

January 5, 2021

EDGARDO

**A New Play by
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EDGARDO

NOTE: *This play is my personal and completely subjective take on an actual historical event. The tale of is masterfully told in David Kertzer's 1998 book THE KIDNAPPING OF EDGARDO MORTARA. In 1858 Bologna, Italy, a seven-year-old Jewish boy named Edgardo Mortara was abducted from his home because word had reached the Church that he had been secretly baptized as an infant. Church law forbid a "Christian child" from being raised in a Jewish household, so Edgardo was sent to Rome. There he grew up in the Catholic Church under the direct supervision of the Pope before becoming a Priest, and spent his adult life in an Abbey in Brussels. Edgardo Mortara's kidnapping caused an international outcry which dovetailed with the effort towards unification in Italy; when Rome was "liberated" by Garibaldi, Edgardo could have been reunited with his family, but he fled, choosing to stay in the Church instead. The story raises profound questions about trauma, memory and identity. What did it mean for Edgardo to be Jewish? What does it mean to be Jewish today? Is it a set of beliefs and values? A memory? Common rituals? A shared history? A permanent danger zone? Can you ever really leave it behind? Could Edgardo? What are the psychological consequences of having your childhood identity forcibly taken away? Can one "remember" what has been erased?*

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TIME: 1851- 1940

PLACE: An Abbey in Bouhay, Belgium. The cell of Friar Pio MORTARA, which devolves into a courtroom in Bologna and many other locations in MORTARA's mind including: Edgardo's childhood home, the Vatican, a train station in Rome and so on. In my imagination, this play takes place on an almost bare stage, with a wooden bench, a window, and an upper area for the Chorus. The more Brechtian the staging, the better.

CHARACTERS:

The play can be performed with seven or eight actors, depending on the doubling and how many voices the Chorus might need

- Edgardo MORTARA (Father Pio) as an old man, age 88, and throughout his life

SIX ROBED JUDGES act as a CHORUS and as individual CHARACTERS. Musically, they impersonate EDGARDO'S DESCENDANTS, NEWSMEN, an occasionally, a CATHOLIC CHOIR. They also perform all the other roles along the way, including:

- VALENTINI (the prosecutor, 40's), Voice of the GESTAPO
- RICCARDO (Edgardo's older brother, 20's), YOUNG PRIEST aka BROTHER NICOLAS (20's)
- JUSSI (the defense attorney, 50's), POLICEMAN (p.24), GARIBALDINI #2
- MOMOLO (Edgardo's father, 40's and up), POPE PIUS IX (50's and up), JUDGE #3 (p. 97)
- MARIANNA (Edgardo's mother, 40's to 70's), JUDGE #1
- ANNA MORISI aka NINA (the Mortara servant, 30), GUARD, POLICEMAN, GARIBALDINI #2, JUDGE #2 (p. 68-9, p. 97)
- LEPORI (the grocer), LUCIDI (the Papal policeman), FRIAR FELETTI (the Inquisitor), the RECTOR

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ACT ONE

An Abbey in Bouhay, Belgium. May, 1940, just after the Nazi invasion of Belgium. An old man, Father Pio Mortara, is sitting on a wooden bench in his robes, preparing to pray. Around his neck is wrapped the arms of an old blue sweater. He looks up. Looks around. Anxious.

MORTARA

Listen. *(he listens)* Such silence. *(beat)* Nearly dawn. *(beat)* No sound of a bird. In spring! Where are the creatures of the earth? What have they done with the birds? *(beat)* There used to be bells. And children. Weren't there children outside yesterday? Birdsong? Did I oversleep? Is it tomorrow? Is it time for prayers? *(he looks around)* Brother Nicolas? Anyone? Is anyone out there? What is happening? What has happened to me? *(he crosses to the outside door, and peers through the tiny window. He listens by the door)* Such silence. No more bells. No more birds. No more light. Is nothing left? Is this what the ending will bring? *(he crosses back to his bench, kneels in prayer)* Into your gracious care I commend my soul, Almighty God. *(We hear a loud knocking on the door. Mortara looks up, startled)* What's that knocking? *(calling out anxiously)* Is someone out there? What is happening? *(beat. A Young Priest, Nicolas, enters from a small side door. He looks disturbed)* Brother Nicolas! Good morning!

YOUNG PRIEST

Good morning, Father Pio. Are you alright?

MORTARA

Me? *(confused)* Why do you ask? *(anxious)* Are you? *(we hear another knock at the door)* Listen! Who is that? Who is knocking so early in the morning?

YOUNG PRIEST

Stay calm. Perhaps we should light a candle. *(he does so. Places it on the candelabra)* If we're quiet, they'll go away.

MORTARA

Who is it?

YOUNG PRIEST

Shall we pray?

He kneels. Mortara does the same. The two men pray silently for a moment as the organ chords continue. Then, more knocking.

VOICE OF GESTAPO

(in German) Open the door! We know you're in there.

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MORTARA

(anxiously) What are they saying? This is a Church! A place of sanctuary!

YOUNG PRIEST

They know that.

VOICE OF GESTAPO

Achtung! *(sound of a rifle butt on the door of the Church)*

MORTARA

(angry) Why are German soldiers knocking on our door? What do they want with us?

YOUNG PRIEST

It's theirs now.

MORTARA

Theirs?

YOUNG PRIEST

(quietly) All of it. You know that.

MORTARA

I know nothing! I'm a man of God! *(his anxiety rising)* Did they kill the birds? And the children—where are the children? *(sounds of rifle butts banging on the door)* Stop! Stop knocking! There's nothing for you here! *(to the Young Priest)* Go and talk to them. Send them away. Hurry! Tell them to go somewhere else. You understand? We have nothing for them here! Go!

The Young Priest exits. Another knock at the door. A memory suddenly comes rushing back to him.

MARIANNA

(from offstage) Edgardo!

MORTARA

(calling out) Go away! We told you to go away!

MARIANNA

(from offstage) Someone's knocking!

MORTARA

Don't open it, Mamma! Don't let them in! *(more knocking)* Mamma! No! I beg you!

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Marianna appears as if from nowhere. Mortara's childhood home, Bologna, 1858.

MARIANNA

Edgardino, someone's at the door and your father is still out. Go see who it is.

MORTARA

It's no one, Mamma! It's late! Please don't let them in! *(he sits on the bench and covers his face)*

MARIANNA

(sitting down beside him, gently) Don't be scared.

MORTARA

They have uniforms—and sticks—send them away!

MARIANNA

It must be a mistake. I'll send Nina down to see who it is. *(taking his hand)* It's okay, angel—nothing will happen.

MORTARA

The Germans have come. They're here. Outside our Abbey! Banging on the door to get in!

MARIANNA

Such an imagination you have! God will protect us. *(Marianna begins to chant quietly, rocking back and forth)*

“Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Baruch Shem Kavod Melchuto L'Olam Va'ed.”

MORTARA

What are you saying?

MARIANNA

“Baruch Shem Kavod Melchuto L'Olam Va'ed--” Don't you remember? *(whispering)*
Can you hear them at the door?

MORTARA

Don't let them come in. Send them home! Don't let them take me away! *(He reaches for her. Marianna disappears. The Young Priest re-enters. MORTARA is startled)*
Riccardo? Thank God! Is that you?

YOUNG PRIEST

It's me.

MORTARA

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(confused) Riccardino, go back to bed! There are bad men downstairs—can't you hear? Don't let them in. They've killed the birds!

YOUNG PRIEST

(gently) Sit down, Father Pio—you're overwrought--

MORTARA

What is happening? They've stopped the bells. Why are they knocking at our door, those men with the guns?

YOUNG PRIEST

I've asked them to go away.

MORTARA

The birds?

YOUNG PRIEST

The soldiers.

MORTARA

What did they want?

YOUNG PRIEST

They say Jews and partisans are hiding in the Belgian countryside. They think we may be giving them sanctuary.

MORTARA

We're priests! Why would we hide Jews in the Abbey?

YOUNG PRIEST

I don't know. *(beat. Carefully)* Perhaps because we believe in the sanctity of life.

MORTARA

(shocked) What? *(beat)* What did you say?

YOUNG PRIEST

Is that not true, Father Pio? You taught me that. When I first came here as a little boy.

MORTARA

No—you don't understand—

YOUNG PRIEST

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I was so angry at the world! I hated my parents for abandoning me! I hated everything about myself. And you said, "Every human soul is beloved in the eyes of God."

MORTARA

It was true—I wanted to save you--

YOUNG PRIEST

You *did* save me. You saved my life. You gave me a *new* life.

MORTARA

That was so long ago. It's different now. We must be careful. Say nothing. Go outside. Do you hear? Look in the grain bins. In the closets. Make sure there are no strangers hiding in there. No partisans. No politics.

YOUNG PRIEST

The Resistance is blowing up bridges everywhere to keep the Nazis from getting closer. There's violence on the roads. Villages are being destroyed.

MORTARA

Terrible!

YOUNG PRIEST

Which is yours?

MORTARA

My what?

YOUNG PRIEST

Your village. Where do you come from?

MORTARA

I don't remember.

YOUNG PRIEST

You don't remember your home?

MORTARA

I'm old. My memory is cloudy. In the doorway there, you looked just like Riccardo, my oldest brother... the one who— (*he stops, abruptly*)

YOUNG PRIEST

Who what? (*Silence*) I didn't know you had a brother. You've never spoken of him.

MORTARA

I only just remembered.

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YOUNG PRIEST

You never speak of your family at all. Tell me!

MORTARA

They're gone. All gone. Like birds in migration, flying away. (*agitated*) Tell the Germans to leave us alone! We're pure! A fraternity. All for one and one for all.

YOUNG PRIEST

The soldiers said they would come back tomorrow.

MORTARA

Tomorrow! What will be different tomorrow?

YOUNG PRIEST

This is their country now. That they can do as they like.

MORTARA

That's a lie! The Pope will protect us. Think of the beauty of heaven, Nicolas. Think of the light of God, the music of the angels, the beauty of salvation! It's a miracle, remember?

YOUNG PRIEST

Yes.

MORTARA

Go and prepare Matins. We must keep up our daily routine... and the Virgin will protect us, you know she will. La Madonna Sancta. Soon we will be with her in heaven—with our celestial Mother. We will be together for all eternity! And we will find peace. (*he touches the Young Priest's forehead*) God bless you, Brother Nicolas.

YOUNG PRIEST

And you, Father Pio!

MORTARA

Take the incense. Pray for me.

YOUNG PRIEST

And for our eternal souls. (*The Young Priest makes a slight bow to Mortara, takes up the incense holder and lights it. The scent wafts across the cell. Mortara looks around, his memory momentarily alerted. The Young Priest exits. Mortara wafts his hands through the incense. Sounds of liturgical singing fills the room as he takes in the scent. He turns, as if facing an interrogator*) What are you staring at? There's nothing for you here! (*agitated*) I am Father Pio Mortara. I've been on this earth eighty-eight years. Once I was Italian. I've been leading this Abbey in the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ for forty years. It's a miracle! (*beat. He stares at his reflection in the*

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window) The miracle child! That's what they called me! I was a miracle! Everyone said so! (*his mother reappears*)

MARIANNA

You were! You were always our miracle! That's why they wanted you!

MORTARA

Who?

MARIANNA

The Church! The Inquisition! All of them! They grabbed you from our hands and wouldn't let go!

MORTARA

No! Those are lies, Mamma! All lies!

MARIANNA

I see you in my dreams. Every single night, caro. I see you exactly as you were that night— (*she stops. Catches herself*)

MORTARA

What? What do you see?

MARIANNA

Sometimes I see you as a boy— my funny little curly-headed near-sighted boy—and sometimes... sometimes I imagine you all grown up and I wonder who you've become! (*she reaches to touch his face*)

MORTARA

When will we be together again? Will we find each other after we die? (*more knocking*) Please, Mamma. Please. Tell me we will be together in heaven.

MARIANNA

No, Edgardo. We will never be together again. The trial put an end to all that.

MORTARA

Don't say that!

MARIANNA

(*bursting out*) We fought so hard! Everything we did was for you. Everything in our whole lives, from that moment forward. A nightmare. You know that. Wake up, my love! Why don't you remember the truth?

MORTARA

Which truth? (*there is more knocking. Mortara yells as if to those outside*) Go away! You want Jews? Go find them somewhere else! They're hiding everywhere, the

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rats—you can smell them! They're right under your noses! Look around you! Don't you see?

MARIANNA

What are you saying?

MORTARA

(to his mother) There is no truth! It's lies, always lies! No one came to get me! No one!

MARIANNA

We weren't allowed!

MORTARA

Leave me alone! The only truth I know is the will of God!

MARIANNA

The truth is what happened!

MORTARA

I remember what happened.

MARIANNA

You don't! You weren't there!

MORTARA

You told me. About the trial. You said there was a verdict! Not guilty! That's what the judges said. The Church is not guilty! Not guilty!

MARIANNA

The Church is completely guilty! Who else gets away with robbing a mother of her child? Don't you see? The trial was rigged. We didn't stand a chance.

MORTARA

The judges ruled. *Not guilty!*

MARIANNA

We were sure once everyone heard the facts, we would get you back. But they stole you. They destroyed your mind. Right from under our nose.

The lights crossfade to a courtroom. Six Judges in black robes.

Bologna. 1860. A trial is underway. Radamisto Valentini, the Prosecutor, steps out of the Chorus of Judges and becomes the Prosecutor. Francesco Jussi steps out and becomes the Defense Attorney. They stand facing the Judges.

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VALENTINI

Right under their nose! With absolutely no shame! Six months ago now-- the knock on the door, the terrified family upstairs, the insistence of the police, the violent abduction of the child, all in a single night. While the father was at a bar down the street and the mother was alone with her nine children. It was a crime against humanity!

JUSSI

I object! We have been through all of this already. The feelings of the parents, while regrettable, have no bearing on the justice of the case.

VALENTINI

A child belongs with his parents. That is sacred and irrefutable. Neither the state nor the Church has the right to remove a child against the will of the family.

JUSSI

Unless he's been baptized. Baptism is a practice instituted by Jesus himself. It cannot be reversed. When a child has thus become Catholic, it is forbidden for Jews to have any hand in the raising of that child. That is and has always been Church law, and will be forever after.

MORTARA

That's right! I read it in the newspapers—it was the law!

VALENTINI

Then let me put this question to the court. Is there any real evidence that a genuine baptism took place in the household of the Mortara family in the summer of 1852? No one witnessed it, no one attested to it, aside from a serving girl who claimed to have administered the baptism when she believed the boy was dying.

JUDGE #1

Call your witness.

VALENTINI

I call to the stand Anna Morisi.

ANNA MORISI is a peasant woman who came to Bologna in her early twenties to make a living as a serving girl for Jewish households. It is she who supposedly baptized Edgardo as a baby.

MORTARA

(delighted) Nina? Is that you? Our Nina of the beautiful perfume? I knew I smelled something sweet! I would recognize your powder anywhere! *(Mortara looks around)* Nina! Nina, Mamma says to wake up! Hurry!

ANNA

(from offstage) What is it?

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MORTARA

There are men at the bottom of the stairs!

ANNA

(from offstage) So what if there are—they won't hurt you! Go to sleep, Edgardo—

MORTARA

They're banging on the door! Mama says you must go downstairs and make them leave! Now!

A distraught woman of about 30 years old is led to the witness box.

VALENTINI

Please tell the court your name. *(she stares, terrified)* Loudly. So the court can hear you.

ANNA

My name is Anna Morisi. But everyone calls me Nina.

MORTARA

Carissima Nina! I knew it was you! How I loved your scent—I can close my eyes and breathe it in! *(he does so)*

VALENTINI

And were you, *Nina*, employed by the Mortara household from 1851 to 1857 as a servant and *shabbos goy* for the Mortara family?

JUDGE #1

Objection. The court does not understand the term "shabbos goy".

VALENTINI

(annoyed) Seriously? *(to the Court)* A "Shabbos goy" is a non-Jew who performs certain activities which Jewish law prohibits Jews from doing during the Sabbath.

JUSSI

Pont of clarification. The Church has expressly forbidden Jews from hiring Christian servants. We therefore disavow both the practice and the term.

VALENTINI

Disavow it all you like, my friend, but there isn't a Jewish family in Bologna who does not employ at least one Catholic woman to light the fire and look after things on the Sabbath. Even the *Rothschilds--*

JUDGE #1

(interrupting) Understood. Please continue.

