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SF PERUSALS

Kosher Lutherans

by William Missouri Downs

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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KOSHER LUTHERANS was originally produced by the University of Wyoming's Summer Theatre in 2007. The cast and crew was as follows:

FRANKLYN . . . . . Wolf J. Sherrill
HANNAH . . . . . Anna Brownsted
BEN . . . . . Michael James Smith
MARTHA . . . . . Dodie Montgomery
ALISON . . . . . Rachel Rosenfeld

Director – William Missouri Downs
Scene Design – Michael Earl
Lighting Design – Adam Mendelson
Costume Design – Ellen Bredehoft
Sound Design – Adam Mendelson
Production Stage Manager – Catherine Wallis

Special Thanks to: Lou Anne Wright, Chameleon Playwrights of Denver, Michael Earl, Adam Mendelson, Catherine Wallis, and Gwen Feldman.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN – 3 WOMEN)

FRANKLYN - (A Perfect Husband – late thirties)
HANNAH - (A Perfect Wife – late thirties)
BEN - (An Imperfect Husband – late thirties)
MARTHA - (An Imperfect Wife – late thirties)
ALISON - (An eighteen-year-old girl from Iowa)

SETTING

Franklyn & Hannah's living room & dining room table

PLACE

Van Nuys, California

TIME

Act One – Purim
Act Two, Scene One – The first night of Hanukkah
Act Two, Scene Two – A month later

ACT ONE

Purim

*(***FRANKLYN** *sits alone in the living room reading from his manuscript.)*

FRANKLYN. "She strolls in for dinner like a centipede with 92 legs missing. Her eyes were as dark as new tires yet they flashed like luminous hubcaps, while her hair gently rolled down her shoulders exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't. 'What's for dinner' she said, her lips forming a perfect oval, like a circle compressed by a Thigh Master." …Wow. That's good.

*(***HANNAH** *enters dressed for a dinner party and sets the table. She is running late.)*

I mean that's really quite good.

HANNAH. *(busy – not listening)* Yes dear.

FRANKLYN. I guess it's time I admit it to myself. I'm a writer!

HANNAH. Would you open the wine?

FRANKLYN. This night school professor says to me, in front of the entire class, she says my opening scene can't take place at a dinner party – No dinner scenes allowed. Says all they do is make people hungry

HANNAH. *(not paying attention)* That's nice dear.

FRANKLYN. Instead she thinks it should take place someplace exciting, like a doctor's waiting room with a dentist drill screaming in the background. Or the burning deck of an aircraft carrier under Kamikaze attack. But if you think about it Kamikaze attack or dinner party – Kamikaze attack – dinner party. Obviously a dinner party would be far more interesting. Let me read it again. "She walks in for dinner like a centipede with 94 legs missing –."

HANNAH. I know your creative juices are flowing right now, but they'll be here any minute.

FRANKLYN. No they won't. They're always late.

HANNAH. You don't know that.

FRANKLYN. And all they do is talk about things.

HANNAH. That's what couples do when they get together, they talk about things.

FRANKLYN. No, I mean *things*. Last time he spent thirty minutes discussing his new, "top of the top" of the line, 60,000 BTU Weber grill with automatic moistness control. And always a new car – Every eighteen months – spanking brand new car.

HANNAH. It makes them happy – So what.

FRANKLYN. Know why we're friends? Cause his name is Ben and I'm Franklyn. That's it, that's what our entire friendship is based on. Ben. Franklyn. Back in college, we thought it was cool – Used to go to bars and pick up history majors.

*(***HANNAH** *grabs* **BEN***'s manuscript and exits.)*

FRANKLYN. Hey, I'm not done –

HANNAH *(offstage)* Is that what you two were up to the other night? You came in awfully late.

FRANKLYN. What's this?

HANNAH *(offstage)* After your writing class you said you bumped into Ben.

FRANKLYN. Oh, right, after class, right –. *(notices the mezuzah on the door frame)* What's that?

*(***HANNAH** *enters with dinner party snacks.)*

HANNAH. Huh?

FRANKLYN. That?

HANNAH. It's a mezuzah.

FRANKLYN. Doesn't it go on the outside?

HANNAH. I know but Bubbe gave it to me and it's so pretty I thought I'd glue it to the inside.

FRANKLYN. Glue? You used glue?

HANNAH. Removable permanent glue. Open the wine.

FRANKLYN. Removable permanent – Who ever heard of such a thing?

HANNAH. Would you open the wine. They'll be here any moment.

*(***FRANKLYN** *opens a bottle of wine.* **HANNAH** *puts the finishing touches on the table.)*

FRANKLYN. You know, maybe it's not such a good idea to have them over for Purim? They are raging alcoholics.

