

Hardball

by

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

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Contact:

Michael Bettencourt
(201)770-0550
m.bett@verizon.net
67 Highwood Terrace #2
Weehawken NJ 07087

Dean B. Kaner
(602)404-1512
kanerrus@cox.net
5259 E. Paradise Lane
Scottsdale, AZ 85254

Hardball

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" -- doubled by RAFAEL

MISCELLANEOUS

- The actor playing RAFAEL KANER doubles as BARNEY PELTY. The two characters can be distinguished by something as simple as BARNEY wearing a baseball cap.

Hardball

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 this 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.

BARNEY

Like son, like father -- and they both like Barney Peltly.

HENRY

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

Do what?

HENRY

Don't jive me! Do what you did.

BARNEY

I just did it.

HENRY

Barney Pelty just did it.

BARNEY

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

HENRY

You never hid --

BARNEY

Being a Jew.

HENRY

Yeah.

BARNEY

Why? And why is this suddenly a problem?

HENRY

For eight seasons, St. Louis Browns --

BARNEY

Served up my wicked Jew curve ball. They paid me \$850 for wicked, 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 that you're holding. You're pretty busy being a Jew curve ball at this moment in your life.

HENRY

Don't know what you [mean] --

BARNEY

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 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 --

HENRY

I always liked you -- was amazed to find out
about you.

BARNEY

So you know that 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 snaps his fingers and disappears.

HENRY

Bastard.

MORRIE COHEN appears. He holds his duffel bag.

MORRIE

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

HENRY

Did ya see some blowhard standing 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 wanted to talk to you. 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. At one point he holds up the shirt of the uniform: on it, the team name is momentarily visible.

MORRIE

So, Farnsworthy -- did he, like, make an --

HENRY

He offered me marriage, but I turned him down.

MORRIE

But he left you his card.

HENRY

Only that -- and my virginity. No diamond ring.

MORRIE

Could give you a ring later.

HENRY

Let's go.

MORRIE

I'm just saying he could give you a ring. I'm just saying 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

Not so good.

MORRIE

Kinda fierce --

HENRY

We'll talk about it later, okay?

MORRIE

Promise?

HENRY

Does a catcher go down?

MORRIE

You kiss your mother with that mouth?

HENRY

Say hello, then go.

MORRIE

Mrs. Kaner, how ya doing?

(to HENRY)

Great game, anyway -- ace of spades.

(to BAYLA)

He was great.

HENRY

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

MORRIE

Over and out.

(to BAYLA)

Mrs. Kaner, nice to see you again.

MORRIE holds up his fist. HENRY bumps knuckles with him. MORRIE leaves. HENRY puts down his duffel bag. 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 --

HENRY

But you will anyway.

BAYLA

He hasn't met a holy day he wouldn't play on.

HENRY

Baseball is his holy --

BAYLA

No smart mouth.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

Go ahead. Say it.

BAYLA

Why say it if you know it?

HENRY

Because you have to say it.

BAYLA

I don't "have to" -- but it has to be said.

HENRY

You do "have to" --

BAYLA

You do this because you know it embarrasses me.

HENRY

I'm late -- say it.

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.

HENRY

Nothing, Mama, is light here --

BAYLA

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, regular and extra, because I wanted to -- I knew what the time was -- you don't put in a new pitcher when the pitcher you got working is pitching a no-hitter --

The silence stretches.

BAYLA

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

HENRY

Babe Ruth made twenty grand last year --

BAYLA

And did he lose his religion to make it?

HENRY

The Babe's religion is not --

BAYLA

(dismissive)

What man is called "The Babe" --

HENRY

You want me to quit?

BAYLA

What I want, and what I want to know, are two different things.

HENRY

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

BAYLA

Stop it.

HENRY

More money coming in -- can always use it --

BAYLA

Stop it because this isn't an honest offer.

HENRY

I'm being very honest.

BAYLA

Not honest, and not heartfelt.

HENRY

Honor your father and your mother. 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 to live, like him? Done.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

I can be the good Jew. The good Jew is stretched out on the table for you. Just ask for it.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

What? What?

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, Henoah -- you read them like your father reads them -- both digging into the Torah -- I hear the local boy's got a good ERA. It's not that hard to figure out those figures.

HENRY

But.

BAYLA

But. Do those sacred numbers 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 Shabbos.

HENRY

Not 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.

DAVID

(checking his watch)

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

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

DAVID

(underscore)

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 fat ears were overhearing rather than listening --

DAVID

Who could stay away from hearing yet once again -
-

(as a radio announcer)

-- " 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 an answer on you?

HENRY

The candles get lit 18 minutes before. And by these wonderful hands.

BAYLA takes her hands back.

BAYLA

Pour the honey somewhere else.

HENRY

And David, what time is it now?

DAVID

I don't know.

HENRY grabs DAVID's wrist and looks at the watch before DAVID pulls his arm away.

DAVID

Get your own.

HENRY

(reciting)

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 know 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, remember -- no one asked except you. 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.

HENRY

Glad you could come to my ball game, Froi Kaner -
- David, get behind her -- put her hands up a
like a catcher's.

DAVID

I will not.

HENRY

Come on.

DAVID

Baseball is stupid.

HENRY

David -- even you want to know what they mean if
Papa does them.

DAVID

I do not care what they mean.

HENRY

Don't bullshit me -- I know you want to know what
they mean.

DAVID hesitates, then goes to BAYLA.

BAYLA

What are you doing?

