

Hardball

Michael Bettencourt, Robert E. Ozasky
and Dean B. Kaner

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DESCRIPTION

The protagonist of Hardball is co-writer Dean Kaner's grandfather, Henry Kaner. In his early twenties, Henry Kaner had been a pitching phenom for a semi-pro baseball team in Superior, Wisconsin. Everyone expected him to move up to the majors, and in fact he was offered a contract by the St. Louis Browns. What made his story drama-worthy in Dean's eyes was the fact that Henry was the son of Orthodox Jewish parents who had emigrated from Lithuania to escape the pogroms, and because of their efforts to create a better life, Henry Kaner, twenty-two, had been offered the chance to reach the American dream through that most American game, baseball. The catch, of course, was that he would have had to play on Saturdays. In the end, he said thanks, but no thanks, choosing religion and family (his father was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's, which in 1922 was a new condition, only named in 1906) over what probably would have been a lucrative career.

CHARACTERS

- BAYLA KANER, 50s - Henry and David's mother
- RAPHAEL KANER, 60s - Henry and David's father
- HENRY KANER, 23
- DAVID KANER, 18
- MORRIE COHEN, 22 - Friend of Henry Kaner
- LOULA PARSONS, 22 - Wife of Lou Parsons
- ROSIE DAVIS, 24 - Daughter of the local butcher
- BARNEY PELTY - Known as the "Yiddish Curver"

MISCELLANEOUS

- Even though it would require a bit of inventive blocking, the actor playing RAFAEL KANER could double as BARNEY PELTY if casting is a budgetary concern. The two characters can be distinguished by something as simple as BARNEY wearing a baseball cap. However, the preference is for two separate actors.

Act I, Scene 1

Stage in darkness.

In the darkness, the harsh sound of an OUTBREATH, repeated once --

Light comes up slightly -- second time.

Light fully up -- third time.

HENRY KANER appears, on the mound, throwing right-handed. He does not wear a glove, but he holds an actual baseball. The unusual thing about the baseball is that its covering is torn apart.

He stops pitching. At his feet is a discarded baseball uniform, cleats, a glove, socks, a duffel bag -- stuff in a locker room after a game.

BARNEY PELTY appears, indicating he's from the St. Louis Browns.

HENRY

I always liked you, you know.

BARNEY

What's not to like.

HENRY

My father liked you, too -- always liked Barney Pelty. Of course, for him -- the Jewish -- thing -- you know --

BARNEY

For me, too -- you know -- the "Jewish thing" --

HENRY

How did you do it?

BARNEY

I just did it.

HENRY

Barney Pelty just did it.

BARNEY

I, Barney Pelty, became known as the "Yiddish Curver." What pains you about that?

HENRY

You never hid being --

BARNEY

Being a Jew. And why is this suddenly a problem for you?

HENRY

For eight seasons, St. Louis Browns --

BARNEY

They paid me \$850 for my wicked Jew curve ball,
so wicked I gave 'em.

HENRY

On Shabbos?

BARNEY

Whenever. That pains you?

HENRY

Maybe not.

BARNEY

You're a liar --

Indicates for HENRY to toss him the ball.

BARNEY

Just look at this. You're pretty busy being a
Jew curve ball at this moment in your life. The
Jew curve ball of Henry Kaner is on the way, and
which way is it gonna break -- will it this way,
will it that way --

HENRY

SO WHY DON'T YOU PITCH ME AN ANSWER. BARNEY
One year I sucked bad -- I beaned 19 batters --
on the arm, the leg, both knees --

HENRY

The foot --

BARNEY

Made 'em hurt before they made it to first.
Another year, sixth in the league in wild
pitches. But.

HENRY

Tell me.

BARNEY

In the World Series, White Sox, 1906, I let in
one run in 32 innings. One run. Thirty-two
innings.

BARNEY tosses the ball back to HENRY.

BARNEY

Henry Kaner knows his stats, Henry Kaner loves his stats -- but one stat he doesn't have, one stat that waits for every Jew on the inside corner of his life -- Henry Kaner looks in and --

MORRIE COHEN appears, duffel bag in hand. BARNEY melts away.

MORRIE

You ready? You're not even close to ready.

HENRY

Did ya see some blowhard around here in a St. Louis uniform?

MORRIE

You're kidding, right? Get your stuff --

HENRY

I'm not kidding, Morrie.

MORRIE

The only St. Louis here was that scout, Farnsworthy. He talk to you?

HENRY

And he gave me his card. Look --

MORRIE

That's all.

HENRY

-- you sure you didn't see --

MORRIE

Why would there be a St. Louis uniform at one of our games? Maybe they shouldn't let you pitch extra innings -- oxygen-deprives your brain.

HENRY crams his stuff into his duffel bag -- fierce, preoccupied.

MORRIE

So, Farnsworthy --

HENRY

I said, he left me his card. Let's go.

MORRIE

It's a start.

HENRY

I get plenty of starts, Morrie. You wanted to go? So let's go.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 2

KANER kitchen, 1922. HENRY and MORRIE enter the kitchen, see BAYLA. BAYLA sees them, ignores them.

MORRIE

Looks not so good.

HENRY

We'll talk about it later, okay?

MORRIE

Promise?

HENRY

Say hello, then go.

MORRIE

Mrs. Kaner, how ya doing? Henry pitched a great game.

HENRY

That'll buy me nothing. Go -- have one for me.

MORRIE

Over and out. Mrs. Kaner, nice to see you again.

MORRIE salutes HENRY, leaves. The silence stretches.

BAYLA

Is that how you were taught to come in?

HENRY backs up. He touches the "mezuzah," kisses his fingers, comes back into the kitchen.

HENRY

Sorry.

The silence stretches.

BAYLA

No use complaining about Morrie Cohen there -- he hasn't met a holy day he wouldn't play on.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

Go ahead. Say it. Say it -- I'm late --

The silence stretches.

HENRY

And I'll say back to you -- again -- that I'm not late. It's not Shabbos yet. And late is just later than you want --

BAYLA

You take all of this so lightly. Our custom -- look at me -- our custom is always --

HENRY

The game went into extra innings, Mama --

BAYLA

And nobody else on your team pitches?

HENRY

I pitched all of 'em, start to finish, because I wanted to -- I knew what the time was -- I knew how to work it --

The silence stretches.

BAYLA

This is what I really want to know. You're twenty-two -- unmarried -- working nights as a fireman so you can play this semi-pro game --

HENRY

Babe Ruth made twenty grand last year --

BAYLA

What man is called "The Babe" --

HENRY

You want me to quit? You want me to fill my quit-time with a second job?

BAYLA

Stop it.

HENRY

More money -- can always use it --

BAYLA

This isn't an honest offer. Not honest, and not heartfelt.

HENRY

Honor your father and your mother, it says. I honor you if I'm here at 3 PM Fridays? Done. I honor Papa if I live out a life that's not the life I want, like him? Done.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

Just ask for it.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

What? What, Mama?

BAYLA

I sometimes watch you -- when you read the sports pages -- you don't even notice me -- you read them so hard.

HENRY

Yeah?

BAYLA

"Yeah."

HENRY

It's like a butcher has to know his meats --

BAYLA

It's more than just to know, Hensch -- you read them like your father reads what he reads -- both digging in. I read, too. I hear the local boy's got a good ERA.

HENRY

Does he, now?

BAYLA

It's not that hard to figure out those figures.

HENRY

There's a but.

BAYLA

But do those sacred numbers of yours ever say there has been a Shabbos celebrated -- honored -- in baseball?

HENRY

Only nature in a bad mood can stop a game.

BAYLA

But not a Shabbos.

HENRY

Not a Shabbos.

BAYLA

And do those numbers tell you what happens to a 22-year-old boy who ends up a 32-year old boy out there? All of which is why I cannot ask you. If I didn't love you the way I do, then I would ask -- but because of how I love you -- the offer is on your table but not on mine.

DAVID KANER enters. As he enters, he rolls down the sleeves of his white shirt, buttons the cuffs, formalizes himself, checks his watch.

DAVID

Brother Henry in the Shabbos doghouse again. My day is looking up.

DAVID begins placing plates, cups, silverware on the table.

DAVID

Watch how the good son does it. "At about 3PM on Friday afternoon observant Jews begin Shabbos preparations" -- but that's right, you're late --

HENRY

I was actually telling Mama about the weather page --

DAVID

That's not what I heard.

HENRY

Because your big ears were overhearing rather than listening --

DAVID

Who could stay away from hearing yet once again "the continuing struggle of our hero, Henry Kaner, as he -- "

BAYLA

David --

HENRY

I was telling Mama that when I was on the sports page, I looked over to the weather page, which is right next door, and you know what? When does sundown come today, brother of mine?

DAVID

The sun seems to rise and set wherever you walk.

HENRY

Sundown comes today at 8:02 PM. Tell me, oh smart one in the family, when do the candles get lit?

DAVID
Why waste the answer of "18 minutes before" on
you?

HENRY
And lit by these wonderful hands.

BAYLA takes her hands back.

BAYLA
Pour the honey somewhere else.

HENRY
And David, what time is it now, since you just
checked?

HENRY begins reciting.

HENRY
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam --

BAYLA
Amein. My bullshitter.

DAVID
Mama --

HENRY
You can call me "bullshitter" too --

DAVID
Not in front of her, I'm not --

HENRY
She just said it front of you.

BAYLA
David, you have to use the word for something
when there is so much of it around.

DAVID
There are words, and there are words.

BAYLA
I need to cook -- your father is home soon. Your
offer --

HENRY
Still there --

BAYLA
--is not an offer. Only ask of yourself, not of
me. Your life is your own.

HENRY

And so we end up here again.

DAVID

C'mon, Mama -- I'll give you a hand.

They turn to go. BAYLA turns back.

BAYLA

Can you tell me something, before your father gets home?

HENRY

Shoot.

BAYLA

I watch him listening to radio baseball, watch him clench his fists like this -- "go go" -- and sometimes he stands up and does -- well --

HENRY

Does what, Mama?

BAYLA

Well, all right -- but don't laugh.

BAYLA squats down a little.

DAVID

Mama --

BAYLA

Not you, either.

BAYLA pops her right hand between her knees and makes the signs a catcher would make to a pitcher.

HENRY

You're sure? You're sure that's what he does?

BAYLA

I study his hands -- he doesn't even know I'm in the room, so I can study very closely.

HENRY walks a short distance from BAYLA. He takes his pitcher's stance.

HENRY

Do them again, Mama.

DAVID

Come on --

HENRY

I promise you, it's a secret worth knowing --
Mama?

HENRY

BAYLA hitches up her dress a little, bends at the knees, and does the
hand signals.

DAVID

Baseball is stupid.

HENRY

What you just told me is throw a curve ball, low
and outside.

BAYLA

I told you that.

HENRY

Not only that, but in Yiddish.

Unseen by the three of them, RAPHAEL enters and stands in the
"doorway." He carries a barber's kit under his arm. He kisses the
"mezuzah." He watches.

BAYLA

That's crazy.

HENRY

That's Jewish baseball. Morrie and I do it all
the time.

HENRY winds and pitches, with his characteristic OUTBREATH. Then
HENRY, in slow motion, mimes carrying a ball across the space to
BAYLA.

