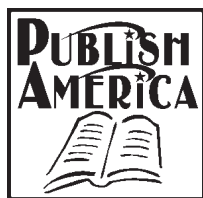


# Sephardic Farewell

*Ancestors*

by

Joseph Hobesh



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*To the memory of my parents,  
Albert and Sultana Hobesh, whose Sephardic  
roots I honor.*

*To my wife Anita, without whose support  
this work would still be a figment of my vivid  
imagination.*



*I am indebted to the many scholars and historians whose works I relied upon to transform historical facts into historical fiction.*



# Prologue

*The emigration of Jews to Spain began around the sixth century B.C.E., following the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians. They came as refugees or slaves, torn from the land of their forefathers. Suffering hardships, persecution, and conversionary pressures. Yet they survived the Roman, Visigoth, and Byzantine Empires.*

*A larger exodus occurred after the destruction of the second temple, around 70 CE, during the rule of King Herod. At this time the Roman Empire was the predominant power in the world, and although it was the Romans who destroyed the second temple, King Herod's policies and politics brought infamy to himself and catastrophe to the Jewish people he ruled.*

*Again, the Jews were forced to leave their homeland, to settle into many lands foreign to their way of life. These "scattered seeds" or the Diaspora, formed communities in France, Germany, Eastern Europe and Spain. Eastern European Jews or "Ashkenazim," differed from Spanish Jews in the foods that they eat, some customs, but mainly in the languages spoken. "Ladino" a Judeo-Spanish, is the spoken language of Sephardic Jews. Whereas "Yiddish" a Judeo-German is the spoken language of the Ashkenazim.*

*The Jews of Spain are known as Sephardim—Sefarad being the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula—assimilated into the life and culture of Muslim, then Catholic Spain, over a span of five hundred years. Known as the Golden Age of Spain, the Sephardim lived many years in Muslim, then Catholic Spain. Some good and happy, others sad and full of misfortune.*

*At the close of the fifteenth century, almost all of the Iberian Peninsula was under the control of Christian Kings. As a consequence, past tolerance of other religions became reprehensible to the papal authorities. The burden of possible persecution, forced conversions, the pressures of the Church, and economic reasons caused some non-Catholics to give up their beliefs entirely. Others to seemingly convert to Catholicism, to live as Christians in their everyday lives, continuing to practice their true faith secretly. Those who did not convert endured much suffering. Jewish converts, “Conversos” or “Marranos” as these “New Christians” were called, became the primary objective of the Inquisition.*

*During the massacre, which occurred in 1391, close to thirty thousand Jews were killed throughout Spain by roving mobs who were incited by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.*

*In 1478 as the last stronghold of Muslim resistance in Granada was about to fall, the Inquisition was renewed. It was to become a crusade against heresy and a means of political persecution within the Christian community.*

*Then in 1492, two events occurred that would change Spanish Jewry forever, the first was the Expulsion Edict. It ordered all Jews to convert to Catholicism or leave the country and take nothing of value with them. Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella would no longer tolerate non-Christians, or pseudo-Christians.*

*All ties to Spain were cut for anyone not professing the Christian faith.*

*The second event was approval of Columbus’s final appeal to Isabella and Ferdinand for funds to begin his search for a westward route to Asia.*



## SEPHARDIC FAREWELL

*This is a tale of two families, the Ben-Halavis leaving their world and comforts behind in order to justify their beliefs, and the San Miguels, fully assimilating into a Spanish Christian world, securing the benefits of professing the proper convictions.*

*For both families the edict would evoke sadness, hope, and despair. For both, the decisions—the leaving of one, and the lingering of the other—would sorely test their faith in the religion of their choice.*



# Chapter 1

*“In the same month in which their Majesties issued the edict that all Jews should be driven out of the kingdom and its territories; in the same month they gave me the order to undertake with sufficient men my expedition of discovery to the Indies.” —Christopher Columbus*

**Seville, April 1492**

David Ben Isaac Halavi

*Today begins the test of our strength, and the start of our agony, David Ben-Halavi thought as he labored in the tiny room that housed the print press. We are to be punished again for our beliefs and our faith. The Expulsion Edict issued by the King and Queen proclaims “convert...leave España with nothing, give up your Jewish faith and you will be allowed to remain.”*

*Last year my beloved Rachel taken from us. She suffered so.*

*Now this terrible news. The strength of my beliefs is waning, and again we will be rigorously tested. Surely the agony begins, as it did with my forefathers, with the need to make a new life in some foreign land.*

David Ben-Halavi pondered the affect of the edict. It would effectively end their lives in Spain. Where would they go? How would they live? What would they do with the press, the type?

Could they possibly move it? So many questions, so few answers.

*How will Benjamin and Joshua react? How can I explain to them that I cannot accept this Christian religion? I cannot live as anything but a Jew. Conversion for me, my family is unthinkable!*

*The news comes so soon after our mother's death, has it been just a year since she left us? My heart is heavy, Rachel, I miss you so, life without you has been heartbreaking. May you rest in peace.*

*I must hurry in order to meet with the other congregants at the Cal—synagogue. The meeting is to be held very soon, to discuss what can be done about the edict.*

*The synagogue has always been a refuge. It fills me with hope, peace, and sometimes understanding. Isaac Abravanel, the Grandee, was to meet with the King. Perhaps he has been successful and will be able to propose some kind of solution. A delay of the edict, maybe it can even be annulled.*

\* \* \*

Benjamin Ben-Halavi was angry. The focus of his anger was the man standing at the *bema*—the synagogue podium.

Father Manuel was addressing Benjamin, as well as the other congregants; his speech was intended to offer some solace and advice regarding the Expulsion Edict. It degenerated, like it usually did, into a bitter diatribe of the Jews. Who in their stubborn refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah had brought all this misfortune on themselves.

Benjamin felt the blood rising in his veins. Sought to keep his temper in check. The priest would enjoy someone from the synagogue disputing or attacking him. Then he would have an excuse for doing what he really wanted. Converting or punishing all of the Jews in Seville.

Waving to his father as he entered the synagogue, Benjamin experienced a great sadness. His father shuffled towards his seat instead of walking. *How this man has suffered*, Benjamin thought. Losing his wife and their mother last year was a terrible blow to him. *Now this new misery being inflicted on all of us.*

David Ben-Halavi reached the bench that Benjamin was sitting at and sat down next to him, uttering a huge sigh as he did so.

"Have you seen Joshua?" he whispered.

Embarrassed at his father's mention of Joshua or his whereabouts, Benjamin quickly answered, "Only for a short while at the river."

"Was he planning to join us here at the synagogue?"

"I am not sure, he mentioned something about speaking to some sailors who were planning to sail with the Italian, Colon."

"Why!" his father hoarsely whispered. "Why would he choose not to be with his family at this time?"

Benjamin could only shrug, dismayed at his father's emotional outburst. Benjamin never quite understood his younger brother's reasons for doing what he did.

Father Manuel ended his address with a loud admonition.

"Conversion is the only solution available that will allow the Jews to remain in the country." Rabbi Hachham rose, and thanked the priest for his wise counsel. Agreeing that it would certainly be given serious consideration. Father Manuel, as he turned to leave, shouted in his loudest voice.

"All conversions not taken in the true spirit of the Lord will be severely punished." He then stepped down from the bema and left the synagogue. As soon as the priest left, Rabbi Hachham began to address the congregation.

"Contrary to the counsel given by Father Manuel, neither conversion, nor the secret practice of the religion is the answer. Our only refuge is to leave *España*, and make new lives for ourselves elsewhere. Someplace that will allow us to practice our religion as the Lord has commanded us to."

The problem was where, how, and what property they would be allowed to take with them? The rabbi asked *Isaac Abravanel*, one of the King's leading tax advisors, to tell of his struggle to intercede with his Majesties. To provide any counsel he thought would be helpful for all of the Jews of Seville.

Isaac Abravanel arose, majestic in bearing, one of the true Grandees of Spain. As he approached the bema, he looked around the synagogue and slowly began to speak.

"I pleaded with the King and Queen, to no avail. Then I asked the King: 'Why are you doing this to your Servants? Take all of our gold, silver, all that the Children of Israel possess. We willingly give our wealth to you. But let us remain in *España*, the land of our birth, as your loyal subjects, and as—Jews.' However, he remained deaf to my appeals, his heart was hardened. I implored the Queen, who was standing by the King's side, but she as well would not listen to my pleas."

Isaac Abravanel began to sob, but with a great effort brought himself under control and continued.

"Spain is the land of my birth, my home. But it will be closed to those of us who wish to remain here as Jews. I have struggled long and hard to find an adequate solution to this terrible choice we must all make. My family is urging me to remain."

Again he began to sob, paused and began again.

"So it is with a sad and heavy heart that I have decided—to convert and stay."

With those words he broke down completely, turned and quickly left the synagogue.

The rabbi, although shocked beyond belief, tried to quiet the ensuing bedlam which followed *Señor Abravanel's* remarks.

"Please, please let us all calm down. We have lost one of our most illustrious spokesmen, it is a fact we cannot change. He has made his choice; I pray to *Adonai* that he does not suffer for it."

Close to breaking down himself, the rabbi again asked the congregants to be seated. Sensing that the shock of the ensuing events would not allow any realistic discussion. The rabbi called

for another meeting in two days, prior to Shabbat—the Sabbath.

At that meeting, discussion of other alternatives and options open to the congregation would take place.

\* \* \*

Benjamin and his father left the synagogue together, both silent and lost in their own thoughts. Not daring to give voice to what they were thinking. Although they knew deep in their hearts—there was only one choice open to them.

The air fresh and clean on a beautiful spring day, they walked towards the Juderia. The Jewish section of the city where their home was located. Coming upon Joshua who was walking in the same direction, Benjamin called out to him. Seeing his father and brother, Joshua stopped and waited for them to catch up with him. Approaching Joshua, his father began to berate him for not being at the synagogue. But stopped in mid-sentence, instead, gently inquiring where Joshua had been. Joshua glanced at his brother who gave him a piercing look, and stammered.

“Just at the wharf talking to some of the sailors and fisherman.”

Benjamin, becoming agitated, sharply said, “Let’s not discuss this here, wait until we are at home.” David looked at both of his sons, and just shook his head.

As they continued on their way, they passed the small shops and businesses that made up the Juderia’s commercial section.

Food stands selling a myriad of vegetables, fruits, olives, cheeses and nuts. Various kinds of foods could be seen in all directions. Fish, eggs, meat prepared and koshered was available from many stands.

David Ben Isaac stopped to talk with a number of the tradesman, responding with the same answer to the repeated question. “*Que paso en el Cal?*—What happened at the synagogue?”

David’s typical answer was.

“We are having another meeting in two days, before Shabbat, join us if you can.”

The shock of Isaac Abravanel’s announcement precluded David from relating the events in anything more than this simple statement.

Benjamin and Joshua walked slowly to allow their father a chance to catch his breath. After a short while they reached their home. Located on a narrow tree lined street called *Calle de los Judios*. The sweet fragrance of the lemon trees, which lined the street, elicited memories of happier times, and at the same time sadness in having to leave.

The small Ben-Halavi house consisted of a large entry courtyard, tile roof and two small floors each containing sleeping and cooking facilities. Chamber pots provided bath and sanitary facilities.

The courtyard bordered the property of the San Miguel family, who were influential Christians, rumored to be *Conversos*.

The second floor of the Ben-Halavi home contained the print shop and a small room leased to a widow, a good friend of Rachel’s, Señora Bejar, who since Rachel’s death had become a second mother to all the Ben-Halavi men.

Entering their home, they washed up, as Ben-Halavi began preparing their midday meal. Since the death of his wife David assumed the responsibility of meal preparation. His sons, the responsibility of keeping the house in order.

Both tasks required the frequent attention of Señora Bejar. She routinely checked to see that the house had not burned down, and that the laundry was properly done.

Ben-Halavi continued to slice some cucumbers and tomatoes, while Benjamin prepared the cheese and olives. Joshua placed some dishes on the table along with the wine and bread.

Before they could sit down to their meal there was a knock on the door. Entering, Señora Bejar apologized for just bursting in.

“*Que paso en el Cal?* What happened at the synagogue?”



Greeting her, Ben-Halavi helped her to a chair. Began to explain. Stopped, asked if she would care to join them in their meal. Señora Bejar answered, "No, no thank you, I have already eaten. But, Señor, I heard that the Grandees were unsuccessful in their appeals to their Majesties. That the edict will be enforced in four months. That even the Grandees from Barcelona were unsuccessful."

David took a deep breath and calmly began to explain about Señor Abravanel, even though the turmoil raged within him.

"Most important, Señora, you must calm yourself. What you heard is true, and now we must all begin to prepare for the long journey out of *España*. The same way our ancestors did during the Exodus from Egypt. Leaving our homes, and our memories behind us."

Pausing to break some bread, he passed some to his sons, and began the prayers over the wine and bread. Reciting the prayers calmed him, and he bid his sons to begin their meal.

Turning to Señora Bejar, he continued, "Let me explain as clearly as I can what our choices are: leave and find new homes in some other lands, or stay and become Christians. Those who accept conversion and remain will be lost to our faith. Others will convert, but secretly continue to practice the religion.

"These Conversos will bring the wrath of the Church down upon themselves, I intend to leave. My hope is that my sons will come with me, but they are old enough to decide for themselves."

Señora Bejar, looking forlorn, softly asked, "Where can we go, what about our property?"

Before Ben-Halavi could answer, Benjamin spoke up. "The King of Portugal has said he would allow us to enter his country, but going to Portugal would risk a second expulsion, since the King of Portugal blindly follows Ferdinand and Isabella. As for trying to sell our property, the Christians will just wait until there is no time left and offer us nothing for it, probably just taking it after we are gone."

Señora Bejar began to cry. “*Ay de mi! No hay nada para nosotros*—There is nothing for us,” she wailed.

Softly Ben-Halavi said, “trust in God,” as he began to explain again what their alternatives might be. Realizing that Señora Bejar was too distraught to comprehend. He simply told her of the meeting in two days at the synagogue. Agreeing, she said she would try to attend, and left.

The rest of the meal was eaten in silence. When it was finished, and the dishes had been cleared, Ben-Halavi asked both of his sons what they thought the family should do.

Benjamin spoke first. His subdued anger renewed. “I will not convert, of that I am certain. The priests and bishops can do what they want, I was born a Jew and I will die a Jew.”

Angered at Benjamin’s words, Joshua tensed and shouted, “Yes live as Jew, and have the rest of the world despise you, live as a Jew and live the life of an outcast.”

“Please, Joshua, Benjamin, this kind of bickering is wrong,” Ben-Halavi cried. “It will not bring solutions, only bitterness.”

Before any one could reply Benjamin shouted, “How can we not be bitter, Papa? Our world and way of life is being destroyed. We are being uprooted because we pray a certain way. We hold beliefs, which are contrary to what the King and Queen believe. We are Spaniards, true to *España* as any Christian. We pay our taxes, obey their laws, and still we are persecuted, and now we are told to leave. Well I will leave, as a Jew and never look back on *España* again.”

Ben-Halavi looked at his sons, sadness filling every line in his face, and quietly said, “I am overwhelmed with grief over what is happening to us. I have prayed to God for some relief. Some solution, but my prayers have gone unanswered. Now like our ancestors, there is no other solution but to leave. Begin a new life somewhere else. You both agree with this, don’t you?”

Ben-Halavi looked directly at Joshua as he spoke. Joshua’s heart wrenched with unhappiness. The mixed emotions he was feeling, prompted a whispered reply. “No, Papa, I do not agree,

*I am leaving España, but not in the way you describe. Forgive me, Papa, I intend to leave with the Italian Colon. He has agreed to let me sail with him."*

Shocked Ben-Halavi hoarsely whispered, "Then that means you will be converting!"

Benjamin, trying to control his anger at his brother and spare his father any further anguish, asked as quietly as he could, "And what will you do? You are not a sailor, you know nothing of ships and the oceans."

Joshua, trying his best to explain and maintain his composure at the same time, answered, "I will interpret the tables I transcribed for *Señor Zacuto*, the astronomer. These tables chart the tides, position of the moon and stars, they will allow Colon to find the true route to Asia. And since Colon's Spanish is not good I will translate for him."

Before Joshua could continue, Benjamin brusquely asked, "So your Italian is good enough to translate for Colon, but what do you know of these tables? How can you help Colon with them?"

"*Señor Zacuto* explained them to me while I was transcribing them, he taught me how they are to be used, when I delivered the first part to *Martin Pinzon*, one of Colon's captains, he asked if I would be interested in joining Colon on the voyage."

Excitement filled Joshua as he began to describe his talk with Martin Pinzon.

"I agreed I will convert. However, it will mean nothing to me. I am not afraid of sailing the oceans. The opportunity for riches is all that matters."

Ben-Halavi now began to feel the full impact of what was taking place. His youngest son was going to renounce his faith and put his life in mortal peril by traveling across a vast and mysterious sea. In spite of his sense that his sons were old enough to decide for themselves he felt he could not let this happen.

“Joshua, listen to me, you and Benjamin are my whole life now. How can you refuse to come with us? Of even considering conversion. Is your faith in your religion so weak that you would give it up so easily? What would your mother have thought if she were alive? To hear you utter these words would have brought her sadness beyond belief. But not only are you planning to convert, you are putting your life in grave danger. For what?”

Before Joshua could answer, Benjamin asked, “Does Elena de San Miguel have anything to do with your decision?”

Joshua felt weak and elated at the same time. Elena was the whole reason for his decision to go with Colon. He wanted to marry her, but her father would not allow his daughter to marry a poor Jew. The voyage if successful would change that. And if unsuccessful, well, he would rather be dead than face life without her.

As far as the conversion went, many had accepted the Church, yet had remained Jews. He felt he could do the same. In his mind the “courtyard” would always be available to him.

Since the time Joshua and Elena were children. Most Friday evenings the San Miguel family, along with “others” of questionable religious beliefs, would join Jewish families in the “courtyard.” Along with the Ben Halavi’s they would participate in Sabbath prayers and songs. The fact that these “others” were of the Christian faith was not mentioned or discussed. They were just accepted.

Joshua and Elena were drawn and attracted to each other instantly. And as they matured the attraction turned to love. An intense burning kind of love, made all the more so because of the limited times they were able to see each other.

Origins of the conversion of San Miguel’s oldest family member, Don Pablo, was shrouded in mystery and rumor.

The passing years brought fewer and fewer visits by the San Miguels to the “courtyard.” But the lovers continued to meet in

other places and at different times. Continuing to pledge their love for each other.

At the mention of Elena's name, Ben-Halavi remembered Joshua's sadness and disappointment at being rebuffed by Don Fernando de San Miguel. Elena's father had made it perfectly clear that Joshua was not worthy of his daughter's hand.

Ben-Halavi himself did not feel the marriage was a good or proper one for his youngest son and had told him so.

The San MIGUELS, although rumored to be *Conversos* were too close to the Church now. Don Fernando himself was an intimate advisor to Monsignor Abate.

"Yes," Joshua softly answered his brother. "She is the reason for what I am planning to do, without her life has no meaning for me."

Benjamin, although not entirely surprised, was still astonished that his brother would go to such lengths for this woman.

"You are willing to give up your family, your religion, maybe your life?"

"Yes," Joshua answered excitedly. "But both of you must understand, the decision has not come lightly for me. Even if the opportunity to sail with Colon had not come along, I would have sought some way of becoming wealthy. Elena is too important for me to have done otherwise. The edict has complicated the situation, conversion was not part of my plan. But it is the only way I will be able to leave with Colon."

Ben-Halavi began to realize, further discussion would not change his son's mind. Aware that love for a woman was a powerful emotion, David softly said, "*Vaya con Dios, mi hijo—* Go with God, my son."

# Chapter 2

**Seville**  
**April 1492**

Don Fernando de San Miguel

Elena Maria de San Miguel hurried home, her heart heavy and her mind confused. Her rendezvous with Joshua Halavi had turned into a complete fiasco. She had intended to explain her reasons for rejecting him again. As gently as she could, she tried to explain why she could not disobey her father's wishes. To tell Joshua she loved him, but could not marry him. The edict tangled the situation, the lives of the San Miguel family would never be the same. They would never be a part of the "courtyard" again.

When Joshua revealed his plans to convert and sail with Colon, she sensed a small possibility that her father might accept Joshua after he converted. But the thought of him sailing away caused her emotions to erupt. She might never see him again, he could be lost to her forever.

She had to prevent Joshua from leaving with that madman Colon, but how? Unless her father's mind could be changed, Joshua would insist on leaving. Then it occurred to her, Antonio, her brother, had never spoken ill of Joshua. They had even been friends. He might be persuaded to intercede on her and Joshua's behalf. Although she was uncertain her father would accept any argument she or Antonio might put forth. His heart had been hardened against those whose practice of Judaism was completely open. Monsignor Abate had seen to that. Reaching her decision, Elena felt a small amount of relief, and a great amount of anxiety. Thinking of her father's reaction to what she was going to propose sent shivers down her spine.

The thought of Joshua gave her the determination to pursue her plan. Remembering him so sad, and the fact that she might never see him again, gave her renewed courage.

Her immediate concern, however, was explaining to her mother why she had left her duenna, slipping away to meet Joshua.

\* \* \*

*It has come, all that I feared, all that I tried to overcome by proving my worth to his majesty, King Ferdinand, to Monsignor Abate, all in vain. Now I must decide, leave or become what in my heart I cannot accept. These beliefs are not mine, am I a Jew or a Christian? Why must I make my family suffer so!*

Don Fernando de San Miguel pondered his plight and was filled with anxiety. He and his family were so vulnerable now.

The edict severely altered the plan he had proposed to Monsignor Abate. It would bring the wrath of the church down upon all of those whose practice of the Christian faith was questionable.

*Conversos*, or New Christians, it did not matter, the Inquisition would assuredly investigate them all, some would inform to save themselves or their families.

Don Fernando's family had practiced the Jewish faith in secret since the time of his grandfather. His father tried to explain why this was so, but he had been too young to comprehend.

Time had dulled his feelings for the religion. The edict made him realize how dangerous the practice of Judaism had become. In spite of the plan he had began with Monsignor Abate. Now he fully understood the consequences he and his family would have to face, continuing the secret practice of Judaism as New Christians.

*The edict would force us to live as true Christians, or leave España. I choose to remain. My family will be bound by my decision. Life will become easier. No longer having to sneak about, practicing one religion in darkness and secret while the other in false pretense. We become acceptable, all barriers removed. My son and daughter able to live their lives to their fullest without fear of persecution. This was the hope of the plan I proposed to Monsignor Abate.*

*I will not allow my family to be subjected to the horror that occurred so many years ago. When my grandfather, Don Pablo, who was born Samuel Ben Coloma, may he rest in peace, was forced to become a Christian, my father, Francisco, hid this story from me for many years. His reasons for this were his own. Nevertheless little by little, I came to understand why. My grandfather suffered greatly for his beliefs. I remember my father's terrible sadness as he related the tale to me.*

\* \* \*

Seville 1391

April, and Seville was truly beautiful that spring. Full of blossoming orange and nut trees, warm sweet breezes blowing off the *Guadlquiv* river. For Samuel, the only child of Avraham Ben Coloma, the year 1391 marked his thirteenth birthday. The



year he was to become *bar mitzvah*. Literally “Son of the Covenant,” and a full member of the Jewish community.

The ceremony was to take place at Shabbat, the Sabbath services at the Cal, where Samuel would be conducting the morning services. He then would be called to the *bema* for his first *aliyah*, the reading of the weekly portion from the Torah—The Five Books of Moses.

His studies for becoming bar mitzvah had been relatively easy. *Hachham*, Rabbi Mordachi, was not the taskmaster that some of Samuel’s friends had made him out to be.

Learning the trope for chanting the weekly Torah portion turned out to be the hardest part. Thankfully his mother was a musician of sorts, and able to instill an understanding of the cantillations required to properly chant the portion. His father would be furious if he found out his wife, a female, had chanted the Torah portion along with her son. Samuel vowed he would never mention it, his mother made light of it. It was her feeling that someday in the very distant future women would be able to do almost everything men could.

The whole family was looking forward to the fiesta following the morning services of Samuel’s bar mitzvah. All the special dishes that were being prepared. The visiting relatives that would be there, along with all of his and his family’s friends.

*Life is good*, Samuel thought, except, for the ill will the Christians professed at times. Especially when the priests or visiting monks preached their hateful sermons, depicting Jews as devilish or diabolical. Samuel had not experienced any real hatred or physical abuse. His father being so well known in the district, brought Samuel’s family into contact with some of the more prominent members of the Christian community. And in this way the family was somewhat protected.

Samuel continued on his way to the rabbi’s house for his last lesson before his bar mitzvah. Approaching the rabbi’s street, he heard someone calling him. He turned and saw it was Juanito,

one of his Christian friends, son of Juan Pacheco, the sack-cloth weaver. Juanito approached Samuel with a worried look on his face.

“Samuel, I just came from church, Fray Vincente has returned. He plans to preach a sermon condemning the Jews again for their beliefs.”

Samuel frowned. “Do not worry, Juanito, it happens all the time. Especially after Fray Vincente has been unsuccessful trying to convince *us* that we are practicing the wrong religion.”

