

Illinois Wesleyan University

From the Selected Works of Jared Brown

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Old Hoss

Jared Brown, *Illinois Wesleyan University*



SELECTEDWORKS™

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Old Hoss

Cast of Characters

Charlie (Old Hoss) Radbourn

Actor (who plays “Death” and Charlie Sweeney)

2nd Actor (who plays multiple characters)

(Throughout the play, the actors move about when appropriate. For example, Hoss frequently mixes himself a drink at the bar; Death and his associate should not be rooted to the spot; instead, when Death’s associate speaks to Radbourn, he sometimes creeps up behind him.)

(The time is 1897. The action takes place in Radbourn’s billiard parlor in Bloomington)

HOSS: *(He wears an eyepatch over his left eye. His right arm dangles uselessly at his side. Speaking to the audience)* What’re you lookin’ at? I don’t give out autographs no more – exceptin’ right here, at my billiards and pool parlor, Radbourn’s Place. Yeah, I might sign an “X” to a customer up here, but you gotta play a game of pool or buy some cigars. I ain’t givin’ anythin’ away for nothin’, I’ll tell you that much. Still, like the poster for my place says, we guarantee “polite attention and pleasant associates.” *(Spits tobacco juice into the spittoon)* That pleasant enough for ya?

(The Actor stands up in – or behind -- the audience)

ACTOR: For me? It doesn’t bother me, Radbourn. Be as surly and unpleasant as you like.

HOSS: You – I’ve seen you somewhere before. Mebbe you’re real, or mebbe you’re in my mind.

ACTOR: Oh, I’m real, all right. But I’m in your mind, too.

HOSS: *(He speaks with fear in his voice)* The reaper? Is that what they call you?

(The Actor walks to the stage. He is accompanied by a second actor, who will play many roles)

ACTOR: Your time has come, old man. Why, you look half dead already.

HOSS: I ain’t ready for the grave quite yet. I may not be able to see out of one eye, and my right arm might not be workin’, but I ain’t ready to go yet.

ACTOR *(Pulls a stopwatch out of his pocket and looks at it)* One hour. That’s the time you have left, Radbourn. Make the best of it.

HOSS: An hour? What the hell am I supposed to do in an hour?

ACTOR: Up to you, Radbourn. But these folks (*indicating the audience*) came here to find out about your life; so I'll shoot a few questions to you and you can answer them. And you'd better tell the truth, or I can guarantee you'll roast in hell.

HOSS: And you're only givin' me one hour?

ACTOR: Sixty minutes, no more and no less. (*Checks his watch*) Fifty-nine minutes, that is. So let us know about growing up in Bloomington, pitching in the big leagues, and what happened after that. And you better get started. Death doesn't wait, you know.

HOSS: And who's this guy you brung with you?

ACTOR: My associate. A sort of Reaper-in-Training, you might say. Just in case I decide to step down. A long way down.

HOSS: (*looks at the audience – but when he's addressing them he never forgets the presence of Death, so he is always nervous and a bit frightened – and when he speaks there is an urgency we did not detect before*) Well, I'll tell you what you might want to hear. There's no denyin' that I'm a big attraction around here. A "celebrity," somebody called me, or some fancy-dancy name like that. Nobody else ever won fifty-nine games in one big-league season, that's for sure. 1884 it was, when I was pitchin' for the Providence ball club.

ACTOR: All right, but you're just giving us the middle of the jigsaw puzzle. What's on the edges? You don't have that much time left, Hoss. Better give 'em the whole story.

HOSS: Okay, if that's what they wanta know, that's what they're gonna get. (*To the Actor*) So just lemme alone for a while and let me do all the talkin' – (*remembers who he's talking to*) – Sir. (*To the audience*) So, let's see. I was born just outside Rochester, New York, then my Ma and Pap moved the family right here to Bloomington, Illinois, when I was still a baby, and that's where I grew up. Not much of a town in the early days: just a frontier village, you might say. Hogs rooted in the muck right in the middle of the main road. But on the other hand, you had your Abraham Lincoln who was in and out of town practically every week, plottin' strategy with the local members of the Republican Party – which was just puttin' itself together. And in 1856, at a political convention in Major's Hall, Lincoln gave his first speech denouncin' slavery, and practically bowled over ever'body who came to hear him. 'Course, I was only two years old at the time, so I didn't hear the speech myself, but my pap was there.

2nd ACTOR: (*playing "Pap"*): Ya might be too young to understand, little Charlie, but

I gotta tell ya that I heard a great speech tonight.

HOSS: And then Jesse Fell, who founded our paper, the *Bloomington Pantagraph*, told Lincoln he oughta challenge Stephen A. Douglas to a series of debates, when they was both candidates for the Senate in 1858. And just a couple of years later, Lincoln won the nomination for president – and went on to win the presidency, too. By that time I was six years old and beginnin' to understand that Bloomington wasn't just no small town, it was a damn important place in the U.S. of A. That was also the year that my pap opened a meat market on Front Street, don't you know. And that business was what really got my family goin'. I was put to work there too, workin' as a butcher. In no time at all, my pa owned --

2nd ACTOR (as "Pap") . . . cattle, calves, hogs and sheep. Say, boy, want to go out huntin' and fishin' with me again today?

HOSS: Let's go, Pap. I want to be the best hunter in town. (*To the audience*) Didn't like people too well, so I spent lots of time in the woods and fields with the animals, trained a lot of dogs. I'll tell you a peculiar thing: once I captured a quail with a broken wing, but somethin' – I don't know what – told me not to kill it. So I brung it home with me, set the broken bone, and nursed the quail back to health. I wasn't much of a, what do you call it, a sentimentalist, but somethin' about that bird just touched my heart, I guess you'd say. (*To Death, slyly*) I oughta get credit for good behavior, wouldn't you say? That little story ought to be good for another five or ten minutes.

ACTOR: (*As Death: sinister*) I'm not about to bargain with you, Radbourn. Just say what you gotta say.

HOSS: Yes sir. (*To the audience*) I'll tell you, there was nobody who could hold a candle to me as a hunter. I once put an ad in *The Pantagraph* challengin' any man to shoot against me for \$1,000. And I signed it, or, if you're partick'lar about such things, I had a friend sign it, "Charles Radbourn, Bloomington, Ill." Now, a thousand dollars was a huge sum in them days – about half of a star baseball player's salary for a full year, which I can compare it to 'cause I know all about baseball salaries – and I knew nobody could shoot as good as me.

ACTOR: You say you had a friend sign the ad you put in the paper. Why didn't you sign it yourself?

HOSS: Well, I never was much for schoolin' and quit as soon as I could – after the second or third grade, I think it was – so I could help support my family. Still, I learned to read a little, though I never could write.

ACTOR: Illiterate, eh?

HOSS: What're you talkin' about? I had a mother *and* a father, and they was married, too – to each other. (*To the audience*) Anyway, the one thing kept me from movin' away from Bloomington was baseball. I knew I'd become the best there ever was. So I started out playin' with the local team in the 1870s.

ACTOR: Gamblers used to try to get the players to throw games back in those days. Did you ever have gamblers approach you?

HOSS: Sure. One time in Bloomington, I got sloshed in Schausten's saloon. This was in 1876, when I was twenty-one. A couple of gamblers come up to me and said . . .