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VALENTINI

(to Anna) So, Nina, how old were you when you began working for the Mortara family?

ANNA

I'm not exactly sure. Maybe... eighteen?

VALENTINI

Where did you grow up?

ANNA

San Giovanni in Persiceto.

VALENTINI

Can you read?

ANNA

Read? *(she is embarrassed)* No. I never learned to read.

MORTARA

But you told us stories, such stories! Every night—all of us crowded onto one big bed, listening! Tell them, Nina!

VALENTINI

Have you ever actually witnessed a baptism? In Church?

ANNA

(flummoxed) In Church...?

VALENTINI

Tell the truth. *(Anna shakes her head. To the court)* Let it be noted that the witness has never actually witnessed a proper baptism, and rarely if ever attends Church services.

ANNA

(bursting out) How could I go to Church? I worked for Jews! They had nine children! I was needed on Sundays!

MORTARA

She was needed on Sundays!

VALENTINI

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Understood. *(beat)* Is it true, Nina, that a few years after beginning work at the Morisi household, you became pregnant?

JUSSI

Objection! Anna Morisi's private life has no bearing on the matter at hand!

JUDGE #1

Overruled. Continue, Councilor.

VALENTINI

I'll repeat the question. Did you become pregnant in your third year of service at the Mortara household?

ANNA

It wasn't my fault! There were so many soldiers staying in the area—

VALENTINI

(to the court) An Austrian brigade was stationed right near the Mortara home. In fact, a number of the soldiers let rooms in the Foschini apartment one floor above the Mortaras. I have credible reports that Signorina Morisi had a disturbing familiarity with most of them. *(Anna starts to cry. Valentini addresses her)* Pull yourself together. Tell the court, when your pregnancy began to show, what did the Mortara family do in response?

MORTARA

What did we do? Why did the papers hate Nina so much? My family loved her!

Marianna and Momolo Mortara step forward.

MARIANNA

We can't just send her away!

MOMOLO

She's a dangerous influence! And her libido is beyond belief.

MARIANNA

She's so good with the children. She loves them. It's not her fault!

MOMOLO

Didn't you hear what Rosina had to say?

MARIANNA

Rosina? That slut who runs the café next to San Domenico?

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MOMOLO

She told everyone who would listen that one morning Nina came out of the Foschini apartment next door with her hands over her face exclaiming, “Oh what a fuck I had! Oh what a fuck, Signora Rosini!”

MARIANNA

(laughing) Maybe it was true! She’s a lusty girl.

MOMOLO

We should have kept a closer watch over her. I think the soldiers climbed in from our terrace. People will know.

MARIANNA

She’s lonely. She has nothing. She knows no one in Bologna. It’s hard to be a woman on your own.

MOMOLO

And now? Now what do we do?

MARIANNA

We can’t send her home—she says her parents will disown her.

MOMOLO

We must find someone new—you’ll never manage on your own!

MARIANNA

The children adore her. Edgardo most of all. He can sniff her perfume a mile off—he comes running as soon as he smells it!!

MORTARA

It’s true! Nina was my best friend. My only friend. We played together—every day—she laughed that huge beautiful laugh while she hung up the clothes and I hid in the laundry basket waiting to be found!

MARIANNA

Let’s send her to a midwife till she delivers—she could give the child up to the Bastardini. That way, she’ll be back with us before we know it.

MOMOLO

Do you trust her, my darling?

MARIANNA

What choice do we have? They don’t let decent girls work for Jews. You know that. *(sighing)* Why did we come to Bologna? It’s an awful place. We don’t even have a synagogue here!

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MOMOLO

Cheer up, carina! I make the best chairs in Bologna! And the good news is, every single person at some point during the day needs to sit down.

MARIANNA

On a Jewish chair? (*Momolo laughs*) Remember how kind Nina was when Edgardo was poorly? Even when she was sick herself? (*Marianna nods*) So it's agreed. We'll pay for her to go to the midwife and deliver the baby. And no one will know.

Crossfade back to court.

ANNA

They paid for me to go to a midwife to deliver the baby. And no one knew.

VALENTINI

Then why did you betray them? Why did you try to baptize their son Edgardo against their will?

ANNA

He was dying! I wanted to send the baby's soul to heaven! Was that wrong?

MORTARA

(in his cell) I was chosen by God! They told me I was chosen by God!

VALENTINI

Pasquale Saragoni, the Mortara family physician, actually testified under oath that Edgardo only had a minor infection when Nina baptized him, and was nowhere near death.

ANNA

(crying) They were reading Hebrew over the bed! My sister Monica – *(explaining)* she worked for the Mortaras before me-- she said that when Jews read like that over the bed, it means someone is about to go!

VALENTINI

And so you took it upon yourself to baptize him? You, who had no religious education? *(Anna begins to weep copiously)* Did you say the prayer at the same time as you sprinkled the water or afterwards?

ANNA

I don't remember!

MORTARA

Don't cry, Nina! *(to Valentini)* Don't make her cry!

VALENTINI

You said yourself in your sworn deposition that you only started saying the prayer when the little boy woke up. And what woke him up? The water in his face! Isn't that

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right? *(Anna nods)* According to the Church, a baptism is only valid if the prayer is recited in conjunction with the immersion in water. *(to the Court)* Thus, what the Signorina did is null and void. Even if she did do what she says she did.

ANNA

(bewildered) Null and void? You mean, I didn't do it?

VALENTINI

Who knows what you did, you lying minx? You yourself were sick in bed at the time of the supposed baptism, were you not, Signorina? When questioned at the time by the police, your grocer testified that you'd complained of fevers and headaches on the very day before it happened. And then you blamed *him*. You said it was his idea to baptize the boy, am I right? *(Anna nods, miserably)*

Lepori the Grocer steps out from the row of Judges.

LEPORI

It's a lie! I never spoke to anyone about baptism! I never even knew that woman's name! *(to Nina)* Baptize him! It's easy!

MORTARA

Lepori! Our neighborhood grocer...

ANNA

How?

LEPORI

You take some water from a well, and sprinkle a few drops on the baby's head while you say "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". Basta!

ANNA

But what if they see me?

LEPORI

You'll be doing is dumping a glass of water on the forehead of a sick child. So what? You'll be saving a soul!

MORTARA

(echoing) Saving a soul!

LEPORI

Dirty Jews. Maybe God will bless you for it!

MORTARA

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God bless you!

ANNA

I'm scared. Why should I stick my neck out?

LEPORI

Don't you want to go to heaven, you slut?

MORTARA

All good children go to heaven!

ANNA

(handing the list) Here's the grocery list. Plus an extra dozen eggs and two pounds of cheese. There are so many visitors at the house.

LEPORI

Even though the baby's sick?

ANNA

(bursting out) It's me who's sick! My head has ached for days and I have a fever! But those Jews won't let me rest—they keep me on my feet from morning till night. So give me the extra groceries and I won't have to come back again tomorrow! I wish I never had to see them again!

LEPORI

You're lucky you have a job, the way you behave.

MORTARA

What a shyster. We hated that grocer. He always made Nina cry.

ANNA

Don't tell me how I behave! What would you know? You're eat well no matter what. I have nothing—not even a dowry. How will I ever get married?

LEPORI

I heard this morning that Father Feletti is giving away dowries—even to shady girls like you-- if you go make confession at San Domenico.

ANNA

What do you mean, shady girls like me?

LEPORI

Bad girls who screw Austrian soldiers. Right in the shadow of the parish church!

ANNA

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That's a lie! *(beat)* Who told you there were dowries?

LEPORI

My friend Don Pini, the local parish priest. You never heard of him? You would've if you'd ever been to Church!

ANNA

Don Pini? He's the one that seduced Regina Bussolari—the upstairs maid!

LEPORI

So what if he did! He's a Jesuit and a devout man. *(smiling)* And he orders a dozen cannoli from me twice a week. *(he takes the grocery list)* I'll go get the cheese. *(he steps away)*

JUSSI

Why did it take you five years to confess to baptizing the child?

ANNA

I was scared! It was only when another of the Mortara babies was sick that I realized what I'd done!

VALENTINI

You mean, you did a *second* baptism, you evil woman?

ANNA

No! I didn't want to make the same mistake twice! So I quit. If I'd told them about Edgardo when it happened, they would've fired me on the spot!

JUSSI

But God would have blessed you!

ANNA

I tried to do it right! The baptism. I drew some water from the well. I stood over the sleeping baby, He was so sweet, with his little round fists. He deserved to live. When no one was looking, I sprinkled some drops on his forehead. Then I said the words the grocer had taught me. *(beat. Wailing)* How did I know he'd grow up to be such a good boy? I thought by the morning he'd be dead!

JUSSI

But instead, he survived! And five years later, when you finally told the truth and word of your miraculous deed reached the Church, the child was taken from his heathen parents and given a new life. It was a miracle!

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MARIANNA

It was a crime! A crime against us, against Judaism, against the state! And everyone knew it, Edgardo—across the world, they *knew!* People marched, and sang songs, there were protests!

MORTARA

Then why did no one come? Why did no one save me?

MARIANNA

You better than anyone know the power of the Pope! Money, armies, prisons—the Church has it all. It's a fortress of evil.

MORTARA

That's what the Pope calls the secular world. A fortress of evil.

MARIANNA

How can the whole world outside the Church be a fortress of evil? We're your family—your *blood--*

MORTARA

It was an act of God. That's what they said. I was granted salvation by Jesus Christ himself! They chose me to be one of their own! They sang to me!

The Judges form a Choir.

THE JUDGES

(singing) Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
Ora, ora pro nobis;
Ora, ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
Nunc et in hora mortis,
In hora mortis nostrae.
In hora, hora mortis nostrae,
Ave Maria!

The end of the song is interrupted by a loud knock on the door. Mortara is startled.

MORTARA

(yelling to the soldiers outside) Tomorrow! You said tomorrow! *(calling out)* Mamma! They've come back! Don't open the door. Why did you ever open the door?

VOICE OF GESTAPO

We know.

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MORTARA

They know nothing. They're only trying to scare you!

VOICE OF GESTAPO

We won't take long.

MORTARA

You should have held on to me. You could have said no!

MARIANNA

(appearing to Mortara) Who is it? Who can be knocking so late in the evening?

MORTARA

My head! So much noise? Why is there so much noise?

MARIANNA

(beat) Nina! Nina! *(Anna Morisi turns towards Marianna)* Go downstairs and tell whoever it is that Signore Mortara is out and we can't be disturbed. *(Anna exits. The knocking continues)*

MORTARA

Where was Papa? And Riccardo? Why weren't they home to save me?

We hear the sound of a baby crying. Marianna exits to get the baby.

VOICE OF GESTAPO

We have all the time in the world. *(Anna rushes back in, calling ahead)*

ANNA

Signora! Signora Mortara! They're coming up! *(Marianna reappears carrying a crying baby girl, Imelda)* They're coming upstairs! I couldn't stop them!

MARIANNA

Who? Who is it?

ANNA

Police!

MORTARA

Police? Why?

VOICE OF GESTAPO

We'll wait as long as it takes. You won't escape.

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MARIANNA

Nina! What have you done this time?!

ANNA

Nothing! It's not about me, I promise you!

MORTARA

I have done nothing. Who do you think I am?

MARIANNA

(terrified) What do they want? Why are they here? *(we hear footsteps on the stairs. A knock on the front door)* Listen! *(she's frozen. Rocks the baby. More knocks. From offstage, a voice)*

POLICE

Police! Let us in!

VOICE OF GESTAPO

Let us in, Father Pio, and no harm will come to you.

MORTARA

Mamma!

MARIANNA

(to Nina) Tell them my husband is away!

ANNA

I told them!

MARIANNA

Tell them again. *(yelling to the Police)* Go away! We are alone here!

MORTARA

I am in charge of this Abbey. We have nothing to hide!

POLICE

(from off) Please, Signora. We mean you no harm! *(beat)* We're waiting.

VOICE of GESTAPO

We're waiting.

MORTARA

I'm telling you, there are no Jews hidden here! Try in the village! In the barns! Under the bridges! You'll find them, dirty animals! This Abbey is without sin! *(we hear the loud barking of several dogs right outside the door)* Take those animals away! Now! Take them away! I am clean! I have been cleansed by God! *(terrified, leaning against*

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the wall) Dogs! Why are there always dogs? They were barking and scratching at the door that night. I remember. Loud and angry. As if they had never been fed.

MARIANNA

(hearing the barking dog, whispering, to Anna) You'll have to open the door. *(Anna crosses to the door and opens it. In steps two uniformed policemen. Marianna is terrified)* The Papal police! *(she backs away)* What are you doing in my home?

PIETRO LUCIDI (Papal Police)

We're sorry to disturb you so late in the day, Signora.

MARIANNA

(shaking) We heard your dogs! What is it? Is it my husband? Has something happened?

LUCIDI

No no. Stay calm. I am Pietro Lucidi, Marshal in the Papal Carabinieri. This is Brigadier Agostini. We're just here for some information.

MARIANNA

Information? At nine o'clock at night? *(the baby cries)* Ssshhh, carina. Nina, take the baby! *(she hands the baby to Nina, who rocks her and exits into the other room)* She's scared of the dogs!

LUCIDI

We'll leave them outside. *(taking a piece of paper from his pocket)* Stay calm, Signora. We seek some clarification about your family. Could you list for us everyone currently residing in this household?

MARIANNA

You mean my children?

LUCIDI

Everyone.

MARIANNA

Everyone? *(rattled)* Let's see. There's my husband Momolo, and me, and our servant Anna Morisi—but everyone calls her Nina. And then there are nine children—

LUCIDI

Nine! You'd think you were Catholic. *(Smiles. Beat)* Tell me their names. *(he looks down at a list he's carrying)*

MARIANNA/MORTARA

(Mortara recites alongside Marianna) Riccardo, Erminia, Ernesta, Augusto, Arnoldo, Aristide, Edgardo, Ercole and the baby, Imelda.

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LUCIDI

May I see them, please?

MARIANNA

My children? Now? They're asleep!

LUCIDI

All of them?

MARIANNA

Yes! It's late! They go to bed at eight, every night. All except the eldest, Riccardo, who is out with his father. Please, signori, come back another time, when my husband is here!

LUCIDI

I'm afraid that won't be possible. I need to see the children. Now.

MARIANNA

Why? Why on earth would you need to see my children? What have they done?

LUCIDI

(firmly) Now.

MARIANNA

(terrified) Yes sir.

LUCIDI

(to the Policeman) Go with her.

MARIANNA

This way. *(she exits with Policeman following her. There is a beat. Lucidi falls to his knees and begins praying. Mortara is praying at the same time. We hear a gentle knocking.)*

YOUNG PRIEST

(from offstage) Father Pio?

MORTARA

Go away! You lied to me. *(The Young Priest enters. Mortara is terrified)* What do you want?

YOUNG PRIEST

It's me! *(beat)* Brother Nicolas.

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MORTARA

Liar! You said they had gone away. You said they'd come back tomorrow. But they are knocking, knocking, always knocking!

The Young Priest looks at him, concerned. Beat. Gently.

YOUNG PRIEST

The Brothers have assembled for the service. Are you leading Matins, or shall I?

MORTARA

I am unwell. My head! It's my head. There is something knocking in my brain.

YOUNG PRIEST

I'll do it then.

MORTARA

Are you spreading lies? What have you been telling them?

YOUNG PRIEST

(bewildered) Me? Nothing! Why would you—

MORTARA

(interrupting) I don't believe you! Where is our mother? What happened to her? You saw it all! Why didn't you stop them? I saw you coming home that night as they took me away!

YOUNG PRIEST

What are you saying? No one is taking you away.

MORTARA

Didn't you hear the dogs? There were dogs barking that night too. And candles burning. And guns rapping on the door.

YOUNG PRIEST

We promised there was nothing for them here.

MORTARA

How do you know? Oh Riccardino, if only you hadn't gone out that night. If you'd stayed home, with Mama, with all of us, you could have saved me.

YOUNG PRIEST

Saved you? From what?

MORTARA

I'm telling you, they never would have dared to come in if there had been a man at the door.

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YOUNG PRIEST

We must stay calm, Father Pio. Your mind is playing tricks on you.

MORTARA

I heard them! I heard the dogs!

YOUNG PRIEST

I've barred all the doors. The brothers will come into Chapel through the hidden door at the back. We will be safe.

MORTARA

Will we? *(beat)* Are you frightened, my son?

YOUNG PRIEST

No. *(beat)* Are you?

