



# A comet with A BRIDE'S tail

Story of an inexhaustible friendship between Emilia-Romagna and Bethlehem

text by Piergiorgio Bighin

illustrations by Giovanni Cavicchi

translation by Leila Zorkot and Beatrice Menegatti

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UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

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# PrefACE

**B**etween the things that struck me most when I first set foot in the Holy Land in 2001 were the local people, their stories, their attachment to that Land and their full sense of being the custodians of a history that concerns all humanity. This factor, and the desire to explore more and more of the cultural richness of this people, was certainly the main reason why I decided to live there for so long: the people!

Behind every door there is an ancient history of emigration and resilience, of faith and strong identity, which is passed down from generation to generation. Often, and perhaps rightly so, as foreigners and pilgrims we dwell on the daily sufferings, the violence of the conflict that enters people's lives every day, the difficulties and challenges of religious coexistence, but in the stories of the Bethlehem houses the tales are ancient and span the ages, sometimes making the difficult everyday life a brief stage in a tale that makes them proud.

The homes of the Bethlehemites are always open and ready to welcome us. No matter how many of us there are and what time we arrive. To conflict and violence, the daily answer is Turkish coffee, lemon and mint juice and the colourful table of salads and *Mezza*. All that is needed to be together, to keep each other company and tell each other about life.

The most important gesture of charity we can do to ourselves and to others is to give our friendship. To find time to listen to

each other, to be together and together try to build our lives with the teachings of that Man, made a child, in Bethlehem itself.

A small group of us knows in detail this story of the Holy Land, which has become a children's story through the pen of Piergiorgio. The name Lea is that of a dear friend who passed away this year and who undoubtedly had the frown of the Bethlehem girl who grew up. It's the perennial story of the search for freedom, a story of peace within a conflictual context, telling us that nothing is forever lost and we must walk again... following a star!

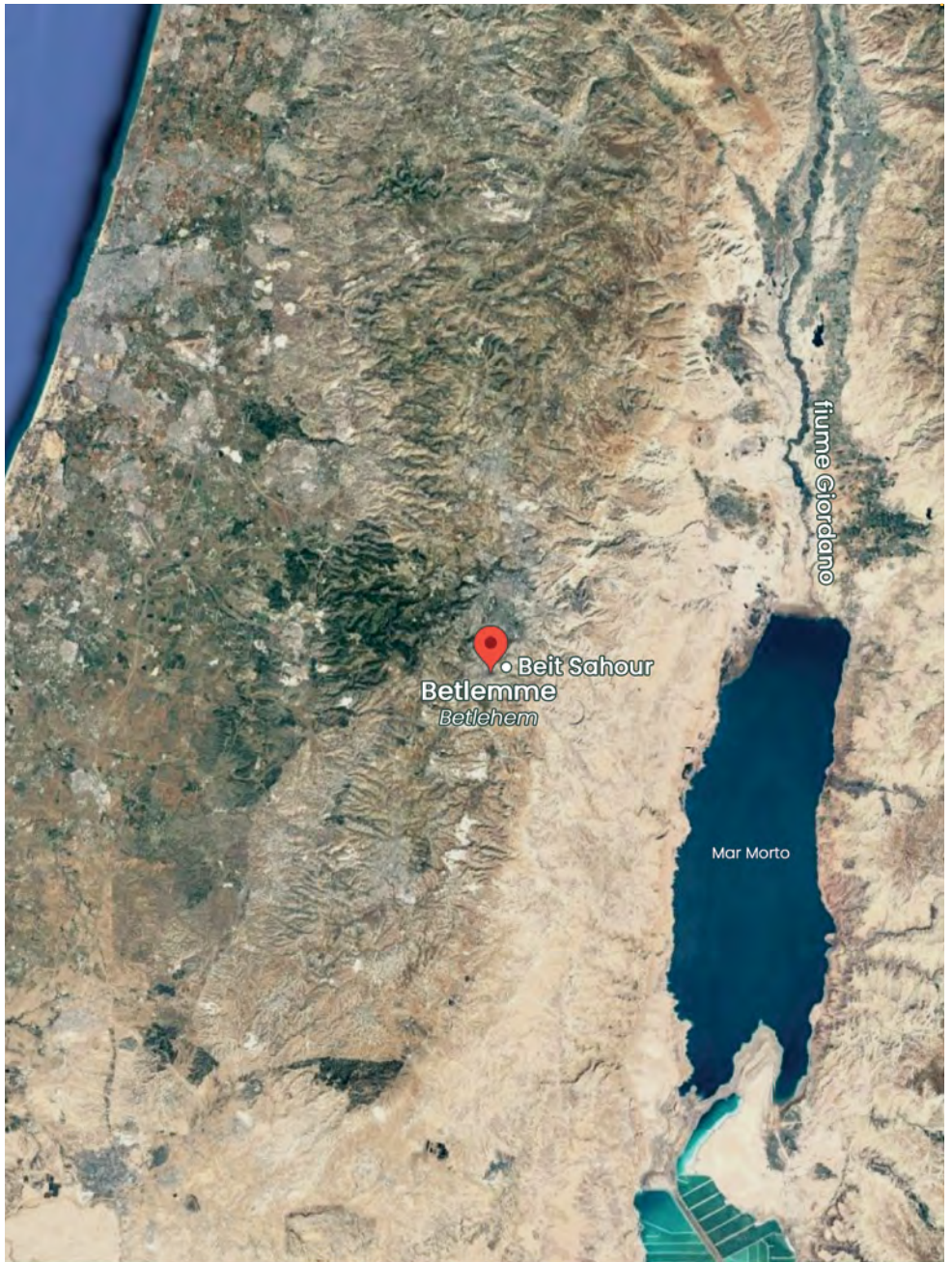
Vincenzo Bellomo  
*Project manager Ass. Pro Terra Sancta, Bethlehem*  
*Honorary citizen of Bethlehem*

# Friends' Houses



Italy, Emilia-Romagna Region

Google Earth, 2023



40 km

**Bethlehem and other places of the story**  
Google Earth, 2023

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**I**n that advent season, Lea had thought about making a small comet star together with Dad. There had for a long time been a piece of light wood in the house, left over from who knows what work, which she had put aside. She had traced an entirely new figure on it: a comet with a small trailing tail, like that of brides. Here, her comet must have been like her, different from all the others: anyone seeing it would have immediately noticed that trailing tail, the fruit of a fertile imagination that an inhabitant of Bethlehem could never lack...