2nd ACTOR: (*now taking the role of a gambler*) Hey, Charlie Radbourn, lemme buy you a beer. Listen, kid, how'd it be if I gave you twenty-five dollars. And all you gotta do is throw tomorrow's game against the Springfield nine.

HOSS: Well, maybe I took the money and maybe I didn't, but I was too drunk to know what I was doin'. A few hours later I told the gamblers I didn't want nothin' to do with sellin' out my teammates or the town. But next day, Springfield beat us four to one, and I guess lots of folks in Bloomington thought that I was on the take, like they say.

2nd ACTOR (*now taking the role of an angry fan*) Took a bribe, didn't you, Radbourn? Just another crook, ain't you? We thought you was somethin' special, but you're just another crook.

HOSS: It could've ruined my whole career, but, of course, it didn't. The very next year, *The Pantagraph* called me . . .

2nd ACTOR (*now the voice of the Pantagraph*) "the best pitcher in the state."

HOSS: . . . which, by God, I was. And in 1877, I signed my first professional contract with the Peoria Reds. We didn't play no regular schedule; we'd just travel from town to town, takin' on any team that thought they could beat us, ragtag town teams and a few major league outfits, too. Won most of our games, with me playin' right field most of the time, and pitchin' in relief. One time I came into a game against the Chicago White Stockings and struck out five batters.

ACTOR: Five batters. Is that all? That doesn't sound like very many.

HOSS: For a relief pitcher? Pitchin' for only a few innings? I'll tell ya, I struck out just about every man I faced. So then I signed with Dubuque, pitchin' regular, and winnin' most of the games I started. Fact is, I was reckanized as the best pitcher in the league, and led my team to the 1879 Northwestern League pennant.

2nd ACTOR: (*now playing a fan, talking to another fan – perhaps to Death, perhaps to someone in the audience*) Looks to me like this Radbourn fella deserves a promotion, wouldn't you say?

HOSS: Then I broke into the National League with the Buffalo Bisons in the big leagues. Hurt my arm when I was playin' for Buffalo, though, and the club released me after just six games, the sons of bitches.

2nd ACTOR (*the owner of the Buffalo team*) Got to let you go, Charlie. My colleagues and I don't think you have the stuff to pitch in the majors. I'd go home if I were you.

HOSS: So I went home to Bloomington for a while, joined the old amateur outfit I used to play for, and rebuilt the strength in my arm. Guess I did a good job, too, 'cause the very next year I was signed by the Providence Grays of the National League – back in the best league in all of baseball – winning twenty-five games for them and thirty-three the year after that. One of the games I pitched that year lasted for nineteen innings. I pitched all the way, and hit a home run to win the game, one to nothing. What a game! Some people called it . . .

2nd ACTOR: (*a fan*) The greatest game ever played, that's what it was.

HOSS: But then come 1883, and that was the year I broke the all-time record for wins in a season. Forty-eight victories, and a whole lot of 'em against the Buffalo Bisons. I never did forgive that team for givin' up on me, an' I never will. So it was in Providence that I became known as the best pitcher in baseball. Every year I got better and better, addin' new pitches, like my dry spitter, to my fastball, my curve ball, and all the other pitches I threw. And I gotta say that I worked harder than anybody else in the league.

2nd ACTOR (*a sportswriter*): "Strong and sturdy as an oak. . ."

HOSS: . . . this writer said about me.

2nd ACTOR: ". . . the most willing pitcher who ever lived."

HOSS: Even though I was pitchin' every other day – and sometimes two days in a row – I piled up the wins. 'Course all that pitchin' wasn't so good for my arm, which hurt like the devil. And then I met this young pitcher, Charlie Sweeney, who come up to Providence in the middle of the season.

(*Hoss is seated in a chair or on a bench. He is wearing his baseball uniform, although it is in disarray. He is drinking a beer.*)

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY: (He's tall, young (19), good looking. He enters the scene from behind, holding a suitcase)* Hey, whaddya say? Your name Radbourn?

HOSS: (*Not looking at him*) Could be. Who the hell are you? (*Spits tobacco juice in the spittoon*)

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Charlie Sweeney. Looks like your team needs help. I'm here to bail you out.

HOSS: Yeah? What are you? A third baseman? We could use a third baseman.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Hell, no. I'm a pitcher. Best damn pitcher you ever saw.

HOSS: (*Turning around to look at Sweeney*) You?? You look like you're just off the farm, you snot-nosed nancy-boy. And you're talkin' to me? Me? Charlie Radbourn, the guy who won thirty-three games last year.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Yeah, but that was 1882. *Last* year. But you ain't gonna do it again, I can tell ya that. Kinda small for a big-time pitcher, aren't ya?

HOSS: What? You don't think I can throw just as hard as you? Jes because I'm five foot nine and a hundred and sixty-eight pounds? I started fifty-one games last season and finished fifty of 'em. An' the only reason I didn't finish every damn one of 'em was because I was injured so bad I could hardly stand up.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Cut the boastin', old man. You want to see the best pitcher in baseball, just watch me.

HOSS: What'd you say yer name was?

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Charlie Sweeney. (*crosses down to Hoss*) The way I hear it, you and I is goin' to be the pitchin' staff for Providence the rest of this year. You pitch one game, I'll pitch the next – and at the end of the season, I figure you'll be eatin' my dirt.

HOSS: You do, huh?

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): That's the way it's goin' to be around here, Radbourn.

(*Hoss turns to the audience.*)

HOSS: Well, it twasn't like that at all. Sweeney only won seven games for us in '83, and he lost seven, too. Meanwhile, I won forty-eight games, settin' an all-time record.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Don't get too high on yourself, old man. I'll be back next season and I'll show you a thing or two.

(*Hoss turns back to the audience*)

HOSS: After the season I went home to Bloomington to see my family, and get in some huntin' and fishin'. And I didn't forget about that young bragger, Sweeney. I wasn't goin' to let him get the better of me. So I'd take a dose of sulfur and molasses – some folks called it brimstone and treacle – twice every day. The idea, y'see, was to get my arm in shape for the next season, and what the stuff did for me was to thin my blood. Leastways, that was the remedy that my pap always recommended. If it worked for my pap, I figured it'd work for me, too. An' it did – at least until the season started. Specially in 1884, there was some days I just couldn't make it on to the field 'cause the pain in my arm was so turrible. But I got the ballclub to buy a stove that they'd keep in the dressin' room, just for me. Even when the temperature on the field was somethin' like 110 degrees, I'd stay in the dressin' room, get the stove goin' and boil some water to steam my achin' arm. I thought the heat would loosen up my muscles, y'see.

2nd ACTOR (*as a teammate*): Hey, Charlie, what's the idea? I think you'd be a lot better off if you'd *ice* your arm and shoulder. That's what they tell me, anyway.

HOSS: But who the hell knew the difference? Anyway, I *thought* the heat would help, so maybe that did the trick. Along with the liquor. Yeah, I drank a lot of liquor that year. Not on the field or in the dugout, you unnerstand – but before games and, especially, after 'em. My own brother said that I used to drink a quart of whisky every single day of my career, and he prob'ly wasn't very far off. But in 1884 I s'pect that I drank more than that. Needed somethin' to get me through the pain, you know what I mean? And I had to sit out a lot of games, the pain was so bad. But Sweeney, I tell ya, he was somethin' else again. I gotta hand it to the kid, even if I couldn't stand him. He won seventeen games for us before the season was half over – and some people was sayin' that *he* was the best pitcher in the league, not me. So he says to me --

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Looks like yer age caught up with ya, old man.