HENRY

And not just a curve but a "table-top curve,"
that breaks late and drops to the plate.

HENRY has the ball close to BAYLA's hands.

HENRY

Don't take your eye off the ball. Barney Peltz,
the "Yiddish Curver" -- best season, 1906, with
the St. Louis Browns -- that's the pitch he
liked. Okay, drop your hands down a little and
to your right.

BAYLA does, and HENRY plants the "ball" into her cupped hands.

BAYLA

So it's a game with a language that has secrets.

RAFAEL
Stee-rike three -- yer out.

BAYLA
Oh. Oh.

BAYLA kisses RAFAEL, tosses the "ball" back to HENRY as she takes RAFAEL's kit and hat.

RAPHAEL
God might have said, "Play ball!", you know, instead of "Let there be light!" And does the seventh inning stretch sound like Shabbos to you? Does to me.

BAYLA
They were just distracting me.

RAPHAEL
Good distracting, then.

RAPHAEL sits. Everyone else sits except BAYLA.

BAYLA
Tea, water, coffee?

RAPHAEL
Do you have any "krekerjek" for the ballgame around here? Just kidding, Bayla. Water would be nice. So you've been teaching her what?

HENRY
How to win in extra innings.

BAYLA brings him water, sits.

RAPHAEL
And why a lesson in extra innings?

HENRY
Because we had them today -- enough to win.

RAPHAEL
Good. But it must have made you late.

RAPHAEL looks at BAYLA.

RAPHAEL
Ah. At least he was late because of the game God himself made.

BAYLA
God does not play baseball.

DAVID
Papa, you can't really say --

RAPHAEL
(mock serious)
Oh, he doesn't?

BAYLA
No he doesn't --

DAVID
No he doesn't --

BAYLA
It's a game made up by non-Jews for non-Jews.

DAVID
And, Papa, I don't think --

RAPHAEL
Aha! It is time for more lesson.

DAVID
I don't think it's right --

RAPHAEL holds up a hand to cut DAVID off.

BAYLA
If I am going to have another lesson thrown at me
--

DAVID
Papa, it's not right -- Mama -- I'll help you out
-- let's go --

RAPHAEL
David, sit down, please -- we have time.
Baseball was what God thought about on the
seventh day. And so shall we.

DAVID
Papa --

RAPHAEL seems to be listening to something else as well as he holds
HENRY's gaze.

HENRY
Papa?

RAPHAEL doesn't answer.

BAYLA
Raphael? The chemicals on people's hair these
days -- they can make a person --

RAPHAEL comes back to the present, looks at everyone looking at him, smiles, pats BAYLA's hand.

RAPHAEL

Don't worry, Bayla, whose name means life, we are, in a manner of speaking, already observing. David. A question -- a conundrum -- a mystery -- the things you like -- are the eight position players like the eight candles of the Hanukah lamp, lit by the ninth, the pitcher?

Everyone looks at RAPHAEL.

RAPHAEL

And this one: is a baseball game like our hearts? There are two sides. We have yetzer hatov and yetzer hara, good and bad. I have another.

But RAPHAEL again stares into the distance. BAYLA puts a hand on his forearm. He shakes himself awake.

RAPHAEL

I'm sorry -- I just -- well, I don't know -- what did I say --

DAVID

Eight players, eight menorah candles --

RAPHAEL looks completely pleased.

RAPHAEL

Things to think about.

BAYLA

I need to think about dinner. Is that all right with you?

RAPHAEL

Yes, yes -- go.

BAYLA

All right. David, give me your hands. You'll be okay?

RAPHAEL

I am sitting here with my pitcher --

BAYLA and DAVID exit.

RAPHAEL

I cut hair all day and think mystic thoughts -- how bad can life be?

HENRY

Papa -- c'mon on --

RAPHAEL

I would have told your mother a joke, except that she wouldn't have appreciated it so close to Shabbos. David, either --

HENRY

Eighteen going on sixty --

RAPHAEL

He just wants to learn what is old -- I can respect that he respects that.

HENRY

He wants to be you, Papa.

RAPHAEL

He can certainly do better than that.

HENRY

And the joke --

RAPHAEL

Other than me? All right, the joke is that baseball is in the Book -- at least in English -- right from when God decided to be God: "In the big inning, God created the heavens -- "

They laugh.

HENRY

Now I have something to tell you.

RAPHAEL

Good or bad?

HENRY

Good, I think -- maybe -- there was a scout in the stands today -- from the St. Louis Browns.

HENRY pulls a business card out of his pocket and slides it across the table. RAPHAEL stares at the card.

RAPHAEL

He gave you his card.

HENRY

I asked for two -- one for you.

RAPHAEL pulls the card toward him, reads it.

RAPHAEL

"Farnsworthy." Does this mean anything?

HENRY

Who knows?

RAPHAEL

Nothing on the table.

HENRY

Glad-handed me a big "great" on the game I pitched, though.

RAPHAEL

With the extra innings.

HENRY

With the extra innings.

RAPHAEL taps the card with his index finger.

RAPHAEL

Don't let your mother know about this.

HENRY

There's nothing to know about.

RAPHAEL

I think it's good, Henoah, I do -- I think it's good -- but she has her own fears, and one of them is this --

RAPHAEL stares at the card, taps it again.

RAPHAEL

May I?

HENRY

Sure. That's why I got it.

RAPHAEL pockets the card.

HENRY

Won't amount to anything, probably. Morrie really wanted to get a talk with him.

RAPHAEL

Morrie --

HENRY

(jokingly)

Morrie's got a problem?

RAPHAEL

Sometimes in his head he's already made the throw to second before he gets the ball. Impatient -- wants the cookie before his hand is out of the jar.

HENRY

I'll be sure to tell him that.

RAPHAEL

It won't make a difference.

HENRY

Morrie's okay -- he's thinking about getting a girlfriend --

RAPHAEL

Now, that your mama wouldn't mind for you --

HENRY

And you?

RAPHAEL

I just want to see you happy, Henoch.

BAYLA and DAVID come back in and begin setting up for Shabbos: the plates, the cups, the candles, the bread, the vessel of water.

RAPHAEL

Is it time?

BAYLA

It's getting closer.

RAPHAEL

Closer is close enough to begin. David?

DAVID

Yes, Papa?

RAPHAEL

I haven't greeted you well today. I'm sorry.
Come.

RAPHAEL opens his arms, and DAVID goes to be embraced -- at first perfunctory but then with warmth. They all sit. BAYLA puts a veil on her head.

RAPHAEL

And what extra innings did you do today?

BAYLA

Could we please pay attention?

DAVID

"Innings" are his, Papa, not mine.

RAPHAEL

Bayla, a moment. Your schoolwork, then.

DAVID

I won the Nobel Prize.

RAPHAEL

Really?

DAVID

But the Swedes forgot to tell me --

RAPHAEL

Not like them.

DAVID

And I probably won't hear from them by sundown --

RAPHAEL

I'll write a letter of protest in the morning!

DAVID

So you'll have to settle for an "A" on my history paper and a 95 on my math test. Nothing big.

RAPHAEL

Nothing little, either -- and all good.

DAVID

Nothing like extra innings, though, Papa --

BAYLA

Learning, the mind --

HENRY

I keep leaving my brain at the ballpark.

DAVID

Stop it.

BAYLA

He doesn't always admit it -- but in Lithuania your father wrote music for cantors --

RAPHAEL

This they know, and in Lithuania we'd be dead, Bayla, and these two would never have been.

RAPHAEL leans in to make his point.

RAPHAEL

The sun is going down, and the challah is impatient. In America I have these two miracles, and you, and baseball -- from such seeds stars shall grow.

RAPHAEL holds out his hands.

RAPHAEL

Everything to one side. Bayla?

BAYLA takes his hand.

BAYLA
You work so hard to forget.

RAPHAEL
So that I can make more room for remembering.

BAYLA
I don't forget.

RAPHAEL
And that is what makes you superior to me and why
I married you. David?

DAVID takes the other hand. HENRY takes DAVID's and BAYLA's hands.
They bow their heads.

Lights to black. Transition.

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Act I, Scene 3

HENRY alone. He pulls Farnsworthy's card from his pocket. He reads
it. He toys with it. He sings.

HENRY
Nem mikh mit tsu der ball geym
(Take me out to the ballgame)

Tsum oylem lomir dokh geyn
(Take me out to the park)

Koyf mir di nislekh un krekerjek
(Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack)

(half-sung, half-spoken)
I don't care if I never get back

BARNEY enters. He carries a baseball bat. He occasionally swings it.

HENRY
My father taught me to sing that.

BARNEY
How's the Jew curve ball coming along?

HENRY puts away the card.

HENRY
I've been keeping the card in my pocket.

BARNEY
I wouldn't think of it as just a card --

HENRY
You'd think of it as --

BARNEY
A ticket.

HENRY
It's just a card.

BARNEY
Here is where you need to change your frame of reference. That's how a curve works. That's how a ticket works. Are you really dumb or are you just acting at it -- because you don't have much time left.

BARNEY positions himself as if he's going to take a swing at HENRY.

BARNEY
Ball -- bat -- strike or hit. The three elements. In under a second.

BARNEY holds the swing, hold HENRY's gaze. MORRIE enters. As BARNEY exits, he hands MORRIE the bat.

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Act I, Scene 4

Saturday night. Kaner porch. HENRY looks skyward. MORRIE next to him with a baseball bat.

MORRIE
Come on!

HENRY
Wait. I have to wait until it comes.

MORRIE
Two stars already -- there and there.

HENRY
Got to be three.

MORRIE
You don't even really believe. There's gonna be three anyway, there always is, so just get a jump on the third and let's get going.

HENRY
Just wait.

They wait. The star comes.

MORRIE

Let's go.

HENRY

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melekh ha-olam, ha-mavdil bayn kodesh l'chol -- done.

MORRIE

You didn't finish it.

HENRY

I did enough.

MORRIE

"I'm a Jew, I'm a not-Jew" --

HENRY

Zip it.

MORRIE

We lost today because your arm had to be all Shabbos all day, but you don't even --

HENRY

Better than being all Morrie all day.

MORRIE

I can live with being Morrie -- on the other hand, you --

HENRY

I'll give you one hand, then the other, if you don't shut up.

A silence. HENRY gestures for the bat. MORRIE hands it to him. HENRY swings it.

MORRIE

Okay -- so we're not in a hurry.

HENRY

Tell me about the game.

MORRIE

Game was nothing -- when is a losing game something? But Farnsworthy -- knew that name'd get your attention -- sniffing around again. Asked Coach.

HENRY

What'd Coach say?

MORRIE

Sure you're interested?

HENRY

What did he say?

MORRIE

"Hanks's a good boy -- arm like a bullwhip."

HENRY

Right about that.

MORRIE

"Comes from a good home -- Jewish, but good."
Thinks he's big-hearted when he says drek like
that --

HENRY

Why would you care?

MORRIE

I'm even less a Jew than a half-Jew like you but
--

HENRY pivots and holds the bat in a way that would indicate that he
might just swing it against MORRIE's head.

HENRY

Stop. Calling. Me. That.

MORRIE

Then. Stop. Being. What you are. Because I
have news that will not leave a bruise. Yeah.
Farnsworthy talked to me.

HENRY takes a swing.