DAVID

Let's humor the bullshitter, eh, or he may kill
us with one of his pitches. Like this.

DAVID takes BAYLA's arms and hands and sets them like a catcher's.

HENRY

DAVID crouches behind BAYLA like an umpire. BAYLA makes the signs,
then puts her hands up.

HENRY

All right! 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.

BAYLA drops her hands, stands up straight, almost catching DAVID under the chin.

Unseen by the three of them, RAPHAEL enters and stands in the "doorway." He carries a black 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. Now, once more with the signals, and I'll tell you what you just told me to do.

BAYLA

You just want to laugh.

HENRY

Gotta have 'em to do my job.

BAYLA stares at HENRY for a moment, then gets back into her modified catcher's crouch. DAVID takes his position.

HENRY

I love it when she does that.

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

HENRY

A curve ball curves because of how I snap my wrist. The closer to my body, the straighter and sharper my curve. I like 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 Pelty, 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. HENRY looks at DAVID, and DAVID half-heartedly raises his arm in the "strike" sign.

DAVID
(unenthusiastic)
Stee-rike three -- yer out.

BAYLA stands up. She hands the "ball" to HENRY.

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

From the "doorway," RAPHAEL speaks.

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 bustles to him, kisses him, takes his kit and his hat.

BAYLA
They were just distracting me.

RAPHAEL
Good distracting, then. And I see you pay attention to me, as a good wife should.

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?

DAVID
I haven't been teaching --

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.

RAPHAEL
How many?

HENRY
Enough to win.

RAPHAEL
Enough to win --

HENRY
To win big.

RAPHAEL
Good. Forty years in the desert is a lot like
extra innings. 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
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 --

(standing)

Mama -- I'll help you out -- let's go --

RAPHAEL

(to HENRY)

David, sit down -- 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

RAPHAEL looks completely pleased.

RAPHAEL

Things to think about.

BAYLA

I need to think about dinner. All right?

RAPHAEL

Yes, yes -- go.

BAYLA

All right.

(to DAVID)

Give me a hand.

(to RAPHAEL)

You'll be okay?

RAPHAEL

I am sitting here with my pitcher --

RAPHAEL gives HENRY a set of hand signals. HENRY watches, then waves away the sign. RAPHAEL gives him another, ending with him striking his left breast, over the heart. HENRY nods.

RAPHAEL

See?

BAYLA and DAVID exit.

RAPHAEL

I cut hair all day -- 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.

HENRY

He wants to be you.

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 to tell you something.

RAPHAEL

Good or bad?

HENRY

Good, I think --

RAPHAEL

Good.

HENRY

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

He gave me his card. Two cards.

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

That's something.

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

Keep it? Sure. I have the other.

RAPHAEL pockets the card.

HENRY

Won't amount to anything, probably, anyway.
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 want to see you happy, Henoah.

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 show it -- but in Lithuania --

RAPAHEL

"In Lithuania" -- all so boring --

BAYLA

In Lithuania your father wrote music for cantors
--

RAPHAEL

And in Lithuania a Jew and a salami had equality
because they could both be strung from a rope --

BAYLA

In Lithuania he wrote --

RAPHAEL

And in America I cut -- I serve the top of the
head rather than what's underneath -- so what?
It's safer.

BAYLA

And you forget --

RAPHAEL

In Lithuania we'd be dead, Bayla, and these two
would never have been...

BAYLA

I was just trying to make a point --

RAPHAEL

And the sun is going down, and the challah is
impatient. Besides -- in America I have these
two miracles, and you, and baseball -- much
better than "in Lithuania."

BAYLA

Baseball is not up there with --

RAPHAEL

There is nothing but God, but there is his world
through which we know him.

BAYLA

Not through baseball -- there's gambling, there's
Morrie Cohen --

RAPHAEL

Henoch, we are going to have to work on her some
more.

BAYLA

I don't want to be worked on -- I want the sun to
go down.

RAPHAEL

From such little 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 come 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 a card -- just a card -
-

HENRY
You'd think of it as --

BARNEY
I'd think of it as a ticket.

HENRY
It's just a card.

BARNEY
This is where you need to start changing 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 -- keeping up some
kind of innocence by the act? You don't have
much time left for that crap.

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

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

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

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 4

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

MORRIE
Come on!

HENRY
Wait.

MORRIE
For what?

HENRY
Wait.

MORRIE
For what?!

HENRY
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.

HENRY
My parents are inside, and I'm not moving.

MORRIE
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.

HENRY
Done.

MORRIE
Let's go.

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

MORRIE
Man --

HENRY
Done.

MORRIE
You didn't finish it.

HENRY
I did enough.

MORRIE
Even I know that's not enough.

HENRY
It's enough.

MORRIE
From the "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, and 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

First feature wasn't that good anyway.

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 some more. About you. Yeah.

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 shit like that --

HENRY

And 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.

HENRY

Yeah?

MORRIE

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.

HENRY

But.

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

It's what I'd like to think'd happen if you don't screw it up. You'd turn it down?

HENRY

Hey, if I'm good enough, maybe the league'll stop games Friday, Saturday for me.

MORRIE

My foreskin'll grow back before that -- it's just business with these guys.

HENRY

Maybe it shouldn't all be the business.

MORRIE

That's American for you -- your folks know that -
- my folks know that -- that's why they came out
of Lit-too-a-nee-ah [Lithuania] --

HENRY

Mama, maybe -- a long maybe -- not Papa.