HOSS: Don't worry about it, Sweeney. I'll be back, and I'm gonna wind up with more wins than you.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): The hell you are. And I'll tell you somethin' else, too. I'm gonna ask the owner to rip up the contract I got and pay me a whole lot more money.

HOSS: What are you talkin' about? You got a contract, you gotta live with it.

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): Live with it? They better start payin' me more or I'm gonna jump the club.

HOSS: They'll kick you right out of the league.

ACTOR (as SWEENEY): You think this is the only league? What about the Union Association? The St. Louis club has already talked to me and offered me a bundle of money to switch leagues.

HOSS (*to the audience*): See, up till the time he left, it was me and Charlie Sweeney, we was the pitchin' staff. I mean we *was* the pitchin' staff! Not like it is today, when a ball club's got five or six pitchers so nobody gets his precious little arm used up too fast. Yes sir, in the first half of '84, it was just me and Sweeney, and Sweeney, he jumped to the Union Association halfway through the season, leavin' us with only one pitcher – me. And I was on suspension at the time 'cause they said I throwin' ball games. Also, I was drunk too much. Well, I like my whiskey, and why not? Show me a man that don't like his liquor and I'll show you a snot-nosed nancy boy. Anyway, I was happy as a lark that Sweeney jumped to St. Louis, 'cause I never did like Sweeney. In fact, I hated his guts. But it left our club with a problem. See, I was the only pitcher left, except for a couple of college boys who'd start a game once in a while, but not very often. Here's the kind of thing I used to go through: on July 16 of that year I pitched twelve games in nineteen days. Almost had a nervous breakdown, I did, when the manager, Frank Bancroft, told me . . .

2nd ACTOR (*as Bancroft*) You're pitchin' tomorrow, Radbourn – and I expect you to pitch nine innings – or more, if the game's tied after the bottom of the ninth.

HOSS: Which is what I did, game after game. Nobody was goin' to get me off the mound after play started, I guarantee you that! I believed I could beat anybody, and, by God, that's exactly what I did, no matter how long it'd take. You wanta know what some people in baseball said about me? Ted Sullivan, one of my managers, said . .

2nd ACTOR (*As Ted Sullivan*): "For dead gameness and grit he never had an equal."

HOSS: Damn right. And my old teammate, Hardie Richardson, said somethin' else I never forgot.

2nd ACTOR (*As Hardie Richardson*): "Radbourn didn't know the meaning of the word 'quit.'"

HOSS: Good old Hardie. See, I got somethin' that other athletes don't got. I got persistence, or will, or whatever you wanta call it. I can't even begin to tell you about the hours of practice I put in, experimentin' with new pitches, throwin' the ball at bottles settin' on stools if there wasn't no catcher around. I could throw just about any pitch I wanted to throw and hit the corners of the plate, too. That gave me confedience, if you know what I mean. I was confedient every time I stepped into the pitcher's box.

ACTOR: Tell us more about Sweeney.

HOSS: Sweeney! (*He spits in the spittoon*) Guess that'll tell ya what I think about the son of a bitch. Sweeney was only twenty when the '84 season come around. Next to me, I guess he was the best pitcher in the National League til he jumped to the Union Association. He had a scorchin' fastball and a hard-breakin' curve – but the thing I didn't like about the son of a bitch was that he thought he was even *better* than me. And this from a snot-nosed kid who got kicked out of the Pacific Coast League for throwin' ball games. But Sweeney come acrost the country to pitch for the Grays, and *he* – not me, but this snot-nosed kid – became the toast of Providence. I s'pose the fact that he was taller than me and maybe even a little better lookin' had somethin' to do with it, but it made me damn mad. Made my teammates mad, too, 'cause the veterans on the ball club didn't like Sweeney no better than I did. But they had to play with him, 'cause I hurt my arm when we was in spring trainin' for the '84 season and got a bad case of rheumatism in my leg, too. For a while there Sweeney did just about all of the pitchin'. And I gotta admit he pitched good, too; but what I don't admit was that I was on my last legs, even though there was days when I was playin' in the outfield and could hardly hobble from one base to the next. No, I knew I'd come back and give Sweeney a good run for his money. But he lorded it over me, said he was goin' to get all the money and all the glory, 'cause my day was over.

ACTOR (*as Sweeney*): Ya might as well quit, old man. Maybe you had a good last year last season, but I'm here to tell you that I'm the King now.

HOSS: Take a hike, Sweeney! (*To Death*) Sweeney was purty good, I'll give that to him. Not as good as he thought he was, but good. Our manager, Frank Bancroft, used to sing his praises, until I thought I'd puke.

2nd ACTOR (*As the Grays' manager, Bancroft*): "The most marvelous drops and curves I've ever seen."

HOSS: That's what Bancroft'd say. So what about me? Wasn't my drops and curves goddam marvelous? Sweeney won a long string of ball games while I was nursin' my achin' arm durin' spring trainin' before the 1884 season. So what? That don't make him God, does it? An' after sittin' out the exhibition games that year I started the second game of the season and beat Cleveland five to two. I prob'ly should of got a shutout, but I pitched good enough to win. And that started a contryversy that didn't die down for months: who was the better pitcher, (*sarcastically*) the great Charlie Sweeney – or me?

ACTOR (*as Sweeney*) Sweeney, Sweeney, Sweeney. I'm in your head, old man.

HOSS: (*ignoring Sweeney*) Sweeney got injured in June – he felt something pop in his arm after throwin' his fast ball – and sat out a couple of weeks. This made me as mad as I ever got in my life. I was injured, too, wasn't I? But I was still pitchin' – and still winnin'. Anyway, the club asked me to do double duty while Sweeney was out restin' his poor, dainty little arm. So I pitched practically every day, sometimes even

pitchin' both games of a double-header – which gnawed away at me until I told Bancroft I was goin' home – I wasn't goin' to pitch for that lazy bastard, Sweeney, who was bein' pampered, petted, and well-paid. Too well-paid, if you ask me. I lost a few games at about this time, and, by God, the newspapers and the cranks started the rumor . . .

2nd ACTOR (*quoting from a newspaper*): Could it be that Radbourn might be losing intentionally in order to pick up a little more money?

HOSS: – which burned me up no end, for I never threw a game in my life. I tried to prove it to 'em by puttin' everything I had into every pitch. Well, our catcher, old Barney Gilligan, his hands got tore up pretty good, his fingers pounded practically to jelly, but I hadda fire it in as hard as I could, didn't I? But the ballclub's board of directors, who believed that stinkin' propaganda that I was throwin' games, just decided to ignore the fact that I'd already won twenty-four games with only eight losses and half a season to go.

2nd ACTOR (*as a member of the Board of Directors*) You've gone too far this time, Radbourn. The Board of Directors has voted unanimously to suspend you without pay, and as their spokesman, I'm letting you know about it. You're putting the members of the team at risk, you're drunk every night, and you've been accused of throwing ball games.