It was the same fantasy of the shepherds who had seen a sign in the sky, an angel announcing an event: *Today in Bethlehem a child is born to you!* And they had set off immediately towards a clearly indicated destination: *find a feeder!* Lea felt part of that shepherd population, she was one ready to set out, gather everything and go. Who knows what that petite, black-haired, quick-eyed girl was destined for, constantly searching for something beyond the marked boundary. Thus





is the gaze of the pastor: he must always look for greener fields, even going far from the usual places...

So it had been for them when they had had to leave their home in Jerusalem and go to Beit Sahour to re-establish their poor family reality: wasn't that the very place where, according to tradition, an angel had announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds?

Literally thrown out of their little house, they barely had time to gather a few poor things, a few relics of their roots. Lea put a rag doll inside her rucksack and its cot, a Christmas present, which she would keep forever: a tiny little sign of the great big love her parents had for her!

After Lea had outlined her star, Dad had cut it with a hacksaw and chamfered it here and there with sandpaper to remove the small splinters of wood, being careful to respect the last part of the tail that made it unique... They would give it the yellow-gold colour with glitter that would make it glittery. They would then place it above the grotto, a few days before Christmas, and it would forever be '*Lea's comet!*'

Everyone in the family had their own figurine bought or inherited from their grandfather and placed in the crib at home. They were made of plaster and therefore delicate, requiring special care both in their placement and then in the final deposition, when the crib was removed. Underneath the base, where the white plaster could be scratched away, the initial of the name was engraved with an insistent pencil, so that everyone would know the affiliation, which was reconfirmed every year since only the owner could choose a place in the crib and then vary it from day to day. It was a dynamic way of making the nativity scene taught by her grandfather who

considered it the closest to the living nativity...

So, her brother had the bagpiper, her sister the shepherdess with a jug on her head, her parents a double statuette: a mother carrying a child to the grotto. The latter was a precious figurine and cost more than the others; it was called 'the tradition', because you get to the crib of Jesus if there is someone there to accompany you by the hand. Lea would be the comet leading the Magi to the grotto... Those were also to be sought as the crib lacked them. All three appeared at some point at the same time: someone had bought and placed them but had not wanted to reveal their identity. Thus the Magi assumed almost a magical aura. They were nobody's and therefore everybody's figurines, held in high regard because of their mysterious provenance. In the family, some things happen without being said, they happen because being family means participating in a common enterprise in which each person does his part, counting on someone else, even up there, to do his. The family is one of the human places where 2 plus 2 is much more than 4... They experienced this on a daily basis in the eating that was always just enough, even if it sometimes seemed like it should be lacking. They had really learnt to '*take food*': that it was enough, but no more than necessary, and that there was a '*little left over*' for someone who might come along. Because in such a family there could always be the unexpected guest added to their table....

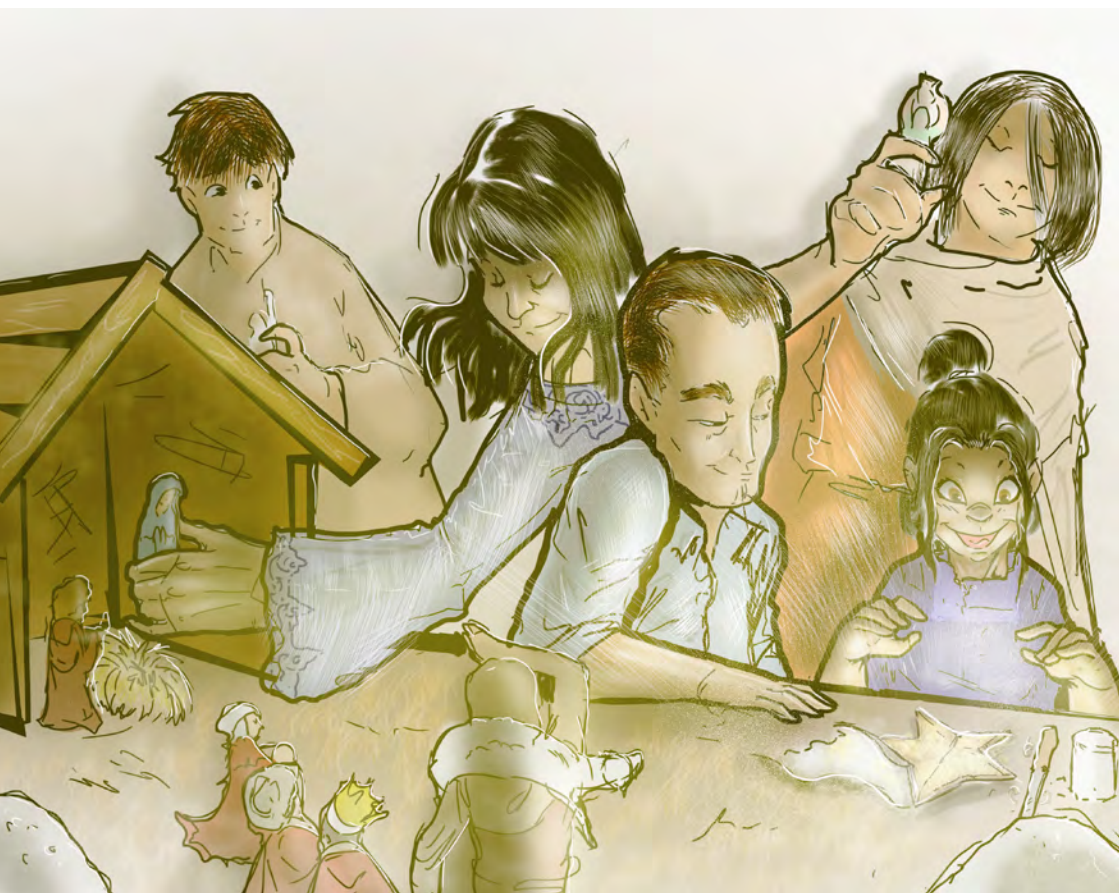
The wise men, who appeared secretly, just after Christmas, as scripted at the right distance from the grotto, would arrive step by step to deliver their gift on 6 January. They summed up the spirit of the family: each person in time would bring

something, what they held most dear, then Providence would do its part. Every time!

