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Tinker to Evers to Chance

By

MAT SMART

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“The world premiere of *Tinker to Evers to Chance* was produced by Geva Theatre Center, Rochester, N.Y.”

for
Laura Elizabeth Hall
Deborah Marie Craven
and
Kevin “Gus” Keil

Tinker to Evers to Chance received its world premier production at Geva Theatre Center (Mark Cuddy, Artistic Director; Tom Parrish, Executive Director), opening on May 16, 2014.

CAST:

RJ James Craven
Lauren Emily Kitchens

PRODUCTION:

Director Sean Daniels
Scene Designer.....Apollo Mark Weaver
Costume Designer.....Amanda Doherty
Lighting Designer Emily Stork
Sound Designer Stowe Nelson
Dramaturg Becca Poccia
Stage Manager Frank Cavallo
Production Assistant..... Jenny Daniels

The play was subsequently produced by Merrimack Repertory Theatre (Sean Daniels, Artistic Director; Elizabeth Kegley, Executive Director), opening on Feb. 13, 2016.

CAST:

RJ James Craven
Lauren Emily Kitchens

PRODUCTION:

Director Sean Daniels
Scene Designer.....Randall Parsons
Costume Designer.....A. Lee Vilieis
Lighting Designer Brian J. Lilienthal
Sound Designer Stowe Nelson
Producer Peter Crewe
Production Stage Manager.....Casey Leigh Hagwood
Stage Manager Danielle Zandri

The development of *Tinker to Evers to Chance* was supported by a workshop in PlayLabs at the Playwrights' Center (Minneapolis).

Special thanks: Jeremy Cohen

Tinker to Evers to Chance

CHARACTERS

LAUREN: early 30s, any ethnicity. Also plays:

JOHNNY EVERS: 25 and 64 years old.

NESSA POWELL: 17 years old.

RJ: late 50s or early 60s, any ethnicity. Also plays:

FLORENCE: 25 years old.

MRS. SPOOR: ageless.

JOHNNY EVERS: 64 years old.

PLACE: Chicago.

TIME: October 2003 and April 2004.

NOTES: There is an intermission between Act I and Act II.

While the events described by the TV and radio announcers are accurate, the dialogue is invented. It should be recorded and made to sound real, but it is not subject to any copyright other than that of this play.

Tinker to Evers to Chance

ACT I

(NESSA POWELL's one bedroom apartment on the second floor of 3625 N. Sheffield Avenue in Chicago. Outside the window, the back of Wrigley Field's right-field bleachers can be seen. It is nearly time for Game 6 of the 2003 National League Championship Series to begin.

RJ stands in front of his laptop in the living room. He holds a file folder with a large stack of typed and handwritten pages. He reads from the first page.)

RJ. *The Saddest of Possible Words* by Vanessa Powell.

(He turns to the next page.)

This play is for people who occasionally cry for no reason—
for those who long for a greatness that no one alive today has
ever known.

It is for the angry, the foolish, the lovers who can't stop loving—
(Clears his throat and slowly repeats.)

The lovers who can't stop loving.

It is for hope, smashed against a brick wall, over and over and
over again, until it is fucked up beyond all recognition.

In other words, this play is for Cubs fans.

(Beat.)

It is for my daughter, Lauren, who I miss more and more each
day she is gone, and each day I grow older.

It is for people who are forced to ask: when is enough enough?
Or is that a question never to be asked and never to be
answered?

When is enough enough?

(The front door opens, and LAUREN hurries in with a carry-on suitcase. She wears a business outfit and a well-worn Cubs hat.

We now hear the commotion outside. The sound of a bustling crowd. The sound of the Bucket Boys drumming on empty five-gallon buckets. A saxophone plays a meandering jazz version of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame.")

LAUREN. Why are you here?

RJ. What?—Didn't you get my voicemails?

LAUREN. My battery died on the way to the airport.

Why are you still here?

RJ. Hello, Lauren. How are you? It's nice to see you.

LAUREN. Sorry. The flight was late and—I'm sorry, I'm—
Hi, RJ.

(LAUREN holds out her hand. RJ shakes it.)

RJ. Hi, Lauren.

LAUREN. How are you?

RJ. I was trying to call you.

LAUREN *(calling out)*. Mom? I'm sorry I'm late. You ready to go? Ma?

(LAUREN goes to the bedroom and looks inside. RJ closes his laptop. He hurriedly puts the handwritten pages in a folder. One of the pages falls to the floor.)

LAUREN *(cont'd)*. Mom?

Did she already go to Wrigley?

RJ. Did she call you?

LAUREN. I don't know.

RJ. Will you plug in your phone, please?

(LAUREN comes back into living room and searches through her bag for her phone charger. Eventually, she finds it.)

LAUREN. Work right now is totally—and I didn't want to cut the flight that close, but I had a—and then my phone died and—I hate LaGuardia—everything is always late out of—but it doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that my mother and I are going to see the Cubs win the National League pennant. Mark Prior on the mound. Cubs up three games to two. Against the Marlins? Please.

