

Flames of Freedom

Podcast Episode 2

"Exile"

Written by Richard Stone. Produced and directed by Mark Simon at Cue Tone Productions. Audio Engineering, Original Music, and Sound Design by David Wilson. Executive Producer Lance Toland.

This is a production of LTA Entertainment.

FLAMES OF FREEDOM

"Episode Two: Exile"

FADE IN UNDER
OPENING MUSIC:

SFX: OPENING MUSIC

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to Flames of Freedom, a docudrama based on actual historical events, brought to you by Lance Toland Entertainment. Episode 2: Exile. In the previous episode, Zipporah is telling the story to her grandson, Benjamin Jonas Phillips, of her father and mother, Diogo and Gracia Nunes and how the Inquisition had incarcerated them for Judaizing in 1703. Whereas Diogo capitulated under torture, Gracia proved to be more resilient when confronted by the Inquisitor General...

OLD INQUISITOR GENERAL

Don't you think it would be easier for both of us if you simply confessed? It will be painless. The weight of your sins will be lifted, and you can return to being a mother to your child. Need I remind you, you haven't seen him for two years. I wonder if he would even recognize you by now.

GRACIA

(between clinched teeth)
You can go to hell.

ZIPPORAH

My mother spat in his face.

SFX: Spitting

OLD INQUISITOR GENERAL

You filthy Marrano bitch! Tighten the ropes, and if you have to, tear her limbs off!

SFX: music out

ZIPPORAH

Well, the fact that I am here is proof that the Old Inquisitor failed in his task to break my mother.

BENJAMIN

How did she survive that?

ZIPPORAH

As I said, she was an amazing woman, tough as nails. If it wasn't for my father interceding and begging her to say what they wanted to hear, she might never have given in, and I, I might never have been born. And Lucio Gama, who later took the name Shem Noah, might never have come into our lives.

BENJAMIN

Who was he?

ZIPPORAH

My brother, even though he was not my parents' child. But definitely a member of our family. My parents adopted him after the Auto da Fé of 1706.

BENJAMIN

The auto what?

ZIPPORAH

The Auto da Fé. It means "act of faith." Did you ever read in your history books how the Romans would bring the Christians into the Coliseum and watch as vicious lions tore them apart?

BENJAMIN

Yes, we studied it just last fall.

ZIPPORAH

Well, the Auto da Fé was something like that. Just in modern times, in Lisbon...

SFX: music shift; shouts from the crowd; hubbub

CROWD 1

Jewish devil!

CROWD 2
May your soul burn in hell!

CROWD 3
Worthless bitch!

SFX: Person being chained to a stake

CROWD1
Burn the heretics!

CROWD 2
Kill the Jew lovers!

CROWD 3
Filthy marranos!

ZIPPORAH (V/O)
...they built a large stadium in the center of town and marched religious prisoners through the streets dressed in sackcloth, garments they called sanbenitos, yellow with red crosses if you were a heretic who was doing penance, like my mother. But if the sackcloth was black, painted with devils, dragons, and flames, you were considered an impenitent heretic and condemned to burn at the stake. That's what happened to Shem Noah's parents on that fateful day as they were chained to a post surrounded by a pyre of wood. The executioner fed the crowd's flames of hate as he held his torch to the faces of Lucio Gama's parents, who were bound there on the stake.

EXECUTIONER
(laughing diabolically)
Should I show mercy? Clearly, they are guilty as charged.

THE CROWD
No mercy! No mercy! No mercy!

NARRATOR
The executioner looked to the priest, seated in a special box reserved for royalty. The cleric nodded, and the executioner lowered his torch to ignite the flames.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The crowd screamed with murderous rapture.

SFX: Crowd screams, torch fluttering, ignition sound

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Standing to the side was Lucio Gama, their son, barely six years old, with two priests holding him by his arms. He was screaming and crying, attempting to break free as his parents, with the flames licking at their feet, recited the Shema, our holiest of prayers proclaiming the oneness of God, before the flames engulfed them.

LUCIO GAMA

Mama! Papa!

ANSELMO & MIRIAM GAMA

Sh'ma Yis-ra-eil, A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu, A-do-nai E-chad. Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One...

SIX-YEAR-OLD LUCIO

Mama! Papa!

SFX: music denoting scene change

BENJAMIN

They burned his parents at the stake? Why?