Bethlehem knew that special throb on 25 December when the eyes of the whole world were on the square of the Basilica of the Nativity. There the Christmas tree was erected and had to be the largest and most important in the city. Even in their new home, on an old tree, they had attached baubles and lights so that the whole neighborhood could enjoy it even though it was a very sad month for the children of Beit Sahour. It was the time of the intifada and one had to stay home.

The little ones were the ones who were most caressed by the Christmas atmosphere, but then they grew up and realised that the world of Bethlehem was a difficult world in which the things that could happen would leave a permanent mark. Lea still remembered, with a thump in her heart, when she had heard banging at the front door. They were blows given insistently, perhaps with the butt of rifles, for there were also metallic sounds and it was an imperious signal, without any creed. The children retreated from the doorway and the father had the courage to go and say that they were frightening the children and that they should leave it alone, be quieter, that there was no need to enter a civilised house like that! A young soldier, who could have been his son, feeling provoked by her father's calm but frightened tone, raised his arm high and slapped her father's cheek! Lea, who had been watching hidden behind a kitchen cupboard, disobeying her father who had hastily sent them all to their room, felt like she had received that slap, right on the cheek, in the same way as her father. If her father, her hero, could be hit by a

passing soldier, a small, beardless young man who had taken up service in those days, there was no salvation left, the world was over! The world of dreams and games was over, paternal authority had been violated and thus the world was left without a rule! As she tried to sleep at night, reviewing her certainties, starting with the house, her parents, her little games, she told herself that all that turmoil would pass and that they would return to a normal life. But which? But when?



## The small blue cross

**T**hen the story of Jesus went on, the crib was laid and we had to move on to new episodes, and already Lea was imagining what she could have done to defend Jesus from Herod... she who didn't even know where Egypt was? If it was necessary, she could have embarked too... *ah wasn't it necessary to embark? Then the ship could have been that camel that she had already seen in the crib, and the donkey was also a desert ship, and she could have walked alongside it, because on top of it were to be them, Jesus and his mother Mary. But how had St Joseph managed to walk all that way, accompanying Jesus to salvation?* Because the baby Jesus was to be saved and she also wanted to accompany him. So the story of salvation mixed with her daily chronicle of a poor girl born in a wonderful and difficult land, too difficult! At that moment, all around her house, the military held the situation in checkmate. You couldn't go out of the houses and even if you barely put your nose on the balcony, you were reprimanded with the megaphone that ordered you to retreat inside immediately... Lea also realised that she lived in a difficult land by listening a little to the talk of the grown-ups, especially her grandfather who had been beaten up by militia men and had lost the right to the house he had been born in and would never see again.

*“Remember, my grandchildren, when you pass through the Talpiot quarter at number 33 (the Lord's years!). That is your grandfather's old house!”*

Christmas would come to an end, the star with the bride's tail would be put away carefully so that its glitter wouldn't come off, and everything would start up again and people were forced to hide like the children were forced to hide by Herod's infanticidal edict. Even to go to school they had to hide, because after months of curfew they couldn't stay at home any longer and they organised themselves to go to a teacher who put half a dozen children together. By this time, the time of the morning patrol was known and had to be anticipated: Uncle Aaron stood at the highest window of the house and gave the go-ahead and she, long since ready at the door, came out quickly with her schoolbag with the little doll inside... she always had to carry it! She would hurry between a street and a porch, arrive at the teacher's door, already open, and slip inside in a rush. And what joy it was to find one's companions and be able to embrace them again! It was a dangerous and clandestine way of doing school, but with her parents it was decided that it was right, because school is important in every moment of life...

Christmas was soon over and people were beginning to believe that they had ended up in the most unfortunate place in the world. A grey concrete wall prevented access to the places of Jesus' life and especially to Jerusalem where the life of the Son of God had been fulfilled. How much little Lea missed the Easter and how much she missed the sparkling of the sea!

Once she had this thought clear in her mind: *she had been given the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that alone should have made her ever grateful, but she had been deprived of passion death and resurrection, so much of her Lord's life! Who knows if it would have been possible for her to complete the sacred story:*

*to finally arrive free at that hole in the cross that her grandfather had told her about, to put her hand in and feel that she was part of that sacrifice... And then the holy sepulchre: how Lea missed the resurrection! That night she laid awake thinking about her misfortune as a girl who couldn't 'have the paschal places'. For some kind of strange childish realism Lea couldn't fix her eyes on the Risen One. It was as if after the birth and a few other episodes of Christ's life she couldn't really visually complete it all and suffered from this 'vision gap'. She had even thought of making herself a cross out of found wood, asking her father, who loved those handicrafts, to help her. It wasn't to be one of those already made and anonymous objects that were sold around, it was to be 'Lea's cross for Jesus'!*

This initiative of hers had helped her for a while to stop thinking about that wall that surrounded her Bethlehem all around. She had found a sky-blue coloured wood in the street inside a large bucket of dried paint. It was the wood that had been used to mix the paint and had been thrown away now dry, next to a bin. Lea carefully peeled it off and wrapped it in paper as if it had been a relic. She liked to collect things thrown away because she could see a second chance.

Seeing her arrive home with that stuff in her hand, her mother was immediately on her.