(She plugs in her phone.) It's gonna take a minute.

(Beat.)

RJ. Marlins are tough.

LAUREN. The Marlins are garbage. They're an expansion team. They shouldn't even exist. They are not tough.

RJ. They won the World Series six years ago.

(Beat.)

LAUREN. Why are you here and where is my mother?

RJ. Wednesdays and Saturdays I take Nessa to physical therapy. Tuesday and Thursday mornings I meet her at the Starbucks on Addison, we go to Jewel for groceries, and then I make sure she's squared away here. I'm out by noon. But today she forgot the marshmallows and Rice Krispies, so I had to go back out. Said she always makes you Rice Krispie Treats when you visit.

LAUREN *(slightly embarrassed, but trying not to show it)*.

... That's right. So?

RJ. When I came back at two p.m., she wasn't here.

LAUREN. So?

RJ. I don't know. I'm worried.

LAUREN. You're not her keeper. You've made that clear.

RJ. She's not answering her cellphone.

LAUREN. She's seventy-four years old—she never answers her cellphone.

I bet she was already in line at the gates by two p.m. Did you check?

RJ. No, I—

LAUREN. I bet she is already at our seats with an Old Style, on her second bag of peanuts with the lineup already penciled in. So I'm gonna go over there now so I don't miss first pitch. Or *The Coming of the Lord* that will follow.

It's OK for you to go. And you don't need to come by while I'm here, but we'll still pay you.

RJ. Who's gonna carry her up the stairs if she needs it?

LAUREN. She says her right side is only that bad once or twice a month.

RJ. It's a little more now.

Will you please call me if you need help? I don't live far.

LAUREN. Is that your laptop?

RJ. What?

Yes.

LAUREN. Are you doing other work while you're here?

RJ. No.

(LAUREN's phone beeps. She looks at it.)

LAUREN. Thirteen new messages.

RJ. Twelve of those are from me.

LAUREN *(calling her voicemail)*. Why did you—

RJ. See who the other message is from.

(LAUREN listens, skipping each message that's from RJ. He paces.)

LAUREN. How much is a little more?

RJ. What?

LAUREN. Having to carry her up the stairs?

RJ. Once or twice a week.

LAUREN. A week?

RJ. Give or take.

LAUREN. How does that compare to other stroke survivors you work with?

RJ. Every case is different.

LAUREN *(still skipping messages, looking out the window)*.

I told her she shouldn't have gotten a second floor apartment.

But when she retired, all she wanted was to live outside Wrigley and this was the only apartment for rent.

You know, if you stand on a chair, you can see a little bit of the outfield grass.

Two floors up, it's a perfect view of the field.

Why are the Bucket Boys drumming already?

(She closes the window. It is somewhat quieter in the apartment.)

RJ. It's been all day today.

LAUREN *(of the voicemail)*. It's from her.

RJ. Thank God.

(LAUREN listens and then puts the phone down.)

LAUREN. That was ... that was weird.

RJ. What'd she say?

LAUREN. She said, "Enough is enough."

(Pause.)

RJ. What'd she say exactly?

LAUREN. She said:

(In NESSA's voice.) "Honey?

Enough is enough.

... I love you."

Then she hung up.

RJ. What time did she leave it?

LAUREN. It was toward the end of your messages.

RJ. Can I listen to it?

LAUREN. I'm calling her.

(LAUREN dials. They wait.)

LAUREN *(cont'd)*. Went straight to voicemail.

She has her ticket.

RJ. She had me take a picture of her with it this morning.

Can I listen to the message?

LAUREN. Has she been taking her pills?

RJ. She does fine with her medication.

LAUREN. I would really appreciate it if you double-checked her pills.

RJ. It's in my profile that I don't do anything with medication.

Some personal care assistants do, some don't. I don't. Your mother hired me anyway.

... She fills up her pillbox every Monday morning. She doesn't need help.

LAUREN. And what qualifies you to make that assessment?

Are you a nurse?

RJ. No. I cost a lot less than a nurse.

Look, Lauren, her mind is fine—great, actually. It's her body that's giving her trouble. She doesn't need help with her pills.

(Beat.)

LAUREN. Well, I need to change and then I'm heading over.

RJ. Can I stay here?

LAUREN. What?

RJ. Just until I know she's OK.

LAUREN. How old is your mother?

RJ. She just turned eighty-seven.

LAUREN. And do you know where she is every second of every day?

RJ. Yes, actually. She's either at her place or out and about with me.

I won't be able to do anything until I know Nessa is OK—can I just stay here until you call me?

LAUREN. Fine.

And now—bum bum bum ba!

(LAUREN takes a cardboard box out of her suitcase. She opens the box and takes out an old Chicago Cubs jersey.)

RJ. Holy cow.

Is that it?

LAUREN. The jersey Johnny Evers himself gave to my great-grandmother after the 1906 World Series.