“This time I think he is planning to incite the townspeople, have you heard what happened at the synagogue of Cadiz?”

“No. Tell me.”

“Well when the rabbi of Cadiz finished the—how do you call it, the service for the morning?”

“*Shachrit?*”

“Yes, I think that’s it, well when that was finished, and the people were getting ready to leave, Fray Vincente ordered everyone to remain. He accused the rabbi of preaching blasphemy. When the rabbi tried to protest, the priest had him taken away. He is being held in prison awaiting an inquisitor.”

Samuel hesitated before speaking, deep within himself he felt the stirrings of some ominous disaster approaching but said nothing.

Thanking Juanito for his news, he repeated his invitation to him and his family to attend the bar mitzvah fiesta.

Juanito heartily agreed, and bid him good-bye. “*Via con Dios, mi amigo.*”

Samuel continued on his way to the rabbi’s home. He was warmly greeted by the rabbi’s wife as she ushered Samuel into his study.

Rabbi Mordachi, deeply absorbed in the large book in front of him, looked up, his dark eyes glowing. “*Ah, buenos dias, Samuel.* How are you? I have been reading some passages from the Book of Exodus. The portion you will be chanting this Shabbat, have you been studying them?”

"Yes, *Hachham*," Samuel answered.

"And do you understand the *Parsha* portion, do you have any questions?"

Samuel paused before answering, yes he had questions but not about the Torah portion. He was thinking about what Juanito had described to him. He decided to ask the rabbi if he knew what had occurred at the synagogue of Cadiz.

"Rabbi, you have heard what happened at the synagogue of Cadiz.

The rabbi thought awhile before answering. "Yes," the rabbi finally replied. "And this concerns you, Samuel?"

"Shouldn't it, Rabbi? Why do they hate us so? Why do simple people like the Pacheco family accept us as we are? Do not demand that we pray as they do, or accept the customs that they follow. Yet educated priests and bishops insist that we accept the Catholic religion, regardless of our feelings and desires. I would have thought that educated church members would respect other religions."

The rabbi was thoughtful for a moment, then said, "Samuel, you are familiar with our history. As Jews we have been blamed for almost every misery afflicting mankind. Human beings need someone to blame when misfortune strikes, when life becomes a struggle from birth to death. Our beliefs differ from the Christians, we have not accepted their Messiah. Therefore in their eyes we are evil. The monks and priests use these differences to incite the people so that they will not look deeply into the lives they are forced to live. Trust in our God, Samuel. He will show us the way to a life of prosperity and happiness."

Samuel did not reply, it was all so confusing and troublesome. Although the rabbi had tried to comfort him, he still could not shake off the gloom that had settled upon him.

He began chanting his lessons, while the rabbi nodded in approval. When his lessons were completed, the rabbi told him he was doing very well, and that he looked forward to his bar

mitzvah. Samuel thanked him and left for home and his midday meal.

The walk home was uneventful and Samuel arrived at home at the same time as his father. His mother greeted them both exuberantly. "*Ah, venidos a bien tiempo*—You have arrived at a good time. The meal is ready, come we will eat," she said, ushering them both into the dining room.

Samuel, still feeling the affects of what he had heard, spoke to his father of his encounter with Juanito, and his talk with the rabbi. Avraham Ben Coloma assured his son that there was nothing to worry about. But he secretly worried. Since the death of King Juan, the clergy had been preaching more venomous sermons against the Jews.

Inciting the people to destroy synagogues, to physically drag the Jews to the baptismal font, and murder them if they refused conversion. King Juan, while he was alive, had been able to provide some protection for the Jews of his kingdom.

The King's successor, an invalid son, was ineffective in exercising control over the Church, and was unable to curb the excesses of the Church's more zealous members, this was the source of Ben Coloma's uneasiness.

Trying to change the subject, Ben Coloma asked Samuel how his studies were going. Whether Rabbi Mordachi was succeeding in properly teaching him the trope for chanting his portion of the Torah.

Samuel smiling, glanced at his mother said, "Yes, very well, Papa, but I think you and Momma have been my best teachers."

To which his father answered, "Momma sings beautifully, doesn't she?" And with a wink of his eye began the blessing over the bread for their midday meal.

\* \* \*

The Sabbath morning of Samuel's bar mitzvah arrived in a rush. His mother sweeping through the house directing the

servants and cooks, helping his father get dressed and admonishing Samuel to hurry.

The walk to the synagogue was uneventful, and they arrived just as the morning Psalms were being chanted.

The synagogue was full of people, the men downstairs, surrounding the bema. The women upstairs in the balcony overlooking the entire synagogue. The cover on the Aaron Hakodesh, the Holy Ark where the Torah scrolls were kept, had been presented to the synagogue by the Ben-Halavi family in honor of Samuel's bar mitzvah. The cover depicted the Lions of Judah embroidered with gold thread, surrounding the Torah scrolls. Fresh flowers adorned the *Aaron Hakodesh* as well as the bema.

Samuel began chanting the preliminary morning services, and when they were completed, began the Torah service. As the congregants began to chant the prayers prior to removing the Torah scrolls from the ark, along with the singing, a low rumble could be discerned coming from outside the synagogue. It soon grew to a roar. Then without warning, the synagogue doors were smashed open. An angry crowd of hundreds threw themselves on the defenseless worshipers.

With knives, clubs and axes they hacked and stabbed and beat, men, women, children. It did not matter, the mindless killing caused the blood to flow as if from many fountains.

When the killing frenzy had been satisfied the mob raced from the synagogue to the street in search of new victims. Black plumes of smoke could be seen rising from many buildings. Pent-up emotions held in check for many years exploded with disastrous results for the Juderia of Seville.

\* \* \*

Samuel awoke in a small cubicle, a burning candle providing the only light. A crucifix was affixed above the straw cot he lay

in. Where was he, was it all a bad dream? Had the horror he witnessed really happened?

He tried to rouse himself but was unable to do so. His head throbbed and his right arm stabbed him with pain every time he moved it. Then reality hit him like a bolt of lightning, it had happened, it was true, where was his family? Were they all right? Were they hurt? Were they alive? He had to know, he had to find out. The shock of all that he had witnessed washed over him and he began to sob, the only words running over and over in his mind — *Yitgadal v'yidgadash shema rabba* — the opening lines of the mourner's Kaddish. The prayer recited over the dead. Trying as hard as he could, Samuel was unable to lift himself from the cot. Exhausted he fell back into a painful sleep.

\* \* \*

Brother Pablo, kneeling in prayer at vespers, was heartbroken and sad, the violence that had occurred today was incomprehensible. To think that human beings could harm other humans in this manner was beyond understanding for him. He prayed to the Lord Jesus that the souls of those taken by this madness, although not Christian, would be allowed to enter His Kingdom.

He also prayed for some solution to the problem of the boy he had rescued at the synagogue of the Jews. The son of Avraham Ben Coloma, the well-known physician. How was he going to tell Samuel — this child — that his whole family had been killed? That there was nothing left for him, nothing.

Pablo completed his prayers and rose, behind him someone entered the chapel. He turned, standing there was Fray Vincente waiting for him to finish.

“Good evening, Brother Pablo, I hope I did not interrupt your prayers. I have something very important to discuss with you. The young Jew you rescued today, he is the son of Ben Coloma, the physician?”

Brother Pablo, not recognizing what Fray Vincente wanted with the boy, thought carefully before answering.

Fray Vincente had a bizarre past. Born in Seville in 1350, he was afflicted at an early age with Godly inspirations. Browbeating other children for crude behavior, fasting twice a week, experiencing visions, he was convinced, his was the voice of the Lord. As a Dominican Friar he traveled from town to town crusading against the Jews, who he characterized as the worst enemies of Christianity. Once he achieved the priesthood, his solution to the question of the Jews was conversion. Either by persuasion or forcibly, his preference was for the latter.

Brother Pablo, on the other hand, believed in the Christian ideal of loving one's neighbors. In trying to convince non-believers by talking, discussing, and by example. He felt Christians should slay Jews with reasoning not with the club or axe. Pablo had had many disputes with Fray Vincente concerning some of the ways conversions had been taking place. Today's events had filled him with great sadness.

Yet he was powerless to change anything. Fray Vincente's influence with the hierarchy of the church and the court, made him too powerful an adversary.

Brother Pablo looked deeply into the priest's eyes, something lurked there. Something he could not clearly see, but whatever it was. He was concerned, and fearful.

Filled with sadness Pablo quietly answered, "I believe he is, but I am sure you are the last person he would want to see or speak to. The madness that occurred today should not have happened. His whole family is gone, as is practically all of the Juderia. I am sure the boy will blame the Church. How can the bishops and cardinals atone for what has happened? Why do we continue to massacre these people, yet expect them to willingly convert?"

Fray Vincente glared at Pablo, his tall thin frame visibly shaking with anger.

“Don’t you question the wisdom of the Church, the Jews will be converted! How and by what means will be shown to us by our Lord Jesus, the Pope, the King himself, once the Moors have been completely driven out of *España*, and, and—” Fray Vincente realizing he was beginning to rant, stammered, took a deep breath and began speaking in a more rational manner. “Have you spoken to him yet, are the boy’s injuries very serious, will he live?”

Brother Pablo’s loathing of Fray Vincente was barely hidden, as he answered, “He will live but he needs much rest. I advise you not to disturb him so that he may fully recover.”

“Yes, yes, I will not disturb him until he is well enough. It was most unfortunate that all of his family was slaughtered, Ben Coloma was a most learned physician. But these stiff-necked Jews will not learn, they continue to mock the true religion. Today’s events are only God’s will; they will learn. Christianity is the only true religion. The boy’s conversion must be fittingly done. We must set a proper example. I was considering taking responsibility for this myself, you have no objections to this, do you?”

Brother Pablo now became alarmed, the look in Fray Vincente’s eyes was glazed, almost trance like. Pablo could almost feel the lust poring forth from them. Incidents of priests having certain carnal appetites for young boys had been rumored to have occurred throughout the Church. Rumors that were true, according to Brother Pablo’s information. He himself had administered treatment to one such victim. But to his distaste was unable to punish the priest responsible.

Brother Pablo felt a strong obligation to protect Samuel. Conversion was one thing, but carnal abuse was an abomination, and he would not allow it.

He answered Fray Vincente’s question by stating that the boy’s injuries, although painful, were not life threatening. But that he should not be disturbed until he was fully recovered. Fray Vincente reluctantly agreed. Said he would be back in a



week, stressing how important it was for him to take responsibility for Samuel's conversion.

Brother Pablo bid the priest good-bye and decided to check on Samuel's condition, thinking of ways of explaining to Samuel the destruction of his family, and dreading what he now felt was inevitable. *Samuel's approaching conversion under the tutelage of Fray Vincente.*

Arriving at Samuel's room, he found him in a deep sleep. Not wanting to disturb his rest, Pablo decided to wait until the morning to be the bearer of such sad news.

\* \* \*

Samuel awoke, his head throbbing, and his right arm aching. Bright sunlight filtered through the small opening that served as a window. Forcing himself to swing his legs over the side of the cot, he was now well aware of what had happened. *He had to get to his home, find his family.*

Fighting the dizziness that almost caused him to faint, he rose from the bed and tried to stand, struggling for a foothold he realized he was naked. None of his own clothes were anywhere to be found. Reaching for the thin blanket on the bed, he draped it around himself and sat back down.

Weak with pain, distraught, and frustrated he was unable to leave. Samuel lay back down and began to sob softly.

Samuel's young heart was filled with despair. He instinctively knew that his family was gone. Their lives taken in the most horrific way imaginable. A terrible anger began to arise in him, as he pounded the cot with his fists.

There was a soft knock on the door and someone entered the room. Samuel looked up and saw Brother Pablo. His anger boiled over into a ferocious rage, rushing the monk with all the strength he could muster. Legs kicking, arms flailing, he managed to land a flurry of blows before Pablo was able to subdue him.

Quietly, and calmly, Pablo began telling Samuel what had happened, and what he was now faced with. Samuel stopped his struggling and listened. Pablo sadly explained what happened to Samuel's family, the Juderia, and all the other Jewish communities in the area. They were gone! Beginning to sob himself, Pablo continued, many had saved their lives by converting, unfortunately Samuel's family had not been given this choice, they had been the first victims of the mob's frenzy. Rebuilding the community, if it occurred at all, would take years.

The monk's words hit Samuel with the force of a stallion's kick. His instincts had been correct, but the effect of the actual words caused him to turn and retch. As he began moaning, "Mama, Papa."

Brother Pablo hugged him, led him to the cot, and gently laid him down. With tears in his eyes, Pablo whispered, "Rest now, Samuel, the Lord will provide you with the help you need, trust in Him."

\* \* \*

A week passed and Samuel's physical injuries, began to heal. He could move his arm and head with less pain, and the bruises on his face were fading. But the mental anguish he had suffered was too much to endure. He refused to eat, spent all of his daytime hours just staring into space.

Brother Pablo, although concerned, felt this was a temporary condition. Once Samuel accepted the fact that what had happened was real, not some horrible dream, he would respond and accept the situation as it really was.

Pablo spent the entire week gently consoling Samuel, talking to him, feeding him, and tending to his physical wounds. Attempting to make him understand his only refuge now was the Church. Gently raising the subject of conversion, and stressing the similarities between the Jewish and Christian

faiths. How the roots of one religion, became the beginnings of the other.

Slowly Samuel began to react. Although young in age he was extremely intelligent, and had a mind that reacted quickly. He began to realize, he would be responsible for what happened to him—for the rest of his life!

First and foremost he needed to mourn, for his family and the entire Jewish community destroyed so savagely. The normal period of shiva, the ritual of mourning, lasted for a full seven days, saying prayers with a minyan—a gathering of ten males over the age of thirteen. Concluding with the mourner's Kaddish.

Alone without prayer book or minyan, Samuel began to chant prayers he could remember. What came to his lips almost as if the rabbi or his father had been at his side was "*Adonai roee lo achsar—The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....*" Psalm 23, the traditional concluding prayer of the memorial service.

Pablo, realizing that Samuel was praying, decided not to pursue any further discussion, and left. The friar understood the need for Samuel to perform the ritual of shiva. That a minyan would not be present, did not lessen Samuel's need to perform the ceremony.

\* \* \*

The week of mourning passed slowly for Samuel. Free to wander about the monastery, which was located on a small hill overlooking the river, he continued to pray, remembering happier times with his parents, and slowly the sadness began to diminish. He continued to pray, concluding all of his prayers with the mourner's Kaddish. A prayer which did not in any way allude to death, but simply sanctified God's name and His Holiness. He experienced much comfort while reciting the prayer, even though a minyan was not present to recite it with him.

Along with the prayers, Samuel began trying to clarify in his own mind, what options were open to him: He could accept conversion, become a true Christian, let the Church take care of him. Alternatively, he could outwardly convert to Christianity, but continue to practice Judaism in secret. He had heard his father and the rabbis talk of the “courtyard” a number of times. He was familiar with the methods secret Jews used to hide their true beliefs. Life as a *Converso* might be a viable situation for him—if there was any chance of rebuilding the Jewish community!

Suddenly, it occurred to him. What he really wanted was revenge, someone to pay for the horrible things done to his family. One name stirred him, Fray Vincente. Was he responsible for what had occurred? Juanito had mentioned the incident at the synagogue of Cadiz. How could he tell who was really responsible for what had happened that fateful day? What would he have to do to accomplish what he really wanted? How could he punish those who were responsible for the terrible acts that had been committed? An almost impossible task to accomplish, he believed, but one he must attempt even though he felt so alone and helpless.

Slowly, ideas began to take shape. First he had to find somewhere he could live. The monastery would do as a temporary place of shelter until he finalized his plans. Then he would leave, the rest would come to him he was sure.

# Chapter 3

Pablo visited only once during the week Samuel was in mourning, spoke to him briefly, trying to decide if his mental outlook had improved. Judging that it had, the problem now was to convince Samuel that conversion was his only salvation. Prepare him for his encounter with Fray Vincente, who had repeatedly visited the monastery during the time Samuel had been recovering and mourning.

Fray Vincente's constant badgering about the boy had been a source of considerable irritation to Brother Pablo. He must have a decision from Samuel today, he thought, or Fray Vincente would certainly take matters into his own hands.

As he entered Samuel's room, he softly whispered, "How are you today?"

Samuel, looking at the monk and feeling an inkling of kinship, answered, "I am much better today. How are you?"

Gratified that Samuel was finally responding Pablo readily answered, "I am well thank you. Have you concluded your prayers of mourning?"

"Yes," Samuel answered.

"Have you given any thought to some of the plans we talked about, do you want to consider some of the choices?" Pablo asked.

Samuel, not certain how he should answer the monk, decided to find out as much about him as he could. "What is your name, Brother, do I know you?"

"I am Brother Pablo. Friar of the blessed Monastery of San Pedro, I don't think we ever met before."

"The monastery, is it far from the Juderia?"

"It is in the *Plaza de San Salvador*, about one league from the Juderia."

"How did I get here, did you bring me here?"

"Yes," answered the monk.

Pablo began to explain to Samuel what had happened on that dreadful day. The mobs incited by some of the priests, and encouraged by Fray Vincente, shattered the gates of the Juderia destroying everything in their path.

"When I found you at the synagogue, I thought you were dead, but as I examined you closer I realized you were still breathing. Evidently someone had placed you behind the ark, out of harm's way. I decided to bring you to the monastery, to avoid the mob that was still raging in the Juderia, and get help for your wounds."

"I am sincerely grateful for all that you have done for me Brother Pablo. But my heart is heavy, my loss is almost too much to bear. The monsters that have committed these terrible things must be punished."

"And they will be," Pablo answered, "they will be judged by our Lord Jesus and if found guilty they will be damned to Hell!"

"Damning them to Hell is not punishment enough for those who committed this terrible outrage. They must be made to pay in this world."

Samuel was now beginning to feel his anger again. Pablo, his face contorted with the pain he felt, quietly said, "My son, do not let your heart seek revenge, it will only bring you more sorrow."

Let us teach you the ways of our Lord Jesus, to seek forgiveness and peace.”

Samuel, hearing those words, angrily thought, *How can this monk talk to me of forgiveness when my family has been so cruelly massacred, my whole life so drastically changed?* Decided, he would not convert, he was a Jew and he would remain a Jew. Even if it meant he would have to leave the monastery sooner than he planned.

He would find a way to support himself, and he vowed that those who were responsible for the death of his parents would somehow be punished. Samuel was grateful to the monk for having cared for him while he was injured, but he had to make him understand what he needed and what he intended to do.

“I thank you again, Brother Pablo, for all that you have done for me. But I cannot and will not convert. I will leave the monastery as soon as I can. It is not that far from where I once lived, and maybe some of my relatives or family friends survived the madness that occurred. If not, I am able to read and write and not completely helpless.”

Brother Pablo, although disappointed that Samuel refused to convert, was truly concerned about his welfare. He was well aware of Fray Vincente’s influence and his ability to have his way. Vincente could make life very difficult for Samuel, he might even try to forcibly convert Samuel. Or worse force him to go to the Church of Cadiz. And God only knew what would happen there.

Pablo felt it was most important to dissuade Samuel from leaving the monastery until he was completely well, and a definite means of supporting himself. Fray Vincente would be a considerable problem, but Pablo felt he could put him off until Samuel left. Or at least until Samuel reconsidered conversion here at the monastery.

“Samuel, there is no need for you to leave so soon, you are welcome here. Be sure that you are completely healed. Take some time to think about your future, I can make some inquiries,

and maybe find some work for you. Our Lord will provide what you need.”

Samuel thought about this suggestion, and although wary, decided to accept the monk’s offer.

“Thank you, Brother Pablo, I will stay for a while longer. But I ask you to please, cease any further talk of conversion.” The monk smiled gently, nodded his head in approval, and thought, *How like his father he is.*

Samuel spent the next few days enjoying the quiet comfort of the monastery, it was a truly beautiful place, serene and restful, overlooking the city and river. In the distance the *Alcazar*, the 12th century Moorish castle, could be seen. Becoming familiar with some of the other monks, Samuel spoke at length with them, and Brother Pablo about his plans. His desire to become a physician, follow in his father’s footsteps, and what he hoped to accomplish. The anger he still felt, he kept to himself. Those responsible for the sad events of his life would pay. This was undeniably, the focus of his thoughts.

Samuel’s refusal to convert and his desire to leave the monastery were only part of Pablo’s dilemma. Fray Vincente was coming to the monastery almost every day, checking whether Samuel had healed sufficiently to allow him to start his conversion.

Pablo had done his best to forestall Fray Vincente, but today he felt that any excuse offered would only enrage the priest. Enrage him to the point where he would just drag Samuel off to the baptismal font without any preparation and forcibly convert him.

As he was pondering the situation, one of the younger monks, Brother Michael, entered Pablo’s study and advised him that Fray Vincente had arrived, and was ranting on about Samuel. Pablo asked the younger monk to show the Father in as he tried to prepare himself for the onslaught that was to come.

Fray Vincente, beside himself with anger that he was visibly shaking, thought how dare that upstart monk prevent him from



doing what he felt was his God given duty regarding the Jews! The boy would be converted today; he would feel the strength of the true church. From this day forward, he would become a true Christian, or know the pain of the lash.

At that moment he spied Brother Michael approaching him tremulously. When the monk reached Fray Vincente, he spoke barely above a whisper, and asked the priest to follow him to Pablo's study.

Noting the monk's awe of him gave Fray Vincente much satisfaction and calmed him a bit. When shown proper respect, which he felt was his due, reinforced his beliefs in his ways.

Brother Michael ushered Fray Vincente into Pablo's study and quickly left. Sitting behind his writing table, Brother Pablo quickly arose and offered Vincente the only chair in the room. The one he had been sitting in.

Pablo again began to explain why approaching the boy at this time was not a good idea. He was swiftly cut off by Fray Vincente, who felt the monk—disrespectful in the past—was patronizing him now.

"I do not want to hear your excuses, Brother Pablo, where is the boy? I will baptize him myself, and he will leave with me." Pablo tried to repeat his explanation, but was abruptly cutoff.

"WHERE IS THE BOY!" Vincente shouted.

Pablo, realizing that the only thing he could do now was to allow Fray Vincente to see Samuel, experience for himself the boy's revulsion at being forced to convert.

"Calm yourself, Vincente, his quarters are in the south wing. I will take you there. You will be able to see for yourself why rushing to convert the boy will not work."

Fray Vincente became livid at these words. How dare this Jewish child refuse the true church. How dare he even question what was to be done, what must be done.

Following Pablo to Samuel's room, through the meditation gardens, Vincente's emotions were boiling over. Cutting a switch from one of the birch trees, Vincente angrily thought it

would be useful if his powers of persuasion were questioned by Samuel.

Brother Michael, on delivering Fray Vincente to Pablo's study, had stopped to inform Samuel that the priest was there to see him, and that he should prepare himself. Michael had mixed feelings about Samuel. Although he was sympathetic for his loss, he felt that too much attention was being paid to him. He was just a child, so why all the fuss? Fray Vincente's temper was to be avoided at all costs, Michael thought, leaving to attend his other duties.

Samuel hearing the priest's name became alert. Why was he here? What was he planning? As Samuel was considering these thoughts the door to his cubicle was thrown open and Fray Vincente rushed in, shouting, "*Sea est por la passion de Nuestro Señor... This is for the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and for the remission of our sins,*" and struck Samuel across the face with the switch he had cut.

The blow drawing blood caused Samuel to turn and back away. Fray Vincente continued to lash at Samuel, hitting him several more times on the neck and arms. Samuel retreated to a wall of the cubicle, and with his back to the priest reached up along the wall trying to protect himself. As he groped along the wall his fingers felt something solid; grasping the crucifix at its base, he swiftly turned and swung at Fray Vincente with all his might, inflicting a blow to the priest's head, causing him to collapse in a heap.

Fray Vincente lay there in silence, blood oozing from the wound. Dropping the crucifix, Samuel stared in horror. Had he done this? Had he actually struck and killed another human being?

He had to get away, run, for if they caught him now they would surely punish him in some terrible way.

Samuel ran right into the arms of Brother Pablo. Hearing the ruckus, he had rushed to Samuel's cubicle. Pablo began to speak but uttered just one word "*Dios,*" crossed himself and just stared

at Fray Vincente's bloody body, too shocked to prevent Samuel from breaking away and continuing his flight. Kneeling down to examine the priest, Pablo could not detect any signs of breathing, blood continued to flow from the wound.

Pablo called for help, and with Brother Michael's assistance carried the lifeless body to a nearby chamber. Brother Pablo now was able to carefully examine Fray Vincente. He was dead! Of that there was no doubt. He cautioned Michael to hold his silence regarding what had happened. Pablo, after administering last rites, now began contemplating how to explain to the authorities the death of the priest. Samuel fled the monastery grounds and continued to run, his mind in turmoil. Where could he go? What would he do? He set out for the Juderia. If he could get there somehow he would manage, somehow he would survive!

# Chapter 4

Juan Pacheco, the sackcloth weaver, toiled in his small shop, operating the weaving loom in the expert fashion his father and his father before him had. Juan had learned the art from his father, and his son Juanito would learn it from him.