MORTARA

My heart is pounding in my mouth. *(beat)* God bless you and keep you, now and forever more. Go and lead the service. *(the Young Priest nods and exits. Mortara looks around the cell)* Do you hear, Mamma? Bar the doors! Quickly! *(the policemen and Marianna return)*

MARIANNA

And now will you go and leave us in peace?

LUCIDI

I'm afraid we can't.

MARIANNA

(frightened) What is it? What's happening to me?

MORTARA

(looking around, anxiously) What's happening to me?

LUCIDI

The truth is, Signora... you and your husband have been the victim of a betrayal.

MORTARA

(confused) A betrayal?

MARIANNA

A betrayal?

LUCIDI

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Your son Edgardo...

MARIANNA

You can't say anything against him! He is the sweetest, the kindest, the most intelligent of them all! He is my blessing from God!

MORTARA

I was her blessing from God!

LUCIDI

Indeed.

MARIANNA

Then what? What do you want with Edgardo?

LUCIDI

According to Church law, it is no longer permitted for you to raise Edgardo in your home.

MARIANNA

What Church law? It has nothing to do with us-- we're Jews!

LUCIDI

Exactly so. *(beat)* We have it on good authority that your son Edgardo has been baptized. And therefore, he must be removed from this household immediately, and taken under the protection of the Church. *(Marianna is stunned. She starts to shake her head violently. Mortara rises)*

MARIANNA

No! No! It's impossible! Edgardo has never left my sight! In all his seven years, he's always been here, by my side! He's never been baptized, never!

MORTARA

That's not true!

LUCIDI

I'm sorry, Signora.

MARIANNA

It's a mistake! It has to be a mistake! Who told you this?

LUCIDI

I'm only acting on my orders.

MARIANNA

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Orders? From who? It's a lie! He knows his Torah—he prays every day with his Papa—he's a Jew! Why are you doing this?

LUCIDI

The Inquisitor sent us. *(at that, Marianna begins to scream. She throws herself on her knees and wraps her arms around Lucidi's legs)*

MORTARA

No!

MARIANNA

(screaming) Nooooo! Nooo! You can't take him, you can't! It's a lie! That was years ago! Edgardo is ours—he has never been baptized—never!!

MORTARA

(kneeling) Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve!

LUCIDI

We're only doing what we were told.

MARIANNA

Take me there! Take me to the Inquisitor! Let me talk to him.

LUCIDI

That won't be possible.

MARIANNA

Tell him! Tell Father Feletti it never happened—it's a lie! He'll understand! Edgardo is ours! He's a good Jewish boy! I'll kill myself rather than give him up. *(At this, Lucidi gestures to the other policeman, who steps forward. Marianna sees this)* At least wait till my husband comes home!

LUCIDI

This is for the best, Signora. Edgardo will be perfectly safe. In fact, he'll be under the protection of Pope Pius IX himself!

MARIANNA

The Pope! No! No—you can't do that!

MORTARA

(praying) To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears!

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LUCIDI

I'm truly sorry for your pain. *(gesturing to the policeman)* Go fetch the boy. *(The Policeman heads for the door)*

MARIANNA

(rushing after him) Let me! Please. Let me be the one to wake him up! He's so little. He'll be scared!

MORTARA

(praying) Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb! *(Marianna disappears into the bedroom. Lucidi waits with the other Policeman. He sighs. Lights a cigarette. Crushes the piece of paper in his hands)*

LUCIDI

I told you this wouldn't go well.

MORTARA

(calling out) O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

LUCIDI

(smoking) Jews are obsessed with their children. I begged the Friar to choose someone else.

POLICEMAN

Why? If we don't set an example for those heretics, we'll just have more riots. More mess. Send the brat to Rome. Who cares?

MORTARA

(praying, arms raised) Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

LUCIDI

The Church can't keep taking kids from their parents.

POLICEMAN

Jews complain about everything. Always the victim. We should've kicked them out of Bologna once and for all.

MORTARA

(finishing his prayer) Forever and ever! Amen.

LUCIDI

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I'll take the boy. As quickly and gently as I can. You'll have to hold her arms back while I do it. Then we'll scam.

Crossfade back to the Judges.

VALENTINI

Your Honors, for what purpose did Father Feletti, the Inquisitor of the Holy See, have Edgardo Mortara abducted and sent to Rome? I would posit that the Friar was and continues to be driven by an implacable hatred of Judaism.

Marianna returns. She crosses to the kneeling Mortara and puts her arms around him as if he were a small child. She sings him a lullaby. Lucidi waits.

LUCIDI

(putting his arms out, gently) Thank you, Signora. Now you must give him to me.

MARIANNA

I can't.

MORTARA

(cowering on the ground) I can't! Don't make me go!

MARIANNA

I can't give him up. He's my angel. Look. He's sleeping.

MORTARA

(curling up on the ground) I'm sleeping!

LUCIDI

Perhaps that's for the best.

MARIANNA

See what a beautiful sweet boy he is! *(kneeling beside him, stroking his forehead)*
Don't take him from me. I beg you.

MORTARA

I beg you!

LUCIDI

Forgive me. It can't be helped. *(again he reaches for the child)*

MARIANNA

(enfolding Mortara in her arms) He's part of my body. My blood runs through him. I won't survive.

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LUCIDI

You will. We all survive.

MORTARA

(in Marianna's arms) Do we? *(beat)* Should a child survive without his parents?
Should parents survive without their child?

MARIANNA

And my husband? What will my husband say?

LUCIDI

You can both come to San Domenico tomorrow to say goodbye to him. How about that?

MARIANNA

Where are you taking him?

LUCIDI

If we put him in a monastery here in Bologna, do you promise to leave him alone?

MARIANNA

Never!

LUCIDI

Then he will be sent to the Catechumens in Rome.

MARIANNA

The Catechumens? No! You will never make my son a Catholic! Please.

LUCIDI

It's a blessing from God.

MORTARA

(holding her) Mamma! My sweet Mamma! I will protect you! I promise!

MARIANNA

(clutching him close, whispering) Edgardo, my precious! They're trying to take you away! They want to convert you! *(she kisses and kisses him)* Kiss your Star of David! Go on! Kiss it! Now—and always! *(as he does so, we hear the sounds of a violin playing the melody of a Jewish prayer. This runs under the next set of exchanges)*

POLICEMAN

Come with me.

MORTARA

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Where? Where are you taking me?

LUCIDI

Don't be frightened, my boy. All will be well.

MARIANNA

(desperate) Well? First the Inquisition burns our precious books, every copy of the sacred Talmud, in the town square! Then you wall us up in this disgusting ghetto where we can barely breathe. Then you give our only cemetery as a gift to the nuns of St. Peter's and we have to dig up the bones of our ancestors and carry them away on our backs. We pay a tax to finance the Catechumens, your disgusting conversion factory! And now you steal our children? No! It's enough! Tearing a family apart is a crime. God will destroy you for this!

POLICEMAN

Please, Signora. Give us the boy. *(The policeman peels her arms away. Mortara looks up, shaking. He faces his mother. Marianna screams)*

MORTARA

(softly, terrified by her grief) Don't cry, Mamma! Don't let them see you cry. *(to Lucidi)* Please, sir—don't take me from my mother. She can't live without me.

LUCIDI

I'm sorry, my boy. Where we are going, your mamma can't follow. *(to Marianna)* Prepare some clothes for him and whatever else he might want. You can bring it to San Domenico tomorrow and we'll put it in the carriage. Now say goodbye.

MARIANNA

(quietly) I can't. *(Lucidi pulls her away from Mortara, who is frightened to look back at his mother. Lucidi exits. The music fades)*

MORTARA

I can't! *I can't!* That's what she said! Mamma let me go. She let them take me away! She was so angry. I had never seen her so angry. There was nothing I could do! *(beat)* No more family. No more home. Pushed out, alone, like a sparrow, into the great world. And then suddenly, as if a door were opened... *(Mortara opens the door and looks outside. Morning light shines on his face. Wind blows into the cell. He turns back into the room, almost as if blown by the wind)* ... everyone in the world knew my name. Everyone had read my story. Everyone was pulling me in opposite directions. How could I go home? It was over! I was a different person. Who were those people to me now? *(in his mind, Mortara hears the voices of this family, his descendants, those he had abandoned)*

CHORUS OF DESCENDENTS

(singing)
So much pain.

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So much drama.
So much secrecy
And nothing but lies and hate.

A man is always missing
A seat remains deserted
The Seder is without his name
The ghost that haunts our family
A child robbed of heart and home
A Jew forced to leave behind
Everything he loved.

So much pain.
So much drama. So much secrecy
And nothing but lies and hate.

Listen to the Vatican
Amplify their legacy
Listen to the papal council
Venerate, beatify
The man who was a kidnapper
The man who was a brainwasher
The man who twisted hearts and minds
And left a child destroyed.

MORTARA

Lies! All lies! I wasn't destroyed! I was happy! The Church is my home! My salvation!

Momolo appears and crosses to Marianna. Marianna turns and sees him.

MARIANNA

Momolo! They are taking him to *Rome!* To the Pope! Today! You must run... *run...*
throw yourself on their mercy...beg the Father to relent...

MOMOLO

Right away. I'm going to San Domenico. Riccardo will come with me. We won't return without Edgardo, I promise you. But you—you must think! *Think*, cara! Who could have done such a thing? We'll have to build a case. Who could have baptized Edgardo?

MARIANNA

No one! It's a lie! And it was so long ago! They hate us, Momolo. To the Church we are heathens, savages who killed their lord! They'll never believe us.

MOMOLO

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They will. The world knows it's wrong to kidnap a child. We must discredit the Inquisitor, however we can.

MARIANNA

Better to appeal to their Christian sympathy and beg them to give Edgardo back. We'll pay them! We'll never bother them again! Whatever it takes. Go! Now! Beg Inquisitor Feletti to relent! *(they exit. Gentle knocking on the door)*

MORTARA

(shaken by the knocks) Leave me alone! There is tapping in my head. *(The Young Priest enters, carefully, respectfully. He is carrying some lilies)* Oh! Brother Nicolas! Did you bar the Church doors?

YOUNG PRIEST

I did, Father Pio. For the time being, we are safe.

MORTARA

Thank God.

MOMOLO

Your Eminence? *(correcting himself nervously)* I mean, Your Holiness?

We hear Friar Feletti from within.

FELETTI

Enter!

MORTARA

(urgently, to the Young Priest) Tell me something. Do you believe in the goodness of the Church?

YOUNG PRIEST

Why would you ask me such a thing? It was the Church that saved me.

MORTARA

From what?

YOUNG PRIEST

From everything! From a life of despair!

MORTARA

Did the Church take you away? From your family?

YOUNG PRIEST

My family gave me up! You know that!

MORTARA

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Why? Why would parents give up a child?

YOUNG PRIEST

My father left me outside the gates of the Abbey like a dog.

MORTARA

(startled) A dog? *(beat)* You must forgive him.

Momolo comes into the massive rooms of the Inquisitor, Feletti, who is seated behind a desk, a Rosary in his hands. A candle burns.

MOMOLO

Forgive me, Your Holiness, for the late hour. I am Momolo Mortara, Edgardo's father—

MORTARA

Papa! *(bewildered, turning to the Young Priest)* He can't have wanted to let you go!

FELETTI

I know who you are.

YOUNG PRIEST

Who knows what he wanted? There was no food at home, no money—

MORTARA

(anguished) Children must be loved!

YOUNG PRIEST

You loved me. That was enough. *(holding out the lilies)* I brought you some lilies. From the altar.

MORTARA

From our Easter service!

YOUNG PRIEST

They're so beautiful—like the spirit of resurrection. Take them.

MOMOLO

There has been a terrible mistake.

MORTARA

There has been a terrible mistake. God has turned against me!

THE YOUNG PRIEST

Why do you say that?

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MORTARA

I am being punished! Hounded from my cell!

THE YOUNG PRIEST

(bewildered) By whom?

MORTARA

Those men out there.

YOUNG PRIEST

They're just thugs. Barbaric thugs.

MORTARA

They have guns! And dogs! I am nothing! They will find me! They will kill me on the spot.

THE YOUNG PRIEST

Sit down. Take a deep breath. You're imagining things. *(Mortara sits on his bench, holding the lilies)*

MOMOLO

Please, Father, please— what makes you think my son Edgardo has been baptized? We have lived with him every day since then and I can assure you it is not so.

FELETTI

The rules of the Holy Tribunal have been scrupulously followed.

MOMOLO

Surely the Church recognizes the sacred bond between parent and child. You can't think it's right to remove him from us this way.

MORTARA

(inside the story) It's not right! *(to the Young Priest)* It wasn't right. A child needs his parents.

FELETTI

Are you saying God makes mistakes, Signore Momolo?

MORTARA

It was a mistake!

YOUNG PRIEST

It was the will of God!

MOMOLO

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It wasn't God—it was a *Policeman*—your Policeman! He claimed Edgardo had been baptized—but it's not true! (*smiling, trying to retain control*) We're a nice quiet family, Father. Well, not exactly *quiet*, we have nine children you see, so there's always a bit of commotion, but--

FELETTI

(*interrupting*) Nine children? And you can't spare one to honor the Blessed Virgin?

MOMOLO

What does the Blessed Virgin have to do with it?

MORTARA

(*quickly crossing himself and beginning to pray*) Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb...

YOUNG PRIEST

Amen.

FELETTI

Signore Mortara, we have it on credible evidence that five years ago, when your son Edgardo was lying sick in bed, indeed, while he was near death, a kind Christian soul baptized him, so that his soul would not be lost to God.

MOMOLO

His soul was never lost to God! Edgardo knew his Torah portion before he was four—he was a devoted member of our little congregation—

FELETTI

What little congregation? There is no synagogue in Bologna. You're lucky we even allow you to live here.

MOMOLO

Jews have always lived in Bologna!

FELETTI

More's the pity.

MORTARA

Pity me!

YOUNG PRIEST

I do! Of course I do!

MOMOLO

Please, Your Holiness, please don't destroy our family. His mother will never survive it.

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MORTARA

Mamma!

FELETTI

She should rejoice in his new life. Prepare to say farewell to him tomorrow. Creating a nasty scene will benefit no one, least of all you.

MOMOLO

This is against international law.

FELETTI

Not in the Papal States.

MOMOLO

I'm asking—begging—for another chance! Where is the harm of returning Edgardo to us? What use is he to the Church?

FELETTI

What *use*? He is a Catholic! All Catholics are held in the loving bosom of the Church. I am under no obligation to respond to your questions. The Holy See has acted.

MOMOLO

Are we nothing to you? Are we rats? Dogs? Are we invisible? You would not take a kitten from the cat as cruelly as you steal my son! Jews have been living in Italy for two millennia. We are good citizens. Do we not deserve better than this?

MORTARA

(anguished) Papa! Don't!

FELETTI

Pope Pius IX is the best friend the Jews will ever have. He has opened the ghetto gates in Rome, he has eliminated the weekly conversion ceremony, he has supported your ungrateful tribe as generously as he can.

MOMOLO

Have you ever been in the Roman ghetto, Father? Have you ever tried to tread on the filth and bile that covers its streets? It's a sewer! A mountain of garbage and excrement, where children are supposed to study, to thrive, to grow up to be God-fearing and just. That ghetto is a crime against humanity.

FELETTI

Such propaganda! You can't really believe that, can you? Besides, if conditions for the Jews in Rome are as bad as you describe, all the more reason you should celebrate the conversion of your son. He will enjoy the divine protection of the baptized. And he will sleep in a clean bed.

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MORTARA

(shivering) I'm cold!

MOMOLO

Don't you see? Victor Emmanuel is waiting in Sardinia—he's ready to bring the Italian nation together—he won't look kindly on this!

FELETTI

(sharply) Have you ever known a political regime, of any stripe or any persuasion, who is interested in protecting Jews?

MOMOLO

I'll go to Rome myself—I'll petition the Pope!

FELETTI

Good luck.

YOUNG PRIEST

Shall I turn on the heat?

MORTARA

(Rocking back and forth, trying to comfort himself) "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, they spin not, and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!"

Feletti rings a bell. Mortara rises in his cell. Two Policeman enter the Feletti scene. Brother Nicolas crosses to Mortara and reaches for his arm.

FELETTI

Show Signore Mortara the way out. The corridor is very dark at this time of night.
(They move to grab Momolo)

MOMOLO

Don't touch me! I can walk on my own.

