

# Once Upon a Clown

Genre: Drama

Log line: Sometimes a Savior doesn't always look like one.

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Rudy Bue is a high school hockey goalie for the Lincoln Academy Saints who have made it to the state tournament for the first time in 33 years. Thanks to his outstanding play, the Saints make it all the way to the championship game that ends in a tie during the regulation period against the Bulls from St. Paul. With only seconds remaining in the sudden death overtime there is a face off to the left of Rudy.

HOCKEY ANNOUNCER VOICE OVER: Rudy Bue has been outstanding tonight with 51 saves and now with 33 seconds remaining in sudden death overtime; the face off is to Bue's left...the puck is dropped...Minachelli controls the puck for the Bulls...over to Iverson...

***I can't see the puck...***

back to Minachelli...over to Connors at the point

***I can't see the puck!***

He shoots-- HE SCORES!!! IT'S OVER!!!...IT'S OVER!!!...THE BULLS WIN!!

As Rudy looks back to find the puck, he sees the flashing red goal light and hears the goal siren behind the net signifying their sudden death loss. Instantly, his mind flashes back to the fatal train collision--and with it, the flashing red railroad crossing signals and the sound of sirens--that only a few years earlier had killed his father and had only slightly injured him. His Father had been his idol, his hero, and his world. He had been one of the greatest hockey players that had ever come out of the state--and now he was gone. Stunned and bewildered, he stands in front of the net staring at the flashing red goal light through his white goalie mask.

Days later we find Rudy trying to stay awake in his English class while the teacher begins to explain the story they are reading together. 'OK we have a lot of symbolism going on here class,' the teacher describes. 'So what does the white face mean? Come on, we talked about this yesterday--remember? That's right, it signifies death. So what does it mean in our story here?'

The teacher goes on to describe the déjà vu experience of the main character--how the story begins where it ends —like a circle that is in a sense eternal, transcendent of time itself without a beginning and without an end. One of the students asks if it is like a dream and the teacher agrees, calling it a once upon a time moment in which we put aside reality as we know it and enter into the reality of the story. 'Once upon a time there was a woodsman...once upon a time there was a beautiful princess.' When he sees Rudy falling asleep in the back, he calls him out; and after class the teacher asks if anything is wrong because he seems to be sleeping a lot lately. 'No, just tired,' he replies.

But something is wrong. Angry and bitter and hurt about the loss of their hockey game that had triggered the loss of his father, Rudy begins to withdraw emotionally from the world around him. Seeing the change in her son, his mother decides to send him to the same psychologist that is treating his 11 year old, stuttering brother, Jamie, to see if he can make any headway with Rudy. During their first and only session, the psychologist asks Rudy if he ever cried over his father's death. 'Nope' he replies. During the rest of the session, Rudy plays the clown to keep the hurt from surfacing. Afterwards, the psychologist tells his mother that future therapy sessions are a waste of time until Rudy decides he wants help.

As he continues to withdraw from his friends and family, it is only his admiring younger brother, Jamie that gains access into his solitary world. Jamie is scheduled to give his statement of faith in a few weeks at his classes' confirmation service at their prestigious, high-profile, mega church where they belong. And as the confirmation service approaches, Rudy becomes more frustrated at the progress of his stuttering brother and tries in vain to help pronounce even the simplest of words on their trips to the church. On more than one occasion he tells his hard working mother, 'Why do they even go to that church? So we can feel important being around beautiful people with nice things? Jesus wasn't born in a country club, mom. He was born in a manger and if he were to walk in to church today, I bet half of us wouldn't even know Him.'

One night on the way home from church, Jamie tries again to say his statement of faith without stuttering. 'For G-G-G-God so I-I-loved the wawawa world, th th that...' In a sudden fit of rage and frustration Rudy yells: 'For God's sake, Jamie, just say the words! For-God-so-loved-the-world-that-he-gave-his-only-begotten-son-that-who-so-ever-believes-on-him-should-not-perish-but-have-everlasting-life! My God Jamie, you're gonna have half the world watching you on TV in a few weeks. Do you think you can get that one little phrase right?!' As they pull up in the driveway, Rudy feels a sense of remorse after seeing his brother cower in fear. He then asks him if he wants to play flashlight tag—Jamie's' favorite game—as a means of making amends.

When Jamie goes into the house for the flashlight, Rudy goes into hiding. And after searching for his brother for what seems like hours, Jamie finally finds him sleeping in the garage: 'I f-f-f-found you, Rudy!' Jamie cry's out with excitement holding the flashlight in his hand. 'I f-f-found you!'

From that moment on, the story shifts into a dream, a déjà vu that ends where it begins--with Jamie's bright flashlight shining in Rudy's face. But something profound happens in that dream between the beginning and the end. It is there where time stands still, suspended in a once-upon-a-time moment that takes Rudy down a path that is similar, but different than the current world in which he lives.

