

JERUSALEM STORY

CHARACTERS:

5 M, 4W

ISMAIL, Palestinian manager of Caesar's, about 30

SHLOMO, Jewish owner of Caesar's Palacedine, mid-40's

SHOSHANA, a Jewish waitress, 20's-30's

Three men and three women may play the following roles:

MOHAMMED, a holy man, 60's-80's

CHAIM, a bread seller, 30's- 50's, large, out of shape

AHMED, a cook, 20's

YASMIN, a Palestinian waitress/singer/dancer, 20's-30's

ELIAHU, a magician

RESTAURANT CUSTOMERS: NUNS, KNESSET GROUP

CHASID

GUARD, POLICE OFFICER

AZIZA, ISMAIL' s wife

BARBARA, a New York Times reporter

ISMAIL'S PARENTS

ACT I

Scene 1

April 2000, Jerusalem. A time of relative peace and hope. Caesar's Palacedine, a restaurant in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, late morning. Muezzin call is heard, followed by instrumental music, oud or ney playing the Turkish song Uskudar, or similar. Lights come up on a Roman style banquet hall with large tables and wide pillowed benches. Stone wall representing the outside of the restaurant at one side of stage, with sign saying "Caesar's Palacedine".

A CHASID comes up to the wall, and writes: "Romans killed Jews, don't eat here" and exits. Music fades.

ISMAIL enters, carrying a newspaper. He wears a toga and a crown of leaves. He sees a fly and rolls up the newspaper, swats it, misses, mutters an expletive in Arabic. Tries again, gets it.

ISMAIL

Serves you right... for invading my territory!

(His cell phone rings.)

Aiwa..... Ok, ok, let me talk to her.....Nabili, what happened?hey, I know it hurts, but you have to just keep the ice on ok ? *Makes kissing sound.* I love you...
bye.....Aziza, come on, you should know better than to call now, we're about to open.

(Speaks heatedly in Arabic. Hangs up cell. Calls offstage)

Hey, Ahmed!

AHMED

(Offstage)

What?

ISMAIL

Did the bread come in?

AHMED

No!

ISMAIL

Shit!..... I'm sick and tired of the bread always arriving late.

(Dials on cell)

Chaim, where are you?!.....OK, OK, just get here as soon as you can.

(Hangs up cell.)

(MOHAMMED enters, limping with cane. He has a long white beard and a white skullcap.)

ISMAIL

A Salaam Alechum, Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

Alechum wa salaam. Allahu Akbar!

ISMAIL

Allahu Akbar. *(calls offstage)* Ahmed!

AHMED

(yells from offstage)

What?!

ISMAIL

Bring some food for Mohammed!

AHMED

OK!

MOHAMMED

Sirat al Mustaqim?

ISMAIL

Yes, Mohammed, I am staying on the straight path.

MOHAMMED

The world is full of temptation, my son.

ISMAIL

I know, Mohammed, you're right about that.

(AHMED enters with the food and gives it to MOHAMMED.)

MOHAMMED

(thanking him)

Shukran gidan, shukran, salaam alekum.

AHMED and ISMAIL

Wa alekum es salaam.

(MOHAMMED exits.)

ISMAIL

This is ridiculous, we open in 15 minutes and we have no bread! Where the heck is he?
Hey, Ahmed, you got a cigarette?

AHMED

Sure, here.

(AHMED hands ISMAIL a cigarette, lights it and lights one for himself.)

ISMAIL

Don't tell Shoshana, I told her I quit.

AHMED

Who cares what you told her? Are you quitting for yourself or for her?

(SHOSHANA enters, dressed in Roman garb, carrying pitchers of lemonade.)

SHOSHANA

Shalom. Hey, what's going on, I thought you quit.

ISMAIL

I know, I know, I just had a lapse. It's my first one in a week.

(He puts out the cigarette. AHMED exits.)

ISMAIL

Hey, let me help you with that.

(He takes the tray from her and sets it down.)

SHOSHANA

Thanks.

ISMAIL

How're you doing?

SHOSHANA

Ok, b'seder, how about you?

ISMAIL

Good.... I'm just getting a little nervous about this fucking bread guy.

SHOSHANA

Shit! He hasn't come yet?

ISMAIL

If he doesn't make it, we'll just have to heat up yesterday's.

(CHAIM enters and drops a large breadbag.)

CHAIM

OK, here's your bread.

ISMAIL

Finally!