MORTARA

Don't touch me! I must pray on my own. *(The Young Priest backs away)*

FELETTI

We pray that Edgardo grows up as a good Catholic boy, filled with the grace of Jesus Christ Our Lord, who died for our sins. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. *(Momolo exits with the Policemen) Idiot. (Crossfade to court room)*

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JUSSI

Let me put it to you this way. Maybe the child wanted to go!

MORTARA

(holding the lilies high) Behold the white-robed apostles of God!

JUSSI

Maybe he longed to save his immortal soul! Never forget-- the Divine Redeemer himself said, "He who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven!"

MORTARA

Sprung from the sweat of our Lord, as it dropped from his brow the night before the Resurrection!

JUSSI

These are things that cannot be decided in a court of law. God works in mysterious ways.

VALENTINI

And Feletti works by secrecy and intimidation. Pay attention! In the court of public opinion, the Church is going to lose, now and forever!

MORTARA

(to the Young Priest, explaining the lilies) They're trumpets, you see? Trumpets announcing the ascension of Christ! Can you hear? Can you hear the trumpets in the distance? He is always with us! He won't let those dogs drag us away!

YOUNG PRIEST

Never!

MORTARA

So many enemies. So many tears. *(Mortara begins to scatter the petals of the lilies on the ground)* The tears of the Virgin. The tears of Our Lord. Weeping for our sins. And everywhere a drop fell, a lily grew. Did you know that? The lilies of the field. So many flowers. So many tears. It was cold in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before our Lord was crucified. So cold.

YOUNG PRIEST

It's strange that it's so cold. In May! Let me go turn on the radiator for you. It will make you feel better. I'll be right back. *(The Young Priest slips out. From the opposite direction, Marianne and Momolo enter, wrapping up Edgardo's clothes in a bundle they are preparing to carry to where Edgardo is being held on the day of his departure)*

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MARIANNA

Is it cold in Rome? Colder than here? We should give him your winter coat!

MOMOLO

He's too tiny, my love. It would drag behind him like a train. *(Grabbing sweaters)*
Here. My blue sweater—

MORTARA

(feeling the worn sweater around his neck) My sweater!

MOMOLO

He loves this one—it will remind him of home. And some blankets.

MARIANNA

And a kiddush cup—he'll need a kiddush cup!

MORTARA

What happened to my kiddush cup?

MOMOLO

And a prayer shawl. Hide them in the clothes. *(as they pack, we hear the voices of the descendants)*

CHORUS OF THE DESCENDANTS

(singing)

So much pain.

So much drama.

So much secrecy

And nothing but lies and hate.

Why do Christians steal our pasts?

Why is hatred still so present?

Why are children never safe?

The Pope has never staunched the wound

The pain will never disappear

The world knows who Edgardo was

And we will never let him go!

MORTARA

Stop! Stop saying that! Let me go!

CHORUS

(singing)

So much pain

So much sorrow

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So much silence
And nothing but lies and hate.

MORTARA

Nothing but lies and hate! So much hate! Why was there so much hate? Why were there so many lies?

MOMOLO

It's getting late. We should hurry before we miss him!

MARIANNA

But some food—I need to pack some food for his journey—some figs, and cheese—

MOMOLO

They'll feed him, my love—

MARIANNA

(starting to cry) Feed him what? Panini with pork? Shrimp? They will choke him to death with their disgusting food. Give me a minute. *(she rushes off to prepare some food)*

MORTARA

Why did no one say goodbye to me? Why did they just let me go? They left me outside the gates like a dog! *(shaking his head anxiously)* Is that right? I can't remember!

Mortara and Marianna rush to the Convent of San Domenico.

MARIANNA

Is this the right spot?

MOMOLO

Yes. They told us to wait here. Outside San Domenico.

MARIANNA

(calling out) Edgardo! My darling! Where are you!

MORTARA

I'm here, Mamma! Couldn't you find me?

MARIANNA

(looking around, bewildered) What have they done with him? Do you see a carriage?

MOMOLO

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No, but this is the road—there's no way they could get past without us seeing.

MARIANNA

He must be so frightened, the little mite. He has never spent a night apart from us! He didn't even have his blanket!

MOMOLO

He's a wise child, my darling. He'll be fine. God will watch over him.

MARIANNA

(looking in the windows) Is he in there? Do you think he's had his breakfast? *(calling)* Edgardo! It's Mamma! We're here, my love—don't worry! Papa and I are right outside!

MORTARA

I see you! I see you, Mamma!

A Guard enters from the Convent. Momolo rushes to him.

MOMOLO

Excuse me, Sir—we are here for our son—for the child, Edgardo Mortara, who was taken into custody last night—

GUARD

Yes?

MOMOLO

We're here to say goodbye. Father Feletti promised—Edgardo hasn't said goodbye to his mother—

GUARD

That little Jewish boy? He's gone.

MARIANNA

What? No! That's impossible! Where is he? Where have you taken him??

GUARD

(shrugging) As far as I know, they went to Rome.

MARIANNA

They promised we could see him! They can't just *take* him! We have his clothes! His food! His breakfast!

GUARD

The carriage left an hour ago.

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MARIANNA

Edgardo!!

MOMOLO

But how can that be? We never said goodbye!!

MORTARA

You never said goodbye! Why didn't you come? Why did you let me go?

MARIANNA

(sobbing) He won't be able to sleep. He needs his blanket. His own things! How could they leave without telling us?

GUARD

It looked like rain this morning. They figured they'd get out before they got wet.

MARIANNA

(stunned at the news) Wet? They were worried about getting wet?

GUARD

Be quiet! This is a Convent!

MARIANNA

We're not animals! Edgardo's our son! He's our *son!* *(she approaches the Guard)*
We'll give you everything we've got. What is it you want? Money? Is that it? Can we give you gold? Jews are rich— is that what you're thinking?

MOMOLO

Marianna—no!

MARIANNA

(seductively) How about a woman's love? Is that what you're looking for, you sad and lonely man? Shall I give you a kiss? *(She puts her arms around him)* Take me to your rooms. Tell me what to do.

MOMOLO

My darling—stop!

MARIANNA

We need to find him. *(to Guard)* I need to find my son. I'll do whatever you ask. I'll worship Jesus Christ if I have to! Tell me what to do!

GUARD

I told you. He's gone. That's it.

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Marianna loses control and starts pelting the Guard with the blankets, clothes, etc. He backs away. Momolo tries to calm her. Mortara cowers in his cell.

MOMOLO

Don't, my love. Sshhhhh. Don't waste your breath. I'll go to Rome. Tomorrow. I promise. With Riccardo. We'll take our case all the way up to the Pope.

MARIANNA

(breaking away, screaming at Guard) You're criminals! All of you! Barbaric thugs!

GUARD

(advancing on her) That's enough, do you hear?

MORTARA

(in pain) That's enough!

GUARD

(to Momolo) Shut your wife up, *now!* Or we'll lock you both up where you'll never see the light of day. *(Marianna gathers the lily petals one by one and holds them to her breast. She collapses weeping on the ground)* Get up! Get out of here. Go back to your ghetto.

MORTARA

Mamma!

MOMOLO

(to the Guard) Just wait. The world will support us. I'll write to America! To newspapers across the world! You think the French will defend your Pope forever? Some day soon Rome is going to fall—and when it does, we will be there to bring Edgardo home! *The Young Priest slips back in the side door)*

MORTARA

Lies! It's all lies! They blamed the Pope! The Holy See! That was wrong. They wrote endless horrors in the press!

YOUNG PRIEST

Who are you talking to? *(Mortara sits down, shivering)* The heat is on—it should warm up now. *(beat)* I've brought you some water, Father Pio. And some bread. It will calm your nerves. *(he hands Mortara a glass of water. Mortara sips. As he does, Lucidi enters)*

LUCIDI

Have some water, my child. It will calm your nerves. *(Mortara looks up at him)*

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THE YOUNG PRIEST

Then you must go speak to the brothers. They need to hear your voice.

MORTARA

Tell them I'm coming. Let me drink this first. *(the Young Priest nods and exits)* Lucidi! *(He stops. Lucidi sits on the bench beside Mortara. Beside him is Edgardo's battered little suitcase. The sound of horses, of a carriage moving. Mortara stares at Lucidi)* You gave me water. I remember that. You spoke to me in a soft voice... you asked if I were hungry...

LUCIDI

Are you hungry? *(Mortara shakes his head)* Thirsty? *(beat)* Have some water—it's so hot today. *(Mortara takes a sip of water from his glass)* Better? *(Mortara nods. Puts down his glass)* Don't be scared. We will look after you. *(Mortara looks down and begins fingering something gripped in his hand)* May I see? May I see what you're holding? *(beat)* I'll give it back, I promise. *(Mortara holds out the mezuzah. Sounds of a violin. Lucidi looks at it carefully)* It's a mezuzah, isn't it? *(Mortara nods)* It's what you pray with? *(Mortara nods)* I see. Say your prayer for me.

MORTARA

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonaie Echad..." Hear Oh Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is one. Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom, forever and ever." *(he stops, startled. Listens to himself. What prayer is that?)* What am I saying? Is that what happened? Was it a trick? Did I pray? Did he let me say my Sh'ma?

LUCIDI

Can I give you something? Something very valuable to me? It's just like your mezuzah! *(Lucidi reaches around Mortara's neck for his Medallion of the Virgin. He takes it off and holds it in his open palm. The sound of the violin fades)* Isn't she beautiful? *(beat)* Do you know who that woman is, engraved on the medallion? *(Mortara shakes his head)* She's the Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We sometimes call her...

MORTARA/LUCIDI

Our Lady of Sorrows.

LUCIDI

Do you know why she's crying?

MORTARA

For all of us sinners.

LUCIDI

And for the Jews, who refuse to become Christians.

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MORTARA

(looking up) Me?

LUCIDI

No, my boy. You're a Christian now, remember? *(a moment of silence. Mortara contemplates the medallion)* She's crying for your mother and father. And for all your brothers and sisters too.

MORTARA

My mother was crying for me! My mother and my father! They were crying for years and years! *(calling out)* Mamma!

MARIANNA

(arriving at the other side of the bench) Edgardo! There you are, my love. *(she takes his hands in her own)* So much pain and no one understands. They say they do, but they don't. "You have so many children," they are thinking. "What's the problem with giving up just one?"

LUCIDI

(still holding the Medallion of Mary) She loves you, Edgardo. She will take care of you.

MARIANNA

(smiling tenderly at him) We're making plans, don't worry! We won't leave you there for long! Close your ears just like I taught you... and be patient...

MORTARA

Mamma! I should have taken care of you. Protected you. I should have fought them off!

LUCIDI

(to Edgardo) Would you like to keep it? *(Mortara stares at the medallion)* Shall I put it around your neck? *(Mortara puts his medallion back around his neck)*

MARIANNA

No, Edgardo! Don't do it!

LUCIDI

I'll put your mezuzah in your suitcase, shall I? *(he does so)* Look out the window, my boy! You see? There's the Cathedral in Fossombrone.

EDGARDO

Cathedral?

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LUCIDI

A big church. Do you want to take a look? It has a giant rose window full of angels and prophets. *(beat. Mortara looks at his mother, torn)* I could give you a candle to light. Would you like that? Would you like to present a candle to this Lady, who loves you with all her heart? She will rejoice to see you.

MORTARA

She's never met me.

LUCIDI

She's the Mother of us all. All of us love the Madonna, just like you love your Mamma. And she loves us. Do you understand? She will never let you down.

MORTARA

I have let her down. I want to go home. *(reaching for Marianna)* I want my real mother.

LUCIDI

She's home with your brothers and sisters. She's perfectly safe.

MORTARA

No she's not! She's here. Look! She's crying! *(crying out)* Mama! Ti amo, Mama! I see your face, every night, in my dreams—your sweet sad face!

MARIANNA

And I see yours, Edgardo!

LUCIDI

You have a new Mamma now! Shall we go into the Church and visit her? I will teach you a little prayer to say with the candle, to let her know how much you love her. It goes like this: *(Lucidi lights a candle in the cell)* "Hail, Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee; blessed art thou amongst women." *(Mortara joins in. They say the prayer together)* "And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus Christ. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." *(Lucidi stares at him)* Very good. Have you heard that one before?

MARIANNA

Never!

MORTARA

It didn't matter! It was so beautiful. *(Suddenly we hear the sound of bells. It is time for the noon prayers. Mortara stands up immediately and makes as if to remove his hat)* The bells! Listen!

LUCIDI

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Listen! The Campanile! You hear the bells welcoming you? As you enter the church, you must tip your hat, to show your respect. Can you do that? Like this. (*Lucidi demonstrates tipping his hat*)

MORTARA

(*in the moment*) The church bells start to ring. I want to go inside and see where that beautiful sound was coming from! So I do what I was told. I tip my hat.

LUCIDI

(*smiling*) And then, Edgardo—when you step inside, you must make the sign of the cross.

MARIANNA

(*reaching out to grab Mortara's hand*) No, Edgardo! That you must not do! Remember who you are!

LUCIDI

You dip your finger in holy water as soon as you enter the church. And then you make this sign. (*Lucidi makes the sign of the cross*) Our Lady will see you and bless you.

MORTARA

She will see me? And bless me? (*sound of bells. Lucidi urges Edgardo forward and then steps away. Organ music, rich and inviting*) It's like magic, Mamma! Inside the Cathedral, bells are ringing. I look up-- the ceiling is so high, like heaven! We light two candles and stare up at the rose window. It glows with hundreds of colors—the colors of precious jewels! There are angels with wings—you see? – and wise men in long robes—kind women with outstretched arms—all looking down at me and smiling! They're calling to me! "Edgardo!" "Edgardo Mortara!" I want do what everyone else is doing. I raise my finger to my forehead-- and make the shape Lucidi showed me. (*he raises his finger to his forehead. Marianna reaches for it and pulls it away*)

MARIANNA

Don't you dare! It's a crime against God! (*the music snaps out*)

In the court room:

JUSSI

Edgardo Mortara left Bologna a Jew, but he arrived in Rome a Catholic. It was a miracle. One of two miracles the Virgin Mary gave to us in that remarkable year of 1858—her apparition at Lourdes, and the conversion of Edgardo Mortara.

MARIANNA

He was confused! He didn't know what he was doing!

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MORTARA

(looking up at a cross) Above the altar there's a man, weeping. I could hardly look, Mamma—I hate to see people cry. The man has a crown of thorns on his head. His hands are bleeding. There's a gash in the side of his body. And lilies scattered on the ground. I ask who he is. Why they've hurt him. Someone should take care of him, before he bleeds to death!

MARIANNA

He's not who he says he is. Everything they've told you is a lie.

VALENTINI

It's a lie. The Catholic Church has always been a haven of fabulists and storytellers. Edgardo wept the entire trip to Rome. He was scared. He longed for his mother and father. When he got to the Catechumens, he knew it was a place of horror, a place designed to deprive him of everything he loved. Of his very identity. He begged to go home, but he was forbidden to leave. Even when his father came to visit him, the Rector would never leave the two of them alone together—there were spies everywhere! It's a crime. The Jews will not take this abduction and forced conversion lying down. Word is spreading throughout Europe!

MORTARA

(staring at the crucifixion) I stand there, staring at the sad man, until it starts to get dark. And then, right before I leave--

MARIANNA

Don't, Edgardo. Don't do it. You will always regret it.

MORTARA

I did it. *(crossing himself)* In the name of the father. Gone. And the son. Taken away. And the Holy Ghost. Amen. *(He bows to the cross and then turns away. Marianna turns and begins to leave)* Forgive me, Mamma! I had to!

MARIANNA

No, Edgardo! Where is your mind? Your heart? Your Jewish soul? *(Mortara crosses to the doorway and shuts the door. The wind stops)*

JUSSI

If your case is so indisputable, where are your witnesses? Where is the Grocer Lepori, who was so eager to refute Morisi's account? Where is the upstairs maid Regina Bussolari, who conveniently abandoned her position in Bologna and returned to the country on the day Father Feletti was arrested?

VALENTINI

Regina Bussolari has been muzzled by the Church.

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JUSSI

What evidence do you have for that? You attack every woman who would give testimony. Admittedly, Anna Morisi is a girl of loose morals and even looser skirts. But as Portia so eloquently argues in *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*, if we are unwilling to believe anyone who has fallen prey to human weakness, there would not be a single truth-teller in this world.

VALENTINI

Now the Church is resorting to *Shakespeare* to defend its actions?