HANNAH. They're not alcoholics. They hardly drink at all.

FRANKLYN. Then how come they constantly fight? It's like having an opera in our living room without the music.

HANNAH. Little love spats, it's nothing.

FRANKLYN. And if you want my opinion, she's a little wacky.

HANNAH. Watch it, she's my cousin.

FRANKLYN. Distant cousin – From the wacky-raging-alcoholic-fighting side of the family.

HANNAH. She's been a little depressed since Isaac's death –.

FRANKLYN. It's been three years.

HANNAH. Why're you bringing this up? Have you changed your mind? You don't want to ask them?

FRANKLYN. What? No. I'm fine with asking.

HANNAH. You sure?

FRANKLYN. Totally fine.

HANNAH. Cause if you really think they're wacky alcoholics –.

FRANKLYN. I'm fine…Cause I have no doubt they're going to totally freak out.

HANNAH. You don't know that.

FRANKLYN. Yes I do. He'll have to consult with the highest rabbinical authorities before he says "no" and she'll say "no" cause she's afraid of needles – mark my words.

HANNAH. How do you know she's afraid of needles?

FRANKLYN. Trust me, now that I'm a writer I'm a great judge of character.

HANNAH. Let's not second guess life.

(She kisses him on the cheek.)

(doorbell)

HANNAH. That's them.

FRANKLYN. And only twenty minutes late. Everything's Kosher, right?

HANNAH. Mostly – why?

FRANKLYN. I just don't want another Cheez-it incident.

(an offstage bing)

HANNAH. Oh, that's the oven. Get the door.

*(***HANNAH** *runs into the kitchen.* **FRANKLYN** *heads for the door.)*

FRANKLYN. Idea! *(calling off to* **HANNAH***)* What if I switch and have the opening scene take place in a stuck subway car?

HANNA *(Offstage)* Get the door!

FRANKLYN. You got your darkness, your menacing third rail, and no food, she's gotta love that…

*(***FRANKLYN** *opens the door to find* **BEN** *with two bottles of wine.)*

BEN. Happy Purim fella!

FRANKLYN. Ben.

BEN. Franklyn!

*(***BEN** *hugs* **FRANKLYN**.*)*

FRANKLYN. Where's Martha?

BEN. Parking. Took separate cars. She bought a new S.U.V. – insisted on driving. Told her parking in Van Nuys is a pain in the butt – that we'd have a better chance finding a spot with my BMW – had a fight, took separate cars, what's for din?

FRANKLYN. Sorry to hear that.

BEN. Told her not to buy a Caddy – Did she listen? The gas mileage of an M-1 tank. But it does have dual

temperature controls. You gotta have dual temperature controls, life is too short to live without dual temperature controls.

*(***HANNAH** *enters with fresh out of the oven Haman's pockets.)*

HANNAH. Ben.

BEN. The other half of the perfect couple!

*(***BEN** *hugs* **HANNAH**.*)*

HANNAH. Where's Martha?

BEN. Parking her new Cadillac S.U.V. – the best of the best.

FRANKLYN. Dual temperature controls, sweetheart.

HANNAH. Dual temperature, imagine that.

BEN. Told her not to bring it. Had a fight. What's it been two years?

HANNAH. I think you're right two years.

BEN. And still no children?

HANNAH. Thanks for bringing it up, but you're right, still no children.

BEN. Still trying?

HANNAH. We never stop trying.

FRANKLYN. *(changing the subject)* So Ben, how's business?

BEN. Making a killing. *(to* **HANNAH***)* Have you tried in vitro fertilization?

FRANKLYN. Wine?

BEN. Cause if you haven't I know this doctor – Doctor Arnold Rosen –.

HANNAH. Yes, you suggested him two years ago.

BEN. Has a seventy-five-point-four percent success rate. You'll be pregnant so fast your head'll spin. He's Martha's gynecologist.

FRANKLYN. *(again, trying to change the subject)* I decided on Chardonnay. The L.A. Times said that this one has a sweet citrus taste complemented by a touch of spicy oak.

*(***FRANKLYN** *pours wine.)*

BEN. You know a few months ago Martha and I thought about having a kid.

HANNAH. Really?

BEN. We were watching TV on our 52-inch plasma – you gotta get one of these Frankie – great color and depth, I swear the screen has depth – when we suddenly realized that we got enough money, a great house and the schools are kinda close. It's a perfect situation for children. So we resolved to go upstairs and get started, knowwhatImean?

HANNAH. Ben, Martha never told me this.

BEN. Then we got really interested in this episode of Seinfeld and forgot. I swear we forgot. Totally and completely forgot.