ZIPPORAH

His father was a Converso who married a Mulatto woman whom he met on the island of São Tomé, a Portuguese settlement off the Western coast of Africa. They both rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah and re-embraced Judaism, even speaking out against the Catholic Church. The Portuguese officials arrested them and brought them back to Lisbon, where they were tried by the Inquisition and convicted of heresy.

BENJAMIN

How did Lucio Gama come to live with you?

ZIPPORAH

My father saw him that day, watching his parents murdered. He once told me it broke his heart. As the crowd dispersed at the end of the Auto da Fé, my father found Lucio alone, huddled in a corner of an alley, sobbing. He comforted him, then picked him up in his arms and walked slowly back to the square. My mother, Gracia, was waiting for him, exhausted but with a look of defiance in her eyes. They conferred quietly and, together, walked the streets until they arrived at their house. From that day on, no one questioned whether or not Lucio was a family member. I considered him my brother as much as any of my blood brothers were to me.

BENJAMIN

So when they came home, what happened? I mean, you said they lost everything.

SFX: Footsteps among the ruined house

ZIPPORAH (V/O)

Yes, nearly everything...our home had been ransacked. The furniture was turned over, and the cushions slit open. Medical books were strewn on the floor. My father picked up one of the books with half the pages ripped out...

DIOGO

We're ruined. How are we going to ever recover from this?

SFX: Gracia picking up a chair and righting it

GRACIA

We'll start over. We should be grateful we're still alive.

DIOGO

Start over? With no patients? No practice? My reputation is destroyed. Start over? What are you thinking?

GRACIA

There are three things they
couldn't take from us. Our faith.
Our minds. And our determination to
survive.

DIOGO

What should I do?

GRACIA

Start by picking up these books and
putting them back on the shelf. And
don't forget. You're one of the
brightest, most gifted doctors in
Portugal. Your knowledge isn't in
these books; it's in your
head...and they haven't taken that
from you! Trust me, patients will
return and seek you out because
they will need your skills and what
you alone know.

DIOGO

You don't understand...

GRACIA

I understand that if you are not
strong, we will not survive this
Diogo, and those Catholic
bastards...they will have won!

ZIPPORAH

My father, Diogo, faced her, took a
deep breath, picked up a book, and
put it back on the shelf.

SFX: Book being slid into the shelf

BENJAMIN

Did he ever get any more patients?

ZIPPORAH

Those early years were difficult.
But my father's reputation had been
restored by the time I was born.
Many of the friars at a nearby
monastery relied on him, which led
to a fateful day as my father was
pouring over a medical text...

SFX: KNOCK ON THE DOOR

SERVANT

Doctor Nunes, this was just delivered by courier.

ZIPPORAH

The servant handed him an envelope with a red wax seal.

DIOGO

Thank you, Doroteia.

ZIPPORAH

My father examined the letter's red seal closely. Instead of opening it, he got up, went to the parlor where my mother was knitting, and handed her the envelope.

GRACIA

What is this?

DIOGO

Look at the seal.

GRACIA

The Inquisitor General?

DIOGO

Yes. What business would he have with us? We're just getting back on our feet. We have been careful. Who could have spoken out against us?

GRACIA

How do you know it's an accusation?

DIOGO

What else could it be?

GRACIA

They wouldn't be sending you a letter without an accusation. We'd both be in chains by now.

DIOGO

What, then, would he want with me?

ZIPPORAH

My mother handed the envelope back to my father.

GRACIA

I suggest you open it and find out.

ZIPPORAH

He took the envelope, broke the seal, removed a folded letter, and read it before handing it to my mother.

DIOGO

He requests to see me in his office at two this afternoon.

GRACIA

Does he say why?

DIOGO

No. Perhaps he wants me to testify against one of our friends.

GRACIA

If it's bad news, at least we'll know something before the day is out. Keep your head about you. We'll get through this.

ZIPPORAH

Later that afternoon, my father found himself sitting in a large chair in the palace hallway of the Inquisitor General, waiting to see CARDINAL DA CUNHA. The Cardinal was a few years older than my father and was dressed in priestly garb, with a long flowing beard with faint specs of grey showing.

SECRETARY

Doctor Nunes, Cardinal da Cunha will see you now.