Juanito watched his father operating the loom trying to determine how he was able to move so quickly. When he was distracted by a tapping at the door. Looking up, his father nodded for him to see who was there. Opening the door, Juanito recoiled in fright and amazement, standing there was Samuel covered in mud and sweat. "*Dios mío*—My God," Both father and son uttered simultaneously. "Come in, come in," Juanito said as he ushered Samuel into the shop.

"We thought you had been killed in the riots, where have you been, what are you doing here?"

Samuel could utter just one word, "water." Juanito rushed to fetch some, returning to fetch more as Samuel hungrily drank down cup after cup. When his thirst had been satisfied and the Pacheco family settled. Samuel began to relate what had happened to him since the rioting, what had occurred a few hours ago and the events leading up to his hasty departure from

the monastery. He had no one to turn to, he explained. He needed their help, and any news they might have of his family. Any who might have survived the riots. Samuel realized he was putting the Pacheco family in grave danger. But felt he had no other choice. He faced a terrible punishment, his life hung in the balance.

Juan observed Samuel, as he began to describe the day's events. Listening to Samuel speak, evoked a flood of memories for Juan.

The Ben Colomas, although Jews, had always been gracious to the Pacheco family. The father, *Avraham the physician*, was the kindest of men, and had always been fair in his business dealings with Juan.

When Maria, Juan's wife, became deathly ill, Avraham and Samuel's mother, Sarah, spent many hours trying to nurse her back to health. To no avail, she finally succumbed to the malignant growth within her body. It was the Ben Colomas who helped pay for her burial and provided much solace to Juan and his son.

Samuel and Juanito became very good friends. Though Samuel was educated, he never made Juanito feel inferior. They had had many good times together.

Juan also remembered the sad burial he had performed just one month ago. Samuel's parents! Hoping to be of some help to the Ben Colomas, he had gone to the Juderia. Only to come upon the gruesome discovery of their bodies in the synagogue of the Jews.

Both had been bludgeoned to death, and left where they had fallen. Juan arranged to have the bodies transported to the Jewish cemetery. Which, thanks to Jesus, had not been harmed by the rioter's rampage. Burying them both, with the help of Juanito, in a common grave. A crude wooden Star of David marking the gravesite. Now here the boy turns up alive and in desperate trouble.

Juan found himself faced with two unenviable tasks. First to inform Samuel of his family's fate. Second to find some way of preventing the authorities from discovering him. The circumstances surrounding the death of Fray Vincente would surely bring the prosecuting attorneys of the Holy Office to the monastery, to the city. Questions would be asked, all of the surrounding areas would be under scrutiny.

Juan feared for his and Juanito's safety. Samuel would have to leave but where, he could not just send him away without some kind of help.

Thinking hard for some kind of solution to Samuel's difficulty. Their own as well, just having Samuel here put them at great risk. Juan considered sending Samuel to his cousin, Luis Lopez, in Cordoba, far enough away from Seville yet close enough to travel to in a matter of days. Then he remembered Luis' hatred of Jews. His constant talk of Jews being devils disguised as human beings. Samuel could never pass for a Christian, he knew nothing of the catechism. And if questioned in detail by Luis, he would quickly be found out. No, he could not send him to Cordoba.

Then Juan recalled Samuel's description of Brother Pablo and the monastery. How Pablo seemed so eager to help him. Juan was well acquainted with the monk, knew he bore no hatred for the Jews. He was well known in Seville for his gentle ways. Juan sensed Brother Pablo's strong feelings for the boy. And although the incident had taken place at the monastery, he felt Pablo would protect Samuel in any way he could.

Now he had to convince Samuel that Brother Pablo was his best, his only means, of avoiding the awful punishment he would receive if he was brought before the prosecutors of the Holy Office.

Samuel, listening to Juan's proposed solution, became fearful. How could he approach Brother Pablo for help? He had killed the priest, there was no denying it. Regardless of the fact that he was protecting himself. He had swung the crucifix in

anger. Being a Jew only made the situation worse.

Juan, in an effort to assure Samuel, began to tell him some of things he knew about Brother Pablo. How he helped the poor and sick, his attitude towards the Jews. How he admonished those who wanted to harm them.

"Surely he will feel some kind of pity for all that has happened to you," Juan suggested.

Samuel, tired, confused and heavy of heart, no longer able to discuss anything coherently, finally agreed.

It was decided that Juanito would go to the monastery the next day with a message for Brother Pablo. Juan also thought it best to postpone telling Samuel about his parents until the next day.

\* \* \*

The next morning dawned bright, sunny and heavy with dew. The chirping birds awoke Samuel, the dread he had gone to bed with still lingering in his mind.

Hearing Juan preparing the morning meal, Samuel got out of bed, and tended to his bodily needs. After washing and dressing he went to help with the meal preparation.

"Good morning, Samuel," Juan greeted him. "I hope you slept well."

"As well as I could considering all that has happened. Has Juanito left for the monastery yet?"

"No, he is fetching some wood to warm our meal. He will leave after we eat."

"What kind of message will Juanito take to the monk?" Samuel cautiously asked.

Juan considered for a moment then simply said, "Only that you are here and asking for his help. There is no need for you to dwell on what has happened, it is done. You cannot change the past. Your father and mother would have wanted you to go on with your life, Samuel."

As soon as Juan mentioned Samuel's parents he regretted it, recalling the second task he had to perform.

"What did Brother Pablo tell you about your parents?" Juan asked.

"Only that they had been killed. The synagogue destroyed along with most of the Juderia. Have you heard anything! Do you have any other news!" Samuel anxiously cried.

"Only sad tidings, Samuel, your parents *were* killed. I was at the synagogue and saw them. Juanito and I buried them in the Jewish cemetery not more than a month ago."

Overcome by a flood of emotions, Samuel felt a bitter hatred of Christians. Especially for those who had committed this awful act. But along with hate, Samuel experienced a great affection for the Pacheco family. Christians! Who had acted so selflessly. Unable to adequately express himself, Samuel fell silent. Juan continued to prepare the meal and said no more.

Juanito returned, his arms full of wood. Noting the somber mood of his father and Samuel, he placed the wood in its bin, sat down at the table, and silently waited for the morning meal to be heated. No one spoke as the meal was served and eaten.

\* \* \*

Juanito enjoyed his walk to the monastery of San Pedro, the weather was warm and pleasant the walk not too long or arduous. Samuel's predicament saddened him greatly. He was glad to be of some help. The whole situation puzzled him greatly, why was there was so much hatred of the Jews? Yes they were different in how they prayed, lived, their strange rules for eating. But they were still human beings. It was all too much to think about. Juanito's innocent mind could not grasp all the contradictions of the world he lived in.

Surprised at not having seen any officials heading to or from the monastery, Juanito expected the death of the priest would have caused more of a commotion.



The message his father had instructed him to deliver to Brother Pablo was simple and direct: "The boy is here and needs your help." Juanito had memorized it. Cautioned not to mention Samuel by name, and to guide the monk to the house. Most important, he was admonished, the message was to be delivered to Brother Pablo alone and not to anyone else.

Reaching the monastery entrance gate as the bells were chiming terce, Juanito bowed, crossed himself, and entered the grounds. Everything appeared to be calm and quiet. Searching for someone to direct him to Brother Pablo, Juanito was suddenly grabbed by the scruff of his neck and roughly turned around.

"What is your business here, boy?" a very large monk demanded.

Barely able to speak, Juanito managed to explain his need to see Brother Pablo.

"Brother Pablo is it, eh!" the large monk uttered, dragging Juanito along. "I'll take you to him myself, just to make sure you stay out of mischief."

In a few minutes they were in the Meditation Gardens, standing in front of Brother Pablo, who had been meditating while sitting at one of the many benches scattered about the gardens. Brother Pablo was earnestly praying for a way to solve his predicament over Fray Vincente's death. Even though he had managed to convey the impression that what had happened was an accident—Fray Vincente had stumbled, fallen, and struck his head, thereby avoiding, by others, close examination of the facts—he was still fearful, that if Samuel were found, more questions would be asked. An official investigation would certainly be initiated then! He had to find the boy, he prayed that he was all right!

His thoughts were interrupted at the sound and sight of the large monk dragging along a small boy. Could it be Samuel? Momentary elation gave way to speedy disappointment, when he spied Juanito.

"Brother Benito, who have you got there?"

"Someone who says he has a message for you."

"Well we should not keep him waiting, what is your name, boy, and what is this message business about."

Rubbing his neck, Juanito looked warily at Brother Benito. Not wanting to speak to anyone but Brother Pablo, as he been instructed, he quietly said, "The message is for your ears only, Father."

Sensing some urgency in the boy's voice, Pablo asked Brother Benito to leave them. When the large monk left, Pablo asked Juanito to tell him what the message was. Juanito repeated from memory, word for word: "The boy is here and needs your help."

The words stirred Brother Pablo, "the boy" could only mean Samuel.

"What is your name, and who sends this message?" Pablo asked.

"Juanito, and my father sends this message."

"Juanito what?"

"Pacheco."

"Father's name?"

"Juan, the sackcloth weaver."

"Christian, Jew or Converso?"

"Christian."

"The boy of the message, what is his name?"

"My father will explain, he hopes you will come to him as soon as you can."

Pablo now became hopeful, if Samuel was at the sackcloth weaver's home some solution might be at hand.

"Juanito, you will take me to your father's house now, I will leave with you in a short while, wait here."

\* \* \*

As the church bells chimed the hour of *None*, Juanito and Brother Pablo approached the Pacheco home.

"It is very close now, Father, near *Calle Sin Puertas*."

The afternoon sun had warmed them and they were both hot and thirsty. Juanito was gratified that the monk had not asked any more questions about why he was being summoned. He merely followed along.

Juan and Samuel, who had anxiously been waiting for some news, were startled when Brother Pablo followed Juanito into the house. Samuel, seeing the monk, rushed for the door, but was restrained by Juan.

"I come in peace, Samuel, to help if I can. I wish you no harm."

Pablo cried out, "How can you or anyone help me? I am doomed, my life is finished."

"Do not despair, Samuel. Brother Pablo comes in peace, at least listen to what he has to say," Juan asserted.

"Señor Pacheco's words are apt, Samuel, there is a solution to your dilemma. Although it is a solution that will require a great effort on your part. An effort I feel, that you must undertake if you are to survive. It will require a great sacrifice on your part, one you may not be willing to fulfill. But listen carefully, Samuel. Your life and the lives of all of us, depends on your agreeing to all that must be done."

Samuel, although uncertain, began to realize that the monk truly wanted to help him. Although he was not quite sure why. Thoughts of why of Pablo was helping him had arisen at the monastery, but Samuel had not mentioned them. Now he felt that understanding Pablo's reasons for what he was doing was not important. Samuel would make the sacrifices that were required of him. His life depended on it. He would agree to do whatever Brother Pablo was going to propose.

After a light supper Brother Pablo outlined his plans. He would go back to the monastery tonight and return in three days. Samuel was to prepare himself for a journey to Toledo. Juan and Juanito were to teach Samuel all they knew about the Christian religion. Beginning with the sacraments.

After four days of waiting, Samuel began to despair that Brother Pablo would ever return. He even tried to memorize the seven sacraments and their meanings that Juan had tried to teach him. But as the days passed he grew listless, refusing any further study.

On the evening of fourth day at the end of Vespers, Pablo returned with Brother Benito, some clothes and a quantity of dried meat and bread. He explained that affairs at the monastery had delayed him, that now time was of the utmost importance.

Samuel would be baptized in the morning without any arguments. And leave the next day for Toledo. Brother Benito would accompany him and take him to the home of *Don Jose de Alvarez*. A letter from Pablo, that Samuel would carry, explained everything to Don Jose.

\* \* \*

The dawn broke cloudy and chilly, Samuel awoke with a start. The little sleep he had provided little rest for him. The first prayer he had learned as a child, and probably the last he would say on the approach of his death, turned over and over in his mind. *Shema Yisrael—Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.*

Would he ever declare those words in the synagogue or with a minyan again? With a heavy heart he prayed for the souls of his parents. For God to give him the strength, to allow him to endure whatever was to come.

“Are you awake, Samuel?” Juanito softly called out.

“Yes,” he answered.

“Father Pablo waits outside, you are to go to him.”

Trembling, Samuel proceeded to do as he was told, stepping outside he saw Brothers Pablo and Benito waiting at the side of the house. Pablo beckoned Samuel to approach. Benito held a pail in his arms.

“You may think baptism is a foolish ceremony, Samuel. But without its performance, all that I am doing for you would have no meaning.”

Brother Pablo then helped Samuel remove his shirt. And began the baptismal sacrament, chanting.

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I baptize you, Pablo de San Miguel,” he said, sprinkling Samuel with water from the pail Brother Benito held, Pablo continued the ceremony.

Samuel shivered as the cool water ran through his hair, thought about his new name. Pablo de San Miguel. How strange, he thought, the monk had named him after himself. Pablo! Did this ceremony mean he was now a Christian? He felt no different. The words spoken meant nothing to him. *I will do what I have to do. I will go to Toledo, endure whatever Señor Alvarez requires of me. But I will return to Seville someday, the faith of my father and mother remaining in my heart. Memories of them shall give me the strength to survive.*

Within the hour, accompanied by Brother Benito, *Pablo de San Miguel* was on his way to Toledo.

# Chapter 5

**Toledo**  
**October 1391**

Don Pablo de San Miguel

Four months had passed since the newly baptized Pablo de San Miguel had arrived in Toledo. With nothing more than the letter from Brother Pablo in his possession, Samuel's arrival caused no undue disturbance, and he was accepted into the Alvarez family almost as if he had been born into it.

Accompanied by brother Benito, who on the way had offered Samuel additional tutoring regarding Catholic prayers and liturgy, but refused to provide any information regarding Don Jose Alvarez.

On their arrival in Toledo, Brother Benito showed Samuel the way to the Alvarez home, cautioned "Pablo" about his new identity, and departed very quickly.

Pablo was unsure how he was going to cope with this "Christian" life thrust upon him. But many surprises lay ahead.

The first being the Alvarez family themselves. Señor and Señora Alvarez were a handsome couple. Don Jose was tall,

with flashing dark eyes and dark hair to match. Dona Marina was small, stately in her bearing, with reddish brown hair and sky blue eyes. Their daughter Gracia, at eight years of age, showed the beginnings of the beauty she was to become. They were a warm and loving family.

Señor Alvarez, as a physician to the royal court, enjoyed access to the upper echelons of Spanish society. His superior medical knowledge had made him a favorite of the court.

The Alvarezs welcomed Pablo, instructing him to address them as "*tia*" and "*tio*," aunt and uncle. Gracia was to be considered his "cousin."

To all appearances they appeared to be a model Catholic family. Attending church, observing holy days and feasts, all of which was very confusing to Pablo. Yet he was not unhappy.

During his first month in Toledo Señor Alvarez introduced him to a Señor Juan Salcedo, a herbalist, and explained that Pablo would serve an apprenticeship with Señor Salcedo, which would last two years. If his performance was satisfactory, he would then begin his medical training with Don Jose. Training that would lead to becoming a physician. His training, and the fact that no one questioned where he had come from, or why, pleased Pablo very much. He was very grateful to the Alvarez family, but everything was so puzzling.

Pablo accepted the fact that Samuel Ben Coloma no longer existed. But living his life as a Christian was another matter. This was a struggle he would have to wrestle with for his whole life.

For the next few months, under Señor Salcedo's tutelage, Pablo's routine consisted mainly of mixing herbs and studying various potions. One Friday evening, returning home tired after a particularly busy week of study. His "cousin" Gracia—who was constantly taunting him for not knowing the proper words to the "Hail Mary" or the "Our Father" or whatever prayer she decided to tease him about—looking very solemn, quietly indicated for Pablo to follow her.

Not knowing what was happening, Pablo cautiously did as she asked, accompanying her to a part of the house he had never seen before. Passing through a number of twisting passages, and down some stairs. A solemn Gracia led the bewildered Pablo to another passageway ending at a heavy door, which, with some difficulty, Gracia managed to open.

There, well hidden from prying eyes, was a small chapel empty of the usual statuary normally found in a catholic sanctum. In its place a simple wooden ark had been placed along the eastern wall. Candelabra similar to menorahs scattered about provided the only light. And waiting at a table adorned with the traditional Sabbath bread, wine and candles was Señor and Señora Alvarez.

“Welcome, Pablo, Shabbat Shalom. I am sorry we had to be so secretive about our true beliefs. But our world is filled with danger, being Jewish in a Christian world is not easy nor safe.”

Pablo could scarcely believe what he was seeing or what Don Jose was saying. Had God finally smiled upon him? With tears in his eyes, he pulled Gracia to him, and ran to Señor and Señora Alvarez. Hugging them tightly, together they recited the blessings, and lit the Sabbath candles. Pablo, feeling the joy and true meaning of Shabbat, experienced a flood of happy memories; and sadness for his lost family.

\* \* \*

At the festive meal which followed the Kiddish prayers, Señor Alvarez explained how his family had continued their secret practice of Judaism by sharing “courtyards” with other Jewish families and friends, participating in Jewish festivals, keeping the Sabbath and observing Jewish dietary laws. There existed between practicing Jews and “New Christians” an unspoken, intermixed, emotional community. A community very vulnerable to exposure, and fraught with danger. Pablo was cautioned about the need to conceal all of these practices,



speaking of them only while here in the secret chapel or when attending festivities at a “courtyard.”

Pablo listened to Don Jose with intense interest, a multitude of questions racing through his mind. Blurting them out as quickly he could think of them. Why did Señor Alvarez help him? Why did he take him in, an act which seriously endangered the whole Alvarez family? And what was his connection to Brother Pablo?

“*Paciencia*—patience, Pablo, the explanation is not very complicated, although the story may take a little while in the telling.”

Don Jose relaxed as he sat back and poured himself a little more wine. Señora Alvarez and Gracia both smiled, they had heard parts of the story a number of times before, but tonight’s version would certainly be complete.

“One hundred years ago,” Don Jose began, “the Jews of Toledo enjoyed an economic and social well-being that had not been seen even in the earlier years of Muslim Andalusia. Commerce, as well as textile manufacture, tanning, dying, and wine making was largely in their hands. They were more envied than Jews anywhere else in either the Christian or Muslim worlds. *Toledo*, capital of *Castile*, exemplified that Jewish well-being. With scores of Jewish markets, shops, offices, homes and many synagogues. Don Samuel Ben Coloma, Pablo’s grandfather, was a courtier, a personal advisor to King Pedro I. Enormously respected in both the Jewish and Christian worlds. With his wealth Don Samuel established a large estate in Toledo, and married into the well known *Arama* family. A learned and practicing Jew, he was instrumental in the founding and building of the *El Transito*. The most splendid synagogue in all of Toledo. The Ben Coloma family was blessed with two sons, Avraham and Isaac, both handsome and intelligent. My family, and myself, on the other hand, were Conversos. When or why we had converted and for what reasons I do not know, but we were secret Jews, and the ‘courtyard’ of the Ben Coloma family

was always open. It was where I first met Avraham and Isaac. We quickly became good friends, always discussing and arguing the merits and shortcomings of Judaism, Christianity and the impact of Greco-Arab rationalism on both.

“Avraham and Isaac were very close, as was all of the Ben Coloma family. But that all changed on that fateful day in March of 1351. It was the *Feast of Esther—Purim*, that most joyful and festive of Jewish holidays. At a fiesta honoring the holiday, held at the *El Transito* synagogue, they met Sarah. And both brothers fell helplessly in love. Sarah Mendes, your mother, was as beautiful as she was gracious. Kind to everyone she met. With a laugh that made one think of chimes swaying gently in the wind.”

The reference to his mother brought a flood of memories to Pablo, but he quietly continued to listen.

“Everyone at the fiesta was stirred by Sarah’s beauty, but none more so than the Ben Coloma brothers. Isaac, the younger and more outgoing of the two, immediately engaged her in conversation. Shared a glass of wine with her, and before any other possible suitors could react, began dancing her around the ballroom. When the dance was finished Isaac escorted her to his family and introduced her to everyone.

“Extending her hand to Avraham, she smiled and began to engage him in conversation. So taken was he was by her beauty, he could only mumble his replies. He felt his whole being soar as he gazed at her. Sarah, although amused by Isaac, for some unexplained reason was very moved by Avraham. She felt a closeness to him, something she had never experienced before. As the festivities began to end, Isaac insisted on accompanying Sarah home. She agreed, but only if Avraham would come along, her duenna would not object then, she explained.

“As the months went by Isaac became captivated by Sarah. His whole life began to revolve around her. Sarah, although enjoying the attention, remained cool to the relationship. Her thoughts kept returning to Avraham, whom she had seen and

spoken to on several other occasions, began to realize that she was experiencing strong emotions for him. Avraham, trying to resist his feelings, had fallen in love with Sarah the first time he saw her. Not wanting to hurt his brother, he tried to deny the love he felt for her.

“When Sarah finally chose Avraham to become her husband, the estrangement between the brothers exploded into a violent quarrel. Isaac, angry and bitter, left Toledo, vowing he would never return. What prompted him to convert I do not know. But he was baptized Pablo de San Theresa. Became friar of a monastery in Seville. Don Samuel, on learning of his son’s conversion, declared Isaac dead. And began the prayers of mourning. His name was never to be mentioned in Don Samuel’s presence again. Avraham blamed himself for the break in the family’s closeness. He tried many times to heal the breach, to no avail.

“After his marriage to Sarah, your father worked very hard and became a very successful and well-known physician, and as fate would have it, also settled, along with your mother, in Seville. Don Samuel and your grandmother both passed away within months of each other, about a year after you were born. I visited with both brothers—separately never together—when I had business in Seville. The estrangement between them still lingered. But time and your mother’s influence softened the feelings between them, although the anger and hurt never really healed. Why your father chose not to tell you of your uncle I can only speculate, and this I will not do.

“Your parents’ death, the way it happened, filled us all with despair. When Brother Pablo informed us you were alive but in great danger—Fray Vincente’s death, I believe has been adequately explained to the authorities—made us realize that God works in mysterious ways. Brother Pablo, your uncle, was there to help you in your time of need.”

Young Pablo moved beyond words, was too stunned to do anything but ponder what he had just been told.

Señora Alvarez, realizing the news of his family was a great shock to Pablo, gently said, "You must take time to understand all that you have learned tonight, Pablo. It will take time for you to understand. But now it is very late, and we must all get to sleep." Lifting the sleeping Gracia in her arms, she bid Pablo and her husband a good night.

# Chapter 6

**Toledo**  
**June 1401**

The changes of history move in irregular, and fickle ways. For the Jews of Spain, the madness of the last ten years had given way gradually, to a momentary breathing space. Brought about by political changes in Spain's royal and clerical courts. However, at all times a small number of converted Jews or "New Christians" maintained their influential roles at the upper levels of government.

For Don Pablo de San Miguel the past years had brought many things. Although the memories of Seville still lingered, they had been dulled by time. His arrival in Toledo, which seemed so long ago now, had been filled with many dangers, hard work, sadness, success, and much happiness. He had achieved his impassioned aim of becoming a physician.

Following in his father's footsteps, he was well known and admired by all of his patients. Regardless of whether they were New Christians, Old Christians, or Jewish.

Fray Vincente's death had, it seemed, been adequately dealt with. Pablo's longing for punishing those responsible for the death of his parents had greatly diminished. He was very grateful to Brother Pablo and Señor Alvarez.

But today, Don Pablo de San Miguel's happiness would truly begin. He was to be married to Gracia, whose love he cherished more than anything else in the world.

As he dressed for his wedding, he thought of many things, but mainly of Gracia. She had won his heart without really trying.

Gracia, with her father's flashing eyes and her mother's stately grace, was beautiful there was no doubt of that. But most important she understood, probably better than he, the dangers of living their lives as secret Jews. He remembered that Easter week as the whole family was leaving church. A Dominican friar had begun preaching an inflammatory exhortation against Jews pretending to be Christians. His words became so slanderous that Don Pablo, barely able to contain his anger, began to move towards him with clenched fists. Gracia managed, without visible effort, to stop him before he could inflict any harm to the friar or the family itself.

The wedding ceremony was another example of the self-discipline required to maintain the secret lives they lived. First a Christian ceremony held at the church, a fiesta to follow, with all the Alvarez's Christian friends in attendance. Then tomorrow a second Jewish ceremony in the secret chapel. A ceremony which for him and Gracia would have the most meaning, followed by a smaller fiesta.

Just thinking about all that had to be done, all the preparation that was required boggled his mind. Yet Gracia and all of the Alvarez family were masterful at the art of duplicity, concerning their true religion. An art he too would learn to master.

His thoughts turned to his uncle in Seville; he had no word of Brother Pablo in ten years. Señor Alvarez could not provide any

information, his travels to Seville ended about eight years ago for reasons of ill health.

Don Pablo felt a great debt of gratitude to both Brother Pablo, Señor Alvarez and of course Juan Pacheco. But his strongest feelings were for Gracia, she loved him, and his love for her was the most profound a man could feel for a woman.

Both wedding ceremonies and fiestas went well. Still the one in the hidden chapel performed under the *huppa*—the bridal canopy, was the most memorable for the wedding couple. Sitting on a *talamo*—the nuptial bench before two candles. As the rabbi blesses a glass of wine from which both bride and groom take a taste, it symbolizes their commitment to share everything.

