



Where the Wind Blew: A Boyhood Lost in Tangier

Michel Emile Bensadon

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This memoir of coming of age in Morocco in the 1950s is also the memoir of a lost nation. The author's childhood coincides with the end of the idyllic Sephardic culture that had flourished in Tangier for centuries. This is the story of two paradises lost: the dreamy childhood which ends when Michel's parents' marriage breaks apart; the end of Morocco's colonial rule which had allowed the Jews to live peacefully alongside the Arabs. The "wind" in the title is Simoun, an infamous blast that blew in from the Sahara and terrified the author as a child. The wind is also the symbol for the wild forces at work in that part of the world and the havoc they wreaked upon the author's family, and the Jews who left soon after. Michel was the privileged child of a "mixed" marriage. His Sephardic father, the son of a well-established Tangier dynasty, married his Ashkenazi mother, a young Viennese fleeing the Nazis. Lily arrived in Morocco as a "refugiada," (a refugee) in the guise of an exotic dancer. The inter-Jewish culture clash was acute. This cultural incompatibility between Michel's parents was soon to erupt: Lily left, and abandoned her husband and children. The story explores the chaos that followed, and the struggles the author's father endured to survive in a declining Moroccan city which grew unfriendly to the Jews. This is also the story of a father and a son and the reversal of authority which overtakes them: a cataclysm is inevitable. The author has recreated the rich tapestry that was his Sephardic culture; a world redolent of spices, populated by exotic extended families and lavish celebrations. The book spans the crucial years 1949-1960, and provides a time capsule of that vanished Eden. Morocco remains an enigma. Its once blossoming Jewish community has shrunk from 15,000 at the time of the story to about 200 currently. This is the definitive portrait of the lost Sephardic paradise.

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