In the déjà vu dream-world that follows, Rudy gets up after being discovered by his brother and wants nothing more to do with the game or him. He pushes him aside and goes in to his room and packs his belongings and tells his younger brother he is leaving home. Jamie watches in disbelief as his brother packs his duffle bag full of clothes. And when Rudy sees his white goalie mask among his belongings, he whips it against the wall in anger--and all

Jamie can do is shudder in fear, knowing his brother is leaving and may never return. 'Are you ccccoming bbbback? he asks Rudy. 'Do I look like my brother's keeper?' he shouts out sarcastically and walks out.

He then hitches a ride that night and gets dropped off in the middle of a small town that is filled with people celebrating *Rodeo Days*. Looking for a place to stay, he stops at a nearby police station and asks if can spend the night. The sheriff reluctantly allows him to share a cell with a town drunk by the name of Corvair Dubone and an old rodeo clown by the name of Methuen Finn who has been jailed on a number of misdemeanors including disturbing the peace.

The quirky old man named Finn is as comical as he is a mystery. Dancing in his cell in the wee hours of the morning like a Mr. Bojangles, he hums his way into a stupefied smile. Irritated, Rudy tries to ignore him, but can't, and discovers from Corvair how crazy the old man really is. 'He still thinks he's a rodeo clown and keeps putting on the white face paint and attends these rodeos even though his "clowning " days are over.' he tells Rudy. 'I don't know why those clowns wear make up like that anyway...guess they are suppose to die to themselves or something crazy like that. And you'd have to be crazy to step into a ring to save a bull rider from them angry bulls.'

When all three are released the next morning, the old man asks Rudy if he can make him breakfast Having nowhere to go in particular, Rudy agrees and follows the old man to his humble abode: an abandoned freight car just outside of town.

The old man makes him a breakfast of re-fried beans in a cast iron skillet. Finished eating, Rudy gets ready to hit the road, but sees the old man putting on white face paint. Curious, he asks him what he is doing and the old man tells him he's going to the rodeo and grabs his black tattered bag from one of the shelves. He then reaches up and grabs an extra jar of white face paint and gives it to Rudy and tells him it's a gift. Rudy laughs. Having nothing else to do and no other place to go, he decides to follow him to the rodeo. When the two of them get to the arena, they are quickly whisked away by a few sarcastic grounds keepers who tell 'Bozo' they already have their clown. The old man nods as if he had known all along he wasn't invited, then takes his place on the far end of the arena. Once the rodeo begins, the old man puts on a huge red bow tie and a dusty leather hat. No sooner had he done so, the first bull rider shoots out of the gate. It is a long and wild ride until the bull finally throws him off. Then a young rodeo clown jumps in the arena to divert the bull's attention, but is unsuccessful as the bull makes repeated attempts to gore the rider who lies injured on the ground. Desperate to distract the bull, the young clown gets too close and is hooked by the bull's horns and is cast helplessly aside. The anxious crowd gasps in horror as the bull lifts the young cowboy up in the air like a cat playing with a mouse. Others try to jump in to save the cowboy, but are no match for the bull. As screams and mayhem begin to erupt, the old man enters the arena with an old bicycle horn and honks it again and again until the he grabs the bull's attention. Then he coughs and a feather flutters out of his mouth. Then he blows his nose with an oversized red hanky. As the wild bull looks on, the old man's oversized pants fall to the ground revealing his red polka dot shorts. Suddenly, the crowd breathes a sigh of relief as if it is part of the show. Then, as the old man struggles

to pull up his pants, the bull begins to charge him racing full speed across the arena. Oblivious to the oncoming bull, the old man stares up at the crowd as if looking for someone and then just before the bull reaches him, he trips over his pants and the bull misses him by inches. The crowd laughs nervously as the angry bull continues to try and gore him again and again—but the old man continues to miraculously avoid each charge as he fumbles with his fallen pants. Soon the crowd is laughing hysterically while the ambulance crew takes the injured cowboy away to safety.

Intrigued by the old man, Rudy decides to stay and live in the abandoned freight car where he begins to hear stories about the great depression and railroad bulls and train hoppers called hobos—migrant workers who had actually built the majority of this country railroads. Shunned by the small town as an idiot, the old man lives just outside its borders on railroad tracks that once were used by the Great Western Railroad. He tells Rudy that one day he will ride the rails again like all the great hobos before him.

As the days pass, Rudy begins to learn more and more about the life of the old man who tells him how God speaks to people in different ways and by different means—sometimes even through dreams. The old man often reads the Bible wearing his thick, bottle size glasses that make his eyes bulge out in a comical fashion. He also gets his stories and his words mixed up regarding certain accounts of scripture, confusing the hysterical account of the flood with the historical account of the flood. On one occasion, a few members in town who heard he was a palm reader come and ask him to settle a dispute over a particular situation. The old man eagerly agrees and brings his Bible thinking they meant ‘Psalm’ reader. Ironically, the advice he gives them from the Book of Psalms, is exactly what they needed to hear. Over and over, Rudy finds himself exposed to the quirky, humorous stories and the peculiar ways of the old man and slowly his demeanor changes, as if by osmosis, assimilated by the mere presence of the crazy old man who continues to teach in the most unorthodox of methods about stories and scriptures from the Bible.

