

TRUE FAN

By John Whittington

The following is inspired by true events...

But if you're a Cubs fan, you don't need me to tell you that...

FADE IN ON:

CHICAGO'S WRIGLEY FIELD

We're flying high over "The Friendly Confines." Past the many landmarks of one of baseball's most treasured ballparks.

--The iconic IVY-COVERED OUTFIELD WALLS.

--The CENTER FIELD BLEACHERS and HAND OPERATED SCOREBOARD.

--The ADDISON STREET L TRAIN rumbling in the distance.

--Two WORLD SERIES FLAGS flying proudly -- 1907 and 1908.

--And the RED NEON STADIUM MARQUEE. Lit up and reading:

**WRIGLEY FIELD
HOME OF
CHICAGO CUBS**

And underneath it, a DIGITAL CRAWL for tonight's game...

**CUBS VS MARLINS
GAME 6 NLCS**

OCTOBER 12, 2003 7:15PM

Game time is approaching, as the OUTFIELD LIGHTS burst to life, and we...

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL FIELD - SUNSET

No outfield lights to be found out here.

Just the last rays of sunlight falling on a team of LITTLE LEAGUERS (The Renegades) shagging fly balls off the bat of...

STEVE BARTMAN.

A wiry 26-year-old frame and a bespectacled face you can't imagine getting angry. If you rear-ended Steve in traffic, he'd turn around and apologize to you.

STEVE

Alright, lemme see ten pop flies
without one hitting the grass and
we're outta here.

Steve peppers the field with fly balls to every position, sending his Little Leaguers scampering after each one, until--

RON (O.S.)

Stevie!

Steve turns to the quaint TWO-STORY HOUSE directly adjacent to the old ball field, where his father, RON BARTMAN, late 60s, labors onto the front porch.

RON

Hour forty-five 'til first pitch, son. Better get a move on!

STEVE

On my way, Dad!
(back to the Little Leaguers)
Let's go, five more. Come on.

OUTFIELD GRASS

Steve walks off the field, carrying a bag of bats and a bucket of balls, alongside his young TEAM.

SKINNY KID

Hey, Coach B -- You think you're gonna be on TV tonight?

STEVE

I mean, they're pretty good seats. Right on the left field foul line. You never know.

TALLEST KID ON THE TEAM

Yo, Coach B, when the Cubs make it to the World Series, you're gonna take us all with you, right?

STEVE

If the Cubs make it to the World Series, and if you didn't just jinx it for us -- Then we'll talk.

TALLEST KID ON THE TEAM

Man, we're going. Quit lying, we're going.

Steve turns to the rest of the team.

STEVE

First Renegade to get Stackhouse to
shush up and stop jinxing the Cubs
is coming with me to the World
Series -- If we make it tonight.

The kids let out a RALLY CRY and DOG PILE onto their mouthy
teammate -- Rolling on the grass, laughing their asses off.

Steve joins in and "referees" the wrestling match, as the sun
slowly sets over Lincolnshire, Illinois.

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A shrine to the Chicago Cubs and the game of baseball.

Cubs PENNANTS from every era line the walls. Old TICKET STUBS
framed behind glass. AUTOGRAPHED BASEBALLS and JERSEYS from
countless Chicago greats -- *Santo, Banks, Sandberg, Sosa...*

And FRAMED PHOTOS all over chronicling Steve's life as a
baseball fanatic:

A young boy sitting with Ron behind home plate at Wrigley...

Smiling at Cubs spring training in Arizona with his MOTHER...

Swinging away at age 12 in his old Renegades uniform...

RON (O.S.)

Stevie! Your friends are here!

STEVE

Be right down!

Steve opens a desk drawer and pulls out an old WALKMAN.

He places the headphones over his ears. Puts FRESH BATTERIES
inside. Flips on the AM radio and tunes it to...

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)

*...And if you're lucky enough to be
headed to the ballpark tonight,
you're looking at a chance to
witness baseball history. One more
win gives the Cubs a chance to take
home their first World Series title
since 1908 -- Sure, it's only been
95 years, but it's felt a heck of a
lot longer to me...*

Steve flips off the Walkman and heads downstairs. Ready to go.

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Ron Bartman's face -- Trying to hold back a smile as he recites a story he's told a thousand times...

RON

And Steve's mother, rest her soul, she's seven months pregnant at the time. And for a split-second, all I can hear is my wife SCREAM. Now I don't know how long you two have been together -- But if it's any longer than ten seconds, you know that's a sound you never want to hear. So I do the only thing I can: I pull Kathy close to me with one arm, and I reach up towards the clear blue sky with the other -- And when I finally open my eyes...

(beat)

I've got this waiting for me in my hand.

PULL BACK to reveal resting in Ron's hand: A BASEBALL.

Decades old, dingy beige, and scuffed to shit.

But the way Ron holds it, you can tell this is the man's most prized possession.

RON

Go 'head, hold it.

Ron hands the ball over to MARK AINSLEY and LORI YATES.

Both mid 20s, newly dating, and trying to feign a level of interest in this ugly foul ball that matches Ron's.

MARK

That's a heck of a story, Mr. Bartman. You tell it even better than Steve does.

LORI

Wow. You must really love baseball. I feel so bad, I feel like you should be taking my ticket tonight.

Ron LIMPS over to his favorite recliner. Clearly struggling to get around, but too proud to ask for help.

RON

No, no -- I've been to more than any man's fair share of Cubs games...

Steve comes bounding down the stairs and hurries to help lower his father into his chair.

STEVE
Dad, wait-- Here...

RON
I got it, I got it.

Ron finally eases himself into the recliner, smiling through the pain.

RON
But I'll tell you one thing: If the Cubbies win tonight -- You'll see me at Wrigley for every goddamn inning of that World Series.

Steve gets his father a blanket and the remote, as Mark grabs Steve from behind -- Lifting him up in an excited BEAR HUG.

MARK
Stevie! Ready to make history tonight? Lookin' sharp, by the way.

Mark sets Steve down, giving everyone a good look at his gameday attire:

Old Renegades sweatshirt, green turtleneck, Cubs hat, Walkman.

STEVE
(no clue he's being teased)
Thanks, man. You too.

LORI
Wait. What's the Walkman for?

MARK
So he can listen to the game.

LORI
You mean you're gonna listen to the game on the radio... while you're at the game?

Ron MUTES the TV, reaches for an OLD STEREO SYSTEM -- And turns on the CUBS AM RADIO STATION.

RON
That's how you know he's a real fan...

Mark and Lori wave goodbye and hand Ron's beloved foul ball to Steve.

RON
Be safe tonight, pal. I love you.

STEVE
Love you too. Oh, and Dad...

Steve tosses the baseball to his father -- Who catches it with one hand like an old pro.

STEVE
Look for me on TV.

Ron Bartman gives his son a proud smile as Steve hustles out the door.

INT. MARK'S CAR - NIGHT

Mark drives through the streets of Chicago, approaching an upcoming L TRAIN STATION.

Lori sits shotgun, listening to Steve hold court in the back.

STEVE
...So now it's 1945, the last time the Cubs even appeared in a World Series -- And a tavern owner named Billy Sianis wants to bring his pet goat into Wrigley, but the goat smells so bad that they're both kicked out of the stadium. So then Sianis declares: "Them Cubs, they ain't gonna win no more!" and cursed the team never to make another World Series ever again.
(beat)
Hence... "The Curse of the Billy Goat."

Lori turns to Mark -- Ready for him to admit this is bullshit.

LORI
Come on... Seriously?

MARK
No, it's true. See, being a Cubs fan is no joke. There's black magic, dark forces...

Mark glances up at Steve in the rear-view.

MARK
Hey, Steve. You alright, buddy?

Steve breathes a little heavier -- Starting to sweat now.

STEVE

(wiping his forehead)

Yeah. Yeah, sorry, I'm... I'm just excited.

Countless CUBS FANS fill the streets around them. Decked out in jerseys and hats, ready for action.

Up ahead, you can just barely make out the distant glow of WRIGLEY FIELD -- Lighting up the north side of the city.

LORI

Are you sure? 'Cause we can pull over if you need to--

MARK

--He's just nervous. He gets like this before all the big games.

(calling back to Steve)

Hey Steve, get yourself some fresh air, ok? We need you at full strength tonight.

Mark rolls down the window -- Letting in a cool breeze and the sounds of CHEERING and SINGING from the nearby FANS.

Steve looks out at them, breathing easier now.

Calmed by the rising euphoria of the herd of Cubs fans growing BIGGER and LOUDER by the second.

MARK

Better?

Steve nods. Feeling right at home again.

STEVE

Yeah. Much better.

(deep breath)

This is gonna be awesome.

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD - NIGHT

Mecca for any Chicago Cubs fan.

And it's never looked more beautiful than tonight.

FANS file through the gates, BUZZING with excitement--

Ready for a celebration.

Steve approaches alongside Mark and Lori, trying to soak up every moment, as a CRAZED FAN comes SCREAMING in his face--

CRAZED CUBS FAN
 NINETY-FIVE YEARS, MAN! NINETY-FIVE
FUCKING YEARS!!
 (jumping up and down)
 THIS IS THE YEAR! THIS IS THE
 NIGHT!!! **WOOOOO!!!**

The Crazy Fan runs away and SPRINTS into the stadium.

Steve smiles big and makes a tiny fist-pump as he follows the herd inside.

INT. WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS - NIGHT

Aisle 4. Row 8. Seat 113.

Steve arrives at his seat, right at the edge of the wall in shallow left field.

He's close enough to have a conversation with LEFT FIELDER, MOISES ALOU, #18, warming up on the grass.

STEVE
 HERE WE GO, MOISES!!
 (turning to Mark and Lori)
 Can you guys believe this view??

Mark and Lori slide in beside Steve -- Feeling the rush of being so close to the action.

MARK
 Holy shit, Steve -- These are the best seats you've ever gotten us. Nice work, dude.

LORI
 Yeah, thank you so much for getting these tickets. This is amazing.

STEVE
 No problem. Just glad you guys could make it so I didn't have to be here all alone. My Dad hasn't made it back to Wrigley since his surgery -- But he said he'd disown me if I ever missed a game like this...

Mark and Lori are too busy taking in the sights and sounds to hear him. Steve leans in a little closer.

STEVE

Hey-- You guys need anything? Hot dogs, sodas, peanuts?

Still no response. Mark and Lori are in their own world now.

But Steve takes no offense. He just scans the outfield stands around him, suddenly locking in on--

A FATHER AND SON.

A young Dad and the little boy who idolizes him. Wearing matching Cubs hats and jerseys. Sharing a FUNNEL CAKE and a father/son moment that they'll remember their whole lives.

Steve stares longingly at the two of them, feeling himself transported back to a familiar place, until--

STEVE

I got it.
(back to Mark and Lori)
Funnel cakes.

INT. WRIGLEY FIELD - CONCESSIONS STAND - NIGHT

Steve holds three plates of perfect funnel cakes, doused in powdered sugar, and heads back to the seats with his WALKMAN HEADPHONES on.

The CUBS RADIO BROADCAST plays in his ears...

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)

...You can physically feel the electricity in the Wrigley seats tonight. Forty-one thousand people -- Waiting for this moment their entire lives. To share something magical with each other...

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - SAME

Ron's eyes are glued to the TV, clutching his foul ball for good luck, as the radio broadcast plays through the stereo...

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)

...Because win or lose, on a night like tonight -- It feels a lot less like a stadium full of baseball fans. And more like... A family.

Ron cracks a smile and grips his lucky baseball a little tighter, as we get ready to--

HOME PLATE UMPIRE (PRE-LAP)
PLAY BALL!

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD - HOME PLATE - NIGHT

And Cubs PITCHER, MARK PRIOR, #22, fires STRIKE ONE to FLORIDA MARLINS leadoff batter, JUAN PIERRE.

Steve claps loudly while chewing a mouthful of funnel cake.

STEVE
 Atta boy, Mark! All day, baby, ALL
 DAY!

He turns to Mark and Lori -- Unknowingly SHOUTING at them because of the Walkman headphones over his ears.

STEVE
*PRIOR'S STUFF IS UNBELIEVABLE! HE'D
 BE THE CLEAR FAVORITE TO WIN THE CY
 YOUNG AWARD IF HE DIDN'T MISS THREE
 STARTS IN JULY DUE TO INJURY.*

MARK
 (gesturing to Steve's
 headphones)
 You don't have to shout, Steve --
 We're right here.

STEVE
 (still can't hear them)
 SORRY, WHAT?

The crowd CHEERS as Pierre pops out to SHORTSTOP, ALEX GONZALEZ, #8, and we move to the--

BOTTOM OF THE FIRST INNING

Where the Cubs have a MAN ON SECOND BASE and slugger SAMMY SOSA, #21, at the plate.

STEVE
 C'mon, Sammy -- C'mon, Sammy --
 C'mon--

CRACK! Sosa rips a DOUBLE to right field -- Giving the Cubs their first run of the game.

STEVE
 YES! YES-YES-YES-YES-YES!!

Steve HIGH-FIVES Mark, Lori, and every STRANGER within reach.

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - SAME

Ron claps his hands and stomps his feet, watching the action on TV.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)
...Kenny Lofton wheels around to score from second and the Cubs draw first blood! And I can't tell you the last time I heard Wrigley Field this darn loud!

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS - NIGHT

The ROAR in the stadium is deafening as the HAND OPERATED SCOREBOARD changes to read:

FLORIDA 0 CUBS 1

Mark taps Steve on the shoulder and pulls his headphones down.

MARK
 Hey Steve -- Show Lori that trick you can do. The win probability thing.

STEVE
 Oh, I don't know, it's the first inning, I don't wanna jinx any--

LORI
 --No, come on, what is it?

Steve hesitates, then relents. He doesn't want to be rude.

STEVE
 Ok, well, it's nothing really. It's just a method of using situational statistics to come up with a rough estimate of a team's chances of winning based on the current game conditions.

SMACK! Next batter, the left fielder we saw earlier, MOISES ALOU, beats out an INFIELD SINGLE for another hit.

The crowd's loving it. Nearby FANS are leaning over Steve's shoulder -- Listening in on his statistical breakdown.

LORI
 So what're the chances we're gonna win now??

STEVE

Uh, well, bottom of the first, up
one-nothing, two men on, one out.

(doing the math in his
head)

I'd say right now, it's about a 68
percent chance that we win.

The cluster of nearby fans BUZZES at Steve's prediction.

Already feeling the World Series within their grasp.

MARK

What'd I tell you? Can you believe
this guy? He's got a fuckin'
computer in his head. That's why we
call him "The Terminator" at work,
right Steve?

Steve just smiles bashfully and puts his headphones back on,
enjoying the back pats from Mark and the rest of the crowd.

TOP OF THE FOURTH

The Marlins are at the plate with the score still **1-0**.

Mark Prior is dealing now -- Tearing through batters.