HENRY

And the crowd goes wild as Morrie plays on
Shabbos -- again.

MORRIE

And lightning didn't strike me dead. And the
world didn't spin off its axle.

HENRY

So what's the news for the Jews?

MORRIE

I heard Farnsworthy say "ten-day offer" to Coach.
I think -- maybe -- I heard your name attached to
it.

HENRY

And what'd Farnsworthy say to you face to face?

MORRIE

Nothing in the shape of an offer.

HENRY

But.

MORRIE gestures for the bat. HENRY tosses the bat back to MORRIE.

MORRIE

I think if you get a ten-day, I get a ten-day,
too. Pitcher-catcher combo deal.

HENRY

That's what you think.

MORRIE

If you don't screw it up. Come on, it's just
business.

HENRY

Maybe it shouldn't all be the business.

MORRIE

Look at us, Hank, sitting under the three stars.
Your family's got as many nickels to rub together
as mine -- if Farnsworthy offered us a trip
downtown, those nickels'd turn into dollars and
we could tuck 'em in our parents' pockets and
never worry about them worrying about anything.
Not bad, eh? I think that's not a bad thing for
a son to do -- if he wouldn't let a Saturday get
in the way.

MORRIE takes a mighty swing, then looks at HENRY, who is looking at
him.

MORRIE

And what's that look? That look ain't the usual
sourpuss look! May wonders never cease!

HENRY

It'd be great, wouldn't it?

MORRIE

Tell me what'd be great.

HENRY

A trip downtown.

MORRIE

Look at that face! It would, wouldn't it?

HENRY

Everything's so -- clean -- when I'm out there.
Me, the batter --

MORRIE

Don't forget your catcher.

HENRY

That's it -- it's just so -- clear --

MORRIE

Answer me this -- look at me -- would you kill to play? Would you kill to play?

HENRY

You mean would it kill me not to play.

MORRIE

Right! Right!

MORRIE points to the sky.

MORRIE

Enough of 'em out? If we hurry, we can cop a drink before the second feature starts. Come on.

They start to exit.

MORRIE

Want to hear an ancient Chinese proverb about baseball? "Man with four balls cannot walk."

HENRY

What's that go to do with anything?

MORRIE

Got nothing to do with anything except to make you laugh.

HENRY

It makes me laugh.

MORRIE

Because you need to laugh, you know.

HENRY

So make me laugh.

MORRIE

Morrie and his four balls.

Off they go, MORRIE waddling as if he's got four balls. Transition.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 5

DAVID under a streetlight, wearing a light jacket, cap. A comic book, rolled up, sticks out of one pocket. Not far from him is the doorway of a speakeasy from which oozes jazz and blues. He smokes a cigarette -- not expertly -- and he doesn't smoke it long before he stamps it out.

As he listens to the music, he tries out a few steps of something like the Break-Away -- again, awkward, self-conscious.

From out of the shadows comes LOULA. DAVID doesn't see her. LOULA watches him until he senses her watching him. Which makes him stop.

LOULA
Don't stop on account of me.

DAVID
It's nothing.

LOULA
It ain't much, but it ain't zero.

DAVID
It ain't much more than zero, though.

LOULA
What are you doing out here? Because you so obviously don't belong around here.

DAVID
Nothing.

LOULA
Choir boy, you are such a BS artist -- bad at it, too. Gimme one.

DAVID pulls a cigarette pack out of his pocket and fumbles one out, hands it to LOULA. She takes it, waits. DAVID pulls matches out, lights one, lights her cigarette. She blows out the match.

LOULA
Thanks. Now choir boy, one more time for my survey: what're you doing out here where there isn't a choir? Come on, it's just a question --

DAVID makes a gesture at the door.

LOULA
That some sort of sign language?

DAVID
The music.

LOULA
You do not look the jazz type.

DAVID
And what type would that be?

LOULA

Not you, especially with that comic book sticking up outta your pocket. Radical boy, sneaking out a comic book! You look like you should be doing homework with a warm milk at your elbow put there by your loving mama.

DAVID

I just like it -- the music.

LOULA

Some people think it's the music of the devil. Oh, are you blushing?

DAVID

It's not the music of the devil.

LOULA

I'm not saying it is -- I like it, like the way it mashes things together and makes the blood jump.

Cigarette in hand, LOULA dances a better version of the Break-Away.

LOULA

Can't stop the feet when I hear the beat -- I am a poet and I didn't even know it --

LOULA stops.

LOULA

Look at me. Entertaining a baby. My life has gotten so good.

LOULA stamps out the cigarette.

LOULA

You want to go inside?

DAVID

I can't -- do that -- I really can't --

LOULA

But you'd like to, huh? And you'd like to do that with me --

DAVID

Doesn't matter -- I can't ever --

LOULA laughs.

LOULA

You're a deer in the headlights! All right, can you at least walk me to that bench over there?

DAVID

I can do that.

LOULA offers him her arm. DAVID doesn't take it.

LOULA

Well, then, make good on your word to walk me.

They walk to a bench, sit. LOULA pulls out a flask, drinks. Offers it to DAVID. DAVID takes it, looks at it, hands it back.

LOULA

I don't have germs.

DAVID

I can't.

LOULA

You're really a little "can't" boy, aren't you?
Such self-discipline.

LOULA goes to drink again, doesn't, puts the flask away.

LOULA

Nice just sitting here. Now that I apply my grey matter to the matter -- I don't think I really want to go in there. Again. Jazz or no jazz.

LOULA holds out her hand.

LOULA

I am being terribly rude. Loula Parsons.

DAVID stares at her hand.

LOULA

Can't?

DAVID half-reaches, then takes her hand, shakes it.

DAVID

David Kaner.

LOULA

Kaner.

DAVID

Is that a problem?

LOULA

You got a brother.

DAVID

Henry.

LOULA

You know my husband? Parsons -- he plays baseball. With your brother. On the whatever team it is. Stupid damn game. Pardon my goddamn swearing.

DAVID

I don't like baseball either.

LOULA

Even with a famous bro?

DAVID

I really don't like baseball.

LOULA

So you don't like your brother.

DAVID

I didn't say that.

LOULA

Just about.

DAVID

No, it doesn't. I like my brother.

LOULA

It'd say it for me, especially when you say it like that.

DAVID

You don't even know him.

LOULA

I'm only listening to you.

DAVID

I like my brother.

LOULA

Then it's good for a brother to like a brother.

DAVID

Then that's settled.

LOULA

For you. Not for me. I don't have to know him to not like him because he being so good a pitcher makes my husband want to play baseball, and I am not much liking my husband or baseball at the moment --

DAVID

What?

LOULA

This thing I just noticed: you're really listening.

DAVID

You're talking.

LOULA

What the hell. My husband -- who this very tonight is hanging out with his fellow teammates "jes' fer a few beers, hon." Swear he likes being with them a lot more than -- Well, maybe not "what the hell." Not your problem, sweetie. Not your problem.

DAVID

Your not liking my brother could be a problem.

LOULA

I don't dislike him -- it's not about -- I don't really have the energy -- so no problem between us, okay?

LOULA takes out the flask, takes a sip. Offers it again to DAVID. He gives it a stare, then refuses it.

LOULA

The music, eh -- isn't it great?

LOULA hums with the music. She puts the flask away.

LOULA

I gotta go.

DAVID

I really do hate baseball.

LOULA

Good to know -- I gotta go.

DAVID

I really do -- don't go --

LOULA

Then that's a problem, David Kaner, when your brother's so good at it. "Henry Kaner -- what an arm!" Like he's got no other body part worth mentioning. Hah -- made you blush again.

DAVID

No, I really do hate baseball. I really do. I think it's so stupid. Just really stupid.

LOULA

Well, so do I --

DAVID

I mean, it's really stupid, isn't it? Spitting and scratching themselves -- "humbaby, humbaby" -- what is that supposed to mean? -- "let's hear some chatter!" -- and slow! -- slow slow slow -- and someone throws a ball at your head and you just stand there! -- I think it needs some jazzing up, I really do. I really do.

LOULA

Okay -- I'll bite.

DAVID

Players shouldn't be allowed to wear gloves -- if they're real men, let 'em play with bare hands.

LOULA

You've thought this over.

DAVID

A lot.

LOULA

Give me another.

DAVID

The ball should be set to explode if a guy makes an error. Or maybe one team gets bats and another gets balls and they try to hurt each other for a while, then switch.

LOULA

The man is on fire.

DAVID

And make the game only one inning long. Or what's a "ball"? Make a "ball" really a strike against the pitcher, and if he gets three strikes against him, he is outta there! For good! That one I like a lot.¹

LOULA

This is my husband you're talking about. Your brother.

DAVID

No apology.

¹ Thanks to <http://jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu/~tdobber1/baseball.html> for the inspiration.

LOULA

Not asking. I'm just saying how impressed I am by how much you hate it. I thought I hated it, but I am a piker next to you, I am in the minors. Maybe you and me could form like a mutual hatred society -- the "I Hate Baseball" League -- I'm sure we could get lots of other people to join up --

LOULA takes out the flask.

LOULA

So cheers and huzzah and hats off to us!

She drinks. DAVID holds out his hand. She hands him the flask. He puts his hands on the flask and the flask to his mouth.

LOULA

You be the president or should I?

DAVID

Doesn't matter.

LOULA

Doesn't matter -- share the power -- so you'd like it if your brother didn't play?

DAVID

Like it if your husband didn't play?

LOULA

Yes I would.

DAVID

Okay, then.

LOULA

You're deeply serious.

DAVID

Why not?

LOULA

This is just talk.

DAVID

In the beginning there was the word. And then words lead to actions --

LOULA

You are -- hmm -- I don't know. I don't know. And with that -- I am going home.

LOULA stands up.

LOULA
You know --

DAVID
What?

LOULA
You saved me tonight. Sort of. But yeah. Nice work.

DAVID
Maybe we could listen to the music again. Later.

LOULA gives him a long look.

LOULA
Maybe.

LOULA turns and exits. The music plays. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 6

HENRY and BAYLA, HENRY in a suit. BAYLA steps up to HENRY, primps his suit.

HENRY
Mama, this is --

BAYLA
Not "stupid" --

HENRY
I wasn't going to use "stupid" -- just --

BAYLA
Not "silly" --

HENRY
You're running me out of words, Mama.

BAYLA finishes, pats down his lapels, pulls his sleeves.

BAYLA
There -- you'll like her.

HENRY
You talk like I don't know Rosie already.

BAYLA
I know you know her, but you don't know her.

HENRY

What's to know about the kosher butcher's daughter --

BAYLA

Said by the semi-pro fireman. Sit down.

HENRY

I feel forced at second.

BAYLA

Because I'm forcing you, Henoah -- sit down -- I have something we need to talk about before Rosie gets here. To help you know your own mind.

HENRY

I know my own mind.

BAYLA

There's something you don't know.

HENRY sits.

BAYLA

Your father.

HENRY

What's going --

BAYLA

What have you noticed lately about him? David's already figured it out.

HENRY

He seems to stare a lot more now -- I mean, he always stared, you know, like he was traveling somewhere -- in his head. But a coupla times I've had to shake him -- give him a joke punch in the arm or squeeze his shoulder. He comes around.