JUSSI

I find that if one reads him carefully, Shakespeare can answer almost every question known to man. Listen. *(he begins to recite from memory. As he does so, we begin to hear the sound of an organ. The music grows underneath the speech. Perhaps the Chorus joins in)*

“The quality of mercy is not strained.
It falleth like the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest,
It blesseth him who gives and him who takes,
’Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.
But mercy is above this sceptered sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself.
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy...”

The organ music climaxes as the row of Judges splits and Pope Pius IX steps forward in his splendid red robes and mitre. He is played by the same actor as Momolo. He opens his arms wide, gesturing to Mortara.

POPE

Vieni! Vieni, carino! Come my child! I’ve been waiting for you for such a long time! A child! My own child!

MORTARA

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I step out of the carriage in Rome, and Il Papa is standing at the top of a flight of marble stairs. When he sees me, he opens his arms. And I run and hide in his robes. *(he does. The Pope embraces and holds him tight)*

POPE

Let me look at you! *(he does) My Edgardo!* They tell me you are a prodigy! A brilliant boy! They say you learned your catechism as soon as you got into the carriage to come here! Is that true? *(Mortara nods)* And your “Ave Maria” too? *(Mortara nods)* It’s a miracle! Can you read?

MORTARA

Yes.

POPE

Of course you can! You Jews are nothing if not studious. Do you know how many years I have been longing for you? You will be my special charge! Like my own son! You will give me hope, won’t you? You understand why I had to bring you here? You will help me through this terrible time, my sweet Edgardo. I will look after you and teach you and we will read Latin and sing psalms and you will never be sad again.

MORTARA

But he was sad. And sick. It frightened me to look at him.

POPE

Oh my son, what a heavy price I have paid for you! Heavier every day! The world hates me, do you know that? They write terrible things about me in the papers. Yes! And today, Napoleon of France sent a nasty missive demanding that I send you back to your parents. Immediately! He says the French won’t stand for it—a child being removed from his parents. What do the French care? Napoleon is conspiring with Cavour to drive the Austrians out of Italy and annex the Papal States. I won’t let it happen. Over my dead body! Never! *(The Pope’s lips start to tremble and soon his whole body is shaking. Mortara is terrified. The Pope becomes quiet again)* Forgive me, Edgardo. I am not well.

MORTARA

And then he is shouting and falling and I have to help him. I know what to do, right from the very beginning!

POPE

If you find me having a seizure on the ground, my son, you must hold me still until it passes, do you understand? That’s your job! Never forget! *(He embraces Mortara)* And you? What do you think, Edgardo? Do you hate me for what the Church has done? *(Mortara stares at him silently)* Do you want to stay here, in the Vatican? With me?

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MORTARA

(to the Chorus) Did I want to stay? Did I want to go home? Did it matter what I wanted?

POPE

(Edgardo stares at him) You are my prize, Edgardo. But they will try to take you away from me. *(He holds Mortara very holds tight)*

MORTARA

(Mortara looks at the Pope. But sees Momolo. He is confused) Papa? Papa! Mamma! I want my mother and father! *(Mortara covers his face with his hands)*

POPE

Does it pain you to think of them? Would you like your Papa to come visit?

MORTARA

(anxious) I thought *you* were my Papa now!

POPE

Yes. I am the Papa of every Catholic in the world, Edgardo. Including you.

MORTARA

Then where are your children?

POPE

You are all my children! Your Papa had nine children, but I have thousands.

MORTARA

Riccardo, Erminia, Ernesta, Augusto, Arnoldo, Aristide, Edgardo, Ercole and the baby, Imelda. Don't forget, Edgardo! Honor they father and mother. They told me to honor my father and mother! I tried! *(beat. Looking at the Pope, confused)* You said you were my father.

POPE

Il Papa Pius IX.

MORTARA

No! My real father! Who was my real father? The father that brought me up? Momolo! *(beat. The Pope removes the Mitre from his head)* Momolo Mortara. Yes! Whose real name was Salamone David. I remember! And I was Edgardo! People told me it was a strange name for a Jewish boy! Not even biblical! What kind of Jews name their children Riccardo, Erminia, Ernesta, Augusto, Arnoldo, Aristide, Edgardo, Ercole and Imelda?

MOMOLO

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(laughing) It was for the future! For Italy! We were all going to be Italians and we would all have names that everyone could pronounce! Edgardo Mortara!

EDGARDO

Edgardo Mortara!

MOMOLO

You and Riccardo marched around the house like tiny soldiers and sang patriotic songs! Remember? *(he tickles Mortara)* And you loved to be tickled! You and your Mamma would scream with laughter as she chased you around the house!

MORTARA

Yes! She tickled me with a feather from her favorite pillow, and made me sneeze. And then she'd find a sweet in her apron pocket—some tiny sweet, deep in her pocket, just for me! *(he pulls a sweet out of his own pocket and puts it in his mouth)*

MOMOLO

So many children and never enough to eat!

MORTARA

And you, Papa-- you'd come running up the stairs at the end of the day with bits of cloth from the shop, and we cut them up in tiny pieces and made it snow.

MOMOLO

Snow! Yes! I chased you around in the snow! *(he begins to chase Mortara who laughs and runs away. He hides, as if in a game. Momolo breaks from him, retrieves his mitre)*

POPE

(calling out) Where are you, Edgardo? Are you hiding from me? Be a good boy or the soldiers will take you away and lock you up!

MORTARA

Me? Why? *(terrified)* Don't let them in! Don't let them take me!

POPE

(stroking his hair) You poor boy. You have been scared out of your wits. If you listen to me, no one will ever hurt you again. *(he sits down with him on the bench)* Shall we sing? *(Edgardo shakes his head)* You don't like to sing? *(he thinks)* Shall we play? *(Edgardo nods)* What shall we play?

EDGARDO

Latin!

POPE

Yes. Let's play Latin. I will give you a word, and you must guess. *(beat. Thinking)* "Doloroso".

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MORTARA

I know! "Doloroso". That means sad.

POPE

(taking a medallion from around his neck) The Virgin is sad, Edgardo. Do you know why? Because the Jews betrayed her son. You understand? *(Edgardo stares. Shakes his head)* They betrayed the person closest to them, their friend and companion and guide, their miracle-worker and hope for the future-- they turned him in, and let the Romans hang him on a cross like a common criminal.

MORTARA

(wide-eyed) Why? Why would they do that to him?

POPE

(shrugging) They're barbaric. They murdered our Lord!

MORTARA

(frightened) No.

POPE

Yes! You saw him, didn't you? In the Cathedral in Fossombrone.

MORTARA

(wide-eyed) Is that why his hands were bleeding?

POPE

(nodding) And his forehead, where the thorns pricked his skin. Did you see the gash in his side where the lance went through?

MORTARA

I wanted to help him! To make it stop!

POPE

Then you must do so, Edgardo! Those savages refused to believe He was the Messiah!

MORTARA

What's a Messiah?

POPE

Someone who saves the world! That's why Jesus wanted to leave his home-- to rescue all of us from our sins. But Jews are jealous and greedy. They stoned him, and hurt him. Like they want to hurt me! Do you understand? *(Mortara shakes his head)* I am in constant danger. *You must believe me!* People are out to get me. Your people.

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That's why all these hundreds of years later, we must keep your family in a ghetto!
(Mortara stares at him, bewildered) You must teach your parents about Jesus! About
Salvation! You must convert them to the Holy See! Tell them!

MORTARA

(he calls to his mother) Salvation, Mamma! The Pope can save you! And then we'll all
be together again! You and me and Papa and the whole family. *(Marianna appears)*

MARIANNA

How could you say such a thing?

MORTARA

Didn't you want us to be happy? To be reunited?

MARIANNA

(she looks at him) It's not who we are, Edgardo.

MORTARA

Who are we?

MARIANNA

How can you ask that?

MORTARA

How could you abandon me?

MARIANNA

It was you who abandoned us! Our entire faith! Our history!

MORTARA

What history? You always said —we have spent our lives fleeing home with a
suitcase and a shawl—running away like rats. Why would you choose that?

MARIANNA

We are not rats! We have a great destiny.

MORTARA

We have no destiny! Only pain, and abandonment, and suffering! Everyone hates us,
no one wants us, they never have!

MARIANNA

(taking Edgardo's little suitcase from under the bench) You see this, Edgardo? Your
little suitcase? Our people may have only a suitcase between ourselves and
destruction. So what? We have our faith, our language, our knowledge. We have our

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minds! Our souls! Our rituals! Our laughter! Our history is so ancient—theirs is so new, so small. We will save ourselves, and our children, and our children’s children, for a time when we can be who we are, Edgardo! Without shame!

POPE

(taking Mortara’s other hand) Your family is covered in shame, Edgardo!

MORTARA

What shame?

POPE

(thundering) The shame of having killed our Lord!

MORTARA

We didn’t kill him! Did we, Mamma?

MARIANNA

Don’t let them tell you such ridiculous lies!

MORTARA

He looks so sad! He’s crying!

POPE

You mustn’t cry. You are Catholic now! You are beloved!

MARIANNA

(pulling him towards her) Never forget! You are better than all of them!

POPE

You are clean!

MORTARA

I am clean! *(he shoves his suitcase under the bench)*

POPE

You will never have to doubt.

MARIANNA

You will *always* have to doubt, Edgardo—you’re a Jew!

POPE

You have only to believe. And all will be well.

MARIANNA

You have only to *think!* To remember! To use your mind!

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POPE

(urgently) The Church will never give up on you.

MARIANNA

We will never stop loving you. Never. Every day, we'll fight to bring you home.

POPE

Every day, you will become closer and closer to God. Every day, you will forget a little more about your past. Until finally one day, you will be entirely ours.

MARIANNA

You will never be theirs! You are an example to Jews everywhere, Edgardo. The world is with you! Everyone is watching.

MORTARA

Stop watching me! *(he looks around)* Why me? Why did it have to happen to me? Was the world with me? Was anyone with me? Is anyone with me now?

POPE

I will give you your first Communion, and the whole world will witness this miracle! *(knocking on the door)*

MORTARA

But on the Day of Judgment, when God looks into my soul, what will He see? Who will He find?

MARIANNA

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord cause his light to shine upon you.

POPE

(making the sign of the cross over Edgardo) In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(Church bells ring. Knocking on the door. The lights close in on Mortara. He covers his ears in terror, rocking himself back and forth)*

Blackout.

End of Act One.

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ACT TWO

Mortara has fallen asleep on his bench. It is late afternoon. He is dreaming.

THE CHORUS OF PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

(singing)

It is a dogma divinely revealed
That the Roman pontiff
When he speaks ex cathedra
By the Divine assistance promised to him by Blessed Peter
Is possessed of that infallibility
With which the Divine Redeemer willed
That his Church should be endowed
In defining Doctrine regarding faith or morals.

POPE

Do you hear? Are you paying attention, Edgardo?

CHORUS

(singing)

By the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ
And the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul,
And by our own authority
We declare, pronounce and define the doctrine
To be revealed by God
And as such to be firmly and immutably held
By all the faithful.

POPE

(screaming, slightly fanatic) The Pope is infallible! There will be no more dissent!

MARIANNA

(screaming back) The Pope is evil! We will never stop dissenting!

CHORUS

(singing)

In virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter,
The Pope when appealing to his highest authority
Is preserved from the possibility of error
On doctrine and matters of faith.

MARIANNA

You are preserved from nothing! Your days are numbered!

POPE

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No more questioning!

MARIANNA

No more permission to kidnap children!

POPE

No more attacks on Papal authority.

MARIANNA

No more attacks on Jewish families!

POPE

I am the Pastor Aeternus!

MARIANNA

You are an abductor and a criminal!

POPE

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

MARIANNA

May you suffocate in a cloud of incense!

POPE

Should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours, let him be...

CHORUS

(singing, loudly)

ANATHEMA!

Mortara wakes suddenly, frightened.

MORTARA

Anathema! (he looks around, anxiously) What is anathema? Who is anathema? (he turns, and sees the Young Priest standing in the corner) What are you doing? You think it's me? Am I anathema? Is that what you think? Is that what everyone really thinks?

YOUNG PREST

Father Pio! You were sleeping...

MORTARA

It's not my fault. It was never my fault. Someone is tapping on my brain! (the Judge is calling for order)

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JUDGE

Order! Order in the court! The trial of Father Feletti will now resume!

MORTARA

Not guilty! I told you, the verdict was not guilty! Filthy Jews! It was all lies, all of it! What do you want with me? Why do you look at me that way? None of it is true!

YOUNG PRIEST

None of what?

MORTARA

They abandoned me—everyone abandoned me. Except my Papa—and he only came to find me once! Only once and then never again!

YOUNG PRIEST

I don't understand-- to find you where?

MORTARA

In the Catechumens! Where they had hidden me!

YOUNG PRIEST

You? Why would they take you to the Catechumens?

MORTARA

Why are they hiding in the countryside? Where are the Jews?

YOUNG PRIEST

The Jews? They're running for their lives!

MORTARA

Go find them, Brother Nicolas! Now, before it's too late!

YOUNG PRIEST

(appalled) What are you talking about?

MORTARA

Anathema! Do you know what that means? I am not anathema! I am not one of those filthy scum. I will not be attacked by their dogs! Tell them! Tell them if we see Jews here, we will shoot them on sight!

YOUNG PRIEST

(shocked) Father Pio!

MORTARA

Can't you smell them? They're everywhere! They pollute the world! They smell of money!

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YOUNG PRIEST

That's disgusting. You don't mean that.

MORTARA

You don't think so? It's a conspiracy! Backed by money and newspapers and politicians—lies! All lies! Tell them! Tell them I am pure!

YOUNG PRIEST

Which one of us is pure, Father Pio? Let us not cast stones—

MORTARA

(interrupting ferociously) Yes! We will cast stones! We will not succumb! The divine Redeemer said, "Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword!"

YOUNG PRIEST

(trying to stay calm) Surely you can't be hoping innocent people get hurt...

MORTARA

(viciously) Innocent! Who is innocent? Have you forgotten what Jesus said? "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes will be those of his own household!"

YOUNG PRIEST

Jesus called for mercy! Charity! Understanding!

MORTARA

"He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me!" That's what he said!

YOUNG PRIEST

Then we must take up the cross and preach salvation! We must lift up the vulnerable and protect the weak! That's what it means to be a Christian—you know that—it was you who taught me—please, please, Father Pio, don't frighten me—you are my Father, my spiritual father, I have always loved you—

MORTARA

I never asked you to love me!

YOUNG PRIEST

But I do! You're all I have.

MORTARA

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Then tell them! I am not one of the weak! I am not a parasite! I am not part of their international conspiracy! I have not spent my entire life at this Abbey only to be attacked by Jew-baiting Germans—

YOUNG PRIEST

You're attacking yourself!

MORTARA

They can't tell me who I am! They have no right!

YOUNG PRIEST

Stop yelling—this is awful! You know what happens to you when you get over-excited—you'll make yourself ill again—

MORTARA

I've always been ill! I was ill as a baby and Nina saved me! She saved me, do you hear? From my family—from the Jews—from the whole lying cabal—and now they're trying to drag me back--

YOUNG PRIEST

You've gone mad. You don't know what you're saying. I don't even recognize you!

MORTARA

(listening) Listen. It's gone quiet. *(beat)* Have they gone? *(the Young Priest crosses to the door and looks out)*

YOUNG PRIEST

It's snowing. In May. *(beat)* Snow. Like the end of the world.

MORTARA

The end of the world. *(beat. He joins the Young Priest at the window, captivated by the snow)* It was snowing that day. Just like now. So cold! Papa was covered with ice—I remember—when he suddenly pushed his way through the door!

(Momolo Mortara bursts in, followed by the Rector. This is Mortara's memory of Momolo's visit to the Catechumens to visit the 7-year-old Edgardo)

MOMOLO

Edgardo! My darling! I'm here! I made it to Rome! *(Momolo throws his arms around Mortara, weeping)*

MORTARA

Papa!

MOMOLO

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Carino! (*kissing him*) I'm so happy to see you!

MORTARA

Look at you, Papa! You're covered in snow!

MOMOLO

I came all the way from Bologna! In the snow and ice! I had to see you, Edgardo! Are you well? (*he hugs him*) I've been trying for months to get you out—every single day-- standing outside in the cold-- (*he looks up at a man standing in the corner*) May I please be left alone with my son? Just for a moment?

RECTOR

I'm sorry—that will not be possible.