Sitting around the campfire at night, he teaches Rudy that the world is lost and can’t find their way....they needs a savior and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life. He teaches him about what it means to die to yourself and follow the cross. He teaches him how God uses the foolish and the weak things in life to confound the proud and the high and mighty.

Then after few weeks, the old man encourages him to go home. Rudy arrives the night before Jamie’s confirmation and learns that his mother has been worried sick about him and has contacted every possible department to help her find him. He also learns that Jamie has had a major break through with the psychologist, but his statement of faith has made little improvement; and if anything, he worse off than ever.

When Rudy asks his mother what the psychologist found out about Jamie, his mother tells him that just months before his father’s death, Jamie found him sleeping with another woman and his father made him promise to never tell anyone. Shocked, he accuses his mother of lying. A heated argument ensues about how Rudy never really knew his father

and he wasn't the man he thought he was: a great hockey player--yes, a great man--no. With his world beginning to crumble around him, he storms off into his room and in a fit of rage, he starts throwing things against the wall--hockey things: his pads, his skates, his glove while Jamie looks on in horror just outside the door. Suddenly their eyes meet and he yells at his brother for lying.

'I'mmmm Sssorry RRudy,' Jamie pleads. 'Get out of here,' he yells back. 'Get the hell out of my life!'

As Jamie walks away, Rudy reaches down to throw another piece of his hockey equipment against the wall and grabs his white goalie mask. Suddenly he is back in the nets during the championship game.

HOCKEY ANNOUNCER VOICE OVER

Minachelli controls the puck for the Bulls...over to Iverson...

***I can't see the puck...***

back to Minachelli...over to Connors at the point

***I can't see the puck!***

He shoots-- HE SCORES!! IT'S OVER!!...IT'S OVER!!...FATHER!!

Seeing the flashing red goal light and hearing the ambulance sirens, he breaks down and cries.

That next day Jamie is getting ready at the church for his confirmation service and the sanctuary is filled to overflowing. His mother brushes Jamie's hair with her hand and kisses him...'You'll do fine,' she tells him. He nods nervously. Shortly thereafter, the service gets underway with TV cameras filming the whole event. A few of the confirmands recite their eloquent and well rehearsed statements of faith and are applauded by the congregation. Then it is Jamie steps up to the altar. A sudden hush falls over the sanctuary as he takes hold of the microphone with both hands as if to keep it from dropping. Then he begins: F-For G-G-God so la la al loved th th the Wa Wa Waorld th-th-that...

Like a deer caught in the headlights, Jamie suddenly stops and stares helplessly out into the sea of people as if looking for help. He sees his mother fumbling with her handkerchief as she tries to help him along, but all he can do now is stare. Soon the uncomfortable silence permeates the large hall and the tension mounts as people begin to squirm in their seats. Other confirmands make sarcastic gestures and soon Jamie loses all sense of hope. As tears start coming down the sides of his face, a loud honking noise suddenly pierces the back of the sanctuary.

In walks Rudy wearing a white face and large oversized pants and a tattered hat. He stops half way down the aisle then coughs. A feather comes out of his mouth and floats slowly to the floor. A few chuckle, then he gets out a big red handkerchief and blows his nose making an exaggerated sound. A few more chuckle as he works his way up to the altar. Suddenly his oversized pants fall to the ground revealing his red polka dot underwear. Suddenly the whole congregation is laughing.

After pulling up his pants he approaches Jamie who continues to clutch the microphone as if his life depended on it.

Rudy stares him in the face and then begins: ***For God so loved the world...***

Jamie begins to repeat it: 'FFFor GGod so lala loved the world...'

***'That he gave his only begotten Son'***

'TTTaaht He ggave hhhis only bbbe gotten Son'

***'That who so ever believes on Him'***

'TTThat who so ever bebebelieves on HHim'

***'Should not perish but have everlasting life'***

'Shhould not pperish but have ever lllasting llllife.'

'Good job Jamie,' Rudy says

'GGGood jjjob Jamie,' Jamie replies--and then smiles.

As tears stream down the sides of Rudy's face, he reaches out and hugs his brother. 'I loves ya, Jamie,' Rudy says in the style of the old man. 'I lllove you too RRRudy.' Jamie replies.

That night he hitch hikes back to see the old man, but he is nowhere to be found. He then starts walking along the railroad tracks where the Great Western once rolled; and to his surprise, he sees a train coming at him in the distance. 'Methuen!' he shouts as the solitary light from the train grows brighter and brighter and brighter. Suddenly, it is in his face.

'I f-f-f-found you, Rudy!' Jamie cry's out with excitement holding the flashlight in his hand. 'I f-f-found you!'