BAYLA

He had his physical with Dr. Timmers -- I was there with him -- and Dr. Timmers told us that --

ROSIE DAVIS appears at the door. She touches the "mezuzah," kisses her fingers, waits. BAYLA ushers ROSIE in.

BAYLA

Later. Come in, come in. Henoah --

HENRY

Rosie, good to see you -- without having to stand on line.

ROSIE
(laughing)

"Next!"

HENRY
("Jewish" accent)
"What a minute, I was here first -- " "No you
were not -- "

ROSIE
But nothing happens until Mrs. Krumwich gets her
little bit of pastrami and then orders the hard
cervelat instead.

HENRY
Like the sun rising, her doing that. Maybe you
should get one of those ticket dispensers.

ROSIE
Maybe we should. Good to see you, too.

BAYLA
Sit, sit, please. Henoch, the lemonade.

HENRY brings over a pitcher and glasses, pours.

BAYLA
Made fresh. Henoch and Mr. Kaner like it that
way. Fresh.

ROSIE
So do I.

BAYLA
Who wouldn't? Fresh is always better.

HENRY
Mama is always about fresh.

ROSIE
That's what my father says about his meats.
"Kosher is as kosher does."

BAYLA
Your father runs a good shop. The hard salami --

ROSIE
His specialty.

BAYLA
I can taste why. This is very nice.

ROSIE
Yes, it is.

They drink lemonade.

ROSIE

And David?

BAYLA

Tops in his classes at high school. And his teachers are talking college -- can you imagine that?

ROSIE

College --sort of like the major leagues, isn't it?

BAYLA

After that, who knows?

ROSIE

I remember David in the store -- he'd make the change faster in his head than my father could make it at the register.

HENRY

"The boychik adding machine" --

ROSIE

And Mr. Kaner?

BAYLA

In good health.

ROSIE

My father misses their talks about baseball -- the pitcher as the ninth candle that lights the others -- my father thought that was brilliant.

HENRY

Did you know that in Lithuania, my father wrote music for the cantors?

ROSIE

I did not.

HENRY

Here he talks about baseball. Is that an up or a down?

ROSIE

Anything that keeps the mind alive is an "up."

BAYLA

But some things are better for an "up" than others, wouldn't you say?

ROSIE

That could be said.

BAYLA

A difference, isn't there, between knowing that the British mandate in Palestine is beginning and Babe Ruth is coming back to play?

HENRY

My mother has taken up a newspaper a day.

BAYLA

It's my "up." Or between that they're jailing anarchists and that Gorgeous George Sisler is at the top of the batting heap. And what kind of name is "Babe" for a man?

ROSIE

I would agree that a newspaper a day's an "up." Can't say much about "Babe."

HENRY

To newspapers.

They drink lemonade.

HENRY

More?

ROSIE

A little.

HENRY

Mama?

BAYLA holds her hand over her glass. HENRY pours for ROSIE.

BAYLA

If you'll excuse me both -- I have some housework to finish. I'll let you two talk. Nice to see you, Rosie.

ROSIE

Pleasure's all mine, Mrs. Kaner.

BAYLA exits. HENRY and ROSIE toy with their glasses.

ROSIE

"Housework" in the evening -- she's a carbon copy of my mom.

HENRY

All mothers are a carbon copy.

ROSIE raises her glass.

ROSIE

Here's to mothers.

HENRY does not raise his glass.

HENRY

To mothers.

ROSIE

She's not that bad. My mom? She worries me about past, present, and future and every verb tense in between.

HENRY

Carbon copy.

HENRY raises his glass.

HENRY

To mothers, then. And what is it about mothers that makes it that you and I are sitting here with each other?

ROSIE

Who wouldn't take the invite to come see in person the locally famous Henry Kaner, "The Hebrew Hurler," the King of the Curveball?

HENRY

Well, I'm sure you probably noticed the dozens pounding the sidewalk out front demanding my autograph. "Next!" "Next!" I'm sure you had to fight your way through.

ROSIE

It was brutal.

HENRY

My adoring fans --

ROSIE

It's been a while -- I only get to see your mom when she comes by the shop -- used to see you all.

HENRY

And that's why?

ROSIE

That's why.

HENRY

Like old home day?

ROSIE

In a manner of speaking.

HENRY

And that's why we're sitting here together? A visit out of the blue?

They laugh.

HENRY

Bayla Kaner has not been coming by just for the salami --

ROSIE

She and my mother have been pretty buddy-buddy over by the veal.

HENRY

Feeling a little filleted at the moment.

ROSIE

Laid out in the "specials" section of the display case --

HENRY

For Mrs. Krumwich!

ROSIE

And her "leettle bit"!

They toy with their glasses.

HENRY

I gotta admit --

ROSIE

To what?

HENRY

That I was nervous before you got here.

ROSIE

You still nervous?

HENRY

You saying you aren't nervous?

ROSIE

Did you hear me say that?

HENRY

I, in fact, did not hear you say that.

ROSIE

I'm still a little nervous.

HENRY
Carbon-copy on that.

ROSIE
But not just this --

HENRY
You mean "this" right now?

ROSIE
Yes -- nervous about a lot of things lately --

HENRY
Know what you mean --

ROSIE
As my mama keeps telling me --

HENRY
Mamas always keep telling --

ROSIE
"When you're young, you add minutes to your life,
when you're twenty-four -- "

HENRY
The beads are falling off the abacus.

ROSIE
Even if I don't believe her -- completely -- it's
hard to get the wailing and the gnashing of her
teeth out of my ear. On the other hand -- I'm
not planning to be the butcher-shop bookkeeper
forever.

HENRY
That so?

ROSIE
That is so.

HENRY
If you chose today, this second, to be the ex-
bookkeeper of the butcher shop --

ROSIE
What would I do?

HENRY
What would you do, that choice put there by you
on the table?

ROSIE drains her glass, gives HENRY a direct look, waits.

HENRY

You don't have to say --

ROSIE

How do you throw a curveball?

ROSIE puts her glass down.

HENRY

This is the burning question.

ROSIE

I want to know. Who better to ask?

HENRY puts his glass down.

HENRY

Like me asking you to add up some numbers for me.

ROSIE

Don't mock.

HENRY

It's just a strange --

ROSIE

What's strange about asking you something you know about?

HENRY

I don't have a ball.

ROSIE holds up her fist.

ROSIE

Use this.

HENRY

You really --

ROSIE

I want to know.

HENRY

First thing: stand up.

They stand up. HENRY grips ROSIE's right hand with his right hand in a curveball grip.

HENRY

Make believe your first two knuckles are the seams of the baseball. You know what a baseball looks like.

ROSIE
Got a vague picture in my head.

HENRY
My index and middle finger lay on the seams, the
rest of the fingers meet underneath the ball --

They are standing close to each other. HENRY brings her hand back slightly, then forward.

HENRY
Then coming forward, I snap my wrist --

ROSIE
To curve it --

They now stand close to each other. HENRY steps away.

HENRY
(gesturing)
The ball drops off the table -- goes from 12 to 6
--

ROSIE
And you got strike three.

HENRY
Strikes one and two aren't bad either.

ROSIE mimes the throwing gesture.

ROSIE
What else you have in your bag of tricks?

HENRY
Got a screwball, a knuckleball, a changeup, a
slider --

ROSIE
Sounds like you're naming my cousins.

ROSIE "pitches" her fist and travels it to HENRY, who puts up his hands to catch it. He catches it. A silence. ROSIE sits.

ROSIE
The ex-bookkeeper of Davis Butchers would do
this: she would grab the suitcase she always has
ready-packed under her bed and take the first bus
out of town to a city that begins with the letter
"A."

HENRY sits.

HENRY
Like Albuquerque.

ROSIE

Atlanta. Akron. Albany. Amherst. Believe me,
I've made a study and written the list.

HENRY

So when you choose, you'd choose to leave.

ROSIE

Sometimes it's good to burn the bridge behind
you.

HENRY

Yeah?

ROSIE

Yeah.

HENRY

Why "A"?

ROSIE

More "A's" than "Z's" in cities.

HENRY

And that suitcase --

ROSIE

I've had one ready-packed ever since I was tall
enough to reach the top shelf of the closet to
pull it down. Not a big one -- a valise -- don't
need much. Don't want much.

HENRY

These are interesting things to know about a
person.

ROSIE

Like throwing pitches.

HENRY

You mind if I borrow from your plan?

ROSIE

I suspect the King of the Curveball maybe has
plans of his own.

HENRY

Maybe he does.

ROSIE

Maybe.

HENRY

Maybe. Look, you take the trolley back, right?

ROSIE
You trying to get rid of me?

HENRY
There's an ice-cream shop near the stop, right?

ROSIE
Right --

HENRY
So let's blow this house with all its ears and
get something sweet.

ROSIE
Only if we go dutch.

HENRY
I don't get to be gallant?

ROSIE
For later. You can tell me about the slider.

HENRY
It's a mysterious miracle.

ROSIE
Any better kind?

HENRY
Mama!

BAYLA enters almost immediately.

HENRY
Pretty quick housework, Mama.

BAYLA
A little of this, a little of that.

HENRY
I'm gonna walk Rosie to the trolley stop. We may
indulge in some ice cream.

BAYLA
It's a good night for that.

HENRY
And then, like the gentleman you've taught me to
be, I will offer to escort her home.

ROSIE
It's a good chance she'll accept.

BAYLA
Well, then, give our best to your family.

ROSIE

You know they give their best to yours. Tell Mr. Kaner to come by -- Papa would welcome a change of menu from the brisket and corned beef.

BAYLA

A new menu never hurt anyone.

HENRY

You want any ice cream on my way back?

BAYLA

You both take your time -- a little flavor, a little savor, doesn't come often enough in life.

HENRY

Tell Papa I'll be back soon. And you and I, we'll talk.

BAYLA

Always time for talk, but go, go, before they run out of flavors!

HENRY escorts ROSIE out. BAYLA watches them exit. RAPHAEL comes in, touches the "mezuzah," kit under his arm.

BAYLA

I hate these nights when you're working late -- you just missed Rosie -- Raphael, what's the matter? Your face -- what's the matter?

RAPHAEL

Huh?

BAYLA

Your face, a million miles away, like you didn't know me.

RAPHAEL stares for a moment longer, then smiles a broad smile.

RAPHAEL

Of course I know you.

In the big inning God created the Heavens and the Earth.

Eve stole first.

Adam stole second.

Gideon rattled the pitchers.

Goliath was put out by David.

Brilliant, eh?

BAYLA takes his coat, hat, and kit. RAPHAEL sits down. BAYLA gets him a glass of lemonade, sits beside him. He speaks simply to her.

RAPHAEL

Brilliant -- it's so simple, so beautiful, isn't it. The pitcher and the catcher -- glory and groundedness -- they work together to get the ball past the batter, the foundation, while the batter tries to make runs, to make additions, just like making children. But the batter, is not the enemy -- the three of them, together, they make the game happen -- they make life happen -- together in struggle -- whatever the players do, a scorekeeper records the results -- an accounting of the soul -- if someone scores a run, he comes home -- home --

RAPHAEL sips.

RAPHAEL

This is what I think about when I am cutting hair.

RAPHAEL puts the glass down, takes BAYLA's hands and looks her square in the face.

