a complete product. My journey with my honors college senior creative project has helped me develop immensely as an artist by providing a practical model for writing a play from which I can move forward in my post-collegiate career. Utilizing the lessons and tools learned from my classes, in conjunction with my own personal experience, I was able to fuse my ideas together into a coherent, developed product.
Supplements

(ORIGINAL) TREATMENT FOR PLAY

Setting: Suburban Chicago, Modern Day

Characters: 5 (3 Male, 2 Female)

Clark is a 25 year old salesman living outside of Chicago. An avid Cubs fan, he is obsessed with his hometown team, and has been his whole life. His full name being Addison Clark Banks, he was named after two of the streets on which Wrigley Field is located. He considers it an added blessing that he shares a last name with one of the Cubs all-time greats, Ernie Banks. His schedule throughout the year is impacted directly by his relationship to the Cubs, as he tries to catch as many games as he can either by television, computer or any other method he can. Being a Cubs fan, he is hopelessly optimistic most of the time, but is also subject to the melancholy and heartache that frequently are associated with being a fan of a team that hasn’t won a World Series since 1908. The simplest way to describe his relationship with the Cubs is a love-hate relationship. He has been known to call off work after tough losses, and for key days throughout the Cubs season, such as the last possible day the Cubs can still mathematically qualify for the playoffs. He has various superstitions about the Cubs. For instance, he refuses to watch games with the commentary from the television, preferring to listen to the radio broadcast instead. He fears that if he watches a game already in progress, the Cubs will lose. In general, he has a belief that if he watches his team play on television they will lose. He tries to balance his life out rooting for other teams, such as the Blackhawks and the Bears and the Bulls, all native Chicago teams, but he always seems to come back to the Cubbies. His grandmother, whom he has great love and affection for, is a devout Cubs fan as well, and he credits her with fostering his love for his team. Clark’s looking for love and connection in this world, like any other human being, but wants something more stable than his Cubs, who always seem to let him down. This has put a hamper on his worldview as a whole, and he often wrestles with his identity in the outside world as both a sports fan and a boyfriend.

Yvonne, aged 24, is Clark’s girlfriend. An aspiring editor and photographer, she works with downtown Chicago firms doing photoshoots for various products and putting them in magazines or in online catalogues. She and Clark met at The Cubby Bear after a loss the previous year (of course it was a loss) when Clark was out commiserating with his buddies. She is a very casual sports fan, frequently referring to the teams that are playing by the color of their uniforms, and often needs filling in on the details of the game at hand. She sees Clark’s obsession with sports as childish and hopelessly pointless, but puts up with it because she knows he’s passionate about it, and knows how angry he gets whenever she tries to bring this point up to him. She’s been to a few games with Clark, but is there more for the atmosphere than anything else. Yvonne is patient with Clark, but she wants him to make a commitment either way. If he wants something more, then he needs to man up and do something about it, but if not, they both need
to move on. She often feels like Clark’s crutch after a tough loss, and she’s familiar with the “pity sessions” that happen after Cubs losses when Clark seems to be super affectionate and romantic on the surface, but is really just putting up an act so he can be consoled. She’s afraid to make a leap with Clark because she knows how vulnerable he can seem, and she wants to be with a strong guy, not a vulnerable one who is prone to go hide in his cave whenever his team loses. She sees her boyfriend’s love for his sports teams and wonders if that can be transferred somewhere else.

Leona aged 85, is Clark’s aging grandmother. Beneath her mundane exterior lies a fiery personality and a sharp wit, as well as a love for the northsiders. She has been a Cubs fan as well her entire life, and often shoos everyone else out of the tv room in her assisted living facility to watch her Cubs. A widow now for nearly ten years, Leona lives out her days in her assisted living facility watching baseball, reminiscing about the past, reading copious amounts of books, and knitting to keep her wrists from permanently locking up. Her arthritis acts up from time to time, making it hard to do various things, but she is very proud of the fact that she can still walk around her assisted living complex on her own, without any assistance from anyone else. Clark visits once a week, three times if there’s a three-game home stand against the Cardinals, and the two of them chat about this, that and the other. Leona tends to get feisty during Cubs games, often berating her team and the general manager, and basically anyone responsible for the Cubs’ misfortunes. Her goal in life at this point is to see Clark be successful. Though she doesn’t know it, she is about to get the news about having terminal cancer.

Joe aged 25, is one of Clark’s best friends, and also a diehard Cubs fan. An insurance salesman living outside Chicago, he is also often known for calling off work to go to Cubs games, or meeting clients at bars with televisions to watch the games. He and Clark have been friends since childhood, and both share a passion for the game. They fret over every trade that is made, every player that’s signed, and every pitcher that’s put on the disabled list. Joe is a trusted friend to Clark. Unlike Clark, Joe is not as benevolent as most Cubs fans. He gets violently angry at his team’s lack of results, and frequently threatens the treasonous notion of rooting for another team. He wants to see results, and when those things don’t occur, he loses interest and moves on to the next sport coming up on the calendar. He refuses to believe in curses and the old generation of fans, and espouses that he is part of the “new generation” that believes in winning, and that the new general manager will lead his team to the promised land.

Harold aged 62, is Clark’s father. A clinical psychologist, he is often used to dealing with avid sports fans and finding ways to curb their obsessions and deal with loss and tragedy. Needless to say, he has no shortage of clients in a city like Chicago. He and Clark have a good relationship, although Clark often feels like he’s been psychoanalyzed whenever they chat. Harold insists that he will not make his own son a patient, and that he is his own person and has to make his own decisions. He is neutral in his affiliation with sports, rooting for some teams when he feels like it, or when they’re on television after coming home from work. He appreciates his son’s passion for the game, though, and is always willing to listen to his son’s complaints after games. He has made an unwritten rule with Clark that he is allowed to complain and mourn about a loss for
one day, and then he must move on. While he admits this is difficult considering some of the Cubs losses that have seemed to linger over the years, he constantly reminds his son that there’s always tomorrow, or in the Cub’s case, next year.

INCITING INCIDENT

Clark and Yvonne come home after going to the Opening Day game for the Cubs new season. After a tough loss, Yvonne confronts Clark about their relationship. After a heated fight, they break up. A day later, Clark goes to visit his grandmother in her assisted living home for their weekly ritual of watching a Cubs game together. He goes in to watch the game with her, and is about to drop the news about him breaking up with Yvonne when Leona tells him the news about the tests from the doctor. She is now terminally ill with cancer. Having to deal with this information so quickly, Clark is speechless at first, and decides it would be best to not tell his grandmother about his recent break up. Leona responds by asking how he and Yvonne are doing. Clark decides he needs to mend his relationship with Yvonne.
### Play Treatment Outline (2\textsuperscript{nd} Draft)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Really and truly could include anyone, but the specific demographic I would love to go after are casual sports fans, or people who have absolutely no interest in sports at all.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>90 Minutes, Ideally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Performed</td>
<td>I would love to place this play in a black box theater so that I could get the seating arranged the way I want it to. Logistically speaking it would be a little difficult, but I want the seating to be on three sides, like a baseball diamond, with bases around the perimeter of the stage as well. There would also be vendors going around before the show and during intermission selling cotton candy, hot dogs, and refreshments, like a baseball game. I would also love for there to be foul poles along the foul lines on left and right bleachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Most of the play’s action takes place at Magnolia Assisted living facility, located just outside the city of Chicago. We spend a lot of time in Leona’s residence. A few scenes will take place in Harold’s Psychologist’s office. Die Hard Fan Apparel Shop where Clark and Joe work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>5 (3 male, 2 Female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
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**Clark** is a 25 year old sales rep for a sporting goods company. Working at this company allows him to express his passion for sports twenty-four seven. He is a die-hard Cubs fan who, as they say, bleeds Cubbie blue.

**Leona** age 85, is his sharp-witted, wise-cracking grandmother who lives at Magnolia. Though arthritis has caught up to her hands and joints, limiting her movement, she still takes pride in getting around on her own. She is an even bigger Cubs fan than her grandson, and watches the games religiously on her beat-up old television. She and Clark watch games together at her facility once a week. She has cancer.
Yvonne age 24 is a part-time caretaker at Magnolia assisted living facility. She took the job to support her burgeoning career as a photographer. She has been assigned to Leona’s ward.

Harold age 60, is Clark’s father, who is a licensed clinical psychologist, and Clark’s confidante. Also a Cubs fan, but not as diehard as mother (Leona) or Son. Divorced, and now living alone, he is coping with the loss of his marriage and his mother’s illness.

Joe age 26, is Clark’s co-worker at the sporting goods company. The two are very competitive in nature, as Joe is a die-hard Cardinals fan living outside of Chicago. They often agree to disagree on things.

**Emotional Subtext**

Clark more than anything else, is looking for love. He realizes now, at the age of 25, that he is getting older faster than he would care to admit, and he really needs to get going in life, at the behest of his grandmother and father alike. He is hesitant to make long-term commitments because he has felt let down so many times, much in the same way he’s been let down as a Cubs fan. He’s used to rejection, and simply accepts it as part of his identity of being a tortured Cubs fan. Once he learns of his grandmother’s illness, the pressure mounts on him as well, as he wants to show that he’s been successful to his grandmother. What’s lacking in Clark’s life is a stable force to guide him forward. After his father’s divorce to his mother after thirty years of marriage, the ending of yet another bad relationship, and now the news of his grandmother’s mortality, he feels as though the weight of the world and expectation is upon him (much like the Cubs feel at the start of every season).

Leona by contrast, is coping with her mortality with a newfound sense of optimism. She seems to have skipped the 5 stages of grief and gone straight to acceptance. She candidly admits her impending death, much to the chagrin of her sensitive grandson. She insists that he not treat her any differently, in spite of her illness. She approaches her chemo like her Cubs always do, with a hopeless sense of optimism in the face of immense adversity. Upon meeting the lovely and interesting Yvonne, she makes it her personal mission to educate this “poor young girl” on the basics of “the easiest damn game in the world to understand.” It
dawns on her about halfway through the play (by the end of the first/start of the second act) that her other purpose will be to play matchmaker with Yvonne and Clark.

**Harold** has always managed to keep his home life and his work life separate, but now he feels as though he should be the one in the chair and not his clients. After a painful divorce, he has turned to his son and his mother for some stability. He’d much rather deal with their problems instead of facing and accepting his own. His “sessions” with Clark are more to mend the feelings of hurt he’s caused his son, but Clark always manages to divert his anger from directly talking about the divorce. Instead, they use the metaphor of baseball to dissect what went wrong, and how to mend the situation. They bond over Leona’s illness, and rally to her cause.

**Yvonne** is a curious character in that her goal in life is to be a world-famous and successful photographer, and yet all she can seem to manage right now is the Explore Illinois! Travel magazine, which sends her to the exciting towns of Moline and Rantoul to take pictures of one-stoplight towns fourth-of-July parades. She has always been fascinated by people, and took the part-time position because of her Hospitality double-major that she picked up in college. The world of sports is very foreign to her, but after a rather hostile initial exchange between her and Leona, she discovers that the way to get through to her stubborn resident is to learn the language of baseball.

**Joe** is not just a sounding board for Clark. He is a foil, in a sense, because his team has experienced success, and is more successful as a salesman than Clark, a fact that he often rubs in needlessly. He’s also more successful in the romance department, always seeming to be a hit with the ladies in a way that Clark is not. He plays the Id to Clark’s Superego, in that he goes out and does the things that Clark dreams of, and has experienced the things that Clark has not. He feels hollow, however, because, unlike Clark, he has no relation to his immediate family, a fact that irks him more than anything else. The Cardinals winning the World Series was the last time he had talked with his father in four years, ever since he dropped out of college with one semester to go to pursue his lucrative career. Sports
provided the spark for him to open a dialogue with his father.

**Throughline**

Clark’s journey through his grandmother’s cancer treatments over the course of a baseball season lead him to talk with his father about his parent’s divorce, confront Joe about his family issues, and find love with an unexpected individual in Yvonne.

