

THE SURPRISE

I only ever saw my father angry once.

It was the sabbath. Ours was not a very religious household. Sometimes we lit candles; other times we did not. On this occasion, Mother had polished the silver candlesticks until they gleamed. There was a plaited loaf laid upon a white tablecloth. There was a guest in the dining room. We didn't know who he was but he looked distinguished in his smart suit with his fine, silver grey hair.

My father called us to make the traditional blessings on the bread, wine and candles. My brother whispered his idea to me: why don't we sing it mock-rock fashion, with air guitars? I knew in my heart that this was wrong but somehow I agreed to it.

We entered the dining room. My brother and I twisted our faces into ugly shapes, thrust our legs apart and strummed our imaginary instruments. 'Barach atah adonai...'

That was as far as we got. Our guest had lowered his eyes and our father's neck was purple.

'Go to your rooms,' he hissed.

We sat in our bedrooms in shame. My mother brought us food on a tray. Even though it was delicious, it stuck in our throats. We could hardly swallow.

Later that night, my father came to speak to us. That man, a publisher, was an observant Jew. He was our guest. We embarrassed him.

That evening taught me many lessons. The one is to be careful with other people's beliefs. It is important to make others feel comfortable in your home. And also, do not presume to know what others will be offended by.

Never again have I mocked someone's religion.