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THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE DAY OF HIS LIFE
A short story by Charlie Teljeur

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And he will awaken early, unable to sleep, knowing full-well what this fateful day holds for him.

And he will feel nauseous, so nauseous he will be unable to keep any food down nor drink anything of consequence.

And he will be overcome by nerves, almost numbed by the fear of what the day could, and will bring. And of knowing that the season, the day and perhaps even the moment will all come down to him – as it always does – to fether away his density.

And he *knows* it *will* ultimately come down to him, as it always does. And he knows the roulette wheel always stops on Red. And he, is always Red.

And he knows his life has always been like this, one blown opportunity after another, the constant test of his will and of his character, and of his potential.

And he will ask his Mother on that day if she will come to see him play - all the time hoping she'll mournfully refuse so that he may be alone in this grand witness to failure. And she *will* refuse to go. And she will attest it to her being sick. And it seems she's always sick or at least she's *always sick* when it comes to watching him play. And he will be happy that she can't make it although he hates disappointing her. And he much prefers disappointing her with a tragic story told in *his* first-person, rather than *hers*.

And he will kiss her gently and stroke her warm face, trying to draw visceral inspiration from whatever grand, unwavering spirit dwells within her powerful eyes. And he will hug her before he leaves. And she will tell him that she loves him and that she thinks *this is your day* - as she always says. And he will smile for her, insincerely and shallow, so transparent they likely both sense his ultimate doom.

And he will walk the lonely half-mile to the baseball diamond, hoping and praying the ball is not hit to him or that he never comes to bat with anything vital at stake. And he hopes his team can find a way to win, in spite of him. And he hopes, on this day, God is listening.

And he will dress in his corner locker as he always does. And he will stay quiet, talking to no one as if doing so may sap the last bit of athletic ability he has somewhere inside. And he will watch his teammates - uncharacteristically quiet - knowing how important this game is to them as a team, and as growing men. And he will be sick to his stomach continuously. And he will throw up at least once. And he will sweat as much *in* the locker room as the other players do in the field.

And the coach will come in and tell them how proud he is of them. And he will tell them how utterly unimportant the outcome of the game is. And then, he will stress how important it is to win this game. And he will tell them that, three more times.

And there will be a team huddle and a team prayer. And the players will embrace each other, more comfortable with intimately touching each other than they ever have, or will be, again. And each boy will hope to ingest and absorb the strength they feel in this communion. And they will pray for a successful outcome. And they will pray that no one gets hurt.

And he will pray that no one of any significance to him, is there to watch his inevitable gaffe.

And his team will take the field. And he will take his position in right field, the position his coach informs him, *is very critical*. And he knows *critical* translates to *smallest chance of failure* against a team stacked with right-handed hitters. And he will pray, during every at-bat, for his opponent to rain down fly balls on the left fielder or the centerfielder – or anyone else on the field for that matter, save him.

And he will escape the first three innings unscathed, though he will see a ball venture deeply into his territory. And he will be saved by a second baseman who runs like a gazelle. And he will thank God for second basemen with great range.

And he will bat, for the first time, in the bottom of the third inning. And he will face five pitches. And he will foul one off majestically, momentarily releasing him from his life of hopeless-mediocrity. And he will close his eyes as he always does when batting. And he will hope the Greater Being in charge, will grab the bat from his hands and wallop the ball into orbit. And he will swing mightily at a huge curve ball, almost

dead as it reaches the plate, and he will grimace as if he was *this close* to smacking a double. And he will sit down at the end of the dugout.

And his teammates will give him a limp pat on the back. And the coach will say *nice try*. And he knows that this will undoubtedly be his epitaph - his life ultimately quantified by the phrase *nice try*.

And he will sit and wait for his teammates to do what he seemingly cannot. And he will hope the game has either been won or lost by the time it's his turn to play a role. And he will be content as that kid in the photos carrying the hero aloft or consoling the pitcher who gave up that winning hit. *Nice try*.

And it will be the fifth inning. And his team will be down by a run. And the ball will miraculously skip past the gazelle at second base and into right field. And he will be *so amazed* by what has transpired he'll forget momentarily that balls that get past gazelles at second base are now the responsibility of the water buffaloes in right field. And he will watch the ball shoot past him and hit the wall. And he will watch the center fielder run over frantically and retrieve the ball rightfully in another's territory. And the center

fielder will throw the ball home, hoping to salvage one survivor from this swiftly-sinking ship. And he will watch their team put up another two runs.

And the center fielder will walk away from the right fielder. And the center fielder will be annoyed at the right fielder. And the center fielder will yell at the right fielder. *Move, idiot.*

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And his team will rebound capably as they always seem to do. And he will see how this team – despite its glaring weaknesses in places like right field – has made it here, to the championship game on championship day.

And they will tell him to *suck it up and get your head in the game*. And they will be as encouraging as a team that resents its right fielder as much as they do, can be.

