APPROACHING LABAN'S HOME
(Gen. 29:1 – 12)

Emboldened now and charged with elation,
He rode east with determination;
Arriving at the central well,
He asked the shepherds if they could tell
Him where he might locate a man
Called Laban—
They replied, ''We can!''

''In fact,'' said one, ''here comes his daughter,
The gorgeous Rachel, to draw her water,
To quench the thirst of her father's flock;
But she'll have to wait till the dead-weight rock
That covers the well is lifted by us
Three shepherds together, without any fuss;
Then, when we've watered our own sheep,
The girls can approach—
While we take a peep!'

''Be off with you!'' said Jacob,
''The sun's still high in the sky;
So, the flocks have plenty more time to graze—
Their full quota,
You scoundrels deny!''

Just as the shepherds, in anger, rose
To give Jacob a thorough beating,
He whipped the rock off the top of the well—
And the lambs all started bleating.

The shepherds fell back in dismay
At the amazing strength on display.
At the uplifted rock
They abandoned their flock—
And in panic ran away.

When Rachel approached,
Jacob knew at once
That this was the love of his life;
That she was the one who was heaven-sent
To be his partner and wife.

He gave her sheep to drink their fill
And then replaced the rock;
They talked and embraced until
Their love was soon unlocked.
He planted a kiss on her cheeks

And wept tears of joy:
‘‘To find you I have travelled weeks;
There’s no need to be coy!
I am your cousin, after all,
Your aunt Rebekah’s boy!

‘‘Just beware,’’ said Rachel,
‘‘For my father can’t be trusted;
Take every promise that he makes
With several grains of mustard!’

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JACOB AT LABAN’S HOME
(Gen. 29:13 – 30:13)

When Laban was told that Jacob had come,
The potential for gain made him run
To greet the young man with a warm embrace—
But the smile was soon wiped off his face!

‘‘When your grandpa’s servant arrived here,
Many years ago,
He came laden with many gifts—
But you with a mere *hello!*’’

‘‘Forgive me, uncle that I don’t impress,
For a fugitive am I;
Let me work on your estate,
Rather than just stand by.’’

A month passed, and Laban saw
That Jacob was there to stay;
‘‘You can’t work here for nothing, lad—
That’s really not our way!’’

In Laban’s mind a plan was hatched:
Older daughter, Leah, was as yet unmatched.
Her face was sallow, her figure narrow;
Her eyes weak, she didn’t much speak;
Always looked tired,
Was never admired—
No wonder no suitors
Had enquired!

‘‘Jacob, good fellow, you need a wife,
And I know for whom you care;
So, for how long are you prepared to work?

Let’s agree a term that’s fair.’’

‘‘Indeed, I love her,’’ Jacob replied,
‘‘And Rachel loves me too;
Is seven years a fair bride’s price?—
I think so;
Don’t you?’’

He knew that, in his love for her,
The years would pass as days;
The nuptials arranged,
The townsfolk came,
To shout their *hurray*s!

Heavily veiled,
To the canopy,
The bride was conveyed;
And when the last guest had gone,
The bridal bed was made.

In the deep darkness of the night
The couple were united;
But when the morning light shone in,
Jacob’s hope was blighted.
For, lying there next to him,
Was not the one he adored,
But her homely sister, Leah,
Whom he’d hitherto ignored.

He rushed straight to Laban’s tent,
Beside himself with rage;
Denouncing him for the treachery
In which he’d been engaged.

‘‘In the light of what you’ve done to me,
Could I go after Leah a-wooing;
Demonstrating passion for
A conspirator in my undoing?’’

‘‘Come, Jacob,’’ Laban replied,
‘‘I’m surprised that you don’t know
That life has an inexorable rule
That we reap what we sow;
Did you not supplant your older brother;
And secure his birthright under cover?
But in *our* place,
We don’t stoop so low
As to leave the older in limbo!

‘‘But just to show my good intent,

Once this week's celebration is spent,
I'll give you Rachel as you desired,
If for seven more years
You agree to be hired.''

True to his word, the marriage took place;
And Laban allotted a suitable space,
On his estate, situated,
For the two families now created;
Providing all that the couples might need,
And that, from chores, they might be freed,
He gave Zilpah to Leah as a handmaid;
No task would Rachel's Bilhah
Evade.

The Lord wasn't pleased
That Leah was hated,
So, with children,
Her status, He elevated!
When Reuben, the firstborn,
Arrived in their life,
She felt she'd become
The number one wife.

With Simeon, Levi and Judah
In quick succession;
Leah's nest became
Jacob's proudest possession.

Rachel grew more bitter
With each passing day,
Though Jacob tried to console her,
What could he say?

''Give me children!'' she would cry;
''Without them, I'll surely die;
That such a gift you can supply
Is something you certainly cannot deny;
Though it's very clear
That you and God speak,
Yet, in my desperate need,
You act awfully meek!''

Jacob flew into a rage,
Though by nature, mild:
''Do I stand in place of God
Who's withheld from you a child?''

Rachel paused for a while,
Then she had a thought:

‘‘With my handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife
Would you now consort?
If you do,
The child produced
Would fulfil my maternal need,
And I would be fulfilled, my love;
Of my burden I’d be freed.’’