**Scenario/Cause and Effect**

Addison Clark Banks has just arrived to his grandmother’s assisted living facility to begin their summer ritual of watching their beloved Chicago Cubs play baseball. It is March 31st, Opening Day. Clark is coming off of a tough breakup with yet another girlfriend, and is lamenting this fact with his grandmother. She lovingly remarks “There’s always next year.” She receives a phone call and Clark answers. It’s the hospital telling him that his grandmother’s cancer was detected again. She has relapsed, and this time, it’s gotten much worse. Leona candidly remarks “Well, this better be the year.”

Clark meets with his father in his office. He is sitting on his father’s couch, much like a patient would do, although his dad insists that he is not here to give his son a free session. They dance around the issue of Harold’s recent and painful divorce with Clark’s mother, finally resorting to obscure baseball terminology to discuss the issue, even utilizing the bases that are placed around the stage to enact their feelings about the whole situation. After the “D” word is finally dropped and the issue is out in the open, Clark tells his father about Leona’s cancer.

Yvonne is vacuuming the floors of Leona’s apartment while she is dutifully watching a Cubs game. Leona, obviously irritated at Yvonne’s complete lack of recognition of the game in progress, gives her death stares as Yvonne continues to vacuum. Finally, she presses the Life Alert cord around her neck, and waits as the sounds of sirens come from outside. An EMT enters the room, startling poor Yvonne, who stops the vacuum. The television can now clearly be heard. The EMT asks Leona what the emergency is, to which she responds “she couldn’t hear.” Confused, the EMT asks her again, and she explains “I couldn’t hear it!” the EMT then asks if she can hear now, to which she responds,
“of course I can!” Confused, the EMT walks away befuddled. Yvonne, finally discovering the source of the trouble, demands an explanation from Leona. She explains about watching the game, and Yvonne questions the importance of baseball, leading to Leona yelling at her to get out! Yvonne leaves in a huff.

Realizing that baseball is going to be the way to get through to Leona, Yvonne decides to learn a little bit more about it. She goes to a sporting goods store, where Joe is working, and asks an innocent question about baseball. Clark, who is nearby, hears Joe talking about the Cardinals, and butts in, stressing the importance of being a Cubs fan in Chicago. Yvonne is entertained by the two boys antics, as they are obviously competing for her affection.

Leona is seen attempting to explain the game of baseball to Yvonne in her room. She starts telling stories about the days of old, and Yvonne is fascinated by her interest in the sport in general, as well as Leona’s passion for the sport.

Clark is seen watching a game with Leona, the Cubs manage a dramatic comeback in the ninth inning and win the game, but the stress causes Leona to go into shock, and she gets taken to the hospital. In the melee that ensues, Clark sees Yvonne and does a double-take, realizing that it’s the girl that came into the sporting goods store.

Clark and his father have another session where they discuss their issues, at one point becoming a pitcher and a catcher trying to get their signs worked out. There are a series of comical gestures that are made towards each other, and at one point an umpire (played by the actor who plays Joe) has to come onstage and separate the two of them, and then throws Clark and Harold out of the game. The two of them go back to their chairs, and Clark talks about watching his grandma have her episode.

Leona, impressed by Yvonne’s recent interest in baseball, warms up to her, and decides to learn more about the girl who is her caretaker. Her passion and exuberance for photography becomes evident. As she starts explaining her passion, Clark comes onstage and explains his passion for baseball at the same time.
While the two monologues are going on, some of the lines become shared lines, as each of them talk about their passion. Leona, who is listening to both conversations, realizes that the two have a connection, and can be visually seen getting excited about the prospect of the two meeting.

At the start of Act Two, Leona is shown coming into Clark’s sporting goods store, but he is not working today. Instead it is Joe, whom Leona is familiar with and knows. This is a special trip she has made just for this occasion. She asks Joe if he knows anyone who works at Wrigley Field, from all of his work with sports. Joe scoffs and mockingly says that he does, but that he doesn’t know why he needs to, being a Cardinals fan. Leona fights with him over this point momentarily, then drops it, asking if he knows a way that he could possibly get access to the field. Joe, enjoying the opportunity to demonstrate his connections, says that he could work something out, and would try to get it set up for Leona.

Yvonne and Leona are watching a game together at the assisted living facility. Yvonne is spouting off numbers about the players batting averages, yelling about the umpires and the strike zone, and Leona is taken aback by all of her sudden knowledge.

Harold and Clark are talking again, and this time Clark and Joe have him in a rundown between home plate and third base, all of a sudden, however, the tables turn and Clark is caught in the rundown. Joe then somehow becomes part of it, and the discovery about his disconnect with his family is discovered, and he is tagged out.

Joe is talking with Clark in the store about what’s been going on in his life, and laments at Clark’s stable relationships with his family. Clark shoots back that he’s jealous of Joe’s success, but Joe stresses that it’s been worth nothing. Clark accuses him of being ungrateful. Joe accuses him of being selfish. Coincidentally, the Cubs and Cardinals happen to be playing each other. In a huff, Joe angrily reveals the effort to get tickets to Wrigley, and spats that he’s not even going to try anymore. Clark, who has been unaware of this situation, apologizes.
Leona is resting in her room with a cap on her head, lazily watching the game, when Clark comes in. He watches the game with her for some time, and then starts to ask questions of Leona about the tickets. Leona, realizing she's been discovered, fakes having a seizure, and presses her life alert button. This time, as she's being wheeled off, Clark and Yvonne actually meet, and make the crucial connection that they've met before.

Harold and Clark can be seen playing catch, this time openly discussing their problems and situations to one another. It is as though Clark is back in elementary school again, playing in his first baseball game. The two laugh for the first time in ages.

The laughing continues into the next scene as Leona, back in her bed in her facility, is chuckling at her feigned illness. Clark is scolding her for being so ridiculous. They are watching a game together again. Clark tells Leona about the girl from the store, and the assisted living facility. The game ends in a Cubs loss, and both Leona and Clark are upset. Leona says that she's not sad, however, and that things are looking up. She closes her eyes for the last time. Clark tries to wake her up, but this time, she's not joking.

In a poignant montage, Leona can be seen standing at second base with a glove and a baseball cap, shouting taunts at the batter at the plate, who happens to be Joe. Joe takes a strike, and the sound of the announcers can be heard over the radio shouting "Cubs win! Cubs Win!" Leona goes to join the other teammates, Clark and Harold, but their joyous reunion is short-lived, as the umpire (in this case Yvonne) walks up to Leona and walks her the opposite direction.

The last scene involves Clark sitting at the foot of Leona's now empty bed, watching yet another Cubs game on television. The sound of the game can be heard in the background, and the announcers shout about the Cubs possibly clinching the playoffs. Clark gets up and rubs his grandmother's headboard, then looks up and says "This had better be our year." Yvonne walks in. Clark is transfixed on the television. Yvonne starts muttering about the game under her breath, while Clark does the same. Their eyes meet in mutual understanding. Clark notices a letter on the table.
addressed to Yvonne. She opens it and gasps, it is two tickets to the Cubs playoff game, with passes to allow Yvonne to be a photographer at the game. Clark is stunned, when he realizes he is the other attendee. The note simply says “From Cardinal to Cubby. Only the best for you.” Yvonne and Clark kiss as they leave Leona’s room. The spot slowly fades out on the bed as “Take me out to the Ball game” plays in the background.

Ideas/Questions

1) The cyclical nature of baseball, and the way it ebbs and flows, much like life and the nature of a terminal disease.
2) Baseball as a metaphor for life, as demonstrated in the scenes with Harold and Clark in particular
3) What makes individuals passionate about various things
4) Sports and the family dynamic.
5) Debunking the usually delicate subject of terminal illness, and seeing it through the eyes of an eternal optimist.
There’s Always Next Year

By Matt Gauen
A senior thesis presentation
A Staged Reading
April 27, 2012

Cast:
CLARK: Kodie Egenolf
LEONA: LaKecia Harris
HAROLD: Bradford Reilly
YVONNE, PHYLLIS: Macie Tonn
ANNOUNCER, EMT, OFFICER JONES:
Craig Ester

There will be a ten minute intermission

I would like to thank my professors, Dr. O’Hara, Jen Blackmer, and Dr. Smith for all of their support throughout this semester and for the last four years. Their help and guidance throughout this process has been immeasurable. I would also like to thank Dr. Stedman and the honors college for approving this project. I would like to thank my family parents, without whom this all would not be possible
And finally, to Grandma Gauen and Grandma Leslie, the biggest Cubs fans I know
Enjoy the show!
There's Always Next Year

A Play in Two Acts

Matt Gauen
4/13/2012
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CLARK Banks: age 25, avid Cubs fan; recently diagnosed with testicular cancer. Works at a sporting goods store.

LEONA Carpenter: age 84, mother of HAROLD, also a lifelong Cubs fan; suffers from adenocarcinoma, lives at the Magnolia Lane Assisted Living Facility.

HAROLD Carpenter: age 50, son of LEONA, works as a clinical psychologist

YVONNE Smith: age 23, photography major at a local college, works at the Magnolia Lane facility.

NURSE: works at the outpatient facility

EMT

THE ANNOUNCER

PHYLLIS

OFFICER JONES: security officer at Wrigley Field.
ACT ONE
PROLOGUE

The stage is set up like a baseball diamond, with the audience forming the bleachers on both the 1st and 3rd base sides. Two large yellow foul poles are at the end of each bleacher section. There are baselines and four bases on the stage, along with a rubber bump for the pitcher’s mound.

LEONA’S nursing home is located at 1st base. HAROLD’S office is located at 3rd. The outpatient facility is at 2nd. The bar scene and final scene take place at the pitcher’s mound.

“Take me out to the ballgame” cackles over an old radio as a young LEONA takes the stage. She walks out to the pitcher’s mound with a mitt and ball, and begins throwing pitches to the catcher. THE MANAGER walks over to THE UMPIRE, and hands him a scorecard. THE MANAGER gives LEONA a long stare. LEONA feels the eyes of her manager on her. She returns the gaze. She lingers for a moment, then shakes her head. She looks again. THE MANAGER nods at her, and gives a few hand signals. THE UMPIRE stands behind the catcher. The song finishes and there is a beeping noise, like a tape machine.

LEONA is irritated. This is breaking her concentration. She goes into her windup, and hears the beeping again. She steps off the pitcher’s bump and adjusts her cap. She gives one more glance to THE MANAGER, who starts to exit. LEONA follows her with her eyes. She starts to speak, but there are no words. The beeping noise can be heard again. The tape machine starts. An automated voice speaks

October 15th, 2003. At 11:30 AM.

HAROLD’S VOICE
Hey mom. It's me. I'm really sorry about last night. For...everything. I was just so upset. It's such a bummer for the Cubbies. Well, I guess there's always next year. I miss you and I love you.

BLACKOUT
SCENE ONE
An outpatient cancer treatment facility. LEONA is propped up in a hospital bed, relaxing while receiving a chemo treatment. NURSE stands at a desk, checking her clipboard. CLARK enters. He looks confused.

CLARK
Hi, I’m here for my first chemo treatment today. Clark Banks. I was wondering if I could be out of here by 3:15.

LEONA
Join the club.

CLARK
I would really like to reschedule, today’s a very important day.

LEONA
What, are you having a baby?

NURSE
Sir, I’m sorry, but chemo treatments are very difficult to reschedule. We’d really like you to stay on the regimen. It’s really not helpful if you miss a treatment. Especially your first one.

CLARK
Fine, but I would really appreciate it if I could get out of here by 3:30.

NURSE
I can’t make any promises, sir. The sooner we get started, the sooner you can get out of here.

CLARK
Thank you! That would be greatly appreciated.

NURSE exits.

CLARK
What’s weaseling in your pants?

LEONA
I beg your pardon?
LEONA
Where are you running off to so quickly?