And he will take solace in the fact that his team has somehow found a way to tie the score in the seventh inning – and then, surge ahead - without being blown to bits by the minefield that is the right fielder.

And he will smile, sort of, for now.

And he will take his position in right field. And it will be the top of the ninth inning. And his team will have a one run lead. And he will notice that the center fielder has taken, not only his regular position, but also partial-custody of the right fielder's as well.

And the right fielder will not mind the intrusion at all.

And the right fielder will again feel sick to his stomach. And he will be fully aware that his team is but three simple outs from eternal glory. And he knows – absolutely – the game is never over until the final out, and until the right fielder has played his vital if not tragic part - as he always does.

And he will watch his team tidily put away two quick outs - almost too perfect - in a fable too ludicrous to be believed.

And then their team will start to hit. And they will hit some more. And they will spray fly balls and ground balls all over the field, littering the diamond with displaced mounds of dirt and severed blades of grass.

And he will see their team tie the game. And he will hear the crowd cheer and moan.

And he will watch their team go ahead by a run, punctuated by more cheering and more moaning.

And he will be secretly relieved, knowing the game's dramatic turns have had nothing to do with the right fielder's inability to play a fly ball or hit a curve. And he knows he's dodged a starring role in this tragic drama – for now.

And sensationally, their team keeps hitting. And sensationally they now have the bases loaded and stand poised to metaphorically crush a spine.

And now he feels the nausea again, growing from inside him. And his comfort from having eluded destiny only moments before is gone, much like his team's one-run lead and their hopes for a championship.

And he sees a right-handed batter take to the plate. And he feels a tiny sense of ease, knowing that right-handed batters hitting to pathetic right fielders is very uncommon - the fodder of tragic comedies or comic tragedies.

And he hears the crack of the bat. And the right fielder sees the ball, coming his way.

And the ball is descending rapidly towards the right fielder. And he knows the ball will land on the wrong side of him to gain any assistance from the heroic white knight in center field.

And the right fielder starts to gallop towards the plummeting baseball. And he starts to pick up speed, as if fed fuel by the Gods of Redemption.

And he closes in rapidly on the ball. And he lifts his glove mightily towards the Heavens, offering his leather nest to this doomed, wingless bird.

And the right fielder hears the unmistakably-gratifying sound of ball striking glove, followed immediately, by the unmistakably-*unnerving* sound of ball hitting grass.

And the right fielder tumbles forward, the errant ball deflecting off his shoulder towards the gazelle at second base.

And he hears more cheering, and even more moaning. And he lifts his head from the turf to watch still another runner cross the plate.

And he sees the gazelle at second base hurl the ball home in a valiant attempt to stop the bleeding. And he sees the ball arrive, and the umpire decree the final, merciful out of this disastrous inning.

And the right fielder slowly rises from the muddy hole his body has pounded into the turf. And he stares at his glove.

Nice try.

And the right fielder will arrive back at the dugout, dejected. And he will feel pretty much the same as he's always felt in circumstances like these – he is well-attuned to this role.

And he will replay in his head how close he came to being, well maybe not a *hero*, but at least a less-toxic *failure*. And he will never forget that the difference between the two is sometimes simply three or four inches, or being able to *close your baseball glove* at the exactly right time.

And he will thank God that at least this time, the burden of collapse has been shared by others.

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And he will see his team three runs down in the bottom of the ninth.

And he will notice that his name is an impossible sixth in the batting order for this inning.

And he will know that, only through the most incredible of circumstances, will he *ever* find himself at the plate, bat in hand, with the game *again* on the line.

And he will pray to God for a merciful, unspectacular end.

And God will not be listening on this day.

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And the right fielder will see his miraculous team regain composure and regain form.

And he will see the first batter foul off three straight pitches and go down swinging.

And he will see the second batter walk on four straight pitches.

And he will see the third batter hit the fifth pitch for a double, putting the lead runner at third.

And he will see the pitcher start to inexplicably lose control and walk the fourth batter on another four straight pitches.

And the right fielder will see the bases loaded with one out and his brave team three imposing runs down.

And he will see a pitcher wavering badly and an opposing manager nervously pace to the mound. And the manager will wave to his bullpen to call in a kid way too large to rightfully be considered Little League.

And this mammoth kid will unmercifully mow down the fifth batter on three straight pitches.

And the opposing team will still be leading by three runs. And they will be one out – three measly strikes - away from adolescent immortality. And they will face the bases loaded. And they will have Kid Kong on the pitcher's mound.

And we will feel pity for the sixth batter. God have mercy on the sixth batter.

And the coach will tap the sixth batter – the right fielder – on the shoulder, and he will tell the kid *we believe in you, son*.

And his teammates - the bravest and the most forgiving of them, at least - will say much the same to the kid. And the right fielder will feel, or hear, none of this. And he will be *so* frozen with fear and dread that he will do well to just avoid passing out, let alone completing his journey to the batter's box.