HOSS: That's when I had had enough. I wanted to leave the Providence club and join the St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association, which'd be closer to home, and which'd prob'ly pay me more money, too. Them Union Association reps, they'd been trailin' our club, meetin' with players in dark corners, offerin' big money, tryin' to bribe us to get out of the National League and join one of their teams. Most of the top players in our league wouldn't jump to the new circuit 'cause they was afraid they'd be blacklisted by the National League and the Union Association might flop. It might even fold up. Well, then where would they be? But I wasn't afraid. The Maroons offered me five thousand dollars, coverin' the rest of the '84 season and all of 1885, with a thousand dollars in advance. That sounded pretty good to me. But just about at this time that big blowhard Sweeney shows up at the Providence ballpark stinkin' of alcohol an' a couple of whores on his arm and got into an argument on the field with the manager, Bancroft.

ACTOR (*as Sweeney; he stumbles drunkenly*): Get outta my way, Bancroft. And make way for my lady friends here.

HOSS: Sweeney marched right out of the park with them whores, right in the middle of the game, and left the team with only eight players. So now the board of directors votes to get rid of Sweeney and blacklist him from the National League. Now, since I was suspended, too, the Providence club had no decent pitchers and the club was thinkin' about disbandin'. In fact, they told the league president that that was what they was gonna do. But the president, he didn't like it . . .

2nd ACTOR (*as the league president*) No, gentlemen, that's not an alternative. I want you to finish the season even if you have to use rank amateurs. But since that means you'll probably lose every game, I suggest that you remove Radbourn from the suspended list and get him in the pitcher's box.

HOSS: So the Providence owner and Bancroft, they come to me on bended knees, like they say, and begged me to go back to out there. I said to the owner of the team I'd do it if the club'd give me Sweeney's salary on top of my own.

2nd ACTOR (*as the owner of the team*) You're killin' me, Radbourn. But I guess I've got no choice. All right, I'll give you the remainder of Sweeney's salary, and, by God, I'll even sweeten the pot. Since you seem to hate Providence so much, I'm willing to let you out of your contract at the end of the season . . .

HOSS: Which is the thing I wanted most—to become a free agent and make my own deal. So I said, okay, I'll just pitch every day from now on – with an occasional day playin' at first base or in the outfield. I told 'em I'd win the pennant for 'em all by myself. Nobody else thought I could do it, but, by damn, I knew I could. Sweeney was gone, which was a big relief to me. And I was rarin' to go, havin' been out on suspension for five days. I won the first game I pitched, and then lost two to one in eleven innings. But after that, I went on to win my next eighteen starts. Eighteen in a row! Nobody ever done that before. And the ballclub done even better: they won twenty straight. My arm damn near fell off, but I just kept goin' out there and rackin' up the wins. I pitched every inning of all four games of a crucial series against the Boston Beaneaters without givin' up a single earned run – and then pitched the next two games to beat Cleveland and Detroit. At one point, I started sixteen straight games and passed my old record for most wins in a season when I got my forty-ninth.

ACTOR: OK, so Sweeney got away from Providence and made more money in St. Louis. Ever think of doin' the same thing? Or did you love it so much in (*sarcastically*) Dear Old Providence that you never even considered leaving the ball club?

HOSS: No, I'd of left the club in a minute if it meant more money. But I *did* want to stay in the National League, 'cause most folks figured the National League was better than the Union Association. And there was the damned reserve clause. You don't know what I'm talkin' about, do ya? Well, lemme give you a lesson about that. Y'see, a player'd sign a contract for a year with whatever team offered him the most money, thinkin' that the next year he'd go somewhere else and get paid even more. But no. Accordin' to this damned reserve clause, once his contract was up, the player'd only be able to make a deal with the same team he'd played with the year before, and no other. If he tried to go somewhere else, he might find himself on the owners' blacklist and be banned from the National League for the rest of his life. Well, I thought this was the good old U.S. of A., where a man could sell his services to the highest bidder through a free market – I mean, that's the American dream,

ain't it? – but I guess I must'a been wrong. The owners of the team, they could trade the players any time they had a mind to, but the players? We had no freedom at all. Slaves, that what we was. And who wants to be a slave, I ask you? (*He spits in the spittoon.*) Not me. Not Old Hoss. Them sons of bitches who owned the teams – not just Providence, but *all* the teams – was no better than a bunch of graspin' thieves. Us players sign a contract with a club and they can hold us forever, or so long as we want to play ball, anyway. And what do we get? Pensions? Medical insurance? You gotta be off your rocker. Payin' you when you got injured? No, not if you was goin' to be out of the lineup for more than a few days. Took every chance they could to dock you money. And how many of the players thought of savin' money while they could? Not many, I can tell you that. They spent their money on liquor and whores. Most ballplayers had no other skills at all, so, when they couldn't play no longer they'd try farmin' or workin' in the mines or, in some cases, they'd just wait to die.

2nd ACTOR: (*as a typical fan*): Aw, you athletes are always moanin' about "slavery." And what do you expect? The government's gonna take care of you for the rest of your life after your career is over? Hell, I'll take the glamorous life of a ballplayer any day. All you guys care about is money. I'd play for nothin', if it come to that.

HOSS: Fact is, the life of a ballplayer was pretty over-rated, I'd say, especially in them days. It sure as hell wasn't glamorous. We'd travel from city to city, didn't get much sleep, had lousy meals – and had to drink the filthy city water which led to cramps and diarrhea. And no doctor to help out either – not on the field or off the field. Oh yeah, I know that some teams nowadays hire a doctor to travel with 'em, but not in the '80s when I needed 'em. So all I could do, on the days I was pitchin', was limber up the best I could. An' after the game was over, the ballclub would supply one pail of water for the whole team to cool off with – and this was standard practice around the league. What a bunch of cheapskates, them owners.

ACTOR: (*as Death*): Better not waste any time, Radbourn. The clock's ticking, you know.

HOSS: Well, ever' once in a while we'd use some college boy or somebody like that who'd start a game or two while I rested my arm, but them boys wasn't worth a pile of spit. They didn't do nothin' 'cept fill in when my arm was so sore that I could barely lift it up. But you can look at their records if ya like. You know how many wins they got in the whole season? One! One damn win among the whole lot of 'em. Kee-rist! I might as well've gone out there if I knew what a bunch of rummies them kids'd turn out to be.

ACTOR: So you were *basically* the entire starting staff for Providence after Sweeney jumped the club?

HOSS: Yeah, and sometimes more than "basically." Pitched every game for a solid month, I did. When I got up in the mornin' I could hardly lift my arm to brush my

teeth, but I'd stretch it out and rub it up and then, come game time, I'm out there on the mound pitchin' up a storm. 'Course, I drove a hard bargain. Almost doubled my salary – which was the main reason I pitched so often. Money. That's what I wanted. Oh yeah, I wanted glory an' fame, too, 'cause I figgered I was the best pitcher in the game, and wanted to prove it. But money is the main thing I wanted and money is what I got. (*To the audience*) Somebody asked me once if I got tired pitchin' every day. Here's what I said: Tire out tossing a little five ounce ball for two hours a day? Man, I used to be a butcher. From four in the morning until eight at night I knocked down steers with a twenty-five pound sledge. Tired of playing two hours a day for ten times the money I used to get for fifteen hours a day? (*Spits tobacco juice*) What are you, crazy in the head?