*"What did you bring home for us this time, rubbish lady?"*

*"You know mum, I liked the colour sky blue and I thought it was the right colour to make me..."*

*"There she's! All it takes is a stick found in the street and her*



*imagination goes wild: come on, let's hear it, what can a wood soiled with paint serve for?"*

*"Mom, it's not dirty, it's coloured sky-blue!"*

*"That's my Lea, she always sees other things like that time of the comet with the bridal tail. Come on tell me what you see here Miss Visionary..."*

*"No, it will be a surprise for everyone except for daddy who has to help me,"* concluded Lea, who had a frown, from which it was better to stay away. So that time she preferred to play mysterious as if to punish her mum who had lacked confidence in her. Mum smiled slyly, thinking that if it wasn't a secret from Dad, it soon wouldn't be a secret from her either....

This time the work was very simple: the sky-blue wood became the transverse pole of the cross, and it was hollowed out a little in the middle to fit it into the other piece, the vertical pole, which was mottled with white as if it had been used to mix two different and overlapping paints. Lea liked that white dripping as if it were a source of spring water running through the cross from top to bottom. Underneath, she placed a piece of blood-red wood that stood at the foot of an olive wood left rough on which she placed a red pearl that she had always had among her *relics from the past*. It looked almost like a heart, like Matisse's Icarus that she had loved ever since her art teacher had introduced it to her at school.

## A sea of freedom

**T**here, that was her Christ, she wanted Him in front of her while she did her homework, close to an aerial view of her land finally united, without obstacles. She even thought she should start writing her prayer letters to Him, because He would certainly answer them. Adolescence was a special time in Lea's life, the demand for freedom had become pressing, and any obstacle to its attainment seemed intolerable. She harboured a desire to travel, to go free in the wind, to fly above obstacles like a kite, as in Chagall's painting in which Bella, in a purple dress, soars through the sky above houses and churches, held by the hand of her man.

The desire to grow, to be, to go now overwhelmed her with all its force and clashed against the compressed experience in her country. She was tired of being guarded, escorted, watched on sight... One of her cousins had been picked up by soldiers in front of the school and taken away, missing for months on end, at the age of 17! It had become a punishment for Lea to have been born there, to have to continue living there: fear was her companion day and night. At that time she also had a dream: *'She stood with a small flock on the height of a hill in view of Jerusalem, the main gate of which appeared behind a high wall. She had to watch over the flock, which at a certain point began to jump over the wall as if the sheep had become kangaroos and literally wanted to flee to the other side. And she couldn't help herself: she took a running start and when she reached the wall she barely jumped, bending over Fosbury-style to land on her back on the soft wool carpet of her sheep. The wall was over in no time and she found herself inside a flock that*

*was even bigger than her own, a huge flock that took up all the space and no one could stop it. The soldiers, who had also drawn their rifles, were literally overwhelmed and understood that they couldn't stop that flood wave of sheep bleating freely, joyfully, towards Jerusalem. She within the flock, sheep among sheep, literally allowed herself to be carried, gradually conquering a territory that was absolutely forbidden. And in the flock, she saw all her relatives and friends: her grandfather was prancing happily before her, and her father had picked her up and led her as if he were carrying her to the altar with a sure hand, and she was now dressed as a bride and was almost floating on air just like in Chagall's painting. The soldiers were no longer holding their rifles, but had their sabres raised in the air to bridge her and Dad as they passed underneath, and there was also the little slap soldier smiling and winking at her.*

She woke up serene as if she had dreamt of a reality that would happen sooner or later. Over the next few days she was almost afraid to forget that vivid and liberating dream and wondered about its meaning, concluding that something new was certainly going to happen in her life.

## The letters in the Jordan...

**S**he had one thing to ask that hurt like a splinter stuck in her. Why had she been born in that blissful wrong place, why could she not be free like all the other men and women of the world to visit people, to see the cherished places of her history, to find her roots? And the sea, where it meets the land - it's called the foreshore and it's the place where children play - why had she always been forbidden to go? This is what she wanted to write to Him at all costs and He would take care of the answer. He was God, He would take care of answering a petulant girl who wanted to become a woman, have a husband, a nice family and tell everyone the story of salvation.

So she took her pen and paper: that first time she chose a beautiful gift paper with the final curl on the top and bottom edges, like an ancient parchment that Jesus would have loved, and she immediately started writing with the black pen as when she was doing her homework in class:

*“Dear Jesus, I’m Lea a young girl from Bethlehem. Actually, I was not born here, but then the difficult events of my homeland brought me to your homeland. Now it’s not that I don’t accept it, but I wonder how one can live in a city surrounded by a wall? You know, sometimes I feel like I can’t breathe, and I suffer for how my grandfather and father were treated and I’m afraid. Tell me, You who know everything, what can I do in a city like this where I lack the breath of freedom and as I grow, I feel I reject it with all my being. Yet here you were born. Give me an answer. Your Lea. I love you!”*



The years had passed since that first letter, Lea had grown up, she was now a mother, she had found a solid and welcoming man, but she was still the one waiting for the *pasque she had not had*, and she kept writing little letters and depositing them in every holy place that came within her reach. But the answer didn't come or maybe, who knows, it was in the wind and she still couldn't see it. Her letters became more and more tired and even took on a tone of reproach for that Lord who did not answer her.

*“Lord my God, how long has it been since the first letter I wrote to you. At that time, I dreamt of your reply but today I doubt it will come... Excuse me for saying this, but I'm disappointed in this land of yours. I know that you came here, you wanted to incarnate right here among us, but now why don't you answer me? Now I reject this land and leave it to you. Yes, I want to go elsewhere, where a freedom, a resurrection is finally possible... I want Easter Lord, help me! Why don't you send me an angel like that time to Mary? Have you no more that come to this land where you wanted to be born and make me live? Yet my Jesus I want to tell you that my life without you has no meaning ... because without you I'm nothing and I wouldn't know how to live. This umpteenth letter this time will be thrown into the Jordan, Your river. Will the water reach You this time?”*

Lea felt herself with her hands open and outstretched waiting for an answer, waiting for it like the beggar at the corner of the temple, begging for it but not demanding it, waiting for it now even with a little irony. And time passed and the question was thrown everywhere like a small mustard seed, the smallest according to the gospel.

