

Introducing Miss Ray Frank

A Short Play

by

Mona Deutsch Miller

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Ray Frank</u>	Tall, attractive, serious-looking female Jewish journalist, 29
<u>Tobias Smith</u>	Local editor and publisher, 40s - 60s, a gentile
<u>Esther Levy</u>	A local Jewish lady, 40s - 50s, nicely but modestly dressed
<u>Isaac Levy</u>	Married to Esther, 40s - 50s
<u>Audience Member</u>	Versatile male actor (20s - 50s) who can do different voices and different physical styles (uses hats to establish identity)

Mostly MALE VOICES from the Crowd gathered to hear the sermon, including an enthusiastic cat caller [may be prerecorded]

### Scene

The Opera House in Spokane Falls, Washington. This may be represented by a banner. The stage is bare with a lectern downstage center and several chairs away from it.

### Time

Erev Yom Kippur, 1890

The Opera House of Spokane Falls, Washington, on the eve of Yom Kippur, 1890. A lectern is set center stage. A bit upstage are a few chairs. A tall, serious-looking young woman, RAY FRANK (age 29) has a rushed conversation with TOBIAS SMITH (50s), ISAAC LEVY (40s) and his wife, ESTHER LEVY by the chairs.

RAY

(Nervous)

I - well, I wasn't expecting hundreds of people. Look at them! And even more arriving every second...

(SHE looks out at the audience, overwhelmed)

ISAAC

They're here. And they expect to hear from you. You promised to deliver the sermon tonight if we could get together a minyan. Looks like maybe a thousand people out there.

ESTHER

Oh my! That would be one hundred minyans, maybe more.

(EVERYONE on stage stares at the audience, amazed)

ESTHER (CON'T)

Now Isaac, even you, my dear, did not expect - this. Mr. Smith, I know you like to sell newspapers, but...

TOBIAS

Ms. Frank provided me with a lovely letter of introduction from a distinguished newspaper editor - she's a reporter from Oakland, California, you know - and I wasn't going to let the opportunity pass.

ISAAC

What did you do, Mr. Smith?

TOBIAS

Now, Isaac and Esther, we've known each other for some time, you can call me Tobias.

ISAAC

What did you do?

RAY

What did you do?

ESTHER

(Simultaneously with RAY and ISAAC)

What did you do?

(AUDIENCE MEMBER, carrying a carpet bag full of different hats and props, arrives on stage, takes a chair, and nods politely to the others. HE pulls a newspaper out of his carpet bag, leans back in his chair and reads attentively. MRS. LEVY, focused on TOBIAS, and ESTHER, on the audience, do not notice.)

TOBIAS

Well, I put out a special afternoon edition of the Gazette announcing that Ms. Frank would be preaching to the Jews at the Opera House tonight. Went like hotcakes.

(Inspects the crowd and AUDIENCE MEMBER)

Looks like they're very interested, Miss Frank - you could thank me.

RAY

I just wanted to find a place where I could worship for Rosh Ha Shana when I first got to town. And then, I discover there's no synagogue, no planned religious services...

ESTHER

Oh, dear, I did tell you, we've tried, but...

TOBIAS

(To RAY)

You did promise. You know anything about giving a sermon?

RAY

My family loves learning. My great great-grandfather was the Vilna Gaon!

TOBIAS

What the dickens is that?

ISAAC

Oh, it's a title, like "excellency." He was a big rabbi, a really big one. She sure has *yichas*.

RAY

Not that *yichas* is that important.

TOBIAS

Are you going to deliver this sermon in English, Miss Frank?

ESTHER

They're getting restless out there...

(First noticing AUDIENCE MEMBER)

Oh Lord, some of them are coming up on stage it's so crowded!

RAY

"*Yichas*" means your lineage. Well, yes, I said I would deliver a sermon myself if a minyan could be gathered... You could at least introduce me, Mr. Smith.

TOBIAS

Alrighty.

(HE heads to the lectern, directing RAY to sit down.)

TOBIAS

Now quiet down, all of you! This ain't a saloon! It's the Opera House - not that I'd know it by the way some of you's is dressed. Mind your manners, and let me introduce our sermon giver.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Since when does a girl give a sermon? Not at no church I ever been to!