RAPHAEL

Dr. Timmers has a name for it. He's very proud he has a name for it -- he wants to show us he reads the journals.

BAYLA

When he told me, he made me say "Alzheimers."

RAPHAEL

The same. He said it will only get worse.

BAYLA

He says they have nothing they can do for you.

RAPHAEL

And you, name that means life -- what will you do?

BAYLA

I quote a very smart man: "They make life happen, together in struggle."

RAPHAEL

Poor Henoah. Poor David.

BAYLA

It is their time anyways --

RAPHAEL begins whisper-singing the Hatikvah. BAYLA joins him. Only a few lines. Then they stop. They look at each other with great love.

RAPHAEL

I cannot promise you anything anymore.

RAPHAEL lays his head in her lap. BAYLA strokes his hair.

Transition.

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Act I, Scene 7

DAVID and LOULA outside the bar, LOULA seated on the bench. DAVID paces. Jazz seeps out.

LOULA

So that's the story?

DAVID

That's the latest news flash.

LOULA

So -- is he -- demented?

DAVID

He's not crazy.

LOULA

What you laid out for me --

DAVID

He's not crazy! He's -- touched. But he's not crazy!

LOULA

Fine, your word is the gold standard -- and your brother, the great Henry Kaner -- he's maybe got an offer to go away, which leaves you taking care of everything with your mom. Yeehaw.

DAVID looks at her, says nothing.

LOULA

Oh, I know that look -- I know that look -- "bruhdah against bruhdah" -- Davy's been trying so hard not to trash his big "bruhdah," but Loula's not deaf -- she can read between the words up there on the movie screen --

LOULA gets up. She does a pantomime of an impassioned actor on the silent screen, then stops and mimes holding up the placard that would have the actor's words written on them.

LOULA

And what does it say up here? Go on, you can say it -- I know you can say it.

DAVID

You say it.

LOULA

Me doing the heavy lifting. Okay, I would guess it says, "I hate my brother."

(looks at placard)

Yup, that's what it says.

(pointing to words)

"I. Hate. My."

DAVID

Leave off --

LOULA

How's it sound in your ear, Davy? Huh?

DAVID doesn't answer.

LOULA

So, my friend, what're gonna do about it? Something like "I. Hate. My. Brother." doesn't just go [away] --

DAVID steps away from her.

LOULA

Fine -- this is stupid -- this is going nowhere -
- so I'm going to go --

DAVID

Don't.

LOULA

Sorry, Davy -- it's come the time for me to go into that gin joint over there and wash away Lou Parsons and the Hebrew Hurler and you -- in that order, by the way --

DAVID

Don't do that --

LOULA

I am going to do just that.

DAVID

Don't!

LOULA

And what's with the tone?

DAVID

Nothing --

LOULA

You don't talk to me like that.

DAVID

It's nothing -- not what you think --

LOULA

It's very much something, whatever I think.

DAVID

Just don't. Don't.

LOULA

And what does this "don't don't" mean? Huh? For me? Save me again, Mr. Knight?

DAVID

I don't know how you mean, "save" -- just don't go --

LOULA

Then give me a solid reason why I should "don't go," should stay here, with my angel pal, who hates his brother, and not go do something adult and tragic like I am supposed to --

DAVID

I like you.

LOULA

That's your offer.

DAVID

I said I like you.

LOULA

You like me.

DAVID

That's what I said.

LOULA

He likes me. And that is supposed to be saving enough.

LOULA sits down. She pats the bench. DAVID sits down.

LOULA

This is my life -- this is so pathetic -- you know that?

DAVID

Are you going in or aren't you?

LOULA

Look, we got to get something straight about this "I hate baseball" club we got going here. You're still mad -- I can see it in your eyes -- look at me -- it's still there. Isn't it.

DAVID

Yeah. Yes.

LOULA

You could hurt him. It's all right to feel that -- but you could hurt him, right? I know about that.

DAVID

How?

LOULA

You think Lou Parsons is always a gentle soul?

DAVID

Your husband hurts you?

LOULA

Give that man the kewpie doll.

MORRIE enters, gives them the once-over.

MORRIE

Now, hey hey hey --

LOULA

Christ. Hay is for horses.

MORRIE

What is this I see before me?

LOULA

Bug off.

MORRIE

David, what're you doing here? Does Henry know -
-

LOULA

He's gonna know now because he won't keep his flapper tight about this -- will you?

MORRIE

Don't know -- feeling good -- we won today -- your brother was an ace on fire. Scout from the St. Louis Browns was there -- again --

LOULA

Look, Morrie, just go get bent in there and leave us alone.

MORRIE

Lou did great, too --

LOULA

How nifty is the news report tonight -- now just go bend an arm and dry up --

MORRIE

Can't.

LOULA

Go.

MORRIE

Can't. You said "us": "Leave us alone."

LOULA

(sotto voce)

Damn.

MORRIE

"Us," Loula? You? Little Davy Kaner, with the Jewish smarts -- "us"? You gotta be kidding. Wait'll Lou hears --

LOULA

Lou don't need to hear.

MORRIE

He doesn't need to hear, but baby-snatching is a serious offense -- hey, Davy, what'd'ya think Henoch's going to think when he hears about this?

LOULA

Look, I'll join you, okay? Okay?

MORRIE

That's a step taken in the right direction.

LOULA

Just go on in, start your first sheet to the wind -- I'll meet you for one, all right?

MORRIE

Gotta celebrate the great game of baseball -- nothing like it this side of paradise -- one might not do it --

LOULA

Morrie --

MORRIE

Fine -- fine -- I'll go see the man about a dog. It's okay to see you here, kid -- it's okay -- your brother's got the goods out on the field, but, you know, when the game's over -- he can be a pain in the ass. Good to see that one of the Kaners 'sgot some blood in his veins. All right, all right, I'm going --

MORRIE exits into the speakeasy.

LOULA

You look pole-axed. I gotta go.

DAVID

You and Morrie --

LOULA

It's nothing -- really nothing -- but I can't have him telling Lou --

DAVID

So I didn't save you --

LOULA

You did more than you think. It's all this goddamn baseball --

DAVID

I'll wait.

LOULA

Don't. You can't.

DAVID

I can.

LOULA

You don't understand -- you can't. Go back. Go home.

LOULA starts to leave, turns back.

LOULA

Like I said, it's okay to feel it -- I feel it all the time. It doesn't feel okay, but it's okay.

LOULA starts to exit again, then stops. She reaches into her handbag and pulls out a baseball. She tosses it to him. He catches it.

LOULA

Lou gave it to me before he ducked out tonight -- big present, he thought it was -- made the last out in the game. I don't really care.

LOULA moves toward the speakeasy.

DAVID sits. He reaches into this pocket, pulls out a pen knife. With the knife, he methodically cuts and rips apart the baseball.

LOULA watches him for a moment, then exits into the speakeasy.

DAVID cuts, keeps hacking at it as lights fade to...

Intermission

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 1

HENRY and ROSIE on the Kaner front porch. They have lemonade.

HENRY

Nice night, huh?

ROSIE

It's a very nice night.

HENRY

Nice sitting out here.

ROSIE

And the lemonade is tart and sweet.

HENRY

Like the woman who made it, now that I think about it.

ROSIE

Do you think she can hear you?

HENRY

If she could get away with it, she'd be the fly on the wall. Naw, she's in the kitchen taking care of Papa.

ROSIE

You sound --

HENRY

Yeah, well, it all feels like it's moving downhill so fast.

ROSIE

Your papa's worse?

HENRY

Rosie, I wouldn't say worse -- he's still going to his shop every day -- but it's like he's -- shifting -- moving from here to here -- to some place else -- we can see him but --

ROSIE

(overlapping)

But he's not all there. I mean -- he's all there here, but, somehow, in his body --

HENRY

You sound like you know this.

ROSIE

Your papa has his baseball, right? My papa has his meats. Every day before he cuts, before he wraps, before he delivers and accepts deliveries, he says a prayer to his knives.

HENRY

What'd'ya say to a knife?

ROSIE

Since I'm a woman, he never tells me. But he's told me why -- the knife divides this from that, just as we need to divide this --

(touching her body)

-- from this --

(hand over heart)

-- in order to keep God in our sight and ourselves in God's sight and on and on and on and on. And then he will say a bracha to each of his meats. Cut them all with kavannah -- brow furrowed, deep look, a holy act -- when all anybody wants is just beef brisket, not too fatty for braising -- it's a daily regular spiritual work-out with my father.

HENRY

Something -- I don't know --

ROSIE

What?

HENRY

Pure, maybe? -- in them doing that.

ROSIE

My father's got this whole song and dance about Adam and vegetarianism -- I'm not kidding you! -- and Noah saving the animals and that's why we eat meat --

HENRY

Go back --

ROSIE

Don't ask me to repeat it! -- and he ends with this idea that food is a hiding place for Godliness and when we eat in a holy manner, then the Godliness comes out of hiding, boosting everyone up a good few notches. Meat will make ya holy -- that's how he starts his day.

HENRY

And your day, too.

ROSIE

And my day, too! But like I said before -- some city with the letter "A."

HENRY

Well -- "St. Louis" doesn't begin with an "A" --

ROSIE

What are you getting at?

HENRY

A scout from the Browns at the game today.

ROSIE

And you didn't point him out to me?

HENRY

He's kinda made me an offer.

ROSIE

"Kinda"?

HENRY

An offer to talk about an offer some more. It's nothing -- it'll turn out to be nothing.

ROSIE

But he came to you?

HENRY

Yeah.

ROSIE

Then it's not nothing. He leave you his card?

HENRY

The second time he's left me his card.

ROSIE

Then it's definitely not a nothing, Henry. This could really be a something.

HENRY
Could be, could be not, especially since St.
Louis doesn't begin with an "A."

HENRY drains his glass.

ROSIE
The alphabet can shift.

HENRY
That so?

ROSIE
Twenty-six letters -- be stupid to let just one
take over everything.

HENRY
Huh. You want more?

ROSIE
You're not letting out a peep, are you?

HENRY
Not until I have a peep to peep about.

ROSIE
(handing off her glass)
Hope your mother has better luck reading your
face for clues.

HENRY
Unlike my brain, my mug'll be clueless.

They laugh. The laugh is interrupted by DAVID, who bulls into the scene looking distraught and tight. HENRY stops, looks at him.

HENRY
You look like you've seen a ghost. He look okay
to you?

HENRY moves closer to him, sniffing.

HENRY
Cigarettes? Liquor? You?

DAVID struggles to get something out of his pocket.

DAVID
You're so smart -- damn! Offer -- damn!

DAVID finally pulls out the carved-up baseball. He sets it on one of the glasses HENRY holds.

Before HENRY can react, DAVID sucker-punches HENRY in a way that crumples HENRY to the ground. HENRY drops the glasses. DAVID is on him.

BAYLA appears in the doorway, holding a pitcher of lemonade. RAPHAEL hovers behind her.

With HENRY out of action for the moment, everyone stares: a frozen moment.

DAVID grabs HENRY's right hand and bends the fingers or wrist in a way that, if he keeps bending, he will break something in the hand.

BAYLA

David! David!

But DAVID does not let go.

BAYLA

David!

RAPHAEL moves past her to DAVID. He stands near DAVID, not touching him, just looking at him.