CLARK
Well, if you must know, I have a game to watch.

LEONA
Me too.

CLARK
Game starts at 3:30

LEONA
Three-fifteen.

CLARK
I've been a Cubs fan all my life, I know what time the game starts.

LEONA
I've been a Cubs fan since before you inhabited a uterus. Three-fifteen.

CLARK
But is that the ceremonial first pitch, or the actual first pitch?

LEONA
Depends on how long they drag out the national anthem

CLARK
Especially if it's sung by

LEONA and CLARK
Wayne Messmer.

CLARK
Who are you?

LEONA
Adeno-carcinoma

CLARK
Is that Italian?

LEONA

'Round here we go by our cancer names. To the outside world I'm simply Leona. Leona Carpenter

CLARK

Leona Carcinoma. That has a nice ring to it. Rolls right off the tongue, Leoooona, Carcinooooma

(LEONA laughs for the first time in weeks)

LEONA

All right then, what cancer have you got?

CLARK

Ah, well...I'd really rather not say.

LEONA

Oh, c'mon, wear it like a badge of honor.

CLARK

No judgment here?

LEONA

Nope.

CLARK

Gonadoblastoma

LEONA

Say what?

CLARK

My nads.

LEONA

Son, what are you talking about?

CLARK
I’ve got cancer of the cajones. A syndrome in the sack. A tumor in the testes. I’ve got testicular cancer, ok?

LEONA
Ah. I see. So you’re gonna lose your balls, huh?

CLARK
God! I hope not!

LEONA
They’ll usually let you keep one.

CLARK
Don’t joke about that!

LEONA
They let Lance Armstrong keep one.

CLARK
This is true.

LEONA
What’s your real name, son?

CLARK
Addison Clark Banks.

LEONA
Now I know you’re lying about that one.

CLARK
No, I'm serious! Here, have a look at my license.

CLARK takes out his license, hands it to LEONA, who examines it.

LEONA
Well I'll be Harry Carey, you are Addison Clark Banks.
CLARK
Clark, for short. Like Kent. I like to think of myself as superman. But, without the glasses.

LEONA
Do you have a sister named Wrigley? Or a cousin named Waveland?

CLARK
No, I'm the only family member to take up two of the street names from Wrigley Field. My mom got to name my sister, and she was a fan of the theater. so she became Aphra Benn Banks. I think I got the better end of the deal.

LEONA
Well nice to meet you Clark.

Beat.

It’s your first chemo treatment, isn’t it?

CLARK
How could you tell?

LEONA
The hair on your head. That and your face being as white as snow.

CLARK
I’m just a little shell-shocked right now. Cancer just sounds so...intimidating.

LEONA
It sounds worse when you’re told you have it again.

CLARK
No! Really?

LEONA
Mmmm-hmmm. I was about ready to throttle the doctor.

CLARK
They caught mine pretty early, so they said the diagnosis is pretty good.

LEONA
That's good, that's good.
CLARK

How about you?

LEONA

Old bag of bones like me? I've only got three brain cells left?

SHE and CLARK chuckle.

Mine’s terminal.

Beat.

CLARK

Hey, it's opening day today.

LEONA

It sure is.

NURSE enters.

NURSE

Mr. Banks, you can choose to either sit in the chair or have a seat on the gurney, your choice.

CLARK

That's fine.

NURSE

The chair or the gurney?

CLARK

Either one.

LEONA

Pick one or the other, Clark!

CLARK

Oh! The Chair, yes the chair will work fine.

NURSE exits.

LEONA

We’re missing the start of the game.
I've got it recorded at home. Besides, they take forever anyway. I have all sorts of superstitions about watching them anyway. I don't think I've ever watched a full game start to finish. I usually tune in in the last couple of innings. Or turn it off when we're ahead.

LEONA

When they're ahead!

CLARK

As my father always said, "If they lose it now, you don't want to watch."

Beat. CLARK walks over to the television mounted on the wall and turns it on. He flips through the channels to find the game.

CLARK

First pitch is in twenty minutes.

LEONA

Where are you from, Mr. Banks?

CLARK

Melrose Park. Yourself?

LEONA

Oak Park. I live at Magnolia Assisted Living facility off of Kingery Highway.

CLARK

That's quite a ways away.

LEONA

This is the outpatient facility associated with Magnolia Lane.

CLARK

I see. Do you get to watch the games often?

LEONA

Well sure, but it’s usually by myself. I love to watch with company.

CLARK

Tell you what, newfound Cubs fan friend, I’ll come join you.
LEONA

Oh aren’t you sweet.

CLARK

No, really! Magnolia Assisted Living? That’s not that far away from me at all.

LEONA

Well alrighty then.

CLARK

I’ll check my schedule. I think I’m free next Tuesday, after I get off of work. Does that sound good to you?

LEONA

Sounds good. Oooh look, the game’s starting!

END SCENE

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP ON LEONA’S half of the stage

ANNOUNCER

It’s a beautiful day for baseball here at historic Wrigley Field. We welcome you to today’s game between the Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago Cubs. It’s a balmy fifty degrees here at Wrigley Field with partly cloudy skies. The winds are swirling today, but it is a packed house here at the Friendly Confines for yet another wonderful season of Cubs baseball here on WGN radio.

THE UMPIRE comes onstage in full Umpire gear, takes out a brush and wipes home plate, he takes out a score card and begins to examine it.

Our umpiring crew today is led by Mike Winters, in his 21st year in the league. And now there’s the Cubs skipper out to the mound to give Mike his scorecard.

THE MANAGER trots over to THE UMPIRE and hands him the scorecard. They mouth to each other as the ANNOUNCER keeps going.

The Cubs are in their home jerseys, with white pants and shirts with blue pinstripes, Cubs insignia on the front, blue caps with red bills. The Reds are playing in their away greys, with Cincinnati emblazoned in red type across the breast, with Red caps and black bills.

As the announcer keeps going, LEONA enters from offstage, having just rushed upstairs from the dining room. She’s slowed in her old age, but she moves quickly for a woman of eighty-four, and a woman
who is in a rush. She turns on her radio, and the announcer’s voice now takes on a crackly, radio quality to it. She listens intently.

The Cubs are coming off a difficult end to last season, dealing with the transition of a new general manager and numerous off-season acquisitions.

LEONA breathes a sigh of relief realizing she hasn’t missed the beginning of the game yet. She slowly motors her way over to her ancient television, a set with rabbit ears from the 1980s, the last time she ever bought a television. She hits it three times, more out of ritual or superstition, and then turns the dial. She is willing it to come on, but the picture takes many seconds—enough time for LEONA to slowly motor her way back to her chair. As she starts to sit—

The teams are lined up along the first base line for the playing of our national anthem, sung by Wayne Messmer. Let’s turn it over to Public Address announcer Andrew Belleson.

LEONA reluctantly forces herself back upright, resisting the urge to sit, and slowly removes her Cubs baseball cap from her head. It’s a flashy shade of pink. She patriotically places her hand over her heart as the anthem is belted out. THE UMPIRE and THE MANAGER also stand at attention. When the song concludes, THE UMPIRE SHOUTS

PLAY BALL!!!

ANNOUNCER

And we are underway! (Fades)

THE MANAGER and THE UMPIRE leave the stage, and it is now lit in full light. LEONA goes to sit down again, slowly, when there is a knock at the door. LEONA ignores it, staring at the door with contempt.

LEONA

No visitors, please.
The door opens slowly. LEONA figures it's probably a nurse or something, and continues to watch the game.

CLARK walks in the door, holding a small white teddy bear, and notices LEONA watching the ball game.

CLARK
Special delivery for Miss Leona Carcinoma?

LEONA
For the last time, it’s Carpenter--

Well I'll be damned!

CLARK
Not the greeting I was expecting.

LEONA
How did you find me?

CLARK
We talked about this a couple of days ago, remember? I said I’d stop by and watch a game with you? This is a lovely place you’ve got here. Very homey.

LEONA
It’s more of a prison than a house.

CLARK
It doesn't look that bad, to be perfectly honest.

LEONA
Wait till they stick you in one of these places and then tell me how you feel.

CLARK
I brought a housewarming gift. He hands LEONA the teddy bear

A cubbie bear for a Cubs fan.
LEONA
How sweet. Such a young gentleman you are.

CLARK
(Taking a seat opposite LEONA)

What inning are we in?

LEONA
Top of the first. It took the kitchen forever to get my order out at lunch. How hard is it to grill tilapia? I almost missed the first pitch.

CLARK
When I asked for you at the desk, they told me you were booking it just to get up here. You took out an attendant, apparently.

LEONA
She's new, she'll learn.

CLARK
Who’s pitching?

LEONA
No clue. Haven’t had a clue for years. All that matters is that he throws strikes. I’m always fond of pitchers who hit guys in the head. Too bad that’s out of style these days.

CLARK
You’d get thrown out for that kind of thing nowadays.

LEONA
A good bean ball never hurt anyone.

BEAT. They watch the game in silence. The ambient sound of the game can be heard in the background. This is their nirvana. Their peace. They live and breathe with every pitch on the patchy color television.

CLARK
Your picture could use a little work.
LEONA

Whaddya mean?

CLARK

I'm having trouble distinguishing teams here.

LEONA

I've had this TV for 25 years. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, I always say.

CLARK

Is it a good luck charm or something?

LEONA

It was the first color TV I ever got.

CLARK

They make nicer TVs these days, you know. I could find you a new one.

LEONA

No, this one suits me just fine.

CLARK

I have a friend who works at an electronics store, I could cut you a great deal.

LEONA

No no no, I'm content. As long as I can watch my Cubbies.

CLARK

Or my dad's old TV, that thing's been lying around in the garage for ages, I could have it here by tomorrow, in time for that double header. It's a little bit bigger too—

LEONA

Damn it Harold, No!

She is visibly upset.

CLARK

Who's Harold?

LEONA

Who?
You called me Harold. My name’s Clark.

CLARK

LEONA

(Taken aback)

Never mind. that’s none of your business.

My apologies.

CLARK

BEAT. They watch the game in awkward silence. Clark takes off his baseball cap. He is bald.

They gotchya!

LEONA

CLARK

What are you talking about?

LEONA

That cue ball of a noggin you've got there!

CLARK

Oh this? Well, yes, I figured it would come out eventually, so I sped up the process by just shaving it myself. You look unscathed.

LEONA pulls up her wig and tilts it to the side as though she were exposing her brain.

CLARK

Ah, I see.

LEONA

I asked them to give me an auburn wig. I always wanted red hair when I was younger. I wanted to be Maureen O’Hara, with her fiery red hair.

CLARK

Who?

LEONA
The famous actress. How Green Was My Valley? Miracle on 34th Street? My Irish Molly?

CLARK
Those don't ring a bell.

LEONA
She was such a great actress of the 40s and 50s.

CLARK
My parents weren’t even around in the 40s and 50s. I’m too young to know what you’re talking about.

LEONA
You’re never too young, Clark.

CLARK
Or too old for that matter. I just haven’t lived enough.

LEONA
Huh?

CLARK
I mean, this cancer thing. I could lose a lot, you know?

LEONA
You’re a Cubs fan; you should be used to it.

CLARK
Ouch.

LEONA
Think about it, we deal with loss all the time.

CLARK
Yeah, but that doesn't mean we have to like it.

LEONA
No one ever likes losing, but it’s the ones who are prepared for it who handle it best. Do you think a Yankees fan knows how to cope with futility like a Cubs fan does?
CLARK
Well, no. But isn't it easier to point to your team when you're down and say, "At least they're winning?"

LEONA
Well sure. But it's just as easy for me to say, "When I lose, my team loses with me." We have a mutual understanding of one another.

Still seems really defeatist to me.

LEONA
You know, you may think you haven't lived long enough, but for some of us it's been too long. You've only been a fan for 25 years. You've only really had to "suffer" for 20, because I'm assuming you don't remember games from when you were younger. I've been suffering for 80 years, even though I can only remember the last 60 or so. That's still a lot more than you've "suffered."