In the meantime, a small group of friends was consolidating

around her, dealing precisely with the little ones of the gospel: Lina and Hiba dealt mainly with children, Souzy and Lama with the elderly; Philip was busy at university, and Eliana and Carol were in that very company that had that land at its center: pro Terra Sancta!

## **The Magi from the West...**

In those years it happened that some magi, coming 'this time from the west', arrived in the holy land and set out to follow Lea's little comet. One was called Michelangelo, born and living in Foggia, who had always scanned the heavens of possibilities and had identified Bethlehem in his ancient map in order to realise a social project; the other Vincenzo came from Magna Graecia, a man of tongues and heart sent to act as a bridge between two different lands and finally settled right there in Bethlehem; the third Enrico came from the northern plains, Chioggia-Ferrara, homelands of fogs and mists, a very clear man capable of connecting paths foreshadowing new skies and new lands, and the fourth, added to the company, already resident there, named Ettore, a connoisseur of the ancient scriptures, of the stones and sands of the desert from Jerusalem to Capernaum.

The four of them bore the gift of an acute gaze on people trained in following the great masters within the most varied experiences and an ability to distinguish the brilliance of a star even when it was a small point of light, that desire that had lit Lea's heart as with the balsa wood comet built so many

years ago with Dad...

The four of them happened to be at the Baby Hospital in Bethlehem, where Lea worked. It was a time of weariness for her who had stopped throwing letters into the Jordan a few years ago and had hardened somewhat. So many people were passing by, many were keeping in touch, many were helping, many were looking at her, but it was still not His gaze... She, who had so often lately been brooding over the idea of going elsewhere and had even declared it: *“we deserve a new land, with no more constraints, no more fences, we want to find the Lord who comes and finally shows us the glorious wounds!”*

What is a look made of? At the end of the day it's just eyes in eyes, how many times does it happen in a life and why does one become special at some point and determine the course of events? Yes, it had already happened to her that time she fell in love with her husband: an intense gaze on destiny when you see not only the presence of the other person in front of you, but also a promise of what is to come, and you see your future as if in a mirror reflection... You realise then that life can all be lived within that gaze, that you can stop running away. It's no longer necessary to flee to see the sea, to look for dawns, to feel oneself hovering in the air.

An unexpected turnaround of plans happens, like when suddenly the fog goes away and you can see!

*‘We who felt like strangers in our own land, take note that we have been chosen to inhabit it...’*

How many times would Lea have wanted to go away: she would have managed to convince her husband because when she put an idea in her head, she was a specialist in pursuing it. She would have chosen a small seaside town that is the



epitome of freedom, with no borders in front of it at last. Yes, she longed for the sea, for freedom, with the tenacious will, with the boldness of a child. She wanted all the sea in the world, the sea in all the senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste and sixth sense... Instead, the gaze of the four Magi, finally arrived at their destination, was decisive, like that of Jesus who does not ask you to go away from you, but to stay with Him: *'Life does not coincide with more or less fortunate circumstances. You may be physically a prisoner but free, and we are living our life to the full, albeit within a situation of restricted freedom, because You're there. I asked You for a sign! And You answered me by other ways, more powerful than the sea, by bringing these magi of yours all the way to us...'* Lea had written in her last letter thrown into the Jordan.

*'Do you also want to leave?'* Jesus had asked his own and now it was as if that question was repeated for her and became imposing: *'If we leave, who will remain here in Bethlehem, behind the wall, to guard your land?'*

*"We here are small, as you were, the smallest seed of God, the smallest gospel seed, the mustard seed, but we asked for water to grow, and water is now given to us. You're the shepherds of that blessed night, walking today on the streets of the world, in the streets of Bethlehem. The Magi of my family nativity scene, whose provenance was never ascertained, followed the comet of my desire, that little balsa wood comet built with Dad, and came here, to me. Now stay! Be for me that Presence I have long asked for, the hole in the cross where I can sink my hand and be within the Event that saves me! For only thus can I abide in this land of trial and never wish to escape from it again."*

Lea now felt as ready for the challenge as Claudel's little

Violaine to whom her father had addressed those memorable words: *'But my little Violaine was wiser. Perhaps that the end of life is to live? Perhaps that the children of God will remain with firm feet on this miserable earth? Not to live but to die, and not to cross but to climb the cross, and to give in joy what we have. Here lies joy, freedom, grace, eternal youth... What is the world worth compared to life? And what is life worth if not to be given? And why torment yourself when it's so simple to obey?'*

There, now Lea was ready to obey, she would no longer ask to leave but to be watered by that water that had begun to gush right there, in front of her and her friends.



*“I have long prayed to understand why we and our children have been put to live in this difficult land.... A land full of contradictions in which living today is just risky... But so is the land of Jesus, not the land you would like but the land that is given to you...the land of trial! That is why Bethlehem is here, it’s the company we keep in the face of an unprecedented event that has surprisingly entered history here and now: God has become man among us and each one of us is Bethlehem, the land where a new Presence germinates”.*

So had Lea written, this time in her diary, which was still the one given to her by her mother and father when she became a teenager. Because of this newly intuited presence, some women and men from Bethlehem will move from home, in a journey of the Magi backwards, to come to the mists of Ferrara, the mists of Chioggia, the blueness of Syracuse, not as tourists but as shepherds in search of the grotto, they who live ten minutes from the grotto...

The answer to your old questions now appears in all its evidence: it’s this travelling band of God’s fools. And you just must find it and recognise it where you’re and the world becomes your home, that is, His home.

This became so clear to Lea that she needed to write one last note, no longer to be thrown into the Jordan but to be kept at home in the daily prayer book.