CHAIM

(wiping his forehead with a handkerchief)

Look, you don't know what it's like, crossing the Old City to get here every day. If the road isn't blocked for a security check, then it's jammed up with tour groups, and I get ticketed every time I park within 2 blocks of the restaurant, so I have to walk a half mile or so...look, you guys are my only delivery in this neighborhood, I'm going outta my way for you.

SHOSHANA

Chaim, it's ok, enough already.

CHAIM

I think I'm getting an ulcer!

SHOSHANA

Get out, you don't have an ulcer.

CHAIM

(breaking down)

I do! And I think I might have a tumor, too.

ISMAIL

Chaim, you're gonna be all right.

SHOSHANA

Have some lemonade, Chaim.

(SHOSHANA serves him, takes the bag of bread, exchanges a glance with ISMAIL, and exits. CHAIM takes a seat and drinks. The restaurant phone rings.)

ISMAIL

(Picks up phone.)

Caesar's Palacedine, Shalom.....No, Shlomo isn't here, this is Ismail, the manager speaking.....he should be in any minute, can I help you with something?
.....Oh.....you want to come here on Yom Ha'atzma'ut?.....I'm sorry, Israel Independence Day we will be closed.....oh, really...you arranged to have a party here? Are you sure?..... You must be mistaken, we are always closed for that day.....oh.....
(He stiffens.) I see, you made a special arrangement with Shlomo.....ok, what is your name, please?.....ok, ok, he'll call you.....Shalom.

(He hangs up, takes it in, shell- shocked. SHLOMO enters, wearing toga, talking on cell.)

SHLOMO

Ok, we'll have to talk more later, I've gotta open here. *(He hangs up.)* Chaim! Good to see you, that means we've got bread!

ISMAIL

Yes, *just* in time.

SHLOMO

I can't believe those guys have been at it again- did you see the graffiti?

CHAIM

(shaking his head)

Yeah, I noticed that.

ISMAIL

Yeah, it's pretty bad this time. I'll take care of it.

SHLOMO

Can you believe the chutzpa of it? We're talking 2,000 years ago- these people are absolutely nuts!

CHAIM

Shlomo, I've been meaning to ask you something.

SHLOMO

What is it, Chaim?

CHAIM

Well, my truck is in bad shape, I really need to replace it....

SHLOMO

What do you want, Chaim, a loan?

CHAIM

Well, I was wondering if you could put the money up for the whole car, I'm not doing too well right now.

SHLOMO

I'll think about it, Chaim, look I can't talk about it now, we're about to open. Call me, or we'll talk tomorrow if you get here *early*... take care of yourself, ok?

CHAIM

Ok, thanks, Shlomo. Shalom.

SHLOMO

See you, Chaim.

ISMAIL

Bye, Chaim.

(CHAIM waves lazily as he exits.)

ISMAIL

I think we oughta start buying bread from the Arab market, I've had it with this guy. Are you seriously thinking about loaning him money?

SHLOMO

Look, this is a kosher restaurant, we need to serve kosher bread. He tends to run late, but he always gets here. You think I shouldn't loan him money?

ISMAIL

Not if you expect to get it back, the guy's a born loser!

SHLOMO

You may be right there- I don't know, I guess I feel sorry for him.

(Ismail finds the cigarette he put out and lights it again.)

SHLOMO

Hey, I thought you quit.

ISMAIL

I did, but I got so nervous waiting for Chaim, I borrowed a cigarette from Ahmed. Now I don't want to let it go to waste....

SHLOMO

Just like Mark Twain said "I can quit smoking, I've done it 1000 times."
(Ismail forces a smile)

SHLOMO

Hey, is something bugging you?

ISMAIL

No.

SHLOMO

Are you sure?

(Pause. ISMAIL takes a drag of his cigarette.)

ISMAIL

Shlomo, tell me you haven't booked a party for Yom Ha'atzma'ut.

SHLOMO

Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you about that. This woman called and wants to have a party for 50 people here. A bunch of Knesset members who will be leading the festivities on Mt. Herzl and their families. I couldn't refuse. You don't care about working that day, do you?

ISMAIL

Oh my God..... Shlomo, we've always been closed on that day out of courtesy to the staff. Look, I know you're the boss, but it would have been nice if you had checked with me first about this.

SHLOMO

Ismail, I've never known you to turn down a party. Since most of the staff are Arabs, I assumed the holiday's not a big deal for them.

ISMAIL

Because of that, it is a big deal.

SHLOMO

Hm..... . doooo... you like to celebrate in a big way? I know you're Israeli, but I somehow thought, being an Arab, that...

ISMAIL

We *commemorate* the holiday, rather than celebrate.

SHLOMO

Oh, I see...