RAPHAEL

A really smart man would only think of doing what you are thinking of doing. A really smart man would not do it.

DAVID does not let go.

RAPHAEL

You hungry, David? Are you hungry, son? I have something that can take the hunger away.

DAVID does not let go.

RAPHAEL

If you don't take what I offer, David, I will do something to hurt you. You are not the only one enraged in this house. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations."

DAVID

"Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel."

DAVID does not let go. Without hesitation, RAPHAEL reaches out and grabs DAVID by the throat, but before he can do any damage, he collapses.

DAVID catches him, cradles him. ROSIE cradles BAYLA.

Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2

BARNEY PELTEY shakes HENRY, who comes to both groggy and fighting mad.

BARNEY

Whoa there champ --

HENRY

I'll -- I'll --

BARNEY

You'll what? Against who? What day of the week is it?

HENRY

Back off --

HENRY shakes out his hand.

HENRY

Damn!

BARNEY

Who's president?

HENRY

I'm not getting like my fa[ther] --

BARNEY

How many fingers do I [have] --

HENRY

Just get back --

BARNEY gets back.

BARNEY

So you got a mind composed -- good --

They sit, gather themselves. BARNEY watches HENRY's agitation.

BARNEY

So go on.

HENRY gets up, paces. BARNEY offers him his hand, and HENRY pulls BARNEY to his feet. HENRY massages his pitching hand.

HENRY

Why --

BARNEY

Why what?

HENRY holds up his pitching hand.

HENRY
Why does -- why is it all about hating me?

BARNEY
Give me your hand -- c'mon, give me your --

HENRY places his pitching hand in BARNEY's hands. BARNEY massages it.

BARNEY
My hand'd get so charged sometimes, I'd have to flop it on a block of ice to cool it down. So, this is the hand that's gonna do it.

HENRY pulls his hand away, paces.

HENRY
I am not gonna do it.

BARNEY
So you know what I'm talking about --

HENRY
How could you even [think] --

BARNEY
You really do need to learn how to get mad, Henry -- pissed off, even apocalyptic --

HENRY
Why? Why? They all hate me --

BARNEY
That's a start --

HENRY
And they all want to steal from me --

BARNEY
(like an engine)
Rev --

HENRY
I feel like I'm suffocating half the time --

BARNEY
Rev --

HENRY
-- the other half drowning --

BARNEY
Revelation --

HENRY
Why is it so hard? Why are they making it so
that I --

BARNEY
Who is saying that you can't?

HENRY
They all --

BARNEY
I only hear one person circling around here
saying "can't can't," and it ain't me.

HENRY
Drowning -- suffocating --

BARNEY
So do something --

HENRY
This hand can't --

BARNEY
(mocking)
Can't --

HENRY
Won't --

BARNEY
(mocking)
Won't --

HENRY
Shouldn't --

BARNEY
Shouldn't -- the good man can't -- won't --
shouldn't -- and so he suffocates and drowns.
Everything else about him is just a nervous tic,
like frog legs stuck with electric wires, the
walking dead --

HENRY explodes. BARNEY does not flinch.

BARNEY
You really ought to use that hand for something
better.

HENRY stares at his hand as if were a stranger, enemy, and savior.

BARNEY

If it's got "can't" in it -- If it's got "can't"
all through it -- if it's got "can't sir"
[cancer], you should cut it off.

BARNEY puts his right hand on imaginary ice with a hissing sound.

BARNEY

Ahhh -- when this hand was hot, it made for me
the world that I wanted to live in. It didn't
have to be good --

BARNEY shakes out his hand, puts it back on the "ice."

BARNEY

-- I beaned hitters, I chucked wild pitches in
all four directions -- it just had to have heat -
- when it had heat --

BARNEY blows on his hand to cool it off.

BARNEY

I had life. Go on -- test it --

HENRY lays his hand down on the "ice" -- and a hiss escapes from him.

BARNEY

Listen to that!

HENRY

What is the life I want.

BARNEY

(singing)

"If they don't win, it's a shame."

HENRY cools his hand, makes a fist. Lights out. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 3

About 24 hours later. BAYLA, HENRY, and DAVID at the hospital. BAYLA is wringing a handkerchief to death.

HENRY

Mama, I have to go.

BAYLA

There's nowhere you should be going with your
father here.

HENRY

Mama, we've been here all day because Dr. Timmers
said we have to wait a day to make sure --

BAYLA

I know what he said.

HENRY

Then you heard, like me, that Papa is going to be all right -- not a stroke, just --

BAYLA dismisses him with a gesture. HENRY accepts it.

HENRY

I have to go -- I have to go to the station --

BAYLA glares at him.

BAYLA

That's what you've told me.

HENRY

It's my job, Mama -- a meeting of us with the chief, the kind of chief, I've talked about him, you have to meet with when he says "meet." You want me to lose the job?

BAYLA

You're telling me that if I called this "chief you have to meet," he'd tell me that you have to meet him today.

HENRY

Of course he would.

BAYLA

The truth?

HENRY

Of course he would.

BAYLA looks straight at him. HENRY cannot hold her gaze because he's not telling her the truth.

DAVID

They could give you a break because of Papa.

HENRY

Don't flap your gums.

DAVID

I'm just saying you could --

HENRY

You're saying too much for someone who shouldn't be saying anything at all. Promise, Mama -- right back, I promise. I want to be here, believe me. Watch her.

DAVID
Like a hawk -- dig it?

HENRY
You've got no class.

DAVID
I've had good teachers.

HENRY kisses BAYLA, leaves. BAYLA reaches into her pocket, pulls something out, hands it to DAVID.

BAYLA
I gave him a chance -- that's where he's going.

DAVID examines the card.

DAVID
It's an appointment card.

BAYLA
I found that in your father's wallet.

DAVID stretches out the name.

DAVID
"Farnsworthy."

BAYLA
Henoch must have given the card to him -- he would have liked handling it. A game of secrets. Now I've got two sons who can't be trusted.

DAVID pockets the card. BAYLA pulls at the handkerchief.

DAVID
Mama, you are gonna rip it --

BAYLA
Stop telling me to stop doing what I'm doing. The hospital bill will kill us.

DAVID
I'll go to work --

BAYLA
And that will put the wrong you did to right.

DAVID
I didn't say that --

BAYLA
Because you can't.

DAVID
Papa is going to be okay.

BAYLA
I love you, David, but you have done nothing but disgust me with what you did. I have turned it over and over in my mind, and still "you" make no sense, what you did makes no sense --

BAYLA rips the handkerchief in half.

BAYLA
Damn! Damn!

BAYLA throws it on the floor. DAVID picks up the pieces.

BAYLA
The act of an animal --

DAVID
There is a reason.

BAYLA
For being such a monster?

DAVID
For being such a monster.

BAYLA
Did I raise, a monster, a devil, a -- what reason could you have that wouldn't gag me?

DAVID
Because of love, Mama. Because of in love.

BAYLA stares at him.

DAVID
It's connected with a married woman.

A long silence.

DAVID
I wanted to save her.

BAYLA
From what?

DAVID
From baseball.

BAYLA
No one needs saving from baseball, David. From maybe the ten plagues or J. Edgar Hoover, but not drek like baseball.

DAVID

She's the wife of one of the guys Henry plays
with --

BAYLA

And what does her baseball husband do that makes
her need to steal my son --

DAVID

It's not great with her --

BAYLA

So let her talk to a lawyer.

DAVID

And he beats her.

BAYLA

How do you know she's showing you the truth?

DAVID

She wouldn't not.

BAYLA

The way you wouldn't not tell a lie?

DAVID

I never lied to you.

BAYLA

You just let me think I knew what wasn't true.
How do you know anything about this?

DAVID

I feel it -- it's a knowing like that.

BAYLA

And a knowing like that brought you, brought us,
to chaos --

DAVID

To make it turn out right for her, better for her
-- Henry was like a stand-in for her husband,
maybe -- I'm not saying it makes sense now though
it made sense then -- seemed to --

BAYLA gives her son a good once-over.

BAYLA

What did you do with her?

DAVID

Talked a lot -- we listened to jazz --

BAYLA
Over at the speakeasy on --

DAVID
Exactly!

BAYLA
Outside or inside?

DAVID
Outside -- how do you know about the speak[easy]
--

BAYLA
Did you have sex with her?

DAVID
No.

BAYLA
You wanted to. Well?

DAVID
I don't think I wanted to.

BAYLA
Why not? She must have offered.

DAVID
She never offered --

BAYLA
And you never --

DAVID
I never -- it made no sense to think like that --
it makes no sense right now --

BAYLA
Don't lie.

DAVID
That's not a lie.

BAYLA gives him a hard look.

BAYLA
All right. And you thought you could save this
Tamar?

DAVID
I felt I could --

BAYLA
Why?

DAVID
Because thinking it made me feel like I was doing
something useful in my life finally. Be useful
to [someone] --

BAYLA
Useful and noble --

DAVID
Something like that --

BAYLA
Very much like that.

DAVID
Maybe even something clean -- maybe even pure --
the good son turned Jewish warrior to the rescue!
Sorry.

DAVID worries a part of the handkerchief.

DAVID
Henry gets attention paid for being so good at
something so stupid -- even you think it's stupid
-- and, boy, stupid to me! -- and I get --

BAYLA
To be the one always expected to be good -- what
a weight around the neck.

DAVID
Not like I'm such the good one now.

BAYLA
Not like you are. But the weight doesn't go away
either.

BAYLA takes back the handkerchief from DAVID.

BAYLA
Your father and I met in a sort of speakeasy --

DAVID
In Lithuania?

BAYLA

I was the "good one" at home -- proper, a high-mark student -- sound familiar? -- but there was this coffee-shop in Vilnius -- sort-of like your speakeasy -- full of young people -- anarchists, criminals -- at the coffee-shop, I danced, I swore, I lived high and paid no attention to anything except my own mind. And there I met your father, the poet for the cantors -- he was escaping, too, searching. Guilt, how could we avoid that? -- but freedom, and then America, then Henoah and you. And baseball and Shabbos and your brother lying and temptation and all comes down to this hospital waiting.

Worry the handkerchief, worry the handkerchief.

BAYLA

This Tamar or Hagar or Abigail outside the speakeasy -- you have to give her the dignity of letting her know the truth face to face. And you have to ask your brother to forgive you.

DAVID

I know the teachings --

BAYLA

So do the teachings.

DAVID

I can't wait --

BAYLA

Now you feel what I feel. Your father -- he'll give you it without a preface, but you still have to ask or else you'll still be a monster. I didn't raise a monster.

Without preamble, DAVID begins to cry. Instead of comforting him, BAYLA sits up straight, looking "down the hallway." DAVID notices, follows her gaze.

BAYLA

It's Dr. Timmers. It's Dr. Timmers, David.

Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 4

HENRY and MORRIE at the team's speakeasy, drinks in front of them.

In front of the drinks, their two contracts. MORRIE picks up his contract, "clinks" his glass against it as a toast, and takes a drink.

MORRIE

To ten days downtown with the Browns. You should be happy.

HENRY

I have to get back to the hospital.

MORRIE

So what if you lied -- a little -- it was for a good cause. Which is why you should instead be happy at this moment.

HENRY does not look happy.