HANNAH. Then perhaps it's best that you don't have children.

BEN. You know, I've found that couples who want kids but can't have 'em often have serious long lasting issues with depression. Then hostility sets in, pressure from family and before you know it the marriage is in the toilet. If you're interested, I know this head doctor who specializes in childless couples. Got his card here some place.

*(***BEN** *digs into his business card wallet.)*

FRANKLYN. *(changing the subject)* So how's that Weber working out?

BEN. Oh! Cooked on it yesterday. You know the word "cooked" is just too crude to describe the experience. I *created* on it. *(to* **HANNAH***, handing her the card)* Dr. Frank Green. He counsels bunches of those anorexic Hollywood starlets who can't have kids cause all they eat is organic soy-crap and lime-water. *(to* **FRANKLYN***)* It's called XR-73. Remember that XR-73. Let me write it down for you. *(He writes it on the back of the business card.)* – You gotta get one of these – It's got 60,000 BTUs and automatic moistness control.

FRANKLYN. I'm not so much into moistness.

BEN. Top of the top of the line. Got 'em only at special stores in affluent neighborhoods – near movie stars and whatever.

HANNAH. And there is one near you?

BEN. No. I heard about it from Doctor Rosen – Did you know that he once got a fifty-six year-old woman pregnant – course that had nothing to do with in vitro hence the lawsuit.

(doorbell)

HANNAH. She found a spot.

*(***HANNAH** *heads for the door.)*

BEN. Hannah, before you let her in do me a favor will ya?

HANNAH. Sure.

BEN. I know this is going to upset you but…Martha and I… we…maybe you should sit down for this.

(doorbell)

HANNAH. Can I get the door first?

BEN. I guess I'll just say it. Martha and I…we…decided to call it splits.

HANNAH. What?

BEN. I know I know – long story – just don't bring it up in front of her.

FRANKLYN. Ben, what're you saying?

BEN. Contacted a lawyer friend this morning.

HANNAH. Ben, I'm –.

BEN. Totally shocked. I know, you thought we were the perfect couple. Isn't that strange, we thought *you* were the perfect couple.

HANNAH. But you've been married for so long –.

BEN. Not that long – six years. She didn't want you to know, being that you introduced us. I insisted we be up front. She didn't think it was a good idea. Had a fight.

(two doorbells)

FRANKLYN. What're we supposed to do?

BEN. Just act like I didn't tell you.

FRANKLYN. Then why did you tell us?

(three doorbells)

BEN. Everything'll be fine. We'll drink some wine and have a great time. Just don't make us sit next to each other. Or near each other for that matter.

HANNAH. Maybe we should call this off.

FRANKLYN. Yes, that does seem best –.

BEN. Look, if you're going to make a big deal out of it –.

HANNAH. It is a big deal.

BEN. We're getting divorced; it's not the end of the world. The sun turning into a red giant and crashing into Krakatoa – that's the end of the world, this is nothing more than a blip.

(The door pops open. It's **MARTHA**.*)*

MARTHA. What, are we not answering doorbells today?

HANNAH. Martha!

MARTHA. I rang and rang.

HANNAH. I'm so sorry.

*(***FRANKLYN** *helps* **MARTHA** *with her coat.)*

MARTHA. Frankie. Thank you. Such a gentleman.

HANNAH. Lovely dress.

MARTHA. Neiman Marcus. *(then she glares at* **BEN***)* You took my parking spot.

BEN. It was way too small.

MARTHA. Even if it was, I saw it first.

BEN. So what. You couldn't fit.

MARTHA. You *assumed* I couldn't fit.

BEN. I had only inches to spare.

MARTHA. All I'm saying is that a gentleman would offer and not assume.

BEN. What type of offer is that? Here's a parking space that's much too small for your M1 S.U.V. – It's an empty gesture.

MARTHA. Empty or not, you should offer and not assume!

BEN. I wasn't assuming anything, I know what fits. I have spatial intelligence.

MARTHA. Spatial intelligence? What the hell is this spatial intelligence?

BEN. It's the talent to know what fits! And you don't got it.

MARTHA. All I'm saying is that a gentleman would offer!

BEN. Next time I'll make an empty gesture! Happy?

FRANKLYN. Wine?

MARTHA. Maybe there won't be a next time!

BEN. Fine! I'll gladly go out and move my Beemer! The offer's been made. Are we happy?! The keys are in my hand I will walk out there right now if you want! Are we happy? Answer the question, are we happy?!

MARTHA. Yes! We are happy!

BEN. Good!

(Beat – **BEN** *and* **MARTHA** *glare at each other.)*

FRANKLYN. …It has a citrus taste complemented by a touch of spicy –.