ISMAIL

For you, it's the celebration of Independence, while as for us, it is referred to as Al Nakba- the catastrophe. We commemorate Al Nakba the day after Yom Ha'atzm'ut. But it would be very uncomfortable for us to be here for a celebration on that particular holiday, you understand what I'm saying?

SHLOMO

Yes, I see, of course.....but recently, there has been so much hope for peace in the air, and a chance for a two state solution...

ISMAIL

Some people seem hopeful. But the Israelis are like the Pharoah in the Exodus story- one day they give an inch, the next, they take away a mile. Yes, ok, I *am* Israeli, at least that's the passport I carry, I'm one of the lucky ones, my family got to stay in Jerusalem. I'm doing well here. I have friends who are Jews, but I can't celebrate this day with you. If you're planning to celebrate the birth of Israel in the restaurant, I'm not going to be here and nor will the staff.

SHLOMO

Ismail, you can't do this to me. This is a fantastic opportunity for us. Imagine the publicity we'll get!

ISMAIL

It may be an opportunity for you, but I don't need this kind of publicity- that would be just great for me if it got in the paper! How could I show my face to my aunt, whose son, my cousin, was killed by Israeli soldiers, when he stepped out to buy a newspaper one day.

SHLOMO

Ismail, I'm sorry, this stuff is terrible, it's a tragedy. We have been hit, too. But there have been very few incidents on either side for the past 5 years, I think everybody is ready to finally move on. We all want peace.

ISMAIL

I'm not coming in that day.

SHLOMO

Think about it....please...

(SHOSHANA enters with bowls of fruit and checks table setups. Two NUNS enter, outside restaurant.)

GLADYS

Mary, I feel like I'm walking on a cloud. To be in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in that room built on the spot where Jesus was crucified and then enter that chapel where he

lay- when I stood before the tomb that contained his body before he ascended, I couldn't keep back my tears. I felt like he was in the room there with me. Mary, I heard him speak to me.

MARY

Really?! What did he say?

GLADYS

I'm not rightly sure, but it was some kind of message like, everything's gonna be all right. Yes, that's what it was, it was just kind of a hopeful feeling I got, that no matter how terrible things may get, for me or this whole, crazy, mixed-up world, that everything's gonna be all right.

MARY

Hallelujah! That sounds like a prayer, Gladys. Hey, I've been praying we'd find something to eat around here, and here we are.

GLADYS

Thank God, I'm starving.

(They enter the restaurant. ISMAIL greets them.)

ISMAIL

Welcome to Caesar's Palacedine.

GLADYS

Wait a minute, is this a gambling place?

ISMAIL

No, no, don't worry, they wouldn't allow that in this neighborhood. Ladies, please.

(He guides them towards a table.)

SHOSHANA

Come have a seat, and I'll wash your feet.

GLADYS

Mary, I don't know about this. It seems sinful!

MARY

Don't worry, Gladys, everything's gonna be all right, remember?

(They sit, and SHOSHANA pours lemonade, and gives the nuns footbaths. Ahmed comes by and fans them with large feather fans.)

GLADYS

To come from Jesus' tomb to this! I do believe I've died and gone to heaven myself.

SHLOMO

Friends, Romans, Foreigners, welcome! You are about to partake of a typical Roman feast, just as it was, 2,000 years ago. We are not in Rome, of course, but in Judea, which was under Roman rule and of course, greatly influenced by Roman culture and customs. Tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, and corn were not available in this part of the world 2,000 years ago and we will not be serving them to you, nor will we serve pasta, as it was not invented yet.

GLADYS

Shoot! I was really looking forward to some pasta! I thought this was an Italian restaurant..

MARY

Well, the book *said* Roman.

ISMAIL

So, what did they eat? Olives, bread, lentils, yogurt, meat- a lot of things we still eat here in the Middle East today. The servers will bring you Roman bread, which we invite you to tear apart, and dip in the olive oil and zatar, or hyssop spice. It has been told that Solomon ate zatar to give him strength for his one thousand wives.

GLADYS

My word!

SHLOMO

After the bread, we will serve lentil soup.

MARY

Sounds like the same old Middle Eastern food we've been having everywhere.

ISMAIL

And at the end of your meal, if you have eaten too much, you may proceed to the vomitorium located near the baths.

GLADYS AND MARY:

Oh!

ISMAIL

If you need anything, just ask me or one of your servers, and if anyone bothers you, just let us know and we will chop off their heads.

ISMAIL and SHLOMO

P'tay Avon, bon appetitus!