Well, here was my routine on the days I pitched: I started out about ten feet in front of home plate and lobbed the ball to my catcher. Then I'd take a step or two back and try again, rubbin' my achin' arm between tosses. Finally I'd get back to the pitcher's box – we had a box, y'know, not a mound with a slab of rubber on it – in those days; anyway, by the time I got to the pitcher's box, I could throw sidearm. I kept goin' backwards until I reached second base. Finally I was able to get my arm over my head – even though I almost never pitched that way. But, y'know, when I wasn't pitchin' in a game, they'd put me in the outfield or first base – and hit me in the clean-up spot, too – so I had to be able to throw overhand when I played outfield. And when I played out there, then I'd rifle the ball to the catcher with all my might. But that was the thing, see: pitchers were s'posed to be able to hit, to play other positions, to field at least as well as the shortstop or second baseman – and, of course, when they pitched, to finish the games they started. Why, it would've been humiliatin' to be taken out of a ballgame when the contest was still goin' on.

ACTOR: Don't tell me about it, Radbourn. I want you to *show* me.

HOSS: Show ya? With an arm that don't work?

ACTOR: Lift up your right arm, Radbourn.

HOSS: Can't do it, even if you are the Reaper. My arm don't work no more.

ACTOR: Raise it up, Radbourn!

HOSS (*raises his right arm*): What the hell?

ACTOR: And take off that eye-patch.

HOSS: (*removes the patch*) Christ! I can see. What's goin' on here?

ACTOR: I can move mountains, Radbourn. Mountains. Your little ailments are no challenge to me at all.

HOSS: OK, So now I can show ya. *(He stands and crosses to center stage)* I tole you that we had a pitcher's box in them days. Yeah, the box was what you'd call *(using both arms to make a rectangle)* a rectangle. The front edge of the box was just fifty feet from home plate, not like the sixty feet six inches it is today – and you could move around all you wanted to if you was inside the box, so sometimes the pitcher'd take a runnin' start and fire the ball toward the plate. Usually, you'd take a hop, skip and a jump before your throw to work up your momentum, don't you know. 'Course, if you threw inside and hit the batter, well, that'd leave a mark he'd never forget. I'm not talkin' about hittin' him in the head, though that might happen, too. Hitters had no protection, y'know; there's some talk goin' around about providin' hitters with helmets some day – but that day ain't here yet. Most of the players' hands was torn up pretty bad, too. Y'know, we didn't use fieldin' gloves in them days, not like the fancy dansters do today – 'ceptin that the catchers wore leather hand gloves, with the fingers open. Still, those catchers, they got beat up real bad, even though, when nobody was on base, they'd set up ten feet behind home plate and catch the pitch on a bounce. But when runners was on base, they had no choice. If they was gonna stop a stolen base, they had to set up right behind the hitter. Show me a catcher who didn't have broken fingers and I'll show you somethin' that never was. But then, *all* the players had real bad hand injuries. Just imagine, a line drive hit to the outfield and the fielder had to catch it without a glove. Or a third baseman stoppin' a hard smash down the line and then throwin' it across the diamond with all his might, and the first baseman had to catch the ball with no glove to keep his pretty little hands protected. Why, I remember in '82, a thrown ball broke the finger of one player who had to have it amputated at the first joint. But he came back to play ball as soon as his stump had healed. In my greatest year, 1884, the catchers did start to wear chest protectors and face masks, which was s'posed to give 'em some sort of protection. But them masks was just a bunch of wire that could easily be broken by a good fast ball, so lots of the catchers had razor-sharp metal crash right into their faces. Not much protection, if you ask me.

ACTOR: 1884. A long time ago, Radbourn – at least for those who grow older – which doesn't apply to me, of course. Anyway, I'd say the game's changed a lot since then.

HOSS: Well, it's still ninety feet between bases, nine innings to a ball game, nine men in the field, three strikes and you're out. I don't s'pose them things'll ever change – they worked for us in the '80s, and now, with 1900 approachin', they're still just about perfect, 'specially now that it only takes four balls to walk a hitter, whereas it took six back in 1884. But the biggest change in the rules that year gave pitchers the right to throw overhand. And I did, ever' once in a while, but more often I stuck to the underhand delivery that I'd used for years. And, when the time seemed right, I'd toss in a sidearm pitch, too.

ACTOR: Seems like the pitchers had all the advantages in those days.

HOSS: Damn right. And, y'know, back in them days, we used only a single ball for

the entire game. Somebody who caught a foul ball in the stands was expected to toss it back to the umpire. So the ball'd get scuffed up, get covered with dirt an' grime – and tobacco juice that the pitchers and catchers would spit on it – so that by the end of the game the hitters could barely see it. Not only that, but the ball was beat to a pulp. I'd like to see any hitter who could hit the ball over the fence after the fifth inning or so. That was a real advantage for a pitcher, and I'm glad I played the game when men was men. Another advantage for the pitchers was that the games didn't begin until about 3:00 or 4:00 in them days. The sunlight was fadin' just enough so that the hitters had a hard time seein' a filthy baseball whoosh by 'em at about ninety miles an hour.

ACTOR: You haven't even mentioned the appeal baseball had for the public. What about the so-called beauty of the game? (*Speaking with some irony*) The magnificent greensward that greets each spectator as he enters the ballpark? The pastoral beginnings of the sport?

HOSS: Well, all I can tell you is that it wasn't that way in the 1880s. No sir, things was pretty nasty down on the field. We wasn't above usin' brute strength to win ball games. Knockin' an opposin' player down who was runnin' from second to third base when the umpire wasn't lookin', for instance. And, of course, only one umpire worked a game, so he couldn't see everythin' at once. Or take the time that I was at bat against One-Arm Daily, just a couple of days after I had thrown a no-hitter against his team. Well, One-Arm, he reared back, ran to the front of the pitcher's box and fired a fastball right at me. Hit me smack in the chest and raised a turrible lump. I fell down and couldn't get up. Now, you know I was famous for finishin' what I started, like in 1884, when I started sixty-eight games and completed sixty-six of 'em; I *never* come out of a ball game, 'cept for a bad injury, and this was one time I couldn't go on. But I also got me a record that's goin' to live forever. Won fifty-nine games that season, I did, and nobody'll ever do that again. That's why the newspapers took to callin' me "Old Hoss," 'cause I just lifted that team on my back and took it to the league champeenship. Started seventy-five games that year and finished all but two of 'em. Then we took on the New York Metropolitans of the American Association in the first World Series ever played –

2nd ACTOR: (*as a New York fan*) Can't wait for the series to begin. And, what? The Metropolitans are supposed to worry about Radbourn? Why, he's so wore out from pitchin' all season he can hardly get the ball to the plate.