*Lazy POP FLY to center -- STRIKEOUT swinging -- Another
STRIKEOUT swinging.*

Steve high-fives Mark and exhales hard.

Five more innings to go.

BOTTOM OF THE SIXTH

Almost two-thirds of the game have gone by and the Cubs have
TWO OUTS and Sammy Sosa standing on THIRD BASE...

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron leans in, nails digging into the hide of his foul ball,
watching ERIC KARROS, #32, stand at the plate--

RON

C'mon, Eric -- C'mon, Eric--

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)

*...The pitch is in and-- It gets
away from Rodriguez!*

(MORE)

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)
*The ball gets by Pudge Rodriguez
 and Sosa comes in to score! Giving
 the Cubs a two-zero lead here in
 the sixth!*

Ron lets out a WILD HOLLER, as we go back to--

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

Where Steve is LOSING HIS MIND! Mark, Lori, and the other nearby fans all turn to him, waiting for...

STEVE
 Uh... 80 percent. No-- 83 percent!

More CHEERS from Steve's new friends as the scoreboard reads:

FLORIDA 0 CUBS 2

BOTTOM OF THE SEVENTH

CRACK! Cubs SECOND BASEMAN, MARK GRUDZIELANEK, #11, smacks a hard single to center field--

--Bringing PAUL BAKO, #9, around to SCORE!

Steve and the others are GOING NUTS. Full on HUGGING strangers now -- Feeling like this is it.

This is destiny.

FLORIDA 0 CUBS 3

TOP OF THE EIGHTH

Mark Prior is still on the mound for the Cubs -- Over 100 pitches in but still going strong.

Steve holds his breath, listening to his Walkman, as...

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)
*...And the pitch to Mordecai is
 popped up, lazy fly to Alou in
 left, he snags it. And that's one
 down in the eighth, bringing the
 Cubs five outs away from the World
 Series -- Five outs away from our
 wildest dreams coming true...*

Steve pulls down his headphones, already knowing the surrounding section is waiting for him to chime in.

STEVE

94 percent.

Nobody speaks. They just nod and watch, as--

WHACK! Juan Pierre slashes a DOUBLE down the left field line.

Steve quickly puts his headphones back on. He doesn't want to talk, feeling his temperature slowly rise once again.

MARK

(hand on Steve's shoulder)
Hey. It's alright, man. We got this. Just... Try to have fun.

Steve forces a smile and turns back to the action.

Marlins SECOND BASEMAN, LUIS CASTILLO, #1, is at the plate.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)

*...Prior deals and-- Strike one.
Right down Broadway.*

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron watches, holding his breath for the next pitch--

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)

*...And that's strike two. Right on
the outside corner.*

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

Steve rocks back and forth, desperately hoping this next pitch is Castillo's last, as--

CRACK! The ball jumps off Castillo's bat -- Floating sky-high towards FOUL TERRITORY on the left field side--

NEARBY FANS

Oh shit! It's coming this way!
Heads up!!

And suddenly -- *TIME SLOWS.*

The stadium goes SILENT.

Steve tracks the ball in flight -- Falling straight to him.

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

At the same time, Ron watches Moises Alou closing in on the left field wall -- Ready to JUMP INTO THE STANDS for the ball.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)
*...Fly ball to left, heading
 towards the foul line, Alou's
 giving chase, does he have room?...*

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

But Steve doesn't see Alou.

No one does, as every pair of hands in Aisle 4 REACHES UP, desperate to bring home this priceless memory--

Steve stands and REACHES too -- Over the OUTSTRETCHED GLOVE of Moises Alou, who LEAPS above the left field wall, just as--

THE BALL BOUNCES OFF STEVE'S HANDS.

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron winces as the ball bounces away from Alou's grasp.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)
*...Alou leaps and cannot make the
 play -- And Moises is livid with a
 fan! He's screaming at a fan in the
 stands right now!*

The TV cameras hold on Alou, GOING BALLISTIC on the field--

RANTING, SCREAMING, and POINTING INTO THE STANDS.

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

And now time UNFREEZES for Steve Bartman, as he sees the foul ball roll across the floor of the left field seats, and...

The play-by-play of the moment rings out in Steve's ears:

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)
*...Because he knows if that fan
 just gets his hand out of the way,
 Moises makes the catch! That ball
 was headed right into his glove,
 but the fan knocked it away!...*

Steve and the rest of Aisle 4 are too confused to realize exactly what's happened yet--

--Until Steve looks out onto the field and sees:

MOISES ALOU SCREAMING AT HIM.

MOISES ALOU
FUCK! CHINGATE! FUCK! FUCK!

There's no mistaking it now.

Alou is pointing at Steve, looking him dead in the eyes.

Telling the world... *It was HIM.*

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)
*...And boy, you just have to hope a
 play like that doesn't come back to
 bite the Cubs down the line...*

Steve shrinks back into his seat, suddenly numb, as CUBS PLAYERS and COACHES all point towards him--

The stadium ERUPTS IN BOOS, raining down on Steve--

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron watches the slow-motion REPLAY on TV.

In panic and disbelief at the sight of his son knocking the ball from Alou's grasp.

RON
 Oh my God...

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

The next throw from Prior is a WILD PITCH -- Sending Pierre to THIRD BASE and Castillo to FIRST.

The BOOS get LOUDER now.

Steve's in a state of shock -- All he can do is turn to Mark and Lori and ask:

STEVE
 Did I... Do you think I did
 anything wrong?

MARK

No, no way, man. I would've done
the same thing. We all would.

Steve nods. Turns up the volume on his Walkman to drown out
the BOOS.

But he still hears them.

And we realize that for the rest of our time in this stadium
with him...

We're in a fucking horror movie.

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron is on his feet now, in pain, SHOUTING at the TV as the
cruel REPLAYS of his son keep coming--

One after another after another...

RON

No! Get him off the screen! You
sons of bitches! Leave him alone!

The camera finally cuts away from Steve just in time for--

CRACK! IVAN RODRIGUEZ, #7, RIPS a single into left.

RON

GODDAMMIT!

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

Pierre scores from third and the scoreboard changes to:

FLORIDA 1 CUBS 3

Steve just stares straight ahead. On an island in a stadium
full of 40,000 people.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER WALKMAN)

*...You can feel the momentum
shifting in the stadium, and boy is
this crowd letting that poor fan in
left know how they feel about that
foul ball...*

(beat)

*Actually, they're serenading him
with a chant that I can't repeat on
the air without losing my job...*

Steve pushes back his headphones -- Getting his first clear sound of the stadium crowd CHANTING...

STADIUM CROWD
ASSHOLE!... ASSHOLE!... ASSHOLE!...

Steve puts his headphones back on -- Praying for a swift end to this personal hell.

It's not coming.

Next batter, MIGUEL CABRERA, #20, hits an easy GROUNDER to Cubs SHORTSTOP ALEX GONZALEZ -- A sure DOUBLE-PLAY BALL...

And Gonzalez drops it. Everybody's safe on the ERROR.

Bases loaded now.

Next pitch, DERREK LEE, #25, rips a DOUBLE to left field.

Two runs score. Tie game.

FLORIDA 3 CUBS 3

Steve sits perfectly still. The BOOS are deafening now.

NEARBY FANS (O.S.)
 Who was it?! Who the fuck touched
 that fucking ball?!

FANS standing mere feet away from Steve POINT HIM OUT -- More than happy to give him up to the growing MOB.

Steve turns to Mark and Lori -- They don't even look at him.

ANOTHER FAN (O.S.)
*Hey, what's the win probability
 now, jerkoff?! FUCK YOU!*

And what happens next is all a blur, for Steve, his father, and every Cubs fan, as the onslaught continues:

--A SACRIFICE FLY to right...

FLORIDA 4 CUBS 3

--A BASES LOADED DOUBLE off the ivy-covered wall...

FLORIDA 7 CUBS 3

--A line-drive SINGLE to right field...

FLORIDA 8 CUBS 3

And now Steve can hear the chants BOOMING from every seat in the stadium...

All the way to the ROWDY CROWD outside on SHEFFIELD AVENUE...

STADIUM CROWD

**ASSHOLE!!... ASSHOLE!!...
ASSHOLE!!!... ASSHOLE!!!**

Suddenly, DEBRIS starts raining down on Steve's head.

Bottles... Trash... Anything they can get their hands on...

SECURITY GUARDS try to keep the crowd at bay, to little avail.

MARK

Steve, this is really fucked up, I think we need to get outta here.

LORI

Me too, what if someone tries to--

PISS-DRUNK FAN (O.S.)

--Where is he? Where's the asshole?!

A PISS-DRUNK FAN with a 6'3" frame and nothing to lose SHOVES his way into Aisle 4, searching for Steve.

Steve turns to his aggressor, trying to explain--

STEVE

Hey, listen-- I didn't--

The Piss-Drunk Fan THROWS A FULL BEER right in Steve's face.

PISS-DRUNK FAN

Enjoy the game, you fuckin' faggot!

BARTMAN LIVING ROOM

Ron sits nearly comatose in front of the TV -- Watching his son wipe the beer off his face, showing no emotion.

Not a word comes out of Ron's mouth.

He just gets up, limps to the fireplace... And places his foul ball on a display stand atop the mantel.

His heart is broken.

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

Finally, a team of SECURITY GUARDS escorts Steve, Mark, and Lori out of the stands.

The CHORUS OF BOOS is overwhelming as they walk up the stairs--

FURIOUS FANS
*We're gonna kill you,
 motherfucker!/You're fucking dead!!*

Steve marches through a TUNNEL on the way into the CONCOURSE--

Fans up above throw TRASH, BEER, even SPIT at him as he goes.

Steve never reacts. He never looks up. He just takes it.

STADIUM CONCOURSE

And here it gets even worse.

DRUNK FANS are waiting for Steve, crowding around his flimsy security escort--

PUSHING -- SHOVING -- TAKING WILD SWINGS AT HIM.

MORE FANS
*You're gonna die tonight!/I'll put
 a 12 gauge in your mouth and PULL
 THE TRIGGER!!*

And now the NEWS MEDIA has found Steve.

CAMERAS dive in from every angle, getting close on his face, demanding to know his name...

Steve covers his face with his sweatshirt and follows the Security Guards up a STADIUM RAMP, away from the mob--

They finally find refuge outside a ROOM marked "**DISPATCH.**"

SECURITY GUARD
 In here, get in here, quick!

Steve looks back at Mark and Lori.

STEVE
 Wait-- My friends. My friends are
 coming too.

Mark and Lori hang back as security pushes Steve in the room.

MARK

Steve, just go-- We'll wait for you, we'll find you after we--

STEVE

--What?

MARK

We'll wait for you, ok? Just go inside and we'll--

SLAM! The door shuts in Steve's face, cutting him off from Mark and Lori, sealing him inside the--

DISPATCH ROOM

Where Steve finds himself alone, save for a Wrigley Security Guard named AMANDA, mid 30s, trying to keep it together.

AMANDA

Jesus Christ. Are... Are you ok?

STEVE

Yeah. I'm... Yes.

Steve scans the room -- Full of LIVE FEED MONITORS showing every angle of the stadium and game broadcast.

REPLAYS of Steve's foul ball blunder play over and over.

AMANDA

You're sure? No injuries? You're not bleeding?

STEVE

Why would I be bleeding?

AMANDA

Sir, people were trying to attack you. Throwing objects, they--

STEVE

--Do you have a phone?

Amanda nods and pulls a cell phone from her hip.

STEVE

Thank you.

Steve dials and holds Amanda's phone to his ear.

It STICKS against his beer-spattered skin.

He wipes the phone down with his shirt as it rings.

STEVE

I'm sorry... And maybe a towel?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - SAME

The phone RINGS -- Ron answers in a split-second.

RON

Hello?

STEVE

Dad.

RON

Steve-- Oh my God. I was afraid it was gonna be the police. Are you alright?

STEVE

Yeah, no, I'm-- I'm fine. I just didn't want you to worry.

RON

Do you need me to pick you up? I can leave right now.

STEVE

No-no, just-- Go to sleep, ok? I'll be home soon. Don't wait up for me.

A long beat of silence. Neither man wants to hang up yet.

STEVE

Dad, I'm... I'm sorry. For tonight. I should've just stayed home and watched with you.

(beat)

I've never watched a game without you.

RON

Steven. That's the last time you're gonna apologize to me for what happened tonight. You hear me?

For a brief moment, Steve feels ok again.

STEVE

I love you, Dad.

RON
Love you too, son.

Ron hangs up.

After a long beat, he finally turns off the TV. He can't bear to watch anymore.

INT. WRIGLEY FIELD DISPATCH ROOM - NIGHT

Steve takes a seat and stares transfixed at the many LIVE REPLAYS still running on the monitors in front of him.

Other TVs are tuned to ESPN and the LOCAL NEWS--

All deep-diving into coverage of Steve's foul ball fiasco.

AMANDA
Your name's Steve?...

STEVE
Yeah.

AMANDA
So, you're famous right now, and I'm the only one in the whole stadium who knows your name.

STEVE
My friends know. I didn't come to the game alone.
(beat)
Actually, shoot, can you check with someone to make sure they're--

AMANDA
--They left.

STEVE
What?

AMANDA
I radioed in to check on them while you were on the phone. I know you wanted them here with you, but they had already...
(beat)
I'm sorry.

Steve blinks to the floor. Hurt, but trying to hide it.

STEVE

It's ok, they... They're not... I just work with one of them.

They both stand silent for a long beat.

STEVE

I'm sorry, what's your name?

AMANDA

Amanda.

STEVE

Amanda, how long do I have to stay here?

AMANDA

Until it's safe for you. When the game ends and the crowd clears out.

STEVE

How long does that take?

AMANDA

Little less than an hour usually. But tonight...

Amanda looks at one of the SECURITY MONITORS--

Showing a FURIOUS CROWD lined up outside Addison Avenue.

AMANDA

They're already waiting for you.

Steve nods. He watches another REPLAY on the ESPN feed.

Finally letting what happened tonight sink in.

STEVE

Do you think I did anything wrong?

AMANDA

No. No, no, no. You did what... Any fan would do.

(beat)

Don't worry. It wasn't your fault they lost. Everyone's gonna realize that soon.

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD - NIGHT

It's HOURS LATER now and there are still pockets of FANS waiting outside the stadium, desperate for a shot at Steve.

Amanda and three more SECURITY GUARDS surround Steve -- Now DISGUISED in the same sky blue "**Stadium Security**" uniform that the Wrigley crew wears.

AMANDA

Follow me. First cab you find, flag it down and don't let it get away.

Steve nods and scans the streets for any sign of a cab.

Finally, they find one. A Guard WHISTLES and WAVES.

The cab whips around and approaches, but not before--

WAITING FAN

Hey! That's him! That's the motherfucker right there!