TOBIAS

(Glaring at AUDIENCE MEMBER)

That's right, "sermon giver"! Now show some respect. This here young woman is a *journalist*.

(MR. and MRS. LEVY GROAN)

RAY

(Nods politely to AUDIENCE MEMBER,  
whispers to TOBIAS)

My name, tell them my name!

TOBIAS

Ladies and gentlemen, local citizens, our local Indians, followers of the Great Spirit, I guess, fellow citizens of Spokane Falls, Washington, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Miss Ray Frank. Miss Frank is a correspondent for several papers in California, but travels throughout the Pacific Northwest to acquire and circulate news pertinent to the western parts of our great United States of America. And she has promised to preach to us this evening, or actually to preach to the Jews of our community, who seem to be well represented tonight... and I see our Christian neighbors have turned out too, as well they should. We are nothing if not neighborly here in Spokane Falls, and we all do love the Good Book...

(A WOLF WHISTLE from the audience)

TOBIAS (CON'T)

You sir, sit down! And there'll be none of that, she's staying with Mr. and Mrs. Levy, entirely proper for a single lady, so show some respect!

ESTHER

Oh, Isaac, perhaps we shouldn't have...

ISAAC

Shh, Esther. She'll be fine.

RAY

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. Thank you so much for coming out this evening, Yom Kippur, such an important night. Our Sabbath of Sabbaths, our time to reflect as the gates of repentance are about to close. And thank you, Mr. Smith, my colleague in the world of newspapers, for your kind introduction.

TOBIAS

Let 'em have it, Ms. Frank.

RAY

Dear citizens of Spokane Falls, how did I end up here, giving a sermon? I just wanted to attend a Jewish service, any Jewish service, to be with my fellow Jews on Rosh Ha Shana, the Jewish New Year, but to my dismay, there was nothing, not a *minyan* to be found. You know how it is, when you have to be away from home on the Jewish holidays. It - it hurts.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Is it like being away from home on Christmas?

RAY

Well, yes, it is. You want to be with people who understand you, who know your rituals, speak your language. For we Jews, here with no synagogue or meeting room of our own... oh my, please don't shove each other! There should be no fisticuffs on a sacred occasion like this!

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Show some respect! She says it's like Christmas! The birth of our lord Jesus...

RAY

Well, for Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement, a day when we consider all our sins during the past year...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That oughta take some time...

(MR. and MRS. LEVY shush him)

RAY

And seek God's forgiveness, as well as the forgiveness of our fellow citizens, we want to be with our co-religionists, someone who understands, well, who will say the *Shecheheyenu* with you, who will chant with you, who - and I mean no disrespect to the many fine Christian ladies and gentlemen in the house - with people who know your prayers, your melodies, your foods. So you can be *home*. Really home. And talk to our God in the language and the tradition that we Jews share. *Sh'ma Yisroel Adonoy elohenu adonoy echod*. Here oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

TOBIAS

What's going on down there? The whole first two rows is rocking back and forth. Why - you got Holy Rollers in here?

RAY

No, Mr. Smith, they're *davening*. It's a traditional Orthodox way of praying, that movement. And here we are, it's already Yom Kippur! Nine days have passed since I came to Spokane Falls! So I said I would deliver a sermon myself, just to bring the Jewish community together. And what have I found during my time in Spokane Falls? What have I learned about the Jewish community here? That the Jews in this community are so divided, so much at each other's throats, that there is no synagogue - not even planned services for the New Year in a local general store, or in the schoolhouse!

RAY (CON'T)

Have we, the Jewish people, not existed for thousands of years, and stayed together, keeping the Sabbath?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Oh, that one, he don't keep the Sabbath. And such a miserable *shochet* I never seen in my life! Don't deserve to be called a Jew! You think he keeps kosher?

MRS. LEVY

It's not easy here. We try.

RAY

And has not the Sabbath of Sabbaths, Yom Kippur, kept our people going? Yet you would ignore each other's needs, ignore our need as a community to pray with each other, our need to address our God together, because of foolish and unimportant differences?

TOBIAS

(Looking out at audience)

Hmmm, is that Jews fightin' among themselves, or Christians pickin' on 'em?

(Reacting to something HE sees out in the audience)

Ooh, that was a good one.

