A Review of "The Crown of Solomon and Other Stories"

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Dr. Israel Drazin is the author of twenty-five books, including a series of five volumes on the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, which he co-authored with Dr. Stanley M. Wagner, and a series of three books on the twelfth century philosopher Moses Maimonides, which he wrote alone. His latest book is Mysteries of Judaism, which has just been published by Gefen Publishing House. His website, visited by over 35,000 people annually is www.booksnthoughts.com.

The Crown of Solomon and Other Stories
By Marc D. Angel
Albion Andalus Books, 2014, 150 pages

This is prolific writer Rabbi Dr. Marc D. Angel's second fictional book, following his much acclaimed and enjoyed novel "The Search Committee." Several of the nineteen tales are based on true events. Many of the stories are set within Sephardic communities in Turkey, Rhodes and the United States.

"Betrayal and Redemption," for example, looks at the relationship between a frail thirteen-year-old girl on the Island of Marmara, Turkey, and a Greek non-Jewish girl of similar age. The two have an excellent relationship. The story explores what happens during an Easter week pogrom and afterwards.

"The Train" has an O'Henry thrill to it. It is about a non-Jewish woman in the American southwest who is married very happily to a non-Jewish man. Suddenly, she begins to dream that she is on the wrong train. The dream keeps repeating itself.

Readers may want to enjoy the tales and think of some of the details in them that are in other tales. For example, his first story "The Crown of Solomon" is

delightful. It is about a highly respected rabbi, scholar, and community leader who spends his life seeking to write all he knows. It is only when he dies that the town people, impatiently waiting to discover his wisdom, are able to read what he wrote. The message of the story is reminiscent of “The Aleph” by the great Argentine writer Jorge Borges as well as a midrashic tale, but Rabbi Angel tells the story differently with zest.

“And Though He Tarry” is a variation of the theme about strangers. A man comes to the synagogue frequently, acts very piously, covers his head with a tallit while praying, but is obnoxious and noisy. The congregants approach the rabbi begging him to expel the visitor.

Angel’s final tale “The Inner Chamber of the King” may remind readers of Maimonides’ parable about the palace at the end of his Guide of the Perplexed. But again, Angel gives it a twist; he adds an event that is a good lesson for all readers.

“The Crown of Solomon and Other Stories” may be ordered through the online store at jewishideas.org; or directly from the publisher, albionandalus.com; or through barnesandnoble.com or amazon.com.