(They bow to the diners and then to each other. Trumpet blast. Music. Servers throw the bread like frisbies to the nuns, who laugh and exclaim, "Oh my! Whoa!" etc. The servers place zatar and olive oil on their heads and serve to the nuns who reach hungrily for the bread, which they dip and eat.)

GLADYS

Delicious!

MARY

Mmm!

ISMAIL

Shlomo, I've been thinking about it, and I've changed my mind.

SHLOMO

About what?

ISMAIL

You know, your holiday party.

SHLOMO

Ah, thank God... you'll do it, then?

ISMAIL

Yes, and I'd be happy to take care of the entertainment.

SHLOMO

Wonderful, you'll be good at that. Got something in mind?

ISMAIL

Not yet. But I promise your friends will have an evening they'll never forget.

SHLOMO

Ok, just nothing too radical, ok? These guys are bigshots.

ISMAIL

Not to worry.

SHLOMO

Great, thanks, buddy, I'm so relieved, you don't know how much this means to me. I'd better go call that woman right now. Keep the flies away from the nuns.

ISMAIL

OK, Caesar.

(Lights dim. Music. Tables are cleared by staff. The nuns leave; lights up on NUNS outside restaurant.)

GLADYS

Well, this was just out of this world!

MARY

Perfect, we'll have to tell the other sisters about it. Now for the *long* hike back up to the convent.

(They are approached by the CHASID.)

CHASID

Excuse me, I see you just came from this restaurant. Are you aware that Romans tortured and killed many Jews and Christians as well?

MARY

Well, yes, I am...

CHASID

Well, if you know about it you really shouldn't eat in this place.

GLADYS

Well, I don't see why not. All that was a *very* long time ago. These folks are just having a little fun with history.

CHASID

This kind of history shouldn't be taken lightly. We in this community are also opposed to the nation-state of Israel, because it is an aberration.

GLADYS

Is that right?

CHASID

Yes, because our prophets said that the Messiah needs to come and that the world needs to be a perfect place with no wars before the Jewish people should have a nation in this place again.

GLADYS

Very interesting. Well it certainly isn't a perfect world yet, and it sure is a mess in this country right now- your prophets may have had a point. But since you are giving us advice, I may as well advise you, that unless you follow our Lord Jesus Christ, who was and is the true Messiah, well, you're just not going to make it up to heaven. And you should just try the restaurant sometime, it's really good, and the menu says all kosher.

(They exit.)

CHASID

(looking after them, shaking his head)

He was a Jew, too, is he not in heaven, then?

(He exits. Lights up on ISMAIL and SHOSHANA, in the restaurant.)

ISMAIL

So, you think you're up for helping me with this project?

SHOSHANA

Sure, I'd love to.

ISMAIL

You're the best....

(He takes her hand and is about to kiss her.)

(Ahmed appears in the doorway, then disappears.)

ISMAIL

You want to take a walk?

SHOSHANA

Yeah...I'll go and punch out.

(She exits and almost bumps into AHMED in the doorway. She makes way for him.)

(AHMED enters.)

AHMED

Ismail...

ISMAIL

Yes, Ahmed.

AHMED

You know, I've always looked up to you like a big brother. I was just a kid when you and my sister got married.

ISMAIL

I know, Ahmed. And you're like a younger brother to me.

AHMED

Look, I know that you enjoy other women's company and it's no big deal. There was Sara, the English waitress, then Mette, the Danish one....

ISMAIL

Ahmed, get to the point!

AHMED

This time you're going too far with that Jewish waitress.

ISMAIL

Ahmed, her name is Shoshana, she's been here half a year now. What are you worried about?

AHMED

Well, for one thing, I get a feeling it's more serious than the others, and for another, how can you sleep with the enemy?

ISMAIL

Ahmed, don't jump to any conclusions. What makes you think I'm sleeping with her?

AHMED

Aren't you?

ISMAIL

(he lights up a cigarette.)

Look, stop imagining things and focus on your cooking, ok? Now listen, I have a project I'm gonna need your help with. Are you still playing the oud?

AHMED

Sometimes.

ISMAIL

Well, dust it off and get practicing, I'll explain why later. And don't worry about Shoshana, we're just friends.

AHMED

Ismail, I'm not stupid.

ISMAIL

What I mean is, it's not serious. Trust me, ok?

AHMED

All right, Ismail. But you take it easy, ok?

(He exits.)

ISMAIL

Don't worry about me. And don't forget to buy extra lamb for tonight, we have a big group coming.

AHMED

Aiwa.

(He exits.)

(ISMAIL puts out his cigarette. SHOSHANA re-enters. They take off their togas, hang them up and exit together.)