MORRIE

This is so like you. When's the last time you sat in a baseball scout's office -- when did you ever sit in a baseball scout's office -- and hear the words, "We want to take a look at you" and -- have ten days ready money dropped in your hand if you just sign on the dotted line?

MORRIE looks at the last pages of each contract.

MORRIE

And yes we did --

HENRY

We signed -- hoo-rah.

MORRIE

You're such a killjoy --

HENRY

So sue me.

MORRIE

What's the bug up your ass now?

HENRY

You know what my dad said about you?

MORRIE

I don't care what he said [about me] --

HENRY

And I agreed with him -- that you're not very good. You're not very good.

MORRIE

I know I'm not very good.

HENRY

Farnsworth gave you that because of me.

MORRIE

I know that. But there's nothing in it that requires you to sit there and rub it in.

HENRY

You're riding my arm.

MORRIE

We both know I'm riding your arm.

HENRY

And we know I can tear this up during my 10-day grace period -- page 2 -- I can tear it up and it's like signing it never happened. What?

MORRIE

You wouldn't do that.

HENRY

I wouldn't?

MORRIE

You wouldn't. Not to me.

HENRY

And why not to you?

MORRIE

Because I've known you forever.

HENRY

That gives you rights?

MORRIE

What the hell is wrong with you?

HENRY

Why should I be your damn meal ticket? Why should I be anybody's damn meal ticket?

HENRY finishes his drink.

MORRIE

Don't tear it up.

HENRY

Don't tell me what to do.

MORRIE

Don't tear it up.

HENRY

And I'm telling you to shut your freeloader mouth.

MORRIE

Don't --

Before MORRIE can finish his sentence, HENRY smacks him in the ear.

HENRY

What did I just tell you?

MORRIE

Goddamn it --

HENRY

You don't listen well, Morrie --

MORRIE

Damn!

HENRY

-- which is why you suck as much as you do.

MORRIE

You're outta your [mind] --

HENRY

I am as in my right mind as I have ever been.

HENRY finishes MORRIE's drink. HENRY picks up his contract, gets up to go.

MORRIE

I'm not buying this act, you know.

HENRY

Free country.

MORRIE

You're being a goddamn faker --

HENRY fishes money out of his wallet.

HENRY

Says the clown.

MORRIE

You still think you can be the "good son" if you tear that up --

HENRY throws money on the counter.

MORRIE

-- that you can just take a taste and then go home and be the good clean Jew-boy that everybody loves all over again.

HENRY turns to exit.

MORRIE

Status report: You lied to your mother. Your dad laid up, and you lied to be here rather than there. Here rather than there -- you getting that? And I'm the one who needs this contract? I may've been a lot of things in my short career as a not-so-good baseball player, but a coward? I have never been a coward.

HENRY does not leave.

MORRIE

You should also buy me another drink.

HENRY does not move.

MORRIE

You want to hear my fig leaf? To cover taking the deal?

HENRY

I have to go bring my father home from the hospital.

MORRIE

So go.

HENRY

I have to go lie to my mother again.

MORRIE

So go lie.

HENRY

And after all that -- I've got the graveyard shift at work.

MORRIE

For your twenty to thirty bucks a week -- yee-haw!

HENRY

My life is good.

MORRIE

"Fig leaf" -- you listening?

HENRY

So talk already.

MORRIE

Some days -- some days I feel like I do nothing but suffocate all day long. You ever feel like that? Like your clothes are too small? Ah, but see, you got Rosie -- maybe that makes a difference in how Henry Kaner half-Jew-boy breathes --

HENRY

Rosie's got her own trouble breathing -- just finish --

MORRIE

Here's my leaf, which could be your leaf, if you're lucky enough to borrow it. I'm going past the ten days because you're gonna go past the ten days, and I'm gonna ride your arm. And when we're full on the roster, I'm playing every Friday and Saturday they'll let me play, and I'm gonna send my folks the two-thirds half of each paycheck, and you're gonna do the same. Think of what the money will do, even if it only lasts a few years. Your dad gets a nurse so your mom doesn't have to be his nurse and she can have a life, you get the butcher's daughter and all the cuts that go with that -- We. Can. Make. This. Happen. Why is it that you shouldn't get to play while all these other putzes get their shot? Why can't you take the one shot God gave you? All you got to do is take the bite.

A silence.

MORRIE

So what does the Jew-boy say? What does the Jew-boy do? And will "say" and "do" match up?

HENRY doesn't answer right away. He lets the contract drop. He winds up, he pitches. Then again. And again, with more anger.

HENRY

I pitch because it takes me outta this life, takes me away from this life -- the crowd? never hear it -- I hear my breath, I hear my living -- it's quiet, it's clear, it's clean -- it's mine -

-

HENRY's finished.

MORRIE

See -- see -- I knew my best friend wasn't a coward. Now, that drink?

HENRY

I gotta go pick up Rosie.

HENRY picks up the contract and leaves.

MORRIE

Damn.

MORRIE follows HENRY. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5

Speakeasy. LOULA sits on the bench. DAVID sits on the bench.

LOULA

I've come to think of this --

(slaps bench)

-- as a kind of amusement park ride. Not the kiddie kind but the drop-your-guts kind.

DAVID

I was first coming here to tell you I can't come here anymore.

LOULA

What did I tell you. Swoosh!

DAVID

Swoosh!

LOULA

Sorry. About your father. Lou told me.

DAVID

What Henry didn't tell him so that he couldn't tell you was that I made it happen to my father. I tried hard to hurt Henry -- to help you -- hurt your husband, Morrie, all of them hitting on you -- baseball! --

LOULA

Cain and Abel. What'd you do?

DAVID

Tried to break his pitching hand.

LOULA

Jesus --

DAVID

Then my father got in between -- that's when it hit him.

LOULA

I didn't want you to hurt your brother -- not really -- I think -- I was hoping you'd deck Lou down a few notches -- maybe -- maybe I should've just asked for that right out -- maybe -- I'm not saying that makes sense now though it made sense then -- seemed to -- it gets fuzzy for me sometimes, David -- real wobbly, not always clear -- you hear me?

DAVID

I hear you -- "not always clear" --

LOULA

And that triggers no backing-away from me for you --

DAVID

None.

LOULA

Go -- you gotta go help your father.

DAVID

Yeah, I do.

LOULA

So go. Help him. Spare me. Spare yourself. God spare us all. You've got nothing to make up for -- nothing in you is broken. You're sweet. I'm not. Now get out of here.

But DAVID doesn't leave.

LOULA

I said --

DAVID

I heard --

LOULA

So why [don't you] --

DAVID

Because I don't want to -- that's not what I was coming here to say --

LOULA

You got a family to consider --

DAVID

And I'll be considering them for forever whether I want to or not --

LOULA
Does your mom know?

DAVID
I told her --

LOULA
And she let you out of the crib to come here --

DAVID
Diapers and all --

LOULA
I'm telling you to get away from here -- I'm not
always clear to myself.

DAVID
And I'm telling you, clearly, no.

LOULA
You can't stay --

DAVID
So leave.

LOULA
You leave.

DAVID
I only leave if I can come back to ride this.
That's the way a warrior works.

LOULA
I have no idea what you're talking about.

DAVID
Neither do I, mostly. But I know it feels right
to talk it.

LOULA
Can't always trust your feelings, David.

DAVID
Can't always trust your head.

LOULA
So what're we gonna trust?

DAVID
What're our choices?

LOULA
Like we have choices, you and me.

DAVID

I already made my choice.

LOULA

I was going to kick you to the curb tonight.

DAVID

You don't get to kick me to anywhere.

LOULA

Which means you're staying --

DAVID

You just answered yourself.

Jazz music starts. HENRY enters with MORRIE.

LOULA

(sotto voce)

Damn.

HENRY

David, you're coming home with me now.

DAVID

Screw you -- you are not my keeper. How'd your meeting turn out? How's this for an image in your brain: while you were sitting there with "Farnsworthy," Mama and I got Papa into a taxi and brought him home. By ourselves.

HENRY

I know -- I got there late --

DAVID

And you think I'm coming home because the mighty Henoch tells me to? You've got no pull here. You are not my keeper.

HENRY

Are you coming, or aren't you?

LOULA

You should go home.

DAVID

You just asked me to stay, so don't take it back.

LOULA

There's later. It's not worth it.

HENRY

Come on.

HENRY puts his hand on DAVID. DAVID shoves HENRY back hard.

DAVID

Put that hand on me again, I swear I'll break it. Go away and make your own goddamn decision, for once in your life, and stop living off the rest of us! I already did my part for you.

LOULA

Don't look at me like I'm the problem. All of you know what Lou does to me, and not a one of you ever said a thing to stop it. Just sniff around for scraps. Am I right, or am I wrong?

Both HENRY and MORRIE keep their mouths shut. LOULA indicates DAVID.

LOULA

At least with the babe, here, I've had a taste of some respect. I like it. I think I could go for some more of it. He tried to break your hand? Maybe you should give him a cut of the contract as a thank-you.

HENRY

I have to go. It's time. It's time. I have to go.

HENRY leaves. MORRIE stays.

LOULA

You should go.

DAVID

Of course I gotta go. I just don't have to go when he says to go.

MORRIE

The outlaws --

DAVID

What did Farnsworthy say?

MORRIE

Ten-day trial run for both of us.

DAVID

My brother signed, right? Come on.

LOULA

Where?

DAVID

To my home.

LOULA

I can't go there with you.

DAVID

You're already on the drop-your-guts kind of amusement park ride, right? Gotta finish it out.

MORRIE

I assume the invitation includes me?

DAVID

If you're on the inside when the door locks.

Exit. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 6

KANER house. ROSIE sits with BAYLA, who is sitting with RAPHAEL, RAPHAEL looking dilapidated, staring. BAYLA holds his hand, looks absolutely lost.

BAYLA

Do you think he still has his mind in there --

ROSIE

Of course -- of course, Mrs. Kaner --

BAYLA

The mind your father waited to listen to --

ROSIE

All that baseball and the beautiful poems of it -
- of course it's still there. It doesn't go away
--

BAYLA

Is that in Henoch?

ROSIE

I believe it is --

BAYLA

And you know what he did when he left the hospital, where he went.

ROSIE's silence shows that she knows what HENRY did.

BAYLA

And what he did is all right with you, even if he lied to me, to his father, to do it?

The silence grows.

BAYLA

Maybe it's easier for you.

ROSIE

It's easy for no one.

BAYLA speaks to RAFAEL.

BAYLA

We have no one but ourselves now.

HENRY enters, trailed by MORRIE, then DAVID and LOULA. At LOULA's entrance, RAPHAEL takes notice of her, though no one really notices it.

BAYLA looks at DAVID, indicates with her head "Is this her?" DAVID nods yes.

BAYLA

I want to see this contract. We want to see this contract.

HENRY pulls it out of his pocket, unfolds it, hands it to BAYLA.

Everyone waits while BAYLA skims the three pages of the contract. The flip of each page rings out in the silence. She comes to the last page, reads it, then sets the contract on the table.

DAVID

The 800-pound gorilla is officially in the room.

BAYLA looks at ROSIE.

BAYLA

The betrayer? He's yours. He cuts -- for money -- maybe that makes him the right one for a butcher's daughter -- just a job with him.

