



Hershele: A Jewish Love Story

Jacob Dinezon

Jane Pepler, Translator

Jewish Storyteller Press (Aug 1, 2016)

Softcover (182pp)

978-0-9798156-7-6

A romance that has stood the test of time, Jacob Dinezon's touching, traditional novel was originally published in 1891. Recently translated from the Yiddish into contemporary English by Jane Pepler, *Hershele: A Jewish Love Story* remains a moving story of a poor student's courtship of Mirele, a wealthy widow's daughter. Described as "the Romeo and Juliet story of the shtetl," *Hershele* is both a historical novel and a sweet, ageless romance.

"Hershele didn't follow the path of the wicked and didn't place himself in the way of sin," but his righteousness confounds his pursuit of Mirele. What is proper? How can he woo her, when he has nothing to offer but himself? *Hershele* dwells on traditional themes and is deeply romantic. Observation of the Torah, refraining from physical contact with the opposite sex, and matchmaker-arranged marriages add to *Hershele's* struggle—and his satisfaction when he celebrates small successes: "She came closer to see the words and pressed her burning cheek against his. He felt her body, her warmth, her heartbeats, and his heart pounded, too." There's more heat in Mirele's proximity than a hundred ripped bodices. *Hershele's* love is completely proper and yet, at the same time, intensified by its modesty.

Pepler's translation is lively, capturing the spirit of Dinezon's fable. Beautiful, lyrical sentences tease the imagination, painting a vivid picture of the two lovers: "When he looked in the mirror, he only saw Mirele: her cheeks shone like a pair of lovely roses, and in her eyes a radiant fire burned."

Bit by bit, without compromising his faith, *Hershele* wins over his *besherete*, his soul mate. Their attraction, and the conflicts raised by their social disparity, is timeless.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (Fall 2016)

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