## **I wish to thank You**

“I wish to thank you for making me inhabit your native land, which was also the land of my rebirth;

I wish to thank you for choosing flesh and bone, persons to manifest you, so it was easier to recognise You and acknowledge Your will upon me;

I wish to thank you because my longing for the infinite sea was quenched within the infinite company of yours, a sea of beauty for which my heart thirsted;

I wish to thank you for the waters of the river Jordan that received my tickets, cradling my desire like a child in the Nile, to the hands of Pharaoh's daughter;

I wish to thank you for the indomitable company of my four friends, for they have accompanied my path through the dark nights when the star disappeared;

I wish to thank you for your good look upon me that finally came to me through the new eyes of your magi and shepherdesses;

I wish to thank you for the slap my father took because it was from there that I began to seek Your tender caress.

I wish to thank you for making me live near that hole in the world where you were born, so I can no longer accept words that do not become flesh.

I wish to thank you for the bread, which always reminds me of yours, and the wine, blood-red in colour, which also reminds me of yours.

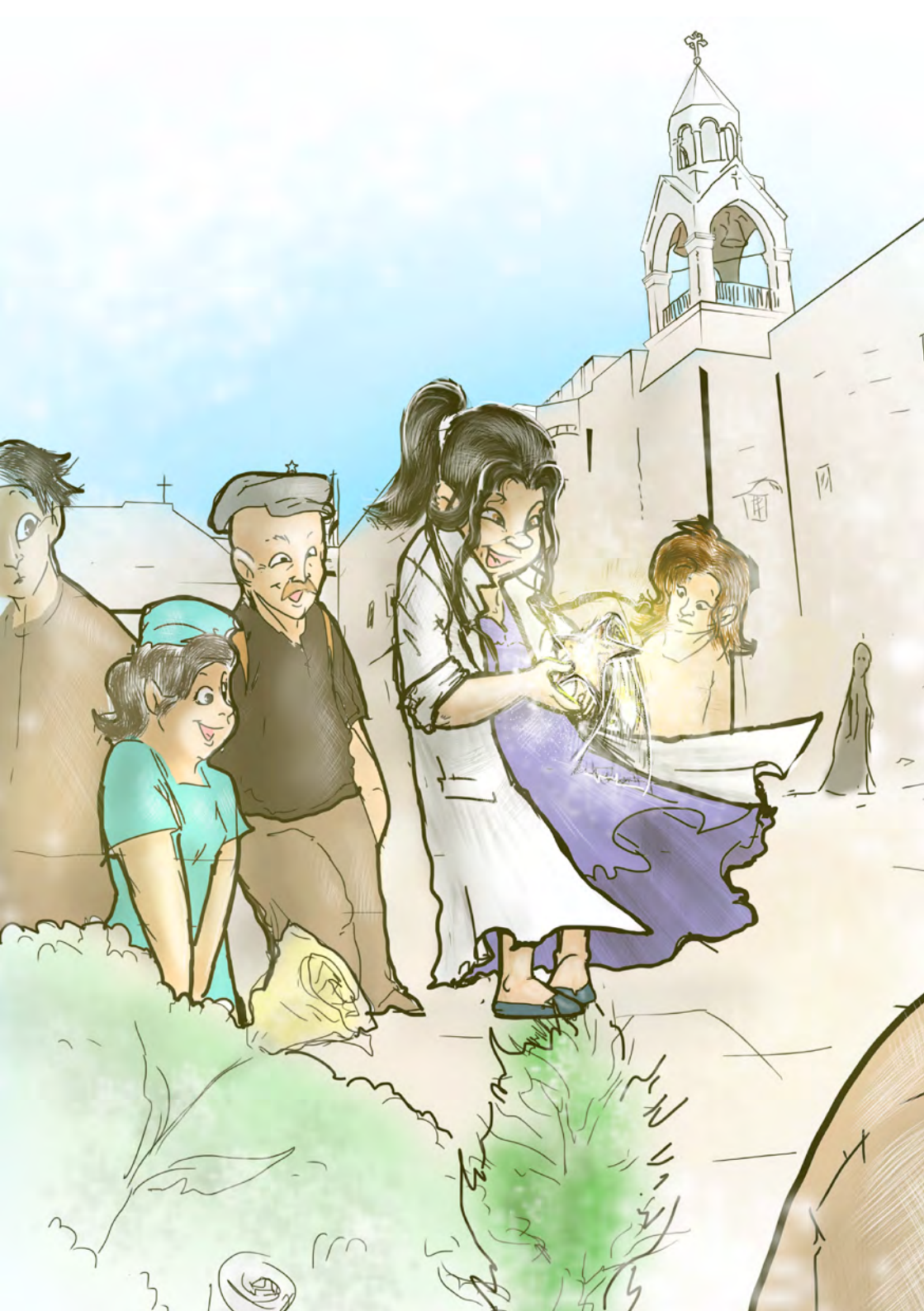
I wish to thank you for the yearning you have cultivated in my heart, so that no place has been sufficient for me any more...

I wish to thank You because Your Presence has revealed itself to me in the only place where I could find it: in the reality of everyday life...

I would like to thank you for Vincenzo and Enrico, Michelangelo and Ettore, for Tiziana and Luigi, for Marco and Federica, Piergiorgio and Luisa, for Jole and Enzo, for Carlo, Silvia, Alessandro, Gino, Peppino, Alice, Maria, Francesca, Chiara, Stefano, Riccardo and Rosetta, Diego, Nicola, Carla, Matteo, Giorgio, Giulia, Ida, Lara, Rita, Elena, Martina, Gabriela, Alessandra, Anna and Giovanni, Riccardo and Giancarlo, Ubaldo and Sandro ...

