

TWO GUYS AND A BENCH

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Joseph Sorrentino

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SYNOPSIS: Frank, a sometime actor and full-time coffee shop manager, is spending his lunch hour in the park, memorizing his lines for his upcoming role in *Henry V*. Things are going well until Harry arrives and not only upsets Frank's afternoon but his entire life as he methodically—and hilariously—takes Frank's identity.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN)

FRANK.....A well-dressed, well-spoken man, in his mid-late 30s. He's an actor.

HARRYA much less well-dressed man, in his late-50s. He's a blue collar worker. Or was one, anyway.

All in the Name of Frankenharry . . .

Joseph Sorrentino's *Frankenharry* plays get their name from the two unforgettable Philadelphia actors, Frank X and Harry Philibosian, who starred in the original Philadelphia Fringe Festival productions. Although the relational plays are not really linked, there is an underlying “opposites truly do attract” thread. Frank is usually the urbane, well-dressed and well-spoken actor while Harry is more of a blue collar Everyman stumbling his way through life. Whenever he stumbles into Frank's life, it almost always ends with surprising and refreshingly comic results. The sharply drawn characters with contrasting qualities give audiences a reason to get involved with them over and over again. These Philadelphia Fringe favorites have been called “clever . . . idiosyncratic,” “ . . . genuinely funny” and “hilarious” and may be produced individually or as “An Evening with Frankenharry.”

AT RISE:

As the lights come up, we see FRANK sitting on a park bench, reading a play that's in a binder. He's a black man in his mid-30s, dressed in black pants, a white shirt and black tie, a metal name tag pinned on his shirt. A briefcase is next to him on the bench. After a moment, HARRY walks on. HARRY is a white man, in his mid-60s or so, and is dressed the same as FRANK except for the name tag. HARRY carries a cigar and a supermarket tabloid under his arm. HARRY sits on the bench, lights his cigar and begins to read. After a moment, FRANK smells the cigar. He clears his throat to get HARRY's attention but to no avail.

FRANK: Excuse me . . .

HARRY: Yeah?

FRANK: Do you mind? The cigar . . .

HARRY: No, of course not.

HARRY continues to smoke.

FRANK: *(More forcefully.)* Excuse me.

HARRY: What?

FRANK: I said, do you mind - - the cigar?

HARRY: Of course I don't mind. If I minded, I'd be pretty stupid for smokin' it, wouldn't I?

FRANK: But I mind.

HARRY: You're not smokin' it.

FRANK: I mean I mind the smoke from the cigar. From your cigar. The smoke is wafting right over me and it is rather strong. *(HARRY stares for a moment.)* After all, I was here first.

HARRY: Oh that's right. I keep forgettin'. My people didn't get here until the late seventeenth century. Lord knows the exact date. I suppose your people came over on the Mayflower.

FRANK: I meant I was on the bench first.

HARRY: Oh.

FRANK: If you had been here first and I sat down, I wouldn't have said anything about your cigar. Not word one.

HARRY: Really.

FRANK: Really.

HARRY puts out cigar, leaves it on the bench. They return to their reading.

HARRY: Son of a gun. Isn't that somethin'? (*FRANK tries to ignore him.*) See, that's why I read the paper. It's got so much information in it. Listen to this - - last week two guys are sittin' on a bench in this park in Poland. Middle of the afternoon, this is. Just sittin' there. Whaddya think happens? Huh? Whaddya think, bub?

FRANK: I have no idea.

HARRY: A fish falls outta the sky, wham! Kills one of the guys.

FRANK: A fish.

HARRY: A frozen fish. (*Reads.*) Says it was a halibut.

FRANK: You're telling me, two guys are sitting on a Polish bench - -

HARRY: I don't know if it was a Polish bench. It just says they were sittin' on a bench in Poland.

FRANK: Whatever. They're sitting on this bench, you're telling me a halibut - -

HARRY: A frozen halibut.

FRANK: A frozen halibut falls out of the sky and kills one of them?

HARRY: Somethin' ain't it? Just goes to show, ya never know what's gonna happen.

FRANK: I don't believe it.