MARTHA. Sorry. Shalom.

HANNAH. Yes, Shalom.

*(***FRANKLYN** *pours wine – They drink.* **BEN** *and* **MARTHA** *gulp.)*

BEN. More.

MARTHA. Same here.

(They empty their glasses again. They start to sit next to each other on the couch.)

HANNAH. Wait, we'll take the couch.

*(***FRANKLYN** *and* **HANNAH** *scramble to sit center on the couch separating* **BEN** *and* **MARTHA**. *An uncomfortable pause.)*

BEN. *(to* **FRANKLYN***)* …I barely fit. Had to go back and forth and back and forth and back and forth at least twenty times – I counted.

MARTHA. *(to* **HANNAH***)* One shouldn't *assume* should one?

BEN. *(to* **FRANKLYN***)* Did you know that I have spatial intelligence?

HANNAH. How about a toast?

BEN. Sure.

MARTHA. Why not.

(They raise their glasses.)

HANNAH. To…To…Friends.

(They toast. **FRANKLYN** *and* **HANNAH** *sip.* **MARTHA** *and* **BEN** *down their glasses.)*

BEN. More.

MARTHA. Same here.

*(***BEN** *and* **MARTHA** *down their glasses again. Another uncomfortable pause.)*

HANNAH. *(trying to be up beat)* Franklyn has good news.

MARTHA. *(jumping up)* No! No, no, no don't say it! It's true! I can see it in your eyes! You went to Dr. Rosen! Boy or Girl? Boy or Girl?

HANNAH. No –.

MARTHA. I knew this would happen! I knew it! I had a sick-headache today that always means good news is coming! Hannah I'm so happy for you – Oh, you shouldn't be drinking!

*(***MARTHA** *downs* **HANNAH***'s wine.)*

HANNAH. But–

MARTHA. Trust me I know what I'm doing–

HANNAH. I'm not pregnant.

MARTHA. …You're not?

HANNAH. That's not the good news.

MARTHA. It's not?

HANNAH. No.

MARTHA. I'm so very sorry. I just assumed that–

BEN. You assumed! I thought people weren't supposed to assume?!

MARTHA. There are times when assuming is not an assumption!

BEN. An assumption is different from assuming?

MARTHA. Depending on the circumstances!

BEN. Circumstances! What circumstances? When is it okay to make our best friends feel like crap cause they can't have children?

MARTHA. It was a logical guess not an assumption! So shut your trap and settle!

BEN. Oh it's closed trust me it's closed!

MARTHA. Then close it and settle!

BEN. It's closed!

MARTHA. Settle!

(an uncomfortable pause)

HANNAH. …What I was going to say is that Franklyn is taking six months off to write his novel.

BEN. Oh.

MARTHA. Nice.

(Beat. **BEN** *puts his hand up.)*

BEN. Question.

FRANKLYN. Sure.

BEN. What novel?

FRANKLYN. I've been working on this novel. Well, more like a novelette.

MARTHA. You mean like with words and pages?

FRANKLYN. And with some luck soon chapters.

BEN. Since when do you write?

FRANKLYN. I've been taking this night school class.

HANNAH. It's not going to be easy, but we can make it on one salary for a while…with some luck…And we, I mean Frankie, figured it's the perfect time to do it… Before we have children.

BEN. Wow. Ya think you know someone and suddenly they're writing a novelette.

MARTHA. Excuse me, I don't want to appear the least bit negative but I assume you've written before – ?

BEN. You assume?

MARTHA. Shut up and settle!

BEN. FINE!

MARTHA. SETTLE!

FRANKLYN. …No. This'll be my first try.

HANNAH. That's not true. I fell in love with Frankie when he sent me a poem in college.

BEN. And the old man gave you six months off, you lucky dog.

HANNAH. No, he quit.

MARTHA. No way.

FRANKLYN. I came home the other night and began wondering what I was doing. Am I going to push papers for Hannah's father for the rest of my life? I've always wanted to be a writer but then reality set in. So the next day I stopped by this butcher shop, got myself a huge roll of paper, a la Jack Kerouac, found a pawnshop typewriter, called in sick and started typing.

BEN. What's it about?

FRANKLYN. *(to* **BEN***)* Well, I'm kinda finding my way, but today it's about this trio of ambitious friends in Manhattan…

MARTHA. *(to* **HANNAH***)* And you support this?

HANNAH. *(to* **MARTHA***)* I don't think I have a choice.

FRANKLYN. *(to* **BEN***)* …The problem is they can't separate their professional and personal lives…

MARTHA. *(to* **HANNAH***)* You don't sound too sure about this.