HOSS: I started every game, pitched every inning – and won all of 'em, too. Them New York candy-lickers couldn't touch my pitches – fast ball, curve ball, slider, drop ball, inshoot, upshoot, downshoot, fadeaway, it didn't matter. I just said to Bancroft, "Gimme the ball and I'll win all three games for you." So he did. And I did, too. In game one, I gave up only two hits and tossed a shutout. The next day, game two, the Mets got three hits and one run off me, but I still won. And the day after that, we clobbered the Mets, eleven to two, and, of course, Old Hoss was in the pitcher's box all the way. So we played three games in three days, and I pitched and won every

game, allowing no earned runs at all. Not a single one. I baffled 'em, that's what, baffled 'em with my underhand delivery. 'Course, 1884 was the first year that pitchin' overhand was legal, but me, I jus' kept pitchin' the way I always had – mixin' in an overhand pitch once in a while, but mostly comin' from under the belt – and nobody could touch me. (*Looks at a member of the audience*) What about you, big fella? Want to try? (*Adopts a fighting stance*) Like to go a few rounds with me, would you? Think you could lay a hand on me? I might not be as big as you are, but I guarantee you one thing: I'd knock you right into the twenty-first century! (*Looks away and spits tobacco juice into the spittoon*) Nobody's goin' to take a swing at old Charlie Radbourn, I can tell you that. Not Old Hoss. Not the greatest pitchin' machine in the history of baseball. Stamina! Durability! Whatever the hell you want to call it, I had it. It was hard enough just to pitch *one* complete game, sweatin' in the broilin' July sun, but I always went out to the mound, sometimes three or four days in a row.

ACTOR: So what happened to Charlie Sweeney after he left Providence? Did you ever hear from him again?

HOSS: Damn right I did. He even wrote me a letter, which I got right here. (*He takes the letter from his pocket. To the actor*) You better read it. I ain't too good at readin'. (*Hands the letter to the actor*)

ACTOR (*as SWEENEY*): "Well, hi there, Hoss old buddy. I still remember the good old days when you and me pitched together for the Providence nine. I hope you got good memories of me just like I got good memories of you. Well, Hoss, old buddy, I'm sort of down on my luck these days, and I sure could use a little help. How about sending me twenty-five dollars if you can spare it. Your old buddy, Charlie Sweeney." (*as DEATH*) So – did you send him the money?

HOSS: Hell, no. Let the son of a bitch stew in his own juice, that's what I say. The way it turned out, Sweeney hurt his arm so bad in '84 that he was never the same pitcher after that. He took up the drinkin' habit again – worse than ever, I'd say – and started gettin' into fights with his teammates, opponents, and anybody else who come his way. He finally got throwed off the team after he threw some punches at his catcher. Sweeney faded out pretty quick after that – and nobody never called him the best pitcher in baseball no more. And later on, in San Francisco, he killed a guy in a saloon, so I heard. Don't know if he ever went to prison, and I dunno if he's alive or dead.

ACTOR: I can tell you about that, Radbourn. I'm scheduled to take him away in 1902. And I can tell you this, too: he'll die without friends or money in the county hospital, his achievements in baseball all but forgotten.

HOSS: (*Thoughtfully*) Is that so? I s'psose he deserves it, but even so . . .

ACTOR: Sounds like you're winding down, Radbourn. Ready for me to take you, are you?

HOSS (*terrified; speaking rapidly*): Hell, no! Lissen, I -- Lemme tell ya what the atmosphere was like at the ball parks. The air was filled with curses of every description and the players was downright dirty, see? I don't mean they used dirty tactics – though that was true, too – but their uniforms was smeared with dirt and mud. Yeah, we was crude, and proud of it. Look at the good ol' U.S.A. 1884 wasn't far from the civil war days and the depression that came after. The whole country was fightin' to survive, so I guess you could say that baseball was somethin' similar to the crudeness of the country. And every big city was full of noise, crime – I'm talkin' about crime in dark alleys and red-light districts, but also about crime in city halls and capitol buildings, where just about every official took bribes and stole elections – people talkin' in different languages, entertainments of every kind, like sports events, minstrel shows, you name it; and the worst traffic you could imagine. Horse-drawn buses crammed with people would try to slice through the traffic, but people would jump on and off without waiting for the driver to stop. Little kids begged for coins and then went home to the lousy tenements where they lived – wooden death traps, we used to call them. (*Turns to look at Death*) Pardon the expression. (*To the audience*) Prostitutes by the thousands worked every big city. Saloons reeking of tobacco juice, sweat, and stale beer was packed every night with drunken men and painted whores. And the stink! Rotting garbage, horse manure, horse piss – you had to have a strong stomach just to walk through a city in the '80s. But we ballplayers, we was treated like royalty. And, of course, since most ball clubs had only twelve or thirteen players on the roster, you'd fight like hell to keep your job, 'cause there was thousands of men who wanted to take it. Some of the things we done might've been called crass, mebbe, but that's the way the game was played. (*Turns to the Actor*) How much time've I got left?

ACTOR: (*looks at his watch*) Oh, about fifteen minutes, I'd say.

HOSS: Fifteen minutes? (*Pleading*) Look, I've done everythin' you tole me to. How about givin' me a break?

ACTOR: Fifteen minutes, Radbourn.

HOSS: S'pose I finish my story, without holdin' nothin' back, would you be willin' to . . . ?

ACTOR: Not on your life. (*Looks at his pocket watch*) Or what you have left of it.

HOSS: (*Swallows hard*) Well, I could use a drink, maybe even two or three. (*Hoss pours himself a stiff drink for himself and another for the actor*)

ACTOR: Have you got anything else to say?

HOSS: Well, (*from now on, his thought processes become more erratic, and he struggles to make sense of what he's saying*) here's a thing that you prob'ly didn't know: when I won fifty-nine that year, the team played only a hundred and twelve games, not like teams do today. A hundred and thirty-two games, that's the schedule now in 1897, but nobody's ever come close to my winnin' record.

ACTOR: (*As Death. Ironically*) And that's what you call a great achievement, is it? All right, tell the people out there how you won all those games.

HOSS: (*to the audience*) How I done it? I'll tell you. (*Goes to the pitching box and demonstrates*) I mixed up my pitches and never released the ball from the same angle twice in a row. I had a great fastball that seemed to jump as it got near the plate, but I mixed it with my curve and off-speed pitches, some of 'em not strictly legal. Like I'd swish the ball against my spikes when the umpire wasn't lookin', and those swishes made grooves that made my off-speed pitches buck and dive. And I used the whole pitchin' box, too, sometimes throwin' from the back of the box, sometimes runnin' up to the front, sometimes from the left side, sometimes from the right. Sometimes I used a windup and other times I just let the ball fly with both feet flat on the ground. The poor dumb batter, he had no idea what was comin' on the next pitch. I was the cat, see, and the batter was just a little mouse. I guess my old teammate Arthur Irwin was right when he said . . .

2nd ACTOR (*As Arthur Irwin*): "Hoss Radbourn was the brainiest pitcher that ever delivered a ball across the plate."

HOSS: I could put the ball just about anywhere I wanted. And I knew how to pace myself. See, I wanted to be just as good in the eighth and ninth innings as I was in the first, so sometimes I'd just put the ball over and let the batter hit it into the outfield, 'cause I knew my fielders was good enough to catch up to the ball most of the time. Other times I went for the strikeout and, boy, *nobody* could hit the ball solid when I was goin' for the strikeout. Of course, I could only get the strikes if the umpires knew what a strike was.

ACTOR: So you don't think the umpires knew their business, eh? Any other complaints you want to get off your chest?