Then Don Pablo places a golden ring on Gracia's finger saying the words: "*Arey at mekudeshet—Be thou consecrated to me by this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel.*" The *ketubah*, the wedding contract, is read and the *shevah berahot*, the seven blessings, are recited. Don Pablo then smashes the glass both have tasted the wine from, crushing it. A painful reminder of the destruction of both temples in Jerusalem. Although the ceremony ends with sadness, the wedding fiesta that follows is a joyful affair. Complete with singing, dancing, eating and drinking.

Yet underlying the happiness of the ceremony, is the agonizing sense of risk and danger *Conversos* endured. So great was their yearning to practice their true faith.

Six months after the wedding Gracia and Don Pablo continued to live with the Alvarez family. When an opportunity to begin a practice in Seville became available—Don Pablo fearful of returning to Seville, but wanting to establish a practice of his own—cautiously accepted the offer.

Gracia, although sad at leaving her mother and father, looked forward to the warmer climate. The greater social opportunities available in the larger city of Seville were another reason.

So it was with mixed emotions on that June day in 1402 that the San Miguel family left Toledo, bound for Seville. Gracia three months pregnant, and Don Pablo happy beyond description.

The journey was hard, but hardest on Gracia who accepted it valiantly. Soon after their arrival, they purchased a home close to the Juderia, the courtyard of which adjoined the home of a family named Halavi.

It was there that they settled into a happy and comfortable life. Their first and only child, who they baptized Francisco, was born six months after they arrived. The *B'rit mila*—the circumcision ceremony—was a difficult problem but with the help of the Halavis they were able to locate a *Mohel*—the person that performs the actual circumcision. Eight days after the baby was born the *B'rit Mila* was fulfilled, and the baby given his Hebrew name of Isaac.

They continued to live their lives of duplicity, attending Mass, celebrating feasts. But always, visiting different “courtyards,” observing Jewish holidays, commemorating Shabbat, and by doing so, kept alive their most meaningful beliefs.

The years ahead would bring Gracia, Don Pablo and their son Francisco happiness, but also lives that were filled with sadness and much danger.



# Chapter 7

**Seville**  
**April 1492**

Don Fernando de San Miguel

Don Fernando recalled the sadness in his father Francisco's eyes as he described the last sorrowful event in Don Pablo's life, learning the final fate of his Uncle Pablo and Juan Pacheco—burned at the stake for Fray Vincente's death! His father never really explained why the two had been found guilty of the crime. He only emphasized the punishment they received, almost as if trying to warn him of the dangers of their secret lives.

*Yes, considered Don Fernando, the dangers are real, the punishment severe. Much sadness has this clandestine life brought us. That was why he had tried so hard to reach an accommodation with Monsignor Abate. Their lives, their happiness depended on it! Now he had to convince his family...*

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of his wife's shrill voice calling, "Fernando, Fernando, where are you?" as she burst into his study with skirts swishing and eyes flashing. Dona Isabel de San Miguel was once again upset, disappointed, or disturbed with someone or something. The object of her dissatisfaction today was their daughter Elena, who had left her duenna, for what reason, Lord only knew.

"Do you know what your daughter has done?"

"Calm yourself, *mi amour*, my love, there are more important problems facing us right now. More important than whatever minor transgressions Elena may have committed."

"But do you know the embarrassment she has caused me? I—"

"Isabel, I cannot discuss Elena with you now. You are aware of the edict that has been issued by the King and Queen. This edict places all of us at risk. It can completely annul what Monsignor Abate, the others, and I have tried to accomplish. Everyone that I convinced to accept Monsignor Abate's scheme is now in grave danger. Our only hope is to convince him that we will completely end our secret practices and fully embrace the Catholic faith. Something his plan would have allowed us to do without fear of punishment. To admit our past secret practice of Judaism now would mean expulsion or worse, maybe facing the Inquisition."

Dona Isabel, visibly shaken by her husband's words, looked around, and spoke in a quiet whisper. "But, Fernando, we have not visited a 'courtyard' in many years. We stopped our practice of lighting the Sabbath candles years ago. We have not performed any religious rites except Catholic ones. Our church attendance has been most regular. Certainly Señor Abate is aware of these facts."

Trying not to lose patience with his wife, Don Fernando took a deep breath and began to explain how their lives, their very fate was now in the hands of Monsignor Abate. Don Fernando had managed to work out an agreement with the monsignor. An agreement that would have allowed the San Miguel family,

along with fifteen other "New Christian" families to secure amnesty from the Inquisition for their secret offenses.

But before Monsignor Abate would finalize the plan, he required signed confessions from all. These confessions he explained were needed, along with promises to faithfully practice the Christian religion, to show the Church hierarchy the sincerity of their beliefs. The secret practice of Judaism was a serious offense.

Nevertheless Monsignor Abate felt certain he could convince the Inquisitor General, the true desire of these once secret Jews, was now to fully embrace the Christian faith. The confessions, he promised, would not be presented unless it was absolutely necessary.

A meeting with the Inquisitor General had been scheduled for next month to discuss the confessions. However, the edict complicated the situation, if Monsignor Abate revealed the confessions now they were doomed. Since all had been properly baptized, seeking absolution for past transgressions would have been a simple matter with Monsignor Abate's help. But because of the edict, confessing to the secret practice of Judaism while professing to be Catholic negated any second chance of conversion. At best they would be forced to leave, or worse, face the Inquisition and a certain *auto-da-fe*. Their only hope lay in convincing Monsignor Abate not to reveal the confessions, and allow them to live their lives as true Christians.

"Now do you see the danger we face, Isabel, if I cannot convince the monsignor to destroy the confessions we..." Don Fernando, hearing the voices of his children as they returned home, ended the explanation to his wife.

"Isabel, the children are home, see that the evening meal is properly prepared, we have much to talk about, many plans to make. Plans which must include all of us."

Dona Isabel, with cheeks flushed and hands trembling, regarded her husband with awe. She loved and respected him. Of this there could be no doubt, she would do all that he asked.

Still, despite the seriousness of the situation, Isabel believed Elena's breach of etiquette, leaving her duenna, had to be addressed, and explained.

Greeting Elena and Antonio, as she left for the kitchen, Dona Isabel made sure to inform Elena that an explanation for leaving her duenna was to be... "Fully discussed with your father." Elena quickly began speaking while Don Fernando raised his hand silencing her.

"Not now, prepare yourself for the evening meal, we have many things to talk about. Including your reasons for your actions." Then gently kissing his daughter on the cheek, he sent her on her way. Turning to his son, Don Fernando asked if he had any further news regarding the edict.

Antonio de San Miguel, tall, handsome and at twenty-one, was full of the self-assurance of youth. The first male of the San Miguel family to disavow the occupation of physician, and the first male to have refused the bar mitzvah ceremony. At the time of his thirteenth birthday he disowned all things Jewish; vowed he was a Christian and would live as one. When asked by his father the reasons for these conclusions, he answered he did not want to live a secret life. A life that did not allow him to express his true feelings. A life that was charged with danger. His feelings had changed very little in the ensuing years.

The shock of his son's decision weakened Don Fernando's faith to such an extent—for it was just one more sign of the futility of their secret practices—that all of the family soon began to forego their Judaism. A few years later Don Fernando began his work with Monsignor Abate.

Antonio was content with his life. As an aide to the Minister of Finance, he was able to work the hours of his choosing. This gave him ample time for drinking, womanizing and gambling. Although outwardly a *bon-vivant*, he had strong feelings for his family and the thought of harm coming to any of them filled him with a great rage.

Antonio had dreams of traveling to Asia and the Far East, to actually see some of the wonders he had read about. Exotic animals, fabled cities, but the dream had to wait for a substantial improvement to his finances.

Although he had to admit feeling a twinge of envy when Elena told him about Joshua. Joshua who was converting and sailing with that fool Colon. Attempting to find a route to the east by sailing the great ocean. Joshua must truly love Elena, to put his life in such great danger.

However, considering what Joshua would have to endure, he thought, for himself, it was best to wait for enough money to purchase passage on one of the caravans that regularly left from Morocco. Just across the Straits of Gibraltar, and a very short ocean journey. It was his belief that the mysterious sea would make Colon's journey one of misery and death.

Dismayed, as he thought of his sister, what she had explained, her plan for preventing Joshua from going with Colon. Their father would never agree to what she was proposing.

Now the Expulsion Edict complicated everything. Not knowing all the details of his father's plans with Monsignor Abate, he had a general idea of what they entailed. He had kept his church attendance to a minimum, and had not thought about his Jewish roots for a number of years, losing interest in any kind of religion, be it Christian, Jewish or Muslim. He was of the opinion that the Expulsion Edict would not adversely affect him or his family.

"No, I have no news concerning the edict, other than what was announced," he answered his father. "The edict should be no problem for us. We are not Jews, I'm sure Monsignor Abate would agree."

Noting his father's look of apprehension, Antonio felt a wave of anxiety sweep over him.

"Or am I wrong, Father, must we take certain precautions to protect ourselves?"

“There are certain problems, Antonio, that must be dealt with, we will discuss them fully this evening. Prepare yourself for the evening meal we will talk again later.”

\* \* \*

Knowing the family discussion would probably run into the late evening hours, Dona Isabel decided to prepare a family favorite as the main course of the evening meal, making sure the cook had all the necessary ingredients to prepare the meal. She instructed the maids to ready the table, and left to ready herself for whatever the evening was to bring.

As church bells chimed the hour of vespers, and a breeze began to cool the evening. The San Miguel family took their places at the large dining table. When all were seated, Don Fernando recited grace and the meal commenced.

Starting with an *ensalada de atún y anchoa*, a tuna and anchovy salad complimented by a variety of baked breads. This was followed by the family favorite, *pollo con berenjena*, braised chicken with eggplant, served with *anjinara con aves*, braised artichokes and fava beans. Accompanying each course was a large quantity of *Rioja* wines, finishing with a compost of fresh oranges and dessert Muscat.

Enjoying the food thoroughly, they spoke very little during the meal. Each knowing, for different reasons, the evening's discussions would be long and tiring.

As he poured more dessert Muscat into his and Antonio's glass, Don Fernando affirmed his decision. Declaring that from this day forward they would all follow the Christian religion faithfully, there would be no turning back to any of the deception of the past. The Jewish portion of their lives was to be forgotten and never spoken of or discussed again. He explained the danger that existed until he could convince Monsignor Abate of their true intentions.

Antonio began to perceive a clearer understanding of what his father was trying to accomplish. He felt convincing Monsignor Abate would not be a problem. They had not visited a "courtyard" in years. Their practice of Judaism was practically nonexistent.

Explaining his thoughts to his father, Antonio suggested a payment or donation to the church, made in Monsignor Abate's name, would certainly provide incentive for him not to reveal the confessions.

Agreeing with his son that this was a good idea, Don Fernando questioned whether an outright payment might seem like they were bribing him to keep their secret.

A different approach was needed. Discussing various ways of accomplishing their aims, Don Fernando and Antonio spoke at length without coming to a solution.

Dona Isabel and Elena sat silently, not wanting to interrupt the men. When Elena, unable to contain herself, suddenly blurted out that their parish church, the Church of San Pedro, was in disgraceful condition. It had not been renovated for years. Why not offer to refurbish the church. Enlarge it if necessary, in Monsignor Abate's name.

Both men looked at each other and smiled, Elena had hit on the perfect solution. That would indicate to the monsignor their intentions, without seeming to be offering a bribe. It also allowed all of the other families who had agreed to the original plan a chance to show the monsignor their appreciation. An offer to enlarge the church would be feasible since a larger amount of money would be raised, if all contributed.

Patting his daughter on the cheek, Don Fernando exclaimed, "Blessed is the father, who has a daughter that can think like a man."

Elena, blushing, kept her response to herself. *Thinking like a man would not have provided the solution.*

Satisfied he had an answer to their dilemma, Don Fernando announced he was ready for bed. He began to rise from the table when Dona Isabel stopped him, saying, "There is another matter that must be considered. Elena, you slipped away from your duenna this afternoon. "Why?" she began. "Is there something you are keeping from us? Explain yourself."

Don Fernando slowly began to sit back down.

"Yes, daughter, tell us why you left your duenna."

Elena began to stammer her explanation, glancing at Antonio, imploring him with her eyes to come to her aid.

Antonio, confused on how to begin explaining what Elena had outlined to him on their walk home, began by saying, "Mother, Father, I think can explain why Elena did what she did. First I must explain what Joshua Ben-Halavi is planning to do."

"No! No! I do not want to hear about Joshua Ben-Halavi," Don Fernando interrupted.

"Please, Father," Elena cried out, "let him explain, I'm sure once you understand how important this is to me, you will agree with what I want to do!"

Don Fernando looked at his daughter, at her blue eyes welling up with tears, her dark curly hair spilling over her face. Not able to deny her, he relented. He would listen to Antonio's explanation. Although fearful of what he sensed he was going to be told.

Dona Isabel began to speak, but was silenced as Don Fernando motioned for Antonio to continue.

"Joshua is going to convert to the Christian faith and sail with Cristobal Colon." Antonio continued, "Halavi is doing this in the hope that he will secure some riches. Once that has been achieved, it is his, and Elena's hope, that you will give your blessing to their marriage. The marriage would take place when Joshua returns from his journey with Colon. Elena fears if he leaves with Colon, she will never see him again. And, and—"



Elena, in a voice filled with emotion, interrupted Antonio as he fumbled for the proper words and began to pore out her innermost feelings. "Father, the only way to keep Joshua from leaving is to allow us to marry. I love him, and his leaving will cause me untold pain. I may never see him again! If you promise to let us to marry one year after he has converted, I know he will not go with Colon. One year should be enough time for you to see if he has taken his vows seriously. And if you decide he has not. I will not marry him. Father, do this for me, do not let him leave!"

Dona Isabel, hearing Elena's reasons for leaving her duenna, shouted, "Chasing a man like a common *puta*," and moved to strike her daughter, but she was restrained by Antonio, who gently admonished her.

"No, Momma. Papa must decide if she is to be punished or not."

Don Fernando, feeling the weight of another difficult problem—Monsignor Abate, the edict, now this—wondered how much more he was expected to cope with. Sighing wearily, Don Fernando admonished his daughter. "I thought I had made myself clear on this matter a long time ago, Elena. You will only marry someone whose *limpieza de sangre*—purity of blood, is unquestioned. Joshua Ben-Halavi, whether he converts or not, will never be one of pure blood. Furthermore you will have made it more difficult for us to convince Monsignor Abate of our true beliefs by shamefully chasing this man. I forbid you to see him again. Promise me you will do as I ask, it of the utmost importance. No one must be able to question our *limpieza de sangre*. Have I made myself clear, Elena?"

Fighting back her tears of disappointment, Elena quietly answered, "Yes, Father, quite clear." She turned and hurried to her room.

Dona Isabel and Antonio began to speak. But one look from Don Fernando immediately silenced them both.

“There will be no more discussion of this matter. Our most important task is to have Monsignor Abate understand our position.”

With those words Don Fernando turned and left the room. His wife and son looked at each other and said nothing, just followed Don Fernando’s example, and retired for the night.

# Chapter 8

**Seville**  
**April 1492**

David Ben-Halavi

The synagogue was filled to capacity as the meeting was convened. Its stated purpose, to discuss possible solutions regarding the Expulsion Edict.

Ironically, since the meeting came one week before the holiday of *Pesach, Passover*, people were relating to the parallels between the holiday, and events actually taking place. Some even going as far as to venture that Adonai, the Lord, was playing some grim joke on the Jews of *España*.

David and Benjamin Ben-Halavi arrived at the synagogue early. Both silent, lost in their own thoughts. Neither was able to voice their true feelings. Express what both knew was the only solution available to them. Leave *España* and their Spanish lives behind, begin a new exodus.

For David, events had given him an even bitter pill to swallow. The loss of his younger son, Joshua. Lost to him in the spiritual and probably in the physical sense as well, if he persisted in his plan to sail with Colon.

During the *Amidah*—the ritual of prayers silently recited by all congregants—David Ben-Halavi repeated prayers for his whole family and all of the Jews of *España*. He fervently prayed for the Lord to watch over Joshua, to protect and forgive him.

Once the morning prayers were completed, the rabbi began the meeting, informing the congregants that all attempts to have the edict annulled or modified, to the best of his knowledge, had failed. The edict would be enforced in August.

“Although the news I bring is not good,” the rabbi continued. “Not all of it is bad. I do have some good news to disclose. *Sultan Bayazit* of Turkey has agreed to allow expelled Jews from Spain to settle in his empire. Has even gone so far as to issue a *firman*. A decree to his governors, threatening death to those who mistreat or harm us.”

The murmuring of the congregants grew loud at this news and many people began speaking at once. “Please, one at a time.” The rabbi tried to maintain some kind of order. Many congregants stood up and shouted for quiet, but calm was restored only after numerous outbursts of questions, comments, and cries for more information.

Finally Señor Levi, one of the synagogue’s most eloquent speakers, stood and started speaking. “Rabbi,” he began, “let me try to explain to everyone what our choices are and the consequences of those choices. If we can make our way to the Ottoman Empire, we will be allowed to establish our own synagogues, our own community, begin new lives. As far as what possessions we can take with us, how we will travel to these new lands, is what must be settled. The edict specifically prevents us taking any gold, silver or money, but all movable and immovable property we may barter, sell, or dispose of freely and at will. This will allow us to....”

As Señor Levi continued to speak, David Ben-Halavi felt his thoughts drifting, drifting away. Was it only a year ago that his beloved Rachel was here with him? His sons learning the trade that would earn them a living when both he and Rachel were gone. Although life was not easy in *España*, they had been happy here, there was food on the table, *pollo con arroz*...chicken with rice for Shabbat dinner. Wine to make the proper blessings, and wine to celebrate life with. The print shop earned them a sufficient living, printing prayer books, and occasionally a hand bill or two. The scribe work that Joshua handled so well. Even the aftermath of the *Pragmatica*, the formal quarantine against the Jews, still lingered. The restriction to wear only black coats adorned with the red "Jew badge" on their outer clothing. Confinement to walled ghettos. Even with these restrictions life had been good. The community had flourished.

But everything changed so quickly. Rachel's illness. Her stomach distended, her breathing labored, she could not eat nor drink, and was in constant pain. When the end came, Halavi was torn by grief on one hand, and relief that her pain had finally ceased. He grieved greatly. Grieved even now, forty years she had been by his side, sharing in all the happy times as well as the sad. Now she was gone. The edict was now uprooting himself, and his sons. He and Benjamin forced to begin a new life in some foreign land. Joshua leaving on some perilous journey. His family splitting apart. He felt a tremendous weariness coming upon him, his eyes began to close. Señor Levi droned on. Then a soft whisper.

"Papa, Papa, wake up, the meeting is over." It was Benjamin gently shaking him.

David Ben-Halavi became alert. "Eh, so what was decided?" he asked, "That we should all leave as one community, find passage on one ship to take us to the Ottoman lands. But I am afraid our house and furniture will have to be sold. It would be very costly to try and take all of our possessions with us," Benjamin answered.

*Just as I expected, thought David. Our house will be sold for next to nothing, our property taken when we are gone, the printing supplies, the press itself. "Ay de mi!" he softly murmured, then got up and left the synagogue with Benjamin.*

\* \* \*

As Joshua concluded relating his plans to the professor, which was how he had always referred to *Señor Zacuto*, the renowned creator of the *Almanach Perpetuum*, the celestial tables, which allowed seaman to determine their latitudes without using the sun's meridian, Professor Zacuto just shook his head sadly. Dismayed that Joshua Ben-Halavi had so recklessly decided to renounce his religion, and sail with Colon. He had grown fond of the boy while working with him to transcribe the celestial Almanach, which Captain Pinzon had ordered for his admiral.

Señor Zacuto had known Joshua's family a long time and thought very highly of them. Whenever he was in Seville and in need of a scribe or of printing services, he always relied on the Halavis, whose work he felt was excellent.

*Now what misery the edict is bringing to all of us, he thought. Especially David Ben-Halavi, whose youngest son was not only converting, but leaving on a most difficult journey, fraught with danger. That the journey would be hazardous, was certain, for no one knew what lay beyond the vast ocean.*

*"Ay de mi!" he murmured softly, the lad was in for a very hard time. The love of a woman does strange things to a man. Señor Zacuto had only one love. His work!*

Joshua, noting the professor's dismay at his plans, asked, "And you, Professor, what will you do?"

"I will not convert, so I will leave! One of my former students at the University of Salamanca, *Joseph Vecinho*, the famous astronomer, has asked me to go with him to Portugal. I have accepted his offer. Maybe you and your family would join us. I

am sure Señor *Vecinho* would be willing to help you as well.”

“Thank you for your consideration, Professor, but my brother thinks that going to Portugal is only delaying the final Edict. He suspects that *King Joao* will eventually issue his own expulsion edict very soon. My father and brother will be leaving for the Ottoman lands. I, as you know, will be leaving with Colon.”

As Joshua spoke he felt a sadness gnaw at his heart. There had been no word from Elena, and he was to be baptized in a few weeks. It appeared his future entailed a long ocean voyage and a life full of duplicity.

“*Vaya con Dios*—go with God, Joshua,” the professor’s voice interrupted Joshua’s thoughts. “And your father and brother as well. Now we must continue our work if we are to complete it on time.”

Joshua nodded his agreement and continued transcribing the last of the celestial tables.

# Chapter 9

**Seville**  
**June 1492**

Don Fernando de San Miguel

Sitting in the courtyard of the San Miguel home on a late morning of a lovely spring day, and enormously enjoying every minute of it, Monsignor Abate smiled, assuring Don Fernando that his worries were groundless. The confessions would not be revealed. He, Monsignor Abate, would take care of everything. The desire of the families to embrace the true faith was all that mattered. He would personally take the matter up with Bishop Julio himself.

The contributions to rebuild the Church of San Pedro were appreciated, Monsignor Abate explained. Since this was the church of his childhood—he had grown up within the parish—and having the church rebuilt meant a great deal to him personally.

But much more important, Don Fernando and the rest were indebted to him. A fact, the monsignor thought, that made him



realize his true ambitions—being appointed bishop—were closer than ever now. Don Fernando and the rest were all very powerful, rich and with great influence.

That they, or older members of their families, had once been secret Jews, was information too valuable to contemplate. The mere fact that professed “New” Christians had continued their Jewish practice was reason enough for the Office of the Holy Inquisition to prepare an *auto-da-fé* immediately.

Although all had now discontinued these Jewish practices, that they had occurred at all provided the monsignor with a tremendous advantage. Having to battle against his *Converso* background to achieve the position he now held in the Church. The monsignor recalled with mixed emotions, the bitter struggle to cleanse himself of his past.

Now he held the power to achieve his longtime ambition. His dream to be called “Bishop.” Monsignor Abate would protect these people from the edict, as long as it was to his advantage and suited his ultimate ambitions. Bishop Julio was very old and very easily manipulated. The monsignor was sure he would be able to attain the required absolution with very little difficulty.

His thoughts were interrupted by Don Fernando asking him if he desired another glass of wine.

“No, no, Don Fernando, *gracias*. Two glasses of wine at this time of the day would only make me want to take my siesta so much sooner. Now I must return to the holy office and make arrangements to meet with Bishop Julio.”

Both men turned at the sound of footsteps and watched as Donna Isabel and Elena entered the courtyard. Both women kneeled before the monsignor, made the sign of the cross, and whispered, “*Buenos dias*, Monsignor, please bless us.”

Observing how poorly Elena looked, Monsignor Abate made a mental note to investigate further the reasons for this. Making the sign of the cross above the kneeling women, he began his prayer. “May the lord Jesus bless you and keep you safe. Amen.”

"Thank you, Monsignor, you are looking well," Donna Isabel said as she and her daughter seated themselves.

"A thousand pardons to you, Donna Isabel, and to you, Señorita Elena, but I must take my leave. So much work, so little time. I hope you will forgive me for such a short visit."

Disappointed, Donna Isabel had hoped to take confession with him, and discuss Elena's behavior, and simply replied, "Only if you promise to return before long, for a proper visit."

"I will, as soon as I can. *Buenos dias* to you and your lovely daughter, Señora."

Don Fernando rose to accompany the monsignor out. "I appreciate your coming to see us, and for all your help, I will inform the other families of your decisions, Monsignor."

"It is my pleasure, Don Fernando, you are not to worry. But may I ask, is Elena fit? She does not look well to me."

"She is fine, just suffering from affairs of the heart, another matter for which I may seek your help."

"I am at your service, Señor. *Adios*. I will be in touch."

"*Adios*, Monsignor Abate. I look forward to seeing you again in the near future."

Returning to the women, Don Fernando found Elena sobbing and Donna Isabel berating her. *Ay di mi!* he thought. *When will I find the peace I so hunger for?*

"*Señora, por favor*, please stop the bickering, it will not help matters. Elena, you must stop this weeping and moping about. My decision is made, there will be no further discussion of the matter, if you—"

Interrupting Don Fernando, Elena angrily shouted, "What, Father, what will you do, have me locked away in a convent? Turn me into a nun, to live a life of obedience and chastity? All I asked for, all I really want, is for you give your blessing to our marriage. A marriage that would not take place until Joshua returns. He is converting, what more do you expect of him?" Elena, breathless, began to sob again. "Even Antonio agrees with me, I—"

“NO! NO! Elena, I refuse to discuss the matter any further,” Don Fernando began to shout, feeling his anger and frustration build in him.