FRANKLYN. *(to* **BEN***)* …Then one day they, get this, they get stuck in this subway car…

HANNAH. *(to* **MARTHA***)* Well, I don't know how we're going to make it.

FRANKLYN. *(to* **BEN***)* …Total darkness! The menacing third rail just inches away – !

HANNAH. *(to* **MARTHA***)* Frankie sort of insisted.

BEN. …Wait a minute, wait a minute! Frankie insisted? I see what happened here. You two had a fight. The perfect couple had a fight!

MARTHA. Ben, that's hardly nice.

BEN. Come on admit it. You had a fight. Just like Martha and me. Go on, admit it!

FRANKLYN. We had a discussion.

BEN. *(to* **MARTHA***)* You're always telling me, "Why can't we be like Frankie and Hannah. They never fight."

MARTHA. I've never said such a thing. *(to* **HANNAH***)* Rest assured, I know you two fight.

HANNAH. It wasn't really a fight.

BEN. No no no, don't disappoint me. Say it! Say it!

HANNAH. It was…It was…

BEN. Yes?

HANNAH. …It was a fight.

*(***BEN** *grabs the Purim Gragger [noisemaker] from the coffee table, gets up and does a little dance.)*

BEN. *(singsong)* They had a fight, they had a fight!

MARTHA. I am so sorry. Rest assured I do not condone my husband's behavior.

FRANKLYN. It wasn't really a fight. It was more like a discussion. Hannah?

HANNAH. No dear, it was more like a fight.

FRANKLYN. (*to* **BEN***)* Would you please stop dancing.

BEN. I used to come to Frankie for advice about my marriage. Let me tell you he was always the expert. Always the A-number-one authority on marriage. *(beat – singsong)* But they had a fight!

MARTHA. You asked Franklyn advice about our marriage?

BEN. It was nothing, we'd get together and compare notes.

MARTHA. So what did he tell you?

FRANKLYN. *(trying to change the subject)* Ben, I was really thinking about getting an XR 37. Do they have a payment plan?

MARTHA. What do you know about our marriage?

FRANKLYN. I know nothing. Most of the time it was Dodgers talk.

BEN. And I always followed his advice. Web flowers Fridays. That was Frankie's idea.

MARTHA. You gave me web flowers every Friday on advice from a friend?

BEN. He used to send me reminder emails every Friday morning –.

HANNAH. Wait a minute. You advised Ben to send flowers to his wife every Friday?

FRANKLYN. Web flowers. Not real flowers –.

HANNAH. Don't I rate flowers?

FRANKLYN. Hannah, our marriage isn't in trouble.

BEN. It is now!

*(***BEN** *does another little dance.)*

MARTHA. Well, I'm just humiliated, totally and completely humiliated. To think, I was coming over here, breaking bread with friends and you knew what was going on behind the closed doors of my marriage.

FRANKLYN. Look, everyone calm down. Sometimes men talk. We're not experts at being married. I've never been married before – Ben never. We…we…

BEN. Compared notes.

FRANKLYN. It's nothing personal. Ben asked my advice cause he mistakenly thought that I had a perfect marriage. Now please, if everyone will just…just…

MARTHA. Settle!

BEN. Yes! Settle…

(They sit silent. They drink. Beat.)

MARTHA. …I too have an announcement.

FRANKLYN. Oh god no.

MARTHA. This isn't easy. Since we moved to Westwood, we just don't keep up like we once did. Well, I want you to know there have been a few changes in my life. You

know, there comes a point where you begin to clearly see where your life is going. It all becomes mapped out, knowwhatImean? Then one day it occurs to you that this *is* your life. So you make changes, try to have a baby, write something that'll never be published, see old friends –.

BEN. Buy a tank with nowhere to park.

MARTHA. Settle! …Sometimes these changes are little wake up calls, other times they're life-changing events.

HANNAH. Martha, I think we already know.

MARTHA. So I've decided, after great forethought to… to… this is so difficult. I don't want it to change our life long friendship.

BEN. Just say it!

HANNAH. It won't change anything, we'll always be friends. Isn't that right dear?

FRANKLYN. *(not so sure)* Oh yeah, friends forever.

MARTHA. Good. Cause I've decided…okay, here goes…I've decided to become…You ready?

BEN. Say it! Just say it!

MARTHA. Settle!

BEN. I'll settle if you say it!

MARTHA. …I've…I've decided to become a Christian–

HANNAH. And that's okay, but first do me a favor and consider a marriage a counselor. I promised Frankie I'd never tell anyone this, but we saw one once–

FRANKLYN. Hannah–

HANNAH. I think it's important that we be honest dear. *(to* **BEN** *and* **MARTHA***)* It wasn't easy, because everyone thinks we're the perfect couple, but we did see a counselor for almost two years–

FRANKLYN. Hannah, I–

HANNAH. Then we went to a couples therapy group and a renewal weekend sponsored by our temple.