The Fan TAKES OFF RUNNING towards Steve -- Followed by a small POSSE, all still out for blood.

AMANDA

Shit, just go, just go!

Steve SPRINTS as fast as he can -- Turning back to see Amanda and the other Guards intercepting the night-stalking fans--

But before Steve can get away, his WALKMAN flies off his hip -- Falling to the pavement.

One of the furious fans pounces on the Walkman and HURLS IT as far as he can.

FURIOUS FAN

If you ever come back to Chicago we'll kill you! You fucking hear me, you fucking bitch!!

Steve dives in the cab as his Walkman SMASHES to the ground.

He looks back to see the Guards struggling to hold the fans at bay. Amanda turns and locks eyes with him before he goes.

Steve gives her a kind "thank you" wave as the cab departs...

Disappearing into the Chicago night.

EXT. BARTMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

The cab pulls up to Steve's house in the middle of the night.

He gets out and approaches the front door, checking over both shoulders -- Still on high alert.

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Steve enters the house and double-locks the door.

He makes sure all the windows are locked too -- Then finds his father asleep in his chair. He waited up all night.

The soft hum of the CUBS RADIO STATION can still be heard.

Steve walks over to the stereo, turns the radio off, and looks down at his sleeping father.

STEVE
I'm home, Dad.

Ron just keeps sleeping. Steve pulls the blanket up over his shoulders and walks upstairs in the dark.

FADE TO:

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The first rays of daylight crack through Steve's window. His crooked body lays splayed out across the bed.

Obviously the worst night's sleep of his life.

RON (O.S.)
Steven. Wake up.

Steve's eyes crack open at the sound of his father's voice.

STEVE
(wiping his eyes)
Dad?... What're you--?

RON
--You're gonna be late for work.

STEVE
Work? Are you--? I can't go to work
after what happened last--

RON
--I don't give a damn about last
night. Today's another day, and
nobody's gonna make my boy a
prisoner in his own home.

Steve sits up.

Realizing his father's stern tone is in support of his son,
not anger.

RON

This'll all be over by tomorrow.
We're gonna win Game Seven tonight,
then we're gonna win the Series,
and anybody who tells you
different...

(beat)

They're obviously not a real fan.

INT. STEVE'S CAR - DAY

Steve drives his Honda Accord to work, still looking like
shit, but doing his best to hold himself together.

He flips on the car stereo -- SPORTS TALK RADIO fills the air.

SPORTS TALK HOST (OVER RADIO)

*...So you believe it was the fan
who cost the Cubs the game last
night? It was all his fault?*

SPORTS TALK CALLER (OVER RADIO)

*You're damn right I think it was
his fault! He stole the ball right
outta Alou's hands, and if I had
the little punk right here in front
of me, I'd stomp his teeth in and--*

Steve stabs at the stereo button -- Turning it OFF and
speeding down the road as quickly as possible.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY - MORNING

The elevator doors open and Steve moves down the hall,
towards the glass office doors of HEWITT ASSOCIATES.

It finally starts to feel just like any other day -- Until
the glass doors open and out steps...

A POLICE OFFICER.

POLICE OFFICER

You the guy?

STEVE

What guy?

POLICE OFFICER

Bartman.

STEVE

Uh, yeah... I'm sorry, is something--

POLICE OFFICER
--Follow me, please.

Steve does as he's told, stepping inside--

HEWITT ASSOCIATES OFFICES

Grey-walled, fluorescent-lit, cubicle-filled...

But today, the room is also CRAWLING WITH COPS.

Taking notes, checking under desks, interviewing CO-WORKERS.

I.T. GUYS are hunched over every computer workstation, frazzled and irate.

Steve's BOSSES huddle in the corner with a POLICE SERGEANT, presumably getting some pretty shitty news.

Finally, Steve makes it to his WORK CUBE--

STEVE
Oh-my-God.

Which is, to put it mildly -- A DISASTER AREA.

Papers everywhere -- Computer smashed to pieces -- Mugs and photos shattered -- Cube walls kicked in...

And every piece of Cubs memorabilia completely destroyed.

STEVE
What-- What happened? Who--

MARK (O.S.)
--Steve. Hey.

Steve looks up to find Mark standing over the wreckage.

Looking like he'd rather be anywhere but here right now.

STEVE
Mark, who did this? How did this--

MARK
--Take a breath, Steve. You're getting red.

STEVE
Why didn't anyone tell me about this? No one called, I'm supposed to just walk straight into a--

MARK

--Nobody thought you'd come in today, man. Besides, we have bigger problems. Someone's making anonymous threats to hack our servers. We had to take email down, confidential accounts could be compromised, it's--

STEVE

--Where'd you go last night?

That question hangs in the air for a long beat.

Mark measures his response.

STEVE

After the game. You guys said you would wait for me.

MARK

Steve, Lori was scared, it was late, you were in there for a long--

STEVE

--I asked them to check on you. It couldn't have been longer than five minutes. You were already gone.

Mark steps closer to Steve. Speaking in a hushed tone now.

MARK

Look man, this is really bad. I think you should take the rest of the day off. Stay home. Sleep. Wait for this all to--

STEVE

--I'm being sent home? Am I--

(beat)

Am I gonna lose my job over this?

Mark's eyes twitch towards the BOSSES watching from afar.

Steve clocks the silent exchange between them.

MARK

Steve, listen, Mitch and Nancy just wanted me to talk to you, calm you down, they know we're friends--

STEVE

--You said I didn't do anything wrong last night.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

Did you tell them that? You said you would've done the same--

MARK

--Please, I think you should take the rest of the day--

STEVE

--Just tell me if I'm gonna lose my fucking job over this fucking foul--

MARK

--Steve, you're putting me in an uncomfortable position right now--

STEVE

--Oh, you're in an uncomfortable position?

MARK

Yes, I feel like this is getting very--

STEVE

(getting pissed now)

--You're in an uncomfortable position?

Mark stops. Takes a long breath.

Angles Steve towards the exit as best he can.

MARK

Look, you didn't do anything wrong, man. I would tell you if I thought you did. But just... Take the rest of the day, ok?

(beat)

Besides, if the Cubs win tonight... Nobody's gonna give a shit about last night ever again.

That's the one comforting thought Steve's had in the past 12 hours. He takes it in, nods.

STEVE

You're right, you're right-- I'm sorry, I'm still just all...

Mark walks Steve to the glass doors, opens them for him.

Steve steps into the hall, walks to the elevator, then turns back. Mark is still at the glass doors.

STEVE

Hey, so, uh... You wanna come over to the house tonight? Watch Game Seven with us? I just think it'd really help a lot if--

MARK

--I gotta check with Lori.

That's it. No promises beyond that.

STEVE

Oh. Yeah, of course. Just, uh, gimme a call, ok? See ya.

Mark nods as Steve hits the elevator button and the doors open up again.

Steve nods back, forces a smile, and steps inside.

INT. STEVE'S CAR - DAY

Steve drives back home, in growing paranoia-mode now.

He ducks his head at every red light and stop sign, nervously checking to make sure no passing motorists recognize him.

Then, as Steve makes his way back to the SUBURBAN STREETS of Lincolnshire, he looks up in the sky and notices--

STEVE

What the hell?...

A HELICOPTER.

Way up in the sky, looking like it's circling...

THE BARTMAN HOUSE

Now more closely resembling the outside of a crime scene than the only home Steve Bartman has known in his life.

COP CARS and NEWS VANS as far as the eye can see.

Steve rolls into the driveway, immediately SWARMED by media--

CHICAGO MEDIA

Steve, what can you tell us about that play?/Do you feel you're responsible for the team's loss?/If you could say one thing to Cubs fans nationwide, what would it be?

Finally, Steve just abandons the car halfway into his driveway and jumps onto the front lawn.

MICROPHONES and RECORDERS jab at Steve from every angle as he races to--

MOLLY (O.S.)

STEVE!

Steve looks up at the front door and sees his older sister, MOLLY, early 30s, five months pregnant, waving him inside like he's outrunning a tornado.

MOLLY

Get in! Hurry!

Steve bursts inside the house and Molly SLAMS the door--
Shutting all the media outside.

STEVE

(huffing and puffing)

What is this?!... How do they--?

Ron Bartman is sitting in his usual seat, eyes on the floor.

Beside him is Molly's husband, JACOB, mid 30s, built like a linebacker with the heart of a teddy bear.

JACOB

The Sun-Times published this
article this morning...

Jacob spins around a LAPTOP -- Revealing a CHICAGO SUN-TIMES ARTICLE with the headline:

"Man in Stands Described as Diehard Fan"

Steve reads it, jaw dropping more with every word.

MOLLY

They printed your name, hometown,
the firm where you work...

JACOB

Your home address has obviously
gone viral -- The cops outside have
already arrested three people for
trying to trespass on your--

The nearby phone RINGS -- Steve instinctively reaches for it--

RON

--No, Steve, don't answer that!

Too late. The phone's already at Steve's ear.

Just in time for him to hear:

MAN'S VOICE (OVER PHONE)

I'm gonna fucking kill you.

Steve's face goes white. Too stunned to hang up or even move.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER PHONE)

You hear me? I know where you live,
I know where you sleep at night,
and if we don't win tonight -- I'm
gonna come in your house and CUT
YOUR FUCKING--

SLAM! Steve throws down the phone, badly shaken.

MOLLY

Steve?... What's wrong? What'd they say?...

RON

Same goddamn thing they've all said so far, I'm sure. Listen, new rule, next time the phone rings: You let 'em talk to ME.

JACOB

Steve, I know this is a lot, but we really oughta think about getting you a lawyer, man.

STEVE

What do you mean? Aren't you a lawyer?

JACOB

Well, yeah, but... I do mostly personal injury stuff--

STEVE

--Well, that sounds like the kind of lawyer I need. There's about ten million people in this town who wanna personally injure me right now!

Ron's heard enough.

He sees how scared his family is, so he pulls himself out of his chair and stomps over to a CLOSET.

MOLLY

Dad? Dad, what're you--?

Ron reaches to the top back corner of the closet, pulling out a LOCK BOX.

He spins the lock OPEN, revealing...

A HANDGUN.

Ron pulls it out, checks the chamber, makes sure it's loaded.

MOLLY

Oh-my-God. Dad, what the fuck?!

RON

Molls, language.

STEVE

We have a gun?? Since when have we had a gun??

RON

Since your mother came home from the hospital holding your sister thirty-one years ago.

JACOB

Ron, just stay calm. There's police outside, they're handling every--

MOLLY

--Dad, I'm pregnant, I do not feel comfortable being in a house with a loaded gun!

Ron puts the gun back inside the lock box and carries it back to his recliner.

Eyes locked straight ahead on the front door.

RON

Then make sure you're standing behind me the next time someone steps on that goddamn grass.

There's no arguing with him right now. This is the way it's gonna be.

Steve is practically shaking. He looks up at Jacob.

JACOB

Don't worry. If we win tonight,
this whole thing's gonna be over.

CUT TO:

HOURS LATER

Steve sits frozen in front of the TV, flipping through
channel after channel...

His face is EVERYWHERE. National news now.

On WGN, he sees an interview with his LITTLE LEAGUE TEAM. The
Renegades.

The boys all hold SIGNS of support and chant "Go Coach B!"

Ron just shakes his head at the insanity of it all. Molly and
Jacob peer outside.

JACOB

There's another chopper in the air.
And looks like more police just
arrived too. One of the guys
outside told me they're on 24-hour
watch right now.

MOLLY

So's the media. They're setting up
tents across the street.

JACOB

Steve, I think we should talk
strategy. Just in case the worst
happens tonight. People are gonna
wanna hear from you.

(beat)

Some are probably gonna demand it.

STEVE

What do you think I should do?

JACOB

We can schedule an interview. A
private sit-down. Any network you
like--

STEVE

--No. No way, I'm not... Putting my
face out there like that ever
again. No.

MOLLY

So what, you're just gonna hide out here and--

RON

--He's not hiding.

When Ron talks, everyone else shuts up.

The silence hangs over the room for a long beat.

MOLLY

I'm gonna go see if there's enough scraps in the fridge to make us some dinner.

Molly nods to Jacob, who follows her into the KITCHEN.

Leaving Steve and Ron alone for the moment.

STEVE

Dad... Do you remember the last time the Cubs were in the Series?

RON

Sure. 1945. Remember the heartbreaks in '69 and '84 too. Like they were yesterday.

STEVE

Well... Do you ever think about what it would feel like...

(beat)

If you never got to see them win?

Ron looks Steve in the eye. Telling his son the truth.

RON

They're gonna win, son. You wanna know how I know that? I know that because I've lived in or around this city my whole life. You've got family that was at the first game this team ever played. First game at Wrigley Field. This family has been Cubs fans for every day, every split-second of their goddamn existence.

(beat)

I loved this team because of my Dad. I loved 'em even more because of you. And I know that if they've got one ounce of love to give back to us...

Ron reaches over and HOLDS STEVE'S HAND.

RON
They're winning this game tonight.

CUT TO:

THE GAME 7 PRE-GAME SHOW

Predictably, Steve Bartman is all anyone wants to talk about.

Fox color commentator, STEVE LYONS, uses the telestrator to highlight every fan around Steve reaching for the ball.

STEVE LYONS (ON TV)
This guy, this guy, this guy -- At least seven all around Bartman, all reaching for the same foul--

The TV goes SILENT as Ron hits the mute button.

He gets up and retrieves his lucky FOUL BALL from the mantel.

MOLLY
 Dad, I think that guy was actually defending Steve.

RON
 Goddamn national broadcasters think they know it all. That guy could barely tell you the colors on the Cubs' uniforms.

Ron turns on his STEREO and fills the room with the CUBS RADIO BROADCAST.

CUBS PRE-GAME ANNOUNCER (OVER STEREO)
...And believe it or not, there are still angry fans waiting outside Wrigley, just hoping that Steve Bartman will return to the scene of the crime.
 (beat)
And I hate to say it, but if the Cubs don't win tonight... The torches and pitchforks may never be put away.

BAM! Ron PUNCHES the stereo, shutting it OFF as well.

RON
 Guess they'll put any asshole on the radio now too.

Ron, Molly, and Jacob all settle in to watch the game, while Steve stands in the BACK HALLWAY, holding the house phone.

STEVE

(into phone)

Hey, yeah, Mark -- It's Steve.
Listen, I don't know if you were still available to watch the game tonight... Maybe you tried to call earlier, the phone's been ringing off the hook, I'm sorry about that. Anyways, it'd be great if you could still make it. I just-- Really feel like the support'll help, you know?

(beat)

Oh, and I know you had to talk to Lori and everything, please tell her she's more than welcome. My sister's here too, so... Yeah, just gimme a call when you figure out your plan. Ok? Thanks man.

Steve hangs up and brings the phone into the living room, where everyone sits -- Watching the game in TOTAL SILENCE.