MORRIE

Not him, for sure. He thinks the game is like
the blueprint of life, clipping away and talking
about the Sefirot and the Kabbalah -- lucky the
guy in the chair's got any hair left!

HENRY

Papa never started out to be a barber.

MORRIE

But that's where he ended up -- and you got a
chance to get ended up someplace very different.

HENRY

If I play on --

MORRIE

Plain as the swerve on your curve. Look at us,
Hank, sitting under the three stars. Look at us.

HENRY

You're sounding like my mother's voice.

MORRIE

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. What's that look? That look ain't a
sourpuss look! May wonders never cease!

HENRY

It'd be great, wouldn't it?

MORRIE

Tell me what great.

HENRY

A trip downtown.

MORRIE

Look at that face!

HENRY

Shut up.

MORRIE

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 bar 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

Don't bullshit me.

DAVID

I'm not -- doing [that] --

LOULA

Yes you are, choir boy, so don't do it because I hate a bullshitter, especially a bad one like you.

(appraises him)

And I didn't scare him away. 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 -- I ain't trying to hook you. Be like robbing the cradle, anyway.

DAVID makes a gesture at the door.

LOULA

That some sort of sign language?

DAVID

The music.

LOULA

Really? You? You don't look the jazz type.

DAVID

And what type would that be?

LOULA

Not someone like 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, is that a blush? I mention the devil and you
blush -- now, what is this choir boy telling me?

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

(in rhythm)

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.

DAVID

What?

LOULA

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 stares at the door of the bar.

DAVID

What?

LOULA

I don't think I can, either, now that I think about it, now that I apply my grey matter to the situation. I. Just. Can't. So. What am I gonna do? Wanna walk me home?

DAVID says nothing, keeps his eyes on her. LOULA laughs.

LOULA

I got a deer in the headlights going on over there! 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

I couldn't've -- I really couldn't've -- taken another night in there -- not good for my health, jazz or no jazz.

(holds out her hand)

I am being terribly rude. Loula Parsons.

DAVID stares at her hand.

LOULA

Can't shake a woman's hand, either?

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

David Kaner. DAVID

Kaner. LOULA

Yes. DAVID

Hmm -- LOULA

Is that a problem? DAVID

No. LOULA

Just that from [the sound] -- DAVID

You got a brother. LOULA

I do. What? DAVID

You know my husband? LOULA

No. DAVID

Parsons -- he plays baseball. With your brother.
On the Superior fucking McNabbs. What a stupid
fucking name. Pardon my goddamn swearing. LOULA

I don't like baseball either. DAVID

Even with a famous bro? LOULA

I really don't like baseball. DAVID

So you don't like your brother. LOULA

I didn't say that. DAVID

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

Huh.

DAVID

You were saying.

LOULA

My husband.

DAVID

Yes.

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.

BAYLA

Try Lionel Barrymore.

HENRY

Still thinking Baby Peggy -- enough, Mama.

BAYLA

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, Henoeh -- I have a wicked throw from the crouch!

HENRY

That's not all that wicked about you.

BAYLA

It seems you took your offer off your table.

HENRY

I'll sit if we don't --

BAYLA

Someone's got to get you to know your own mind.

HENRY

I know my own mind.

BAYLA

Sit down. There's something you don't know.

HENRY sits.

HENRY

Just don't --

BAYLA

Here is all I'm going to say about that subject:
Jews who play baseball are not Jews. Done. Now,
your father.

HENRY

How did we get to him?

BAYLA

What have you noticed lately about him?

HENRY

What are you talking about?

BAYLA

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 --

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

BAYLA

(to HENRY)

Later.

(to ROSIE)

Come in, come in. Henoch --

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 --

(to HENRY)

-- sort of like the big 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

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

HENRY

My mother has taken up taking in 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."

They drink lemonade.

HENRY

(to ROSIE)

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 glass)

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.

(raises glass)

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 Machine," the King of the Curveball?

HENRY

Well, I'm sure you probably noticed the dozens pounding the sidewalk out front demanding my autograph.

(signaling)

"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

She hasn't 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 --

HENRY

Always the "other hand" --

ROSIE

I don't blame her for pushing -- 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.

ROSIE

How do you throw a curveball?

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

(slight sarcasm)

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 and take a joy in the smell of goodbye in the smoke.

HENRY

Yeah?

ROSIE

Yeah.

HENRY

Somehow -- your saying those words that way makes them sound not hard at all.

ROSIE

They're words familiar to me for a long time.

HENRY

Why "A"?

ROSIE

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

HENRY

And that suitcase -- ready-packed?

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

Save that for later.

HENRY

Well, if I agree to dutch, then I get to tell you the secret of a good inside slider.

ROSIE

I can't wait to hear how such a slider slides.

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."

BAYLA

You just missed Rosie -- Rapahel, what's the matter? Your face -- what's the matter?

RAPHAEL

Huh?

BAYLA

The matter -- 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?

RAPHAEL sits down. He stares off.

RAPHAEL

Brilliant --

Transition.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 7

HENRY and DAVID appear, RAPHAEL seated. RAPHAEL's shirt has a button or two unbuttoned, the sleeves sort-of rolled up but not -- he is not disheveled, but he is. He wears a kind of dopey smile. HENRY and DAVID look distressed.

HENRY

Papa? Mama thought --

RAPHAEL holds up a finger, as if he is going to say something. But then he doesn't say anything. Smiles.

DAVID stalks the room.

HENRY

You were going to say something, Papa --

RAPHAEL

The secret.