FRANKLYN. Sweetheart–

HANNAH. They need us–

FRANKLYN. I don't think you heard!

HANNAH. Sure I did, they're getting a divorce.

FRANKLYN. No, she's becoming a Christian.

HANNAH. A what? *(to* **MARTHA***)* A what?

MARTHA. …The other night Ben and I had a fight. What was it about? The S.U.V.? The bills?

BEN. The dogs.

MARTHA. Oh, the dogs, right.

BEN. *(to* **FRANKLYN***)* Never get a lab. Adorable but way dumb. And two is a catastrophe. They, like, feed off each other's dumbness.

MARTHA. My husband was about to walk out, like he always does –.

BEN. I don't *always* walk out.

MARTHA. You *always* walk out!

BEN. Now and then, not *always.*

MARTHA. You disappear for hours and hours.

BEN. To walk the dumb dogs! If I don't, they go insane and attack the slipcovers!

MARTHA. I worry and worry. So I thought no, I'm going to walk out this time. It's my turn to disappear into the night for three and a half hours!

BEN. One hour tops! To get my head together and to save the slipcovers!

MARTHA. I walked and walked. Then I came upon this little funeral parlor. Lights on. People leaving. I walked in. Two funerals. One rather well attended. Family. Children. People sharing hugs. The other – totally empty. I was drawn to the empty one. He was a nice man. Older. But no flowers. No nothing. They were about to put the lights out, then these two acne-faced assistants come in. I asked where are the flowers? They didn't know – and if I didn't mind, could I step back cause they needed to seal the casket so they could go home. And then they bring in this huge welding arc. I kid you

not – an industrial strength welding arc. I asked who he was – they didn't care. Did he have family – didn't know. And then one of them fires up the welder. And adjusts the hot, white flame to a whisper. And then they lowered the lid. And I found myself yelling out, "Wait!" And I ran up for one last look at whom ever he was. A kind looking man…someone's lover, husband, daddy. That's when I did it…

BEN. Yes, you did it all right.

MARTHA. I…

HANNAH. Martha what did you do?

MARTHA. I took off my wedding ring and put it in the casket.

HANNAH. You what?

BEN. And they sealed it. Tell'em! Soldered it shut!

MARTHA. …And they soldered it…

BEN. And then she became a Lutheran!

HANNAH. …Martha, why?

BEN. There's the sixty four thousand dollar question!

MARTHA. I don't know…It was a sudden thing…I wanted to make a statement.

BEN. A statement! A two and a half karat statement! It was my mother's! Been in the family for years. My grandmother saved it from the Nazis by shoving it up my grandfather's colon!

*(***MARTHA** *breaks down in tears.)*

(an offstage bing)

HANNAH. Oh, that's the oven. Martha, come in the kitchen and we'll get you a cup of tea. It'll be all right. *(with a stern look to* **FRANKLYN***)* Frankie…

FRANKLYN. *(aside to* **HANNAH***)* We can't ask them now.

HANNAH. Just take care of things.

*(***HANNAH** *hustles* **MARTHA** *in the kitchen.)*

(Pause. **BEN** *and* **FRANKLYN** *just sit there looking at their drinks. Now and then we can hear* **MARTHA** *crying in the kitchen. Finally…)*

FRANKLYN. …So these friends are stuck in the subway and–

BEN. A thousand to choose from and she chooses Lutheran! Explain that one! She even attended a new members potluck. Took knish!

FRANKLYN. Look, Ben, it's obvious you-two are having some problems–

BEN. Want to compare notes?

FRANKLYN. I don't know if I can.

BEN. You gotta come up with something brilliant to save my marriage, something like web flowers Friday.

FRANKLYN. Okay. Ah…You two should talk.

BEN. We've been talking for years.

FRANKLYN. Then perhaps you should consult with your rabbi.

BEN. Oh great advice. Hello Rabbi Liebman, I'd like you to meet my wife Martha Luther. …I knew she was listening to Garrison Keillor a lot, but who knew there were consequences?

FRANKLYN. What happened? Last time we got together you seemed so happy. And Martha was so Jewish – I mean the Cheez-it incident.

BEN. Happy? That's a laugh. Martha and I are one of those couples who fight in public. Admit it. We fight in public.

FRANKLYN. Little love spats, it's nothing,

BEN. Love spats? She and I are always making nasty little comments – always having little schisms in public places. Don't you hate couples who do that? Admit it, it's annoying – say it.

FRANKLYN. Ben–

BEN. Say it.