SFX: footsteps on the marble floor

ZIPPORAH

My father followed her to the door of the Inquisitor General, which the secretary opened and announced his presence.

SECRETARY

Doctor Nunes.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Thank you, Leonor. Doctor, please, come, have a seat.

ZIPPORAH

The Inquisitor General motioned him to a seating area with two large chairs facing each other as his secretary shut the door.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Can I offer you a coffee?

DIOGO

Yes, please.

SFX: Coffee being poured.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

(coughing)

You are highly recommended, Doctor Nunes.

DIOGO

For what?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

(chuckling)

For what, he asks? As perhaps the best physician in the land, at least according to the Dominican friars you treat.

DIOGO

Well, thank you. I work hard to keep them healthy.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

I have been doing some research on you. Both you and I attended the University of Coimbra {Ko-eem-bra}. Missed you by just a few years. I understand you even took a course or two in theology. Myself, I gravitated toward Canon Law.

DIOGO

Yes, I find the history of our faith most fascinating.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

I like that in a man of science.

DIOGO

Good doctors will be the first to tell you that we don't do the healing. It's our Father in Heaven who is the physician. We're just instruments of his will.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

(again coughing)

Yes, so true. Nevertheless, even though I believe the Lord Jesus can heal the infirm, he can work even more powerfully through someone knowledgeable. Do you not agree?

DIOGO

Yes, otherwise, God would have called me to perform some other kind of service to mankind. Maybe even the priesthood.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

(chuckling)

I'm glad we have a common point of view. I know you're a busy man, so let me get down to business. I invited you here today because I have a problem you can help me with.

DIOGO

(hesitating)

A problem?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Yes, it's this cough. Other doctors can't seem to figure out why or prescribe anything to help.

DIOGO

Ah, well, let's take a look.

ZIPPORAH

My father got up and approached the Inquisitor General as he pulled out a tongue depressor from his pocket.

DIOGO

May I touch you?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Of course.

DIOGO

Please, open your mouth.

ZIPPORAH

After examining the Inquisitor General's throat, my father took his ear to his chest and listened. He then thumped his back in several places and then pressed his abdomen. The Inquisitor General winced.

DIOGO

What have other doctors told you about this cough?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

It's in my lungs, they say.

DIOGO

Well, I suspect they're wrong. It's in your stomach.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Stomach?

DIOGO

Yes. How late at night do you eat dinner, and how much time between dinner and sleep?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Between ten and eleven, depending on work, and then I go to bed after a little reading, like everyone else.

DIOGO

Well, your stomach isn't like everyone else's. Do you wake up coughing sometimes?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Often.

DIOGO

You see, when you go to sleep after eating so late, the acid in your stomach comes back up, irritating your throat and causing you to cough.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

That is amazing--it's not my lungs?
What do I do about it?

DIOGO

Eat earlier, for one, and let your
food digest before sleep. I'll send
over some pills I want you to take
three times a day with every meal.
You should be doing much better
within a week; if not, let me know.

ZIPPORAH

My father placed his hand
reassuringly on the Inquisitor
General's shoulder and gave him a
light pat on the back.

SFX: man patting someone's back

DIOGO

Now, I must return to my surgery if
there is nothing else. I have a
patient scheduled in a short while.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Of course. You have been most
helpful and generous with your
time. Thank you.

DIOGO

No, thank you for your trust. I
suggest you make an appointment to
come to the surgery in four weeks
for a more thorough examination. At
our age, it's good to have a full
check-up once a year.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

I will do that.

DIOGO

Good day.

ZIPPORAH

When my father returned home my
mother was picking flowers in the
garden. He snuck up from behind,
picked her up in his arms, and
twirled her around.

GRACIA

Diogo, what has gotten into you?
Stop it!

ZIPPORAH

He did stop spinning her but held her in his arms.

DIOGO

You are the wisest woman I have ever known.

GRACIA

And you are a liar? What happened with the Inquisitor General? Obviously, you haven't been arrested!

DIOGO

No, what a paranoid fool I am. He wants me to be his doctor. He even thinks we have much in common because we studied the same courses in university.

GRACIA

You? A Converso Jew ministering to that monster? Have you lost your mind?

DIOGO

Perhaps, but think of it. Being his doctor gives us greater leeway to help others, putting us above suspicion, does it not?