CLARK
Well, when you put it that way--

LEONA
Glad to give you some perspective.

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE
Lights up on first base only.
ANNouncer
And Clark Banks will enter the game to pinch run for Soto. The speedy Banks is 4 for 11 on stolen bases this season. With the Cubs down a run, it would sure help things out if he could work himself into scoring position with the top of the order coming up.

CLARK, in a Cubs uniform and wearing a batting helmet, stands at first base with a small "lead" off the plate.

CLARK
Men. We're supposed to be...powerful. Strong. Independent. We show no pain, no fear, and no remorse.
And then you take a ground ball to the sack when you're a little leaguer, and you start wailing like a baby. That's when I learned the value of wearing a cup.

ANNOUNCER
Banks has a decent lead at first. Hamels gives him a long look.

CLARK
For supposedly being such dominant creatures, guys have to hide their manhood behind a quarter-inch sheet of plastic.

CLARK makes a quick move back to the base.

ANNOUNCER
Hamels chases Banks back to first.

CLARK makes a quick move back to the base.

ANNOUNCER
Hamels chases Banks back to first.

CLARK takes a few steps away from the bag again, as though he's going to steal second base.

ANNOUNCER
Hamels delivers. Banks stays.

CLARK
Alright, so I'm not the healthiest. But that's not the issue here and I know it.

ANNOUNCER
Banks appears indecisive on the base paths. He doesn't know whether to stay or go. That's not what you want out of your pinch runners. They need to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

CLARK
I'm getting mixed signals here. Conventional wisdom tells me: Testicular cancer is the most curable of all the cancers. It's common among guys my age. Treatment is effective, and there's a 90% cure rate.
And Sveum gives Banks the sign. Hamels throws again to first, and he chases Banks back to the bag.

CLARK again hustles over to the bag.

But, it's still cancer.

ANNOUNCER

Banks takes a big lead.

CLARK

This is unknown territory here. The goal is in sight, but you never know what's going to happen. You're always looking for a signal of some sort. A sign, a signal, a twitch, a movement, a long windup or a step off the bag. Base stealers have to be fearless. There's no going back once you go. You can't hesitate or hold up, it's a one-hundred percent commitment once you go. But the question is always, when do you go?

ANNOUNCER

Hamels makes a quick turn to first.

This time CLARK dives back to the bag. He is barely safe.

ANNOUNCER

He juuust makes it back to the bag in time.

CLARK

Like I said, the odds are in my favor. This is a beatable situation. I know I can make it to that next step, but there's that looming threat of being called out. Of something going wrong. Or worse, the cancer coming back. I mean, it is cancer. That's such a loaded word. Few words have so much power over us anymore. But that one. I had to say it out loud fifty times before I actually believed it.

ANNOUNCER

Hamels delivers. Ball gets away from Ruiz! Banks takes a few steps towards second.

CLARK starts to go, then holds up.

ANNOUNCER

Ruiz recovers, looks up towards first. Banks stays.
CLARK
You always look for that easy pass in life. The "get-out-of-jail-free" card, the cop that lets you off with just a warning. When your mom only grounds you a week. But, let's face it. Those situations are rare. You can't count on them. Even when the goal is in sight, there are always other things at work.

ANNOUNcer
Banks may have passed up on a golden opportunity there. I don't know if Ruiz would've been able to recover quick enough. Nonetheless, he stays at first, and the count is now 1-0.

CLARK
Everyone gives great advice when you're sick. They give you encouragement. They send cards. You get free food. I had four different types of lasagna last week from my college buddies. They all were the GFS type you buy at Costco, but it was a nice gesture. Suddenly your friends hang out with you more, as though it might be the "last time" they get to. You make a bucket list of things you're going to do. People suddenly think that you're somehow wiser because of your disease.

ANNOUNcer
And Hamels checks at first again. Banks was almost caught napping.

CLARK
The reality is, I'm not. I'm just sick.

CLARK takes another big lead, and squats down. He's ready to go this time.

CLARK
So it's a reality check. I could die. That's a real possibility. People die every day. I get that. But it's the way go about it. Do I take the safe route, count my blessings, wait for someone else to move me over to that next base. Or do I take matters into my own hands? You look for that moment. A twitch. A signal. A big wind up. And then.

ANNOUNcer
Hamels sets. Runner goes!

CLARK
You go.

CLARK starts to sprint towards second base.
BLACKOUT
SCENE FOUR

CLARK lies on HAROLD’S couch, in the middle of a session. HAROLD sits in a leather chair with a legal pad, taking notes. We catch the two of them mid-session.

CLARK
She just gave me a fresh view, for once, Dr. Carpenter, and that was nice.

HAROLD
So, you're doing better then?

CLARK
Marginally. I still have to go in for treatments on a weekly basis. My incentive now is that I catch a game with her afterwards, she gets real animated, especially for an eighty-four-year-old woman.

HAROLD
Good, good, I'm glad to hear you've got some coping mechanisms working for you. Positive thinking is crucial to the whole treatment process.

CLARK
And the Cubs are winning.

HAROLD
Yes, but you don't have control over that. Focus on what you can control.

CLARK
Well, I don't have control over my cancer.

HAROLD
Point taken. What I mean to say is, stick with your routines. Find a system that works for you. Maybe watching Cubs games with this, woman--

CLARK
Leona
HAROLD
Will help give you consistency. Her name was, Leona? You said?

CLARK
Yeah. Do you know her?

HAROLD
She’s my mother.

CLARK
Seriously?

HAROLD

CLARK
I remember now, she called me Harold last week! It was after she got really upset. It was over the television.

HAROLD
I used to tell her to get rid of it all the time. She wouldn't.

CLARK
Do you visit her? Is that why she got upset? I merely suggested that she get a new TV.

HAROLD
I haven't spoken to my mother in years.

CLARK
Ah, well, do you want to talk about it?

HAROLD
Very funny. I'm supposed to ask that question, and, no. Let's just say it was familial issues.

CLARK
She seemed really upset, maybe you need to talk to her.

HAROLD
Clark, I haven’t talked to my mother in nine years. Why would I start now.
Because she’s dying.

She’s been dying ever since she was diagnosed.

That’s a little morbid, don’t you think.

Adenocarcinoma, Clark. I looked it up the first day she was diagnosed. I looked up survival rates. I looked up treatment options. I called clinics across the country. Even though we haven’t talked in a while, I do care about my mother. They gave her a 50 percent chance of survival. That’s what they thought before they realized that they couldn’t get the tumor out. She moved to stage III after that. The minute they couldn’t get that tumor out, she dipped down to a 16% chance of survival. It’s the bottom of the ninth, two outs, two strikes Clark.

So you’ve given up on her.

I didn’t say that, I just don’t like my odds.

Do you think the Red Sox liked their odds when they were down 0-3 back in 2004 to the Yankees?

Clark, it’s not like that

Or the Cardinals when they were down to their last strike against the Rangers in the World Series last year?

Clark, please don’t bring up the Cardinals—

Or Kirk Gibson when he hit a home run off of one good leg in ’88?
HAROLD
Clark, Cancer is not like baseball!

CLARK
And your mom isn’t some statistic! Listen, I know it’s not my place, but if you stopped looking at the numbers for one minute, you might see that. I’m a Cubs fan, Leona is, and from what I gather, you are too. It’s not like us to give up on something. Ever, really.

Beat. HAROLD’S phone rings.

HAROLD
I think my next client is here.

CLARK
I’ll let myself out.

Clark gets up and starts to exit. He turns.

You know, even if you’re down to your last strike, you’ve still got one swing left.

He exits. Blackout.

SCENE FIVE
LEONA’S room at Magnolia Lane nursing home. LEONA is watching the game on her television, watching with great intent. YVONNE enters with a vacuum cleaner. She has ear buds in and is singing along with the music that is playing on her iPod. LEONA makes no acknowledgement of YVONNE’S Arrival. YVONNE goes over to a plug in the wall and plugs in the vacuum. There is still no recognition from LEONA. YVONNE walks in front of LEONA’S line of sight of the television, and there is a brief moment of recognition from LEONA. She now realizes what is going on.

LEONA
Hey. Hey!

Still no response from YVONNE, who now turns on the vacuum. It is very loud.

LEONA
Hey. Hello?
Her voice is drowned out by the vacuum and the ear buds that are in YVONNE’S ears. YVONNE continues to vacuum, oblivious.
LEONA looks out at the audience in defeat. She slowly works her way up out of her chair and makes the slow walk to the television. YVONNE is oblivious, dancing slightly to the music as it plays in her ear buds. LEONA turns the sound up on her old television as loud as it can possibly go, but it is to no avail. The vacuum still drowns out the game she is watching. She starts to walk towards YVONNE, but she is too quick, and LEONA cannot walk fast enough to keep up.
YVONNE moves downstage, towards home base, the vacuum cord now fully extended. LEONA adjusts, and slowly starts meandering her way over to where YVONNE is vacuuming. As she is about to tap YVONNE on the shoulder, YVONNE pulls too far, and the cord comes out.

Whoops.

YVONNE, ignoring LEONA completely, hustles over to the other side of the room and plugs the vacuum back in again. It is very loud. LEONA throws her head back in frustration, looking to the skies as if to say, “Why God, Why?” She looks down and notices her Life Alert necklace. LEONA gets a mischievous grin on her face. YVONNE is now vacuuming underneath LEONA’S chair, and cannot see LEONA. LEONA presses the button. It beeps. Content, she makes her way back over to her chair, and attempts to watch the game.
YVONNE acknowledges LEONA’S presence, and notices the smile on her face. She smiles back and waves slightly.
When YVONNE turns around to continue vacuuming, LEONA shoots daggers into her back with a stare.
Over the din created by the vacuuming, the blasting television and YVONNE’S blaring earphones, an ambulance siren can be heard in the background. YVONNE continues to vacuum. The sound of a door slamming can be heard. Still YVONNE vacuums.

AN EMT walks into the room with a stretcher from the third base side, crossing over to first base. YVONNE jumps at the sight of him, hastily turns off the vacuum, and removes her earphones.

YVONNE

Oh my God, what happened! Did she fall? Is something broken? Is she dead?

LEONA

No, you idjit.

YVONNE

What?

The sound of the game can clearly be heard now over everything, blaring as loud as the old television will allow.

EMT

Ma’am, is there something wrong?

LEONA

Of course there is, why do you think I pressed the button?

YVONNE

Mrs. Banks, I’m so sorry, I totally didn’t notice—

EMT

Ma’am, can you tell me the problem please?

LEONA

She’s standing right there.

YVONNE

(taken aback)

Wha—who me?
LEONA
Yes, you. Can’t you see I was in the middle of something important here?

EMT
So…is there an emergency?

LEONA
Yes, there’s an emergency! I can’t hear my game!

EMT
Ma’am, that’s not a medical emergency.

LEONA
I could go deaf from all that racket she made.

YVONNE
I was just running the vacuum cleaner.

LEONA
And I was just watching the Cubs game.

EMT
Ma’am, the Life Alert buttons are for emergency situations only.

LEONA
Oh, this was a situation all right!

EMT
(talking into his radio)
Yeah, bus we’ve got a false alarm here. I’ll be down in a minute. He exits. Awkward pause.

YVONNE
Really, Miss Carpenter?

LEONA goes back to watching her game. She ignores YVONNE.

BLACKOUT

SCENE SIX
Lights come up on home plate. A catcher and an umpire take their places. The umpire wipes off home plate with a brush while the catcher adjusts his helmet and fiddles around with his glove. The ambient sound of fans at a baseball stadium can be heard in the background.

**PA ANNOUNCER**
Now batting, number 44, Harold Carpenter.

**HAROLD** comes out, in a Cubs uniform and a baseball bat held over his shoulder. He takes a few practice swings before stepping into the batter’s box.

