

SCENE THREE

SETTING:

The Strasbourg home.

AT RISE:

SARA sits holding a little blanket wrapped bundle, rocking back and forth and singing to it sweetly. The MAMA CHOIR enters and clusters around her.

BREINDEL

Mazal tov, mazal tov Rebbetzin.

KREINDEL

Don't worry about anything at all. We are here to help!

SARA

Thank you ladies, but -

YENTEL

Don't bother thanking us. We know what it's like for new mothers.

The music begins.

Brief blackout. SHLOIMELE is sitting next to MENDEL who is learning from a sefer.

SARA (O.S.)

Shloimele! Shloimele, where are you?

SHLOIMELE

I'm here Mame!

SARA

(entering)

Come Shloimele. Let's not bother Tatte while he's learning.

MENDEL

It's alright Sara. You know that he never disturbs. He just likes to sit quietly and listen.

SARA

I know, but not everyone appreciates having a two-year old in the room

(MORE)

SARA (CONT'D)

when they're talking to you. Come Shloimele, do you want to help Mame in the kitchen?

SHLOIMELE places his hand in hers and follows her out.

Brief blackout. MENDEL and SHLOIMELE walk slowly, hand in hand, in front of the stage. Soft Yom Kippur music plays in the background.

MENDEL

Shloimele, today is a very special day. In a short while, it will be Yom Kippur.

SHLOIMELE

Yom Kippur?

MENDEL

That's right tzaddik'l. Tatte promised a big tzaddik that I would sing Kol Nidrei every year. Do you want to help Tatty practice?

SHLOIMELE

Yeah!

They sing a few bars of Kol Nidrei together. Brief blackout.

SHLOIMELE is playing in a corner by himself. ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI approaches him.

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI

Hello Shloimele. My name is Father Zbigniew Mzlateslavski. Do you think we can be friends?

SHLOIMELE stares at him impassively.

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI (CONT'D)

Hmm? What do you think? You could come visit me in the belfry and help sound the bells. Doesn't that sound fun?

MENDEL approaches from behind.

MENDEL

(icily)
Good afternoon sir.

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI

(jumping up with his
hand outstretched)

Good afternoon! You must be Rabbi Mendel. I am Father Zbigniew Mzlateslavski, the new priest. I've heard so much about the famous Shloimele, I just had to come talk to him. But he didn't seem very responsive.

MENDEL

(clipped)

He doesn't speak Polish?

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI

No? Then you must teach him! With his talents and intelligence, he could go far! Why keep him locked up amongst the Jewish people?

MENDEL

(coldly)

The Torah will allow him to go far. His talents will be put to the best use, I assure you. He can always learn Polish later, when there's a use for it.

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI

I did not mean to offend you. He is your son and you can raise him however you wish.

(extends his hand)

I hope we can be friends.

MENDEL

(hesitates, but then
takes his hand)

I hope so too.

ZBIGNIEW MZLATESLAVSKI

(bending down to
Shloimele)

Good-bye Shloimele. I think we'll be seeing quite a bit of each other in the coming years.

MENDEL picks SHLOIMELE up protectively. SARA enters.

SARA

Mendel, what's wrong? You look white as a sheet!

MENDEL

I just met the new priest. Sara, I got a very nervous feeling about him.

SARA

(grimly)

I know what you mean. I've seen him watching Shloimele from afar every so often. I don't like it.

MENDEL

(musing)

I feel like I saw evil lurking in his eyes.

(after a moment,
shrugging)

I'm probably making more of it than it is. We'll just be careful to keep Shloimele far away from him.

SARA

Besides, once he settles in, he'll be kept busy with his parish and his duties. He'll have no thought to even spare for our little boy.

MENDEL

(fervently)

I hope so.