“My decision is made, and you know what it is. There will be no mention of Joshua Ben-Halavi by you or anyone else in this house. The matter is closed. You are not to see or speak of him again. Surely you realize the seriousness of our situation. *The edict*, and all the dangers related to it.”

Elena, beginning to feel helpless and alone, trying to pacify her father, spoke softly. “Papa, he will be baptized tomorrow. Please don’t let him leave without—”

“No more discussion, Elena,” Don Fernando shouted. “Go to your room now! Isabel, see to it that she obeys.”

“I am not a child, Father,” Elena replied, wiping her tears and trying to control her sobbing. She glared at her parents. “I know the risks the edict and your arrangements with Monsignor Abate may bring. But I don’t care. I love Joshua and I want to be with him. All I ask for is your promise to let us marry when he returns, if he ever does. All you and Mother have done is to refuse me what I really want.”

Donna Isabel, no longer able to hold her silence, yelled, “How can you speak to us this way, have you no respect?”

Elena, without responding, turned her back on her parents, and quickly returned to her room. Weeping quietly, but pensive, she thought, *I will not let it end this way. I will not lose Joshua to that vast ocean. Or to the religious fanatics who cannot live in peace or understanding with anyone who disagrees with their beliefs. Dios mío, help me!*

# Chapter 10

Seville  
July 1492

Joshua Ben-Halavi awoke with a start, recalling it was the day of his baptism. The last day he would openly answer to the name of Joshua Ben-Halavi. Quietly leaving his bed in order not to wake his brother, Joshua, instinctively, began to recite the morning benedictions. Prayers he had recited upon arising for most of his life. But thanking God for removing the sleep from his eyes, or making him a man, were prayers far removed from his real yearnings.

Joshua stopped his normal recitations and began to fervently pray for the safety of his brother and father. For a safe return for himself. But most of all, he prayed that Elena would be allowed to marry him on his return. He had not seen or heard from Elena for almost a month. But yesterday she had sent word that she would try to be at the baptismal ceremony. And his hopes soared, he looked forward to seeing her there. How she was going to get to the ceremony without her duenna puzzled him, still he prayed she was successful.

Hearing his brother begin to stir, and knowing he would be awakening very soon, Joshua dressed went to wash up, and help his father prepare the morning meal.

David Ben-Halavi shuffled through his tiny kitchen preparing the morning meal in a state of gloom. Sadness he had not experienced since the death of his wife Sarah overwhelmed him. Recalling the burial service, reciting of the Kaddish, the sound of earth striking the coffin. He experienced again, that utter feeling of despair and sadness. Within a few hours, his youngest son would leave the faith of his father's. And embark on a perilous journey, almost too dreadful to think about. Himself and Benjamin forced to leave the only home they had ever known!

*Ay di mi!* Dios mío! he moaned to himself. *Why has God chosen to punish us so?*

Attempting to convince Joshua to change his mind only brought bitter disputes among his sons and himself.

*If only...* his thoughts were interrupted as Joshua entered the kitchen. "*Buenos dias, Papa, what can I do to help you?*"

*Don't convert, don't go, with Colon,* David almost blurted out, but bit his tongue and instead quietly said, "Start the fire and put the eggs up to boil. I will begin heating the *pastellas*, as soon as the fire is going."

*Desayuna*, the morning meal, consisted of hard boiled eggs, fresh fruit, and *pastellas de queso*. A cheese filled bread dough, which had been baked by Señora Bejar the day before. *Pastellas* was one of the family's favorites, and Sarah prepared them as often as she could. Now they had to rely on Señora Bejar who cooked when she was able to. But only prepared *pastellas* very infrequently. So this morning's meal was extra special.

As the fire heated their small stone oven to the proper temperature, David began heating the *pastellas*. Soon a most pleasing aroma began to fill the house. An aroma of baking bread and simmering cheese.

Benjamin, stirring from a restless night, caught the aroma of the family's favorite breakfast dish. Memories flooded his mind. Memories of happier times. The family together as one, the problems facing them, manageable. Then just as quickly he was brought back to the present. The edict, Joshua converting and leaving, he and his father off to some Ottoman city. To only Lord knew what.

Benjamin arose, washed, dressed and went to join his father and brother. Entering the kitchen, as David was serving the *pastellas* and Joshua the eggs and fruit, Benjamin quietly bid both a good morning, took his usual seat at the table, joining his father and brother. Once the benediction over the food was completed, they began their meal. In silence.

Everyone was apprehensive of beginning another argument.

Benjamin, although very angry with Joshua for what he was planning to do, was also immensely sad and concerned for him. Reaching out to his brother, in an emotional voice, he said, "I will miss you very much, Joshua. I will pray for your safe return and success in marrying the woman of your choice."

Joshua, overcome with emotion hugged his brother to him and softly said, "Thank you, Benjamin, and may we all be together again very soon."

His sons seeming to have overcome their differences, filled David with immense joy. Reaching out to both of them, he simply said, "*Bravo, mi hijos*—well done, my sons."

The tension of the past few weeks broken, all three began to chatter excitedly at how good the *pastellas* tasted. How good the fruit was. How, maybe, just maybe, everything would turn out all right!

In the midst of all the chatter, Benjamin suddenly remembered the idea that had popped into his mind while washing up. How the family might be able to keep possession of the house and printing press.

Benjamin began to explain his thoughts to his father and brother. Since Joshua was to take his vows, he would be considered a Christian, not subject to the laws of the edict. Hence he could retain possession of all the Halavi property, providing it was legally transferred to Joshua in his baptismal name, whatever that might be. The only problem, Joshua pointed out, was legal possession was one thing, actual physical possession was another.

Since everyone in the family was leaving how would the family possess the property? This was a serious drawback and required further thought, but time was short. The baptismal ceremony was only an hour away and Joshua had to get ready.

"It's a good idea, Benjamin, we must talk about it. After I take *their* vows, and become acceptable to *them*."

Since the baptism was to take place at the Church of San Pedro. They agreed to meet there after the ceremony. Joshua, in his excitement, forgot the message he had received from Elena.

# Chapter 11

Seville  
July 1492

Baptism, a Sacrament of the Christian church. Where petitioners are immersed in, or sprinkled with holy water. The rite derived from the practice of John the Baptist. And probably from the Jewish practice of the *Mikvah* or ritual bath.

For Joshua and the hundred or so other future Christians, the ceremony about to be performed, was not entirely unfamiliar to them. Most remained patient and quiet, waiting for the clerics to begin, keeping their thoughts and fears to themselves.

Joshua's thoughts were focused on one subject only – Elena! Would she be here? Would her father allow them to marry? If not, what arguments could he offer to change Don Fernando's mind?

Thoughts of the catechism he was required to learn were far from his mind, suddenly bells began to chime. The doors of the church of San Pedro were thrown open. A melodic choir began to chant some ancient melody.



Realization and fear of what was about to happen fell upon the aspirants like a chilling winter rain. Murmurs of *Hinay el Yishuati*—Behold, the Lord is my salvation—began to ripple through the crowd. Some fell to their knees repeating passages from the *Havdalah* service, and refused to move along. This caused the priests and friars to push and shove them, while calling out.

“Do not be afraid, move along, no harm will come to you.”

After much coaxing, pushing and chattering, all the yet to be Christians were finally settled in the church. Standing close to each other along the pews, some fearful, some ashamed. Their lives being wrenched in a direction not of their choosing.

A hush fell as Bishop Julio made his way to the lectern, followed by Monsignor Abate, two altar boys, and two scribes. The bishop began the services reciting the *Pater Noster*, ending with the *Hail Mary*.

One by one, each man, woman, and child moved to the font, kneeled, and placed their heads above it. Then Bishop Julio sprinkled the holy water and intoned, “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and christen thee...”

Monsignor Abate pointed out to Bishop Julio each new name from the list he carried. The bishop then repeated the name aloud for all to hear. The scribes then recorded each new name along with the person’s old one, thus completing the church records in a befitting manner.

As Joshua’s baptism approached, he began to experience some remorse at what was going to happen. Glancing around the church, he thought he saw Elena. And his mood quickly turned to elation, kneeling at the font, experiencing the water trickle through his hair, hearing his new name being announced by Bishop Julio.

“*Diego de San Gil*.” Joshua realized there was no turning back now, the die was cast.

When all the supplicants had completed the baptismal ceremony, the choir again began their chanting, and the chapel bells their pealing. As each new Christian left the church they were greeted and welcomed by the priests, nuns, and friars who had come to observe the ceremony. They also admonished the newly baptized to adhere to the church's teachings.

Leaving the church as quickly as he could, *Diego de San Gil* began searching for Elena. He was sure he had seen her. Looking about, but not finding her, he began to walk away from the church. As he did so, he heard someone calling, "Diego, Diego, wait."

Continuing to walk away, he stopped abruptly when he realized. "*Diego!*" was his new name. Turning, he saw her, and his heart skipped a beat. Running to her, he had to fight the urge to sweep her up into his arms, and smother her with kisses.

Instead, he kneeled before her and kissed her hand. For the first time in weeks Elena experienced true happiness. She was filled with joy as she gazed at Joshua...! No not Joshua, *Diego de San Gil*, that's who he was now. They both began to speak at once, but realizing where they were, they simply began to walk away from the church and crowds. Not speaking at all, just gazing at each other.

\* \* \*

Walking towards the *Guadalquivir* river, Diego and Elena enjoyed the fresh breezes and warm sunshine. Setting out for their favorite meeting place, a slight rise along the river, sheltered by a single pomegranate tree.

Once in the shade of the tree, they clung to each other and passionately kissed. Diego whispering softly words of his love for her. Elena fighting back the tears she knew would flow once she told him of her father's decision.

"Joshua...? Diego, my father refuses to let us become betrothed. He refuses to discuss our plans, he's closed his mind

and hardened his heart. I don't know how to make him understand. "I...I..." She began sobbing sorrowfully, all the while clinging to Diego.

"*Cara mia*, my darling, please do not cry, seeing you this way fills my heart with an agony I cannot even bear to speak of."

"But, Diego what are we to do? I cannot live without you."

"I will speak to him, maybe I can convince him to reconsider. I am a Christian now, maybe he will listen to me."

"No, Diego, if the Lord himself spoke for us, my father would not change his mind. It's useless."

"Then I have no choice. I leave with Colon in a few months, to what, I do not know. But I pray Colon is successful searching for this...this passage to the Indies. If we find treasure, and I can return safely with it, the glory your father feels is so important will be mine. He will no longer refuse us. In fact I'm sure he will be most eager to discuss our wedding plans."

Elena, not convinced, shaking her head, said, "But what if you do not return, Diego. I cannot bear the thought of losing you, I don't think I could go on living without you."

"*Cara mia*, my love for you is deeper than the ocean I must sail. My life is meaningless without you, but you must be patient. Promise me you will not do anything foolish. Wait for me, but no longer than a year. If I do not return by that time, you can be sure Colon and his passage to the Indies is a myth. And we have all gone to meet our maker."

Hearing the man she loved voice the one thing she feared most, Elena rushed into his arms and passionately began kissing him, pressing her body against his.

"Don't leave me, Joshua, don't go," she whispered as she continued to kiss him.

Startled at her outpouring of emotion, Diego tried hard to control his passion, without success. Feeling her body press against his, her lips moving from his mouth to his cheeks to his neck, aroused him so completely that all control was gone, returning her kisses as passionately as they were given. Quickly

he removed his breeches, lifted her skirts, gently spread her legs and entered her. Pain and pleasure, exploded into one immense hot-blooded passion, consuming them both. Love for each other now became the most important act of their lives.

\* \* \*

Drained of all energy at the climax of their love, they lay side by side. Elena thinking, *He is truly mine now, and I am his. Still I have committed a mortal sin, and I will surely be severely punished.*

Diego, almost sensing her thoughts, softly whispered, "*Caramia*, don't blame yourself for what's happened. We may never see each other again, but more important, we love each other. And no one, neither God nor man can deny us that. Now hurry, we must return to our families before someone sees us."

But someone already had, and that along with act itself would cause future events to change Elena's life forever.

# Chapter 12

Seville  
July 1492

Antonio was livid. Seeing his sister lie with a man like a common *puta*. The rage he felt caused all color to drain from his face. *They both will pay for this*, he thought.

Antonio had attended the baptismal ceremony for Elena's sake. She had been so unhappy these past few weeks. Intending to accompany her to the ceremony, and welcome Joshua to the faith, he wanted to put him at ease with his new religion. However, Elena had left so mysteriously, almost disappearing. It was only by chance that he saw her leaving the church with Joshua.

Witnessing their love tryst, he found himself wishing them both dead. Continuing to walk along the river's edge, the fresh breezes cooled and relaxed him. He began to think less harshly of his sister.

*Who am I to judge her? Is my life so virtuous? She did what she did because she loves Joshua and is afraid of losing him. Aid mi! What can I do? I am duty bound to tell my father. Surely Elena will be punished,*

*sent away, the whole family disgraced. But if I keep this my secret. Not tell anyone, not even Elena, what I witnessed, how much misery will be avoided? Can I live with myself, keeping this secret? I must for Elena, and the honor of the family!*

\* \* \*

Elena sat at her mirror gazing at herself while she brushed her hair. *Today, she thought, will live in my memory forever.* She had given herself and her love to Josh...Diego, and it was wonderful. What she now felt was almost overpowering. She delighted at the thought of Diego kissing, and touching her. His gentle lovemaking and then, the final emotions she experienced, the love she needed and wanted. Now the consequences of that act began to fill her mind. *We cannot be together. We will never marry. He will be leaving and I will be alone. If my family ever found out.*

"Dios mío. Help me please," she uttered as she began to weep very softly.

As if in a dream, she heard the knocking at her door, and yet did not hear it. It was awhile before she realized that someone was calling her name.

"Elena, Elena, the evening meal is ready. We are waiting for you," she heard her mother shout.

"I will be there shortly," Elena answered, as she rushed about trying to get ready.

Antonio sat with his father having a glass of wine before the evening meal. His mind filled with thoughts of Elena. What he had witnessed. His family's reaction if they found out what she had done. His dilemma, regarding what to do.

*Ay de mi! I...* His thoughts interrupted by his father's voice.

"Antonio, are you listening to me, to what I have been saying? Or are you still dwelling on the last wench you trifled with?"

"No, no, I'm sorry, Father," Antonio replied, startled by his father's voice. "It's just that I...I was thinking about the Ben-Halavis. They will be leaving once the edict takes effect in August. They have refused to convert. Except for Joshua who was baptized today. He is leaving with Colon in a few months and—"

"*Basta*—enough, Antonio. Why are you babbling about that Jew family? Since the edict has been announced, they seem to be the only subject you and Elena wish to talk about. There are much more important matters to be discussed."

At that moment Donna Isabel and Elena entered the dining room.

"Ah, father and son discussing worldly topics, I am sure," Donna Isabel laughingly chided her son and husband.

"*Buenos noches*—good evening, Father, Antonio," Elena softly whispered.

"*Buenos noches, mi amores*—good evening, my darlings, you both look lovely. Sit, have a little wine, I have excellent news about the rebuilding of the church of San Pedro."

Don Fernando continued to speak about the church's rebuilding, and the goodwill it was producing between himself and Monsignor Abate.

Antonio stopped listening and became lost in his own thoughts. He furtively gazed at his sister when he thought she was not looking. Every time he did so, he felt a stab of despair.

Elena sensed that her brother was troubled. But not wanting to upset either Antonio or her parents, she decided to wait until they were alone before asking Antonio what was troubling him. And if she could possibly help.

*How much help can I be to Antonio? The issues I am trying to resolve for myself seem insurmountable.* Trying to focus her thoughts, Elena was jolted back to the meal in front of her by mother's shrill voice.

"Elena, you have hardly touched your food. What is wrong with you, are you ill?"

"No, Mama, I'm fine. I was just thinking. I'm really not hungry, but I am tired. Please excuse me, I would like to retire for the evening."

"Yes, certainly," Don Fernando quickly answered. "But I think a visit to a physician would be a good idea. You've been so unhappy, and not looked well these past few weeks."

Elena now became uneasy, an examination by a physician, embarrassing at any time, would be most undesirable, especially now.

Alarmed, Elena quickly rose from the table, muttered her good-nights, and returned to her room.

Don Fernando began to call her back, stopped, and sighed, deciding to let Elena get her rest. Antonio began to speak, but was interrupted by Don Fernando.

"*Ay di mi*, women! I'm sure your sister's good health will return once Ben-Halavi has left on his ocean voyage and is not heard from again. In time she will forget him, and hopefully another suitor will find a place in her heart. Maybe then some peace will return to this family!"

"I hope you are right, Father," Antonio stammered, "but Elena is very strong-willed."

"No, no, you will see, Antonio. Once Ben-Halavi is gone, she will become her old self again and—"

"His name is no longer Ben-Halavi, Father," Antonio interrupted. "He was baptized *Diego de San Gil* today. He is now a Christian. And she does love him..."

"*Basta*—enough. She will be fine, you'll see, you agree, Donna?"

Donna Isabel looked at both her son and husband, then nodded assent. But she was secretly troubled. Elena, although seemingly sad, had a certain glow about her, a visage of complete satisfaction. A countenance that troubled Donna Isabel greatly.



# Chapter 13

**Seville**  
**July 1492**

Diego de San Gil quietly entered the empty kitchen of his father's house. His first visit since his conversion two days before. He had been cautioned by various clerics, about associating with persons of the Jewish faith. The church hierarchy was fearful that the newly baptized could easily be convinced to return to their old ways. The admonition was issued at the mandatory church service he attended the day after he was baptized. This was why he had spent the last two nights at the *Port of Palos*, where Colon's ships were being outfitted.

Guessing his father and brother were working on some last-minute project, he decided not to disturb them, but wait until they were finished.

As he waited, memories of happier times began to consume him, a dreadful sadness overwhelmed him. In two weeks he would be boarding one of Colon's ships for good, leaving his home, his family, and the woman he loved.

*"Ay de mi!"* he sighed. *Why is life so trying and confused.*

All he really wanted was to marry Elena. Continue the printing business his father and brother worked so hard to establish, have children, and be allowed to raise them as he saw fit; in the religion of his choosing.

As Diego dwelled upon the path his life had taken, his thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of someone entering the house from the print shop.

Ink stained and preoccupied with the material they had just finished printing, Benjamin and David entered the kitchen where Diego was sitting. On seeing each other they all rushed into each other's arms and began to speak at once. Once the emotional greeting subsided, David, with his arms around both of his sons, quietly said, "Everyone, wash up and get ready for the noon meal."

Sitting in their small courtyard, with remnants of the noon meal strewn about the table, they leisurely drank their last glass of wine before siesta. Talk subsided, then suddenly stopped, the reality of what was going to occur in just a few short weeks began to make itself felt. Realization of what was happening to their lives began to take hold. David began to softly weep.

"Will we never see or be together again," Benjamin muttered.

Joshua, losing control completely, disconsolate, began to weep, for himself, the woman he loved, his father and brother.

Plans regarding the disposition of their property would have to wait until they all had time to grieve for themselves and each other.

\* \* \*

The next evening Diego de San Gil left the house of his birth for the last time. Burned into his memory and heart the final goodbyes to his father and brother, the sadness he would never forget, or ever ease.

Nothing had been resolved regarding their property. They would do what they could, in the time left to them, take what they could, and leave what they could not. But most important, all agreed, that they try to find each other, in any way possible, after they had settled into their new lives, wherever that might be.

Diego now faced his final and hardest goodbye. Elena, would she be able to see him? The San Miguel home was very close, adjacent to the Halavi courtyard. Close as it was, it might as well have been a million miles away.

As he headed towards the San Miguel, home he thought, *Elena's family would never allow me to see her*, but he had to try. Maybe one of the servants would take her the letter he had already written.

Making his way to the wall surrounding the villa, Diego followed it to a location below a window he thought opened onto Elena's room. Quickly realizing his mistake after throwing the first tentative pebble at the window, Diego saw Antonio, Elena's brother, at the window. Alarmed, he began looking for a place to hide, stopped and thought, *Why should I hide? I love Elena, and that, they cannot change.*

Defiantly standing his ground, he looked up, saw Antonio motion him to be quiet, and to remain where he was. In a few moments he was joined by Antonio, who greeted him, if not cordially, polite enough, to cause Diego to wonder.

*What does he want of me?* Cautiously Diego approached Antonio.

"I am sorry if I disturbed you, Antonio, but I must speak to Elena. My journey begins in a very short while."

Suppressing, with great difficulty, the anger he felt towards Joshua, Antonio also felt an immense pity for the man who had so profaned his sister, and he allowed the pity to temper his anger.

"Joshua, you should not be here, if my father ever finds out what..." Stopping himself before he could say any more, Antonio quickly changed the subject. "I apologize, Señor Diego, I should not have used your former name. But my sister cannot see you now or at any other time. I ask you, please leave without causing any further disturbance."

Before Diego could reply, Don Miguel, from his bedroom window, was shouting, "Antonio, who is it, what is happening out there?"

"It is my father, you must leave now, Diego."

"I'm going, but please see that Elena gets this letter, it may be the last word she has from me."

Handing the letter to Antonio, Diego, as he left, heard Antonio whisper, "I will, *y via con Dios, mi amigo*." He then quickly answered his father. "It is nothing, Father, just some cat or dog trying to find something to eat, go back to bed, it is gone now."

"*Bueno...* good, Antonio, now you get to bed, then maybe the rest of us will be able to sleep."

"*Buenos noches, Papa,*" Antonio replied as he quickly and quietly made his way to Elena's room.

Hoping Elena was still awake, he softly knocked on her door, breathing a sigh of relief when he heard the rattle of the door as it opened. Elena silently motioned him to enter. Not speaking until the door was shut, Elena sensed that Antonio had something important to tell her. *Possibly some word from Diego. Maybe he was not going to leave after all!*

"What is it, Antonio, what was happening out there?"

"*Calma ti...* calm yourself, Elena, Diego was here. It seems he mistook my window for yours. I had to send him away. If Papa found out...he asked me to give you this letter."

Seeing the anger in his sister's face as he handed her the letter, Antonio began to stammer. Then finally blurted out what he had witnessed the day of Joshua's baptism.

Elena, shocked beyond words, blushed a crimson red, and felt her whole world crumbling about her.

"Were you spying on me, Antonio?" she began to shout.

Quickly taking her into his arms, he held her tightly and whispered, "No I wasn't, I just happened to be there. I will tell no one. Now be quiet, do not make any more noise or Mama and Papa will hear us. Surely then, we will have much to explain."

Leaving her brother's arms, Elena remembered the letter she still clutched in her hands, tore it open and began to read.

*Cara mia Elena,*

*Of all the pain and sadness, this life has brought us, leaving you is by far the most painful and saddest. My heart is heavy, my eyes weep, the day of my leaving arrives to soon, and I will be gone. Think of me often, pray for my safe return, the memory of you and our love lives in my heart forever.*

*Diego*

As she read the final words of Diego's letter, Elena began to weep and moan, her heart broken, she felt, beyond hope of ever mending.

Antonio, fearful of waking their parents, spoke softly to her. "Elena, he is gone, there is nothing you can do or say that will change that fact. Learn to accept it, move on with your life."

Staring beyond her brother, Elena softly whispered, "No, Antonio, without him there is no life for me." She began sobbing. "I cannot go on without him."

"You must, for the family's sake. Promise that you will do whatever is necessary to see that no shame can be associated with the family name. Promise me, Elena!"

"I promise, now leave me, Antonio."

Relenting, Antonio, drained of emotion, spoke very softly. "I will help in any way that I can, Elena, I..."

"Just go, Antonio."

Nothing more would be accomplished tonight, Antonio decided. Leaving Elena, he quietly made his way to his own room, and for sure a sleepless night.

# Chapter 14

## **Palos de la Frontera August 1492**

As the last professing Jews on Spanish soil scrambled aboard ships in the ports of *Cadiz*, and *El Puerto de Santa Maria*. At the nearby port of *Palos de la Frontera*, three small ships, the *Pinta*, the *Nina*, and the *Santa Maria* were waiting to hoist sail.

Christopher Columbus, commander of these ships, would describe in his log, the departing refugee vessels as a “fleet of misery and woe.” Those leaving would have agreed. But for generations afterward, Sephardic memories of their eight centuries in Spain would exalt statesmen, physicians, and philosophers.

Romanticizing their lives in their former homeland as a vibrant, spirited civilization which afforded much to Jewish culture and learning. Those memories, which became a natural part of future Sephardic culture, were overwhelmed on this day.

The uprooting and plundering of the Spanish Jewish population by religious zealots, left most broken in mind, heart, and spirit. Adding to this misery, coincidentally or otherwise,

August 2, 1492, was the *ninth of Av*. The Jewish day of mourning, commemorating the destruction of both Jerusalem Temples. The Children of Israel in 1492, like those of the past, were forced to leave their homes, and embark on a journey to foreign lands. Make new lives for themselves in a strange new country.