I wish to thank you because this list, already so long and yet already so incomplete, will gradually expand and the dear faces of the first friends will be joined by others in a line-up that of you *'Most High bears significance...'*

*Your Lea*



# THE STEPS TOWARDS PEACE

## 1 An unpretentious question

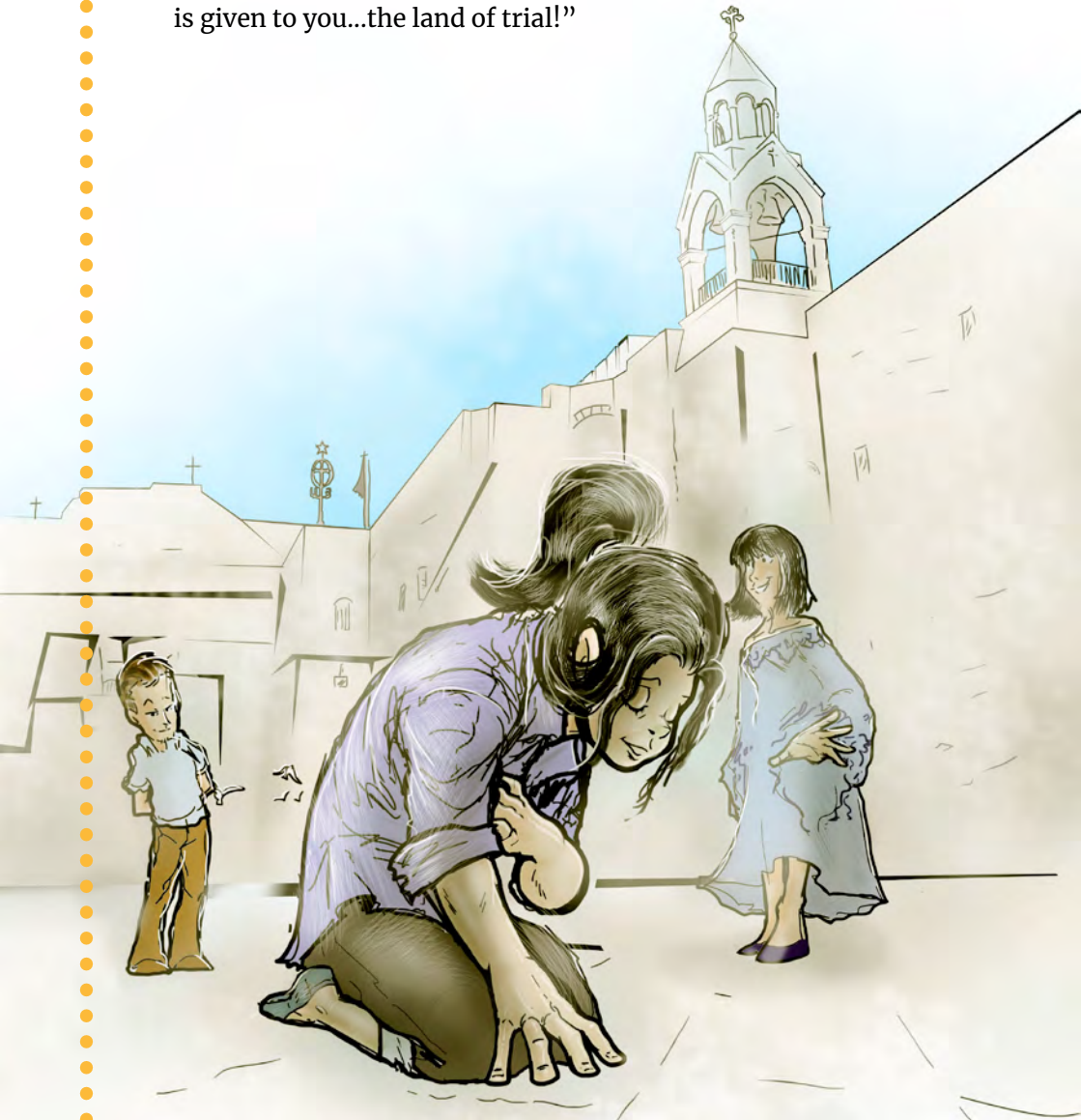
“Lea felt herself with her hands open and outstretched waiting for an answer, waiting for it like the beggar at the corner of the temple, begging for it but not demanding it, waiting for it now even with a little irony. And time passed and the question was thrown everywhere like a small mustard seed, the smallest according to the gospel.”



## 2

# The CHALLENGE of Peace

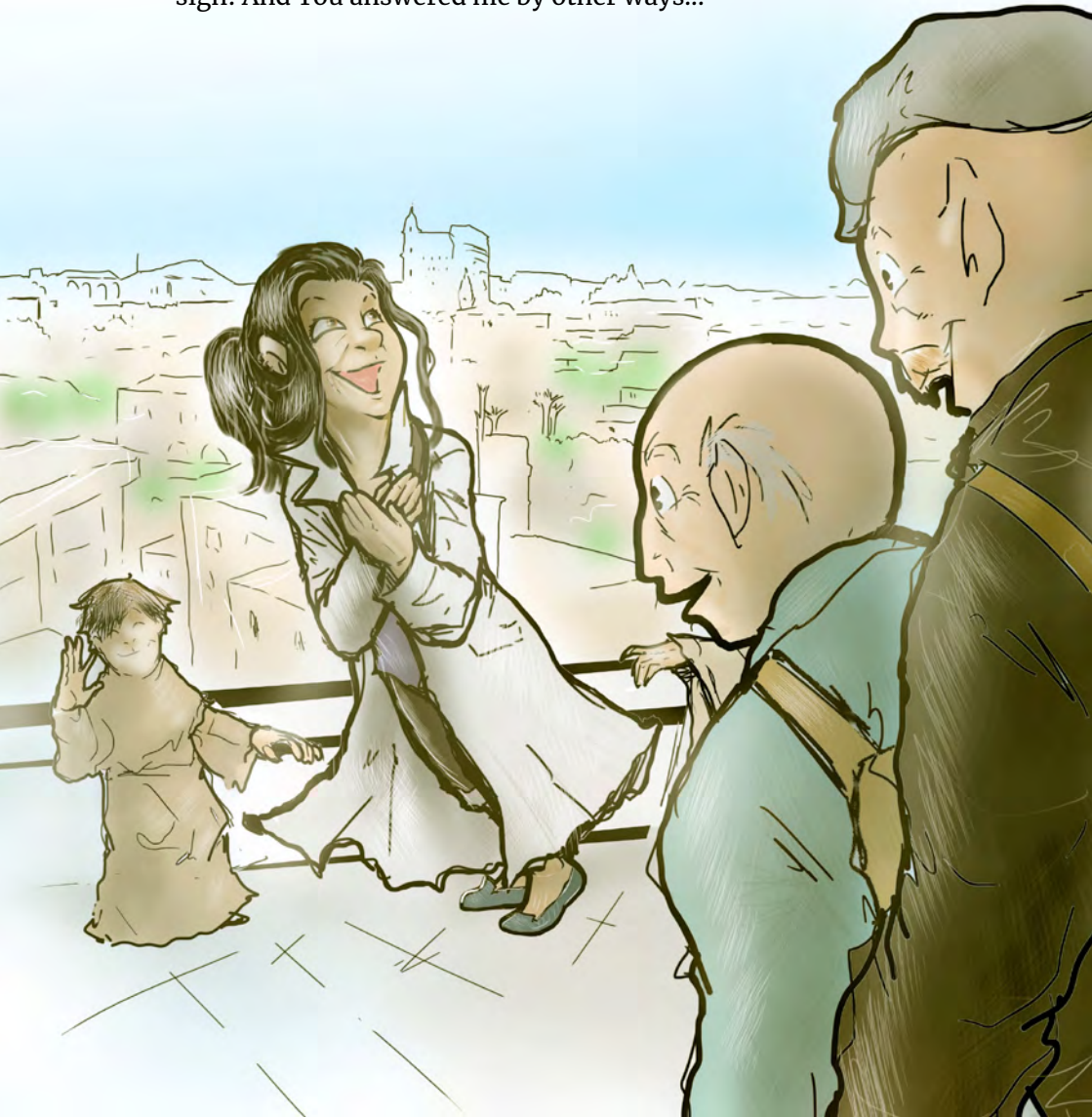
“I have long prayed to understand why we and our children have been put to live in this difficult land.... A land full of contradictions in which living today is just risky... But so is the land of Jesus, not the land you would like but the land that is given to you...the land of trial!”