MOMOLO

I'm his father—I haven't seen him in six months! Tell him, Edgardo! Tell him how long we've waited! Please. Ask him to leave us alone! (*Mortara looks at the Young Priest*)

MORTARA

Leave me alone!

YOUNG PRIEST

Why? What have I done?

MORTARA

You're destroying my mind!

MOMOLO

(*to the Rector*) Please! Don't you see what's happening? With you here, Edgardo is too scared to speak!

YOUNG PRIEST

I only want to help you.

MORTARA

Then pretend you never saw me. Can you do that? Tell them there's no one in this cell—that it's been empty for years. Tell them I've died, do you hear? Whatever it takes! Now leave me! I need to be alone with my thoughts.

YOUNG PRIEST

I wish I knew what was in your mind. (*the Young Priest pauses, takes in Mortara's state, turns and leave the room by the side door*)

RECTOR

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He's perfectly safe. I suggest you use your time well-- you have half an hour.

MOMOLO

Half an hour? I travelled all the way from Bologna! I have been in Rome for weeks and weeks petitioning the Catechumens to let me in! You can't keep him from me! *(holding Edgardo)* What are they doing to you here, Edgardo? Who are these terrible people?

MORTARA

(introducing Rector) This is Pier Carlo, Papa. He looks after me.

MOMOLO

(touching the blue sweater Mortara is wearing) Look what I brought you, to keep you warm! You forgot it at home.

MORTARA

Yes! Your sweater! I still have it, Babbo! *(he strokes the sweater)*

MOMOLO

And what about your blankets? Can you sleep? Where do you sleep?

MORTARA

(crossing to his bench) Here! I sleep between Guiseppe and Giacomo.

MOMOLO

Giuseppe and Giacomo? Are they Jewish boys who got abducted like you?

MORTARA

(frightened) Ssshhhh! *Anathema!*

RECTOR

They are Catholic now. Every child in the Catechumens is now Catholic. No matter what he was before.

MOMOLO

No! They will never be Catholic! What is going on here, Edgardo? This man is evil—he's our enemy! *(feeling around Edgardo's neck. Panicking)* Your necklace! Your Star of David! Where is it? What have you done with it?

MORTARA

I have this now, Papa. *(showing Momolo his Medallion of the Virgin)* See? See how beautiful she is? The Virgin Mother! She is crying for us, papa!

MOMOLO

(outraged, to Rector) How dare you poison my son's mind with this garbage?

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MORTARA

(frightened) Don't say that! We killed her Son! You must kiss her, Papa! *(Edgardo holds out his Medallion of the Virgin)* Go on! Kiss her!

MOMOLO

(appalled) Edgardo! Stop!

RECTOR

Edgardo is our prodigy, our genius. He has been saved!

MORTARA

I've been saved! No one can hurt me!

MOMOLO

Saved from what? From his family? From his heritage? He's a little boy! He doesn't understand! *(to Mortara)* I'm your Papa, my love. You are worth more to me than the whole world! Don't you remember? We're all waiting for you, my little sausage! Riccardo is outside with messages from the whole family.

MORTARA

(full of longing) Riccardo! Why doesn't he come in and see me?

MOMOLO

It's not allowed. These evil people allow nothing to Jews. *(urgently)* We lost the trial, Edgardo. In spite of everything—in spite of the best prosecution and the strongest case—in spite of the fact that it is a crime against the state to remove a child from his parents—we lost! To the Inquisition. Can you imagine?

MORTARA

No.

MOMOLO

But we will never give up! *(urgently, right in his ear)* Remember to say your prayers three times a day, Edgardo, from the moment you wake up till right before you go to sleep. Pray for Jerusalem! And for the health of your Mamma, who is dying without you!

MORTARA

(hopeful) Mamma! Where is Mamma?

MOMOLO

If you don't come home, she won't survive.

MORTARA

Is she sick? I want to go home!

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RECTOR

This is your home now.

MOMOLO

No! Never! (*getting hysterical*) Leave us alone—please-- they promised me I could speak with my son—they promised!

RECTOR

He's such a fine boy, isn't he? We admire him. Everyone here loves him very much.

MOMOLO

You have no idea what it means to love a child.

RECTOR

He learns so quickly. He's the chosen one. Like Jesus in the Temple—do you know the story? When Jesus was twelve, he broke away from his parents and went to the Temple—Luke—Chapter 2--

MOMOLO

Don't you dare recite the Bible at me! I know how brilliant Edgardo is—he was reading Hebrew at four years old!

RECTOR

(*calmly*) There is an easy and blessed solution to your woes, Signore Mortara.

MOMOLO

The solution is to get him out of here! Before his mind is completely shattered and he forgets who he is forever. (*to Edgardo*) We'll have another trial, Edgardo, I promise! And next time, we will win!

RECTOR

The moment you and your family become Catholics, you can be with your beloved Edgardo again. That's how you will win.

MOMOLO

The moment we become Catholics? (*enraged*) Get out. Leave me alone with my son.

RECTOR

You've spoken to him. Visiting hours are over in ten minutes. It's time to say goodbye.

MORTARA

Papa! Don't leave me!

MOMOLO

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Edgardo! Listen to me. It's up to you. Be brave. You must tell them! If you want to save yourself, tell them you want to come home with me. Tell them who you are!

MORTARA

Who am I?

MOMOLO

You are my beautiful son Edgardo! And I am your Papa! We're Jews, Edgardo. We must fight!

MORTARA

(terrified, whispering) Don't say that. Don't ever say that! Don't you know who's outside? Are you trying to get me killed?

MOMOLO

Be brave. Look at me. Don't you remember the Ten Commandments, Edgardo? *(Mortara nods)* Tell me, then! What is the fifth commandment, handed down by Moses from the mount? What is it, Edgardo?

MORTARA

Honor thy father and thy mother.

MOMOLO

Say it again.

MORTARA

(trembling) Honor Thy Father and Mother.

MOMOLO

(emphatically) Honor Thy Father and Mother! Never forget it! God will not forgive you, Edgardo, if you fail us now!

MORTARA

I won't! I will never fail you!

MOMOLO

That's the spirit! *(to Rector)* Wake up! Edgardo rejects what you are trying to do to him. He wants to come home. Let him go, I beg you! Tell the Pope to let him go!

MORTARA

Let me go!

RECTOR

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It's impossible. He's no longer yours!

Bells start to ring. Mortara is startled, moves towards the door.

MORTARA

Listen! The bells! It's time for Vespers! *(Mortara looks around, as if talking to both Momolo and the Pope)* I must go. Forgive me, Papa, for I have sinned! *(whispering anxiously, holding out his Medallion)* Kiss the medallion! The Virgin will save you! She will save Mama too! The Jews crucified her son, but she will forgive us if we believe.

MOMOLO

Edgardo, stop it! We will never believe what they believe. We're getting you out of this place before you're destroyed!

MORTARA

I can't, Papa! You hear the bells?

MOMOLO

Forget the bells!

MONTARA

If I'm late, they'll be angry! The brothers are all waiting for me at the altar.

MOMOLO

Let them wait!

RECTOR

Run, Edgardo! Run to Mass! Quickly, before it's too late! *(Mortara runs into the corner of the cell)*

MOMOLO

(rushing after him) Edgardo! No! Don't go!

JUDGE #2

Order in the court! The evidence has been heard, and the Judges have deliberated.

MORTARA

(crying out, from the corner) Not guilty! Not guilty! Not guilty!

We hear organ chords in the distance, swelling under the verdict. There are sounds of anticipation from the crowd. Church bells begin to ring out. The Chief Judge bangs his gavel.

JUDGE #2

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Order! Order! (*Momolo turns away*) Count Ferrari will now read the verdict.

MOMOLO

I have failed. (*Momolo arrives wearily home from Rome. Perhaps he sits on Mortara's bench. Marianna is waiting for him*)

MARIANNA

Edgardo? Where is Edgardo? Have you brought him home?

MOMOLO

They wouldn't let him go.

MARIANNA

(*in anguish*) Edgardo! (*curling up on the ground*) Don't say another word.

MOMOLO

All he wants it to be in your arms again.

MARIANNA

(*rocking herself, almost in madness*) No. No. I can't hear. I can't hear you.

MOMOLO

He is well and healthy. He loves you so much. He spoke only of home.

MARIANNA

(*she is rocking. Beating her breast. Hurting herself*) End it, God. End it now.

MORTARA

(*hearing her cry*) Mamma!

MOMOLO

Don't hurt yourself. Edgardo will be true to us, Marianna—always and forever—I feel sure of it.

MARIANNA

Edgardo is dead! I can't even remember his smell! The sound of his voice! It's gone! He's forgotten us. Everything is starting to go.

MOMOLO

Listen to me. Garibaldi is amassing his troops. Soon he'll invade Rome. And when he does, and the soldiers are there to protect us, we will steal Edgardo from the Catechumens and bring him home to Bologna! We will restore him to his right mind.

MARIANNA

(*confused*) What right mind? Whose right mind?

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MORTARA

(echoing her) What right mind? Whose right mind?

MOMOLO

Keep his bed ready, my darling. Don't give up. I promise you, it won't be long now!
(They exit. From the opposite direction, the Pope and the Rector enter, in the midst of a dispute, shortly after Momolo's departure)

MORTARA

(calling after his parents) Then why did you leave me? Why did everyone leave?

POPE

Why the hell did you let them in, you fool?

RECTOR

It was just the father, your Holiness.

POPE

I am his father now! Idiot! Don't you understand? Edgardo is a child—he will be confused—a child cannot have two fathers!

MORTARA

(echoing him) A child cannot have two fathers!

RECTOR

Of course not, Your Holiness. But—

POPE

But nothing! The more he remembers his Jewish family, the harder it will be to bring him fully into the bosom of the Church. Burn their letters.

MORTARA

They wrote me letters?

POPE

This can *never happen again*.

MORTARA

I got no letters!

RECTOR

There is huge international pressure—

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POPE

From whom?

RECTOR

The world! Napoleon III is outraged—he says your ability to hold the child in Rome depends entirely on French troops in Rome—

POPE

That's right! French Catholic troops! Who are honored to serve their Pope! I am the head of Christendom—they cannot question my power! If those damn French abandon the Papal States, we will never survive! Burn the newspapers.

MORTARA

I listen at the door. They're yelling... about me.

RECTOR

It's just that...

POPE

What? What is happening out there? What evil groups are undermining me now? You tell that damn Rothschild that if he dares to intervene—

RECTOR

We need his loans to keep the Vatican afloat.

POPE

No! We'll find money somewhere else!

RECTOR

Please, Your Holiness. Rothschild is all there is between the Church and total bankruptcy.

POPE

(starting to tremble) Leave me. I don't want to hear it! I never want to hear the name Rothschild mentioned again! You hear me? These Jews are vermin—they are out to kill me, they are going to destroy the fabric of the Holy Catholic-- *(he starts to shake. An epileptic fit is coming on)* Leave! I can't—I have to go to my rooms—I'm— *(he collapses to the ground, having a seizure. The Rector expertly reaches down to hold the Pope's tongue—he has been through this many times before. In the midst of the seizure, Mortara rushes to him, alarmed at the memory)*

MORTARA

Papa! Papa! Papa! I'm here! *(he leans over the Pope and holds him. The Pope is heaving and twitching)* It's okay—it's me, Papa, Edgardo. Shhhh. *(slowly the Pope calms down. He lies back, exhausted)*

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VALENTINI

(addressing the whole court)

My friends, after hundreds of years of tyranny by the Church, a new secular order is being born! The papal colors flying over Bologna have finally been replaced by the Italian green, white and red! The opinion of the world is on our side! We must not believe the lying worlds of an anti-Semite because he was once the Inquisitor of this city and lived under the protection of the Pope. If Father Feletti is so innocent, why has he refused to appear before this court to defend himself? Why did he burn all the papers relating to the Mortara case? Why, when questioned, does he simply cite Papal privilege and say nothing?

POPE

Edgardo? *(he looks up at him)* You made me fall!

MORTARA

No, Papa. I didn't mean to! You were arguing—

POPE

About you! Your family is going to be the death of me! I have saved your soul-- and them?— all they want is to steal your body back—it is evil! Evil!

MORTARA

Stay calm. Forgive me, Papa! I have sinned.

POPE

You have sinned! You made me fall to the ground! Kneel down! *(Mortara does so)* Kiss my feet! *(Mortara does so)* Now make a cross on the floor with your tongue. *(Mortara hesitates, looks up at the Pope, and then does so)* That's right! Never forget who is in charge, Edgardo. *(beat)* And now, I bless you. Stand up. *(Mortara rises shakily and faces the Pope, who makes the sign of the cross over him)* They're coming to get you, my child.

MORTARA

Who?

POPE

The French. The Austrians. The newspapers. Your parents.

MORTARA

My parents? My parents have forgotten me.

POPE

They are stirring up our enemies!

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MORTARA

Why?

POPE

I warned you about Jews! They're rats! They spread plague wherever they go!

MORTARA

You're the Pope! You're infallible!

POPE

(backing away) Promise me you will stay with me, Edgardo, no matter what! Swear! Swear that you will always love me.

MORTARA

I will always love you.

POPE

(fanatically) Say it. Say it again.

MORTARA

I will always love you.

POPE

(agitated) Again!

MORTARA

Don't get excited—it makes you sick—look at the snow! *(he crosses to the window of his cell. The Pope disappears)* Look at the snow! *(the Young Priest enters. As the door opens, we feel wind blowing. The Young Priest stands in the doorway)* Riccardo! My brother! Is it you?

YOUNG PRIEST

It's me, Father Pio. Brother Nicolas. I want to take you to the infirmary.

MORTARA

No! Brother Nicolas, no! You don't understand! It's not *me* that's sick—it's the world. The whole filthy world is diseased. When I went into the convent as an aspirant, Italy was a random collection of independent states. When I came out, it was a country, a vile country full of non-believers and criminals. What a curse! Can you imagine? The war was on! Suddenly the Vatican was under attack—there were men in red sashes everywhere, waving their murderous banners—even my brother!

THE YOUNG PRIEST

Your brother?

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MORTARA

Riccardo! The one I loved the most! I couldn't understand it. But I should have known. He loved dressing up in uniform when we were boys! He loved waving flags and marching around the house singing songs! He wanted me to join him. He wanted us to be soldiers together! Garibaldi singled him out—he admired him so much!

THE YOUNG PRIEST

(wide-eyed) How do you know?

MORTARA

Because he told me. He tried to take me away. To lure me away from God. *(Mortara crosses to the Young Priest and pulls a red sash out of his pocket. Hands it to him. The Young Priest puts on the sash. Mortara backs away from him, terrified)*

RICCARDO

Don't be frightened. It's me. Riccardino! An Italian soldier!

MORTARA

(terrified) No!

RICCARDO

Yes! Look at the red sash! I'm a soldier of Garibaldi now! Can you believe it? We made it into the city!

MORTARA

Go away! Infidel! You're not allowed in the convent.

RICCARDO

We've taken over the streets! Rome is ours! I've come to bring you home!

Mortara places one hand over his eyes to shield him from the sacrilegious sight and extends the other hand in front of him to keep Riccardo from coming near him.

MORTARA

Get back, Satan! Get away from me.

RICCARDO

Don't say that. *(he removes his hat)* Look at me. Don't you remember?

MORTARA

Take off that assassin's uniform!

RICCARDO

No one will hurt you. I promise. The Papal States have fallen! Didn't you know?

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MORTARA

(anguished) Papa!

RICCARDO

We won! We're all Italians now! It's a whole new world! You have nothing to fear.

MORTARA

(trembling) Papa was right! He told me you would try to steal me away—to take me away from the Church—

RICCARDO

Of course we'll take you away! He said you would be frightened—but I told him you'd know it was safe because it's *me!* Riccardino! Your favorite brother!

MORTARA

You were!

RICCARDO

Papa's right behind me—he's on his way from Bologna—he has waited so long for this day to come.

MORTARA

No—no—he is weeping in the Vatican—

RICCARDO

In the Vatican? What are you talking about?

EDGARDO

Don't you know my Papa—the Pope of all Christendom?

RICCARDO

(bewildered) The Pope is not your Papa!

MORTARA

You must not make me violate my vows! You will not turn me into an apostate!

RICCARDO

What's an apostate?

MORTARA

(crying out) Anathema! They will call me "anathema"! They will throw me into the mouth of the devil!

RICCARDO

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They know who you are, Edgardo! Everyone knows!

