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Wednesday, October 20, 2004: We believe.

It had to come down to this, didn't it? For all of my disavowals of fate and destiny and curses and ghosts, this is what was supposed to happen. After the most supreme test of faith, which we passed, after three heart stopping games, which we survived, after being reminded of those ghosts and goblins and the omnipresent forces of the past, which we denied, the fact is that there had to be a game seven, some how, some way. There had to be a final confrontation between us and our tormentors. There had to be an epic storyline. These playoffs were geared toward this clash. It is what everybody outside of Minnesota and Anaheim wanted.

We believe.

Everyone talked about Curt Schilling and what this might mean. How long could he go? How long would his tattered ankle hold up? What sort of stuff would he have? He answered these questions pretty damned well, going seven innings, giving up a solo home run, and departing with a 4-1 lead in a performance that far surpassed Willis Reed or the over-hyped Michael Jordan flu game in immensity, performance, and obstacles overcome. As I said yesterday, I'd have been happy with five innings, a surmountable handful of runs, and a huge psychic victory. Instead, on a night when we could only muster four runs, Schill was our workhorse. And it is even more remarkable once one discovers what precisely he overcame. The talk the last few days has been all about

finding shoes or a brace that would work, some wonder of technology and duct tape, medical science and voodoo. But in this balance, Schill never found a comfort zone. So according to Dr. Bill Morgan this morning, what they did was actually sew his flesh to cartilage in order to provide a barrier that kept the tendon out of its groove, since it slipped out on every pitch and it was the slippage back to its normal slot that caused excruciating pain. That was why his sock had blood on it last night, which we saw on innumerable close-ups and chalked up to seepage from a shot. They sewed flesh to cartilage, unsewed it last night, and if they go on . . . well, let's not go that far yet. Schilling had his date with destiny. He carried us. Which is why . . .

We believe.

For those who believe in the forces of fate or history or the ghosts of Yankee Stadium, last night must have been an exorcism. We lose those games. Bellhorn's home run that the umps initially called a double? That call never gets overturned. It did last night – correctly, as the ball clearly bounced off a fan's chest about two feet above the wall. Instead of a two-run double that made it 3-1, Belli got to trot the rest of the way, giving us an extra run that would prove vital. Then in the eighth A-Rod tried to cheat his way onto base. His perfidy, blatantly swatting the ball out of Arroyo's glove on a play in front of first that would have otherwise been a clear fielder's choice, would have been rewarded in the past. The call, initially that A-Rod was safe and that Jeter had scored when the ball was knocked out of Bronson's glove, would have remained, a seeming example of how evil can sometimes overcome good. Instead, after huddling, the umpires again made the right call, ruling that A-Rod had obviously cheated, that he was out, and that Jeter had to return to first. Two calls that always go against the Sox, two calls that required umpires to huddle, two calls that they reversed rightly. The prehensile slackjawed mouth-breathing troglodytes in the Toilet Bowl howled madly, threw things onto the field despite their lack of opposable thumbs, and caused the game to be halted while riot police ringed the field, but justice prevailed.

We believe.

These games have been lots of things. But for a Sox fan, it may initially shock some to know that they have not been especially enjoyable. How could they be? When every pitch can mean the end of the season, when the tension is enough to open up ulcers, when the games play themselves out so excruciatingly, how could any sane person enjoy this? Of course there have been moments of rapture, but rapture born as much of relief and release as of unadulterated joy. This is our lot. We can derive pleasure from the process after the fact, but coming back from a three games to none hole tends to absorb frivolous sentiments such as joy.

We believe.

There were not going to be any easy games. The Yankees and their fans had to know this even with that seemingly insurmountable lead. We had to know it even as the comeback went from irrational dreamscape to tangible reality. And so last night's events

were not surprising. The Yankees rallied for a run off of Bronson Arroyo when Derek Jeter drove in Miguel Cairo, who had doubled. A-Fraud tried to cheat, but instead was nailed, with the resultant brouhaha giving Arroyo a chance to settle down a bit and retire the rest of the side. It was 4-2 going into the ninth, and our bats were silenced. Keith Foulke came out in the bottom of the ninth, and there was no way it could go 1-2-3. As Rob had been saying for a few innings at that point (once a superstition takes hold, you cannot stop it – we talked between every half inning, getting off the phone as the first batter came to the plate), there was no way that the Yankees would not have the winning run up at the plate at some point in the ninth. Rob buys into fate and destiny and all of that claptrap far more than I, but we both knew that whether it was destiny or simply parity, he was right. And it proved to be so. Foulke walked two guys and eventually faced Tony Clark with two outs. In a tense at bat (aren't they all when these teams are in the ninth inning?) Foulke struck out Clark. We were on our way to game seven. In a situation in which the Yankees have so often found a way to win, we faced them down and took the victory.

We believe.

And so this is it. Whether through predestiny or the simple fact that for two years these two have been separated by a sliver, it had to come down to this. Game 7, Yankee Stadium, both teams weary, neither putting an ace on the mound, neither team even having a starter with something resembling full rest. We will throw D-Lowe and Waker, likely in that order (If Francona's first guess last night holds), and then everyone is eligible. Might we see Pedro on the mound in the ninth in the Toilet Bowl? Absolutely. Could Foulke possibly be asked to summon up another inning? Might Ramiro Mendoza or Curtis Leskanc play a huge role? Anything is possible now. The Yankees' pitching is in equal disarray. And of course at the plate and in the field anyone might be the difference maker. Manny has been nearly silent all series. Ortiz has been the hero this week. Either might have the crucial plate appearance. Maybe Johnny Damon or Doug Mientkiewicz or Trot or Tek or Belli or Roberts or Mueller or Millar. Maybe the Idiots will be able to do it one more time. Maybe they can make history, and in so doing, rewrite some.

We believe.

It had to come down to this. I do not know if it is fate or simply faith that has brought us to this point. I do not know if it is destiny or drive. I do not know if it is talismans or talent. At this point I can no longer say. It is out of my hands. It is out of our hands.

We believe.