FRANKLYN. It's a little annoying.

BEN. And Martha and I do it all the time.

FRANKLYN. You do it a lot.

BEN. Now that wasn't hard, was it? You know what I hate are people who hand out advice on marriage when in

fact they've been seeing a marriage counselor for two years. That's annoying.

FRANKLYN. Ben –.

BEN. Admit it, that's annoying.

FRANKLYN. That's annoying.

BEN. Well, I'm glad we got that off our chests. How bout them Dodgers.

FRANKLYN. Ben…I think there are other things we need to talk about.

BEN. No we don't.

FRANKLYN. Your marriage is in trouble.

BEN. My marriage is over. Yours is in trouble.

FRANKLYN. Is not.

BEN. Trust me, all marriages are in trouble. Except yours, of course, yours is perfect.

FRANKLYN. I'm sorry that you thought Hannah and I were perfect. We got problems too. Everyday problems –. Life is full of problems.

BEN. So whose fault is it?

FRANKLYN. It's no one's fault – That's life.

BEN. No, whose fault is it that you don't have kids?

FRANKLYN. …Ben, that's too personal.

BEN. So it's your fault.

FRANKLYN. It doesn't matter.

BEN. You shootin' blanks my friend?

FRANKLYN. Ben –.

BEN. I know this doctor –.

FRANKLYN. We saw him. We've been seeing Dr. Rosen for almost two years, okay?…Hannah's ovaries are… underdeveloped. For some reason they never fully matured. She's been taking these drugs – They make her a little sick…nausea, fatigue…We've been told to…hold out little hope.

BEN. …Adoption?

FRANKLYN. You know that's not an option.

BEN. Oh. Right. No. They wouldn't remember. They wouldn't look that deep. What's it been five years?

FRANKLYN. Three and a half.

BEN. Still in a wheelchair?

FRANKLYN. He's progressed to a walker.

BEN. So? It's not the end of the world. Nazi Martians, with strong immune systems, attacking from Mars, that's the end of the world. This is nothing more than a simple pedestrian-Honda incident. You were distracted, Wilshire's hell, it could've happened to anybody.

FRANKLYN. But it happened to me.

BEN. So you ran over your own Rabbi in a crosswalk after temple – He survived.

FRANKLYN. The application form clearly says. "Arrest record." It's right there on the JAA form.

BEN. JAA?

FRANKLYN. Jewish Adoption Agency.

BEN. Does it gotta be Jewish?

FRANKLYN. …You're right…

BEN. I know this guy, he works for an agency in San Diego. He can get you a Ukrainian baby. It's easy, you fly to Kiev and in this back alley you hand this lookout 10,000 Hryvnias and he gives you a baby – All perfectly legal. And you can choose what you want: a socialist or a communist baby.

*(***FRANKLYN** *walks away.)*

BEN. What?

FRANKLYN. …And of course being Purim you know what's going to happen.

BEN. No. He doesn't still call does he?

FRANKLYN. Every Purim, a little tipsy, he calls just to let me know that he "bears no grudge." Just as we're sitting down to eat, without fail, the phone rings and he tells me now he's doing fine and that getting hit in that crosswalk was the best thing that ever happened cause it let him slow down and see life with new eyes. And

then he'll give me that little speech about how there is no such thing as a coincidence. And all he succeeds in doing is making me feel like crap.

BEN. You were lucky, God looked out for you.

FRANKLYN. No, Hannah's father looked out for me…You know it pays to marry the daughter of one of L.A.'s top attorneys. I just wish he could've paid off the L.A.P.D.

BEN. You know what you two are, Hannah and you, you're macaroni. It's true. You two are macaroni and cheese. You belong together. Martha and I, on the other hand, we're pickles and mustard – we make no sense.

FRANKLYN. I just never understood your marriage, not wanting children – What type of marriage is that? We want family and we can't. You don't want and you can. That, my friend, that's annoying.

BEN. What about….donation. You find some one who'll donate some eggs, you know what I mean, embryos not omelets, problem solved.

FRANKLYN. As a matter of fact, tonight, before you announced you were getting a divorce, that's exactly what we were going to ask.

BEN. You wanted Martha's eggs – wow, you are desperate.

FRANKLYN. But then I was going to go one step further. …I was going to ask you to… Make a donation… Also.

BEN. …Me? Why me?

FRANKLYN. When we found the problem with Hannah, we didn't look any further, but then I went to a doctor and found…

BEN. You *are* shooting blanks, I knew it! I always knew you were a low sperm count kinda fella –.

FRANKLYN. …I haven't told Hannah.

BEN. Wait a minute –. That means that you-two would have us-two's baby?