RJ. Holy cow.

LAUREN. The jersey my mom got Evers to sign in 1946—only a year before he died.

RJ. Where's the signature?

LAUREN. Right there. It's faded, but—

RJ. May I touch it?

LAUREN. Are you a Cubs fan?

RJ. What kind of question is that? Of course I'm a Cubs fan.

LAUREN. My mother says you seem happy when the White Sox win.

RJ. So I don't hate the White Sox—sue me! Frankly, I think the crosstown rivalry is garbage. Neither the Cubs nor the White Sox are good enough to hate.

LAUREN. You hate the Cardinals?

RJ. There's only one thing I hate more than the Cardinals.

LAUREN. What's that?

RJ. Cardinals fans.

(Beat.)

LAUREN. OK, you can touch it.

(RJ touches the jersey for a brief moment. He pulls his hand away like it is hot.)

RJ. Woo!

LAUREN. And now—I'm going to do something very stupid.

(LAUREN takes off her dress shirt. She wears a tank top underneath. She pulls out her toiletry bag and puts on some deodorant. She puts on the jersey.)

RJ. What the hell are you doing?

LAUREN. I'm wearing it to the game.

RJ. That belongs in a museum.

LAUREN. It belongs in Cooperstown. But Cooperstown wouldn't guarantee that they'd actually display it, so we told them to shove it.

RJ. What if someone dumps a beer on you?

LAUREN. It'll be worth it. This jersey is going to help reverse the curse. Joe Tinker to Johnny Evers to Frank Chance—the double play combination for the Cubs the only two times we won the World Series in 1907 and 1908. This is some lucky shit.

This is—

(Sees the handwritten page on the ground that RJ dropped earlier. She picks it up.) This is my mother's handwriting.

RJ. It's nothing.

(RJ takes the paper from her hands.)

LAUREN. Would you give that back to me?

RJ. I don't know if your mother is ready for you to see it.

LAUREN. Excuse me?

RJ. Nessa hires me on the side as a typist.

LAUREN. To type what?

RJ. Because of her right hand—the stroke—it takes her too long to type things.

LAUREN. That and she doesn't have a computer.

(Grabs the paper out of RJ's hands. She reads.) This play is for people who occasionally cry for no reason—

(She continues to read silently.)

In other words, this play is for Cubs fans.

(She laughs.)

It is for my daughter, Lauren, who I miss more and more ...

(She continues to read silently.)

... when is enough enough?

Or is that a question never to be asked and never to be answered?

When is enough enough?

(Beat.)

What is this?

RJ. It's a play your mother is writing.

She's paying me ten cents a page to type it for her.

LAUREN. ... What's it about?

RJ. It's about Johnny Evers. About his life. He had a stroke when he was sixty-one—and like your mother after her stroke, Evers had trouble with the right side of his body.

But mostly, it's about his daughter dying. And how it broke his heart.

LAUREN. “Honey?

Enough is enough.

... I love you.”

Did I break my mother's heart?

(RJ doesn't answer.)

LAUREN *(cont'd)*. I took a month leave of absence after her stroke. I told her I would stay here, but she practically begged me to keep my job in New York. She—

Ugh!

She is so full of—

(Looks over the page again.) Am I in it?

RJ. No.

LAUREN. Is she?

RJ. She's in one scene. When she was seventeen years old and got Evers to sign the jersey.

LAUREN. Are you in it?

RJ. No. Well, not exactly. I think I'm the inspiration for one of the characters—a ratchety nurse named Mrs. Spoor. Who, in real life, was the woman who took care of Johnny Evers after his stroke.

(LAUREN points to the folder.)

LAUREN. Is that all of it?

RJ. Most of it. She's still working on the last scene.

LAUREN. ... When I was maybe old enough to not have a babysitter, but not quite—my mother was taking night classes to get her associate's degree. So instead of having a babysitter, she would write me plays. Short, strange plays. I would rehearse them on my own—with my stuffed animals—with Barbies and sock puppets—sometimes she wrote scenes between the salt and pepper shaker and a bag of flour ... and then when she came home, I would perform them for her.

They were what she left behind to keep me safe while she was gone.

(She dials a number on her phone, waits. She leaves a voicemail.) Ma, it's me. I'm at the apartment. Everything out of LaGuardia was delayed. I'm about to head over. I'll meet you at the seats, OK?

I just hope you're ready for a fish fry.

Because we're gonna eff up these eff-ing Marlins so eff-ing bad, and then we're gonna burn Wrigleyville down tonight.

(Note: LAUREN actually says eff and eff-ing. She only says the swear word in its entirety when it is entirely spelled out.)

LAUREN *(cont'd)*. I'll see you in a minute.

Love you.

(She hangs up. She holds the page out to RJ.) If she's not finished, then she doesn't mean for me to see it yet.

(RJ takes the page. He opens the folder with NESSA's play. LAUREN looks down at the title page. He puts the page back into the folder.)