MORTARA

No one knows anything! Where have you been? Where have all of you been? You're not my family—I have a new family now!

RICCARDO

No, Edgardo—they have no power over you anymore. The whole world wants to save you! You can be a Jew again.

MORTARA

A Jew? I can't be a Jew! The Jews killed our Lord. Jews swallow the blood of Christian babies and pollute the earth. Repent!

RICCARDO

Edgardo! Wake up!
Mortara throws himself on the floor. Prostrate.

MORTARA

Save me, Jesus! My Lord and Master! Save me from the infidel! Protect your son Edgardo from this heathen invasion and save my soul. *(Riccardo comes near him, quietly. Kneels beside him. Gently)*

RICCARDO

My brother. *Piccolino*. What have they been doing to you, all these years? What have they done to your mind? *(he reaches out to touch Mortara, who longs to be held by his brother)* I'm not going to hurt you, *fratello mio*. I'm your family. We have held you in our hearts from the second you got taken away. We breathe the same breath. We're made of the same flesh. The same blood. The same spirit. Look. Look what I brought you. From Mamma. *(he hands Mortara a letter, from his mother. Marianna appears, full of joy)*

MARIANNA

"Carissimo! When you read this letter, you will know that the joyful day has finally arrived. I never thought it would come, did you? I have longed for this with every ounce of my being since the night they tore you away. Come home, my angel! I am waiting!"

MORTARA

(in anguish) Home? How can I come home?

MARIANNA

"Your mamma may be old and broken now but I still have sweets in my pocket! Your little bed is standing by the window! Your brothers and sisters are opening their arms wide, to greet you! Your Papa is bursting with pride. We're all Italians now,

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Edgardino! We're safe! They can't hold you there any longer! We can finally be together again!"

EDGARDO

How? How can we be together?

RICCARDO

Imagine! Remember how we marched together, as little boys! Remember how we waved our flags and climbed over all the furniture? How we danced? Dance with me, Edgardino! *(he rises and starts dancing, clapping his hands and swirling around, laughing)* Dance with me! *(he tries to get Mortara up. Mortara resists)* You see? You're safe with Riccardino! It's time to celebrate! Come on! *(they start to dance the hora. Riccardo is laughing, clapping and swirling. Mortara begins to enjoy himself)* That's it! You do remember! Look at you! What a sight! Dancing the hora in the robes of a Priest! *(Mortara stops, ashamed. Moves away from Riccardo. Beat)* Why have you stopped?

MORTARA

We're priests! We're priests, Brother Nicolas! Dancing is forbidden!

RICCARDO

Dancing is a gift from God. It's still in your bones—I knew it would be. You will always be one of us!

MORTARA

I'm not. I'm no one! I have no family! No country. I have dedicated my life to God.

RICCARDO

No one will ever love you more than we do.

MORTARA

(looking around) Do you know what it means to be a Priest? That's what I'm going to be! I will study, and pray, and some day I will be ordained!

RICCARDO

You can let go of that now—you can return to your real faith!

MORTARA

What real faith? *(bursting out)* A promise can never be taken back. A promise is forever! I'm about to take a vow! A vow to serve the Holy Catholic Church, for the rest of my life. The Church will take care of me. No matter what happens. I'm so lucky! And you? You're liars, and cowards! I know that now. Jews can never be trusted!

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RICCARDO

Edgardo!

MORTARA

No one took care of me. Only the Virgin Mother. No one has come to celebrate Mass with me. I am alone—I have always been alone—since the day they took me away! *(looking around)* Where is Mamma? Why didn't you bring her with you?

RICCARDO

She's sick, Edgardo. Life has been hard for her. *(Marianna appears)*

MARIANNA

But when you come home, I will be well, Edgardino. All well. Didn't I tell you that God had chosen you for great things? We knew it! We always knew it, Edgardo! And now you've been set free.

MORTARA

I haven't. Don't make me go. They need me here. The brothers need me!

RICCARDO

(softly, urgently) Edgardo, listen to me. People have always wanted to claim you for their own. You seem to have that power over people. You may be a miracle. But now you have to be yourself.

MORTARA

And who is that?

RICCARDO

You are one of the chosen people. That is who you will always be.

MORTARA

Don't say that! They'll hear you!

RICCARDO

For twelve years, there has been an aching gash of sorrow in the center of our little house. Something Mamma and Papa couldn't stitch together no matter how hard they tried. We all tiptoed around it, trying not to think about it... but every once in a while, something would remind us of you... and then there would be tears everywhere, tears for you, for our beloved Edgardino whom we longed to bring home. Now it's time. Your long and horrible exile is over. *(Mortara buries his face)* It's okay. It's good to cry. So many years of sorrow. Ten long years of tears.

MORTARA

(looking fearfully at the door) You have to leave now. Before they catch you. Before they catch both of us. Or we'll be killed on the spot. Please. *(he reaches for Riccardo's*

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red sash and removes it. Riccardo and the Young Priest become merged in Mortara's confused mind)

MARIANNA

You too, Edgardo! Leave now!

RICCARDO/YOUNG PRIEST

I'm going to get some help. I promise, I'll never let you out of my sight again.

MORTARA

(frightened) You promise?

RICCARDO/THE YOUNG PRIEST

Is there something you want to tell me? Something you're trying to say?

MORTARA

No! You are my fiercest enemy!

RICCARDO/THE YOUNG PRIEST

I'm your greatest love.

MORTARA

The Virgin will never let me go!

RICCARDO/THE YOUNG PRIEST

The Virgin is waiting for you in heaven. She will never abandon you.

MORTARA

(quietly, ecstatically) Heaven! I've seen it, Brother Nicolas! In my dreams. Over the altar in the Abbey. And in all the paintings. A city covered in snow. Absolutely clean, without a single footprint to mar it—just sunlight and birdsong and bells. It's where we will go when we've been saved. Where the Virgin Mother is waiting to take us in her arms and hold us close! Help me. Help me, Brother Nicolas. Help me to find my way.

YOUNG PRIEST

Of course I will. Come to Mass.

MORTARA

I'm coming.

RICCARDO

Come to the train station! Tonight at ten. Papa will be there. No one needs to know. You will be totally protected. You have lost your way, but we will bring you home, and then you can repair your mind. Your heart. Your memory.

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MORTARA

(anguished) What should I do?

RICCARDO

Wear civilian clothes. I will be waiting under the clock at the center of the station.
(Sounds of soldiers outside)

MORTARA

(looking towards the door) Listen! Those soldiers! The Germans! They're coming back. Run, Riccardo! They chase Jews are—they'll poison you—like a rat in a cage!

RICCARDO

That's why you can't stay here!

MORTARA

Me?

RICCARDO

They want to cleanse the world —cover everything in clean white snow! Get out now, while you can!

MORTARA

It's too late! The Pope will never let me go. He has me guarded day and night. Take off that sash! *(he grabs Riccardo's sash and hides it in his pocket)* Tell no one what just happened. *(The Young Priest becomes himself again)*

YOUNG PRIEST

Why are you saying that?

MORTARA

Because I know! They're coming to take me away!

YOUNG PRIEST

Who? Who are you so frightened of?

MORTARA

They take people like me and shoot them in the woods! Don't you see? It's not safe here—not anymore—I have to hide—you have to hide me! *(he slips behind the Young Priest. Whispers)* They were all there that night, at midnight, at the train station. I was wearing civilian clothes. I hid behind the Rector. Everyone was trying to pull me apart. All I wanted was to be left in peace.

A train station in Rome. Sounds of crowds. Edgardo is with the Rector.

MORTARA

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Look! Soldiers in red sashes! They are guarding the station so I can't get out.

YOUNG PRIEST

Are you talking about how you left Rome?

MORTARA

I had to flee! The Pope knew it was no longer safe for me in Rome—he arranged it all, the train ticket, the guards, the trip across the border. “All the bayonets of the world will not force me to hand this child over to the clutches of the Revolution and the devil”. That’s what he said!

YOUNG PRIEST

The Pope? Why did the Pope want you to leave Rome? I don't understand.

RECTOR

(whispering) No one will recognize you in civilian clothes. They're looking for a young priest.

MORTARA

What should I do? What happens when my brother turns up at the station? Where do I go? What do I do?

RECTOR

(pulling dark glasses and a cigar out of his pocket) Wear these black glasses and take this cigar. Even if you don't light it, keep it in your mouth. *(Mortara does so)* Now remember, they're no longer your family! They're just Jews. They're nothing to you. Let them go! You will escape across the border, we will head for Austria where they still love Christ. The Pope has arranged a monastery to take you in. No one will know who you are. Here is your ticket. Don't move till the train has pulled up at the platform. Then you'll walk as quickly as possible behind me, and board the last carriage.

MORTARA

Give me my cross! *(in the distance hear, “Momolo! Momolo Mortara! Viva l'Italia!”)* Listen! Did you hear that? They're shouting my father's name!

RECTOR

(stepping in front of Edgardo) Stop it. Be quiet. I told you—he's no longer your father!

MORTARA

He came with my brother—they're waiting for me—maybe they still love me!

RECTOR

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No one loves you but the Church. The day of your baptism, you ceased to belong to them ever again. *(more shouts offstage, cheers, music)*

MORTARA

They're my family!

RECTOR

You've been confirmed! You're a Catholic believer! You think you can go home to some filthy ghetto in Bologna and pretend to be a Jew again? They will destroy you. You will be damned for all eternity! Do you want to be damned in the eyes of God?

MORTARA

No! Never!

GARIBALDINI #2

(entering quickly, calling out to other soldier) Guard those two entrances! And the back exit!

GARIBALDINI #1

The little snake! How the hell did he get away?

GARIBALDINI #2

They must've taken him out with the garbage. We should've gone through the dump.

GARIBALDINI #1

Vermin. We should've know the Pope would get him out! Where the hell did he go?

MORTARA

Don't do it! Don't take me away!

GARIBALDINI #1

(seeing the Rector) Excuse me!

RECTOR

Are you speaking to me?

MORTARA

Hide me!

YOUNG PRIEST

There's no one here. You're hallucinating.

GARIBALDINI #1

When's the next train to the border?

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RECTOR

I wouldn't know, my friends—I'm only going as far as Bologna.

GARIBALDINI #1

For what purpose?

RECTOR

To check on my factories! Viva Italia!

GARIBALDINI #2

Viva Italia!

MORTARA

Viva Italia!

RECTOR

And welcome to Rome! The world is with you!

GARIBALDINI #1

You haven't seen a group of priests hiding out here, have you? Or one priest? A young one?

GARIBALDINI #2

A piece of scum trying to escape Rome?

RECTOR

(mock shock) Are there really people trying to escape Rome after all you've done for us?

GARIBALDINI #2

Disgusting, isn't it? One particular rat has slipped through the cracks. *(seeing Edgardo)* Is that guy with you?

RECTOR

(quickly) Yes! This is my son! My son Adriano.

GARIBALDINI #!

Why is he hiding?

RECTOR

Alas, he can't hear you—he's deaf.

GARIBALDINI #1

But what's the matter with him? Why does he look so scared? *(he pulls him from around the back of the Rector)*

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RECTOR

(stepping between them) Forgive him, my friends. Crowds frighten him. He can't hear, you see.

GARIBALDINI #2

He would be just his age! The false priest who escaped! *(to Edgardo)* How old are you?

MORTARA

(whispering) I am an old man. My time is nearly up. Leave me in peace.

RECTOR

He's twenty-five, although he looks much younger, doesn't he? Do you like his suit? We've always been natty dressers, our family. It is our dream that some day we can make a suit for Garibaldi himself!

GARIBALDINI #1

He doesn't wear suits, you fool. He's a soldier!

The sound of a train approaching.

RECTOR

Ah! Excuse me, my friends. That must be our train!

GARIBALDINI #2

(to his companion) Go stand on the platform. Make sure no one in a Priest's robe gets on that train! I'll cover the other side. *(to Rector)* Have a good trip. *(the soldiers rush off)*

RECTOR

(to Edgardo) It's time. Run! *(Mortara takes a step or two and then freezes when he hears Momolo calling out from across the stage)*

MOMOLO

Edgardo! My son!

MORTARA

(suddenly captivated) Papa! My papa!

RECTOR

Shut up and run, you fool! God will protect you!

RICCARDO

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(calling out) Edgardo! My brother!

MORTARA

Riccardo! Papa! Come with me! Now! I'll lead you into Kingdom of Heaven!

RICCARDO

Come find us! Quickly. We are by the clock tower!

MORTARA

We need peace! Let us all find peace!

RICCARDO

Let's go home!

RECTOR

I'm going.

MORTARA

I'm coming with you!

MOMOLO

Come home!

MORTARA

I have no home!

MOMOLO

You are ours!

RECTOR

You are the Church's shining light.

MORTARA

(crying out, clinging to the Young Priest) I am no one! No one! I'm a rat in a cage. Nothing but a filthy rat they want to kill. I'll never get out. Stop watching me! Don't love me. Don't listen to me. Don't try to understand. There is nothing—nothing you can do to save me. *(he starts to scream. The sound of the train builds and then begins to disappear. He buries his face in his hands. It's quiet. The Young Priest holds him)*

YOUNG PRIEST

Stop! Stop, Father Pio. Everything is okay. You are safe!

MORTARA

(crying out) Forgive me! Forgive me! I don't want to die!

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YOUNG PRIEST

You're not going to die.

MORTARA

Why was I too scared to go with them? Why am I such a coward? Let them arrest me. I no longer care.

YOUNG PRIEST

No one arrests priests just for being priests! Even the Germans!

MORTARA

I'm not just a priest.

YOUNG PRIEST

If they arrest you, let them arrest me too. *(he helps Mortara to sit down on the bench)* Whatever happens, it will happen to us both.

MORTARA

(surprised) You mean that?

YOUNG PRIEST

I will stay with you always. You know I will.

MORTARA

Why wasn't I a real son to my parents? *(beat)* Why wasn't I like you, Brother Nicolas?

Momolo is at home again, with Marianna. Mortara sits beside the Young Priest on his bench.

MOMOLO

(wearily. To Marianna) I'm finished. I have failed utterly. I have failed myself. I have failed you, and our children. I have failed every Jew in Italy and across the world. For twelve years, we have prayed for Edgardo's release. For twelve years, we have wandered the world, begging for mercy. We have taken the Inquisitor to Court, and petitioned the Pope. We have sent letters to Rothschild, to President Buchanan, to Napoleon III. Our son Riccardo has joined the militia and defeated the French. The Garibaldi have taken over Rome. And still we have lost our son. We have lost Edgardo to the brainwashing of the Church. We have lost his mind to the evils of the Papacy. The bigots and fanatics have won. It's over. All over. Why did I ever try? Edgardo is gone. *(he sinks down, a defeated man. Marianna holds him. She prays)*

MARIANNA

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Oh Lord. Why have you forgotten us? Why have you abandoned my son? Where is he? What will become of him now?

MORTARA

Do you know why I become a priest?

YOUNG PRIEST

It's your gift. You had such vision! You preached in a dozen languages! You saved so many souls.

MORTARA

But not the ones I needed to save! My family! I needed to save my family!

YOUNG PRIEST

Maybe it wasn't God's will.

MORTARA

(rising, agitated) There's still time, Brother Nicolas. Time for salvation! I must get ready for my ordination. *(he starts taking off his robes)*

YOUNG PRIEST

Your ordination?

MORTARA

(his eyes bright with excitement) Help me dress! All of the novitiates are going to line up at the door in our white robes... I'm in Poitiers. In France! I am so young—only 21— not even the minimum age to become a priest—but I'm special—that's what they tell me--so special—

YOUNG PRIEST

Of course. You have always been special.

MORTARA

It was the happiest day of my life. I had been saved. I threw myself on my knees at the altar and thanked God.

YOUNG PRIEST

(smiling) Is that how it happened? You never told me about your ordination!

MORTARA

It was perfect! Except for my family. My family never came. *(beat)* The day of my ordination, the sun was bright. The sky was so blue. My robes were so white. I heard the bells ringing, and I was ready! I was reborn! Do you see? *(he lifts the glass of water and pours the remains onto his head. He stands shivering in his long johns)* You

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see! I am baptized anew! I am transformed by holy water! I get to choose beauty! And music! And light! I am becoming a Priest! No matter what anyone says! Me, Father Pio Edgardo Mortara, before the eyes of God and the world! All those years of training, and finally one day, the organ begins to play and it's my turn! My rebirth! My turn to be ordained!