TWO MARLINS are already on base, as Cubs PITCHER, KERRY WOOD, #34, hurls a pitch--

And 20-year-old MIGUEL CABRERA CRUSHES A THREE RUN HOMER into deep left center field.

Gone from the moment it hit the bat.

STEVE

Oh God...

FLASHBULBS pop from outside the front windows--

Desperately trying to get an angle on Steve's reaction.

MOLLY

Steve. Maybe you should sit over here by us where nobody can--

Steve can't hear her.

He just stands there, barely breathing--

Paralyzed with fear as the FLASHBULBS outside keep POPPING...

FLORIDA 3 CUBS 0

BOTTOM OF THE SECOND

The Cubs are at the plate now -- Men on SECOND and THIRD.

DAMIEN MILLER, #27, chops a ground ball to third--

Bringing in the first run for the Cubs.

MOLLY

Wooo! YES!

RON

Atta way! We're chipping away here,
we're chipping away!

JACOB

THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!
C'MON!!

Steve's the only one who stays quiet.

Watching pitcher Kerry Wood step into the batter's box.

STEVE

Ok, this is good, Kerry swings a
solid bat for a pitcher. Worst
case, we burn the number nine spot
to end the inning and get to the
third at the top of the--

CRACK! At least, that's what it would sound like if the
Bartman's were watching with any sound on.

But either way--

Kerry Wood DRILLS A HOME RUN OVER THE CENTER FIELD IVY!

STEVE

What?! Are you kidding me?!

JACOB

HOLY SHIT! THE PITCHER! THE FUCKING
PITCHER!

RON

Jake, language!

(beat)

RUN THOSE GODDAMN BASES, KERRY!

The family trades high-fives and yelps, as the Cubs draw even.

FLORIDA 3 CUBS 3

BOTTOM OF THE THIRD

Now MOISES ALOU -- Steve's nemesis from last night -- stands at the plate with a man on FIRST, and...

ABSOLUTELY CRUSHES A HOME RUN.

Out of the stadium and onto Sheffield Avenue.

Steve is beside himself -- Feeling the shackles of last night being lifted at last.

FLORIDA 3 CUBS 5

While the others all high-five and fist pump -- Steve picks up the PHONE. Dialing Mark again...

MOLLY

Hey. Who're you calling?

STEVE

No one. Just a friend of mine.

Steve waits as the phone RINGS and RINGS... No answer again.

TOP OF THE FIFTH

The Marlins are at the plate and quickly come roaring back.

A pair of WALKS -- Then a two-run DOUBLE -- A run-scoring SINGLE -- And all of the sudden, it's...

FLORIDA 6 CUBS 5

The room is deflated. Feeling like cruel fate is here again.

RON

Still five more innings, Stevie.
That's why they play all nine.

Steve forces a nod. Trying to keep it together, as--

THE PHONE RINGS.

Steve grabs it, hoping to hear Mark on the other line--

STEVE

Hello?

DIGITALLY SCRAMBLED VOICE (OVER PHONE)

I will bury you.

Steve freezes. The terrifying voice BREATHES HARD in and out.

DIGITALLY SCRAMBLED VOICE (OVER PHONE)
*If we lose this game, I will shoot
 you in the skull and bury you.*

CLICK.

The voice is gone, but the game continues...

TOP OF THE SIXTH

--A Marlins SINGLE, scoring ANOTHER RUN.

FLORIDA 7 CUBS 5

The phone RINGS again.

BOTTOM OF THE SIXTH

The Cubs go down in order.

An easy 1-2-3 inning for Florida, as...

The phone RINGS once more.

TOP OF THE SEVENTH

--Another DOUBLE, scoring TWO MORE RUNS for the Marlins.

FLORIDA 9 CUBS 5

It's all slipping away now, as the phone RINGS again.

This time, Ron grabs the phone on the first ring and shouts--

RON
 Fucking, what?!
 (beat)
FUCK YOU!

At his breaking point, Ron RIPS the cord out of the wall and THROWS the phone across the room.

MOLLY
 Dad!

RON
 I don't wanna hear it! There's
 still three more innings!

But everyone in the room knows -- The whole city knows...

The end is near.

BOTTOM OF THE NINTH

Last stand for the Cubs.

Down to their final out, with PAUL BAKO at the plate--

Who hits a lazy FLY BALL to left. It lands easily in the THIRD BASEMAN's glove.

And just like that, FINAL SCORE:

FLORIDA 9 CUBS 6

The entire Marlins team SPRINTS onto the field -- SCREAMING, LAUGHING, DOG PILING on top of each other in celebration.

Steve watches his father drop his lucky ball -- Head hanging towards the floor, until he finally looks up, and we see...

He has tears his eyes.

Not just for his team, or for the loss, but for his son...

Whose life may never be the same.

STEVE

Dad. Dad, I...

Ron pushes back the tears--

Refusing to let them spill in front of his family.

He pulls himself up, stands beside Steve, and HUGS him.

RON

No matter what, you're my boy,
Stevie. You're my only boy.

(kisses Steve's head)

I love you. Always. There's nothing
this world can do to change that.

Ron holds Steve close, desperate to protect his son. Unable to hold back his emotions any longer -- Until finally...

Steve PULLS AWAY from his father.

Too ashamed to even look Ron in the eye right now.

Ron nods and lets Steve go. He limps back towards his bedroom. Before he goes, he turns back around and says...

RON
They're gonna win someday, son.
We're gonna see 'em win it someday.

And with that, Ron walks into his bedroom and closes the door.

HOURS LATER

It's the middle of the night now.

Steve sits holding his father's foul ball, lit only by the glow of the TV -- Still showing REPLAYS of him from Game 6.

Finally, Steve gets up, ready to stop torturing himself, until he looks down and sees...

The house phone.

Still unplugged and thrown aside.

Steve bends down and picks up the phone, staring at it, wishing he had someone to reach out to on the other line.

But he doesn't.

So he just plugs the phone back in, turns to go upstairs, until--

THE PHONE RINGS.

Steve picks it up. Just needing to hear another human voice right now, no matter who it is.

STEVE
Hello?

MAN'S VOICE (OVER PHONE)
Is this Steve?

STEVE
Who... Who's calling please?

Just short, nervous breaths on the other end for a beat.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER PHONE)
I've been trying you all night.
Don't ask me how I got your number.
I'm not proud of doing it, but...
(beat)
(MORE)

MAN'S VOICE (OVER PHONE) (CONT'D)

My father has been a Cubs fan for seventy-four years. He's the biggest fan I've ever met. He can tell you just about every player on just about every team in Cubs history. And he lived every day of his life without ever seeing them win a World Series.

(beat)

Last month, we found out he has cancer in his liver. And his bones. And he promised me tonight that he'll make it to next season, that he'll hang on no matter how long it takes, but... We both know tonight was his last game.

(beat)

My Dad's gonna die without ever seeing his team win. And I had to call you tonight to say... to say...

(voice cracking)

That I hope you know what that feels like someday. You fucking cocksucker--

CLICK.

The stranger's gone.

Leaving Steve to absorb that body blow in any way he can.

Finally, Steve feels himself about to break, so he yanks the phone cord out of the wall and races up the stairs, as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

A TV SCREEN

Cycling through just about every channel on the dial:

ESPN, CNN, FOX NEWS, every NATIONAL NETWORK NEWS SHOW--

VARIOUS NEWSCASTERS

...The lifelong Cubs fan issued a statement today/Bartman apologized for his costly Game Six gaffe/In a written apology read aloud by his brother-in-law...

EXT. BARTMAN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Jacob's recitation of Steve's apology begins, as we peer down into an open car trunk... Packed full of BOXES and SUITCASES.

JACOB (V.O.)

There are few words to describe how awful I feel and what I have experienced within these last 24 hours...

INT. BARTMAN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Molly sits on the family couch, CRYING while Jacob holds her.

JACOB (V.O.)

I've been a Cub fan all my life and fully understand the relationship between my actions and the outcome of the game...

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ron stands in his son's bedroom, now STRIPPED BARE from wall-to-wall. All of Steve's old Cubs memorabilia is PACKED AWAY.

JACOB (V.O.)

To Moises Alou, the Chicago Cubs organization, Ron Santo, Ernie Banks, and Cub fans everywhere...

Ron peers inside one of the boxes, sees an OLD FRAMED PHOTO.

It's Ron and a 10-year-old Steve sitting behind home plate at Wrigley together. Father and son.

JACOB (V.O.)

I am so truly sorry from the bottom of this Cub fan's broken heart.

Ron stares at the photo, holding in his pain, then puts it back in the box. He turns off the light and closes the door.

INT. STEVE'S CAR - NIGHT

Steve drives into the night.

Lost in thought, the Chicago lights receding in the distance.

As Steve Bartman disappears and escapes, we PUSH IN CLOSE on his sullen face... Dissolving into a series of--

INTERNET MEMES

--Steve's face photoshopped in the hole where Saddam Hussein was captured with the caption: **FOUND HIM.**

--A Wild West WANTED POSTER with Steve's face reading: **WANTED for Crimes Against Cubs Baseball: BILL E. GOAT**

--Steve in a fake MASTERCARD AD: **"Fucking Up Your Team's Chances of Winning the World Series: PRICELESS"**

--FACEBOOK PHOTOS of people DRESSED UP AS STEVE FOR HALLOWEEN. All with green turtlenecks, Cubs hats, Walkmen...

--A portrait of Steve's lonely face behind the left field wall -- CHICAGO CUBS FOAM FINGERS pointing at him from every direction.

Next, it's Steve at the center of countless--

VIDEOS AND NEWS REPORTS

--ESPN personalities TONY KORNHEISER and MICHAEL WILBON trashing Steve on "Pardon the Interruption":

MICHAEL WILBON

Can this kid even live in Chicago anymore after all this, Tone?

TONY KORNHEISER

Oh no. Let me tell you something: THIS KID IS MEAT. THIS KID IS MEAT.

--A CHICAGO TRIBUNE REPORTER:

TRIBUNE REPORTER

He became Chicago's J.D. Salinger. He refused countless offers for appearances, interviews, even Super Bowl commercials. He never took a dime. He just... Disappeared.

--MAN ON THE STREET interviews outside Wrigley Field:

RANDOM FAN

I heard he quit his job, he had to leave Chicago. My buddy said he heard he moved to London, got plastic surgery, I don't know...

--MIKE GREENBERG at the "Sportscenter" anchor desk:

MIKE GREENBERG

Meanwhile, the anonymous owner of the infamous "Bartman Ball" -- Who picked it up after the ball's unfortunate bounce off Bartman's hands -- has sold the cursed piece of memorabilia for upwards of one-hundred thousand dollars to the owners of Harry Caray's restaurant... Who will destroy it.

--CHARLES GIBSON on "Good Morning America," watching FOOTAGE of THE "BARTMAN BALL" EXPLODING inside a giant MICROWAVE.

CHARLES GIBSON

*And as a Cubs fan, I can tell you... That ball is going to Hell.
(beat)
Steve Bartman on the other hand?
Your guess is as good as mine.*

Finally, the reports on Steve come to a merciful end, and we--

FADE TO:

THE BALTIMORE INNER HARBOR

An early morning bird's eye view of the city skyline.

Shimmering water meets docks, boats, and high-rises.

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

YEARS LATER...

INT. STEVE'S OFFICE - DAY

A grey-walled cube farm not unlike the last office we saw Steve in, only this one's over 700 miles away.

Sitting at a barren workstation, typing away, we find an almost unrecognizable STEVE BARTMAN.

Several years older, 20 pounds heavier, beard, no glasses.

If you didn't know this guy intimately all those years ago, you'd never guess it was the same Steve Bartman from Game 6.

INT. STEVE'S OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Steve eats lunch alone, surfing an ONLINE DATING SITE.

He cycles through the PROFILE PICS of a cute woman named **KATIEKAT79**.

Steve goes through picture after picture of her -- *Doing cartwheels on the beach, hugging her dog, sipping margaritas with her girlfriends* -- liking what he sees, until he gets to:

A picture of her in a Cubs hat.

Steve feels a wave of anxiety and quickly hits the "X" atop the woman's profile.

DO YOU WISH TO REMOVE KATIEKAT79 FROM YOUR LIST OF MATCHES?

Steve hits "YES" -- The profile DISAPPEARS -- He exhales.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey, Ronny?

Steve doesn't look up -- Then realizes...

STEVE

Oh, uh-- Yeah?

A sweet OFFICE MOM-type stands in the doorway.

OFFICE MOM

Bunch of us are going to O'Sullivan's for happy hour after work. Just wanted to see if you--

STEVE

--Oh, you know what Diana, I have a--

OFFICE MOM

--Doctor's appointment, teeth cleaning, oil change? C'mon, Ronny, you gotta get some new material.

Steve just forces a smile back at her. Busted.

INT. O'SULLIVAN'S BAR AND GRILL - DAY

Steve sits at a high-top table amongst a group of CO-WORKERS, nursing a beer and picking at an appetizer sampler in silence.

Left out of the conversation, Steve glances up at the ROW OF TVs positioned over the nearby BAR.

ESPN's "BASEBALL TONIGHT" plays on every one.

Steve starts to get a little twitchy.

He gets up and approaches the BARTENDER.

STEVE

Hey, uh, excuse me... You think you could maybe change the channel for me?

BARTENDER

No problem. What're you looking for?

STEVE

Oh, anything's fine. Thank you.

The Bartender grabs a remote, changes the closest TV to FOX SPORTS ONE.

Wouldn't you know it? More baseball.

STEVE

Actually, uh, maybe something other than sports? If that's cool.

The Bartender nods and puts on a random COOKING SHOW.

BARTENDER

We good?

STEVE

Yeah. Thank you so much.

(awkward beat)

And, uh... Sorry, do you think you could maybe switch all the other TVs too? If you have a chance?

The Bartender looks up at the ROW OF TVs above the bar.

All still tuned to ESPN.

BARTENDER

Hey man. You got a TV over at your place? 'Cause they let you watch whatever you want over there.

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

To answer the bartender's question, no, Steve does not have a TV at his place.

Actually, Steve's place doesn't have much of anything, save for cottage cheese ceilings, an IKEA coffee table, and...

His father's old FOUL BALL.

Up on the mantel, where Steve looks at it from the kitchen.

He smiles sadly -- A nice memory just popped in his head.

Then he opens his FREEZER -- Nothing inside but a single shitty Lean Cuisine. Frost-bitten and inedible.

Steve throws away the Lean Cuisine and heads out the door.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Steve stands in the frozen food aisle -- Loading up on Lean Cuisines, six for \$10...

He turns and sees a WOMAN standing next to him. Also with frozen dinners on her shopping list.

Her name is ANNIE, mid 30s, and she glances up at Steve with one of those smiles men think about for days.

ANNIE
Any suggestions?

Steve's a little tongue-tied, so he just reaches in his basket and hands her TWO BOXES OF...

