

SCENE 1

(Maxine mounts her crate once again to address the crowd.)

MAXINE: **Good people of Bethlehem! I know many of you have traversed afar. You're weary. Your animals are weary. I am weary. But for the final time—there is *(emphasizing each word)* no ... room ... in ... the ... stable! My helpful helper, Riley, will give you the updated report. Riley?**

RILEY: *(checking his clipboard, quickly flipping pages)* **You bet, boss. *(calling out)* Breaking news from our zoo; dateline—The Wool Street Journal! *(loud, rather obnoxious laughing—no one else laughs, they just look at him; he stops abruptly)* Sorry. Sometimes I crack myself up. *(clears throat)* We just received ... four barking dogs, three fat hogs, two cooing doves ... and a donkey with a very short temper.**

 *SoundFX: "Angry Donkey Bray"*

(Two stable hands—Nick and his son—are literally "kicked" through the doors of the stable as they yell, followed by a burst of hay. Nick's son stands and slams the doors shut, latching them, as Nick bellows.)

NICK: **That's it! We quit!**

MAXINE: **But Nick, you and your son are my last two shepherds! And you have hill duty tonight! You can't quit!**

NICK: **Watch us. *(turns, rubbing his backside, and begins to exit)* Now you won't have Nick ... or Nick's son ... to kick around anymore.**

(They both exit, limping as they go.)

MAXINE: *(throwing up her hands)* **Now what am I supposed to do? The only way the Bethlehem Stable will survive is if we ...**

VIVIAN: *(sweeping in, finishing the sentence)* **... hire more assistants, and that is precisely my plan! Greetings, everyone! *(handing out business cards)* Vivian Swan—permanent CEO of the Temporary Swan Employment Agency. Our motto is: "We put the 'I' back into 'hire!'"**

MAXINE: *(looking at a card)* **The 'I'?**

VIVIAN: **Yes, I do the hiring, you do the work. I was called to Bethlehem to handle an emergency.**

MAXINE: **We sure have one. With all the travelers coming for the census, this town is overcrowded and understaffed.**

(At this moment, from around the stable, three rather road-weary travelers appear; they carry traveling bundles; they mingle with the crowd, but are listening intently.)

VIVIAN: **And that's exactly what I've been doing today—filling temporary jobs: bellhops at the inn, waitresses at the Falafel House, used-dromedary salesmen at the Camel Lot. And now there is only one job left. *(Clears throat, puts on glasses that hang from a chain around her neck. She unfolds and peers closely at a paper in her hand.)* Allow me to read the notice: "Wanted. One certain poor shepherd ..."**

MAXINE: *(breaking in)* ... make that "three shepherds." We just had two unexpected vacancies open up.

VIVIAN: **Alright. "Wanted. Three shepherds ... to keep watch over some sheep by night. Location: the hills above Bethlehem. Hazard pay included."**

RILEY: **Hazard pay?!**

MAXINE: **Conditions can be rough. That's probably why no one has applied.**

VIVIAN: **Indeed. I had to dispatch my administrative assistant, Mackenzie, to the hills. She's watching the sheep until the temps arrive.**

RILEY: **How are things up there?**

VIVIAN: **Deteriorating quickly. Her last message had only two words: "Fare Well."**

MAXINE: **We'd better find some shepherds fast! I can't take this anymore! All the mooing, the grunting, the squawking ...**

VIVIAN: **Yes, those poor animals.**

MAXINE: **Animals? I'm talking about me!**