More silence. DAVID leans into HENRY.

DAVID

(hissing)

This is your fault.

DAVID moves away before HENRY can respond.

HENRY

Papa, what secret?

RAPHAEL

Baseball.

DAVID

Papa, baseball is not a secret.

RAPHAEL

It holds the [secret] -- God's way to message us about life.

DAVID

(sotto voce)

I can't believe --

HENRY

Ssh.

(to RAPHAEL)

Papa, Mama said that you had your physical with Dr. Timmers --

RAPHAEL

The physical, while necessary, is not sufficient.

HENRY

Maybe, Papa, but what did Dr. Timmers say? About the physical?

RAPHAEL

What makes the physical sufficient is spirit.

HENRY

He said that?

DAVID

(sotto voce)

Stupid!

RAPHAEL

When does the spirit attach to the body? What happens when it does? These are questions of great pitch and moment.

RAPHAEL looks at HENRY and giggles.

RAPHAEL

Did I say "pitch"? I did -- a joke, a pun. I think about this when I am cutting hair. Body -- spirit -- pitch -- moment --

HENRY

Papa, Dr. Timmers --

DAVID

Papa, you can't do this to --

RAPHAEL slams his hand on the table, startling them all, his face suddenly fierce.

RAPHAEL

How dare you question --

RAPHAEL's face then shifts into confused, then a smile, then a scowl of concentration. He mimes scissors in one hand, a comb in the other, a head of hair to work on.

RAPHAEL

Let me think, let me think, let me think, let me think -- the layout of a baseball team -- three outfielders, four infielders, the pitcher --

(indicating HENRY)

-- that's you -- the catcher --

(indicating DAVID)

-- that's you --

DAVID

That's not me --

RAPHAEL

And the batter -- ten on the field at the same time --

RAPHAEL turns to them both, still holding the "scissors" and "comb," a look of triumph on his face.

RAPHAEL

Don't you see it? Don't you see the signs?

RAPHAEL drops the "scissors" and "comb" and makes the Yiddish hand signs to HENRY.

RAPHAEL

The signs? The signs? The open secret that God set loose among us and gives us all the knowing we need to know, as he always does? The ten Sefirot, the Tree of Life -- don't you see? Don't the two of you understand?

HENRY

Papa, we don't understand --

DAVID

(overlapping)

Don't talk for me --

PAPA

Henoch, Henoch, it's so simple, so beautiful. 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.

HENRY

(to DAVID)

Get Mama -- have her get Dr. Timmers --

But DAVID does nothing. He stares at his father.

HENRY

David --

RAPHAEL

But the batter, is not the enemy -- the three of them, together, they make the game happen -- they make life happen -- together in struggle --

HENRY

Papa --

RAPHAEL

In struggle they create beauty --

HENRY

Papa, that doesn't make any sense --

RAPHAEL, exasperated, tries harder.

RAPHAEL

Baseball shows God's wisdom! Can't you see that? Whatever the players do, a scorekeeper records the results --

DAVID

An accounting of the soul --

RAPHAEL

See? See? And if someone scores a run, he comes home --

RAPHAEL gestures to DAVID.

DAVID

The world to come --

RAPHAEL

Yes!

HENRY

Stop showing off and help me --

RAPHAEL

Teamwork, teamwork!

DAVID

Fuck off.

RAPHAEL

(not hearing)

A player who sacrifices himself for his team -- or who leads his team -- praise to them both!

RAPHAEL begins singing Hatikvah. HENRY goes to DAVID.

HENRY

Stop this right now --

DAVID

Make me.

HENRY

You're making him worse --

DAVID

The man loves his baseball, loves your game, you asshole, you should be glad --

HENRY

I don't know what your problem is --

DAVID

My problem is simple -- it's you --

RAPHAEL stops singing. He stares into space.

RAPHAEL

The game -- life itself -- a paradox -- a wash of greys, questions impossible to crack open for their answers -- the ache of loss, that if a certain action had not been followed -- then everything would have turned out different -- a different pitch, a step more to the left or right -- exile and return --

RAPHAEL faces his two sons. He holds his hands over his head.

RAPHAEL

We Jews -- we talk and talk and talk and talk --
(makes one fist)

Metaphor --

(makes a second fist)

Reality --

RAPHAEL bangs his two fists together.

RAPHAEL

Close them, close the gap between them --

Crashes his hands together, laces his fingers. Then suddenly RAPHAEL looks tired and befuddled. HENRY moves to him.

HENRY

What, Papa?

RAPHAEL

What what?

HENRY

I don't know, Papa, like you were going to say something more.

RAPHAEL thinks, then his face lights up. He bangs his fists together again.

RAPHAEL

Metaphor and reality, so that --

RAPHAEL looks at DAVID.

DAVID

The Kingdom of Heaven --

RAPHAEL

The Kingdom of Heaven may exist here, in this earthly life. And that happens, at a ballpark, when you pitch, Heno^{ch} -- the wind-up, the throw, your arm like a bow, and the ball, like an arrow, a question meant to be answered but never finished, and it goes -- and all of life turns to -- turns to --

RAPHAEL stops, looks from one son to the other, then smiles and sits down.

RAPHAEL

Well -- you must think I'm a little crazy. A little -- loose. Maybe, maybe -- though a little loose is better than too tight -- gives life a little play. You two can stop looking so -- struck. Heno^{ch}.

HENRY

Yes.

RAPHAEL

You asked me about Dr. Timmers.