HOSS: If I got time, I'd sure like to let these folks know what griped me. (*To the audience, speaking almost frantically*) Do ya know how long our road trips was in them days? Sometimes longer than a month, on account of the damn owners. They didn't want to put out a lot of money for railroad tickets, so they'd just send us on the road for as long as we could stand it. And – and – here's another thing: the owners wouldn't pay to wash our uniforms, which was made of heavy flannel. So sometimes we'd soak our uniforms in a hotel tub, then hang 'em out the window to dry. Or if that was too much trouble, we'd just put the dirty uniform on again for the next game. Another thing about road trips was the boredom. Spendin' most of our time in hot hotel rooms was nobody's idea of a good time, and the players'd go out

and get roarin' drunk, gamble away their hard-earned money, and spend whatever they had left on whores. Lots of the players got into fights on the sidewalks and in saloons. Some of 'em got hauled away to jail. Now I guess you know why the home team always had the advantage. And I guess you see why I wanted to get out of pipsqueak Providence and make some real money somewhere else. Providence, y'see, had the smallest market in the National League, and, even if the owner of the ballclub wanted to treat the players decent, they didn't have the money like the clubs in New York and Chicago.

2nd ACTOR: (*as a resident of Providence*) What d'ya mean, "pipsqueak Providence? Why, we might just have the greatest city in the Yew-nited States, right here in Rhode Island.

HOSS: Well, I s'pose that's one way of lookin' at it. But as far as I was concerned, Providence was just a lousy town – full of con men, card sharps and lowlifes. Oh yeah, I know that Providence is in Rhode Island and Rhode Island is part of New England, which is s'posed to be all prim-like and proper. But Providence was no quiet New England town – if anythin', it was like the Wild West: full of crime, dirty – there was a lot of factories in the town belchin' smoke all day long, and the smoke never went away, winter or summer. It was noisy, too, with the horses and their wagons goin' down cobblestone streets all the day and night. And stinkin'? You can't imagine. Most of the men smoked and them who didn't chewed tobacco and spat tobacco juice inside and outside. Course I spat a little tobacco juice now and then myself, but I gen'rally waited until I found a spittoon.

2nd ACTOR (*as the resident of Providence*): So, if ya didn't like our fair city, what'd you stick around so long for?

HOSS: There was only ever one thing that I liked about Providence, and that was Carrie Stanhope, who used to live there. Lived the pretty good life, too. Some bums said that she ran a whorehouse out of her house on lower Washington Street, but she tole me it was a boardin' house, and I believed her. Her house was big enough to be a mansion, and was in fine shape, too. And I gotta admit that no woman I ever knew had enough money to buy a mansion like that just by runnin' a boardin' house. Madams made a good livin', though, takin' fifty percent of the money the whores took in, and chargin' outrageous prices for drinks. Still – Carrie a madam? I just don't believe it. Some of the gossipin' fools even said . . .

2nd ACTOR: (*as the resident of Providence*) That Carrie Stanhope's nothin' but a whore!

HOSS: (*Angrily*) Yeah? You'd better have somethin' to prove it. Whatever she did, though, it'd be okay with me. She was the prettiest woman in the city, twenty-eight years old, and I guess I was head over heels in love with her. The only thing that bothered me was that Carrie was all soft about a player on the Chicago White Stockings, whose name I'm not gonna mention, because I don't wanna give this

player no free publicity. But this guy and me, we decided to settle our differences with a public duel – not like the knights of the old times, of course, not in a jousting match if that's the word they used to use, but on the ball-field. So one day, early in the 1880s, I pitched against this swabber from Chicago; it was a hell of a pitchin' duel but I won the game. Carrie was in the stands, wearin' her fanciest dress, watchin' with the fiercest concentration, if you know what I mean. 'Cause whoever lost that game would take a hike; he'd leave Carrie alone and let her be with the winner. So right after the game, this Chicago player, he calls Carrie to come out of the stands and he escorts her, dainty-like, to home plate, and says,

2nd ACTOR: (*as the ballplayer from Chicago*) "She's yours, Rad, for you won her and the game."

HOSS: Or somethin' like that, anyway, and handed Carrie over to me. But Carrie, she also had a lot of actors over the moon about her, and a lot of other ballplayers, too. So it was always touch and go whether there was any real future for Carrie and me. (*The Actor moves toward Hoss, but Hoss holds out his arm to keep him at bay*) I know that she didn't love me at first – she used to call me sullen and sarcastic – but I won her over pretty soon. Before long we was makin' plans to get married, though they didn't work out for a long time. Carrie always called herself Mrs. Stanhope – said she was a widow – but she wasn't no widow. She was still married to a marine engineer, name of Charles Stanhope, in Newport. Why she and Stanhope broke up I never did find out, but she moved to Providence while he stayed in Newport. She had a son, too, and her mother and sister to look out for. I never knew who her son's father was; she had been separated from her husband a long time before the son come along, so it might have been some other jackass. But Carrie made a good livin' from her boardinghouse and supported the whole family. Still, I could tell that she was lookin' for a man who would take her out of Providence and look after her and her son. Anyway, over time, me and Carrie got to know each other pretty well, if you know what I mean.

ACTOR: Your time's getting pretty short, Radbourn. Ten minutes, I'd say.

HOSS (*searching his mind for some information to finish his story – and his mind, increasingly erratic, returns to baseball*): Okay. Well, the league champions in 1883 was the Boston Beaneaters, see, and they figured to stand in our way in '84. Fact is they won eleven of their first twelve games that year and fifteen out of seventeen. They was in first place in late May. But on June the 6th, we took the Beaneaters into extra innings with me on the mound – and I would've won the game, too, except that it was called off on account of darkness with the score tied at one and one. But we proved that we could play with the Beaneaters – and people were beginnin' to say that maybe Old Hoss wasn't washed up quite yet. But then the next day Sweeney struck out nineteen Boston hitters, settin' a new record, and all of a sudden Sweeney was the king again.

ACTOR: I thought Sweeney was dead.

HOSS: (*who is having trouble keeping things straight in his mind*) No, no, you got it wrong. I'm still talkin' about '84, see, when Sweeney was still on the club. Anyways, a marchin' band back in Providence played "Hail to the Chief" when Sweeney stepped off the train, and he was put into a carriage that rolled right past Carrie Stanhope's boardin' house. And don't you think that Sweeney got a swelled head out of all this? The obnoxious bastard was tryin' to push me off the pedestal and climb up all by hisself, but Old Hoss Radbourn wasn't goin' to let him get away with it. Old Hoss wasn't goin' to be second to nobody.

ACTOR (*as Death*): But you said your arm was hurt so bad that you could hardly lift it up. And now you were pitching practically every day? Something's wrong here.