Christopher Columbus, known to his sailors as Admiral Colon, was deep in thought. Entering in his log thoughts about the journey he was to begin. Oblivious to the fact that the books, maps and charts he had acquired and studied were erroneous—Marco Polo's location for Japan, 1500 miles east of China, Ptolemy's underestimation of the circumference of the earth, and overestimation of the Eurasian landmass—led Colon to believe that Japan was only 3000 miles west of Portugal. Well within the capabilities of existing sailing vessels, so confident was he, that by sailing west, Japan would be reached, he had already written a letter of introduction to the Grand Khan.

Now his dream of a sea route to the Indies would soon become a reality. In a few short hours they would hoist sail and be on their way. He looked forward to seeing the golden roofs of the "pagodas" the "easterners" with their fanciful dress.

A knock at his door interrupted his thoughts. To his reply of "enter" *Alonzo Pinzon*, captain of the *Pinta*, and his brother *Vicente Pinzon*, captain of the *Nina*, quickly entered the cabin.

Saluting smartly, the captains reported that all ships were provisioned and ready to sail. "Admiral Colon" repeated his order that all crews were to be aboard their respective vessels no later than midnight. Ready to leave at first light, both captains agreed, received their final orders and left for their ships.

The admiral returned to his reflections and writing; soon the riches of Asia would be available to all of Spain, Europe.

\* \* \*

Although Diego de San Gil had been aboard the *Santa Maria* for a week now. The pitching and rolling of the ship, very tame



while in port, still had a sickening effect on him. Diego hoped that by the time they sailed he would no longer be troubled by seasickness. He had not eaten all day, for two reasons: one—he was not feeling well, and two—it was the *Fast of Av*. Keeping his vow to secretly continue his practice of the Jewish faith, fasting was required. He had not eaten all day, his shipmates if they noticed at all, made no comments.

He was also careful of what he was eating. Trying to avoid pork and not mixing any meat with cheese. Not very successful in his dietary endeavors so far, his excuse of not feeling well was not exactly a falsehood.

As he watched the refugee ships leave their various ports, his thoughts turned to his father, and brother, his friends, all being forced to leave their homes. Silently he began to pray all would have a safe journey, that no harm would come to them.

His thoughts were interrupted by Captain Alonzo Pinzon as he was leaving the ship. Pinzon asked if he had transcribed the last of the required charts.

“Yes, Captain, they are in the chart room of the *Pinta*. Along with the navigational tables. Copies for your brother, Captain Vicente, are already aboard the *Nina*.”

“Excellent. You are aware that the admiral desires that you stay aboard his ship, the *Santa Maria*?”

“Yes, I was informed when I boarded last week, although I had hoped to be on the *Pinta* with you.”

Pinzon, thoughtful, as he smiled and answered, “Much as I would like you aboard my ship, the admiral’s orders are to be obeyed. Are your quarters adequate?”

“As adequate as they can be aboard ship, Captain.”

“Well prepare yourself. We sail sometime after midnight, good luck to you.”

Saluting the captain as he left, realization dawned on Diego like a bolt out of the blue, he was really leaving his home, his country, and everything he truly loved.

# Chapter 15

**Cadiz**

**August 1492**

For the thousands of Jews who chose to remain in the faith of their fathers, the final stages of leaving *España* were unabated misery. Highways were choked with refugees, at seaports they were cursed, stoned, beaten and robbed. Local merchants cheated them. Ship captains took their passage money and then refused to let them board. Or worse allowed them onto the ship only to force them off at some hidden cove, without any food, water or shelter.

The *Cal de Sevilla*—the synagogue of Seville, the community which the Halavis and Mrs. Bejar were part of, was somewhat more fortunate than other synagogues in Seville. Since Rabbi Hachham had many relatives living in Ottoman lands for many years, and in Constantinople since 1450.

These “*Grego*” or “*Romanoit*” Jews had lived in these lands since Roman times and were very familiar with the Ottoman Sultan’s reliance on *Rayahhs*, the non-Turkish communities to help administer the empire, and to govern themselves.

Writing numerous letters to these relatives, and asking for their help and advice, brought replies from the *Romanoit* communities which were heartening. It gave the congregation of Seville hope, and a destination to try to reach.

As for a ship to take them, that was another matter, time was running out. The congregation's prayers were answered in the person of *Captain Alonso de Vega*, agreeing to transport them to Constantinople aboard his ship, for a cost of two thousand maravedis per person. A cost that proved to be a hardship for most. Señor Levi, a good friend of *Alonso de Vega*, convinced the captain, using his most persuasive arguments, to sympathize with their predicament, by allowing children under ten to travel without charge, eliminating a large part of the travel costs, for many congregants.

Very early on the morning of August 1, 1492, the final day of departure. Fifty families, about one hundred and fifty men, women and children. The fragment of the Seville congregation that chose to leave rather than convert, made their way to the old synagogue site, the starting point for their day-long trek to the port of Cadiz. There to board ship for their longer journey to the Ottoman city of Constantinople.

Rabbi Hachham ended the morning service, as the sun rose, with a prayer to *Adoni* that the journey ahead be a safe and easy one. The services completed, all of the families assembled, and they proceeded to make their way to the port of Cadiz.

By mid afternoon with the sun high in the sky, the heat had become almost unbearable. Supporting David on one side, and Mrs. Bejar on the other, Benjamin Halavi struggled to keep up with his fellow congregants. His efforts concentrated on one thing only. To reach the port of Cadiz with his father and Mrs. Bejar safely, and board ship. He would face the problems of the ocean journey only when he had to.

So far, the only real danger they had to confront was the heat, and the waning strength of the older people. The few gentiles they had met along the way had not threatened them physically,

only verbally, shouting insults and curses, which did no one any real harm.

Benjamin thanked God that so far no one had tried to stop them, or take any of the personal possessions most carried on their backs. With luck they would reach Cadiz in a few more hours.

Resting outside the port, no more than an hour away, the remnants of the Cal de Seville began to prepare the late afternoon meal. Their final one on the soil of *España*.

Mrs. Bejar, regaining some of her strength after a short rest, began preparing their meal by slicing some bread, cheese, and putting out some olives and wine. All began to eat heartily after proper prayers had been recited.

David Ben-Halavi, eating slowly, took a small sip of wine, and then began to sob. "Why, O Lord, are you doing this to us, what sins have we committed that you are punishing us so?"

Benjamin, watching his father sob, slowly put his arm around the old man's shoulders and softly said, "Papa, it is not God who punishes us, but the King and Queen, the church that demonizes us. And...and ourselves, who let it happen."

David, wiping his eyes, sat up, and declared, "What else can we do, Benjamin? If we tried to fight back they would slaughter us without mercy. However you are right. God is not punishing us, *Adoni* is trying to teach us something. What that lesson is I do not know or understand. I doubt the rabbi is able to give meaning to what is happening to us. But the centuries we spent in *España*, the great accomplishments of our people must never be forgotten. This I know with all my heart. Promise me, Benjamin, that you will never forget, that you will teach your children, your grandchildren's children, their children, the magnificent accomplishments of our ancestors in the land of *España*."

Benjamin, in a voice filled with emotion, whispered, "I promise, Papa. Now finish eating and rest. We will reach the ship very soon, once we are on board you will feel much better."

"Yes, Benjamin, I will try," David softly replied.

The rest of the journey to de Vega's ship continued without further delay or incident, reaching the wharf by sundown, tired, dusty and thirsty.

After resting for a short while, all of the members of the congregation of Seville were effectively rushed aboard the ship. The ship's crew, mostly Portuguese seaman, managed to feed those who chose to eat, since the *Fest of Av* had begun at sundown, assigned sleeping quarters, provided bedding for all, loaded and tied down all their personal belongings in a swift and efficient manner. Captain de Vega ran a tight ship, and his plans to sail the next day were not to be delayed.

On the morning of August 2, 1492, Captain de Vega set sail to the east, heading for the island of Crete. From there onto Constantinople. Twenty-four hours later Christopher Columbus would leave *Palos de la Frontera*, sailing west to the lands of the Indies, *Cipango* and *Cathay*—he believed.

The Halavi family torn apart by events they could never hope to control would never be together again.

# Chapter 16

Seville

September 1492

Elena and Antonio sat in the courtyard of their parents' home, on a beautiful late summer day. What they were discussing was far from pleasant. While the rest of the family took their normal siesta, they had used the excuse that they were too warm to stay in their rooms, meeting in the courtyard to discuss the dilemma that confronted them. Or more accurately, confronted Elena. The union of two human beings in the throes of heated passion had accomplished the usual result. Elena had missed her last menstrual cycle, and was sure she was pregnant.

As she tried to explain this to Antonio, her patience was wearing thin. He was either not able to face the reality or simply could not understand the functioning of a woman's body.

"I do not understand, Elena, women go through this...this cycle all the time, why is it a problem?"

"Oh, *Dios mío*, Antonio," Elena impatiently cried. "The problem is, I am with child! What am I going to do! How will I explain to Mother, Father?"

Antonio, shocked thoroughly, began to fume. "With child! No! It cannot be...you must never tell them any of this. No one must ever know! Let me think, Elena, yes! You will go away, the child will be born...somewhere. Then you will give it up. All done in utmost secrecy, no one must ever find out you have given birth to a bastard child."

As he spoke, Antonio paced around the courtyard, venting the anger that was building in him. He had promised himself and her, to do everything in his power to prevent any shame or blemish being associated with the San Miguel name.

But as the reality of the situation began to dawn on him, the anger and frustration with his sister began to cloud his thinking. He continued pacing, but was silent for quite awhile.

Deep in his own thoughts concerning Elena's pregnancy, how they would affect himself, and his parents, he was aroused from his reverie by Elena's voice saying, almost as if she had read his mind, "Antonio, stop your pacing, I know what I must do, don't concern yourself. I will need your help solely to get me to *Cordoba*, to the convent of *Santa Maria de Los Ninos*. Once there, the Mother Superior will help me, I know she will. And, Antonio, I *don't* intend to give up my child."

Shocked by her reply, he could only stare at her in disbelief.

"Are you mad, out of your mind? What excuse could you possibly give to Mother and Father for leaving your home, your family."

Speaking rapidly, yet composed, Elena replied, "Calm yourself, Antonio. The reasons I would give are not far from the truth and will be acceptable to our parents, I'm sure."

Antonio, not sure at all, responded, "Come to your senses, Elena, whatever you tell them, they will never believe, it will not work."

"Wait, Antonio, listen to what I have to say before you judge whether it will work or not. I don't intend to tell them anything about my condition. Only that I'm entering the convent to meditate and ease my mind over the loss of the only man I have

ever loved. Probably the truest words I speak in this entire wretched affair. I'll tell them I need time to think about a decision I will make at some future date. Possibly taking my vows as a nun, to serve God in a proper Christian way. A decision I'm sure will please both of them. Once my child is born, I will remain in *Cordoba*, at the convent, where I will raise the child, if the Mother Superior allows it. I can learn to cook or clean. Do whatever is necessary to provide for the both of us. Mother and Father only need to know that I am at the convent and do not want any visitors. In time, I will tell them the truth. If they still wish to see me...and their grandchild then I would be most happy to welcome them."

Antonio stared at his sister for a moment, then throwing his hands up in despair, muttered, "When will you tell Mother and Father that you are leaving for Cordoba?"

"Tonight at the evening meal, and, Antonio, I intend to leave within a week."

\* \* \*

Elena waited until her father had poured the dessert port, and leaned back in contentment. A sign that that he found the evening meal to his liking, and an indication, she was sure, would make him more receptive to the plan she was about to divulge.

With a nod of her head in Antonio's direction and a tiny cough, Elena indicated to him that he should begin. Taking a deep breath, Antonio began addressing his parents. "Father, Mother, Elena has asked me to inform you regarding her plans to enter the convent of—"

"What did you say?" Don Fernando roared interrupting Antonio. "Convent, what are you talking about, Antonio, have you had too much wine tonight? Elena, what is he going on about?"



As usual, her father ignored his son and spoke directly to Elena.

"Father, please listen to him. What he has to say is very important to me."

Noting the somber look in her eyes and the sadness of her voice, Don Fernando bid his son to continue, listening intently.

Antonio, speaking as forcefully, and clearly as he could, outlined Elena's plans.

Don Fernando, unable to speak after Antonio had finished, sat silent and pensive for some time. When he finally spoke, it was in a subdued and emotional voice. "*Cara mia*, Elena, I am overwhelmed by your request. For you to want to take your vows, to serve God, to become a true part of the church...it is wonderful. I'm sure Monsignor Abate could be most helpful in this matter."

Fearful at the mention of Monsignor Abate, she quickly answered, "No, Father, he would only complicate things, I must have time to meditate. To rid myself of all memories of the only man I truly loved. Once my mind is clear, and the pain of Joshua's leaving is really gone. Then I will make my decisions. Ones that are best for me. If I decide to choose the nun's life, it will be my choice, a choice influenced by no one else."

Donna Isabella was the first to break the uneasy silence that ensued. "Why do you want to throw your life away for that *Marrano*. There are many desirable matches for you. True gentlemen, *Hidalgos* from fine families."

Elena, angered at her mother's use of the disparaging term for converted Jews, quietly answered, "Do not ever use that word in my presence again, Mother."

Calming herself, Elena again explained again why she felt she must leave for the convent. Finally blurting out that she intended to leave within a week.

Noting her strong feelings on the matter, and knowing his daughter well, Don Fernando agreed to her leaving. The only

condition being that Antonio should accompany her to the convent and make sure she was properly settled.

Donna Isabella chose to keep to herself, a tiny suspicion, rapidly growing.

Elena's emotional response to Joshua's leaving, was only one event, in a number of events she could not, or would not, have the strength to face.

# Chapter 17

## Canary Islands September 1492

Diego de San Gil's first experience on the open sea was a nightmare of dizziness, vomiting, and an almost constant feeling of nausea. Memories of Elena, his father and brother, along with his inability to adjust to the ship's food made the first few days on the ocean pure hell for him.

Luckily, their first port of call was *Gomera* in the Canary Islands. A journey of no more than three days. With the help of *Juan Sanchez*, the ship's physician, the short journey allowed Diego to find his sea legs, and sufficient time to come to grips with the ship's food.

The stop in the Canaries was required to repair, and re-fit the *Nina*. To pick up fresh water, wood, and the famous *Gomera* goat cheese.

After a delay of almost four weeks, and a number of false starts because of calm winds, today, September 6, there would be another attempt to begin the journey west. Aboard the flag ship the *Santa Maria*, Diego, along with the other seafaring crews

of the *Nina* and *Pinta*, experienced the dread of not knowing what lie ahead of them.

By midday, apprehension had become frustration and anger. As calm winds, along with problems with the *Pinta's* rudder, allowed the ships to travel only as far as the western most Canary island of *Hierro*.

\* \* \*

Cristobal Colon, Captain General of the expedition, and admiral of the fleet, paced his cabin floor. Thinking, *Dios mío, if the trade winds do not return very soon the expedition will be in a risky position. If too much time is lost the winds may not return until next year.* Continuing to pace the cabin the admiral suddenly found himself reciting. "*Ki Yashar Adonai...For the Lord is just...*"

Realizing he had just uttered Hebrew words from a psalm he had learned years ago, he made sure no one had heard him. *Words from my past, which I must be careful never to speak again,* he thought. But the words calmed him, soothed the press of problems facing him. Brought memories flooding back. Memories of his mother, *Susanna*, who afforded him the means to think about all the wonders of the world.

*Susanna Fonterossa*, daughter of *Jacobo Fonterossa*, hid her Jewish roots well. But did an excellent job of passing them onto her oldest son. Against the wishes of his father, she related to him stories from the Torah. Reciting psalms, teaching him the about the holy days, opened Colon's mind, and focused his hunger to learn. She also taught him ways to keep this part of his life secret. So secret, that as time passed, it became a dim memory stored in the recesses of his mind, becoming discernible at odd and strange times. Although Colon's family never attended a "courtyard," he realized at an early age that the Catholicism the family practiced openly was really secondary to their true beliefs. Realizing, when he became an adult, that not

embracing Christianity completely, and turning away from his Jewish roots would have meant he would have to live his life as a poor weaver. Just as his father had done. Burning ambition caused him to seek an education. To learn, to read and write, go to sea and become the admiral and explorer he was today.

Forcing himself to return to the problems at hand, Colon began to consider some solutions. With little to do, the crews were becoming quite restless, and tempers were beginning to flare. Luckily most of the crews were from Andalusia, knew each other, limiting most of the disputes to squabbling over minor gambling issues.

Thinking, they must be kept busy, that is the only way to prevent their bickering. A knock on his cabin door gave him pause.

"Enter," he called out.

Meekly entering, but saluting smartly, *Pedro de Terreros*, the cabin boy, excitedly informed the admiral, "The winds have returned, Captain General, *Señor Nino* requests your presence on deck to issue the proper orders."

"Eh, *bueno*, inform the pilot I will be there immediately. And have the boatswain unfurl the top-sails at once."

"*Si, mi Capitán*," the boy answered as he hurriedly left the cabin to deliver the messages.

Silently saying a prayer of thanks. Colon quickly made the following entry to his daily log:

*Noon, September 8, the year of Our Lord 1492*

*Underway again, I pray the winds continue...*

Completing the entry, he made his way to the main deck where he found the pilot in a discussion with *Juan de la Cosa*, the owner and master of the ship.

"*Caballeros*—gentlemen, what seems to be the problem?"

The pilot Señor Nino answered, "A minor one, Admiral, it seems the master thinks our course should be due west. I am of the opinion that a course southwest is our most promising route."

"The winds, gentlemen, will decide our route. We will correct our course as required to follow a westward passage. For now let us get underway. Signal the *Nina* and *Pinta* to follow at a distance of no more than a half league."

Feeling the relief of finally being on their way, Colon found himself silently reciting, "*Lecha Levadcha—To you alone we give thanks...*" as he went about directing the various activities of the ship.

Diego de San Gil stood on deck amazed at the amount of activity going on around him. Sails were being hoisted, equipment being tied down, men moving about in all directions.

Although his official designation was interpreter. No formal duties had been assigned to him. The initial preparation of the charts he and Señor Zacuto had prepared seemed satisfactory. Now he found himself with nothing to do, but observe the ocean and prepare himself for whatever the journey would bring.

It also gave him time, too much he felt, to think about all that he left behind. Where was his father, brother, Elena? What was happening to their lives? What were they turning into? Would he ever see them again? Giving in to the emotions that were overwhelming him, Diego softly sobbed, repeating to himself over and over. *Why God, why?*

# Chapter 18

## Island of Crete September 1492

For the remnants of the *Cal de Seville*, the three week ocean trek from Spain to the port of *Iraklion*, on the island of Crete, was a journey of vomiting, dizziness, general malaise, illness, and constant fatigue. Of the one hundred and fifty men, women and children that started the voyage, one hundred and forty-five had survived.

With the help of the ship's physician, the ship's salty broth, and sea biscuits, almost all managed to overcome the curse of seasickness. The illness and fatigue were another matter, causing the death of two older and three younger members of the congregation.

Not allowed to disembark at the port, and becalmed for over a week, the ship and its tormented passengers waited for the winds to return.

From the deck of the caravel that had brought them this far, Benjamin Ben-Halavi contemplated the mountainous landscape of Crete. The peak of Mount Ida clearly visible in the

distance. He thought for the first time since they had left Seville an easier journey may have been an overland one, to Portugal. The ocean trek had caused much hardship to the older and youngest members of the group. Benjamin blamed himself, he had adamantly refused going to Portugal.

Even though David had expressed doubts about the ocean voyage, now his father was deathly ill. The doctor not holding much hope for his survival. Mrs. Bejar not much better.

The week in port had improved both but the journey had caused both a decline in mental and physical health, filling Benjamin with grief and remorse. *I cannot change what already is*, he thought. *I must do what I can to help my father regain his health, make sure we reach Constantinople safely.*

Deep in thought he hardly felt the small hand on his shoulder. Turning, he broke into a large grin as Regina Ventura softly asked, "How are you, Benjamin?"

"Always better when I see you, Regina." Not meaning to be so forward, and embarrassed at the boldness of his answer, Benjamin began to blush, and stammer. "I am sorry, Regina, I didn't mean to..."

"I understand, Benjamin, and I'm not offended, I, I, feel the same way about you."

Both blushing furiously, they began to laugh at the situation.

They had been attracted to each other for a long time while growing up. But now the closeness of being on board a ship caused them both to be more open about their feelings.

"Your father is asking for you, I just left him. His condition is about the same as last night."

"Thank you, Regina," Benjamin answered, taking both of her small hands in his, kissed them. Causing Regina to blush a bright red. Still grinning Benjamin answered, "I hope to see you after the evening meal, Regina," and left her to see his father.

Silently praying for his sons, and his community, a safe journey, and the return of his health, a very weak David Ben-Halavi lay in his bed, below decks. Longing to see sunlight



again, to breathe fresh clean air, to regain his health, he continued praying. *How much longer, oh Lord, must we be made to suffer?*

Not hearing his son approach, David continued his prayers, pouring his heart out, uncertain of whether he would live or die.

Seeing his father praying so fervently, Benjamin again felt the sting of remorse. *Why was I so stubborn? I cannot change what is. I must not fail him now!*

"I am here, Papa, what do you need? More broth, some water?"

Hearing his son's voice, David forced himself to a sitting position, and answered, "I want neither food nor drink, Benjamin, just your word that if I die you will honor my memory. That you will say Kaddish for me. Bury me in a proper manner. And most important, relate to your children the achievements of our people in *España*."

Taken aback, Benjamin replied, "Why are you making foolish talk, Papa. You will not die. You will live to see the start of our new life in a new land. The *Brit Mila* of your first grandson. I know it, Papa, and I believe it with all my heart. Rest now, do not concern yourself with anything but regaining your health."

A voice from above called out, as Benjamin strained to hear. "All below, the winds have returned. We set sail within the hour, prepare yourselves," a sailor shouted from the stairs leading to the upper deck, disappearing as quickly as he had appeared.

"Good advice, Papa. Rest yourself. I will return once we are underway."

Nodding his assent, David slowly lay down and began a fitful sleep.

# Chapter 19

**Seville**

**September 1492**

After spending two weeks at the convent of *Santa Maria de Los Ninos*, completely secluded, Elena de San Miguel finally achieved the peace of mind she sought. Through prayers, meditation, and the kindness of the Mother Superior, Sister Teresa, Elena was able to focus on how to provide a life for herself, and her future child.

The only contact she had with her family, was a short note from Antonio. Informing her all was well, and he would try to visit her sometime next month. She appreciated his accompanying her to the monastery. His promise to help her any way he could. Now he was her only link to the world beyond the monastery walls.

Sitting in the cloistered gardens beside Sister Teresa, Elena felt at peace with herself. The sadness she arrived with had subsided. The memories of Joshua, her mother, father, her previous life, did not evoke the pain they once did.

However, disconcerting thoughts still raced through her mind. *Joshua...Diego de San Gil*, she thought. *Where is he now? Is he safe? Should I have told him of my condition? How do I explain to my parents?*

"My child you look troubled. Is there something you would like to talk to me about?" Sister Teresa asked, her voice as soft and gentle as her manner.

Elena felt at ease in her presence, yet was not able to tell her the complete truth.

Is this the appropriate time to explain why she had really come to the monastery, she thought. *I should be completely open with Sister Teresa, who has shown me nothing but kindness.*

Reaching her decision in that moment, she began to disclose her real reasons for coming to the convent.

Listening intently as Elena related her true reasons for entering the convent, Sister Teresa, signaling with her hand for Elena to stop, quietly said, "Do not tell me any more, Elena. I do not judge what you have done. I only ask that you confess these sins, seek penitence. I will hear your confession myself. Then I will do everything in my power to help you."

Quickly kneeling, Elena placed her hands in Sister Teresa's lap, and began her confessional prayers, sobbing softly. "Bless me, Sister, for I have sinned...."

As she listened to Elena quietly praying, memories from the Mother Superior's past began to flood her mind. She remembered that day almost ten years ago, when she too lost someone she had loved very much. He was a young dashing *Hidalgo* of a very respected family who had swept her off her feet. She was very much in love, was to be married in six months.

Then it all came crashing down, all of *Cordoba* became inflamed. Accusations flew. Someone accused his family of being *Marranos*, secret Jews. That was all the Inquisition needed, her lover, and his entire family were thrown into a filthy dungeon.

Interrogated, their property confiscated, all finally sentenced to “relaxation”—death by fire. The day of the executions were etched in her mind forever. Sadness filled her entire being, yet she hated no one. Never sought any kind of retribution. Instead accepted what was, and began her lifelong work. She reasoned that hate and violence were not the way to a better world. That believing in the Lord meant helping people, not torturing or killing them in His name.

She worked long and hard. And with the help of many others who believed as she did, founded the convent—*Santa Maria de Los Ninos*. It became a sanctuary for all needing help and spiritual guidance.

Sister Teresa looked down at the young girl pouring her heart out to her, felt her pain, and whispered, “I will help you, and I will help your child.”

Elena, her heart filling with gratitude, hugged the Mother Superior.

“Gracias—thank you, Sister Teresa. I will do everything you ask of me!”