**ANNOUNCER**
Carpenter is a lifetime 280 hitter against righties, and has struggled at times against lefties. He’s generally a slasher, hits a lot of singles and occasionally legs out a double or two. Here he steps in against Nova. And the pitch.

**HAROLD** acts as though he’s watching a baseball come across the stage. He looks at it as though he’s watching a pitch. The umpire yells strike.

Carpenter looks at a first pitch strike. Carpenter had some hitting struggles early on in his career, including a rather epic 2 for 63 slump, where he was on the verge of being demoted back to the minors.

**HAROLD** calls for time and steps out of the batter’s box.

**HAROLD**
I feel that last point needs a little clarification. Yes, it was a rather epic slump, but you really have to put it into context. “Slump” is a tame word compared to what was actually going on. I have an addiction. Well, I would say had, but it never fully goes away. See, I was addicted to alcohol. It started casually, as all addictions do, with sneaking a few beers with some buddies when I was seventeen. I remember the night mom caught us in the basement. I got a lecture and a grounding the likes of which I had never seen. My mother knew about tough love, for sure. I laid off the sauce for a while, but it came back around in college.

He steps back in the batter’s box, and watches another pitch. He swings.

**ANNOUNCER**
Carpenter slices it foul. The count is now quickly 0 and 2.

**HAROLD**
My friends never thought anything of it, because everyone was drinking, so there was no need to think that it was anything out of the ordinary. We’d go to parties, I’d have a few drinks. I never
really let myself go too much, though. It became a crutch, I guess. It was comforting. Nobody was the wiser. Not even my future wife.

He takes another pitch.

ANNOUNCER
That pitch is inside. Count now is 1 and 2.

HAROLD
Carol was...a dream. She had this wonderful dark brown hair that was so long and flowing. It was probably her hair that was most attractive to me. She was an English education major. I asked if she could help me format an English paper as an excuse to go on a study date. I didn’t learn anything about formatting. But I did learn what type of lipstick she liked to wear.

Another pitch comes in. Another ball.

ANNOUNCER
Juuust a bit outside.

HAROLD
I was so excited to introduce her to my mother. The two of them clicked instantly. Carol, unfortunately, had been raised a Cardinals fan. So my mother, naturally, set about changing her mind. I enjoyed their “discussions.” Mom decided that Carol was a “keeper.” But she pulled me aside one day.

ANNOUNCER
And it looks like the Cubs manager is giving Carpenter a signal from the dugout.

LEONA appears on the first base side, looking at HAROLD.

HAROLD
She said:

LEONA
I know you’re obsessed with this girl. But you’ve got an obsession with something else too. You know what I’m talking about. You’ve got to choose, Harold. I just pray you make the right choice. Don’t drink away the love of your life, Harry, whatever you do.

HAROLD
Hitters often say they try all sorts of things to break out of slumps. They change their swing, their batting stance, try a new diet, get more sleep, get less sleep, change their bat, they turn to others for advice. Carol broke me out of my slump.
HAROLD turns back to the batter’s box. He swings at a pitch.

ANNOUNCER

Swing and a miss. strike three.

HAROLD

Unfortunately, I started a new one.

BLACKOUT

SCENE SIX

LEONA is resting in her chair, absent-mindedly watching a Cubs game, when Yvonne enters.

YVONNE

Miss Carpenter, it’s time to go to your chemo treatment.

LEONA does not respond, but remains in a stupor, watching the Cubs game fervently.

YVONNE

Miss Carpenter, they specifically asked for me to take you downstairs, the van is waiting.

LEONA is still too absorbed in the game.

YVONNE begins to walk towards the television, as though she were going to turn it off. LEONA responds abruptly.

LEONA

Ahhhhnaaaa!! Don't you dare, not until the inning is over.

YVONNE

That could be ten seconds or ten minutes Miss Carpenter, and it takes you awhile to get downstairs.

LEONA

They can wait.

YVONNE

No, they really can't, Miss Carpenter.

She walks over to the television and turns it off. LEONA stares at her in utter disbelief and shock.
I’ll wait for you outside the door.

YVONNE walks out the door. LEONA slowly starts to get up. She goes directly towards the television and turns it on again. She turns the sound up a little.

YVONNE

(From without)

Is that the television I hear?

LEONA

I’m sorry dear, I can’t hear you, the game is on right now.

YVONNE opens the door and walks over to the chair. She stands directly in front of LEONA

YVONNE

Miss Carpenter, I really don’t have time to dawdle, and they’re waiting for you down in the lobby.

LEONA

You’re blocking the game.

YVONNE

I am well aware of that

LEONA slowly gets up, scoots her chair ever so slowly to the right, making it screech on the floor. She sits herself down yet again. YVONNE, stunned, walks over to the television, and goes to pull out the plug.

LEONA

You unplug it and it might not start up again.

YVONNE

Yes, that’s kind of the idea, Miss Carpenter.

LEONA

No, I mean she’s fickle, she might not wake up again.

YVONNE

Then you buy a new tv, it’s not that big of a deal.

LEONA
NO!

Oh, I see. Well, I mean, we can't miss that appointment.

LEONA, desperate, grabs her Life Alert button around her neck.

I'll do it!!

Do what?

LEONA

You don't want another episode like yesterday, do you?

You wouldn't dare.

I could easily fall on the floor right now.

She gets up to her feet, slowly, still clutching the button.

See if I care.

LEONA

I'll say you pushed me.

LEONA

You're pushing me to the limit, that's true.

The standoff continues, YVONNE with her hand on the cord, LEONA with her hand hovering around her Life Alert button. CLARK enters the room.

CLARK

Hey, Carcinoma, how's it---

Taking the temperature of the room.

I see I've interrupted something here.

LEONA

Clark, what on earth are you doing here?

CLARK
You said you had a chemo appointment today. I have one too, so I figured I might as well see if I could give you a lift over.

LEONA
That's very thoughtful of you Clark, but I'm waiting until the game is over.

CLARK
I've got it on the radio. They're between innings. If we hurry we can catch the start of the fifth.

LEONA
Oh, fine, but I hate to miss any of the action.

YVONNE
It's just a game.

CLARK and LEONA
It's not just a game.

YVONNE
Clearly I've struck a chord.

CLARK
Well you happen to be holding one.

YVONNE
Drastic times called for drastic measures.

LEONA
She wants to destroy my TV, Clark.

CLARK
I'm sorry, we haven't been formally introduced. I'm Clark.

He sticks out his hand to shake YVONNE’S trying to coax her out of holding the cord. YVONNE takes note.

YVONNE
Nice try.

Points to her name badge.

Yvonne. It’s a pleasure to meet you.

CLARK
Wait, you’re the girl that I passed in the hallway a couple days ago. You were sprawled out on the floor with a big pile of paper towels scattered all over, right?
YVONNE
Yeah, because Leona the Lunatic here barreled into me trying to get to her room.

CLARK
You know, to be fair, I don’t think she can “barrel into” anyone anymore.

YVONNE
Don’t let her deceive you!

LEONA
Well, you two are getting along so well. I’m going to get back to my game.

CLARK
Leona, I think we should get to your appointment.

LEONA
Tell her to put down the cord.

YVONNE
Quit the "I've fallen and I can't get up" routine.

CLARK
Suggestion! How about you drop both items, simultaneously.

LEONA and YVONNE eye each other for a moment, narrowing their gazes, then proceed to drop each item to the floor. They move ever so slowly towards the floor, LEONA stopping and starting several times to attempt to catch up.

CLARK
Good, now that that's over with.

LEONA stands back up, and walks over to the door, and takes a beaten pink cap off the coat rack.

LEONA
Well, Clark, let's go do some drugs.

CLARK
I'll give you a head start down the hallway.

LEONA exits.

LEONA
Listen, Evian--

CLARK

LEONA exits.

LEONA

It's pronounced Ya-VONN.
Right. So, let's say, hypothetically, that you weren't working here right now.

I'd much rather that not be hypothetical.

No, I mean, when you're on your time off or whatever. Would you like to get some dinner sometime?

You're seriously asking me out?

Yes, I think you're a gorgeous individual and—

(taking off his hat)

I might not have much time left.

Oh that is pathetic. I've had enough guys hit on me before, but using cancer to ask me out? C'mon.

So... that's a yes?

Just take Leona to her damn appointment!

CLARK EXITS, lights out.

LEONA is laughing hysterically. She is in a chair, with an IV stand next to her, and several monitors. She and CLARK are at an outpatient facility getting their chemo treatments.

"I might not have much time left!"

It was worth a shot. I mean, I took off my hat to prove--

(Busts out laughing yet again)
You took off the hat! My god, you must’ve looked like some pathetic alien. Young man, do you even know how to talk to women?

CLARK

I know enough.

LEONA

Right, so you used your Cancer as a pick up line.

CLARK

Not exactly--

LEONA

You should invite her to your funeral while you’re at it.

CLARK

That's not funny!

LEONA

Oh, Clark, please, there's no bigger turn off than a guy who's using his disease to take advantage of a poor girl.

CLARK

Don't talk about my funeral.

LEONA

Why, because it's scary? Or because you don't want everyone to see your bald head in the coffin.

CLARK

Why are you so amused by all of this?

LEONA

Because it’s inevitable Clark.

CLARK

No it's not, I can still beat this cancer--

LEONA

No, Clark, I mean the dying part. That's inevitable. You mean to tell me you've never thought about your funeral? Ever?

CLARK

It, crossed my mind from time to time. I've been too busy living to think about it. I change the channel whenever they talk about mortuaries or crematories. That stuff creeps me out.

LEONA
It's important Clark. Geez. I thought being a Cubs fan you'd have thought of a funeral by now.

CLARK

What do you mean by that?

LEONA

Because it's like a funeral every year. It's like everyone is just waiting for the team to die.

CLARK

What, you mean like, be sold or something.

LEONA

No. I mean everyone's just waiting on the team to lose. They're waiting to bury the season. They're just waiting.

CLARK

Yeah, but we resurrect them every year. We resuscitate ourselves. Go on life support, at least.

CLARK

Clark, do you know why I love baseball?

CLARK

Because it gives you an excuse to yell profanities at the television?

LEONA

That, and because I remember going to a game when I was just seven years old. We lived down state, in Moline, Illinois. It's a long way from Chicago. But we made the three hour drive once a summer to go to a Cubs game. My older sister Phyllis and I always had to sit next to each other. She always liked to look at all of the handsome baseball players. I liked watching the manager yell at the umpire. I walked through the gates of Wrigley, which, by the way, looks almost the same as it does today. Back then, they didn't even have Ivy on the outfield walls. There were no lights for the stadium, they could only play day games. The Bears used it in the fall. But there was just something magical walking into that stadium. Smelling the fresh-cut grass, seeing the pitcher toss the rosin bag in his hands a few times, seeing all the drunkards around the stadium. I remember in the third inning a foul ball was hit our way, and I nearly got trampled as a bunch of grown men tried to catch it. I learned a whole new vocabulary, much to my mother's chagrin. Father kept on laughing on the way back home as we drove in our old Studebaker, and Phyllis kept telling me to stop. I got my mouth washed out with soap rather thoroughly that night. I can't remember if the Cubs won or lost that day, but it didn't matter to me. Something was kindled in me that's never fully been extinguished, and no funeral or death is going to squelch that.

CLARK

They didn't even have the ivy yet.

LEONA

Clark, you're missing the point.
CLARK
Wait, you're eighty-four? That means...2012 minus eighty-four...1928...Oh my god! That was 35, the year they went to the series! You saw a World-Series Cubs team?!?

LEONA
Clark, did you listen to anything I just said?

CLARK
Yeah, yeah, about funerals and don't bury the team and something or other---So you got to see Gabby Hartnett? And Stan Hack? And Phil Cavarretta? I am SO jealous right now.

LEONA
Clark!

CLARK
Sorry, sorry, the baseball nerd in me is coming out.

