

ACT I

SETTING: *A hotel in Bethlehem, Israel, Anno Domini... One. There is counter of some sort. There is also a place to sit – a chest of some sort. Maybe two.*

AT RISE: *The lobby of the hotel is empty. LEAH enters, looking for her husband.*

LEAH

Saul! Room Four needs more towels!

(She notices he's not there.)

Saul?

(She looks around, noticing the audience for the first time.)

Oh.

(She realizes why the audience is there and addresses them.)

I wasn't expecting... When they first started coming, it was one, maybe two people... the next week, three or four... and as the weeks and months went by we'd get more every day, all of them asking to see the place where it happened... But now, there are so many of you...

Ah! Yes. Of course. It is one year since it happened. The first anniversary of the Star. That is why you're here, yes?

(She nods her head to one side of the house then the other.)

Shalom. Shalom.

SAUL (O.S.)

Leah? You seen my hammer?

(SAUL enters.)

SAUL

Table in Room Two's got a loose leg.

(He doesn't notice the audience. She tries to point them out.)

LEAH

Saul...

(Ignoring her, he crosses to the counter and searches behind it.)

SAUL

They want it fixed right away. They actually used the phrase “on the double.” Like they got something so important to do.

LEAH

(“We have company”)

Saul...

(He comes from behind the counter with hammer in hand.)

SAUL

I should have known that couple would be trouble when they complained about the wine last night...

LEAH

Saul!

SAUL

(Annoyed)

What?

LEAH

(Gesturing towards the audience)

We have company.

(SAUL notices the audience.)

SAUL

Oh.

(He nods his head to one side of the house then the other.)

Shalom.

(He looks around.)

There are so many. What is this, another census?

Saul... LEAH

There are too many, Leah. We have no room. SAUL

(To the audience)

I'm sorry, my friends. There are no vacancies.

They're not looking for rooms, you schmuck! LEAH

Then why...? SAUL

(It suddenly dawns on him.)

Wait a minute. All these people came to see the stable?

(To the audience)

Trust me, there ain't much to see. A little hay, a little dirt, a little...

They're not just here to see the stable. LEAH
(Interrupting)

What are you talking? SAUL

Look at 'em, Saul. Look at their eyes. They came for more than just looking this time. This time they came for... oh. Oy vey... LEAH

What's the matter? SAUL

You're not gonna like it. LEAH

Like what? Leah, what's going on? SAUL

LEAH

They came for the story. They came for the whole story. They came for our story.

SAUL

What?

(He gets it. They're gonna talk about Chava.)

No. No!

LEAH

I told you you weren't gonna like it.

SAUL

No! They need to leave!

(To audience)

You need to go!

LEAH

(To audience)

Stay right where you are!

(To SAUL)

We need to do this, Saul. For us.

SAUL

We're fine.

LEAH

We never talk about her.

SAUL

Leah...

LEAH

We never talk about what happened to her...

SAUL

I can't.

LEAH

Yes, you can. I'll help you.

(She gestures to the audience.)

They will help you.

It's the first anniversary of the Star, Saul. It's time. It's time to tell the story.

(To audience)

A love story.

SAUL

Oh, so this is a *love* story, now?

LEAH

Isn't it?

SAUL

("Come on")

Leah...

LEAH

What? You think a love story is only about romance?

SAUL

No.

LEAH

What's wrong with romance, anyway?

SAUL

I never said...

LEAH

(Interrupting)

Frankly, I could use a little more romance from time to time.

SAUL

What? You saying I'm not romantic?

LEAH

When was the last time you brought me flowers, huh?

Flowers?!

SAUL

A bouquet of lilies every once in a while would be nice.

LEAH

Leah...

SAUL

Maybe some violets...

LEAH

Leah.

SAUL

(He puts the hammer down and takes her hands. The next is from the heart – sincere and true.)

Every morning when I wake up and see you lying next to me, my heart fills with gratitude, and I bless our Creator for the gift that is you. I love you, Leah – with all my heart, all my mind, and all my soul.

Saul...

LEAH

(A bit overwhelmed)

(He waggles his eyebrows at her, tries to puts his arms around her.)

How's that for romance, eh?

SAUL

Oh, you...

LEAH

(Slapping his hands away)

Who needs flowers when you got a silver-tongued devil like me for a husband?

SAUL

(She pushes him away.)

You're terrible!

LEAH

SAUL

I meant every word. And if you need me to pick a bunch of flowers...

LEAH

I *need* you to help me tell this story.

SAUL

Okay! Okay!

(He places the hammer back on the counter.)

We'll tell the story!

LEAH

Thank you...

SAUL

A love story.

LEAH

That's right...

(To audience)

...about a young couple who made a journey together during a very difficult time...

SAUL

(To audience)

The Census!

(To audience)

You know what I'm talking about, right? Last year, Caesar Augustus called for a Census, everyone had to travel to their hometown to be registered...Oy! The roads, the crowds, we were never busier...

LEAH

(Trying not to kill him)

The difficult time to which I am referring is the woman's pregnancy.

SAUL

Oh. That.

LEAH

Don't you "Oh. That." to me. You think it's easy? The water retention? The morning sickness? The sleep deprivation?

SAUL

Leah...

LEAH

I give you one day, Saul – no, one *hour* as a pregnant woman, and you'd be crying for your mother.

SAUL

Okay...

LEAH

And that girl – that brave young girl – she rode a donkey one hundred miles through the Judean hills while she was nine months pregnant!

SAUL

Because of the *Census!* Which is why I think the Census is at least worth a mention.

LEAH

(To audience)

The story of that young couple's journey actually begins long before the Census...

SAUL

It does...?

LEAH

(To audience)

Fourteen hundred years, give or take a decade...

SAUL

What? You're gonna give them the history of *Bethlehem*?

LEAH

(To audience)

... in a small village founded by a group of Canaanites...

SAUL

You are! You're giving them the history of Bethlehem!

LEAH

(To audience)

This village was first mentioned in the Book of Genesis as the burial spot for the Hebrew matriarch Rachel...

SAUL

Leah!

LEAH

What?

SAUL

(Referring to the audience)

They don't know who Rachel is. More importantly, they don't care. So maybe we could fast forward a few centuries to the *Census*...

LEAH

Okay, how about David, huh? They know who David is, don't they?

(To the audience)

King David...? David and *Goliath*?

(To SAUL)

Oh yeah! See? They know who David is.

SAUL

Leah...

LEAH

David, he was born here, right here in Bethlehem...

SAUL

And why is that important to the story?

LEAH

Are you kidding me right now? Bethlehem is called "the City of David." That young couple with the donkey, they came here because it was the City of David!

SAUL

I know that!

LEAH

I know you know that!

(She gestures to the audience.)

I want to make sure *they*...

Look, one of the important elements of good storytelling is the establishment of *place*. Our story takes place in Bethlehem. And the reason our story takes place in Bethlehem is because King David was born here. And because he was born here, this little dot on the map did a pretty good tourism business. Which is how Saul's family got into the hospitality business in the first place.

SAUL

(To audience)

My great-great-great grandfather opened this inn, the first inn in all of Bethlehem.

LEAH

(To audience)

The *only* inn in all of Bethlehem...

SAUL

(To audience)

He called it "The Desert Flower Hotel and Spa."

LEAH

Saul.

SAUL

Okay! Okay!

(To audience)

He called it "The Inn."

LEAH

(To audience)

Saul wants to rename it "The Desert Flower Hotel and Spa."

SAUL

(To audience)

She won't let me.