

## COVERAGE

**TITLE:** UnOrthodox                      **AUTHOR:** Sarah Kraus  
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**SUBMITTED TO:** Carolyn Kras              **SUBMITTED BY:** N/A  
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**LOCATION:** New York                      **GENRE:** Drama  
**DATE:** 3/4/19                      **READER:** Olivia Szymanski

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### **LOGLINE:**

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### **CHARACTER BREAKDOWN:**

**RACHEL ROSEN:** (18) – Bride of JOSEF. A timid and religious girl, Rachel wants to be the perfect Orthodox wife – something that is becoming more difficult as her husband won't sleep with her.

**JOSEF ZIMMER:** (21) – Groom of RACHEL. Josef is

**EZRA ROSEN:** (50) – RACHEL's father. Ezra is a drunk, and continually drinks too much and passes out at the wedding celebrations.

**SHOLA ROSEN:** (30) – RACHEL's sister. Shola follows orders and is a good wife, but advises Rachel that she should wait to have children.

**ZELDA ZIMMER:** (52) – Mother to FRIDA JOSEF, and ESTHER. Zelda is rich by inheritance, and converted to the Orthodox faith because her husband MANNY wanted to. She reads, and owns her own mini-mart. She's a friendly and strong woman. She protects her daughter, ESTHER, from getting married too young.

**MANNY ZIMMER:** (57) – ZELDA's husband. Manny is religious, but may be wrapped up in a drug scheme with the Rebbe.

ESTHER ZIMMER: (13) – ZELDA’s youngest daughter. All Esther wants is to get married and have children, and she takes joy in catching the attention of the boys.

FRIDA BREWER: (30) – ZELDA’s daughter. Frida covertly rebels against many of the Orthodox beliefs. She has long natural hair under her wig, and she reads consistently. She practices as a doula for young women, as she wanted to be a doctor but didn’t have the option. She takes birth control pills, and has a loving relationship with her husband. Frida eventually makes the decision to secretly read about gynecology after seeing a problem with STD’s in the community.

ELI BREWER: (30) – FRIDA’s husband. Eli is affectionate towards his wife, and lax with the rules. However, he may also be involved in the drug scheme with Manny.

REBBE: (70) – The Rebbe has a lot of power in the community, and his word is law. He may be involved with the drug scheme.

NEOMI: (19) – Young pregnant woman who has a miscarriage due to her infection of syphilis, which her husband must have contracted from having sex with another woman. She is in denial that her husband would be unfaithful.

TERRY: (30) – Works at the mini-mart. A friendly and compassionate person, Terry supplies FRIDA with reading materials and MICHELLE with money for anything she needs for her son, DANTE.

MICHELLE: (28) – Stripper, friendly with TERRY. She’s considering moving to Atlanta to get her son DANTE into a better school. She may be involved with the drug scheme.

DETECTIVE GIUSTI: (50) – Brings ZELDA in for questioning.

OFFICER CHANG: (22) – Brings ZELDA in for questioning.

SIMON SCHULTZ: (55) – Lawyer sent by the REBBE. Forceful.

### **SYNOPSIS:**

Open on a Synagogue classroom, filled with hundreds of women. A bride, RACHEL ROSEN, sits on a throne in the center of the floor, flanked by her mother-in-law ZELDA ZIMMER and sister-in-law FRIDA BREWER. Frida reassures Zelda that Rachel is stronger than she seems.

The wedding ceremony is held. Afterwards, newlywed JOSEF gives his wife a diamond ring. She thanks him, and they leave for the reception, which is divided into men’s and women’s sections by white gauze.

The REBBE talks to ELI, Frida’s husband. He notes that Rachel’s father EZRA often drinks too much, and that she’ll be happier in Brooklyn. He also alludes to ELI’s troubled past, and praises him for being on the right one now. He then vaguely mentions a delivery in Soho.

