

# HANDLE WITH CARE

BY  
JASON ODELL WILLIAMS

HEBREW WRITTEN BY  
CHARLOTTE COHN



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
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HANDLE WITH CARE  
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*For Norma Fire*

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HANDLE WITH CARE received its world premiere (under the title *At a Loss*) at Kitchen Theatre Company (Rachel Lampert, Artistic Director) in Ithaca, NY on July 13, 2011. It was directed by Rachel Lampert; the set design was by Brendan Komala; the lighting design was by Joey Moro; the costume design was by Lisa Boquist; the sound design was by Lesley Greene; and the stage manager was LaShawn Keyser. The cast was as follows:

AYELET ..... Charlotte Cohn  
TERRENCE..... Michael Dalto  
JOSH..... Michael Kaplan  
EDNA ..... Norma Fire

HANDLE WITH CARE was subsequently produced by Charlotte Cohn and Douglas Denoff at the Westside Theatre (Downstairs) in New York City, opening on December 15, 2013. It was directed by Karen Carpenter; the set design was by David L. Arsenault; the lighting design was by Cory Pattak; the costume design was by Martin T. Lopez; the sound design was by Jill BC Du Boff; and the production stage manager was J.P. Elins. The cast was as follows:

AYELET ..... Charlotte Cohn  
TERRENCE..... Sheffield Chastain  
JOSH..... Jonathan Sale  
EDNA ..... Carol Lawrence

## **CHARACTERS**

**(in order of appearance)**

AYELET (“ay-EL-et”) — Female. Thirties. Israeli. Beautiful, lovely, but has lost her smile. Wounded by a break-up last year, but not quick to cry. Practical. Focused. Searching for more from life but afraid to admit it.

TERRENCE — Male. Thirties. American. Virginia accent. Works as a delivery guy for DHX. Kind of a screw-up, but very well-meaning. Not an idiot, just not worldly. A solid good-guy. Funny without meaning to be.

JOSH — Male. Thirties. American. Handsome. Has an innate charming-shy-funny way about him. Tends to talk quickly, words tumbling out when he’s nervous. Used to be an English Lit teacher at Virginia Tech, but quit after his wife died. Though wounded by his loss, he doesn’t like to dwell on the emotion and never becomes overly weepy when talking about her.

EDNA — Female. Mid- to late seventies. Israeli. Ayelet’s grandmother. Loves life. Loves to smile. A ball of vitality, vigor, and energy.

## **TIME**

Christmas Eve, 2008, with flashbacks to the day before.

## **PLACE**

A motel room in Goodview, Virginia.

NOTE: The play can be performed with an intermission after Scene 3, or straight through. Without a break, it should run approximately ninety minutes.

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

A “ / ” indicates where the next character should begin speaking, overlapping the previous character.

Throughout the text, lines spoken in fluent Hebrew appear in Hebrew letters, which are written from right to left. Lines spoken in English with a strong Israeli accent appear in bold.

Josh’s attempts at Hebrew are written in English letters, transliterated as Josh pronounces them. Josh uses his limited Hebrew vocabulary with a looser, more Americanized accent than Ayelet’s and Edna’s — it is not strictly correct.

Regarding Scenes 2, 4, and 6: Edna and Ayelet speak to each other in Hebrew, and the audience hears their conversation as fluent English, with no accent. When they say unfamiliar English words, the audience hears them speak in Hebrew, or in broken English with a strong Israeli accent.

Never fear — all Hebrew is translated throughout. For help with pronunciation, a rehearsal CD, including an audio recording and a written transliteration of the Hebrew lines, is available from Dramatists Play Service.