RAY

I implore you, drop all dissension about whether you should take off your hats during the service and other unimportant ceremonials and join hands in one glorious cause! We must come together so that we may all worship together, as Jews!

AUDIENCE MEMBER AND ISAAC

Yay! Here here! Yeah!

RAY

Yes, we have our differences, we all know, life out here is not easy. The weather doesn't always cooperate, it may be difficult to bring in the crops, the mortgage always seems to be due... and those of you in business may be wondering how you can stay in business if your customers are unable to pay. But Yom Kippur, this is a special time, a special day, for all of us to come together, as Jews, even if our rituals at home are different, even if - well, if you eat rice on Passover and you over there have never heard of such a thing - let us remember, our people were together at Sinai. We received the Law together. We have been blessed with Torah as a people.



RAY (CON'T)

That's the Bible, what you Christians call the Old Testament. We Jews are one people, the Chosen People, with one God. We are not free to turn our backs on each other, when we are all charged with a great responsibility, to act in accordance with the commandments in this beautiful, marvelous world God has provided for us. Did we - or our forebears - make the long, arduous journey west to fight with each other?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(Now wearing a skullcap, thick Yiddish accent)

With *him* you want I should attend shul? Like a *goy*, that one.

(Rapidly transforming into another character, *sans* skullcap)

Who would want to be in the same Congregation as that old guy?

(Rapidly transforming into another)

This looks bad! Don't behave like this in front of the Christians! What will they think?

(Another transformation, inspired by RAY)

No, no! Not on your life! We can come together!

ESTHER

Oh, Isaac, she's like Deborah in the Bible! Like a judge!

ISAAC

Sssshh, I'm trying to listen to the lady preacher.

RAY

Did you not all come here to be free, to practice your religion without fear of persecution, to follow honorable professions? Even our Christian neighbors came here to the great United States of America to escape persecution. We should all be free to practice our religion, whatever our differences, without government interference, without fear.

ESTHER

Oh, she's doing so well, Isaac. I'm *kvelling*. And to think, she's staying at our house!

ISAAC

Sssshh. You know, some of those Christians are listening pretty good, Esther.

RAY

And on this sacred day, wouldn't it be right and fitting to have a place to come together, to be together, to pray together? Even a simple room in someone's home...

RAY (CON'T)

I know you have come from different places. But this is a day when everyone, from the lowliest tent peg maker and bearer of water to the highest in the community - that's from the Book of Joshua in the Old Testament - we are all as one people, one community in the sight of God. You Jews of Spokane Falls deserve to have a place where you can come together, for prayer, for community, to share your troubles and your triumphs.

TOBIAS

I can't believe I'm saying this - but I'll put up the money to get you people a spot of land, where you can build your - your church.

ISAAC

Synagogue.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Temple.

ISAAC

No, that's just in Jerusalem...

TOBIAS

(Interrupting)

Enough! Whatever you want to call it! You should get started before I change my mind.

RAY

Oh, thank you, Mr. Smith! This is a wonderful start. You see, a Christian has recognized our right, our need, to be together on this sacred day, in a land of freedom and security. The great United States of America. Can you see the wonder of this? A true American generosity, Mr. Smith! And you, my fellow Jews, you must contribute, you must add whatever you can, to this effort, and build upon it. You must come together to help each other, to establish a congregation. Think, a place with a holy ark holding our Torah, our Holy Book, our Bible, which is your Old Testament, with a *Ner Tamid*, an eternal light, a place where God dwells with us and we with the Lord. At such a place - that all of you can together help to build - you will be within God's sheltering presence, under the wings of the *Shechina*, together, safe and secure. God bless you all! And now, we should pray.

(RAY returns to her seat on stage and takes out a *siddur*.  
AUDIENCE MEMBER begins to *daven*, quietly)

TOBIAS

I don't suppose I could slip out now...

ISAAC

I think you'll have to stay, Tobias. Don't worry. The service only takes a few hours.

(TOBIAS looks alarmed)

ESTHER

Oh, don't worry, Mr. Smith. He's exaggerating. An hour and a half, and you'll be home. You can join us to break the fast tomorrow night.

TOBIAS

What fast?

RAY

There's a lot to learn, Mr. Smith. But you've given us a marvelous beginning.

**END OF PLAY**