Later, Eli is standing outside an unmarked door. He unlocks it with a janitorial key, and enters the mini-mart. He opens a security locker full of black briefcases.

Back at the reception, the Rebbe reassures Josef's father MANNY that marriage will give his son purpose and a path. In the women's section, Rachel says goodbye. She asks her sister SHOLA if their mom will come to visit her tomorrow, and she avoids the question.

Meanwhile, Eli waits at the service entrance of a building in Soho, briefcase in hand. The door opens, revealing a WINDBURNED MAN. He takes the briefcase, disappears inside, and comes back to return the briefcase. Eli leaves.

In the women's section, Frida inspects a pregnant NEOMI, who has a fever. She says she'll visit tomorrow. In the men's section, two men assist an inebriated Ezra out of the hall.

Cut to the Josef and Rachel's new apartment. They're attempting to have sex, but can't seem to get it right. Tense, they give up and turn away from each other.

In the morning, TERRY is working at the mini-mart. He greets Zelda and Esther – Zelda is the owner of the store. While Zelda orders bagels, Esther surreptitiously inspects a box of tampons.

In Frida's apartment, she reads. Eli walks in, and she jumps and hides the book under her skirt. He's amused, and jokes about "keeping up appearances." They're affectionate with one another.

Frida heads to the mini-mart, and greets Terry. She exchanges her book for another, but the secrecy implies that if others knew how much she read, she'd be in trouble. MICHELLE enters, and picks up a case of soda for her son DANTE. It's too much money – Terry pays for it himself. Frida reveals that Josef and Rachel barely know each other – they met through the MATCHMAKER in about 15 minutes. Terry reveals that his parents had an arranged marriage in Nigeria.

At the Rodney Street Shul, Josef and Manny are praying. When Eli enters, Josef leaves. A young rabbi takes him by the arm and brings him to the Rebbe's office. He asks if Josef has completed the mitzvah, and Josef nods.

At the apartment, Zelda shaves Rachel's head for the first time, telling her that she won't miss her hair.

At the lobbyist office where Manny works, REN brings his partner a pot of tea. Manny reminisces about how terrified he was when he married Zelda – they were not Orthodox then.

At Neomi's apartment, Frida helps her with breathing exercises and stretches – she's a doula. She wanted to be a doctor, but this was the next closest thing. Neomi asks if she can have children, and Frida says she's not sure. Frida notices blood on the floor, and excuses herself to call 911.

The paramedics arrive, and wheel Neomi outside. The Hasidic women are shocked that she has hair, and throw a shawl over her. Frida takes it off, reprimands the women, and gets into the ambulance.

Meanwhile, Rachel tries on scarves and wigs, looking disappointed. Josef comes home, and tells her what he told the rabbi. They eat bagels in silence.

In the hospital, Frida learns that Neomi has syphilis, which is a high risk factor for miscarriage.

At Zelda's house (pre-1900, a historic landmark), Zelda makes challah bread with Esther, who says she wants a family. Zelda tells her it's too early. Later, Frida arrives with the news about Neomi, lamenting that she'd thought Neomi's husband was faithful. Zelda hypothesizes that he will be now.

Outside Zelda's house, Eli pulls up in a passenger van containing Rachel, Manny, and Josef. The women exit the house and climb in, where they are separated from the men by a thin curtain.

They drive to Kiryas Joel in upstate New York, a traditional community. At dinner, Eli gives a toast to the newlyweds. After dinner, the women clean up. Frida tells Zelda that Shola now eats with her daughters in the kitchen while her husband eats at the dining table – the Rebbe encouraged more gender separation.

There's a crash. Ezra has passed out on the floor. The men help him back into his chair. They're all drinking and boisterous.

Later that night, Rachel confides to Shola that she hasn't had sex with Josef, though she's excited to have children of her own. Shola tells her that if she can wait, wait. They then spot Esther in the doorway, and wonder if she heard.