MORRIE

He's got a grace period, Mrs. Kaner --

BAYLA

A grace period?

MORRIE

To think it over --

BAYLA

The fact his name is on that thing at all is crime enough -- take your girl and your money and go be like your friend here.

ROSIE

His "girl"?

HENRY

Rosie --

BAYLA

I don't need to hear from you.

ROSIE

No disrespect, Mrs. Kaner -- Henry, don't -- but I think you do -- "girl" like that is like "Delilah" or "Jezebel" and I can't let that pass.

BAYLA

If the name fits --

HENRY

Mama --

ROSIE

It doesn't fit. You know it doesn't fit.

BAYLA

Don't count on that.

ROSIE

I count on you listening to what I have to say.

BAYLA

Say whatever shit you want -- I'm an invalid now, too, so I get to say anything I want --

ROSIE

When Henry --

BAYLA

The butcher --

ROSIE

-- told me he'd signed the contract -- I was glad. Am glad.

BAYLA

Sets you on easy street.

ROSIE

Listen!

BAYLA

Unfortunately, my ears still work.

ROSIE

Like Henry said to me, the money is not his but for you and for Mr. Kaner so that whatever pain comes -- the easy street is for you two, not for me --

BAYLA

The money makes him easier to marry.

ROSIE

He's easy enough to marry without it -- but I like him even more for what he wants to do --

BAYLA

He's just your best shot.

ROSIE

He is my best shot -- I'm not getting any younger -- I've been straight about that -- and don't think I'm one-hundred percent on this -- I know it means "gone" for long stretches and temptation on both sides is a fact of life -- but whenever does anyone in this life get what he wants in the way he wants it? It's enough sometimes to just get a near-hit.

BAYLA

It means him playing on Shabbos and whenever else --

ROSIE

Is a person's soul in a script some strangers laid out thousands of years ago or in wanting to make sure the people he loves get less pain?

BAYLA

I couldn't live with it.

ROSIE

And whose problem should that be? I'm sorry if that insults but --

BAYLA

And I couldn't live with his father dying while he was gone earning his money --

(to HENRY)

Could you live with that?

(to ROSIE)

Could you live with him living with that? I can't -- I just can't.

DAVID

Mama, Rosie's right -- I think you should learn to live with it. I think you have to.

HENRY

David --

DAVID

You think I want to leave school to work just to pay medical bills and be around 18 minutes before sundown to light candles? I can think of other ways to be a virtuous son, and Henry's money means some freedom --

BAYLA
(to RAPHAEL)

Raphael, we have no sons.

DAVID reaches into his pocket and pulls out the carved-up baseball from the end of Act I. He slams it down on top of the contract.

DAVID
(to HENRY)

Make your choice! Now!

HENRY does not make a move. RAPHAEL sits up, as if waking up, which takes everyone by surprise. He looks directly at BAYLA.

BAYLA

Raphael --

RAPHAEL looks at HENRY.

HENRY

Papa --

RAPHAEL

Henoch.

HENRY

Papa, I'm sorry --

RAPHAEL

The mistake I made with you --

HENRY

You didn't make any mistake.

RAPHAEL

The mistake I made with you was teaching you to be a good man. Instead of an honest one. I hope it's not too late. Rosie, don't give up on him.

But then RAPHAEL shifts his gaze to LOULA.

RAPHAEL

Bayla.

BAYLA

She's not --

LOULA

I'm not --

RAPHAEL

My Bayla.

BAYLA

She's not --

LOULA
Mr. Kaner, I'm not --

RAPHAEL
(to LOULA)
Bayla, come here --

BAYLA
Raphael!

RAPHAEL motions BAYLA to go away.

RAPHAEL
Come here --

LOULA
What do I do?

DAVID
(whispering)
Do what you can --

LOULA
But I'm not --

RAPHAEL
Miss Bayla Brodsky -- remember we were so formal
with each other --

LOULA
Mr. Kaner --

RAPHAEL
See, just like that! We dance, drink coffee --
then you say to me, "When we have but the will to
do it, that very moment will Justice be done:
that very instant the tyrants of the Earth shall
bite the dust." Remember?

LOULA
Look, Mr. Kaner --

RAPHAEL
And that's when we did it!

RAPHAEL gives her the anarchist salute. LOULA gives it back to him.

LOULA
Look --

BAYLA
Tell him we had to run.

LOULA
I can't [do] --

BAYLA

Tell him.

LOULA

We had to run.

BAYLA

We ran ourselves right to here.

LOULA

We ran ourselves right to here.

RAPHAEL sings The Internationale, in Yiddish, looking straight at LOULA.

RAPHAEL

Sheit oif ir ale wer nor shklafen
Was hunger leiden mus in noit

To everyone's amazement, LOULA takes up the words with RAPHAEL.

RAPHAEL AND LOULA

Der geist er kocht unruft teu wafen
In shlacht uns firen is er greit --

RAPHAEL

Gut, eh?

LOULA

Yeah, gut.

LOULA gives him the anarchist salute. RAPHAEL gives it back to her.

RAPHAEL

Like the kibinai we ate.

BAYLA

In the coffee house --

LOULA

Like in the coffee house.

RAPHAEL touches LOULA's cheek, takes her hand.

RAPHAEL

(to LOULA)

It all changed. Forever.

LOULA

It always changes.

RAPHAEL

We used to think the violent ending would bring
the new improved beginning -- The Great Joker.
What now, Bayla?

LOULA touches RAPHAEL's cheek.

LOULA

A-do-nai s'fa-tai tif-tach, u-fi ya-gid t'hi-la-te-cha.

Ba-ruch a-tah A-do-nai,
E-lo-hei-nu, Vei-lo-hei a-vo-tei-un --

[Adonai, my lips You will open
and my mouth will tell Your glory.
Blessed (are) You, Adonai, our God and God of
our fathers --]

The shift in the room is palpable.

RAPHAEL

Ba-ruch a-tah A-do-nai,
ma-gein Av-ra-ham. A-tah gi-bur l'o-lam, A-do-nai
m'chai-yei mei-tim a-ta
rav l'ho-shi-a --

[Blessed are You, Adonai, Shield of Abraham
You are mighty to eternity, Adonai, enlivening
dead (are) You, great to save.]

LOULA looks at everyone looking at her. She speaks to BAYLA.

LOULA

So I'm a member of a lost tribe. Who among you
doesn't have a secret or three?

RAPHAEL

(to LOULA)

Can I get him to tell the joke?

LOULA

(confused)

Sure.

RAPHAEL indicates for HENRY to step to him.

RAPHAEL

Tell the joke, Yakov.

HENRY

I'm not Yakov --

RAPHAEL

You are Yakov Davis -- c'mon --

ROSIE

He means my father.

RAPHAEL

(pointing at HENRY)

Of course he is! Let's tell them all the joke together.

HENRY

You tell the joke -- you tell it a lot better.

RAPHAEL

You're right! Two buddies Yitzchok and Shmul were two of the biggest baseball fans in America -- you want in?

HENRY

It's all yours.

ROSIE

They agreed that whoever died first would try to come back and tell the other if there was baseball in heaven.

RAPHAEL

Yes! One summer night, Yitzchok passed away in his sleep after watching the Yankee victory earlier in the evening. He died happy. A few nights later, Shmul awoke to the sound of his voice from beyond.

"Yitzchok, is that you?"

ROSIE

"Of course it's me."

RAPHEL

"This is unbelievable! So tell me, is there baseball in heaven?"

ROSIE

"Well I have some good news and some bad news for you. Which do you want to hear first?"

RAPHAEL

"Tell me the good news first."

ROSIE

"Well, the good news is that yes there is baseball in heaven."

RAPHAEL

"Oh, that is wonderful! So what could possibly be the bad news?"

ROSIE

You tell it.

RAPHAEL

"You're pitching tomorrow night." Shpil Ball!

RAPHAEL laughs, everyone laughs. RAPHAEL goes silent.

LOULA moves to BAYLA. She smooths BAYLA's forehead. She takes her hand and RAPHAEL's hand, looks into their faces.

LOULA

Everything is going to be all right no matter how it turns out.

LOULA twines BAYLA's and RAPHAEL's hands together. She gets up, goes to HENRY.

LOULA

Who is going to make sure that what I just said turns out true? Your brother's too young. Your mother's too old. Your father's got nothing left in his tank. It's not Rosie's responsibility. Who's left to make all of this turn out all right?

HENRY picks up the contract. He waits. MORRIE makes a move toward HENRY. HENRY shoots MORRIE a look, which stops MORRIE's movement but not the look of anger and disappointment in his face.

MORRIE

(to HENRY)

Gonna screw me over, aren't you?

LOULA

Doesn't matter --

MORRIE

It doesn't matter?

LOULA

It does not matter because not everybody gets one in the win column at the end of the day.

MORRIE

Don't listen to her -- Hank -- Henoch --

HENRY stares at the contract. Stage goes to dark. At the same moment, a light appears downstage on BARNEY PELTY.

HENRY takes up the ruined baseball. He moves downstage into the light.

BARNEY indicates for HENRY to toss him the ball. He checks it over.

BARNEY

Know what I did when it was all over?

HENRY

You were done by the time I was twelve.

BARNEY

I was done by the time I was thirty-one.

BARNEY takes out some masking tape and wraps it around the ball to repair it.

BARNEY

Not shot -- nor broken -- just -- done. I did it -- didn't need to do it anymore.

HENRY

And your life after being done?

BARNEY

I went back home. Back to Farmington, Missouri. I was raised there.

HENRY

Missouri?

BARNEY

Yeah -- enormous Jewish community there! Enormous! The Jews out among the corn!

HENRY

Challah in the heartland!

BARNEY

That's good! I like that! Ran a bookstore. Was a food inspector. Had several terms as an alderman. That is what I did, Henry: I melted back into the ordinary.

HENRY

What about --

BARNEY

The spirit, the eternal --

HENRY

The "something" like that, yeah.

BARNEY

You mean, did I Shabbos? Yes, I Shabbos'd. Go on, Henry, you gotta -- they gotta -- you all gotta move on to what's next -- shpil ball.

BARNEY tosses HENRY the ball, exits. HENRY lets out his characteristic OUTBREATH.

DAVID enters, bearing a candle, followed by RAPHAEL, BAYLA, LOULA, and ROSIE. ROSIE hands HENRY a box of matches.

HENRY takes out a match, strikes, and lights the candles.

HENRY

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvosav, v'tzivanu l'had lik
neir shel shabbos (Amein).

Then they all sing.

ALL

Nem mikh mit tsu der ball geym
(Take me out to the ballgame)

Tsum oylem lomir dokh geyn
(Take me out to the park)

Koyf mir di nislekh un krekerjek
(Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack)

Vil ikh keyn molfun dort nit avek
(I don't care if I never get back)

HENRY launches into the lesser-known second verse of the song.

HENRY

All I need is just one chance
I could hit a home run
There isn't anyone else like me
Maybe I'll go down in history
And it's root, root, root
For the home team
Here comes fortune and fame
'Cause I know
That
I'll be the star
At the old
Ball
Game

HENRY takes up his pitching stance.

HENRY

Shpil ball.

HENRY winds up, throws -- at the moment of the throw, candles blown out, lights to black.

OUTBREATH.

End of play.