LEONA
My point is, Clark, that I have to face many realities, one of which being that I may have my funeral before we ever win another World Series.

CLARK
Well, hell, that probably goes for me as well.

LEONA
God-forbid. But I take comfort in knowing exactly how I want my funeral to happen. That's certainty. That's something I can count on, even when I can't count on the Cubbies. If I knew when they were going to win, I could plan my life accordingly. But I'm going to die happy either way because of my love of the game.

CLARK
So you've planned your funeral already?

LEONA
Oh yes. They're going to play "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," and the seventh inning stretch is going to take place in the middle of the pastor's eulogy.

CLARK
(chuckles)
I suppose you want vendors in the aisles as well.

LEONA
Depends on what they're selling.
And maybe some infield dirt as well.

LEONA
No, that's where they're going to bury me.

CLARK
I beg your pardon?

LEONA
I want to be cremated, Clark. I want my ashes to become part of the Wrigley Field infield.

CLARK
(under his breath)

That is so cool.

LEONA
What's that?

CLARK
Would they allow that?

LEONA
Probably not. But if I could get someone to do it for me, they'd never have to know.

CLARK
(chuckles again)

Do you have some insider at Wrigley? Some groundskeeper you can convince to spread you around? Or maybe they have a waiting list.

LEONA
You, Clark.

Beat.

CLARK
I'm sorry, what?

LEONA pulls out a Cubs Urn from her bag.

What is that?

LEONA
An urn. You can find these on the World Wide Web nowadays, but I had to go to a special store to find it. Little antique shop on Harlem Avenue.

CLARK
Maybe. But it will be, soon.

Beat.

CLARK

What do you want me to do.

LEONA

Find a way to get me on that field, Clark.

CLARK

I'm not sure--how would I even--

LEONA

However you decide to do it. Just don't tell me how you did it.

CLARK

But you'll be--

LEONA gives him a devilish grin.

This is an awfully tough promise to make.

LEONA

I have faith in you, Clark.

CLARK

But why?

LEONA

Because you're a Cubs fan, Clark. Faith is part of our DNA.

BLACKOUT
ACT TWO
SCENE ONE
Harold's office. Harold is at his desk, while Clark is sitting up on the couch beside.

HAROLD
So you really tried to ask her out by telling her you have cancer?

CLARK
I don't see what's wrong in that.

HAROLD
Makes you sound a little desperate, don't you think?

CLARK
I mean, she would find out eventually.

HAROLD
So you think that you can't win her over on your personality, you have to rely on your disease to define you.

CLARK
It doesn't define me, but it's not like I can escape the fact that there's an elephant in the room.

HAROLD
Clark, I think you're exhibiting a bargaining tactic on the five-scale model. You're telling yourself, "Maybe if I tell her I have cancer, she'll go out with me. She'll sympathize and I won't have to think about my disease." You're putting the cancer before everything else, Clark.

CLARK
What's that supposed to mean? I have to put it before everything else! I'm scheduling my life around chemo treatments and MRIs! I have to work around doctor's appointments and therapy sessions. I can't go anywhere without a hat, I don't have the energy I'm used to having and you're telling me I'm not supposed to put it on the top of my priority list?

HAROLD
You've let it define you, Clark.

CLARK
How so?
How so?

HAROLD

By telling Yvonne, "I have cancer, I might not be here that long." If you want to go out with Yvonne, then ask her out. As you. We identify ourselves in life by many things, Clark. Diseases. Races. Genders. Even sports teams. But you can't let them define you. Do you see the difference?

CLARK

It just makes things easier, Dr. Carpenter. Like, rooting for the Cubs. My ups are their ups, my downs are their downs.

HAROLD

That really seems natural, actually, Clark. If your stressing out about the team increases, then the stress inside your body increases. And conversely, if your stress about your team goes down, then the stress inside you goes down as well.

CLARK

So rooting for sports teams can be damaging my health?

HAROLD

Not necessarily. Cubs fans have a great support system, actually. There's a shared bond and sympathy among other fans that allows you to cope with others. Although rooting for sports teams can lead to other problems, like drinking too much, and straining your heart too much if you get too into the game.

CLARK

Interesting.

Beat

So do I have absolutely no shot at getting a date with Yvonne?

HAROLD

Well, that's out of my hands, really. But I would try to be yourself--not cancer self, but your actual self--and try it again. And, given the circumstances you described earlier, you should probably not be in the same room with her and my mother, of all people.

CLARK

Speaking of which, have you talked to her yet?

HAROLD

I've been busy, Clark.
CLARK
But have you talked to her?

HAROLD
I left a message on her answering machine.

CLARK
She never checks that thing, in fact, I don't think she even knows how to use it.

HAROLD
And how would you know?

CLARK
The light is blinking every time I walk into her room. It's been unanswered for weeks.

HAROLD
Well, then I guess I'll have to try calling her again.

CLARK
Please do, because she asked me to do something for her.

HAROLD
What's that?

CLARK
She wants me to spread her ashes at Wrigley Field.

HAROLD
(laughs)

Ha! She asked you to do that, huh?

CLARK
Yes, I don't see what's so funny.

HAROLD
Well she used to say that when I was a kid, but I never thought she meant it. Always talked about wanting to be a "part of Wrigley." I didn't know she meant an actual physical part of it.

CLARK
She asked me to do it for her. Said she has faith in me because I'm a Cubs fan and we always have faith.

HAROLD
Oh, that's good, that's good. Did she tell you how to do it, exactly?

CLARK
No, only that she wants to be in the infield dirt, preferably.

HAROLD
You could just go to the game, walk on down and dump her out, I suppose.

CLARK
This is your own mother we're talking about!

HAROLD
I'm just being practical.

CLARK
A practical person would call their mother!

HAROLD
I did.

CLARK
No, you left a message. That hardly counts as contact. You're not being persistent enough.

HAROLD
Don't talk to me about persistence!

CLARK
Maybe you should try harder.

HAROLD
You are in no position to judge.

CLARK
You left one message. Big whup.

HAROLD
I've been leaving messages for nine years.

CLARK

What?

HAROLD

Those messages on the tape machine, they're all mine. All twenty-seven of them. I know, because I keep a log of the dates and times when I call. I don't know if she listens to them or not. One every four months for the last nine years. She's never returned them, never answered. But I keep calling. I talk to her like she's there, even though she's not. I talk about the Cubs. About the weather. About practical things. But I always end with, "I miss you and I love you." I've said too much.

CLARK

Dr. Carpenter, I didn’t mean to interfere with your personal life.

HAROLD

My personal life is my own business, not yours.

CLARK

Every year I have to face the inevitable, that at some point during the season, the Cubs are going to be mathematically eliminated from contention. When it becomes apparent, I usually circle the date on my calendar so I can call off work and wallow in my sorrows. But as long as this planet is here, I know there’s going to be another season. I'm facing the inevitable here, and I don't know if I'm going to make it to my circled date this year. Neither does Leona. None of us really do. But I know there's going to be a next year. Now, I might make it five months, I might make it five years with my diagnosis, but for Leona, there's not going to be a next year.

HAROLD

Get out of my office.

CLARK

Dr. Carpenter—

HAROLD

Now, please.

BLACKOUT
SCENE TWO

HAROLD stands out in left field, once again wearing a CUBS uniform. It is the 2003 National League Championship Series. Everything is tense.

ANNOUNCER
And the Marlins are beginning to run out of outs against Mark Prior. Their down to their final five.

HAROLD
I haven’t talked to my mother in nine years. That slump? It came back. It took a few years, and two kids later, for better or for worse. We were a happy family living in suburbia. I had a wife, a son who was going to be my little slugger on the diamond, and a daughter that would be my little angel. But it wasn’t enough. I didn’t feel adequate enough. I didn’t feel good enough, and I let my alcoholism fill that void. Carol found out my dirty little secret, but she stuck with me. “For better or for worse” she’d always say. I started missing things, like soccer games and recitals and concerts. And then I was just too ashamed to show up to anything. Finally, Carol gave me an ultimatum: you have to choose which is more important: alcohol or your family.

ANNOUNCER
Strike one to Luis Castillo.

HAROLD
The last time the Cubs made it to the National League Championship Series was in 2003. I had been over at Mom’s house watching the game, on that damn TV, with a whole bunch of our friends and family. It was game seven. We had watched the Bartman game the night before.

ANNOUNCER
Fly ball to left toward the line. Alou over. And leaping up, Alou cannot make the play.

HAROLD moves over to the Left Field side, he runs over like he’s about to catch a fly ball.

ANNOUNCER
And Moises is unhappy with the fans
But Moises went into the seats, he coulda had that ball, a fan interfered with him.

HAROLD
I felt like Moises Alou in that moment. I was just so angry. How could a fan interfere like that? I got into a big argument with my wife on the way home from the game.

HAROLD throws his hands up in the air. He acts like Alou did in the 2003 NLCS game 6.

HAROLD
I’d say it was because of the game, but it was more likely the alcohol. Carol and I got into a fight when we got home. Stuff was thrown at each other. We said some things. Things we could never really take back. My kids were there. They were in middle and high school at the time. They were
crying. My son Ernie claimed that his tears were because of the Cubs game, but I knew better. Our marriage was falling apart.

ANNOUNCER
But that's all for naught now. The tying run is at the plate. That could be huge.

HAROLD
Game 7 rolled around.

ANNOUNCER
And we welcome fans to Game 7 of the 2003 National League Championship Series between the Chicago Cubs and the Florida Marlins.

HAROLD
We had a lead in that game. Everyone seems to forget that part. But, it just wasn't meant to be.

ANNOUNCER
And the Florida Marlins have come back from being down 3 games to 1 to take the National League Championship and head to the World Series.

HAROLD
And I lost it. A combination of the Cubs losing, the fight with my wife, it bubbled over to my mother's house. For future reference, your own mother's house is probably the worst place to have a quarrel with your spouse. But I had too much to drink, and it got violent. My mother screamed--not yelled, screamed--at me to get out of the house. She sided with Carol and the kids. I couldn't take it. I needed to get away. So I hit the bars. I stayed out late commiserating.

Carol was packing the car with the kids in when I came home that morning. She told me it was too dangerous to keep the kids here, and that she was going to move in with her sister in Arizona. She threatened legal action if I went after her. She shoved the divorce papers into my hand, and said she'd been talking to a lawyer for months. She just took the kids and left?

ANNOUNCER
And what a heartbreak for the Chicago Cubs. Another ending of misery to this franchise that has certainly seen its share.

HAROLD
I'd have left me at that point. I was a chronic alcoholic. It was just easier to let it all go. I gave up on everything for a long while. I gave up on my wife and kids. I gave up on my mother. I even gave up on the Cubs.

Seems sacrilegious, I know. None of it worked, of course. The pain was still there, the guilt was still there. I showed up at my mother's house and tried to apologize. She was stone-faced as she looked at me. No shred of sympathy at all. Everything was still too fresh. I told her Carol had taken the kids. That seemed to hurt her even more. She asked where they were living, and for an address. I gave it to her. She thanked me and asked me to come back when I was a changed man.
So I finally quit on alcohol. I became the patient, for once, and got cleaned up. I wrote to my kids, as much as possible. I sent them emails, cards on their birthdays, with gift cards and presents. Carol, at one point, finally sent a Christmas card. That was a nice gesture, but it wasn't my children. Mom told me I had to choose. I made the wrong choice.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP. LEONA is resting in her chair while the Cubs game plays on the television. She is snoring lightly, with her head tilted all the way back in a very comical fashion. There is an open bag of Cheetos sitting next to her, and her fingertips on her right hand are covered in Cheetos cheese. YVONNE enters the room and notices that her nemesis is asleep. She waves her hand in front of YVONNE a few times to confirm that she is asleep. She then panics and checks LEONA'S pulse to make sure she's alive. She breathes a sigh of relief and begins to dust and clean the room up. As she does so she absent-mindedly watches a few seconds of the Cubs game before there's a knock at the door. Her eyes go wide, staring at LEONA, who remains asleep. The knocks happen again, YVONNE rushes over to the door as quietly as possible. She opens the door as quietly as she possibly can, CLARK is about to knock again as the door is opened. She grabs his hand.