HENRY

Yes, Papa.

RAPHAEL

He said I was fine. And I am fine. Fit. Composed. Your mother doesn't need to worry.

RAPHAEL, using his fingertip, begins drawing the Tree of Life on the table.

RAPHAEL

And neither do the two of -- the two of --

But RAPHAEL does not complete his sentence.

DAVID walks up to HENRY and gives him a very hard shove, just shy of decking him. HENRY pushes back. DAVID pushes again, and HENRY, in a fit of anger, pushes DAVID down. The looks on their faces could not be more different: rage on DAVID's, confused anger on HENRY's.

RAPHAEL notices all of this.

RAPHAEL

Henry?

HENRY

Yes, Papa?

RAPHAEL

I say unto you, if you ever play another baseball game, this is what will happen: I will hate you.

HENRY

Why would you say that? Do that?

RAPHAEL

Because the time has come.

HENRY

You wouldn't.

RAPHAEL continues to draw.

HENRY

You wouldn't.

RAPHAEL continues to draw. Transition.

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Act I, Scene 8

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 -- sounds like he
didn't do much of anything, did he?

DAVID looks at her, says nothing.

LOULA
Oh, I know that look -- I know that look -- the
push and pull of --

(in a slangy tone)
"bruhdah against bruhdah" -- Davy's been trying
so hard not to shit-mouth his big "bruhdah" each
time we sit out here, letting the jazz jazz us
along, 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 fucking brother."
(looks at placard)
Yup, that's what it says.
(pointing to words)
"I. Hate. My. Fucking."

DAVID
Leave off --

LOULA

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

DAVID doesn't answer.

LOULA

Not a lot of protest -- or even a little. Or at all. "Going, going -- gone! Sold to the man with the devil in his ears." So, my friend, what're gonna do about it? Something like "I. Hate. My. Fucking. Brother." doesn't just go [away] --

DAVID steps away from her.

LOULA

All right, fine -- so you don't want to talk about it. It's hard -- you're supposed to love him, but when he's getting the biggest slice of congratulation for doing something so stupid -- picture in the paper! The Hebrew Hurler! -- and how we agree how stupid it all is -- Yeah. Well. This is going nowhere -- and I'm going --

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 McNabbs 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 -- I can't believe how stupid that all sounds, which is stupid because I can believe it --

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

I feel like I'm already in there, except without the gin, which is both good and not good -- the music is at least interesting.

DAVID

And I'm not.

LOULA

What I meant was that you're part of the music --

DAVID

Sometimes you talk in a way --

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

How I might know about people hurting people. For a smart boy, your brain-sparks can be pretty slow.

DAVID

Your husband --

LOULA

Give that man a kewpie doll.

DAVID

He hurts you?

LOULA looks away from DAVID.

DAVID

He hurts you. Because he wants to go out -- with his -- and not with you -- is that --

DAVID stares at LOULA, stares at her hard.

DAVID

Or is there more -- stuff -- "stuff," sheesh, I mean -- I mean --

LOULA

There is always more "stuff," David --

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 --

(to MORRIE)

-- 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 reports 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)

Shit.

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.

(to DAVID)

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 --

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

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

Intermission

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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 -- it's not like he's bad off -- he's still going to work 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 --
(touching her temple)
-- 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

(making face bland)

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.

(to ROSIE)

He look okay to you?

HENRY moves closer to him, sniffing.

HENRY

Cigarettes?

DAVID

Fuck you. You played today.

HENRY

Yeah, I did.

DAVID

What did Papa say?

HENRY

He didn't mean it.

DAVID struggles to get something out of his pocket.

DAVID

You're so fucking smart -- fuck!

DAVID 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 to the floor. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2

Everyone exits except RAPHAEL and HENRY. RAPHAEL wakes first, puts on his baseball cap, becomes BARNEY PELTEY. He 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 --

(shakes out his hand)

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 pitching hand)

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.

(examines hand)

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 looks at his right 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 down on an imaginary block of ice and makes
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 beamed 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, clenches it into a fist. Lights out.
Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 3

Three days later. BAYLA, HENRY, and DAVID at the hospital, outside RAPHAEL's room. BAYLA is wringing a handkerchief to death.

HENRY

Mama, you're going to rip it.

BAYLA

So what? You're leaving.

HENRY

I said I'd be right back.

BAYLA

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

HENRY

Mama, I have to go -- I told you, I have to go to the station --

BAYLA glares at him.

BAYLA

That's what you've told me.

HENRY

It's a meeting of the guys with the chief, and this is the kind of chief you have to 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

Why wouldn't he? Of course he would.

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.

(to BAYLA)
Promise, Mama -- right back, I promise. I want to be here, believe me.

(kisses her)
Watch her.

DAVID
Like a hawk -- dig it?

HENRY
You've got no class.

DAVID
I've had good teachers.

HENRY 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 business card.

BAYLA
I found that in your father's wallet.

DAVID
You really think so?

BAYLA
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 these last three days. 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

Are you a monster? 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.

BAYLA

Bullshitter. You're a bullshitter and a putz.

BAYLA holds out her hand.

BAYLA

Give it to me.

DAVID hands her the handkerchief pieces.

DAVID

Maybe one, maybe both -- but it's still a true reason.

BAYLA

This "love" done by a monster is not a kind I know anything about.

DAVID

You probably wouldn't -- 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 sub 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.

DAVID
What?

BAYLA doesn't stop reviewing him.