HOSS: I just figured I'd tough it out and I'd recover before the next season got goin'. Sometimes I'd go to the pitchers' box and when I was warmin' up I knew I didn't have my best stuff – and sometimes the opposin' team'd beat me up pretty bad. But not very often. I just kept goin' out there and doin' my best. And usually that was enough for me to win. So we get near to the end of the season. Some time in September, when we was in Chicago, I woke up with pain so bad in my arm and neck I couldn't even pick up a towel from the basin. I couldn't raise my right hand high enough to button my shirt or put on my collar – or even to comb my hair. Luckily, Frank Bancroft, who'd been roomin' with me since mid-season, helped me get dressed. And then I couldn't wait for him to get out of the room so I could have a couple of drinks before breakfast. I knew that it'd be pretty difficult for me to pitch that day, but I intended to try. Maybe I couldn't throw the ball past the hitters, but I could outsmart them. So, like I always did on days when I knew I'd be pitching, I spent the morning figuring how I'd get the hitters out. Baseball – and baseball strategy. That's all I cared about, all I ever cared about – 'ceptin huntin', fishin' and Carrie. I pitched every Grays' game from August 21 through September 22. After July 23, I pitched in all but three of the Grays' thirty-nine games. And in Chicago on September 26 I pitched my club to the National League pennant, beatin' Chicago eight to three, even though, between you and me, I had nothin' that day. But I got the win – my fifty-fifth of the year – and the Grays won the pennant. After the game I collapsed, I don't mind admittin' it. I couldn't of thrown another pitch if Frank Bancroft had gone down on his knees and begged me to. But he didn't beg me. Instead, he give me a week off. And after that I beat Buffalo for win number Fifty-Six. Then I got my fifty-seventh two days later against Cleveland. A few days after that I threw a four-hitter for number fifty-eight. And then, finally, against the Phillies I tossed a shutout for my Fifty-Ninth win of the year against only twelve defeats. I don't believe nobody's gonna break that record. Not ever. And not only did I win the most games that year, I also had the lowest earned run average, the most strikeouts, the best winning percentage, the most games pitched, the most games started, the most complete games, the most innings pitched and the most batters faced. What a year!

ACTOR: About time to go, Hoss. Finish that glass of liquor.

HOSS: (*In a panic*) Wait, wait! I gotta tell ya what Bancroft, the manager, said about me. Here's what he told a reporter:

2nd ACTOR (*as BANCROFT*): Radbourn, ever a most willing worker, came to me and said – after Sweeney quit the club – that he would pitch out the balance of the schedule for us. We were playing every other day then. After Charlie had pitched something like ten successive games, the terrible strain began to tell. I was rooming with him then and it was easily noticeable that the task was making a nervous, as well as a physical wreck out of him. There were many nights when Radbourn didn't sleep at all. During others he'd walk the floor for hours and when he did turn in he'd sleep only fitfully. In the evenings I'd take him to theatres, parks, or for rides – anywhere to get his mind off baseball. But it didn't help. Charlie's sole thought was to keep his arm in shape – and to win that pennant. Radbourn made good – he pitched out our schedule that year – exhibited the greatest gameness ever shown on a ball field.

ACTOR (*as Death*) All right, Charlie. Time to go.

HOSS: Just a minute! Lemme finish my story! So I went back to Providence for the 1885 campaign, but it didn't go so well for me or for the team, neither. I won twenty-eight games that year but lost twenty-one, and the team faded out of contention in August. Fact is, things was so bad that the board of directors folded up the team at the end of the year, selling off its best players, includin' me. I went to the Boston club, where I did pretty good, but not great. I still had a few good years left in me, but I guess my arm never really recovered from all the pitchin' I did in 1884. But, tell ya the truth, I didn't give a good god damn. Carrie and I spent a lot of time together, and then she moved to Bloomington along with her son, tellin' everybody that she was a widow – which, of course, she wasn't – and my wife, which was another lie. Oh, yeah, Carrie and I lived together – in sin, you might say – but she started proceedin's for divorce, and we waited 'til everythin' settled down so we could get married. I went on pitchin' with Boston – and pitched 'em to the pennant in 1890 – 'til I signed with Cincinnati for the biggest damn salary I ever got, five thousand dollars, in 1891. But things didn't go so good for me with the Red Stockings, so I asked the club to release me at the end of the year since I was intendin' to quit the game altogether. Most players went to the minors after they couldn't perform on the big league level no more, but I was different. No minor league ball for me. Not for the greatest pitcher who ever lived.

ACTOR: And now you're running this place. A pretty sad end for "the best pitcher who ever lived," wouldn't you say?

HOSS: My saloon and billiards hall? No, I ain't ashamed of it. Me and Carrie, we run it together. I put an ad in the Bloomington City Directory, sayin' "Billiards and Pool, Polite Attention. Pleasant Associates. Best of Everything in Wet Goods and Cigars." Well, I ain't so sure about the "polite attention," 'cause I never was the polite type, but Carrie said I had to put those words into the ad. Fact is, people

always want to ask me about my baseball career, and I don't walk to talk about it. So I just sit in the corner, usually all by myself. But whenever I can I go out huntin' and fishin' and leave somebody else to look after the place.

ACTOR: And you want these people to believe that you don't miss baseball?

HOSS: Yeah, that's the truth, and I don't mind tellin' ya. I played an exhibition game in Chenoa in '92, then, in '94, I wrote to some of the big league clubs – Boston, St. Louis, New York – tellin' them I wanted to pitch another year. But they had forgot Old Hoss, and the sons of bitches didn't want me.

ACTOR: All right, Radbourn. I guess we're finished here. Follow me. (*He starts to exit*)

HOSS: (*Trying desperately to remain alive for another ten minutes or so*) There's a few other things I guess I oughtta mention. Whaddya say?

ACTOR: You know my policy: no extra time, no bargaining. (*looking at his pocket watch*) You've got two minutes left, Charlie.

HOSS: (*Showing signs of fear, and trying to rush through the rest of what he has to say*) Well, I come down with a bad case of syphilis about the same time as all this was happenin'. Folks'd speculate whether I got the syphilis from a prostitute and passed it along to Carrie. Some bastards even said that she was carryin' the disease and gave it to me. I never could figure out what really happened; oh, yeah, I slept with whores now and then, but I don't know if that's how I got the syphilis. Still, I saw the doctors about it, but they said there was nothin' they could do. (*Holding his arm out to Death, as if saying, let me add one more word*) That was jus' the first of some lousy breaks. I went huntin' in April of '94 and stepped out from behind a tree just as a friend of mine was gettin' off a shot. I caught some of that shot in my face and lost the sight in my left eye.

ACTOR: It's good that you saved that eye-patch, Radbourn. Better put it on again.

HOSS (*puts a patch over his left eye*) After that I stayed in the house, bein' tended to by Carrie. Most of my time was spent drinkin', cause I lost interest in everythin' else. And a few years later my right arm become paralyzed – the result of the syphilis, the doc tole me. (*His right arm becomes useless, hanging at Hoss's side*) I guess you could say that I was, whatyacallit, a recluse after that. But I wanted Carrie and her son to be protected if I should up and die, so the two of us snuck off to Milwaukee in '95, and got married. 'Course, I didn't tell nobody about this, 'cause my family and friends thought we'd been married all along. About a month later I made out my will. Said that I wanted to pay my debts and funeral expenses, but whatever was left over would go to Carrie.

ACTOR: Time's up! No more stalling. I've got some more work to do today, so let's go.

HOSS: (*To Death; he seems to calm down, reconciled to his fate*) So you're goin' to take me now. This is it. (*To the audience*) If you wanted to get my autygraph, it's too late. I hope I told you everything you want to know, but if I didn't, what the hell? You can clear out of here right now. I got nothin' more to say. Show's over, folks. (*Spits in the spittoon, then follows the Actor and the 2nd Actor off the stage.*)

(12,359 words.)