STEVE
I like the Lemongrass Chicken.

Annie takes them -- Charmed by Steve's grocery store chivalry.

ANNIE
Oh. Thank you.

STEVE
No problem.

She looks into his eyes. Just long enough for Steve to worry:

Shit, does she recognize him?

He blinks away and strides to the SELF-CHECK OUT STANDS.

Swiping bar codes -- Almost sweating now -- as he looks back towards Annie...

Smiling at him again before he hurries away.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Steve unlocks his beat-up Accord, ready to head home, until--

ANNIE (O.S.)
--I'm so sorry.

Steve turns around -- Immediately panicked at the sight of Annie again.

STEVE
Excuse me? You're... Sorry for--?

ANNIE
--For staring. Just now in the store. That was rude, I'm ok admitting that, I just thought you had a nice face, sweet eyes, and I just... Couldn't help it I guess.

Steve nods and opens his car door. In a hurry now.

STEVE
That's ok. Don't worry about it.

Annie's face bunches up as Steve climbs into his Accord--

ANNIE
--Wait, what? Um, that wasn't, like... A legitimate apology, you know? I'm trying to flirt with you.

STEVE
(genuinely confused)
I'm sorry?

ANNIE
Flir-ting. It's this age-old social ritual where two people engage in a kind of casual banter with each other in the name of--
(stopping herself)
Hold on, why aren't you interrupting me yet? Why are you just standing there letting me explain the concept of flirting to you like you have literally no idea what flirting is, oh my God, this is humiliating, I have to--

STEVE
--No, no, wait! I'm sorry, I'm sorry -- I'm interrupting you, I'm interrupting you now.
(quick breath)
Don't go, I'm just... I didn't... I'm an idiot, don't go.

Annie looks back at him.

He's flustered, but sweet. And kind of cute.

ANNIE
What's your name?

Steve hesitates a split-second longer than someone should at that question.

STEVE
Ron-- Ron Banks.

Steve puts out his hand. Annie shakes it.

ANNIE
Ron Banks. Annie Stephenson.
(beat)
So, it's kinda late and I don't know if you have somewhere to be, but... You wanna get a cup of coffee or something?

STEVE
Coffee? Actually, coffee can make me a little anxious and the long-term effects of caffeine are still--

ANNIE
--Ok, so no coffee, forget all the coffee then.
(beat)
How 'bout this? What's something you've been craving forever? The thing you want the absolute most in the world right now?...

This time, Steve doesn't hesitate at all, as we--

CUT TO:

A GIANT FUNNEL CAKE.

Crispy, golden brown, and covered in powdered sugar.

Steve digs into it. Melting in ecstasy with each bite.

STEVE
Oh-my-God. This is amazing. Here, have some.

Steve and Annie share the funnel cake in a booth at a divey little DINER on Baltimore's INNER HARBOR.

ANNIE

So how long have you lived in Baltimore?

STEVE

About nine, ten years now? A little while before my Dad passed.

ANNIE

Oh, I'm so sorry. And where're you from originally?

Steve is too focussed on devouring this funnel cake to put much thought into the necessary lies here.

STEVE

Um, you know... Around here.

ANNIE

So Baltimore?

STEVE

Yeah.

ANNIE

Which you said you just moved to nine, ten years ago?

STEVE

No, uh, I mean-- *Around* Baltimore. Closer to Washington, DC actually. That area...

(offering the funnel cake)

Here, have more of this. Please, don't let me finish it.

Annie picks at the dessert and stares at Steve...

Going from amused to suspicious real fast.

ANNIE

Ron?... Hey, Ron?...

Steve's too busy chewing his mouthful of fried dough, until--

ANNIE

(grabbing her purse)

Ok, you know what, this was a mistake--

STEVE

--What do you mean? Where're you--?

ANNIE

--When you were all fidgety and awkward back in the parking lot, it was kinda cute -- But your pathetic backstory, the alarming lack of specificity in identifying your hometown, and how you barely even respond to your own name -- You're obviously a pathological liar.

STEVE

No-no-no, that's not true. I'm--

Annie walks out of the restaurant. Steve trails after her.

ANNIE

--Ugh, this always happens to me. My ex-husband was a liar, every guy at AA always has some weird list of perverted liar shit--

STEVE

--AA?

ANNIE

Yes, which I was just about to tell you about, because I'm not a goddamn liar like--

STEVE

--Hold on, just wait-- I'm--
(blurts out)

My name is Steve Bartman.

Annie stops and looks back at him -- He pulls out his PHONE and starts typing on it with quivering hands.

STEVE

That's my real name, I swear, and I'm sorry I lied, but if you look me up, I think you'll understand...

Steve slowly hands Annie his phone--

Open to a GOOGLE SEARCH of his name...

Annie reaches for the phone with one hand and fumbles to grab a TUBE OF MACE from her purse with the other.

ANNIE

Look, if this is some kind of child sex offender registry or proof that you're a murderer of women or something, I swear to God I will--

She looks down at the phone...

Seeing the countless PAGE HITS and PHOTOS from Steve's past.

ANNIE

What... the hell is all this?

EXT. INNER HARBOR - NIGHT

Steve and Annie sit on a bench at the end of the harbor, framed by the water and the Baltimore aquarium as Annie keeps digging through the Steve Bartman story on his phone.

ANNIE

This is unbelievable... There's no way this really happened to you... There's no way this really...

(looks up at Steve)

Oh my God. This is the stupidest story I've ever heard in my life!

STEVE

It's not stupid -- It's all true.

ANNIE

No, no, of course it's true -- But it's also so... *Dumb*. All of this because of a foul ball??

STEVE

It wasn't just a foul ball. If I don't reach for that ball and Alou makes the catch, the Cubs have a 97 percent chance of making it to the World Series, finally breaking the Curse of the Billy Goat and--

ANNIE

--Billy Goat?! There's something called "The Curse of the Billy Goat"? Steve, please, listen to me.

Annie takes Steve's hand, stares into his eyes, and says:

ANNIE

This is the single most stupid fucking thing I've ever heard in my life.

Steve's about to argue back, but then he looks down at HIS HAND RESTING IN HERS.

It feels good. For the first time in years, he feels good.

And finally... He smiles at her.

STEVE

You're right. It's so stupid.

ANNIE

SO stupid! I mean, you went into hiding because of this. You moved to a new city. You changed your name!

STEVE

To Ron Banks. My fake name is Ron Banks.

ANNIE

I should have *known* that was a fake name as soon as you said it! You said "Ron Banks" and I immediately thought, who gets named "Ron" anymore? That's an old ass sounding name. This guy's name is Ron??

STEVE

It is! It's so old. It was my Dad's name!

ANNIE

Your Dad? You mean your dead Dad? Your dead Dad's name was Ron?

STEVE

Yeah, but it's ok, don't be sad, he was old.

ANNIE

Of course he was -- His name was Ron!

They both LAUGH at this. Loudly.

As Steve realizes that all the worst things that ever happened to him are suddenly making him laugh right now...

And the next thing Steve realizes is that he absolutely must--

KISS THIS GIRL.

So he does. And it feels great. For both of them.

Finally, they pull apart, sharing some of that awkward post-first kiss eye contact...

Until Annie glances back at the list of YOUTUBE VIDEOS on her phone--

ANNIE

Hold on. What's this? "Steve
Bartman Likes Howard Stern's--"

STEVE

--No, no, no -- Please don't watch
that--

Too late. Annie hits PLAY and the YOUTUBE VIDEO boots up.

Depicting former Sportscenter anchor DAN PATRICK at his ESPN
NEWSDESK, announcing:

DAN PATRICK (OVER YOUTUBE)

*...Steve Bartman, lifelong Cubs fan
is joining us now via the phone on
Sportscenter -- Steve, have you
received death threats because of
this?...*

A PHOTO of Steve pops up. And an UNFAMILIAR VOICE responds...

"STEVE BARTMAN" (OVER YOUTUBE)

*Yes, I have received at least five
death threats, and I'm pretty much,
you know, hiding out right now...*

DAN PATRICK

*Steve, do you think you can stay in
the Chicago area?*

"STEVE BARTMAN"

*Um -- Do you like Howard Stern's
butt cheese?*

A very awkward beat as Dan Patrick tries not to crack up.

DAN PATRICK

*We've been had. That was not Steve
Bartman.*

The video ends and Steve and Annie look up at each other.

Bursting into LAUGHTER once again.

ANNIE

*Oh-my-God, this is amazing! Are
there more like that?? Show me, I
wanna see everything!*

Steve and Annie move closer. Feeling like the only two people
in the city right now, as they keep laughing together, and we--

CUT TO:

A CHICAGO CUBS HIGHLIGHT VIDEO

Rapid-fire and cut to an intense ROCK ANTHEM that's enough to get any diehard fired up at the sight of:

Double-plays -- Upper-deck home runs -- Fans going CRAZY!

INT. ANNIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Annie's at her desk, curiously watching the CUBS HIGHLIGHTS on her phone while a class of THIRD GRADERS takes a quiz.

The video ends and Annie picks up a day-old NEWSPAPER.

She sifts through each section, just passing the time, until she's struck by an AD in the SPORTS SECTION. It reads:

BALTIMORE ORIOLES VS CHICAGO CUBS
Fri, June 27 7:15PM

ANNIE

Holy shit--

Every pair of eight-year-old eyes darts up at her. The kids all giggle and let out "Ohhhhhhhh"s at their teacher's swear.

ANNIE

(snapping back into
teacher-mode)

Hey, eyes down, lips zipped. Focus
on your work.

The kids all snap back to work and Annie returns to her paper.

Her lips curl in a secret smile, amazed at her good fortune, as she looks down at the bottom of the ad...

BUY YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

EXT. OFFICE COURTYARD - DAY

Steve and Annie huddle up at a courtyard picnic table, eating lunch together. Annie can barely contain her excitement.

ANNIE

So, I did some research. And did
you know that the Cubs and Orioles
only play each other once every
three years?

STEVE

Yes.

ANNIE

And they alternate which city they play in every time they match-up. That means the Cubs will only play in Baltimore once every six years.

STEVE

I know. It used to be ten. Or longer.

ANNIE

That's terrible.

STEVE

Actually, it's convenient. And partly why I moved to Baltimore.

ANNIE

What do you mean?

STEVE

American League city. Zero history with the Cubs. It's almost like they don't exist out here. Then when they come out once every several years, I go out of town. Nags Head or Dewey Beach. Have you ever been to Dewey Beach?

ANNIE

No.

STEVE

Would you like to go? Sorry, when are the Cubs coming to--

ANNIE

--Friday, June 27th.

STEVE

Would you like to go to Dewey Beach on Friday, June twenty--?

ANNIE

--No, Steve, what're you--?

(beat)

We're going. To the Cubs game. I got us tickets! Aren't you excited??

Steve's face suddenly fills with dread.

Like he's just been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

STEVE

You what?

ANNIE

(uneasy)

I... got us tickets. I thought maybe we could go to the game toge--

STEVE

--I really wish you had asked me first.

ANNIE

Well, yeah, but-- I wanted it to be a surprise.

Steve gets up to throw his trash away.

Wanting to just walk away from this conversation right now.

STEVE

If you want to go, you should go. Take a friend. I don't want the ticket to go to waste.

ANNIE

(following after him)

No, Steve, I want to go with you. C'mon, it'll be fun! You'll remember how much you love the team, I'll annoy you with ridiculous questions the whole time, we'll--

He turns around. Dead serious right now.

STEVE

I can't go.

(beat)

I'm sorry, I just... I haven't been to a baseball game since that night. I haven't even watched one since my Dad died.

Annie looks back at him.

Realizing this is about much more than baseball for him.

ANNIE

What was it like?

STEVE

What?

ANNIE

Watching games with your Dad. You know, the two of you. Together.

STEVE

It was the best three hours of my day... It was the best three hours of every day.

Annie takes Steve's hand. Wanting to put him at ease again.

ANNIE

Then come to this game with me. Because I know what your days have felt like since you left home. I know what's it's like to be alone. And I promise, whether we win or we get our asses kicked, if we go to this game together...

(beat)

It'll be the best three hours of your day.

Annie smiles at him, slowly eating away at Steve's poker-face.

Until finally... He nods. Trusting her, as we--

CUT TO:

ORIOLE PARK AT CAMDEN YARDS

One of baseball's most-loved modern ballparks.

Thousands of fans cross the HOME RUN PLAQUES embedded in EUTAW STREET. The B&O WAREHOUSE frames the view from right field.

Steve and Annie move to the ENTRY GATES, taking it all in.

Annie because she's never seen anything like it before.

Steve because he hasn't seen it in so long.

STADIUM CONCESSIONS STAND

Steve stands amongst the ocean of Orioles ORANGE and BLACK, dressed in an anonymous Polo shirt and khakis.

ANNIE

(scanning the menu)

No funnel cakes, but I heard the barbecue's good.

Steve's more concerned with watching all the PASSING FANS--
Making sure none of them are whispering or staring at him.

ANNIE

Steve? You hungry?

STEVE

Oh-- Oh yeah. Sounds good.

(quiet)

Sorry, do you just... Think you
could try not to use my name?

Annie reads the rising anxiety on Steve's face. She nods.

ANNIE

Of course. You got it.

NOSEBLEED SEATS

The *verrry* top section in the right field stands. The players
all look like ants from up here.

Annie cringes, looking back at Steve.

ANNIE

Shit, do these seats suck? You've
probably never sat in seats this
sucky in your life. I'm sorry, I
didn't really know what I was--

Steve freezes at the sight of a GROUP OF CUBS FANS sliding
along the ROW UNDERNEATH THEM.

All decked out in their gear. Obvious diehards.

Steve can't breathe. Praying the Cubs fans don't look at him.

ANNIE

Actually -- Maybe the view would be
better from a little higher up.

STEVE

Higher?

ANNIE

Yeah. Like, up there?

Steve follows Annie's eyes to the VERY TOP ROW. At a cluster
of EMPTY SEATS where no one will be able to notice him.

Annie takes his hand, letting him know it's going to be ok.

ANNIE

C'mon. They say you haven't really seen a baseball game 'til you've watched it from 30,000 feet.

She smiles and leads Steve up the stairs to the top row.

MIDDLE OF THE GAME

The inning ends with the Cubs turning a beautiful DOUBLE PLAY.

Steve claps and grins. Letting his guard down a little and just enjoying the game again for the first time in years.

STEVE

So, that was called a 6-4-3 double-play. That means the shortstop, playing the 6 position, throws to the second baseman, the 4, who then throws to first base, the 3.

(beat)

Make sense?

ANNIE

No, not at all.

STEVE

Ok, well understanding basic offense is a little less complex. "On-base percentage" measures how often a player safely reaches base. "Slugging percentage" measures the power of a batter -- Then "On-base plus slugging" equals--

ANNIE

--Dude. I teach third grade, not Advanced Quantum Theory. Little to none of what you're saying is resonating with me on any level.