## GUIDE TO HEBREW PRONUNCIATION

R	=	glottal, as in the French “rien”
CH	=	guttural, as in “Chanukah” and “chutzpah”
TZ	=	“ts” as in “cats”
A	=	“ah” as in “car”
E	=	“eh” as in “bell”
I	=	“ee” as in “bee”
O	=	“oh” as in “bone”
U	=	“ooh” as in “boot”
AY	=	“ie” as in “pie”

A person often meets his destiny  
on the road he took to avoid it.  
— *Jean de La Fontaine*





# HANDLE WITH CARE

## Scene 1

*December 24, 2008. 3:45 P.M. Lights up on Terrence and Ayelet in a motel room in Goodview, Virginia. One door leads to the bathroom, and the front door leads outside. The room is furnished with one full-size bed, a small table, two chairs, and a few lamps. A framed painting on the wall reads "VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS." A day-calendar sits on a nightstand and reads "Friday, December 24." Through the window overlooking the parking lot, we see that heavy snow is falling outside. Terrence is wearing his DHX uniform, and he nods apologetically as Ayelet berates him.*

AYELET.

אלוהים! למה אי-אפשר לקבל פה תשובה כמו שצריך! היינו אמורים לעזוב, ואז חיכינו וחיכינו — והשלג ממשיך לרדת ואנחנו עדיין פה ... בגלל זה לא רציתי לבוא לאמריקה — ההורים שלי צדקו — זאת המדינה הכי מטומטמת בעולם — אתם כלכם שמנים ועצלנים — ואף אחד פה לא מדבר עברית אבל כלכם מצפים שאני אדבר את השפה הדבילית שלכם. אאאאהההה! אני שונאת — את אמריקה — כל כך!  
[“GOD! Why can’t I get a straight answer from you morons! We were supposed to leave, then we waited and waited — and the snow is still falling and we’re still here. This is why I never wanted to come to America in the first place — my parents were right — this is the dumbest country in the world — you’re all fat and lazy — and no one can speak MY language and you ALL expect me to speak YOUR crazy language. Aghhhhhh! I hate — America — so much!”]  
(Pause.)

TERRENCE. Okay, again ... I DON’T SPEAK — WHAT YOU’RE SPEAKIN’ THERE! So yellin’ at me ain’t doin’ either of us a bit a’ good.

AYELET.

אהה! כל האמריקאים מטומטמים!

[“Aaaahhh, all Americans are stupid!”]

TERRENCE. Yeah, well, *hakunah matata* to you, too. (*A rapid knock at the door.*)

JOSH. (*Off.*) Terry! You in there?

TERRENCE. Oh, thank God. (*Terrence opens the door to find Josh, who is wearing many layers and covered with snow.*) Where you been, man? I’m dying here. / You said you’d be right over — I am freakin’ the hell out!

JOSH. What ... You know how nasty it’s getting out there! My truck barely made it ... What’s the goddamn emergency, anyw — (*Josh finally notices Ayelet, who is staring at him.*) Oh. Sorry. I didn’t — Uh ... (*A moment passes between them — almost like they recognize each other but are unsure from where. Terrence watches curiously, then eventually breaks the silence.*)

TERRENCE. Uh. Josh...? This here’s Ayelet. She’s from Israel, and, uh ... I was hopin’ you two might be able to —

JOSH. Oh, Jesus. This isn’t another set-up, is it? I told you, man. I am off the market. / Forever. (*To Ayelet.*) I’m sorry. You seem like a nice enough person, I’m just not ready to —

TERRENCE. No, no, no, no, no ... You got the wrong idea. Hey. Yo! Listen. Dude: SHE — IS NOT — A SET-UP. (*Pause.*) All right? (*Pause.*)

JOSH. She ... she’s not?

AYELET.

מה זה “set up”?

[“What does ‘set up’ mean?”]

TERRENCE. See?

JOSH. ... This isn’t, like, my best week, okay? So don’t mess with me.

TERRENCE. I’m — I am *not* messing with you. I need your help.

JOSH. With her?

TERRENCE. Yeah, with her. This — is Ayelet. She’s from ... somewhere in Israel, I don’t remember, but we had this, uh, package of hers...? And ... now we’re waiting for it ...