# Chapter 20

## **Bahamas Landfall October 1492**

On the main deck of the *Santa Maria*, Admiral Colon, along with *Rodrigo de Escobedo*, notary of the fleet, made note of the time and date. Two hours past midnight, Friday, October 12, land had been sighted two leagues off.

Ordering all ships to heave to, shorten sails, and drop anchor. Colon decided to wait for daylight before sending any landing parties ashore.

At sea for a little over a month, the admiral was pleased with the results. No major storms had been encountered. Food was still plentiful. All ships' crews were still healthy, and performing well. And to his vast delight, no more than two leagues away was—Asia!

Barely able to contain his excitement. The admiral began humming a long forgotten melody while pacing along the deck. Although familiar with the admiral's somewhat eccentric behavior. *Señor Escobedo* was at a complete loss now in assessing what the admiral required of him.

Stopping his humming and pacing, momentarily, Colon looked at *Escobedo* and asked, "Why are you still here, Rodrigo? Inform the interpreter. Diego de...? Diego...?"

"Diego de San Gil, Admiral?"

"Yes, yes...Diego de San Gil. Inform him I wish to see him right away, now."

Hastily retreating to get Diego. Escobedo, shaking his head in amazement, thought, *strange as his behavior is, the admiral is a brilliant man. He has led us to the Indies, and all the riches they may contain. Yet why would he want to see Diego de San Gil at this most promising time in the expedition? Surely the charts have been correct. Maybe it's a matter of language, the Converso did speak a number of different ones.* Well whatever it was, he would eventually find out.

Diego, sitting alone in his cabin, recorded the events of the night in his own personal journal. A journal he had kept since boarding the *Santa Maria* two months ago. His cabin mate *Juan Sanchez de la Casa*, the ship's physician, along with the most of the ship's crew was on deck, were awaiting orders to explore the newly discovered land. Designated as one of the crew-members to make the first landing, Diego decided he would try to rest before morning. But the excitement of sighting land, and the chattering of the crew on deck made sleep almost impossible.

The journal had been his way of keeping his love for Elena, and memories of his family alive. It gave him the strength to survive the journey, a journey that had so changed his life.

Diego, with much help from *Juan Sanchez*, overcame his seasickness, and managed to reconcile himself to the ship's food.

By avoiding all meat, he managed to subsist on fish, such as sardines, anchovies, and salted cod. Sufficient quantities of cheese, chick-peas, lentils, sea biscuits, nuts, molasses, and honey, made up the balance of his diet. For drink, wine and water was readily available.

Finishing the entry he had been writing, Diego put his journal away, and let his mind wander, thinking about his days aboard ship, how lucky he was to have been placed in the same cabin with Juan Sanchez de la Casa, a true gentleman, a *Hidalgo* of the first order. He had shown Diego nothing but kindness and respect. Even though Diego's status as a *Converso* was not secret. His baptismal certificate clearly indicated this fact. And was required to be shown, before he was allowed to board ship.

Juan became Diego's refuge from the loneliness of isolation he was subjected to. The boredom of the everyday duties they both were required to perform. Well educated and well read. Sanchez found Diego's abilities, and his fine mind stimulating. Lively discussions took place almost every evening on numerous subjects. Both men found each other's company stimulating as well as comforting.

Born in *Cordoba* of a wealthy family, Juan had been well educated in the arts, medicine religion, and history. After receiving his medical training he traveled a great deal. His love of ships though, prevented his establishing a regular medical practice. As soon as he began one, some new ship or journey would catch his fancy, and off he would be. Sailing, or investigating some new means of navigation. Although it disturbed his parents, and disappointed a number of ladies-in-waiting, he jumped at the chance to join Colon's expedition when it was offered.

As Diego contemplated his newfound friend, a loud knocking at his cabin door roused him from his reverie. Going to the door and opening it, he was astonished to find the notary of the fleet standing there, more astonished when the notary spoke.

"San Gil, the admiral asks that you join him in his cabin, immediately." Not waiting for a reply, Escovedo turned on his heel, leaving Diego standing in the doorway in surprised silence. Closing the door, Diego thought, *What does the admiral require of me?*

Quickly grooming himself, he made his way directly to the admiral's cabin.

\* \* \*

Diego could not speak he was so shocked. Did he really hear what the admiral had said!

"Don't look so surprised, San Gil," Colon continued, "you especially should be mindful. Not all of us was born to the Christian faith. Some embraced it as an expedient means of surviving. My grandparents for example, you yourself did so, why? Only you can answer that. The reason I was given for my grandparents' actions was—their love of the Jewish faith. A faith which transformed myself and my parents into perfect Catholics. But kept our Jewish traditions alive within our hearts and minds, dimmed only by time. You, on the other hand, have only recently accepted the Christian faith. Your Jewish roots are still alive, the culture is still fresh in your mind. All I want you to do is prepare a proper benediction that you will recite at tomorrow's landfall. A benediction that includes some Jewish legacy."

Concerned and alarmed, Diego hesitantly answered, "But, Admiral, reciting such a benediction before members of the crew will put you into much danger. You will be denounced, you—"

"Calm yourself, Diego," a smiling Colon answered, "I have no intention of allowing the crew to hear the benediction you prepare. I will honor their Majesties in the most proper manner. Only you and I will understand the ceremony of the Jewish benediction."

"But how?"

"No more questions, Diego, prepare the benediction."

"As you wish, Admiral."

Turning and leaving, his mind in a whirl, Diego returned to his cabin ready to do as the admiral had asked.



\* \* \*

At daybreak, Friday, October 12, in the year of our Lord 1492, near a small Caribbean Island called *Guanahani* in the native tongue, two small boats made their way to shore.

Admiral Colon, Rodrigo Escovedo, notary of the fleet, along with the captains of the *Nina* and *Pinta*, in one. In the other, armed members of the crew including Diego de San Gil and Juan Sanchez. Juan de Triana, the sailor who first sighted land, sat in a place of honor on this second boat. The admiral himself bore the royal standard, The two captains each bore a banner of the royal cross.

Quickly making landfall on a small sandy beach. They all gathered round the royal standard held by Colon. The admiral in a firm voice called upon all present to bear witness. That he before all others, took possession of the island, in the name of the King and Queen of *España*, his royal sovereigns.

Diego, uneasy over the intrigue the admiral had thrust upon him, yet thrilled at setting foot on some foreign land, anxiously waited for a signal from Colon, hoping the benediction he had prepared would fulfill the admiral's wishes.

Waiting, he began to closely examine the land around him, seeing trees, very green, many streams, and varying kinds of vegetation. Someone speaking his name, interrupted his survey.

"Diego de San Gil, you and Juan de Triana will follow me. Juan de Triana, you will have the honor of carrying and setting the royal standard. San Gil, you will assist him. The rest shall wait here," the admiral ordered.

Handing the royal standard to Juan de Triana, Colon led the small party off the beach, and headed for a small rise where the beach met the tangle of foliage marking the beginning of the jungle.

Moving cautiously for about one hundred paces to the top of the rise, Colon signaled them to stop. Motioning to Triana to set

the royal standard, he whispered to Diego, "Recite the benediction now."

*Has the admiral gone completely mad, Diego thought, surely Triana will suspect something, the prayer is in Hebrew.* Confused and frightened, Diego, at a vigorous shaking of the admiral's head, haltingly began the benediction.

As Diego recited the words, his mind flooded with memories of his father, brother, of Elena and the life he had left behind in Spain. Completing the prayer, tears forming in his eyes, Diego glanced at the admiral who was standing very still. As their eyes met, Colon nodded a small smile appeared on his face, which quickly disappeared.

*Juan de Triana, as he worked to set the royal standard, listened to the words of the benediction. Not comprehending them, he smiled to himself and thought how well the *Converso* had learned his Latin.*

Satisfied with this small ceremony, Admiral Colon led them back to the main party waiting on the beach, ordering all crews back to the boats, as he surveyed the beach thought.

*Tomorrow we will completely explore these islands for whatever treasures they may hold.*

# Chapter 21

## Port of Constantinople September 1492

The vestige of the *Cal de Seville* arrived in the Ottoman capital, fatigued, weary, and confused. Still unknown, their final destination within the city itself.

Waiting as patiently as possible for the rabbi's relatives to lead them to their new homes, as their meager possessions were being unloaded, the newcomers were subjected to prolonged questioning by Turkish officials.

Benjamin, caring for Señora Bejar and his father, who was just barely able to walk, was beginning to lose patience with the officials.

Looking about the busy port as he waited, Benjamin thought about the past month with consternation. The voyage had been a hard one for most, especially his father. Joshua, well on his way to an unknown fate. And he...was filled with great remorse.

The activity of the port, the smell of the various cargos, the weariness of the journey, forced his wandering mind back to the present. *When will we be able to rest, when...* his thoughts were interrupted by shouts.

“They are here, the rabbi’s relatives are here.”

Turning, Benjamin viewed a scene he never thought he would ever see in his life. There for the entire world to see was a Jew riding a horse! Not only was he riding a fine animal. He was dressed in some of the finest clothes Benjamin had ever seen.

*Nissim Behar*, dismounting his steed, greeted his cousin, Rabbi Hahcham, warmly. Assured him that the minor difficulties they were encountering would soon be taken care of. Announcing to all around him that they all would soon be allowed to enter the country without any further problem.

Articulate in the Turkish language and customs, his bearing almost royal, he assured the doubting officials, that the Caliph himself had authorized free entry to all Jews emigrating from Spain. After paying a small *baksheesh*—bribe, they were finally allowed to enter the country. And enter they did. Settling into the *Balat* area, along the southern shores of the golden horn, between the Greek quarter of *Phanar*, and the walls of the city.

The *Cal de Seville*, along with other *Sephardic* newcomers, populated not only Constantinople, but towns and villages throughout the Balkans and Asia Minor, revitalizing Jewish communities stripped by an earlier Sultan’s attempt to populate his new capital of Constantinople.

This period would mark a rebuilding of the *Sephardim*. In years to come, established *Romanoit* synagogues would be absorbed into the Sephardic community. From this new society would come the physicians, farmers, tax collectors, interpreters, and teachers who would bring about an era of peace and prosperity.

Although short-lived, it would be remembered forever by generations of *Sephardim*.

\* \* \*

Benjamin, tired and sweaty, hauled the press off the wagon and dragged it into the house. The press he had transported by wagon which he had pulled all the way from *Shishane*. A distance of almost eight miles. Although he was very tired he was content, thinking as he splashed his face with some water from the bucket at the door that he now had the means to begin earning a living. *Has it been six months since we arrived? It feels like years ago.*

Deep inside him memories of *España* began to stir, which he quickly shook off. Drying himself, he called to his father.

"Papa, Papa, I'm back, come see the press." The press was the only thing he would allow himself to think about now.

Entering the windowless and drab tiny back room that was to be the workshop, his spirits lifted as he looked at the old press. Touching it, smelling the old ink, it was one of the few good things to have come about in the past six months.

The press was in fairly good condition. And thanks to "*Pahsha Behar*" Benjamin was able to purchase it at a price he could afford. Nissim Behar, helpful as he had been, was becoming a thorn in Benjamin's side. His constant attention, and ogling of Regina, was angering him and embarrassing her.

"Benjamin," his father called out, as he entered the room.

"I'm here, Papa," he answered as he began to describe the press.

"It's perfect, and still in such good condition. We will have very little to do to make it productive."

David Halavi hobbled around the press examining it with great care. His movements were stiff, and he limped slightly. The past months had not been kind to his health. Suffering from arthritis and asthma, both ailments had worsened in the last six months. Still his outlook had improved greatly, now that they were settled in a home of their own.

The *Sephardic* community was beginning to take shape. Construction of the new *Cal de Seville* was beginning. The Torah brought with them from *España*, devoid of the appropriate vestments, was now properly dressed. Thanks in part to the generosity and good will of the local Greek-speaking Jewish community.

Weekly Shabbat services, temporarily held at the Romanoit synagogue, were well attended. With both rabbis sharing the pulpit, minor ritual differences were overlooked by both communities.

As he examined the press, David began to cough and wheeze.

"It's probably the dust," he muttered. Benjamin feared an asthma attack might be starting, as he gently led his father away from the press, and towards his bed.

"I'll make you some tea, and then you can rest, Papa."

"Yes I will rest," David uttered, then began coughing uncontrollably. Getting the tea, Benjamin made sure his father drank it all. Benjamin then helped his father to bed. After a while the coughing subsided and he could hear his father's soft snoring. Satisfied that he was asleep, Benjamin continued his inspection of the press.

Working slowly but diligently, he noted how well constructed the press was. What repairs would have to be made to make it operable. His inspection was interrupted by a knocking at the door and a voice shouting.

"*Hola*...hello, David, Benjamin, are you home?"

Recognizing Mrs. Bejar's voice Benjamin answered, "Yes, Mrs. Bejar come in, come in."

"I have a visitor with me, she is very anxious to see you."

Entering behind Mrs. Bejar was Regina Ventura. Benjamin was elated. Their last meeting had not ended happily. Seeing her now made Benjamin's spirits soar.

"Regina, Mrs. Bejar, please sit down I...I..." Benjamin began to stammer.

"*Coma esta tu papa?*—How is your father?" Mrs. Bejar asked.

"He is resting now, I am concerned about his coughing."

"*Eh bueno*—good, I will prepare one of my remedies," Mrs. Bejar remarked, as she looked about the room.

"I'm sure you have all the ingredients somewhere in the kitchen.

"While I do this, you and Regina will talk. But remember I am not far away, only in the kitchen."

As soon as Mrs. Bejar left for the kitchen. Regina and Benjamin rushed towards each other. Just stopping short of embracing. They clasped hands, and both began uttering apologies.

"Regina, I am truly sorry for all the mean words I uttered."

"And well you should be, Benjamin. But I am equally to blame. For not explaining as well as I should have. It was my father's wish that I allow *Señor Behar* the opportunity to call on me. But I was not interested. With the help of my mother and Mrs. Bejar, we made my father understand my feelings. Now I hope you understand them as well!"

His heart racing, Benjamin barely spoke above a whisper.

"I do, Regina, and I intend to ask your father...your father..."

"What, Benjamin...what is it you're trying to say?"

Pulling himself together, taking a deep breath, Benjamin shouted, "I AM GOING TO ASK YOUR FATHER TO LET US MARRY!"

Hearing those words, Regina rushed into Benjamin's arms, kissed his cheeks and lips, as he returned those kisses with equal passion.

Mrs. Bejar, hearing the commotion, rushed out of the kitchen.

"*Ay de mi! Sin verguenza*—without shame you touch each other this way," she shouted, "what am I to tell your parents?"

"Tell them we are going to be married. And give us your blessing, Señora Bejar," Regina said, smiling.

\* \* \*

Benjamin Halavi and Nissim Behar sat outside the coffeehouse sipping their hot Turkish coffee, and munching *borekas*, the Turkish pastry so similar to the Spanish pastillas.

Benjamin sighed as he ate, remembering those happier times in *España*. His reverie was interrupted by Nissim, asking whether his wedding day, only a week away, worried him.

"No, why should it? I have been looking forward to this day for quite awhile. Regina makes me very happy."

"Please don't misunderstand me, Benjamin. I only ask because the responsibilities of a family, seem, to me anyway, so demanding. I think Regina perceived that shortcoming in my personality. It was probably the reason she refused my calling on her. In any event I think you are very lucky, to be marrying her. She will make a wonderful wife."

Benjamin, listening to his friend, realized how his relationship with Nissim had changed in such a short time. He had felt so insecure around him just a month ago. But Nissim's true character showed itself in his warmth for people.

His desire to help wherever he could. And most important to Benjamin, the gentlemanly way, he so graciously accepted Regina's wishes.

Nissim's father, whose family had lived a prosperous life in *Bursa*, had been victims of the Ottoman technique known as *Surgun*.

In 1454, the *Sultan* forced various inhabitants within the empire to move to his new capital Constantinople. Uprooting thousands of Jewish families. The Behar family among them. Traumatic as that event was, the Behar family managed to become successful in Constantinople as well. Influential merchants, they had gained ear of many powerful government officials. This allowed the Behar family the means to help the many Sephardic families entering Turkey in 1492, which included the *Calle de Seville*.



"You don't fool me for a minute, Nissim," Benjamin laughed.

"If I not been around you would have pursued Regina, for as long as it would have taken for her to agree to your offer of marriage. But I do thank you for your good wishes. And all the help you have given me and my father."

"Your thanks are unnecessary, but appreciated. How is your father?"

"He is about the same. But he is resting a little better taking Mrs. Bejar's medications."

"That's good to hear." Changing the subject, Nissim asked, "Have you had any word from the *Soncinos*?"

"Yes, we begin printing a book form of the Torah shortly. The commentaries for book, will utilize the *Soncino's* method of placing them alongside of the Bible text. They have also agreed to allow us to use the *Soncino* trademark. Without your help, none of this would have been possible."

Finishing the last of his coffee, Nissim quietly said, "Ah, you give me too much credit, Benjamin. The printing samples you sent impressed them. By the way, is the press completely ready to operate now?"

At the mention of the press' workings, Benjamin, frustrated, simply replied, "Not quite, just a few more adjustments are needed. In about a week it should be ready, I would estimate."

Getting up, Nissim bid Benjamin goodbye. "Well if can be of any assistance let me know. I must leave now. I have an important client I must see. *Buenos dias*—good day, Benjamin, my regards to your father."

Sitting alone in the coffeehouse after Nissim left, Benjamin began to think about his wedding day, his father, and how lucky he was to have Nissim Behar as a friend.

# Chapter 22

**La Navidad**  
**Hispaniola**  
**January 1493**

Admiral Colon, angry and frustrated, contemplated the events of the past three months. Exploration of the numerous islands had brought no contact with the *Khans of Chilpango* or Japan. Nor had he located any large quantities of gold. The loss of his flagship, *Santa Maria*, which grounded and sunk on a reef Christmas Eve. But most galling of all, the defection of *Martine Alonso Pinzon*, along with his ship the *Pinta*. With supplies now running low, he would have to begin the return trip back to *España* sooner than he had intended. Within two days, fateful decisions would have to be made, creating additional problems.

Since his one remaining small ship the *Nina* could not accommodate all of the men, some would have to remain in *Hispaniola*.

Using the remains of the *Santa Maria*, he had a makeshift fort built, which he Christened *La Navidad*. The fort would house the 30-40 men required to be left behind.

The fort building effort, along with the provisions he would have to leave, renewed his anger for *Pinzon*. Who sailed off without permission along with his crew, for some far off island called *Babeque*. *Pinzon*, according to his brother *Vicente*, sailed to this island, because his Indian guide hinted that much gold could be obtained there.

There had been no contact with *Pinzon* since the end of November. And Colon presumed he was either shipwrecked or stranded somewhere, but in any event, lost to himself.

Trying to sort his most pressing problems at the moment: who was going to be left behind—none of the men would volunteer—he would have to order them to stay. How many provisions could he spare, could they rely on the native Indians for any additional food or help they might need?

Considering the problem of the natives, Colon thought, *They do not appear warlike*. In fact he had befriended the local Chief *Guacanagari*. Although poor and simple, they would help, he believed.

Calculating that forty men would have to be left behind, Colon concluded that lots would be drawn to choose those who would remain behind.

Settling these issues in his mind, he called for his cabin boy to summon *Vicente Pinzon* to his quarters. Fighting the anger welling up within himself, Colon sought ways to properly inform *Pinzon*, and the rest of the crew, of his decisions.

As he waited for *Pinzon*, he closed his eyes and softly began to chant, "*Ki Yashar Adonai—for the Lord is just*," words from Psalm 92. Gently swaying as he chanted, the words began to soothe and calm him. A sharp knock at his door interrupted his thoughts, as he called out, "Enter."

*Vicente Pinzon*, at the door, bowed and slowly approached Colon. "*Esta pronto, mi capitán—I am ready for your orders, Admiral.*"

“Come in, *Pinzon*, now you will see what your brother’s disobedience has brought us to. Here are my orders,” as he explained in detail what had to be done. “Must be done within the next two days.”

\* \* \*

Sitting on the beach watching the crew of the tiny *Nina* readying her to set sail, Diego de San Gil considered his fate. Starving to death, being killed by the natives, or just dying of a broken heart.

Diego felt a great sadness overwhelm him, as he wrote his last entry into his journal. His last entry, since he was sending it to Elena with Juan Sanchez. Along with those men lucky enough to have chosen the right lot, Juan was returning to Spain on the *Nina* with Colon. One of the unfortunate forty chosen to remain in *La Navidad*, Diego, did not believe Colon’s assurances that they would survive the six months required for his return trip.

The food being left them was not nearly enough, and the help of the natives was questionable. Recently there had been a number of incidents involving crew members and native women. Although smoothed over, the Indians appeared sullen, not a good sign. Those remaining behind would have to survive any way they could until Colon returned, if he ever did.

The admiral had not found the large quantities of gold he was seeking. He was not even sure these were the lands of *Cilpango* or Japan. Would the monarchs want to fund future expeditions, or even allow Colon to return?

And then there was the strangeness of Colon himself, was he mad, or a true genius?

“*Ay de mi*,” Diego whispered to himself. “My life is turning to dust. I believe *HE* is still punishing me for the choices I have made. Leaving the only woman I have ever loved...my family...”

Thoughts of Elena rushed through his mind, her beauty, his love for her, how much he missed her. Sadly, he began his final letter to her.

*Cara mia Elena,*

*My journal is being brought to you by my very good friend Juan Sanchez, he will explain the events, and reasons why I am not bringing it to you myself. My love for you has not lessened and never will, the memory of your kisses and warmth fill me with great joy. I love you, and will forever.*

*Remember, Cara mia, your tender hands always gently held my heart. You gave meaning to my life, without you, my life has no purpose.*

*My fate is in the hands of God. If it is his will for me to see you again, my heart will be filled with a joy unending. But if this is not to be, then you must not live your life in sorrow, your life must go on!*

*You are forever in my heart, all my love,  
Diego*

Looking up as he completed the letter, Diego saw Juan Sanchez walking towards him and sadly realized, he, Diego, was not returning to Spain. The *Nina* was sailing in a few hours—without him!

*“Hola, mi amigo,”* Juan called to Diego. Embracing each other as they met, Juan softly said, *“So, my friend, this is goodbye.”*

*“Only for a while, I pray to God,”* Diego replied.

*“I also pray for your safe return, Diego. So I am to deliver the journal to Elena Maria de San Miguel, of Seville?”*

*“Yes, and this letter.”*

*“And your family, your father, brother, is there any message I can bring them?”*

*“No, none. By this time they have left España. Where they are, I do not know, aboard some ship I presume.”*

Wrapping the journal and letter to make them as watertight as possible, Diego handed them to Juan. "Tell her I have never stopped loving her."

Shaking hands, Juan whispered, "You have my word as a gentleman, I will do all that you ask. Do not despair, *mi amigo*, God will look after you."

Watching Juan walk towards the long-boat that would take him back to the *Nina*, Diego felt the full weight of the fate awaiting him.

\* \* \*

Departing on January 2, 1493, Colon on the deck of the *Nina*, observed the men he was leaving behind. They uttered not a sound.

Silent as ghosts they watched from the beach, as the ship slowly left *La Navidad*, and the island of *Hispaniola* behind.

*May the wrath of God be borne upon the head of Martine Alonso Pinzon*, Colon angrily thought.

"Follow an eastward course along the coast," he said aloud to *Sancho Ruiz*, the pilot.

"*Si, mi Capitán*," was the respectful answer.

As the ship slowly disappeared from sight, Diego de San Gil felt again that awful sense of despair. But this time his desolation was complete, they were truly gone. He would never see his family, nor hold Elena in his arms again.

In charge of those left behind was *Pedro de Arana*, master-at-arms, a surly man with a very bad temper, who began issuing orders the minute the *Nina* was out of sight.

Grumbling, the majority of the abandoned crewmen, began to complain. *De Arana*, in order to forestall any kind of mutiny, promised that if the men obeyed his orders, he would allow them free access to the native women.

Diego, instinctively knowing that the goodwill of the natives was the key to their survival, began to speak out, that molesting the women would only provoke the natives.

Angered that the *Converso* had so openly challenged him, *De Arana* drew his knife, and rushed at Diego. Fatally stabbing him before anyone else could react.

Lying in the sand, his blood freely flowing, Diego, before closing his eyes for the last time, thought, *Elena, Elena!*

“Let this be an example to all of you. My orders are to be obeyed or you will end up like the Jew. Now bury him, and begin choosing where you will bed down.”

\* \* \*

Continuing on uneventful easterly course along the coast of *Hispaniola* for four days. Colon and the crew of the *Nina* dreaded what was to come. Crowded on the small ship, with food rationed, the voyage home would be a nightmare.

Chanting another Hebrew psalm to calm himself as he paced the deck, Colon was startled back to reality by the shout of the lookout.

“Ship dead ahead, four masts.” Hearing the brief description, Colon’s heart leaped in his chest. A ship in this locale with four masts, *Dios mío*—my God. *Could it be the Pinta?* was the first thought that leaped into his mind.

