



Dinorah Rudolph is a teacher at the Spanish Center, whose story is on the picture pages 4B and 5B.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's Messiah Story

New York — (CPF) — "As Tobias approached the center of the city, a stranger stopped him. He was tall and had a white beard. He wore a long coat and carried a staff.

"'Peace be with you, Tobias,' he said, and held out his hand. Tobias, forgetting he could not move his right hand, clasped the stranger's with it. He was baffled by his miraculous recovery."

Thus does Tobias, a scribe who lived long ago, meet Elijah, a man sent from Heaven, in a story called *Elijah the Slave*.

Written by Isaac Bashevis Singer, the noted Jewish author of short stories, *Elijah the Slave* has won the 1970 National Book Award for children's literature.

Based on an old Hebrew legend, *Elijah the Slave* is filled with allegories about the coming of the Messiah. In the Old Testament, a prophet named Elijah is considered a forerunner of Christ or, some say, John the Baptist. At the end of Singer's story, Elijah — like the Elijah of the Old Testament — is taken up to Heaven by angels.

Elijah the Slave, illustrated with full-page drawings by Antonio Frasconi and published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, is a story that begins in a ghetto of a large city of ancient times.

There, a man named Tobias, "a holy man," eked out a living as a scribe who copied the sacred scrolls. One day he becomes ill and loses the use of his right hand, so that he can no longer support his family, which includes a wife and five children.

"When the neighbors saw the family's need," Singer's story goes, "they tried to help. But Tobias refused their offers, saying, 'There is a God and He will help us.'"

But his wife, Peninah, tells him:

"If God intends to help us, it better be soon. But whatever He might do, for you to just sit at home doesn't improve matters. You must go out into the city. Even while waiting for a miracle, it's good to do something. Man must begin and God will help him."

It is shortly afterward that Tobias sets out from his home, lame hand and all, to get some

support for his family and it is then that he meets the tall stranger with the white beard, who miraculously heals Tobias' hand.

The stranger tells the startled Tobias:

"My name is Elijah and I am your slave."

Elijah tells Tobias to take him to the marketplace and auction him off to the highest bidder, which Tobias does. Elijah draws a very high price because he promises he can build the most magnificent palace anyone has ever seen.

Tobias takes the money, thanks Elijah and goes home to his wife and children. His part of the story ends with:

"As always, Tobias gave a tenth part of his money to the poor; and even though he was now a rich man, he decided to go back to his beloved work as a scribe."

Later, Elijah prays to God for help in building the palace he said he could build. A band of angels comes down from Heaven and in one night they build the palace. In thanks, Elijah is freed by his owner. The story ends:



"'You are free, my lord,' replied the merchant and he bowed low before God's messenger.

"The angels laughed.

"God looked down from his seventh heaven and smiled.

"The angels spread their wings and, together with Elijah, flew upward into the sky."

The coveted National Book Award (plus a glowing review on TV's Today Show by Gene Shalit recently) will undoubtedly open up a new audience for Singer, known until now primarily for his tales of Jewish life in Poland and Jewish

immigrant life in the United States.

Singer is 66. His books include *The Seance* — a collection of short stories — *The Manor*, *The Spinoza of Market Street*, *In My Father's Court* and *The Slave*, a 1962 novel unrelated to *Elijah the Slave*. All were originally written in Yiddish, the language he prefers to write in.

"There is not a thing that I would exchange for my stories in Yiddish," Singer told an interviewer two years ago. "If somebody would tell me to become President or even Pope, I would say, 'No, I'd rather write my Yiddish stories.'"

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