

The Real Disease

As I think back, I think of why. They firstly blamed rats. They blamed the Gods. They blamed the stars. *Et maintenant*, they blame us. *Moi!* For something that I cannot control, that I did not even play a part. For this great pestilence. Yet the wave of persecution approaches, gathering speed. Left, right and centre. I can feel it. Eyes on me, dirty eyes. Piercing eyes.

The Black Death came several months ago. It took over the beautiful city of Paris. It destroyed us. *La belle Seine*, contaminated, dirty. *Notre incroyable ville*, a wreck. All because of this disgusting pestilence. *Et c'est clair!* Us, Jewish people did not cause this. I do not know how it was caused, I am not a doctor nor a physician. I am not an astrologer. But I do know that it was not us. Yet again, we are blamed. Was it not enough to bunt us to the edge of society. We have been shoved into ghettos. Scared to leave our safe place; *Le Marais*. Why us? We believe in the same God, in the same principles. We are a part of the same society, obtaining the same goal. Yet we, the minority are persecuted.

Although we have not been affected as badly by the pestilence, we are still the paramount victims of this great plague. We were relatively safe, being secluded in *Le Marais*. Hidden in our houses, away from the number of deaths sweeping the city, so we were not greatly effected by the disease itself. However, posters and banners have been stuck to the cream brick and brown timber walls around the city. Saying that we poisoned wells and created this great disease. Children were pulled away from us. We started to be avoided. Well, avoided more than usual, anyway. *Peut-être*, the people needed to use us to make themselves feel better. I do not know.

As I think back, I think of my life. I was born to Jewish parents; *Maman et Papa*. I went to a Jewish school, I had fun. My life was fine. *Pas magnifique*, but fine. *J'adore mes parents*. But they passed when I was four. I was looked after by my aunt; *ma tante*. She looked after me from there. I never really did understand the seclusion of the Jewish people when I was young. It was not until I was twelve that I properly understood that I was different. I was not like my friends, Pierre and Jacques; they were Christian. They were normal. I was *bizarre*.

I started to notice people staring, doors closing in my face. People watching me closely when I entered shops. I was too innocent when I was younger to realise these things. Too naïve, too ignorant. I did not realise *ma tante* yelling at other parents for not letting me play with their children.

My childhood was enjoyable. I remember walks past *l'Île de la Cité*. Of watching people study at the *L'école de Notre Dame*. But by the age of fifteen, my life turned. I had a realisation, *une prise de conscience*. That life was not going to be easy, life for the Jewish people simply was not. And after that, I left school and opened a shop and became a draper. My shop was successful. *Le Marais* did not have one so I did not have competition. Life became good, *bien*. And although the life of a shopkeeper, *un marchand*, was basic, it was relatively uneventful and no trouble ever really came to my shop, unlike other Jewish merchants of *le Marais*. *Bien sûr*, I had small experiences of discrimination, but so did the rest of the Jewish population of France. That was until the Black Death, *le peste*, arrived. The moment my life changed. Or more, stopped.

People started dying, some suddenly, some over time. Posters and pamphlets started being handed out explaining that it was because of sinners and that God was punishing us. Others explained that it was the rats. Finally, it came around and we were blamed. And here I am.

And as I am standing here in this square, about to be burnt alive, *à ma mort*. I reflect. On why. On why they chose us, the constant scapegoats, the ones to blame, *les boucs émissaires*. And as I see the torch about

to be set down, I close my eyes and think. Of what could have been, had I and my family believed in one man. Had I simply walked into a different building in the morning. Had I not been Jewish. As the real disease, for the Jewish people, is blame.