GRACIA

True. But I don't like it all the same.

DIOGO

We don't have to like it. It's simply a marriage of convenience.

GRACIA

So it is. But Diogo, don't ever forget, he's a dangerous man who is not to be trusted.

SFX: to denote return to parlor

BENJAMIN

Your father became the Inquisitor General's doctor?

ZIPPORAH

Oh. That's not all. The Inquisitor General was so happy with my father's care that he referred him to the King. We soon had princes and princesses coming to the house seeking his medical advice and often attending our parties and dinners.

BENJAMIN

And you had been born by then?

ZIPPORAH

Oh yes, I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters were much older, as was Lucio Gama. I'm not sure they were quite as impressed as I was seeing all these royals traipsing through the house. It seemed like a fairytale. Little did I know what a charade it was.

BENJAMIN

Charade?

ZIPPORAH

Yes. While my father, by day, ministered to the King and his court, by night, something of a more clandestine nature was unfolding in our home. I recall one night when, besides my father and mother, three couples arrived for tea after the servants had been sent packing for the weekend. HENRIQUE DE CASTRO and his wife IZABELLA, JOÃO DA COSTA VILLAREAL and his wife ROSA, and MANOEL RODRIQUES SARZEDAS DA LA GUARDIA and his wife MALIYAH.

JOÃO

(whispering)

Is it safe?

GRACIA

Yes, the servants have been given the weekend off. We're alone.

JOÃO

(still whispering)

Good.

(MORE)

JOÃO (CONT'D)

The Inquisitor General seems to be increasing his scrutiny of all of us. I have it on good authority he has been digging around in the records, identifying Conversos for investigation. Especially those of us who have means.

MANOEL RODRIQUES

Maliyah and I have been talking. We want to leave. The sooner, the better.

HENRIQUE

We want to leave, too, but we must be careful. Every time one of us manages to escape their clutches, they crack down on the rest of us. Brutally.

IZABELLA

Henrique, we have three children. Do you want them to grow up hiding like we have all these years?

HENRIQUE

Of course not.

IZABELLA

Then, like Manoel and Maliyah, I want to leave now. Not tomorrow. Or next month. Now! I'm suffocating.

DIOGO

An English postal ship is scheduled to depart at midnight tomorrow at the end of the high tide. I am told they have room for just eight people. Clearly, this time around, they can't accommodate all of you and your children. But there will be another ship, hopefully in a few weeks.

NARRATOR

The couples contemplated the implications of this news.

GRACIA

Let me suggest we draw lots to see who departs tomorrow and who waits for their chance to leave.

ROSA

We don't have children. Maliyah, you have one, Izabella, three, that's eight. You go, and we'll wait.

MALIYAH

Are you sure?

JOÃO

I agree with Rosa. Get your children out while you can. We'll take our chances and hopefully join you in London before the end of the year.

DIOGO

Then it's decided. I'll let the harbormaster know. Gracia will visit you tomorrow for tea with all the details. May your journey be a safe one.

SFX: music change to denote returning to the parlor with Zipporah and Benjamin

BENJAMIN

Your parents were like revolutionaries in the war against the British.

ZIPPORAH

Yes, something like that. All of us children were sworn to secrecy. It was all so exciting, but little did I realize the danger was always lurking in the shadows. No one could let their guard down.

BENJAMIN

Did Manoel and Maliyah and Henrique and Isabella get away safely?

ZIPPORAH

Yes. They did.

BENJAMIN

And the others?

ZIPPORAH

They, too, got away with my parents' help.

BENJAMIN

And your parents were never caught?

ZIPPORAH

Not for a long time. They had so many friends in high places no one would have ever suspected their complicity in smuggling people out of Portugal. In fact, my father used his relationship with the Inquisitor General to help others whose arrest was imminent...One Day the Inquisitor General was shown into the examining room by LUCIO GAMA, who was by then in his late teens and working as my father's assistant.

SFX: music change to denote scene change

DIOGO

Lucio, please give the Cardinal a robe. You can undress there behind the screen.

ZIPPORAH

The Inquisitor General removed his clothing behind a folding screen and returned to the examining room, robed. My father pointed to the table so he could proceed with his examination.

DIOGO

Please, lie on the table.
Is everything going well?