DAVID
It'd be better being yelled at than you doing
[that] --

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 reaches over and takes one part of the torn handkerchief and worries it.

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 had sex before we were married.

DAVID

Mama --

BAYLA

I pushed it -- it wasn't from him -- you can pick up your jaw and put it back. 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. Sex -- and 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, even if she maybe lied to you.

DAVID

She didn't --

BAYLA

(overriding him)

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. Perhaps a Superior McNabbs pennant somewhere. [NOTE: this scene could also take place outside the speakeasy, on the bench used by LOULA and DAVID.]

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.
(puts contract down)
You should be happy.

HENRY

I should be back at 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 --
(tapping contract)
-- 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

Farnsworthy 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 fuck 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 fucking
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

(holding his ear)

Goddamn it --

HENRY

You don't listen well, Morrie --

MORRIE

(rubbing his ear)

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
is dying, maybe even dead, 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 don't care what you have to say.

MORRIE

But you're still standing there --

HENRY

I have to go bring my dying father home.

MORRIE

Let's hope it's only dying. So go.

HENRY

I have to go lie to my mother again.

MORRIE

So go lie.

HENRY

Then I have to go hurt my brother.

MORRIE

So go hurt him.

HENRY

And after all that -- I have to go to work.

MORRIE

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

HENRY

My life is good.

MORRIE

But he doesn't move. He ain't moving. "Fig leaf" -- is he listening?

HENRY

(not moving away)

Why should I listen to you?

MORRIE

He's 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 picks up the contract and leaves.

MORRIE

Damn.

MORRIE follows. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5

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

HENRY, MORRIE, and ROSIE come in.

HENRY

Mama?

BAYLA does not answer, though it's clear from her body position that she knows HENRY is there.

HENRY

We went to the hospital -- Dr. Timmers said --

HENRY sits next to RAPHAEL, opposite BAYLA.

BAYLA

Your brother helped me to get him home -- a taxi -- another expense -- your brother was helpful --

HENRY

It's David's fault to begin with --

ROSIE indicates to him to back off.

HENRY

Am I wrong about that?

ROSIE

It doesn't matter -- look to your father --

HENRY

We shouldn't talk about --

BAYLA

You want to shut him out?

HENRY

That's not what --

BAYLA

He's not dead --

HENRY

I'm just saying we shouldn't put a stress [on] --

BAYLA

Not put a stress? This from you? You left us.

HENRY

I told you I had to meet --

BAYLA
How did this so-important meeting go?

HENRY
It was a meeting --

BAYLA
(indicating RAPHAEL)
Tell him. Say it to him.

HENRY
Just a meeting, Papa. For work.

BAYLA
And that's all it was.

HENRY
Like I said.

BAYLA
About your job.

HENRY
About my job. About my job --

BAYLA
Who can trust you now, Henoch?

HENRY leaves to look for DAVID. MORRIE follows. ROSIE sits in his seat.

ROSIE
Mrs. Kaner, if there is anything I can do, we can do --

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
(indicating HENRY)
Is that in him?

ROSIE

I believe it is --

BAYLA

And you know what he did.

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

BAYLA

And what he did is all right with you?

The silence grows.

BAYLA

(to RAPHAEL)

We have no one but ourselves now.

HENRY enters, trailed by MORRIE.

ROSIE

Henry, what are [you doing] --

HENRY

Where is he, Mama?

ROSIE

(sotto voce)

HENRY

Rosie -- where is he?

MORRIE

Let it go, man -- you don't need to push this.

HENRY

Get out of my ear --

MORRIE

Keep your hands to yourself --

HENRY

Mama, where is he?

ROSIE

I am not liking --

HENRY

I'm not likeable -- Mama, where is he?

BAYLA

I don't keep his social calendar.

HENRY

But you know where he might be.

BAYLA

His business is none of your business.

HENRY

The bastard who wants to break my hand has made himself my business.

The word "bastard" hangs in the air. And hangs. RAPHAEL stirs, looks at HENRY.

RAPHAEL

(in a clear voice)

Bastard.

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.

(to ROSIE)

Don't give up on him.

Then RAPHAEL lapses into his stare. No one knows what to say and so says nothing.

MORRIE

I might know where he is.

HENRY

Why would you know?

MORRIE

It's a story I can tell you walking.

HENRY

You won't tell it to me at all, and you won't tell it to me here. It's like I have no place. Papa, you have anything more to chip in here?

ROSIE

Your mouth is --

MORRIE

(hand on HENRY's arm)

Come on -- it'll be better if it's quicker.

HENRY

Get your hand off me.

MORRIE

You want me to use a leash instead?

HENRY shrugs off MORRIE's hand. He kisses BAYLA on her forehead, kisses RAPHAEL on his. Leaves. MORRIE follows.

ROSIE

I'm not giving up on him.

BAYLA

Maybe it's easier for you.

ROSIE

It's easy for no one.

BAYLA

You lie as badly as he does.

ROSIE gets up and leaves. BAYLA strokes RAPHAEL's cheek.

Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 6

Speakeasy. Jazz background. 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 with you -- 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 the fuck 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 fucking 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.

Music floats over them. HENRY enters, with ROSIE and MORRIE following.

LOULA

(sotto voce)

Fuck.

HENRY
David, get home.

DAVID
No.

HENRY
I said --

DAVID
You are not my keeper.

HENRY
You shouldn't be here, you shouldn't be with her.

DAVID
If being around her is a problem, then go home.

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
She isn't worth it, David.