JOSH. So, what, you need me to hold your hand while you wait? Forget it. I’m going back home.

AYELET.

לא, / לא, לא. לאן הוא הולך? אל תלך, אל תשאיר אותי לבד. בבקשה!  
[“No, / no, no. Where’s he going? Don’t go, don’t leave me alone. Please!”]

TERRENCE. Whoa! Hang on, buddy. Please. Don't leave me, I need you, man! (*Josh stops at the door.*)

JOSH. Okaaaay. Someone want to tell me exactly what's going on here? (*Beat. Terrence balks.*)

AYELET.

בבקשה. הם השאירו אותי לבד עם האידיוט הזה, ואני אמורה לטוס לישראל הלילה. אני לא יודעת אם תוכל לעזור לי, אבל כולם יותר טובים מהמפגר הזה.

[*"Please. They left me here with this idiot, and I have to make a flight to Israel tonight. I don't know if you can help me, but anyone is better than this moron."*]

TERRENCE. ... She don't speak English.

JOSH. And you do?

TERRENCE. Aw, man, you know what I mean. She's speakin' Jewish, so I thought you might be able to help out, / talk to her —

JOSH. Hebrew.

TERRENCE. What?

JOSH. That was Hebrew. She's speaking Hebrew.

TERRENCE. ... Whatever, hoss. Just tell her what's going on.

JOSH. What *is* going on?

TERRENCE. I'll ... tell you in a minute. Just tell her: Now that you're here, everything will be okay.

JOSH. I don't know how to say that.

TERRENCE. Then tell her you like orange soda! Ask her where the library is! Just see if you two can understand each other!

JOSH. All right, fine. Jeez ... What's her name again?

TERRENCE. Ayelet.

JOSH. ... Ayelet?

TERRENCE. Yeah, like "I — yell — it." And believe me, man ... She does like to yell it.

JOSH. Okay. Easy enough. (*Stepping to Ayelet.*) Uh ... Ayelet? Um, *sha-LOM, mah nish-MAH?* [*"Hello, how are you?"*]

AYELET.

אה! סוף, סוף מתורגמן. ידעתי. ידעתי שתוכל לעזור לי.

[*"Ah! Finally, a translator. I knew it. I knew you could help me."*]

(*Ayelet pulls Josh a step away from Terrence, confiding in him.*)

תקשיב: הסיפור הזה ממש לא יאמן, אני מחכה פה כמעט שש שעות והגיע זמן ארוחת הערב וכולם נעלמו. ונשארתי פה לבד עם האידיוט הזה שלא יודע כלום ולא יכול לעזור בכלום. אז תגיד לי, בבקשה — מתי נוכל לצאת מפה — אה?

*["Listen: This story is unbelievable — I've been waiting here for almost six hours and now it's dinner-time and everyone disappeared. And I was left here alone with this idiot, who doesn't know anything and can't help with anything. So tell me, please — when can we get out of here? Hmm?"]*

*(Long pause.)*

JOSH. ... *sha-LOM?* [*"Hello?"*]

AYELET.

אאאאאאאא

[*"Abbbbbb!"*]

*(Over the next few beats, Ayelet collapses into a chair, frustrated. Then, she has an idea — she frantically flips through her Hebrew-English phrasebook.)*

TERRENCE. What the hell, man? What'd she say?

JOSH. I have no idea!

TERRENCE. Aren't you Jewish?

JOSH. Doesn't mean I speak Hebrew.

TERRENCE. But I thought you all had to learn that stuff at, like, Sunday School before your Hare Krishna.

JOSH. ... I don't know what to correct first.

TERRENCE. Come on, man!

JOSH. Okay — A: Jews don't go to *Sunday* School. B: It's a Bar Mitzvah, not a Hare Krishna. And C: I crammed, like, five months of Hebrew School into one weekend — when I was twelve. So unless she starts quoting my haftorah, we've got nothing to talk about. *(Ayelet has found the words she wants in the phrasebook.)*

AYELET.