YVONNE
(Whispering)

What are you doing here?

CLARK
I came to see Leona, it's a divisional game today.

YVONNE shushes him.

YVONNE

Can't you see that she's asleep?
CLARK

I'll wake her up, it's cool.

YVONNE

You do NOT want to wake that woman up, believe me. Now, I have a golden opportunity here to clean her room in peace, and possibly vacuum depending on how far gone she is. I'm not about to let you spoil this once-in-a-lifetime occurrence to watch a basketball game.

Baseball, actually

YVONNE

Whatever.

As they talk, LEONA wakes up, but realizes that CLARK and YVONNE are chatting at the door, and pretends to be asleep again.

CLARK

Well, I'd feel terrible not letting her know I came by.

YVONNE

You can sign the guestbook downstairs.

CLARK

Or I could just go wake her up.

YVONNE

Do it and I'll give you testicular cancer.

CLARK

Fine. I won't wake her up. But you have to go on a date with me.

YVONNE

Are you blackmailing me?

CLARK

LEONA!
LEONA, who has been taking in their exchange, opens her eyes for a second and looks their direction, until YVONNE starts to turn her head, and then immediately plays dead.

YVONNE

Are you crazy!

CLARK

Just a Cubs fan.

YVONNE

Or sadistic. C'mon, you know how she gets. She pressed her life alert button on me once.

CLARK

Really? That's funny.

YVONNE

It was not funny!

CLARK

Was it like "I've fallen and I can't get up"

YVONNE

No, it's because I was vacuuming and she couldn't hear the game.

CLARK

Oh that's good, I'll have to remember that when I get in a nursing home someday.

LEONA starts to stir, letting out a long, pronounced yawn before feigning sleep again.

Oooh, she's close to waking up, better take my deal.

YVONNE

No, I'm not getting blackmailed by some immature, bald-headed---

CLARK

We don't even have to go to a sports bar, it can be someplace fancy. Or artsy, you like that sorta thing, right? One date can't hurt you.
LEONA snores again, very loudly. YVONNE turns around and her eyes are closed. She turns back to CLARK. LEONA opens her eyes and looks directly at CLARK, giving him a big wink. CLARK'S mouth drops.

YVONNE

Alright fine! One date! That's it!

CLARK

That's all I'm asking.

YVONNE

The things I do to avoid the wrath of that little old woman.

CLARK

I could bring her along. Find her a double-date. We'd probably have to eat at 4 PM though.

YVONNE

God no!

CLARK

At a Steak and Shake.

YVONNE

You cruel, cruel man.

CLARK

Fine, fine, I won't bring her.

YVONNE

Get out of here.

CLARK

Tomorrow, at seven?

YVONNE

I get off at 5 tomorrow. Sure, that's good.
LEONA gives CLARK a thumbs up and another little wink. CLARK winks back.

YVONNE

What are you--

She looks back at LEONA, who has exaggerated her sleeping posture considerably.

CLARK

Tomorrow. Good. Right. See you then.

CLARK smiles at LEONA one more time, who has a big smile across her face. YVONNE turns around to see LEONA with her eyes closed and a large smile on her face, makes a note of it, then continues to clean.

SCENE THREE

CLARK and YVONNE sit center stage on barstools at a bar that has been wheeled on. CLARK is looking up towards an imaginary television. The ambient sound of a restaurant can be heard.

YVONNE

You told me we weren't going to a sports bar.

CLARK

It's not! Technically. It's the sports bar at an Applebee’s.

YVONNE

Still don't quite see the difference.

CLARK

All right, fine, so I like to watch sports when I'm at a restaurant. Usually I don't have anyone to talk to.

YVONNE

What about tonight?
Tonight is the exception.

But you're still going to stare at televisions all night?

No! No, just...occasionally to check what inning we're in.

You're obsessed.

Only slightly.

Could you even go a day without sports?

Probably not. But there's got to be something that you can't live without.

Well sure, a shower. Food.

Oh ha ha. No, I mean, you've got to have some interest in something

I'm a photography major, actually.

Really? That's fascinating. I have no skill with a camera whatsoever.

It's not as hard as you might think.

So what are you doing working at a nursing home?
Paying my way through college. You know, that whole “starving artist” routine. It’s not much. Plus, I like working with the elderly. Well, used to. I still do, kinda.

CLARK

I can see where Leona can be frustrating.

BEAT. Clark glances at the television.

Damnit, Cubs are losing again.

YVONNE

I don’t see how anyone can get any fulfillment out of something like baseball.

(Rapidly)

You don’t control what happens. the players are all paid millions of dollars, they switch from team to team all the time, the league is all about salary caps and luxury taxes, teams in smaller markets have no chance at competing with the major media markets, especially when it comes to baseball, it seems very unsatisfying.

CLARK is dumbfounded.

CLARK

That’s uh… a lot of knowledge there.

YVONNE

I watch ESPN. You can't escape it. I thought about being a sports photographer once. It's very exciting, I have to admit.

CLARK

Yeah, but still. That's a pretty astute observation. Are you sure you’re not a sports fan?

YVONNE

I have two brothers.

CLARK

I see.

YVONNE

Some of my dislike of sports in general is a reaction to being hit over the head with it when I was a kid. Literally. With a whiffle bat. Or a basketball. Or a baseball in the eye. That was a fun one. I had to learn to fend for myself. So I turned to photography. A 500 dollar camera is very expensive to replace, so it became a security blanket of sorts. I thought about being a sports photographer once.
CLARK
Hey, sports are better than the best reality television. You can't script it. You have no idea what's going to happen. It all unfolds in real time.

YVONNE
Well so does a book. Or a movie.

CLARK
Yes, but you know how that's going to end. The outcome has already been decided. The author already knows how they want the story to end. You can't script the end to a baseball game.

YVONNE
Interesting. So you live for the uncertainty?

CLARK
In an uncertain world, yes.

YVONNE
Huh.

CLARK
Photography is the same way, you know.

YVONNE
Psh, yeah right.

CLARK
You don't know how a shot is going to turn out, do you?

YVONNE
Well, if you've set up your shot a certain way, you'd expect it to resemble something that you intended in the end, but I guess there's a certain amount of ambiguity involved.

CLARK
What about photo-bombers, hmm?

YVONNE
Well, yes, then I guess I could concede that there's a certain amount of uncertainty.
Kinda like cancer.

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bring it up, it's just, on my mind. I was hoping tonight I could sorta forget about it for a while.

YVONNE
Clark, it's fine. I just thought it was a lame pick-up line.

CLARK
Isn't it kinda weird to go on a date with someone who's terminally ill? I mean, the prospects for a second date aren't...great

YVONNE
Astute observation, Watson.

CLARK
No seriously.

YVONNE
I suppose you could just go out and have a whole bunch of one-night stands, get the most bang for your buck.

CLARK
Terminal dating. Yeah, *that* has a nice ring to it. Maybe call it Death-Match.com or something.

YVONNE
You should get on that. You could make millions.

CLARK
Have you thought about your funeral?

YVONNE
I was just curious.

CLARK
Are you wired up right now? Are you in cahoots with Leona? HELLO! LEONA, NO, I HAVEN'T PLANNED MY FUNERAL YET.
I have.

What? Why?

Just the basics. Like the music they'd play, what scriptures I want read, all that sort of stuff.

Are you pretty religious?

No, but I like certain hymns. And sayings. And quotes. And bible verses. I have them written down somewhere, for safekeeping.

Leona wants her funeral to be like a baseball game. 7th inning stretch and everything.

Go figure. That woman *should* be buried in Left Field.

Actually, she wants it to be the infield.

Really?

And not just any field, Wrigley Field.

Get out! Really?

Yeah. And she says she trusts me completely because I'm a Cubs fan, and we always have faith.

That's a pretty big request. Why you, just curious?
CLARK
Desperate 84 year old woman. I guess?

YVONNE
No seriously.

CLARK
I think she sees a spark in me or something. Maybe because we're going through these treatments together or something. I just don't want to let her down.

YVONNE
You won't let her down. She's been let down for the past 100 years.

CLARK
104, actually. See, that's the point though. I feel like I'd just be exacerbating the situation further.

YVONNE
That's exactly why you've gotta do it, then.

CLARK
Why?

YVONNE
Because she has faith in you.

CLARK
You know that losing has a stronger psychological impact on us than winning?

YVONNE
That would make sense, I guess.

CLARK
Even at our highest highs, the emotions we feel aren't as strong as when we lose something. Some days I envy fans of winning teams. Like the Yankees. Or the Patriots. Or the Brazilian Soccer team.

YVONNE
You lost me on that last one.

CLARK
At any rate. I admit. I wonder what it would be like to win a World Series. But if we did, then what? I'd only want more. It would be like an itch that would have to be scratched again and again. I feel a stronger connection to this team just by virtue of rooting for the loser.

YVONNE
Well isn't that convenient.

CLARK
It is.

YVONNE
We're never satisfied in life, Clark. If we were, at some point we would just stop, shrivel up and die. I've known so many people who, not long after retiring, just dropped dead. They lacked a purpose in life anymore. There was nothing to aspire to.

CLARK
So we're always just looking for that next thing.

YVONNE
Exactly. And you're going to lose more times than you win. That's just statistics. So there's no rational reason to root for anything.

CLARK
Hey now, careful. I think you're dising me here.

YVONNE
I said there's no rational reason. But we're not rational people, Clark. Rational things don't always happen. People die in car crashes. Earthquakes happen. Wars break out.

CLARK
People get cancer.

YVONNE
Exactly Any rational person would tell you that sports are useless; futile. But then the irrational happens.

CLARK
You're an inspiration, Yvonne.

YVONNE
Why thank you sir. So how about that funeral?

CLARK
I'll get on it. Though I don't plan on dying anytime soon.

YVONNE
No one plans on dying, Clark. It just happens.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE FOUR
LIGHTS UP on CLARK and LEONA, doing their afternoon ritual. Watching a Cubs game on the beat-up tv set. There is silence in the room, except for the television. Beat.

CLARK
You're a pretty sly one, by the way.

LEONA
What?

CLARK
I said you're pretty coy, with that routine you pulled on Yvonne a couple days ago.

LEONA
You needed some help.

CLARK
I could have gotten her to go out with me otherwise.

LEONA
You used an eighty-four year old woman as collateral, Clark. I think that's grounds for "desperate" status. How'd it go, by the way?

CLARK
We had a good time. We came to an understanding.

LEONA
Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.
CLARK

No, not like that or anything. I meant about our interests. Her apparent lack of knowledge is just a lie, it turns out. Something she attributes to having two brothers. I never asked, by the way. Do you have any siblings?

LEONA

Five. One brother died in infancy. The other four were two brothers and two sisters. My older sister, Phyllis, was my role model. She was much older than me, and really a steadying influence. She was such a strong girl growing up in such a tough time. I hardly ever got to see her with her guard down. We had our squabbles, for sure. She was always taking care of me. Taking care of all of her siblings. She was like a second mother to us, really. But for some reason, her face would light up when we went to games. Probably because of all the attractive young men playing the game, or the looks they'd give her from time to time, with her dark brown hair and gorgeous smile. She died young. It was one of the saddest days of my life. I think of her from time to time watching games. She'd get excited about the game in a way that was totally unlike her quiet demeanor.

Beat.
The rest of my siblings lived pretty long. But they're all gone now. Save for my sister. She's still kicking down in Tucson.

CLARK

Isn't that where Harold's wife took her kids?

LEONA

How do you know about Harold?

CLARK

He's my therapist, Leona.

LEONA

He's the one that needs the help.

CLARK

He talks about you.

LEONA

Really, and what does he say?