HARRY: You tellin' me it ain't true? It's right here in the paper.

FRANK: What is a halibut - - a frozen halibut - - doing in the sky to begin with? Besides, those papers - -

HARRY: Yeah?

FRANK: Nothing - - (*FRANK returns to reading, then they both look up in the sky. They continue to read.*)

HARRY: What're ya readin'?

FRANK: Shakespeare.

HARRY: Oooh! Shakespeare. I never liked him.

FRANK: He does take some getting used to.

HARRY: Too many words. If I spoke like that it'd take me an hour and a half just to order breakfast. And when I'm ready for breakfast, I don't wanna spend - -

FRANK: Look, I don't mean to be rude here but I'm trying to learn my lines. (*Pause.*) I'm an actor. (*Pause.*) I have a part - - a small part but it is a speaking part - - in Henry Five and - -

HARRY: Henry Five? Do you call it Richard Three?

FRANK: No, it's Richard the Third.

HARRY: Interesting. Is that why you're dressed like that? For your speaking part in Henry Five?

FRANK: No, of course not. I manage an espresso bar. That's my day job.

HARRY: I can't stand them espresso bars, all them high-falutin' yuppie types comin' in thinkin' they're better than you are.

FRANK: Mine's not like that.

HARRY: Orderin' lattes, double lattes, café au lait, capuccino, mochachino, frappuccino. What the hell is a frapachino anyway?

FRANK: It's just a frozen . . .

HARRY: You get in line behind one of them people, it's like you're in a Shakespeare play. Takes 'em an hour and a half to order. Why the hell can't they just order a plain old hot steamin' cup of joe for God's sake?

FRANK: Look, I'm on my break and I really have to learn my lines.

HARRY: Well, excuse me.

FRANK: I'm really pressed for time. We go up in less than a month.

HARRY: (*Gathering his paper.*) That's all right. I understand.

FRANK: I don't mean any offense.

HARRY: (*Standing.*) None taken. (*Takes FRANK's briefcase and starts to leave.*)

FRANK: Any other time, I would have been glad for the company but . . . (*Notices HARRY leaving with briefcase, stands.*) Excuse me, sir? Excuse me but that's my briefcase you have.

HARRY: No it's not.

FRANK: Yes it is.

HARRY: It isn't. This is my briefcase.

FRANK: I'm sorry but you're mistaken. It's mine. I put it right next to me when I sat on this bench.

HARRY: Are you accusin' me of stealin' your briefcase?

FRANK: No - - no. Not stealing. Not exactly. Accidentally taking, perhaps. You probably have one just like it at home. In fact, I'm sure you do - -

HARRY: I don't.

FRANK: Oh.

HARRY: I have one just like it right here in my hands. This is my briefcase, bub.

FRANK: I'm sorry but you're mistaken. It's mine. (*He grabs it, they stare at each other.*)

HARRY: Now what are you gonna do?

FRANK: Well - -

HARRY: Let go of my briefcase.

FRANK: But it's mine.

HARRY: I'm countin' to three - - one - - two - -

FRANK: Look - - if this really is your briefcase, you'd know what's in it, wouldn't you?

HARRY: Absolutely.

FRANK: I'll tell you what - - we'll sit back down - - all nice and calm and place the briefcase between us. Then you tell me what's in it. I'll tell you if you're right or wrong.

HARRY: How do I know you're gonna tell me the truth? Suppose I say somethin's in there and you say, "No, it's not." How am I gonna know?

FRANK: I would never dream of lying.

HARRY: Hey, ya never know.

FRANK: Let's just start. This is my briefcase, so you're not going to know anything that's in it. You get a couple things wrong - - I'll show you the contents, how's that?

HARRY: OK.

They sit, FRANK opens the briefcase.

HARRY: Let's see, where do I start? Okay, the wife packed me a lunch.

FRANK: Fair enough.

HARRY: Brown paper bag.

FRANK: OK.

HARRY: There. See?

FRANK: See what?

HARRY: That proves it's mine. Now gimme it.

FRANK: I most certainly will not. It proves nothing. I bet every lunch in America is packed in a brown paper bag. *(Pause.)* What do you have for lunch?