INQUISITOR GENERAL

As well as can be expected given the apostasy of so many Conversos living amongst us. Diogo, you wouldn't believe what I have to deal with on a daily basis.

DIOGO

(continuing the exam)
Hm, hm.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Just the other day, I got information from a source that one of the King's most trusted advisors is a secret Jew.

DIOGO

No!

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Yes. You know Juan Henriques Alvarez?

DIOGO

Yes, in passing at festivals and parties at the palace.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

A Jew!

DIOGO

No!

INQUISITOR GENERAL

I tell you, Diogo, this job of forcing confessions from these people makes the acid in my stomach boil.

DIOGO

Haven't I told you, you must be more careful? Delegate the interrogations to someone else.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

(taking a deep breath)

You're right. As always. What would I do without you?

DIOGO

Just relax and put Juan Henriques Alvarez out of your mind for now. You'll have plenty of time to consider what to do with him.

INQUISITOR GENERAL

Diogo. Thank you for your wise counsel, my trusted friend.

SFX: MUSIC CHANGE TO DENOTE RETURNING TO THE PARLOR

BENJAMIN

So, what did he do knowing that Juan Henriques Alvarez was in trouble?

SFX: door closing quietly; steps on the docks; a ship weighing anchor

ZIPPORAH

That's where the story gets interesting. My mother acted as a go-between, inviting Alvarez's wife, Ilyana, for tea. Casually, she mentioned that she and her family should consider a vacation. Perhaps to the Azores. And then recommended a ship leaving from the docks that evening. The Azores was, of course, a code to alert them they were in danger. As you now know, my father had a secret relationship with a Converso who ran the harbor and would pay off the captains of British postal ships. If all went well, by morning, they would be at sea, out of the reach of the Inquisition.

BENJAMIN

It sounds dangerous.

ZIPPORAH

It was. Lucky for me, I was too young to realize just how precarious our existence in Lisbon was. But this went on for years, until Passover in 1726 when our world collapsed all around us, and we were all arrested and thrown into the Inquisitor's jail.

SFX: INTERIOR OF PRISON CELL AND JAIL DOOR OPENING

ZIPPORAH

There we were, shackled to the wall with manacles, my father and mother, all of my siblings, and my aunt and uncle. The guards entered the cell, untied Theresa my older sister, and took her out, binding her wrists behind her back with a rope hanging from a pulley suspended from a beam. Slowly, they hoisted her up.

THERESA

(screaming in pain)

ZIPPORAH

There she hung, writhing and screaming in agony, with her feet dangling inches above the ground as we all watched in horror.

THERESA

(screaming in pain)
Daddy! Daddy! Make them stop...

GRACIA

(crying)
Do something Diogo...please don't let this happen again...

DIOGO

Stop it! Stop it! I'll confess!
Please! In the name of God, do not do this...

GRACIA

You monsters!

DIOGO

Take me to the Inquisitor General.
I demand it! I'll do anything. Sign anything. Confess to anything. But just stop this...Now!

ZIPPORAH

The torturers looked at each other, and one of them nodded with an expression of self-satisfaction. They slowly lowered Theresa to the dirt, where she collapsed in a heap, whimpering and crying. Then, they untied her and dragged her back into the prison cell, bound her hands with the shackles, unshackled my father, and ushered him from the cell.

END

ANNOUNCER

This is the conclusion of Episode two of Flames of Freedom. Written by Richard Stone. Produced and directed by Mark Simon at Cue Tone Productions.

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Audio Engineering, Original Music, and Sound Design by David Wilson. Executive Producer Lance Toland. Special thanks to our ensemble cast...Zipporah played by Angelines Santana. Benjamin played by Jamie Treselyan. Diogo Nunes played by Juan Pablo Gamboa. Gracia Nunes played by Federica Fogarty. Additional roles played by Brad Davidorf and Barry Stoltze. Thanks to Rabbi Saul Rubin, whose assistance throughout the development of this series was invaluable. And for their guidance and support of this project from its early inception, special thanks to Rabbi Robert Haas of Congregation Mikve Israel in Savannah, GA, Rabbi Rachael Bregman of Temple Beth Tefilloh in Brunswick, GA, Rabbi Shalom Morris of Bevis Marks Synagogue in London England, and Lord Peter Levine of London City, England, and the Jewish Heritage Alliance for their support.

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