And the right fielder will feebly grab his bat and attempt to grip it tight enough to keep it upright. And he will step into the batter's box, adjusting his helmet to protect his eyes while at the same time shielding him from the monolith standing on the mound. And he will wipe the sweat from his face at least three times before awaiting the first pitch.

And he will see this huge pitcher lunge angrily in his direction and unleash a throw so vicious, it knocks the batter backwards on the simple promise of the damage it *might do*, if it ever hit him.

And the batter will see another perfect pitch blaze by him. And he will not even have lifted the bat into the cocked and ready position, as if simply doing so, somehow gave him a chance to actually connect with this rawhide meteor.

And the batter will step out of the batter's box – in panic - and try to collect what little salient thoughts of his remain. And he will feel nausea no longer, only morbid fear.

And he will step in towards the plate, and he will peer from beneath the brim of his batting helmet, trying to focus on the giant patrolling the pitcher's mound. And the batter will nervously search for a strength to grip the bat and a will to make his arms swing at whatever may be coming.

And the pitcher will hurl another cannonball to the plate and the batter will swing grandly, in a simply-instinctive, defense mechanism. And there will be a loud wooden crack that will resonate throughout the hushed stadium.

And the bruised baseball will soar skywards.

And the ball will cascade foul, depositing itself far behind home plate amongst the awed mass of disbelievers.

And the batter will step back and stare at his bat, this veiled weapon of inexplicable power. And he will thank God that this ball, thrown with *that* sort of velocity, had hit wood and not flesh. And he will pray that this day ends soon, with no further casualties.

And he will pray twice, just to be sure.

And, on the next pitch, with the batter facing the very real prospect of *no tomorrow* and the next pitch being the strike that forever quashes whatever heroic qualities may exist within him, the batter swings with every fiber in his body. And then the batter closes his eyes and declares the one and only mid-swing prayer of his life.

Lord deliver me just this one wish. I want nothing else and I will never ask for anything more. Let me have this day. Let this day be Mine.

And the batter will rear back and follow with a swing so fantastic his shadow will stumble. And he will display, with *this* swing, a strength so supernatural and ethereal it wouldn't ultimately matter whether he struck the ball or not – the Legend of The Mighty Swing would have been born on this day.

And there would be more than just the Legend of The Mighty Swing.

And, along with this Mighty Swing, there was a sound so vociferous it instantly obliterated all others in the area. And this was the sound of The Mighty Roar.

And the ball would continue rising, this time in the appropriate direction. And the gargantuan pitcher would glare skyward, as would every other pair of eyes in the building.

And nobody moved.

And nobody *needed* to move.

And that ball, delivered from the right hand of that behemoth on the mound, found itself – most abruptly – buried deep inside the farthest bleachers, beyond the imposing boundaries of the right field wall. And that ball would bounce off a seat, then another, as if trying to expel the last bit of abundant energy it had inside.

And the batter, oblivious to the screaming and the hollering and the absolute calamity occurring around him, just stood still in quiet astonishment.

And the batter might still have had a pulse, if he had bothered to check.

And the batter would have heard people chanting his name, if he'd been able to listen.

And the batter would have felt the Burden of History lift and the new Age of Redemption begin, had he been mindful enough to return to the ground at some point.

And his life would never be the same.

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And he would return home, racing much like he had done to collect that errant fly ball, only this time there was no stumble. And he would play over and over again the grandeur of the moment, of His day, and the local legend he was now part of. And he would recite in his mind each dramatic twist, each theatrical pause, honing down the final product for the solo audience that awaited his return.

And he would tell her how, for one day – *this day* – he was on top of the world.

And how this was The Most Unforgettable Day of His Life.

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And he would return home to an empty house. And he would wander, from room to room, looking for any signs of life; for any devious characters waiting to pounce on his arrival.

And he would find a note. And he would read it. And it would direct him to 100 Valhalla Road. And he would run, faster than he had done at any point during that day and during that game. And he would run faster than he had ever run in his life, or ever would again.

And it would still take him forever to get there.

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And he would arrive at Mercy General Hospital.

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And he would find her.

And she would talk to him. And she would ask him about the game. And he wouldn't answer.

And then *they* would talk to her. And they would talk to her even more.

And she would ask him about the game. And he wouldn't answer.

And they would have things attached to her and tubes connected to her.

And there were all these people doing all these things *to* her.

And she would ask him about the game. And he wouldn't answer.

And there were noises; so many noises.

And he didn't know why, but he was crying.

And he would discover soon, why he was crying.

And she would have ovarian cancer. And she would die just three months later.

And he would miss her immensely, beyond description. And it would hurt more than anything he had ever, or *would ever*, feel in his life. And he would never, ever cry enough tears.

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And he would trade all the home runs and all the days of redemption and all the moments of grandeur for, but one more single solitary, fleeting moment to be by her side once again.

END