

The Lesson

Rabbi This is how it was.

We lived in Spain for hundreds of years.

We Judaized.

We made money for the Moslems, we made money for the Catholics, we made money for ourselves.

We were no happier or unhappier than anyone else, but at least we could live and follow the faith.

This is how it was.

It began in Castile.

They turned the synagogues into churches or burnt them to the ground, sold us as slaves, killed us, or converted us by force.

We called the converted *anusim*

Chorus Forced ones

Rabbi or *meshummadim*

Chorus Converted ones

Rabbi To the Christians we were *marranos*.

Chorus Swine.

Rabbi This is how it was.

Maybe some were sincere. I do not know. But the faith is a candle not easily doused; many of us kept it hidden under our Christian cloaks. It burnt our skin; we learnt to dissemble, to be other than we were. We were suspected of insincerity and the suspicions were correct.

This is how it was.

And then the Inquisition.

A Jew is just an infidel; but for a Christian to Judaize, that is heresy, and must be punished.

Understand the choice. Profess Judaism and be persecuted. Convert and be mistrusted. See how strong the flame.

In 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from their lands.

This is how it was.

We went to Portugal. Then Manuel wished to marry another Isabella, daughter of the other, and so he forced his Jews to convert. But there was no Inquisition, and so we Judaized in secret. There was little trouble. Until after fifty years, a free and unimpeded Inquisition began in Portugal, bearing down on us with even more ferocity than it had in Spain.

This is how it was.

And so began our flight from the sun-cursed Sepharad to the outer reaches of the Spanish Empire. Still not permitted to Judaize openly or in secret but with the faith still burning under our cloaks, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles the Fifth, permitted immigration to the Low Countries. By 1600, there were Jews in Amsterdam.

Maria Nunes I, Maria Nunes, am on a ship bound for Amsterdam. We are captured by the English. The commander of the fleet proposes to me, the salty old dog, Queen Elizabeth promenades me about the streets of London like a parrot in a golden cage, there are generous promises and amorous entreaties, I am desired, I smell of the sun and the sea, of sorrow and danger, I am exotic yet outwardly Christian. I refuse them all, these pale and watery Englishmen, and continue on my way.

My sister, my mother, and two brothers follow me from Portugal. I marry my cousin, Manuel Lopes, and become once more a Jew.

This is how it was.

Chorus The desire which springs from joy is stronger than that which springs from sorrow.

The chorus and Rabbi sings Shabbat prayers.

Enter two Calvinist neighbours.

Calvinist 1 What is this? Can you hear this strange language?

Calvinist 2 Latin, latin, it must be latin.

Calvinist 1 A mass!

Together A mass!

Calvinist 1 Here in godly Amsterdam.

Together It must be stopped!

The Calvinists burst in on the congregation.

Calvinists Stop Papists!

Rabbi We are no Papists.

Calvinist 1 You must be Papists. You worship in Latin.

Rabbi This is no Latin.

Jacob No, sirs, this is no Latin.

Calvinist 2 Who are you, sir?

Jacob I am Jaimes Lopes da Costa, known as Jacob Tirado. We are Jews, we hate the Catholics as much as you.

Rabbi We worship in Hebrew, not Latin.

Calvinist 1 Not Latin?

Jacob No.

Calvinist 2 Forgive us, we thought you were Catholics.

Exit Calvinists sheepishly doffing their hats. The Shabbat prayers continue.

Rabbi To hold the candle in the open is a beautiful thing. But still we must be careful we are not thought to be trying to convert.

Jacob Amsterdam is generous. We will not throw it in their faces.

Congregation This is how it is.

The congregation has dissipated, to reveal schoolboys at desks.

Rabbi I, Rabbi ... Mortera, after so many voyages, find my final joy in a simple schoolroom under the iron skies of Amsterdam.

The freedom to cherish my history.

How the candle burns with the light of God.