FRANKLYN. Correct.

BEN. Wow, that's sick. Really really sick.

FRANKLYN. …I just don't get it. …You'd think that someone who's harmed a life should be allowed to make up for it. And your divorce is the topper. It's almost as if God has it out for us…

BEN. You know, Martha is always saying, why can't we be more like Frankie and Hannah. More like macaroni and cheese. But you two are more screwed up than us whom everyone thinks is screwed up. And now you've taken a leap off the deep end my friend.

FRANKLYN. How's that?

BEN. Writing a novel? That's the surest way to destroy a marriage. All these other curveballs – no children, quitting your job, running down your own Rabbi on Wilshire Boulevard – all of that a marriage can endure, but writing a novel? Your relationship is farkakta.

FRANKLYN. I've screwed it up even more than that.

BEN. How could you screw it up more than that?

FRANKLYN. …I've met someone.

BEN. …What?

FRANKLYN. A night school professor –.

BEN. Hold on.

FRANKLYN. I haven't done anything –.

BEN. I said hold on!

(He makes sure the hallway is empty.)

BEN. What the hell are you saying?

FRANKLYN. Maybe Hannah and my relationship is just bad luck, maybe it wasn't meant to be.

BEN. So you're having an affair?

FRANKLYN. No. We just talk. But it's clear, if I'm interested, she's interested. We…talk…

BEN. Talk – about what?

FRANKLYN. Things… Her car was in the shop. She needed a lift home after class. So we…talked. Then this week it was in the shop again, I think on purpose, so I had to pick her up. And then after reading my opening

scene in class she said it made her hungry so we went out for a late night…snack. If Hannah asks, I told her I was with you.

BEN. So you're lying to your very own wife.

FRANKLYN. Not lying, I just haven't told her.

BEN. You know Martha and I may fight in public but we don't lie. If her hair looks like some sort of hideous hellhole I'm honest about it. If I got day-old broccoli stuck between my bicuspids, she lets me know. But we don't lie. And the perfect couple shouldn't either –.

FRANKLYN. Where does this perfect couple crap come from?

BEN. You're the perfect couple.

FRANKLYN. Says who?

BEN. Everyone. My parents, your parents. Her parents. Rabbi Marks. Rabbi Greenberg –.

FRANKLYN. Well we're not! *(beat)* Martha's right, there comes a point when your life seems all plotted out for you. And sometimes the only answer is to shake things up.

BEN. With a night school professor? This isn't like you.

FRANKLYN. Why not?

BEN. Frankie, no matter how you cook it, you can't dress up macaroni, it'll always be macaroni.

FRANKLYN. …The other night, Hannah went to her hairdresser, like she does the first of every month for seven years now – same hairdresser – Seven years. And she's gone for one hour and twenty minutes. Without fail – One hour and twenty minutes. Like clockwork.

BEN. And that's when you call Miss Night School Professor.

FRANKLYN. Thought about it, but no. I just sit here. And then I look at the clock and it occurs to me that she's been gone for two hours. Then two hours and ten minutes so I begin to worry –.

BEN. Ahah! She knows about your indiscretion and so she's having a revenge fling with her hunky hairdresser.

FRANKLYN. Hannah's not the type.

BEN. Nor are you my friend.

FRANKLYN. …So I call her cell phone. It rings in the bedroom. She forgot it again – She's always forgetting her cell phone. So, I decide to call the salon. You know, just to make sure everything's okay. So I go to look up Hairdresser Haven, but the phone book is missing – Hannah's always losing the phone book. So I think maybe I'll go over –.

BEN. To catch her red handed with her hunky hairdresser.

FRANKLYN. I open the front door and I come face to face –.

BEN. With!

FRANKLYN. This kid. I jump. He jumps. By coincidence he just happens to be delivering the new phone book – A total fluke. He hands it over and walks off. So, I'm looking up the number and then I see it – The last thing I expected. Right there in the white pages. I see…The word, "Happiness."

BEN. Happiness?

FRANKLYN. Right there. In-between "Dale and Jean Happart" and "Hardwood flooring of Van Nuys." And beside it this number.

BEN. "Happiness," like all by itself?

FRANKLYN. All by itself.

BEN. And a number?

FRANKLYN. 818 area code.

BEN. Really? Happiness is right here in the Valley. Who would've guessed. You called?

FRANKLYN. Thought about it. But…What if it's a porn line? Or drugs? It could be anything. So I…I ripped the page out of the book – Been carrying it around for a week.

BEN. Wow man, that's really…really… Sick.

FRANKLYN. Wanta call?

BEN. No – It's probably a porn line. …Look, I'm going to give you advice. I know, I know, it's usually the other

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