

From: SAGReiss

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Subject: Deux Synagogues

Even the synagogue in the Prado was friendlier than the one in the Vieux Port. We had first gone to the big synagogue of Marseille in the rue Breteuil. Who would hire a sixteen-year-old kid as a security guard? OK, he was kind of tall and husky by French standards, but had Tony from Lou's Place breathed on him, he would have disintegrated. No one under thirty should be protecting anyone important's life. One has to learn the value of his own life before one can be trusted to save someone else's. Young soldiers are good for cannon fodder. Anyway this boy too young to shave pissed off Marie (<http://www.sagreiss.org/vivaldi.htm#marie>) right away, asking questions without proper deference. I tried to be diplomatic. We managed to get by him and into the building, leaving behind cigarettes, lighters and corkscrew, where I found an older guy to talk to and explain our problem. Marie's elder son was afraid to go into the men's section of the synagogue without his mother, so I asked if we could all go together. The man had no problem with this. He just asked us to leave before the rush-hour prayers began. We were walking around admiring the stained glass and alter, when the midget body guard began arrived and began gesturing to the old guy. He called out in a stage whisper: "Le monsieur is crazy." The old guy suddenly changed his mind and asked us to leave because of the offending womanhood. We walked around a little more, and left. On our way out the kid asked me some more stupid questions about my place of residence, and this time I got angry: "Jews have a right to live in Israel, in case you weren't aware of this fact." We shuffled out before the fight started. Everything was different in the Prado synagogue in the rue du Rouet. It was seven o'clock on a Saturday morning and I was wearing my black knitted kippa from the Tikva souk, so I was feeling very powerful. The welcoming committee consisted entirely of a paraplegiac octogenarian. He told me to go find a prayer shawl. We talked for a while, and I told him I would be back for the service. I arrived fashionably late, and another old-timer greeted me: "D'ou tu viens?" "Tel Aviv." "You are happier than we." I tried to look like I knew what I was doing with the white garment draped all over me. There were some very well-dressed gentlemen in this place. The rabbi, or perhaps he was the cantor, was a dark-skinned Sephardi, definitely the kind of man who would be hassled getting on a plane in America. But he sang and danced and shook and swayed and prayed with the spirit of God. It was obviously improvised, but it had the look of choreography. He raised or lowered his prayer shawl, turned left or right, removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes, stepped back from the alter and twisted his body, sweating profusely with the considerable effort. There were no mics here, and this was not an acoustic hall, but his delicate tenor soared and roared and trembled and trilled. It was such a moving service that I wanted to get married there in Murder's tux. Au Kilt I met a Jew called Sacha who suggested a reformed rabbi, a polyglot Belgian: "Is your fiancee Jewish? It doesn't matter, Jew, Catholic, Moslem, Dyke, he doesn't ask too many questions."

RECTVM VINVM

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