CLARK
How he wishes he could come see you. Do you ever check your answering machine, Leona?

LEONA
From time to time.

CLARK
There are 27 messages on your answering machine. Now either you've had a lot of people call you in the last few days, or I'd say you've been collecting them.

LEONA
I just haven't cleared out the inbox yet.

CLARK
Leona, I know who those messages are from. And you know. Now, I'm grappling with my own mortality these days, but I've still got some family around to talk to. Your grandkids are in Arizona. Most of your siblings have passed. Buy you've got a son that loves you less than 30 minutes away.

LEONA
Clark, in nine years, he's never come to see me. What am I supposed to do? I'm in a nursing home. It's not like I can drive right over there, stroll right up and say hi.

CLARK
You never returned his calls.

LEONA
He never showed up!

CLARK
So we're between a rock and a hard place?

LEONA
Forgiveness starts with a willingness to be forgiven.

CLARK walks over to the answering machine and presses play. HAROLD'S voice can be heard on the machine.

HAROLD'S VOICE
Hey mom. It's me. I'm really sorry about last night. For...everything. I was just so upset. It's such a bummer for the Cubbies. Well, I guess there’s always next year. I miss you and I love you.

Beeping noise can be heard.

Hey mom. Merry Christmas. I sent you a Cubs throw pillow in the mail. It was supposed to be for Gracie, but she's in Tucson now with her mom. I hope you got it. I miss you and I love you.

Beeping noise

Hey mom. Spring training starts today. Just thought I'd remind you. They're saying our pitching staff looks good this year. I went to an AA meeting today. First one of many, I hope. I miss you and I love you.

Beeping noise.

Hey mom. Well, so much for a June Swoon, huh? Six in a row! That's gotta be a new record. I went to a game a couple of weeks ago. Didn't have anything to drink. Felt weird to be at a Cubs game and not be drinking Old Style. I miss you and I love you.

Beeping noise.

Hey mom.

CLARK presses the next button.

Hey mom

He presses it again.

Hey mom.

He presses it again.

LEONA

STOP it!

CLARK stops the tape machine. Beat.

LEONA

I was just as hurt as he was when Carol took the kids to Arizona. I knew it was bad, but it broke Harold to his core. I was worried he would drink himself to death. But I kept my distance because I prayed that he would break out of it somehow. At that point, I thought that it was good for me to keep my distance. His kids were letting him back into their lives, and I didn't want to intrude. I tried to let it go, but I never could. I called him once. But got an answering machine. It was to tell him about the cancer. I thought for sure that he would visit me then. But I think that broke him. Like he was somehow responsible.

CLARK

But he wasn't

LEONA

No, of course not.
CLARK
Leona, why don't I call Dr. Carpenter and have him come and watch the game with us.

LEONA
Who?

CLARK
Dr.--Your son, Leona.

LEONA
I'd like that.

CLARK goes over and grabs the phone. He starts to dial, and the sound of a ringing phone can be heard on the other end. HAROLD, who is sitting at his desk on the opposite end of the stage, picks up the phone. LEONA, sitting in her chair, blissfully closes her eyes. For the last time. HAROLD prepares himself to answer.

CLARK
He's not answering.

Silence from Leona.

CLARK
Leona, is this his work number? Leona? LEONA!

HAROLD
Mom?

CLARK hangs up the phone.

CLARK
Leona? Leona! Nurse! Nurse! Yvonne?

He presses her Life Alert Button. Leona has died with a smile on her face. There is chaos, as people rush into the room and start to work on her. They work in silence, as Harold speaks from the other end.
HAROLD
Mom? I don't know what's going on over there. Maybe some excitement from the game. I don't know, I'm not watching it, I'm getting updates from my Blackberry. It's interrupted a couple of sessions today. Mom, I wanted to let you know. I will never be a changed man, or a new man, or anything like that. But I am a remorseful man. I'm a man with a stain on his heart, knowing that he left his mother in her time of need. So mom, I'm asking for forgiveness. For everything. For my cowardice. For my behavior. Can you forgive me?

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE
LEONA is standing at the pitcher's mound, appearing much younger, and standing up straight. She’s wearing a Cubs uniform circa 1946 and an old ball cap. She mimes throwing a pitch in towards home plate. The announcer’s voice cackles in over the radio.

ANNOUNCER
And there’s a line drive down the right-field line. A run will score, and it’s now 3 to 2 Cubs. If Carpenter gives up one more run, this could cost them the game. And now it looks like the Cubs skipper is going out to the mound to give Carpenter a chat.

MANAGER
You played a great game, kid, but I’ve got to take you out.

LEONA
Aw c’mon Skip, I’ve pitched eight and two-thirds, I know I can get this last out.

MANAGER
Nope, I’ve gotta pull you.

LEONA
But I feel new, fresh, rejuvenated. Younger, even.

MANAGER
Well, that tends to happen at this stage of the game.
LEONA
Shouldn’t I feel tired, or stressed, or in pain?

MANAGER
Not once I pull you out of the game.

LEONA
I’ve still got some left in me, yeah?

MANAGER
It’s time to pass the torch, little sis.

LEONA
What are you—

The MANAGER takes off her hat. She lets her long brown locks fall down over her shoulders. She flashes a smile at her sister.

Phyllis?

MANAGER
Took you long enough, little sis.

LEONA
But Phyllis, if you’re here than that means I’m—

PHYLLIS nods. LEONA starts to laugh.

So the whole “take me out of the game” thing that was just—you knew the whole time!

PHYLLIS
Sis, I figured you’d catch on when you realized you were wearing that outfit. And pitching for the Cubs.

LEONA
I always said I’d do it

LEONA and PHYLLIS
In your dreams.

They embrace.

So what happens now?
Well, we pass the torch.

But Harold, I never got to—

Say goodbye.

His time will come too, sis. And when it comes, you can be the one to tell him.

They’d let me do that?

Sure thing. Now c’mon, there’s still a game to be played.

They walk offstage, hand in hand.

SCENE SIX
HAROLD, YVONNE and CLARK sit in a waiting room. CLARK has his hands cuffed behind his back, as does HAROLD. YVONNE is shaking her head.

What were you boys thinking?

We just figured we could slip on the field really quickly between innings.

This was all his idea.

It was not! You were the one that suggested we pose as grounds crew members.
HAROLD
I said that jokingly! I didn’t think we’d actually go through with it.

CLARK
Well, it doesn’t matter now. We didn’t even get all of her ashes onto the field.

HAROLD
Well maybe if you hadn’t flubbed opening it so badly.

CLARK
They had it hermetically sealed; I didn’t know I had to rip the bag open.

HAROLD
My mother was in a bag!!

CLARK
To keep moisture from getting in.

HAROLD
But you didn’t check it beforehand?

CLARK
Well do you really want to see someone’s ashes?

OFFICER JONES walks in.

OFFICER JONES
You’ve got a lot of nerve, gentlemen.

HAROLD
Sir, I am terribly sorry. This man is mentally unstable, he has a mental condition, I really apologize for his behavior.

OFFICER JONES
Shut it. You impersonated a grounds crew worker, trespassed onto Wrigley Field, and then tried to pour a mysterious substance onto the infield dirt. Now, personally, I’d classify that as mentally unstable behavior, but it’s also highly illegal. You’re facing some pretty steep fines here, gentlemen. Do you have anything to say for yourselves?
CLARK
It was a dying woman’s last wish.

OFFICER JONES
I beg your pardon?

CLARK
The substance, the jar, the impersonation. Listen, I met this amazing woman a couple of months ago. Opening Day, actually. We were at a cancer treatment facility together. You see, I was diagnosed with Testicular cancer a couple of months ago. This woman, Leona was her name, she was a lifelong Cubs fan. Worshipped the team. She’d do anything to watch the games. In fact, she called the squad on my girlfriend here because she was trying to vacuum during a Cubs game.

OFFICER JONES
And who may you be?

YVONNE
Yvonne. Yvonne Smith. I worked at the facility. I had my ear buds in and wasn’t paying attention. So she pressed her Life Alert button on me, actually.

OFFICER JONES
Oh that’s funny.

CLARK
I know, right?

OFFICER JONES glares at CLARK.
Ok, ok. Look, she knew her cancer was terminal, and she told me all about her funeral. How she wanted to sing Take Me Out to the Ball Game and have vendors in the aisles.

HAROLD
We did, too. They sold cotton candy and Cracker Jack and everything. That was an interesting call to the vendors. “Hi, do you do funerals?”

OFFICER JONES is not amused.

CLARK
Her last wish was to be buried at Wrigley Field. On the infield dirt, so she could always be a part of the action. So, we decided to try and honor that wish.
OFFICER JONES
You didn’t try contacting the Cubs? Or Wrigley Field?

CLARK
We figured they’d probably have a pretty strong “no scattering” policy.

OFFICER JONES
Well it certainly is a unique circumstance. So there’s nothing dangerous about that substance you spread on the field?

CLARK
Absolutely not, sir. In fact, seeing as she was such a passionate Cubs fan, I’d say it can only help. Although, we didn’t get all of it on there. They cuffed us before we could finish.

OFFICER JONES
Fellas, I’m not normally a very forgiving man. I see thousands of kooks and loonies here at this stadium, and every so often a few that try to do things on the field. Like the two idiots who tried to burn a flag on the field.

CLARK
You mean Rick Monday back in ’76? God Bless America!

OFFICER JONES
Yes. But shut up. Now, legally, we’re still going to have to press charges. What you did is pretty ridiculous and dangerous.

Beat.
But I lost my mother to breast cancer last year, and she was the biggest Cubs fan I know. So tell you what, you give us that Urn there, and I’ll talk to the grounds crew about maybe getting the rest of the ashes into a flower garden near the stadium. Or perhaps the Ivy. Or something like that. There’s already a couple of news crews here to get this story, and I think they’ll be pleasantly surprised to hear it. Now if you gentleman EVER try to pull this shit again, I’ll have you banned from Wrigley field for life, is that understood?

HAROLD and CLARK
Yes sir.

OFFICER JONES
Good. And ma’am, this is one crazy boyfriend you’ve got here.

YVONNE
Tell me about it.

OFFICER JONES

But if someone was willing to impersonate a groundskeeper to spread my ashes at Wrigley, well shoot, I’d say they’re pretty passionate.

YVONNE

I guess so.

YVONNE gives CLARK a kiss.

OFFICER JONES

Gentleman, let’s start the paperwork.

BLACKOUT

SCENE SEVEN

HAROLD sits in his office. He is typing something on his computer when the phone rings.

He picks up the phone.

HAROLD

Hello? Yeah I saw it. I watched it about seven times. I found the clip online too.

Well, they were going to put us in jail, so I guess it could be much worse. We’ll be paying that thing off for a while, I know.

Yeah, playoffs start next week, I’m excited. Next year is here!

Alright, take care Clark.

HAROLD hangs up the phone. He notices that there is still one message left on his tape machine. It’s the one LEONA sent him when she found out she had cancer. He presses the button. LEONA’S voice can be heard.

LEONA

Hello Harry. Do people still call you that? Or is it just Dr. Carpenter now? I’m calling to tell you I have cancer, Harold. Adenocarcinoma. It’s a cancer of the lungs. Apparently all that smoking I did has caught up to me all these years later. Your father and I quit for your sake. And your sister’s. I know these last few years have been…rough, for you. I want you to know that I love you. I always have and I always will. You’re my little boy, my little Cubs fan. The one who cried for four days straight when they lost it in ’69. Who bought me my new TV to watch the series back in 84. And then, that night in 2003. Harold, I’ve never cried so hard in my life. I cried for you, for the kids, for the Cubs. For everything. I was angry and upset, Harold. But I will always love you no matter what. And though you may be too ashamed, I will welcome you with open
arms should you choose to come see me. And I know you will, someday. And I’ll be there to greet you, like a manager coming out to the mound. I’ll love you always, Harry.

Beep. End of Play.
Works Cited