Steve realizes he's blowing it.

STEVE

Sorry, I'm making this super boring aren't I?

ANNIE

No-no, it's not that, just...

(beat)

Is this why people love sports?

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Because there's all these statistics, and percentages, and arguments over which player is so much better than whatever other player... Is that what you and your Dad loved about baseball?

STEVE

No. We just... Loved watching the game together.

A long beat as Steve's words sink in for both of them.

ANNIE

Great. Then let's do that.

(beat)

Let's just watch.

Steve nods, as they settle in, all alone up here together...

And slowly -- The beauty of the game begins to reveal itself:

--The way a bare-handed scoop and throw from third gets a runner out by less than half a step.

--A suicide squeeze bunt -- The ball just tip-toeing down the baseline while the runner dives across home plate.

--And of course: A HOME RUN. Wrapping around the foul pole by inches. Sending Steve and Annie leaping out of their seats.

The game ends with the Cubs turning another picture-perfect DOUBLE PLAY -- *Second Base to Shortstop to First Base.*

Annie whoops it up and turns to Steve.

ANNIE

4-6-3?

Steve's eyes light up. She's a natural.

By the time the Cubs run off the field, the scoreboard reads:

CHI CUBS 9 O's 2

Steve lifts Annie up in the air in celebration.

They kiss deeply while the fans down below head for the exits.

AN HOUR AFTER THE GAME

The Camden Yards crowds have all dispersed -- Leaving Steve and Annie the only two people still in the upper-deck seats.

Annie eats a big thing of cotton candy with her legs swung over Steve's knees. Telling him her story.

ANNIE

And the first three years were great. Everything I always dreamed of, magical, all that... whatever.

(beat)

Then we found out I was sick. It was serious, but treatable. But I ended up needing to have a pretty nasty surgery and when it was over...

Annie stops herself.

This is never going to stop being hard for her.

ANNIE

Greg came from a big family. He wanted lots of kids. We both did. I mean, I don't know if I wanted a whole summer camp like he did, but...

(beat)

Anyways, that wasn't gonna happen anymore. So he put in his time fluffing pillows and feeding me soup, until... One day. When he called me from his office and told me:

(beat)

"I'm sorry. This isn't what I signed up for."

Steve feels her hand trembling as she tells him this.

ANNIE

Like almost dying and having half my insides scooped out was what I signed up for. Like I promised him some kind of life and then took it away.

(beat)

Like I was the one who lied to him.

Steve doesn't know what to say. So he just listens.

ANNIE

He's traded up to a new family now. Couple twins and a newborn. A wife who I'll never get to judge because she preemptively blocked me on Facebook. Clever bitch.

(big bite of cotton candy)

Honestly though... I think it was my subsequent foray into internet dating that ended up really fueling my drinking problem.

Steve laughs unexpectedly.

Annie always seems to have that way with him.

ANNIE

You sound intrigued, should we deep-dive into that dark history of my life now?

STEVE

(still laughing)

No, actually, I think I'm ok--

ANNIE

--You sure? It's good stuff. Fair warning though: You will definitely need to cry alone in the shower afterwards. You will. I know this from personal experience.

They smile at each other for a long beat.

Steve is happy again. For the first time in so long.

Annie then glances at the CENTER FIELD SCOREBOARD. It reads:

JOIN US TOMORROW FOR...

O's VS CUBS

1:35 PM

She does a double-take for a second.

ANNIE

Wait-- Why are they asking us to come back tomorrow for the game we just saw today?

STEVE

Because they're playing again. Same teams.

ANNIE

What? You mean they're doing this whole thing again -- Tomorrow??

STEVE

Yeah. And the day after that. It's called a "three game series."

Annie's eyes light up.

She swings her legs off of Steve, ready to race down to the--

TICKET BOX OFFICE

Where Annie skids to a stop in front of an ORIOLES TICKET LADY.

Steve trots behind her, trying to keep up.

ANNIE

Hello, ma'am -- I'd like your two worst seats to the next two games versus the Cubs, please.

ORIOLES TICKET LADY

You said... Our two worst seats?

ANNIE

Yes, ma'am. The two worst seats in the house. As far away from the action as possible.

The Ticket Lady looks over to Steve in confusion.

STEVE

Sorry, she's... A new fan.

CUT TO:

THE NEXT TWO CUBS VS ORIOLES GAMES

Cut like a SPORTSCENTER HIGHLIGHT REEL.

The Cubs are on FIRE.

STEALING BASES -- LAUNCHING HOMERS -- TURNING DOUBLE-PLAYS

Steve and Annie are loving every minute of it from the shittiest seats in the stadium -- Their own private hideaway.

At the end of both games, the Cubs players line up and trade handshakes with each other -- Celebrating a SERIES SWEEP.

While up in the nosebleeds, Steve and Annie KISS.

And keep on kissing... The kind that won't stop until the stadium's empty and the cleaning crew kicks them out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STEVE'S CAR - NIGHT

Steve drives home from the last game at Camden Yards with Annie asleep in the passenger seat.

He makes sure Annie's passed out, then softly turns on...

The AM radio. Tuned to a SPORTS TALK SHOW.

SPORTS TALK HOST (OVER RADIO)

...And I know we don't see much of this team out in Baltimore, but man, the Cubs looked really good out there this weekend. Loaded with young pitching, they have speed, power in the middle of the order--

SPORTS TALK CO-HOST (OVER RADIO)

--No doubt about it. That's a team we could see make some real noise come September. This might be a major turning point for them...

Steve reaches for the radio -- Turning it back off, until--

ANNIE

(touching his hand)

No... Keep it.

Annie stirs, then rests her head on Steve's shoulder.

ANNIE

Has it felt this long for you too?...

STEVE

Since what?

She doesn't answer. She just falls back asleep beside him.

Steve leans closer to her, then looks back at the AM radio, still talking all about the Cubs...

He turns the radio UP just the slightest bit.

CUT TO:

INT. BARTMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Steve's sister, Molly, sits in the kitchen of the old family house. Cup of coffee in one hand, cordless phone in the other.

MOLLY

So, come on, tell me more --
Where'd you two meet?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Steve sits on his couch, talking to Molly.

STEVE

I-- Just, you know... Out.

MOLLY

You went out? In public, for a long enough period of time to meet and engage with a real-life woman?

STEVE

We were grocery shopping. Ok?

MOLLY

No, totally, I'm thrilled. I'm not trying to give you a hard time, I'm happy for you. I really am.

(beat)

So, when can we meet her?

STEVE

(knows where this is going)
Molls.

MOLLY

Ok, I get it, you just started seeing each other. I'm just saying... Has she ever been to Chicago?

Steve doesn't answer.

He grips the phone a little tighter now.

MOLLY

Steve? Hello?... This isn't why I called you, I swear.

STEVE

I know. It's ok.

MOLLY

It's just--
 (deep breath)
 You realize I have a son who
 wouldn't recognize his own uncle if
 he saw him walking down the street?
 You do know that, right?

STEVE

Molly, I told you, I--

MOLLY

--Fine, if you won't come to us,
 just let us come to you. For
 Christ's sake, I don't even have
 your home address!

STEVE

This place is temporary, you know
 that, as soon as I find a new--

MOLLY

--Oh, bullshit. Bullshit!

They both hold for a long beat. Catching their breath.

MOLLY

Steve... Are we ever going to see
 you again? Please, just tell me--
 (beat)
 Am I ever going to see my baby
 brother again?

STEVE

Yes. I'm going to come back, I
 promise I'll--

MOLLY

--When?

A long beat, as Molly looks outside her kitchen window -- At
 the OLD LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD adjacent to the house.

Where a ragtag TEAM OF YOUNGSTERS fields ground balls...

Molly's eyes narrow. She just answered her own question.

MOLLY

Steve -- That fucking team may
 never win a World Series again.
Ever. Is that what you think it's
 gonna take for people to forgive
 you? For you to finally move on?

Steve doesn't answer. He just holds the phone in silence.

MOLLY

And even if they did win, it's already too late. Dad is gone. And you're still going to let a goddamn foul ball be the reason you weren't here with us when he--

STEVE

--I have to go. I love you.

With that, Steve HANGS UP.

Leaving his sister to just stare out the window. And hope...

CUT TO:

INT. O'SULLIVAN'S BAR AND GRILL - DAY

Happy Hour again.

Annie is with Steve this time, sipping water, chatting up some of his co-workers, bringing him out of his shell.

Steve's eyes wander up towards the ROW OF TVs above the bar.

ESPN's "BASEBALL TONIGHT" is on once again.

KARL RAVECH (ON TV)

And don't look now, but after that weekend sweep of the O's, the "Never say die" Cubbies are climbing back into the race for the NL Central...

The NATIONAL LEAGUE CENTRAL STANDINGS pop up on-screen, showing the Cubs 7.5 games behind the ST. LOUIS CARDINALS.

Steve tries to look away, but he can't. Until--

The Bartender CHANGES THE CHANNEL to another cooking show.

BARTENDER

Better?

STEVE

Oh, uh... No, could you-- Could you change it back, please? And maybe turn it up a little bit? Thank you.

The Bartender rolls his eyes and flips it back to ESPN.

Steve leans in, absorbing EVERY WORD of the show now.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Annie's AA meeting.

She stands in the circle, sharing a piece of her story with the rest of the GROUP.

ANNIE

I could find any reason to have a drink. My sister's dog is getting put to sleep? Drink. Neighbor I don't like is having a going away party? Drink. Kids in my class are telling racist jokes again? You get where I'm going with this...

Steve sits beside Annie, looking up at her as she speaks.

ANNIE

I felt so alone I wanted to die. And when I was alone, I became a different person. Until I realized that if I didn't stop... That person would be all that's left.

Steve stares at Annie, getting lost in the weight of her words -- Until his phone BUZZES.

Updating with the score of the Cubs game on his ESPN app.

He tucks his phone away and CLAPS as Annie's testimony ends.

INT. PUBLIC STORAGE CENTER - DAY

Steve pulls open a door to an old STORAGE UNIT. Shafts of light pour inside. Illuminating...

ALL OF STEVE'S CUBS MEMORABILIA.

All the posters, pennants, and autographs from his old bedroom and his father's lifelong collection.

Steve steps inside, almost afraid of what's in here.

He uses his cell phone flashlight to peer into dusty boxes, holding in all his emotions, until he finds...

An old FRAMED PHOTO of Ron and Steve at Wrigley Field.

One that once hung in Steve's bedroom. Depicting a 10-year-old Steve, watching a game with his father behind home plate.

Steve stares at the photo. Missing his Dad more than ever.

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Annie helps Steve hang a vintage CUBS FLAG and decorate the room with a few old pieces of his memorabilia collection.

The apartment's formerly sterile interior is now brightened with some much needed touches of BLUE AND RED.

ANNIE

Looks great. But maybe you can find a new place for that old ball over there? It looks like it's been to hell and back.

She grabs RON'S LUCKY FOUL BALL from the mantel -- Sitting next to Ron and Steve's Wrigley Field photo now.

STEVE

No-no-no, that was my Dad's.

Annie looks at the ball. Realizing what she's holding.

ANNIE

Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't--

STEVE

--No, it's ok, I just... Keep it with me because he never got to see them win and--

BAM-BAM-BAM. Three loud KNOCKS at the door interrupt them.

Steve JUMPS. His paranoia kicks in -- Suddenly petrified.

STEVE

Who's that?

Annie peers out the window and bounces with excitement.

ANNIE

No-no-no, it's nothing -- I just wanted this to be a surprise because you don't strike me as the kind of guy who's into big gifts. But it was on sale and you're gonna need a way to watch the games because you don't own a TV -- Which is honestly a little too hipster-intellectual or borderline serial killer-y for my taste, so...

She opens the door and reveals TWO BEST BUY DELIVERY MEN.

Hauling in a brand new FLAT SCREEN TV.

STEVE

Oh my God. You-- You didn't have to do that. I can just check the scores on my phone or watch highlights online at work.

ANNIE

Now why in the world would you wanna do that?

(beat)

When we can watch them together?

She touches his arm, ready to float off the ground.

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Steve and Annie sit in front of Steve's new TV, so happy, watching a CHICAGO CUBS VS WASHINGTON NATIONALS GAME.

Steve holds his father's foul ball in one hand and Annie's hand in the other. Glancing up on the mantel where he sees...

The OLD PHOTOGRAPH of Ron and Steve at Wrigley Field.

Steve smiles at the picture, losing himself -- Taken away by the perfect image of father and son -- as the SOUNDS OF THE GAME bleed over this moment...

Almost bringing Ron back to life for an instant, until--

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

And that's a foul ball heading towards the seats -- Harper gives chase, reaching into the stands and--

The NATIONALS RIGHT FIELDER makes a SPECTACULAR CATCH--

Reaching into a CLUSTER OF FANS to snag a foul ball.

ANNIE

Oh my God! He caught that??

CUBS COLOR COMMENTATOR (ON TV)

Wow, that was one for the highlight reel. The Nats are just lucky Steve Bartman wasn't sitting in that seat!

Steve and Annie both freeze.

Watching the Announcers yuck it up together -- While GRAINY VIDEO of Steve's infamous moment comes on-screen.

Still far from forgotten, all these years later.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
*Seriously. Where's that guy when
 you actually need him, right?*

Annie turns to Steve.

She can feel every muscle in his body tense up -- as he
 SQUEEZES Ron's baseball in one hand and--

ANNIE
 Ow.

--Squeezes Annie's hand in the other.

STEVE
 Oh, I'm sorry-- I'm so sorry, I--

ANNIE
 --No, no, that's ok, that's ok.

Annie slips her hand away and rubs Steve's back.

Supporting him, but unable to mask her look of concern, as we--

CUT TO:

THE CITY OF CHICAGO

Alive, hopeful, full of passionate love for the Cubs as we
 FLY around the city's most famous streets and landmarks.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)
*"Abandon all hope, ye who enter
 here." You know who said that?
 (beat)
Someone who's never been to
 Chicago.*

WRIGLEY FIELD

Fans celebrate another CUBS VICTORY at Wrigley.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)
*There's not many people still
 walking this Earth who were alive
 in 1908. Who were here the last
 time the Cubs won it all...*

They cheer and high-five as the HAND OPERATED SCOREBOARD
 updates the Cubs' place in the CENTRAL DIVISION STANDINGS:

SIX GAMES BACK OF THE ST. LOUIS CARDINALS.

STEVE'S APARTMENT

Steve and Annie watch another Cubs game on Steve's new TV, a feast of Chinese take-out spread out in front of them.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)

Over a century of losing might be enough to break some cities. But not here. Because in Chicago, Cubs fans have a saying...

(beat)

We say "This is the year."

Steve inches closer to the TV -- Hanging on every pitch.