HARRY: Let's see - - what's today? Wednesday? Meatloaf. Left over from last night.

FRANK: Lucky guess.

HARRY: And she left the mayo off again. I checked.

FRANK: I hate when she does that.

HARRY: Concerned about my cholesterol.

FRANK: Shows she cares. But - but what else?

HARRY: A dozen pens, six black, six blue (*FRANK removes them from the briefcase.*) - - I took them from work. I'm a little embarrassed about that. First time I ever did somethin' like that.

FRANK: You deserve it, the little they pay you.

HARRY: I know but I was afraid I'd get caught. I got a yellow marker for highlighting my lines - -

FRANK: (*Removing it.*) Nothing better. Wait - - are you - - ?

HARRY: And a copy of *Ebony*. The one with Whitney on the cover. Boy, is she somethin' or what?

FRANK: (*Staring at the magazine.*) Yeah.

HARRY: Convinced yet?

FRANK: What? No - - no, you just got lucky.

HARRY: Lucky?

FRANK: I have the exact same things in my briefcase - - which I'm still saying this is, by the way.

HARRY: Look, how long is this gonna go on? I don't have all day ya know. I gotta get back to work.

FRANK: A few more things - - go ahead, try and name a few more things.

HARRY: I gotta prove to you that somethin' I own is mine? Doesn't make any sense.

FRANK: C'mon. Name a few more. What's the matter? Run out of luck?

HARRY: There's a small gift in there - - for the wife. Wrapped in purple paper and a white bow.

FRANK AND HARRY: (*Together.*) Those are her favorite colors.

HARRY: I wanted to make it special, seein' how it's our - -

FRANK: - - anniversary.

HARRY: I forgot last year so I made real sure I remembered this year.

FRANK: That note she left was a big hint.

HARRY: Let's see - - I got tickets to the - -

FRANK: - - circus.

HARRY: I'm takin' the kids again this year. (*FRANK reacts, defeated, maybe murmurs in agreement.*) I didn't think I would after last year. Last year, the three of them - - what a bunch of jokers they are - - the three of 'em get the bright idea to start tossin' firecrackers at the lion tamer. Right after the lions come out. Woo boy. Those lions weren't as tame as he thought. The security guards over-reacted a bit, I thought. I mean - -

FRANK: - - they're just kids, aren't they?

HARRY: That's what I said. They didn't mean no harm. Well, that's it - - no wait, how could I forget? I got a picture of the family in there. Just got it framed. Let me show you. (*HARRY pulls it out and they both look.*). That's Shirley, my wife. Those are the twins, Lakesha and Lakasha - - couple of lookers, aren't they?

FRANK: They sure are.

HARRY: And that - - that's Frank, junior.

FRANK: Looks just like you.

HARRY: Spittin' image. We got another one on the way.

FRANK: Congratulations.

HARRY: Thanks. I hope it's another boy. Well, I'd love to stay but I really have to get back to work.

FRANK: Oh - - sure - - (*HARRY picks up the briefcase.*) About the - - uh - - misunderstanding - -

HARRY: It's already forgotten.

FRANK: Thanks.

HARRY: (*Indicating FRANK's script.*) Do you mind? I have to learn my lines.

FRANK: Oh - - no, of course not. Sorry.

HARRY: No problem. And I'll need the uh - - (*Indicates FRANK's name tag.*)

FRANK: Of course. (*Removes it, gives it to HARRY.*)

HARRY: (*Starts leaving, stops.*) Listen, if you're ever on 18th Street, stop by my espresso shop. Have a hot steamin' cup of joe. On me.

FRANK: Thanks, I'll certainly do that.

HARRY: Or one of them - - whaddya call 'em - - frapuccinos - - whatever the hell they are. (*They both laugh.*) Nice talking to you. (*Leaves.*)

FRANK: Same here, bub.

FRANK sits a moment, then picks up the paper HARRY left. He sees HARRY's cigar, picks it up and lights it. He takes a puff, opens the paper and then looks up at the sky. He slides over on the bench. A moment later, a frozen halibut falls out of the sky, hitting the spot he just left. Lights down.

THE END