DAVID
(to LOULA)
Are you saying about yourself what he's saying
about you?

LOULA
I don't care what he says about me.

DAVID
He's saying you're worthless, you heard him say
it, "she isn't worth it" --

LOULA
David --

DAVID
The great respected Henoch Kaner has just called
another human being worthless.

HENRY
That's not what I said.

DAVID

He's sly, he's crafty, because he's actually got something else in his mouth.

HENRY

You're coming with me.

DAVID

Put that hand on me, I'll break it this time.

HENRY

What is up with you?

DAVID

How "worthless" is not the word really in your nice-guy mouth. Morrie, what word does the great Henoch Kaner hold in his mouth?

MORRIE

How would I know?

DAVID

Because it's the same word in your mouth --

(to the others)

He ain't said it, but I've heard him mean it --

MORRIE

You should shut up.

DAVID

Like you're someone I'm afraid of. Henoch, ask best-friend Morrie here the nature of his connection to Mrs. Loula Parsons.

(to MORRIE)

I'm on-deck if you get tongue-tied.

(to HENRY)

Go on. Go on!

HENRY

(to MORRIE)

There's a connection?

MORRIE

(to DAVID)

You really want to do this?

DAVID

(indicating HENRY)

I got more blood in my veins than him.

LOULA

Enough, all right? Enough of this "duking it out" bullshit -- I get enough of that at home. I'm a slut -- there, the word in everyone's mouth except his is out --

(to ROSIE)

-- probably in yours, too -- I don't even know who you are -- now say what you want, Morrie, to wiggle out, but it won't matter -- just look at his face -- he knows, even if he don't know the details.

HENRY

With Lou's wife?

MORRIE

If you can steal a base, why not?

HENRY

If you can steal --

LOULA

(interrupting)

You all know how Lou treats me. The top-notch Superior McNabbs -- you all know. And none of you -- not one Superior McNabb -- ever once -- put up a hand --

(pointing at MORRIE)

-- just sniff around for scraps --

DAVID walks up to ROSIE and begins sniffing around her.

LOULA

The great heroes of baseball, the all-American guys --

ROSIE

What are you doing?

LOULA

-- except for the Jew-boys on the team -- you should hear how Lou and the others rag on the hebes --

DAVID

What if Morrie started in on Rosie --

ROSIE

David, stop it --

HENRY moves toward DAVID.

LOULA
David --

HENRY
Leave off, David.

DAVID
(keeps sniffing)
Make me. If Loula, Henoch, why not Rosie Davis?
What makes her different?

(to ROSIE)
Does it give you a thrill to be with him --

ROSIE shoves DAVID away just as HENRY grabs DAVID.

DAVID
Ah, so the hero protects his own but won't
stretch a hand out to --

HENRY
Shut up.

DAVID
Or what?

ROSIE
Henry --

DAVID
Or what?

LOULA
He doesn't mean --

MORRIE
Henry, he's yesterday's coffee --

ROSIE
Henry, please, he's just --

DAVID
Make your own goddamn decision, for once in your
life! Do what you want to do!

HENRY seems frozen.

ROSIE
Henry -- for me --

DAVID
Do I have to do it for you --

DAVID tries to punch HENRY but can't because HENRY has him in a grip.

DAVID

Come on -- goddamn it --

DAVID's movement seems to wake up HENRY. Just as ROSIE reaches out to pull HENRY away, with deliberate intention HENRY punches DAVID and drops him to the ground. It's not a hard punch, and DAVID manages to cover his head with arm, but HENRY's intention is clear.

ROSIE pulls back.

LOULA runs to DAVID. HENRY turns to MORRIE, looking as if he'll hit him next. MORRIE doesn't flinch. DAVID stirs.

DAVID

Finally.

DAVID stands.

MORRIE

(to HENRY)

You can't even deck anybody right.

MORRIE advances on DAVID.

MORRIE

But the twerp deserves it.

MORRIE cocks back his arm, ready to deliver the blow.

MORRIE

Come on, kid, get ready to take it.

No one moves to stop him. Then LOULA steps in front of DAVID. MORRIE holds the pose, looking around at everyone. He gestures to DAVID. DAVID makes a fist. Reaching over LOULA's shoulder, DAVID simply bumps knuckles with MORRIE. MORRIE laughs as he drops his fist.

HENRY seems to come awake.

HENRY

I have to go. I have to go. Mama's alone -- I have to go.

DAVID

Then go.

HENRY

You have to go.

DAVID

Already done my part.

HENRY

I have to go. I have to go. I have to go.

HENRY leaves. ROSIE doesn't.

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 -- that include you, Rosie?

DAVID

(to MORRIE)

Did my brother really have a meeting at the station?

MORRIE goes to answer, but ROSIE beats him to it.

ROSIE

No he didn't.

MORRIE

Farnsworthy.

LOULA

That means contract --

MORRIE

Ten-day trial run.

DAVID

My brother sign?

No one answers.

DAVID

That's my answer.

(to ROSIE)

Why aren't you gone?

ROSIE

(to LOULA)

I have a question to ask.

DAVID

Then I shouldn't forget my manners. Loula Parsons, Rosie Davis -- Henry's "girl"? Would that be right?

LOULA

What's your question?

ROSIE

I didn't have "slut" in my mouth, by the way.

LOULA

By the way, that's really nice of you. So what's your question?

ROSIE

Being married to baseball --

LOULA

To Henry Kaner?

ROSIE

I didn't ask that.

LOULA

Morrie, he'll make it past the ten days, right?