### 3 Reading the unexpected signs

“Life does not coincide with more or less fortunate circumstances. You may be physically a prisoner but free, and we are living our life to the full, albeit within a situation of restricted freedom, because You’re there. I asked You for a sign! And You answered me by other ways...”



## PierGIORGIO BiGHin

writer

Piergiorgio Bighin was born and lives in Chioggia, the city that represents the narrative world to which he has dedicated many of his books. A teacher, psychologist/psychotherapist, he is now mainly dedicated to *Opera Baldo*, an association that deals with socio-educational inclusion paths.

*'He writes stories on the seashore, full of signs, of barely hinted promises, as if suspended in the air, within the echo of the water, of the wind that blows the shutters, between canals, footsteps in the alleys and silences...'* writes the journalist and writer Marina Corradi about him.

He wrote:

Trucioli di mare (1988) *ed. Il Leggio*;

Piero delle vele: storie di mare e di laguna (2007) *ed. Il Leggio* containing the short story 'The Shipwright' that will appear in anthologies for schools;

Rosso fuoco laguna (2016) *ed. Marietti*;

Bike Rays (2019) *ed. Il Leggio*;

Vent'anni di Baldo: interviste all'opera (2019) *Pazzini editore*;

Le Madonne d'acqua (2021) *Pazzini editore*;

Come legni spiaggiati: storia di un uomo dentro l'Opera che lo ha incontrato (2022) *Pazzini editore*.

## Giovanni CAVICCHI

### CARTOONIST AND ILLUSTRATOR

The images accompanying the story are the work of Giovanni Cavicchi, a young cartoonist from Ferrara who likes to put his talent at the service of educational and cultural activities.

While at primary school, Giovanni was fascinated by the drawings of a friend and decided to set to work, initially self-taught, then studying advertising graphics and finally attending the International School of Comics in Padua.

A skillful character designer, he has produced several illustrations for the *Gruppo del Tasso*, illustrated Silvana Minia's book '*Su e giù per la Storia*', collaborated with several school institutes in Ferrara and is also carrying out personal projects in parallel, from the script to the finished project.

Since 2021, he has been working with *Santa Caterina da Siena ETS* and its associates, giving contours and colours to educational proposals for minors, literary exhibitions and small publications to be donated to those we meet. Giovanni observes reality with a keen eye, speaks little with words but knows how to sing with his drawings.

## Afterword

# LIBRETTI DA VISITA: SO THAT FRIENDSHIP HAS NO END

The series of illustrated short stories 'An Inexhaustible Friendship - The Forces that change history are the same as those that change the Heart of a Man' stems from the living relationships that St Catherine of Siena ETS and its associates have forged and nurtured over the years. In these pages, writers and illustrators have portrayed the testimonies of six communities from complex and/or conflicting contexts to tell what allows them to live positively even where it would not seem possible, and to discover that the forces that change the Heart of a Man are the same ones that also change history...

We like to call these publications 'libretti da visita', images and fictional stories freely drawn from real friendships, stories of friends of friends, friends not to be missed.

But what is the small contribution each of us can make to build Peace? We have discovered that preserving relationships and relations is a real business: friendships met 'by chance' but which determine our history, friendships that do not leave us alone, friendships that force us to come to terms with our human stature, in a work that becomes an adventure and a responsibility to commit to ourselves every day, because the one who tells us 'Be with me' is the Only One capable of this inexhaustible fidelity.

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<sup>1</sup> In Italian, intended as booklets used in a way that a meeting becomes an opportunity, an opportunity to see each other again and forge a long-lasting relationship.



# UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

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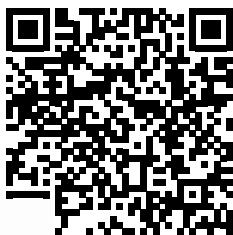
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A comet with a bride's tail  
*Story of an inexhaustible friendship between Emilia-Romagna and Bethlehem*  
texts by Piergiorgio Bighin  
illustrations by Giovanni Cavicchi  
translation by Leila Zorkot and Beatrice Menegatti

*original title:*  
Una cometa con la coda da sposa  
*Storia di un'amicizia inesauribile tra Emilia-Romagna e Betlemme*



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