At the mini-mart, an alarm goes off in the middle of the night. The security locker is open.

Frida reads in her apartment, her natural hair to her shoulders. Eli enters, and Frida takes a birth control pill. Eli mentions that it might be nice for their kids to grow up with Josef and Rachel's. Frida asks him if he knew about Neomi's husband – he didn't. He tells her he loves her, and that she's enough for him. She says she loves him, too.

At the newlywed's apartment, Josef and Rachel sleep in separate twin beds.

At Zelda's house, she and Manny discuss how Esther was placed across from an 18 year-old boy at dinner. Manny says they can't stop her from growing up (and finding a husband), and Zelda maintains that it is too early for her to be married. There's a knock at the door – it's two police officers announcing the break-in at the mini-mart. They question her about stolen prescription bottles of Oxycodone, which was found in the storage locker. As they take her into the station, Manny calls the Rebbe.

Cut to Michelle's apartment. She takes a prescription bottle out of an open briefcase – it's Oxycodone.

At the hospital, Neomi is in denial that her husband is responsible for the syphilis. Frida gently explains to her that he needs to get tested.

At the precinct, Zelda explains that the Rebbe owns the locker, not her. A lawyer, SIMON SCHULTZ, sent by the Rebbe arrives and tells Zelda she can go – it's against her rights to be questioned without an escort. Manny picks her up. They fight about whether or not to end the Rebbe's lease; Manny wants to support him, and Zelda doesn't trust him. They hit a breaking point, and it is revealed that Zelda converted to Orthodox because Manny wanted to. She doesn't know why they don't leave.

At the mini-mart, Frida visits Terry and tells him she wants to read about gynecology. He agrees to help her.

Cut to a strip club. Josef approaches a scantily-clad Michelle. She beckons to him, smiling.

At Zelda's house, the Shabbos dinner is prepared. Everyone sits down... but Josef is missing.

#### **COMMENTS:**

This pilot explores a very isolated group of people and goes into depth with their personal relationships. The audience is introduced to both the Orthodox religion as well as the inner lives of the characters. It is both intriguing for its subject matter as well as its story.

There are many rules that the Orthodox have to follow, but within that structure there is drama and depth. The relationships between husbands and wives, as well as between families, are compelling. The Zimmer family is the most interesting, as there are many different layers. Zelda and Manny converted to the faith, which draws tensions between them at points. Their daughter Frida rejects certain rules, but keeps up appearances in the community. Their marriage-obsessed 13 year-old Esther is a comic relief at times.

Frida's struggle with the rules of the faith and her interest in medicine is something that drives the story forward. She's a likeable character, and her desire to help women in the community is a strong value. Her good relationship with her husband, who supports her, is a nice contrast to the other marriages in the community, particularly Rachel and Josef's.

For the tension between Rachel and Josef to feel more compelling, it would be useful to spend more screen time on them. Josef seems reserved for an unknown reason, and when he rejects Rachel and goes to a strip club, he becomes a very unlikeable and flat character. His personality could be more well-rounded and developed.

Zelda is another great character. She's a strong woman, but simultaneously voluntarily submits to a lot of the norms and rules. She's vivacious and personable, and runs her own store. More so than Frida, she finds ways to be her own person within the structure and rules of the faith.

Though this series is a drama, there are a few moments of humor throughout the script. I would like to see more of that humor to contrast the strict and reserved tone every now and then. Sometimes, it can get a bit stuffy, so those moments of humor help the pilot move along.

**SUITABILITY FOR CONTINUATION:**

I would likely recommend this series for continuation. The spotlight on the Orthodox community is interesting, and the characters are compelling.

The aspect of the pilot that drives it forward is the relationships between characters. There are enough strong characters that I'd be invested in following throughout a series. The drug plot interests me less than the issues within the community, like the increased gender separation and the STDs. Frida's development and desire to help the other women in her community is the most interesting, and I would like to see where she takes that.