MORRIE

I believe he will.

LOULA

He does that, and then he lasts, he'll make a lot more money than putting out dumb-ass fires from people smoking in their beds.

ROSIE

That's not [the question] --

LOULA

What'd'you do?

DAVID

Bookkeeper for her father -- a butcher --

LOULA

Henry makes it, you won't have to be dipping into your father's front case to make the evening meal. Henry makes it, his father gets taken care, you get taken care of --

ROSIE

That's not the question I asked you.

LOULA

You have some iron in that voice -- Married to baseball, was it?

ROSIE

If you've got an opinion.

LOULA

(laughing)

Opinion -- well, my baseball sucks --

(indicating MORRIE)

-- his baseball's okay, as long as he keeps his fangs inside his mouth -- but who can know anything about your baseball? And even if I knew anything -- why would I do your work for you? Bookkeeper, you take your numbers, add them up, and go from there. I would say this much, though: get a thick skin.

DAVID

(to LOULA)

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 closes. Rosie -- you coming in to the family or not?

Without a word, ROSIE turns and leaves. The rest leave. Transition.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 7

RAPHAEL alone, alert and alive.

RAPHAEL

They didn't think I could hear, but I could hear. You made sure I could hear everything. Even in deepest pain, when we could use a sweet forgetfulness, you make sure we hear it all -- for you, truth is a shit we have no choice but to eat. I use the word "shit" and don't apologize -- why should I, you made it, thing and word. Of course the others make your work easy -- how they treat the patient in the bed like a salami. Brutal in their affection. Selfish in their worry. Nothing is ever pure with us, is it? In your image, you said -- and the joke is we're stuck with a god so much like dice, with a sense of humor like fingernails on a chalkboard.

And so I heard another word for "shit" -- stroke -- and a second one -- Alzheimer's -- Dr. Timmers couldn't keep the pride out of his voice as he pronounced because it showed he had been keeping up with the medical journals, he was a man of modern science better than the city in which he lived, more refined than his patients, who were lucky to have him -- in your image --

And so -- do I get to do another edition of Job for you? Afflicted, and afflicting others with my afflictions? My family now blessed with having to care for damaged goods -- this will sharpen their characters, toughen their spirits -- pain as their rod and their staff? It must be the baseball -- did I blaspheme with the baseball? -- no, it's just you wanting to be the Big Ump. Well, call it how you will -- like I have any say in the matter. That's what faith's turned out to be, isn't it -- waiting to see if it's a ball or a strike without knowing which one is the better call and yet not being able to stop yourself from wanting to know right to the bitter end.

During RAPHAEL's next lines, lights come on a family tableau: HENRY, ROSIE, BAYLA. In her hand BAYLA holds HENRY's contract. RAPHAEL joins them, sits.

RAPHAEL

You make us hungry and give us shit to eat. It must do something for us because we all haven't hung ourselves and emptied the world of worshippers. As for me -- I wish you had made everything inside me stop and given them a break -- Job was never so pained with watching his

loved ones feel guilty for being helpless -- just
your kind of twist --

As if a switch had been turned off, RAPHAEL loses his alertness,
slumps in his chair.

BAYLA skims each page 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. She stares at HENRY.

DAVID, LOULA, and MORRIE enter.

DAVID
(pointing to contract)
Is that it?

MORRIE
That's it.

DAVID takes up the contract, skims it just as BAYLA had. He reads the
last page, then puts it back down.

DAVID
The 800-pound gorilla -- it's officially in the
room.

BAYLA gets up and moves to RAPHAEL, comforts him.

BAYLA
(to ROSIE)
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 --

MORRIE
(to HENRY)

Let it go --

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 --

(to HENRY)

I'm an invalid now, too, so I get to say --

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, the money is not his but for you and for Mr. Kaner so that whatever pain comes down the pike doesn't have to look like my father working a side of beef -- 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 --

(touches contract)

-- 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 --

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 --

I can't [do] --

LOULA

Tell him.

BAYLA

We had to run.

LOULA

We ran ourselves right to here.

BAYLA

We ran ourselves right to here.

LOULA

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

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

RAPHAEL

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

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

RAPHAEL AND LOULA

RAPHAEL

Gut, eh?

LOULA

Yeah, gut.

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

Like the kibinai we ate.

RAPHAEL

In the coffee house --

BAYLA

Like in the coffee house.

LOULA

RAPHAEL touches LOULA's cheek, takes her hand.

It all changed. Forever.

RAPHAEL
(to LOULA)

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.

LOULA

(to BAYLA)

So I'm a member of a lost tribe?

(to ALL)

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."

(to HENRY)

Shpil Ball!

RAPHAEL laughs, 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 --

HENRY rips the contract in quarters and sets the pieces down.

MORRIE

You punk. You goddamn coward.

MORRIE makes as if he is going to hit HENRY but then drops it.

MORRIE

I'll save it for something better.

MORRIE exits. ALL freeze.

HENRY takes up the ruined baseball. He moves downstage.

BARNEY PELTY appears. He 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 tosses the ball back to HENRY.

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 spread 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 -- and
I'll tell you this: it felt good to be ordinary.

Everyone starts humming "Take Me Out To The Ball Game," moves into
place for the final tableau.

BARNEY

Go on, Henry, you gotta -- they gotta -- you all
gotta move on to what's next --

BARNEY exits. Everyone stares at the torn contract. HENRY sings.

HENRY

"I don't care if I never get back."

Blackout.