BARTMAN HOUSE

Molly and Jacob sit in their living room beside their strapping young son, DENNIS.

He opens up a UPS PACKAGE. It's a wrapped BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

The card attached reads:

Happy Birthday, Denny. See you at the World Series!

Love, Uncle Steve

Dennis tears open the gift, delighted at the sight of...

A brand new CUBS JERSEY, HAT, and BASEBALL GLOVE.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)

We don't say "This could be the year." Or "This might be the year."

Molly and Jacob look up at each other. Exhaling sadly.

AA MEETING

Annie's in the usual circle, sipping a coffee, while another SPEAKER shares with the group.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)

We say "This IS the year."

But this time, STRANGERS are sitting on both sides of her.

Steve is nowhere to be found.

ESPN'S "BASEBALL TONIGHT"

The show's HOSTS analyze the CENTRAL DIVISION STANDINGS.

Another win brings the Cubs within 4.5 games of first place.

ANNIE'S BEDROOM

Annie sleeps alone. She rolls over, reaching across the bed for where Steve usually is, but he's not here.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)
Because we believe. No matter how long the drought or how strong the curse. We've survived the billy goat in '45, the black cat in '69, Bartman in 2003...

ANNIE'S BATHROOM

Steve sits on the toilet at 1:30AM -- Watching the final innings of the CARDINALS AT LA DODGERS GAME on his phone.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)
And after all of it, we still believe that the curse will be lifted and the suffering will end...

He lives and dies with every pitch. Desperate to know whether or not the Cubs will gain another game on their arch-rivals.

SPORTS RADIO HOST (V.O.)
Think that sounds dramatic? Ok, fair enough...
 (beat)
You just don't know how it feels to be a fan.

INT. CUBS BROADCAST BOOTH - NIGHT

The CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER gives an update from Wrigley Field.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER
 And folks, with the Cardinals falling to the San Francisco Giants earlier today -- That means our Cubs will be just two games out of first place if they can preserve this one-run lead in the ninth...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Steve leans towards the TV, clutching his father's foul ball, watching this update during a pivotal Cubs game vs the Reds.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
And that's with just one week left to go before the pivotal three-game series versus St. Louis to end the regular season...

Annie walks through the living room, holding her purse.

ANNIE
 You sure you don't wanna come to the meeting? You haven't been in a while and it was really great having you--

STEVE
 (not looking up)
 --I'll be at the next one. Promise.

Annie nods, trying to take it in stride.

ANNIE
 Ok, well... Good luck.

Annie steals a kiss from him and heads out. Steve's eyes stay glued to the TV, as the CUBS PITCHER gives up a leadoff WALK.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
And that's ball four -- Batter, take your base.

Steve digs his nails into his father's baseball. Furious.

STEVE
Fuck.

THREE BATTERS LATER

Steve leans in closer -- Sweating and breathing heavily.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
...Just one more out will wrap this one up for the Cubbies, Jackson with the pitch and--

WHACK! The REDS BATTER smashes a shot right up the middle.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
*And that'll bring the tying run in
 to score -- Fowler has to hurry to
 make a play at the plate -- Oh no,
 he bobbles the ball and...*

The Reds score the WINNING RUN. Cubs lose.

And suddenly-- Everything goes SILENT for Steve.

He looks down at his father's foul ball in his hand--

Then up at the OLD PHOTOGRAPH of them on the mantel...

A flood of emotion fills his eyes -- The pain and rage of
 everything he's lost BOILS up inside of him, until finally--

STEVE
GOD FUCKING DAMMIT!!

Steve cocks back and HURLS HIS FATHER'S BASEBALL STRAIGHT
 INTO THE TV -- SHATTERING THE SCREEN ON IMPACT.

It all happens so fast, Steve can barely make sense of what
 he's done.

He takes short, panicky breaths -- Then gets up and
 immediately starts hauling the ruined TV out the front door.

INT. BEST BUY - NIGHT

Steve stands at the CHECK-OUT REGISTER -- Ringing up another
 BRAND NEW FLAT SCREEN. Just like the one Annie got him.

BEST BUY CHECK-OUT GIRL
 That'll be 428.56 -- Would you like
 to apply for a Best Buy credit card
 and qualify for 12-month financ--

STEVE
 --No, thank you. Actually, I'm in
 kind of a hurry.

Steve hands the girl his credit card and forces a smile.

Hating to be rude.

EXT. BEST BUY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Steve opens his car door, as a BEST BUY EMPLOYEE lifts the
 heavy TV off a cart and slides it into Steve's backseat.

STEVE

Thank you for your help.

Steve reaches in his wallet and tips the guy \$5.

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

Not a problem. And thank you, Mr--

The Employee picks Steve's SALES RECEIPT off the cart, glancing at the NAME printed at the top.

He stops, checks the receipt again, then turns back to Steve.

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

Hey. You know you got the same name as that guy? Remember that Cubs fan? With the foul ball?

Steve turns RED in an instant. He SNATCHES the receipt back.

STEVE

Have a good night.

Steve pushes past him, heading for his front door.

The Employee follows closely behind -- Seeing the obvious panic on Steve's face -- suddenly realizing...

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

Holy shit... You're him aren't you?

STEVE

Excuse me, I really have to--

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

--Hey, look man, I don't wanna give you a hard time, but I've got a buddy who works at Bleacher Report--

STEVE

--I don't know what you're talking about, I have to go--

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

--If I could put you two in touch. He wouldn't have to write about where you live now or anything. They'll pay you to just--

Steve opens the front door--

The Employee corners him, just inches away now.

BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

People wanna know what happened to you, man. What about all the Cubs fans who deserve to know what--?

The Employee GRABS STEVE'S ARM -- Holding him back for a frightening instant, until Steve turns and--

SHOVES THE MAN AS HARD AS HE CAN.

STEVE

Get the fuck away from me.

The Employee stumbles backwards -- SLAMMING into a nearby parked car. Other CUSTOMERS gasp and stare from afar.

Steve looks up in horror. Right hand balled into a FIST.

This was the biggest physical confrontation of his life.

STEVE

I'm... I'm sorry.

Steve dives inside his car and peels away as fast as he can.

INT. STEVE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Early the next morning, Steve gives Annie a kiss goodbye as he grabs his stuff and heads for the door.

STEVE

See you tonight. Love you.

ANNIE

Love you too -- Oh, and by the way... We win last night?

Steve flinches at the memory of last night's game.

STEVE

Yup. Great game.

Annie smiles as he takes off.

She sips a cup of coffee and flips on the TV -- Checking last night's highlights on ESPN.

Until she's struck by the CRAWL on the bottom of the screen:

CUBS 3 REDS 4

Annie scrunches her face -- *Didn't Steve just say they won?*

She steps closer to the TV -- Making sure she's not seeing things -- when she suddenly notices...

THE YELLOW ENERGY GUIDE STICKER on the bottom of the set.

The tiny sticker that everyone forgets to peel off when they've just bought a brand new TV.

Annie stares at the TV -- *Studying it* -- Totally confused...

EXT. STEVE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

Annie walks softly down the stairs and through the lot, making sure no one's around to spot her.

She strides to the DUMPSTERS -- Opens them up.

She rifles through all the TRASH BAGS and CARDBOARD BOXES inside-- Until she finds:

THE TV SHE BOUGHT FOR STEVE.

With a BASEBALL-SIZED HOLE smashed right in the middle of it.

Annie's eyes fill with panic. Like she's found a dead body.

ANNIE
Jesus Christ...

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Annie sits in the corner of the lounge, cell phone to her ear, having a hushed conversation with her AA SPONSOR.

ANNIE
Yeah, um, I'm calling about my
boyfriend. I... I think he may need
help and I don't know how to--

AA SPONSOR (OVER PHONE)
--Is he in recovery presently?

Annie has her laptop in front of her -- Watching the YOUTUBE VIDEO of the full, unbroken nightmare Steve endured at Game 6.

ANNIE
No.

AA SPONSOR (OVER PHONE)
And is he dealing with an alcohol
dependency? Or drugs, or--

ANNIE

--I... I don't know. I'm sorry, I don't really know how to classify what he's going through, I--

AA SPONSOR (OVER PHONE)

--It's ok, it's ok. Let me just ask you: Has he experienced any kind of past emotional traumas that could have been recently triggered?

Annie watches the FOOTAGE of Steve getting a FULL BEER thrown in his face.

Her heart wrenches at the sight of her boyfriend staring blankly as he wipes the beer off his face.

Destroyed inside.

ANNIE

Yes.

INT. ANNIE'S CAR - DAY

Annie sits alone in her car in the school parking lot.

She holds her phone up close to her face, watching an ESPN VIDEO analyzing the current PENNANT RACES:

KARL RAVECH (ON PHONE)

...And for the Cubs, it all comes down to this final three-game series with the Cardinals. Chicago needs to sweep all three contests at Wrigley to make the playoffs -- It's winner take all.

(beat)

And if the Cubs' miraculous run falls short, that'll make it a brutal 107 years without a World Series title for the North Siders...

Annie swipes off the video, struggling to catch her breath.

Utterly petrified about the outcome of these next three games.

INT. CHAIN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Date night.

Steve and Annie sit quietly, sharing appetizers in a corner booth.

ANNIE

So... I was thinking maybe we could take one of those trips you were talking about sometime soon. You know, Dewey Beach?

Steve's adrift in his own world -- Sucked in by the TV near the bar broadcasting tonight's BASEBALL HIGHLIGHTS.

Annie reaches for his hand. More concerned than annoyed.

ANNIE

Steve?

STEVE

Oh-- I'm sorry. Yeah, Dewey Beach, totally. When?

ANNIE

How 'bout this weekend?

STEVE

This weekend? You mean tomorrow? I don't think that's gonna work.

ANNIE

How come?

STEVE

It's the Cubs' last series of the regular season. If they sweep the Cardinals, they'll make the playoffs and--

ANNIE

--No, I know that, but--

STEVE

--It's incredibly difficult to reach the postseason in baseball. Only one third of the teams--

ANNIE

--Right, but whether or not you're actually watching really has nothing to do with how they--

STEVE

--And they're one of the hottest teams in the league right now with an excellent chance to--

ANNIE

--Steve!

He shuts up.

Looking over both shoulders to make sure no one heard them.

STEVE

Could you... not say my name so loudly, please?

ANNIE

Sorry. I just... You know I would never lie to you. So that's why I feel like I need to tell you that what's going on right now with you... and this team...

(beat)

It doesn't feel right.

STEVE

That's just because you don't have that connection to a team yet. You don't know what this feels like.

ANNIE

You mean the obsession, the isolation, the depression?...

STEVE

Those are very strong words and I don't think it's fair to--

ANNIE

--How long has it been since you've seen your family?

He freezes at that question. Caught way off guard.

ANNIE

Or introduced yourself to someone by your real name? When was the last time you walked past a stranger on the street and didn't wish to God that you could trade lives with them? Just for a day.

Steve blinks down at the table.

His voice trembles. Barely more than a whisper now.

STEVE

You don't understand. My Dad... All he wanted was to see them win. It's my fault he never--

ANNIE

--No. Your Dad wanted to see them win with you. He loved that team because he shared them with you.

(beat)

Jesus, Steve -- Don't you know that your life is about so much more than a game? It's about so much more than that night.

She lets that hang there. For as long as she needs to.

STEVE

If we can just finally win... Just once. I promise I can let this go.

ANNIE

And what if they don't win?

STEVE

We're eliminated from playoff contention.

ANNIE

No. I mean what's going to happen... If they *never* win.

Steve holds for a beat. Glancing back at the TV over the bar.

STEVE

They're going to win. I know it.

CUT TO:

WRIGLEY FIELD

Where the OUTFIELD LIGHTS burst to life once again and a herd of hopeful FANS files through the gates.

The Cubs and Cardinals take the field and the game begins...

It feels like the entire stadium is watching in silence.

INT. ANNIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Steve and Annie watch on TV, nerves fraying with every pitch.

It's a tense, low-scoring game.

With every play -- Good or bad -- there is no joy.

Only PAIN or RELIEF.

Finally-- The Cardinals push a run across on a SACRIFICE FLY.

Annie's face falls. Steve sits perfectly still, as we reach--

THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH

The Cubs are at the plate. Down to their last three outs.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (OVER TV)

*This is it, folks. Bottom of the
ninth, three outs to go and we need
one run to live another inning --
Two runs to live another day...*

Steve sets down his father's foul ball on the table in front of him. He'll squeeze it into dust if he doesn't.

The first pitch from the CARDINALS CLOSER comes in--

--A CHOPPER to third -- The RUNNER beats out an INFIELD SINGLE by a quarter of a step.

ANNIE

Oh-my-God. Yes!

Steve doesn't crack. He knows they need more. Next play:

--A SACRIFICE BUNT. Moving the runner into scoring position.

ONE OUT.

--Then, a WALK. Runners at FIRST and SECOND.

Steve hunches over. Leaned all the way in. Next play:

--A LONG FLY BALL... All the way back to the WARNING TRACK.

ANNIE

GO! GO!!

But it's CAUGHT.

The runners advance to SECOND and THIRD on the SAC FLY.

TWO OUTS.

--The next pitch comes in and-- HITS THE BATTER IN THE BACK.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

*And Baez took that one right
between the shoulder blades and
that's gonna load the bases for the
Cubs here with two outs!*

Steve still doesn't speak. He just reaches for his Dad's lucky ball again. Holding it tight, as--

STRIKE ONE. Swing and a miss.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
My goodness, Rizzo's trying to get us all out of here on one pitch.

Next pitch: STRIKE TWO. Looking at a curveball at the knees.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
And the Cubs are down to their last strike...

Annie closes her eyes. Steve holds his breath.

The pitch comes in-- *POPPED UP FOUL* down the third baseline.

Lofting ever so close to Aisle 4 -- The section where Steve sat for Game 6...

STEVE
 Get in the seats -- C'mon, get in the seats--

The ball hits its apex -- Looking like it has a chance to reach Aisle 4 and extend the game.

The FANS in the seats below all STAND -- REACHING UP...

Until the ball dies in the air--

Landing safely in the glove of the CARDINALS THIRD BASEMAN.

THREE OUTS.

Final score:

ST. LOUIS 1 CUBS 0

It's over. But Steve can't take his eyes off the screen.

Returning to the nightmare of years past all over again.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)
Well, that'll do it, folks. We've got two more games left in the season -- But there will be no playoff magic. And once again our chance at breaking that darn curse... Just wasn't meant to be.

Steve shakes, barely able to keep breathing, until he finally looks over at Annie...

She has tears in her eyes.

For the exact same reason Steve's Dad did after Game 7 in '03.

STEVE

What're you doing?

ANNIE

(wiping her tears)

Nothing, I'm fine, I just--

STEVE

--Are you crying? Are you--?

(beat)

Why are you crying?

ANNIE

Because... They lost. And I know how much--

STEVE

--You can't cry.