The sounds of organ music. A glorious Chorus of song accompanies Edgardo's ordination as a Priest. Mortara rises in his cell. He begins to sing, with the Chorus.

ALLELUIA CHORUS

(singing) Jesus Christ is risen today
Alleluia!
Our triumphant holy day!
Alleluia!
He who died upon the cross,
Alleluia
Suffered to redeem our loss
Alleluia!

The Pope appears.

POPE

My most beloved Edgardo,
Today marks the day of your ordination to the Priesthood, and I am too ill to be with you. Nothing in the world has filled me with as much joy as this event, which I have longed for since the day you arrived in my care twelve years ago, a little Jewish boy whom we set on the path of righteousness. You are a comet in a dark sky, my hope in a bleak and broken world. Your tale is miraculous. God chose an illiterate serving girl to invest you with the divine grace of God through the sprinkling of holy water over your tiny head. You were a lost soul, saved from the God-forsaken path of the infidel and brought into the care of the Pope himself. Your life is a tale of redemption and glory, in which you, Edgardo Mortara, now named Father Pio, braved the threats of an ungodly world and chose to devote your life to spreading the word of the Holy Gospel. In honor of this glorious day, I have established a lifetime trust fund of seven thousand lire to ensure your support and well-being for the rest of your life. May you follow the ways of the Lord. My God bless you and keep you always, as I keep you in the innermost sanctuary of my heart.
With my eternal love, Pope Pius IX. Your Papa.

MORTARA

My Papa. *(The chords of the music build. The Pope exits)* When he died, I was so far away! I couldn't even hold him in my arms!

CHORUS

(singing)
The Mass is ended.

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Go in peace.
Alleluia.
In peace with God
Forever more
Alleluia.
Alleluia.
Alleluia.

MORTARA

(Looking around. It becomes very silent. Mortara is cold. He looks at the walls of the cell) Silence. *(beat)* So cold. It's always cold here. Italy was warm, I remember.

YOUNG PRIEST

Then why did you leave? Why did you come to Belgium? I've never understood--

MORTARA

Bouhay. I wanted to see Bouhay... famous for its sanctuary to the Virgin of Lourdes— *(excited)* The Virgin of Lourdes! Who revealed herself to the faithful in 1858! A miracle! 1858! The very same year that I was — *(he stops)*

YOUNG PRIEST

That you were what? *(beat)* 1858. You must have been a small child in 1858.

MORTARA

I was seven.

YOUNG PRIEST

“Show me the child of seven, and I will show you the man”.

MORTARA

This is the man. This is the miracle. Look at me. *(he stands up shakily)*

YOUNG PRIEST

Have you ever thought of going back? To Italy?

MORTARA

I have given a thousand sermons in a dozen languages. I've healed the sick. I've taught the young. I've travelled to all the abbeys of Europe, and I've tried—tried so hard—to convert the Jews. To save them. To bring them into the divine light of Jesus Christ.

YOUNG PRIEST

I know. *(beat)* Perhaps we will save them together.

MORTARA

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How?

YOUNG PRIEST

(whispering) In the barn at the bottom of the meadow, there is a hay loft. We have let the Resistance fighters sleep there. They are saving lives—every day—

MORTARA

(shocked) What are you saying? Are you harboring Jews?

YOUNG PRIEST

(carefully) We are all God's people, Father Pio.

MORTARA

All God's people. Yes. That's what my mother always said. *(Marianna appears)*

MARIANNA

We are all God's people! That's what *tikkun olan* means.

MORTARA

I didn't understand!

MARIANNA

Be kind, Edgardo! Be generous. It is our task to repair the tears in the fabric of the world!

MORTARA

Mamma!

YOUNG PRIEST

When did you last see your mother, Father Pio? Tell me!

MORTARA

My mother? *(he thinks)* In Perpignan, in France. I was preaching at a beautiful Norman church, and who was there in the front row— *(Marianna steps forward. He stops, shocked)* Mamma! Mamma had come to hear me. My heart was in my throat. I could barely speak. The church was so quiet you could hear her breathe. Silence. Tears pouring down her cheeks. First, I spoke my sermon.

Mortara turns and addresses the crowd, finishing his sermon. It's 1878.

MORTARA

Beloved friends— *(taking a deep breath)* -- the adventure of being a Catholic is unlike anything else in the world. It is a journey into light, into salvation, and joy,

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and completeness. *(smiling)* How can I explain? How can I describe the *balm* that is the love of God? The celestial music that fills one's mind when one contemplates the divine? It's a love ten times as beautiful as Dante and Beatrice's, a thousand times more powerful than Tristan and Isolde's, it is the love that passeth all understanding. Like a gentle breeze across the ocean after a storm, caressing one's frozen cheeks and bringing hope to one's aching heart. I can only say that I wish all of you could share in that wonder, that enormous pleasure. I wish you could know – could *believe*-- that all the sorrows and hardships of this life are not in vain, but are stepping stones on the path to glory. *(he looks longingly at his mother)* Can you see the Shining City, glowing and majestic in the distance?

YOUNG PRIEST

(transfixed) Yes!

MORTARA

(quietly, directly to his mother) Come with me. Follow me there! Then you will know how deeply I have always loved you. And how much I long to save your souls.

MARIANNA

(It's 1878. She comes near him and smiles. Opens her arms) Edgardo. My bambino. My love. I have been waiting with open arms! Look at you up there in your white robes! So handsome! So grown up. *(She opens her arms and he walks into them—they embrace warmly)*

MORTARA

Mamma! Carissima!

MARIANNA

Thirty years! How did we survive these thirty years?

MORTARA

Is it so long?

MARIANNA

(she touches his face) You speak so beautifully! Like a poet! You're the scholar I always imagined you would be!

MORTARA

And you are my beautiful mamma, just as I remembered you!

MARIANNA

No, my angel, I'm an old lady now.

MORTARA

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Do you still tell stories, looking out the window?

MARIANNA

Rarely, my love. My imagination has withered and died. Like a plant that someone forgot to water. *(she strokes his face)* My love. My soul. So much grief. So much sorrow. And nothing but lies and hate.

MORTARA

Don't say that.

MARIANNA

Never mind. It was God's will.

MORTARA

Why? Why was it God's will?

MARIANNA

For that, you must ask the Church. Your Church, that believes baptism is more important than family. Than history. Than anything.

MORTARA

I was chosen. Chosen by God. *(beat)* Forgive me.

MARIANNA

I do. I forgive you. *(beat)* It's your father you should beg forgiveness from. When he couldn't find you that day in Rome, his heart broke. Cracked in two. There was nothing else for him to live for. He had failed his life's work.

MORTARA

No! No one has failed, Mama! We survived! All of us! I'm happy. And you must be happy too! I am preaching the word of the Lord, all across Europe—

MARIANNA

So I hear! You have such a gift.

MORTARA

(urgently) You must place your love in my care! I want you to be saved! To be safe!

MARIANNA

I am safe, Edgardo. Tell me about yourself. You're still reading Dante!

MORTARA

Of course! I read in every language I can find—Dante, Virgil, Spanish, French, Hebrew—I am even learning to speak Basque!

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MARIANNA

What is Basque?

MORTARA

The language of the mountains in the south of France. Where the troubadours used to hide.

MARIANNA

(laughing) You always loved romance! Such a big heart you had. Always in love!

MORTARA

Me?

MARIANNA

Have you forgotten? We had a maid—Nina—she was the one who— *(she stops herself)*—Never mind.

MORTARA

I wish you'd visit me in Bouhay. Will you come when I die?

MARIANNA

I'll die before you, Edgardino.

MORTARA

Then come now! Come see the Abbey where I have made my life. We would welcome you with open arms!

MARIANNA

No. You wouldn't. They would not welcome me, Edgardo.

MORTARA

(anguished) Why do you refuse? Other families have joined their children! I've seen it! Many others! Why not you? I beg you, Mama—go to the Catechumens! They will help you! Save you! There's still time! For you and the whole family! Don't you want to be happy?

MARIANNA

I'm happy for your happiness. I'm proud of your success. You look so fine, dressed up in your white robes, telling those beautiful stories...

MORTARA

They're not stories! What I say in my sermons is the truth. I could save you, Mama!

MARIANNA

I don't need to be saved. *(beat)* You forget, Edgardo. I know who you are.

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MORTARA

Who am I?

MARIANNA

You come from a line of wanderers, for as far back as history can remember.

MORTARA

Yes. I am always wandering, carrying the word of the gospel wherever I go.

MARIANNA

(with rising anger) Language! It's just language! Words that they've taught you to say.

MORTARA

Salvation is not a *word*, Mama! It's a gift from God! It is granted to the blessed—to those who have been baptized—it could be granted to you too—

MARIANNA

And what about your blood? Your flesh?

MORTARA

I can't bear to see you go to Hell. I can't bear it.

MARIANNA

(suddenly erupting) You can't bear it? Have you any idea how it feels, Edgardo, to have your own flesh ripped away? To lose what you have loved most in the world? Can you even *imagine*, you, who have never had a child, never had a family of your own? You could have resisted! You could have said no! But you were too weak. What has happened to you? You're like a book that has been erased and written over with lies—it's horrible! Horrible!

MORTARA

(angry) They told me you would say that. Jews are all the same. They told me you would try to cast me out, as you cast out Jesus and left him to die. You're murderers, all of you! Filthy money-grubbing murderers!

MARIANNA

You're despicable. You're my beloved child, but you've become a despicable man.

MORTARA

Don't say that! Don't let me go!

MARIANNA

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Some day you will understand. Some day you will realize that however much you pretend... however much you believe your own lies-- when they come knocking at the door, they will know who you are.

MORTARA

Who am I?

MARIANNA

And you will know too. And then you must choose.

MORTARA

Choose what?

MARIANNA

Whether you are brave enough to set yourself free.

MORTARA

I'm a coward. I have always been a coward.

MARIANNA

No. Just confused. (*gently*) Knowledge of oneself is a gift from God, Edgardo. You spew hate when you get scared. But if you could find a way to reconcile with yourself, you would be my beautiful Edgardino again.

MORTARA

(*terrified*) What do they want with me? What should I do?

MARIANNA

(*she reaches under the bench and pulls out the battered suitcase*) Why do you think people like us perpetually have a suitcase packed and ready in the hallway? There is always a knock at the door for us. That is the nature of the world. We have been on the run since the time of Moses, and it will never change. It's what it means to be a Jew, Edgardo. To wander. To escape. To be spat upon. To start over in a new place, with new hopes. Over and over again. We will never belong, but we will always believe in ourselves. In our faith. The only thing we can hold on to is what's inside us, in our hearts, in our minds. Freely chosen. The *word*. That's what's left. The power of the word to speak the truth. To learn, to grow, to develop one's mind. To reason. To think. To write. To speak. They can never take that away from us, Edgardino. As hard as they try. They will try—and keep trying—you know they will—till the end of time. And we will keep learning, and keep fleeing. Because they're scared of what we think, and what we know. (*handing him the suitcase*) Hold on to it. Treasure what's inside. And keep your eyes open.

MORTARA

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They are! They are open! Don't leave me! *(Marianna begins to leave)* Mamma wait! I haven't finished! I need to know! What happened to you when you died? Are you in Hell? In Heaven? Where have you gone?

MARIANNA

I'm going now. *(she kisses him on both cheeks)* I will always love you, my Edgardino.

MORTARA

Why? How can you say that?

MARIANNA

I'm a Jewish mother. No matter how hard they try, they cannot separate my heart from yours.

MORTARA

Nor yours from mine. *(A knock on the door)* Listen! *(another knock)* They're coming for me, aren't they, Mamma?

MARIANNA

Yes, Edgardo.

MORTARA

Give me my suitcase. *(she hands it to him)* I'll need it, won't I? When they take me away.

MARIANNA

Yes. You will need it. You have always needed it. *(beat)* What will you tell them?

MORTARA

What should I tell them? *(Marianna opens the suitcase. We hear the violin tune mournfully playing. Mortara rocks back and forth, listening to it)*

MARIANNA

That's the music of our history, Edgardo.

MORTARA

Do I still have a history?

MARIANNA

(singing softly) "Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad. *(she looks at Mortara)*

MORTARA

(he joins her in singing)

Baruch Shem Kavod Melchuto L'Olam Va'ed. *(Marianna moves away)*
Sh'ma Yisroel.... *(the knocking gets louder. Marianna is gone)*

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MORTARA

Wait! Wait! I'm finishing the Sh'ma! I'm almost ready! Let me finish my prayers!

JUDGE #2

(knocking) Order in the court! The evidence has been heard, and the Judges have deliberated. Count Ferrari will now read the verdict to the Court. *(to Ferrari)* You may proceed.

JUDGE #3 (FERRARI)

"After considerable deliberation, this Court has determined that on the evening of 24 June 1858, the police took from the Jewish couple Salamone, alias Momolo, Mortara and Marianna Padovani, their son Edgardo, and furthermore, that this action was *authorized by the government* as it was constituted at the time.

Therefore there were not, and are not, grounds for proceeding criminally against the executors of the above-mentioned action and thus against the defendant Pier Gaetano Feletti of the Order of Preachers, formerly Inquisitor of the Holy Office in Bologna. Consequently, the boy Edgardo Mortara will not be returned to his family. Father Feletti is not guilty, and should be immediately released from jail."

There are sounds of an outcry from the crowd. These overlap with the sounds of the Gestapo banging on the door and calling for Mortara. Church bells begin to ring out. The Chief Judge bangs his gavel.

JUDGE #2

Order! Order! *(the Young Priest enters)*

MORTARA

You fools! He was guilty! They were all guilty! How can you not be guilty when you steal a child from his parents?

YOUNG PRIEST

Father Pio?

MORTARA

"Baruch atai adonia"—how does it go, Mamma? I forget the words. "Blessed art thou oh lord our god, king of the universe—"

YOUNG PRIEST

What are you doing?

MORTARA

I am saying my prayers, Brother Nicolas. The prayers I learned as a child. *(suddenly self-conscious in his long johns)* It's so cold. Where are my robes?

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YOUNG PRIEST

You must have taken them off.

MORTARA

Why? *(feeling his wet hair)* Why is my hair wet? *(he puts on his old sweater, shivering)* I'll put on my father's sweater. You see? I've kept it all these years-- from when I was a little boy.

YOUNG PRIEST

(picking up the battered suitcase) Do you remember this?

MORTARA

Of course I remember it! It's mine. If you open it, you'll hear music. *(beat)* Why is this day different from every other day?

YOUNG PRIEST

We found it in the attic.

MORTARA

Why is this day different from every other day? Because on this day, we eat tears! Tears! Do you hear? We dip our herbs into tears – and we weep for the lives we have lost!

YOUNG PRIEST

It must have been yours. From when you first came here.

MORTARA

And then there will be sweetness! Apples—apple blossom—honey—sweetness for the future!

YOUNG PRIEST

Inside were some Italian books. Some civilian clothes. And this. *(he holds out a mezuzah)*

MORTARA

(clutching it tightly) My mezuzah.

YOUNG PRIEST

The soldiers spoke to us.

MORTARA

Which soldiers?

YOUNG PRIEST

They told the Brothers in the Abbey what they knew. *(beat)* Who are you?

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MORTARA

I am Father Pio Mortara.

YOUNG PRIEST

Why could you not tell us the truth?

MORTARA

You know me better than anyone!

YOUNG PRIEST

I wanted to stay with you forever. Now it's too late.

MORTARA

It's never too late.

The knocking increases. Louder and louder. And then suddenly stops. The Young Priest stands silently by the door.

MORTARA

Such silence. *(beat)* The birds are all gone. *(beat)* Everyone is gone. Now we are nothing. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. We weep the tears of our ancestors! Two thousand years of tears. *(beat)* You said you would sit with me. *(The Young Priest crosses to the bench and sits beside Mortara)* You said you would stay with me.

YOUNG PRIEST

Are you Edgardo Mortara?

MORTARA

I am nothing.

YOUNG PRIEST

Tell me.

MORTARA

Is my suitcase packed? Is everything ready?

YOUNG PRIEST

Everything's ready.

MORTARA

(after a beat, taking the Young Priest's hand) Will you forgive me, Brother Nicolas?
(beat) Will you bless me after I'm gone?

YOUNG PRIEST

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I bless you now.

MORTARA

No matter what?

YOUNG PRIEST

Are you Edgardo Mortara? *(Mortara looks at him long and hard)*

MORTARA

Am I Edgardo Mortara? *(beat)* Who wants to know?

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.