**Please. For me. Now. To go? For going?**

אני חייבת לצאת מפה עכשיו, למה אני עדיין פה?

[*"I have to get out of here now, WHY am I still here?"*]

JOSH. Yes, miss, I'm sorry — I'm just trying to — figure out the situation here. / One, one second.

TERRENCE. Come on, man. Just talk to her.

JOSH. I don't know how! She's speaking, like, serious Israeli Hebrew, not twice-a-year *shul* Hebrew.

TERRENCE. You'll be great. I hear you say Jewish stuff all the time.

JOSH. Yeah, but I can't *communicate* with her. I can say, "How are you," "Manichevitz," and "*yaysh li ZA-yin gab-DOL.*" [*"I have a big penis."*] *(Ayelet snorts out a quick laugh.)*

TERRENCE. *(Smiling, hopeful.)* What'd you say?

JOSH. ... "I have a big penis."

TERRENCE. (*Shocked and confused.*) Wh — What'd you tell her that for?!

JOSH. No. I didn't *tell* her that. It's just a thing ... a funny thing you learn how to say when you're a kid. It's, like, the first Hebrew phrase I learned.

TERRENCE. ... They taught you that at Sunday School?

JOSH. ... No, Terrence.

AYELET.

Ehm, please —

סבתא.

[*"Grandma."*]

Ehm, where —

סבתא. אני צריכה שיחזירו אותה שנוכל לצאת מפה, בבקשה.

[*"Grandma. I need her returned to me so we can go, please."*]

JOSH. Oh — *SAV-ta*. I know that word. Uh ... "grandmother," right? Your grandmother?

AYELET.

כן! כן, תודה.

[*"Yes! Yes, thank you."*]

Grand-mother. Where Savta.

איפה סבתא?

[*"Where is Grandma?"*]

JOSH. (*Thinking it's a joke.*) Why doesn't she know where her grandmother is?

TERRENCE. Uh ... She's dead?

JOSH. (*Looks at Ayelet.*) Oh.

TERRENCE. Like in a box?

JOSH. (*Looks at Terrence.*) Ohhh.

TERRENCE. And, uh ... (*Moves closer to Josh, says quietly.*) We was shippin' the box back to Israel, and ... now it's gone.

JOSH. What?

TERRENCE. We don't know where the box is. It's gone.

JOSH. Whoa, you LOST her grandmother?

TERRENCE. No, no, her grandma's not lost. She's just misplaced.

JOSH. ... What's the difference?

TERRENCE. Well, in DHX terminology, "lost" means ... lost. Like, never to be recovered. "Misplaced," though. That means we think we know where it might be, and it's only a matter of time before it turns up.

JOSH. ... That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

TERRENCE. Blame DHX — it's their policy.

# HANDLE WITH CARE

by Jason Odell Williams

2M, 2W

Circumstances both hilarious and tragic bring together a young Israeli woman, who has little command of English, and a young American man, who has little command of romance. Is their inevitable love an accident ... or is it destiny, generations in the making?

*"A hilarious and heartwarming romantic comedy ... which exudes gobs of comic energy and insight. Mr. Williams has achieved something special: He has written a Jewish Christmas story."* —**The New York Times**

*"Miraculous ... the story of the beauty in tragedy, the rekindling of faith, and realizing that you're found in translation ... leaves the audience delighted."* —**The Jewish Week**

*"Thrilling ... a delightful, bilingual comedy ... this is the perfect non-Christmas 'Christmas' show, a celebration of friendship and life that is big on the small things that matter in life."* —**Los Angeles Daily News**

*"A romantic comedy you'll remember fondly well into next year. Modest, a little self-effacing and touchingly optimistic, the play is a perfect date to attend with friends and lovers."*

—**The Ithaca Times (Ithaca, New York)**

*"Hilariously funny! Utterly charming, fearlessly adorable and a tiny bit magical."*

—**The Naples Daily News (Naples, Florida)**

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