She looks back at him through the tears. Suddenly hurt.

ANNIE

What?

STEVE

I've been watching this team lose my whole FUCKING life. You've watched for four months.

(rising anger)

Who are you to cry?

ANNIE

Who am I? Who are you?! Seriously, who the fuck is-- This guy. Who yells, and hurts, and... Throws fucking baseballs through television screens!

STEVE

That's being a fan!

ANNIE

No! That's being a fucking psychopath! Did your Dad ever throw that ball through a TV?! Or a window? Did he?

Steve looks down at the ball.

The thing his father loved more than anything in the world.

STEVE

I'm sorry this isn't what you
signed up for.

Those are probably the most hurtful words Steve could say to
Annie right now.

Her anger is the only thing pushing back her tears.

ANNIE

Fuck you.

STEVE

(immediately feeling
terrible)

Wait-- I'm sorry, I--

ANNIE

--No. You don't get to say
something like that to me and just
apologize your way out of it. Your
usually other-worldly level of
politeness can't do a goddamn thing
to take that back right now.

Annie gets up and moves away from Steve.

ANNIE

I know you hate yourself because
you think you cost your father
this... piece of joy that he never
got to feel. And you think I don't
understand it -- And right now, I
hope I never do.

(beat)

But I've seen what happens when you
love something so much... and it
won't ever love you back.

Steve just stares back at her. Taking in all of her pain.

ANNIE

You love this team so much... And
it doesn't even know you exist. It
has no regard for you, or your
pain, or your happiness. It has and
always will proceed in exactly the
same way, forever, whether you are
still alive to see it or not.

STEVE

That's not true. If I hadn't been there to catch that ball--

ANNIE

--It would have been someone else! It could have been anyone else! But it's easier to blame YOU -- To blame *yourself* -- than to admit we're all utterly fucking powerless to control the only things in our lives that can make us happy.

She takes a long breath and looks Steve in the eyes.

ANNIE

What do you think would happen if they finally won? You could go back home? Back to your old name? Go to the games, high-five strangers... And look up and see your Dad again?
(beat)

And what if you walked into that place tomorrow? Would they kill you? Burn you alive? Maybe that's what you want. Because maybe that's what you think will finally get them to forgive you...

Steve is frozen. He knows every word she's said is true.

ANNIE

I think you should go.

STEVE

Go where?

ANNIE

I don't care.

(beat)

Just go, Steve.

Finally, Steve just nods.

He walks out the door, RUNS down the stairs, into the--

APARTMENT PARKING LOT

Where Steve jumps in his car, SPEEDS AWAY, and DRIVES...

STEVE'S CAR

He just drives and drives and drives--

Baltimore receding in the distance...

No idea where he's going -- He just needs to get there FAST.

EMPTY HIGHWAYS

Steve keeps driving. With a purpose now.

White-knuckling the wheel as he hits a SIGN reading:

PENNSYLVANIA WELCOMES YOU

Steve keeps going -- Stopping for nothing -- A man possessed.

It's the middle of the night now, but Steve is still WIDE AWAKE, as he blows by:

WELCOME TO OHIO

Hours and hours have passed, as Steve hits:

INDIANA - CROSSROADS OF AMERICA

And suddenly, the first rays of DAYLIGHT start to creep through as Steve reaches:

WELCOME TO ILLINOIS - THE LAND OF LINCOLN

His eyes are barely open now, but he can't stop.

He's too close.

Too close to...

WRIGLEY FIELD

Shining like a jewel in the early morning sun once again.

The DIGITAL CRAWL beneath the RED NEON MARQUEE reads:

CUBS VS CARDINALS

OCTOBER 3 3:05PM

And in the distance, parked on a dingy side street, we find:

STEVE'S CAR.

Steve sits passed out in the front seat. Exhausted and out cold. But not for long...

It's almost game time.

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD - ADDISON STREET ENTRANCE - DAY

Steve stands on the sidewalk just outside the stadium, haggling with a TICKET SCALPER for a last-minute seat.

FANS file in around him from every direction.

Steve shields his face, hands the Scalper some cash and takes his ticket.

INT. WRIGLEY FIELD - STADIUM CONCOURSE - DAY

Steve walks slowly through the herd of Cubs fans.

Like an inmate being led to the electric chair.

Every nearby FOOTSTEP -- Every HOLLER from across the concourse -- Every split-second of EYE CONTACT sends shivers up Steve's spine.

But he keeps walking.

Ready for whatever's coming to him, until he reaches...

WRIGLEY FIELD - LEFT FIELD SEATS

Aisle 4. Row 8. Seat 113.

There it is. The seat Steve sat in during Game 6.

Steve stands at the top of the aisle -- Ready to move closer to it -- Ready to return to the scene of the crime, until--

He sees the seat is surrounded by SMILING FANS.

Posing -- Laughing -- Taking selfies at this infamous piece of baseball real estate.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey, excuse me--

Steve turns. Ready to be exposed.

He stares back at a YOUNG DAD holding his 5-YEAR-OLD SON in his arms.

YOUNG DAD
 Would you mind taking a picture of
 us? At the seat?

This guy doesn't recognize him. In fact, no one does.

Nobody here could pick Steve out of a lineup right now.

STEVE
 I, uh... Sure.

The Young Dad hands Steve his phone and hoists his adoring son
 on his shoulder.

Smiling big as they pose at Steve's seat.

YOUNG DAD
 (to his son)
 Smile, buddy. Big smile, ok?
 (to Steve)
 It's his first game.

Steve takes the photo and walks it back to the Father and Son.

STEVE
 No kidding?

YOUNG DAD
 Yeah. Tell me if I'm doing the
 wrong thing. After that loss last
 night, you think I'm setting the
 little guy up for a lifetime of
 heartbreak?

Steve looks at the little boy.

Staring out at Wrigley Field with wide eyes like it's the
 greatest place on Earth.

STEVE
 No. Not if he always remembers how
 good it feels to be here right now.
 With his Dad.

The Young Dad smiles and takes his phone back.

YOUNG DAD
 You know what seat this is?

STEVE
 Yeah.

YOUNG DAD

Poor guy. You know, sometimes I wonder whatever happened to him...

(beat)

I mean, when it happened, I was furious, I was going crazy just like everyone else, but-- He was just... A fan. You know?

Steve nods.

YOUNG DAD

I'm sorry, I don't wanna talk your ear off, you've probably got your own friends to meet up with--

STEVE

--No, actually, I came by myself.

YOUNG DAD

By yourself? Where're you sitting?

STEVE

Over in right field, up by the--

YOUNG DAD

--You can't come to Wrigley and watch a game by yourself, man. That's like an unwritten rule of this place.

(setting his son down)

Listen, my wife was gonna come with us, but she's sick today, so we've got an empty seat right beside us.

(beat)

You wanna sit over here with us?

Steve looks back at the Father and Son. Feeling the love they have for this field, this team, and each other.

STEVE

That'd be great. Thank you.

YOUNG DAD

My pleasure. I'm Chris, by the way. And the little guy's Nicky.

(extends his hand)

What's your name?

Steve shakes his hand, looks him square in the eye, and says:

STEVE

I'm Steve.

The Young Dad smiles and directs Steve to their seats, where they settle in as...

THE GAME BEGINS

And for once, Steve just lets go and enjoys all the classic moments of a day at the ballpark:

--The CUBS PLAYERS racing out to take the field. Some do FLIPS across the grass, waving out to the fans.

--The CRACKS of the bats. The SNAP of a blazing fastball colliding with a leather glove.

--The Cubs score their FIRST RUN. Then another. Steve, Chris, Nicky, and all the FANS sitting around them HIGH-FIVE and CHEST BUMP like little kids.

--A CARDINALS slugger hits a HOME RUN to the center field bleachers. The crowd breaks into a deafening "THROW IT BACK!" chant. Steve and the others GO NUTS as the fan throws the Cardinals home run ball back onto the field.

--At the SEVENTH INNING STRETCH, Steve sings "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" with the rest of the Wrigley faithful. A Cubs tradition that brings the entire stadium together as one.

--And finally, THE LAST OUT. It's a Cubs victory. Steve claps and cheers his ass off. Hugging strangers. Pumping his fist.

Overjoyed like his team just won Game 7 of the World Series.

Steve then looks out behind HOME PLATE, at a pair of familiar seats -- Where he suddenly sees...

HIS DAD.

The Ron Bartman from the decades-old photo at Wrigley Field.

And sitting right beside him is 10-YEAR-OLD STEVE.

Both standing, cheering, sharing this beautiful moment together...

Father and son.

Steve stares out at this vision -- This perfect memory -- as his pain melts away and TEARS fill his eyes.

He's been waiting for this moment for so long.

STADIUM CONCOURSE

After the game, Steve moves through the DEPARTING CROWD.
Still undetected and closing in on the EXIT GATES up ahead.
His mission is almost complete, until...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

--Steve?

Steve flinches, but doesn't look back. Just keeps moving.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Steve! Hey, Steve!

He picks up his pace now, about to move into a full jog to escape the pursuing voice, until he looks back and sees:

MARK. The old friend who attended Game 6 with him.

MARK

Oh my God. Steve. It's--

(beat)

It's you, right?

Steve looks over both shoulders, making sure no one else is listening in on them.

STEVE

Mark. Hey.

And suddenly, Mark's eyes fill with a hint of emotion.

This is a moment he never thought he'd have.

MARK

I... I can't believe-- It's been so long.

STEVE

Yeah. How've you been?

MARK

I'm-- I'm great. Still at Hewitt. We actually have a suite at the stadium now, that's why I'm here. Hey, you wanna come up and check it out? Say hi to some of the old--

STEVE

--No. No thank you. I appreciate that though.

Mark nods. Realizing how hard this is for Steve.

MARK

Lori's up there too. Remember her?
 (holds up his ring finger)
 Married going on eight years now.
 Two kids. Can you believe it?

Mark pulls out his phone and shows Steve a bunch of PHOTOS of his family.

Lori and their TWO ADORABLE CHILDREN decked out in CUBS GEAR.

MARK

Lori's a diehard fan too now. She knows all the players, their stats, when their contract's up... I swear, she must've learned it all from you.

STEVE

No... I-- I don't think so.

MARK

And she still talks about your Dad, man. She only met him that one time, but she still says he was the best fan she's ever met...

(beat)

I meant to call you when I heard about him. But I just-- Didn't know how to reach you back then and...

Mark stops himself and looks back at Steve for a long beat.

Tinged with sadness for both of them.

MARK

I'm so sorry, man. I am. I never should've left you alone that night, I--

(beat)

I should've been a better friend to you.

Those words make Steve stand up just a little straighter.

MARK

I mean, I think about it all the time. If it had been me sitting in that seat instead of you... I would've done the exact same thing. We all would have. Every single person in this stadium.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

(beat)

And I think if they could, they'd all tell you the same thing. That what happened that night -- Was wrong. You deserved better than that.

Mark's apology may not be coming from every fan in Wrigley right now, but it may as well be.

STEVE

Don't worry about it, Mark. It was just a game.

Mark nods.

He knows Steve's lying, but pretends not to.

MARK

And hey, too bad we came up short this season -- But we've got a nice little squad lined up now, don't you think? We could make a run next year for sure.

STEVE

Yeah... I've got a good feeling about next year.

MARK

You always do... That's why places like this wouldn't exist without fans like you.

The guys share a small smile.

Their mutual hope serving as an unbreakable bond.

MARK

Anyways, it was great to run into you. I hope we see you back here again soon.

STEVE

Thanks. Me too.

And with that, the guys share a brief hug, a wave, and go their separate ways once again.

Steve exhales...

Finally feeling whole again as he exits the stadium.

But just before he walks out, his eyes land on one last thing--

A CONCESSIONS STAND.

Packing up. Just about to close.

But still radiating with the warm aroma of...

FUNNEL CAKES.

Steve smiles and heads towards the stand, not ready to leave Wrigley quite yet, as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE OLD LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD

The one adjacent to Steve's old house in Lincolnshire -- Where he used to coach his team of Little Leaguers, The Renegades.

It's bright and early the next morning, when we find Steve exiting the house he once shared with his father -- Now home to his sister Molly, Jacob, and their son, Dennis.

Steve walks to his car and gives Molly a hug goodbye, then hugs Jacob and Dennis.

STEVE

I'll see you guys soon.

MOLLY

How soon?

Steve gets in the car and looks up at his sister. Bringing a long overdue smile to her face.

STEVE

You won't even know I'm gone this time.

With that, Steve waves goodbye and hits the road.

As he goes, he looks down at the passenger seat next to him.

TWO FUNNEL CAKES sit covered in saran wrap. Ready to make the trip back home with him.

STEVE'S CAR

It's HOURS LATER now and the sun is just starting to set.

The radio's on -- The call for the final Cubs game of the season fills the air.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER RADIO)
*...So here we are, the ninth inning
of game number one-sixty-two, and
our Cubs need just three outs to
end this season with a win...*

Steve breathes easy, steering back down some familiar streets.

CUBS RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER RADIO)
*A cynic might call it a meaningless
victory -- But I've never met a
Cubs fan in my life foolish enough
to call any victory meaningless...*

INT. ANNIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Annie sits alone on her couch, watching the end of the Cubs game in silence.

The Cardinals batter swings and misses for out number one, just as Annie hears a KNOCK at her door.

She gets up and answers.

It's Steve. Holding the plate of funnel cakes.

STEVE
Hey.

ANNIE
Hi.

She glances down at the funnel cakes. Then back at Steve.

ANNIE
Where'd you go the other night?

Steve breathes in and out. Finally so happy to say:

STEVE
I went home.

ANNIE'S COUCH

Steve and Annie sit side-by-side, sharing the funnel cakes, watching the last few pitches of the Cubs' season.

ANNIE
(mouth full)
Not bad. Little chewy, but decent.

STEVE

Yeah. Sugar-coated fried dough
isn't really made to hold up well
the next day, but...

(takes another bite)

They're great at the ballpark
though.

ANNIE

Yeah? Well, maybe we'll go sometime.

Steve smiles and nods.

STEVE

Can't wait.

Annie smiles back and they turn to the TV -- Where a lazy POP
FLY to right field sends the Cardinals down in order.

The Cubs high-five and line up to congratulate each other on
the win.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

*And that's gonna close the book on
another season of Cubs baseball,
folks. I hope you enjoyed sharing
it with us as much as we enjoyed
sharing it with you...*

The Wrigley crowd STANDS UP and APPLAUDS as the Cubs leave
the field.

Proud of their team. No matter what.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

*I know this year ended a little
sooner than we all hoped, just like
they all have since back in good
ol' 1908. But if you're feeling a
little blue right now, guess what?
I've got good news for you...*

Steve looks back at Annie. She holds his hand.

He holds hers right back. Never more hopeful than now.

CUBS GAME ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

There's always next year.

FADE OUT.

THE END