“Close on her as quickly as you can, and begin signaling our ship’s name,” Colon ordered. His mind racing. *If the ship is the Pinta, then, Pinzon, I will forgive all that you have done.*

Almost reading his mind, the lookout called out, “She is signaling she is the—*Pinta.*”

A mighty cheer arose from both ships, the journey home would be a little easier.

\* \* \*

The *Taino* Chieftain, *Guacanagari*, looked sadly about the smoking ruins of what once was the fort of *La Navidad*. None of the Spaniards survived, all had been brutally murdered.

*A just punishment for the raping of Taino women*, thought *Guacanagari*. *May we have seen the last of these white devils*, he prayed.



# Chapter 23

**Seville**  
**April 1493**

Antonio shook the hand of the gentleman standing before him, amazed that this man actually made the journey with Colon, across that vast ocean, and survived.

Colon was the talk of Seville, arriving at the port of Palos on March 15, 1493. After a harrowing and perilous sea journey home, he was given a hero's welcome.

Describing to the King and Queen the wonders of his discovery and the treasures they might hold. A second expedition was already in the planning stages.

*Juan Sanchez de la Casa* spoke in glowing terms of Diego. His love of Elena. And his unfortunate luck at being one of those left behind. Juan began to explain the purpose of his visit. To deliver Diego's journal and letter to Elena. He had hoped to present them to her personally, which was Diego's wish.

Antonio, uneasy, began explaining that Elena was not in Seville, but at the convent of *Santa Maria de los Ninos* in *Cordoba*. Distraught after Diego's leaving, she sought solace there, and was considering taking her vows.

"I am on my way to *Cordoba*, I am familiar with the convent, and Sister Teresa, may I take the journal and letter to her myself?" Juan asked.

Antonio, alarmed at the thought of someone outside of the convent seeing Elena with her swollen belly, began to stammer excuses why this was not a good idea. Almost blurting out the truth, Antonio began to explain. "I..I will take them to her myself. I am planning to visit her within the next few days. Thank you for your kindness, I am sure Elena will be sad and disappointed. And even though Diego himself is not delivering them, she will be overjoyed to have the journal and letter."

Sensing Antonio's discomfort, Juan did not pursue the subject. Although he felt the situation was not quite as simple as Antonio described.

"As you wish, Señor, please give your sister my best wishes, and my distress, at not being the bearer of better news."

Taking his leave of the San Miguel household, Juan contemplated. An inquiry to Sister Teresa regarding Elena, could do no harm. Explaining the circumstances of Diego's fate to Sister Teresa, having her explain them to Elena, would soften the blow of Diego's not returning. It was evident Elena was upset at Diego's leaving. His not returning, he expected, would cause enormous unhappiness.

\* \* \*

Clutching the journal and letter to her breast, Elena, heavy with child, urged Antonio for more details of Juan Sanchez's call.

"Did he say how he looked, was he well?" she excitedly asked.

"Elena, he brought the papers you are holding. Other than to explain why Joshua, I..I, mean Diego, did not return with him, Señor Sanchez gave no indication of Diego's state of health. I did

not pursue the subject, since your...condition is...uppermost in my mind."

Elena coldly stared at her brother, as she acidly replied, "Yes my condition, the condition that will bring nothing but shame to the San Miguel name, nothing but..."

Antonio filled with frustration began to shout. But softened his voice as he answered, "Elena, I am not here to argue with you, I must have a reason to explain why you are still here, at the convent. Mother and Father are insisting on visiting you, and I cannot put them off any longer."

"Maybe you should just tell them the truth!"

"Calm yourself, Elena, I am trying to help you, becoming emotional will do no one any good."

Shaking her head in surrender, Elena opened the journal and began reading Diego's letter. Sobbing softly, Elena, as she read, prayed with all her heart for his return. Still, felt in every part of her being that Joshua—Diego—was not coming back, did not know he had fathered their child. She vowed to herself, *This baby will be born, loved and taken care of. No matter what!*

"Ay de mi," Antonio muttered. Started to speak, but stopped.

Observing his sister softly sobbing, filled him with an uneasy ache. Speaking softly, and gently as he could, Antonio said, "Monsignor Abate has been asking about you, he wanted to know whether you have decided to take your vows."

Hearing of the monsignor's interest, Elena quickly composed herself. He was the one person in all of Seville she most feared.

If he gained knowledge of her condition, and how it came to be, he would destroy her, and her whole family!

"He must never know the truth, Antonio. You are aware of the consequences if that happens!"

Antonio with renewed frustration, declared, in a whispering hiss, "Yes I am! And I'm doing all that I can to put him off. But Elena, Mother and Father are the most immediate problem. When will you allow them to see you?"

“Not until the child is born. Which according to Sister Teresa should be some time next month.”

At the thought of Sister Teresa, Elena began thinking. A letter from the Sister, to her parents, and Monsignor Abate, explaining her need for seclusion. Citing Diego’s dilemma, his not returning, seemed like a very plausible solution to the problem at hand.

“I have just thought of something, Diego,” she exclaimed. “Here is what I think we should do.”

\* \* \*

Elena winced, the pains were coming more frequently now, sharper, and with more intensity.

Sister Teresa, gently wiping her brow with a cool cloth, whispered, “My child, it has been over eighteen hours since you started your pains, I fear something is wrong. I am going to send for the physician. Do not worry I’m sure everything will be all right.”

Nevertheless Elena was worried. Not actually having experienced the birth of a baby. She was somewhat familiar with the birth process. Having heard her mother, and aunts, speak of it. “Hard” or “easy” births, dominating most of these conversations. She was sure she was experiencing a “hard” birth.

Before she could continue her train of thought, she was jolted by a pain sharper than any of the others. Biting down on the wet cloth Sister Teresa had left with her, she fought back tears. Suddenly realizing she was in a pool of wetness, she panicked, and called for help. Recognizing deep inside her, something was terribly, terribly wrong.

\* \* \*

Holding tightly to the wailing, squirming bundle in his arms, *Juan Sanchez de La Cosa*, angrily thought, *What a strange, sad coincidence. What an ironic twist of fate.*

In his arms he held the son of *Diego de San Gil*. The mother, *Elena de San Miguel*, gone, in spite of all his knowledge, he was unable to save her life.

"The Lord must have a mission for you, Juan, to have intertwined your life so closely with the father of the child, and now the mother," Sister Teresa declared, as she reached for the baby.

Juan was still in awe, as he handed the child over, at the events of last night and today. Summoned to the convent by an urgent call. Sister Teresa had requested his help, someone was very ill. He was shocked beyond belief when he learned it was *Elena de San Miguel*. Her condition was very grave when he arrived. Using all of his available skills and knowledge, he was unable to save her. Echoing in his mind, the last words she spoke. An appeal to see that the child was taken care of. And of her undying love for *Diego*.

"You might be right, Sister. I had just met the brother, *Antonio*, no more than a few weeks ago. I considered paying a visit to the mother—*Elena*. But something in *San Miguel's* voice put me off. Now I know why. When do you expect to see him again?"

"Very soon I believe. I sent a message to him as soon as *Elena* began her labor... The father of the child, he is still far across the ocean. Will he ever return?"

Sadly shaking his head, Juan explained, "I cannot answer that, Sister, his fate is in the hands of God. And God has not been kind to him in the past."

Gently rocking the sleeping babe, Sister Teresa uttered a small sigh of resignation. "I suppose if the family cannot care for the child, a place for him could be found at the orphanage.

"What would happen to the boy then?" Juan asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps some family would adopt him, but..."

Sister Teresa stopped speaking as one of the other sisters of the order approached and whispered in her ear.

"*Ah bueno*—good," she addressed the nun. "Antonio de San Miguel is here. I have the very sad task of informing him of his sister's death. Accompany me please, Juan, informing him of this news will be hard enough, so I'm sure another man's support will be most welcome."

Handing the baby to Sister Elvira, Juan and Sister Teresa left to inform Antonio of Elena's death!

A shaken, distraught, and heavy-hearted Antonio de San Miguel stared blankly at Sister Teresa and Juan, as she related the news of Elena's death. He was unable to speak. Many thoughts racing through his mind. Elena dead, a child. "*Aye de mi*. What am I going to tell Papa, my mother?" he muttered aloud.

"Antonio, Antonio. Are you all right?" Sister Teresa asked.

In a trance-like daze, Antonio reacted to the voice calling his name, taking a deep breath he fell silent.

"Get hold of yourself," Juan cried, as he shook Diego.

Breathing deeply again, Antonio regained his composure.

"I must make preparations...I don't know where to begin."

Sister Teresa began consoling Antonio, explaining how she had performed the last rites herself. That Elena had come to terms with her situation.

"You may bury her here, if you wish, Señor. All members of the order have taken a vow not to reveal anything that occurs in the convent. The child of course...would have to be placed in an orphanage. Or with other relatives, if your family refuses to acknowledge or take him in."

Antonio, weeping for himself, for Elena, felt his heart grow cold at the mention of the bastard child.

"No! It is impossible, for my family to take the child. The shame of a child born out of wedlock would destroy my father. I shudder to think what it would do to my mother. The child's father may return, he certainly would take the child, but..."

"The father is far across a vast ocean," Juan interrupted, "his return is questionable..." Juan hesitated, a thought, quickly coming to his mind. "With your permission, Señor, may I make some inquiries regarding the baby. A family I have in mind, might be receptive to raising the child as their own."

Scornful of the child so sinfully conceived, yet grateful for Señor Sanchez's offer to help, Antonio quickly agreed. "I have no objections. You may do whatever you feel is best. But I beg you both, not to reveal that my sister bore the child. Many of my concerns could be resolved, if Elena was buried here."

Antonio also recognized, explaining his sister's death, to his parents would require a physician's statement. And additional help from Juan Sanchez.

"A statement from you, Señor Sanchez, regarding the cause of her death, would solve a most pressing problem."

Sister Teresa assured Antonio that all of his wishes would be followed. Looked directly at Señor Sanchez as she said, "You agree, don't you, Juan?"

With a nod of his head, Juan indicated his agreement. "What will the baby be called?" Juan asked.

"*Diego de Jesus*, and may the Lord forgive us all," she prayed.

\* \* \*

On a warm spring day in the year of our lord 1493. Elena de San Miguel was laid to rest. A small stone marking the grave, within the walls of *The Convent of Santa Maria de los Ninos*.

Antonio de San Miguel, depressed and sad, left for Seville. Certain he could convince his parents, that Elena had died of a broken heart.

*Diego de Jesus*, properly baptized, left with Juan Sanchez de la Casa. Traveling the city of *Medellin*, within the province of *Extremadura*.

*Diego de Jesus* would be taken in by the *Cortes de Monroy* family. A family which would raise him as one of their own children!



# Chapter 24

**Constantinople**  
**November 1493**

Benjamin Ben-Halavi worked diligently at the press. The repetitious work beginning to tire him, he let his mind wander over the events of the past seven months.

His marriage to Regina, only weeks away. An event he looked forward to with considerable anticipation. The new *Sephardic* community beginning to take shape here in Constantinople.

These events, along with settling into their new homes, eased some of the pain his family had suffered. Benjamin began to experience some solace. Although all, especially the older people, his father included, were experiencing painful adjustments to their new lives.

Nevertheless, one thought gnawed at him constantly. The fate of his brother, Joshua. Had he survived that uncertain journey? Was he all right? Sketchy news of Colon's successful return to Spain reached Constantinople just last week. Giving Benjamin a spark of hope. However information was scant, and he could only hope for the best.

The arrangement with the *Soncinos*, was working out very well. *Gershon Soncino*, himself, had traveled to Constantinople to meet with Benjamin and his father. As well as to deliver the print type he wanted used for the Bible undertaking they were planning.

Benjamin, discussing the problems he had to deal with in acquiring their press, was surprised to learn that the *Soncino* press had been moved at least six times since its founding in 1484. Why the *Soncinos* adopted printers mark was the tower *Casal Maggiore*—it was there that Gershon's uncle, *Joshua Solomon Soncino*, moved their first press.

After a week's stay, *Soncino*, leaving for *Salonika*, offered the Halavis his help, and promised more work when it was available. Benjamin, very grateful and thankful, promised himself he would strive to provide Soncino with the best work possible.

Deciding it was time for the afternoon meal, he stopped work, washed up and called out to his father.

"Papa, time to eat."

Receiving no reply, he called out again. Believing his father was deep into the *Zohar* or some Torah text, and would not answer, he began cutting some bread and cheese.

His father would come to eat when he was ready, Benjamin reasoned. For the past few months, David, although somewhat depressed, seemed to be physically healthier.

Absorbed in the study of *Kabbalah*—Jewish mysticism—David was haunted by the idea of the Messiah's coming. Benjamin surmised. The loss of his home and country, his son, the Expulsion itself, was proof, for David, the end the world was near. Benjamin was not overly concerned about his father's studies. As long as they did not become an obsession. *Kabbalah* study was not to be taken lightly.

The most irritating consequence of his father's studies, though, was his complete lack of interest in the day-to-day

functioning of the press. The setting and cleaning of the type. What paper to use, etc.

Benjamin sighed, as long as David was content, that's what mattered. He could run the press himself. Unless of course, *Soncino* decided to offer more work. Then he certainly would have to consider getting some help with the typesetting.

Deciding he would like some wine with his bread and cheese instead of *raki*, the raisin based, anisette flavored Turkish liquor they had been drinking, Benjamin reached for the bottle of wine he purchased a few days ago from *Samuel Gormesano*, the community winemaker.

In Spain, *Gormesano* produced some of the finest wines Seville had ever tasted. Now, a proper red was about the most anyone could hope for. The quality of Turkish grapes did not match those available in Spain. Not yet anyway, *Gormesano* thought. Unless, the cuttings he had brought from Spain took hold. Then his wine making would improve immensely.

Enjoying the wine and food, Benjamin heard his father's shuffling pace, and in a few seconds his father appeared. Wild eyed and disheveled.

"Papa, what's wrong?"

"*Nada*—nothing, where is the *raki*?"

"It's here, are you all right? Have some food."

Ignoring his son, David poured himself a large glass of *raki*, muttered a prayer of sorts, and took a healthy swallow. The alcohol warming his entire body. Almost immediately he began to shake and cough. Benjamin led his father to a chair as he gently scolded him.

"Papa, *raki* is supposed to be sipped, not gulped. You'll make yourself sick."

His cough beginning to subside, David nodded his head in agreement. "I know, Benjamin, I know...but all that's happened...the end, it is coming."

“Stop, Papa, stop it, what’s happening to you? If the Messiah is coming then there is nothing we can do about it. We will have to accept it,” Benjamin loudly exclaimed.

Benjamin’s outburst, the effect of the *raki*, made David’s head swim. Slumping into a chair, he felt a vast exhaustion sweep over him.

“Eat, Papa, you will feel better.”

“I am not hungry, Benjamin...a Turkish coffee maybe.”

“Fine, Papa, I’ll make you some.”

Preparing the coffee and trying to keep his mood light, Benjamin decided to question his father’s study of *Kabbalah*. Today’s events seemed to stress the damaging effect it was having on him.

Once the coffee had been brewed to its frothy completion, Benjamin poured two cups. Giving one to his father, he sat down next to him. Quietly, sipping the dark sweet liquid, Benjamin thought, *We are becoming more Turkish every day*. Inasmuch as coffee, and coffeehouses, mirrored Turkish culture very well, most business was conducted over coffee.

Making a face because the coffee was very sweet, which his father preferred, while he enjoyed his coffee slightly sweetened, Benjamin softly asked his father, “How is it, Papa, is it sweet enough for you?”

“It is fine, Benjamin.”

“Papa, I know it’s been very hard for you...for all of us. But, Papa, it is done. The country we tried so hard to make our own has rejected us. Once again our history has caught up with us. Now we must try to make meaningful, fruitful lives for ourselves. Here in the real world...in Constantinople.”

“What do you mean ‘real world,’ Benjamin.”

“I mean here, Papa, where we are living right now. Not some dream world you think is coming.” David put his coffee cup down.

“How do you make a fruitful life for yourself, Benjamin. How? I’ll tell you how, by following the *Mitzvot*. By living our

lives as *Adonai* has commanded us. Think, Benjamin, why did we leave *España*? We could have accepted their Messiah. As *Conversos* they would have let us stay."

"I understand, Papa...but—"

"No, Benjamin, let me finish," David interrupted. "We chose to keep our faith. To remain Jews. To endure losing our homes, our country, as well as our children. Why did we suffer all these things, Benjamin? So that we could continue to live our lives as Jews. Keeping our faith in *Adonai*."

Reaching into his pocket, David pulled out a packet of papers, and holding them in front of his son, he said, "This, Benjamin, is an account of the past seven months, a history if you like. I hope it will be passed on to my great-great...your great-great-grandchildren. We must never forget the reasons why we left *España*. So that we can sanctify Shabbat—the Sabbath. Say Kaddish for our departed ones, if nothing else, Benjamin, these mitzvot we must always fulfill! And I study, Benjamin, because my heart is breaking, and only *Adonai* can bring me consolation."

Benjamin, hearing his father voice the great sadness he was feeling, what he was trying to convey to him, grasped the meaning of his father's words, and took his father in his arms kissed both his cheeks.

"I understand, Papa, I understand."

\* \* \*

"*Buenos dias, Bohor*," Benjamin called out as he approached the open front door of the winemaker's house.

"Ah, *buenos dias, Benjamin*," Bohor answered, coming to the door.

"Come in, come in, what can I do for you today?"

"*Quien es Bohor? Who is it, Bohor?*" Señora Gormesano called out.

"*El novio*—the bridegroom, Benjamin Halavi."

"*Ah bueno, un cafe*, Benjamin—good, a coffee, Benjamin?"

"*Gracias, Señora*," Benjamin answered, sitting down at the small wooden table, that also served as the winemaker's workbench.

"So, Benjamin, in three days you will be marrying Regina Ventura. A fine family, her father, *Haim*, is a good man. Regina will make you a good wife," the winemaker commented.

"Also a beautiful girl," Señora Gormesano said, as she placed the hot coffee in front of Benjamin.

Discomfited by the compliments being paid him, Benjamin shyly answered, "*Gracias, Señora*, you honor me with your good wishes. Regina is...everything you say she is." Swiftly changing the subject to the reason he was there, Benjamin asked, "The wine and *raki* for the wedding, there are no problems, you have it?"

Benjamin was concerned over the alcoholic beverages because of the Muslim ban of alcohol. Although the community was granted a *Dhimma*, a covenant of protection. Certain Turkish officials were known to ignore the covenant in order to extract an additional *Baksheesh* or bribe.

"*Si, si*, yes, Benjamin, all is taken care of. We didn't pay any *Baksheesh*, Nissim Behar saw to that."

Greatly relieved there were no problems regarding the alcohol, Benjamin breathed a sigh of relief.

"Please thank Nissim for me. Although I'm sure I will see him at the *boda*—wedding."

Finishing his coffee, he stood, thanked the winemaker and his wife, and quickly began to load the wine and liquor into his wagon. With the help of Señor Gormesano, the chore did not take long at all.

\* \* \*

SEPHARDIC FAREWELL

On a cool November evening at the conclusion of Shabbat, a full moon showing through the windows of the synagogue, sitting on the *talamo*—the wedding bench, under the *hupa*—the nuptial canopy, Regina and Benjamin took their wedding vows.

As he watched the ceremony, his heart filled with happiness and his eyes with tears. David Ben Isaac Halavi thanked God for allowing him to witness this day. And prayed Joshua would soon join them, here in this new land.

# Chapter 25

**Seville**

**September 1496**

Antonio de San Miguel sat alone in the courtyard of his parents' home, cheerlessly sipping the last of his wine left from the afternoon meal. He removed from his pocket, the letter he had received five days ago. Rereading it evoked memories of the past three years. Memories that washed over him like an icy hand.

Elena's death had devastated his mother and father. His father, markedly. Don Miguel cursed Diego de San Gil endlessly.

Desiring nothing less than damnation upon him; but blaming himself repeatedly for the loss of his daughter. His mother, Donna Isabel, knowing somewhere in a mother's secret heart, the true reasons Elena had left for the convent, still mourned. She continued to wear black. Refusing invitations to joyous festivities; it seemed she prayed from morn to night.

Antonio suffered the most, since he knew of Elena's bastard child, and how she really died. However, it was a burden he



would carry to his grave. A secret he would not, could not reveal. The whole household was bleak and dismal. All pleasure and enjoyment seemed gone from life.

Now after all these years without a word, Juan Sanchez de La Casa had written asking if he might visit. For what reason, remained a mystery.

There was the possibility that Sanchez had been part of Colon's second voyage to the New World. Which left the Canary Islands in October of 1493, not returning until June of 1496. A large expedition, many ships, men, horses, sheep and cattle. It was the Crown's intent to colonize these new lands. Admiral Colon, in ill health, returned from this voyage disappointed and confused. Still unable to confirm if he had found the mainland of China. The monarchs, confident that this new world would yield a healthy profit in gold, and converts, began to doubt Columbus' abilities. They commenced issuing new licenses to other expeditions.

If *de La Casa* had been part of Colon's second voyage, and was now returning, was it possible he was bringing word of Josh...Diego! Maybe Diego had returned with him. *Aye de mi!*

What a situation that would create.

Hearing Anna, the house-maid approach, he quickly returned the letter to his pocket.

"*Pardone Señor. A gentleman, Señor Juan Sanchez de La Casa, calls. He asks if you are available. He is most anxious to see you.*"

"Is he alone?" Antonio nervously asked.

"*Si, Señor.*"

"Then show him in. And make sure the patron and Donna Isabel are not disturbed."

"As you wish, Señor."

As he watched the servant leave, Antonio frantically searched his mind. He needed some excuse for his parents, to explain Sanchez's visit. His father would certainly want to know

the reason why he had come. Sanchez's part in the episode at the convent had never been revealed to anyone.

*Hopefully Sanchez will be gone by the time siesta is over, and my parents still asleep until he is gone,* Antonio silently prayed.

Bracing himself for whatever was to come, he stood as *Señor de La Casa* accompanied by Anna made his way to him.

"*Buenos dias, Señor, it is a pleasure to see you again after so many years,*" Juan warmly greeted him.

Antonio, tense and ill at ease, again felt the terrible pain he had known the day he learned of his sister's death. He mumbled his response, dismissed Anna, making sure she was unable to hear, then sharply hissed, "Why have you come, Señor, after all these years of silence? My parents know nothing of you, nor the events that occurred at the convent."

Sadness replacing his initial joy at seeing Antonio again, Juan began his explanation. "I had hoped that after all these years, you might have reconciled yourself, and your family to what happened at the convent. To accept it."

"I beg of you, Señor, do not speak of the incident at the convent. Elena's death was hard enough on my parents. To reveal what happened now, would put both of them into their graves."

"A thousand pardons, Señor, it was not my intent to open old wounds, I thought the passing of time might have healed them."

"Those wounds will never be healed." Antonio shouted, "And Diego de San Gil, may his soul rot in hell, will pay for the sin he committed, just as my sister has."

Checking his temper, at Antonio's outburst, and not wishing to cause additional pain, Juan simply and quietly related the events of his second journey to the New World. Of Diego's death, how well Antonio's nephew *Jesus* was doing. Still living with the *Cortes* family, Juan asked whether Antonio had any wish to see Jesus.

"Maybe my sister would still be alive if he had never been born. No I have no desire to see the bastard child. But thank you

for the small consolation you have brought, by informing me that Diego de San Gil...*has* paid for the sin he committed."

Juan, saddened and crushed by Antonio's words and hatred, decided to leave. Thinking, continuing in this manner would only bring additional resentment, he quietly said, "Forgive me, Señor, I will take my leave now. I apologize again for any distress I may have caused you. You have my word as a gentleman, the events we have spoken of, will never be revealed to anyone." Bowing low, Juan whispered, "*Adios*—goodbye, Señor. No need to summon your servant. I can find my way out."

"As you wish, Señor," Antonio replied, turning his back on Juan.

Watching *de La Casa* leave, Antonio experienced a multitude of emotions, anger, sadness, relief.

Anger at Diego de San Gil. Sadness for the loss of his sister. Relief his mother and father, not finishing their siesta, had remained in their room. He marveled at Juan Sanchez's fortitude, traveling that vast ocean and surviving once more. Thinking of Diego's death, how he died...at the hands of wild savages.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of his father's voice, speaking to Anna. Entering the courtyard, Don Fernando called to Antonio, "Eh, Antonio. Anna tells me a fine gentleman paid us a call, why did you not waken me."

"It was no one of importance, Papa. An old acquaintance who was on his way to *Medellin*, who decided to pay a call."

"One of your wenching *amigos*, I would venture to guess."

"*Si*, Papa, exactly; did you sleep well?" Antonio asked, hoping to change the subject.

"As well as I could, but I ache all over. Some wine is what I need now. *Anna, un poca de vino por favor*—Anna, a glass of wine please."

"*Si, Señor, pronto*—yes, sir, right away," Anna answered.

Preparing the wine, Anna was puzzled. While Antonio's visitor was here, she could have sworn she heard the words *bastard child, sister*. Yet Antonio said nothing to *el Patron*; just described the gentleman as an "acquaintance." From the sound of Señor Antonio's voice, the "acquaintance" was bringing very bad news. *Why?* Anna de Segovia thought, as she served the wine.

\* \* \*

Sitting in the coach he had hired for the trip to Medellin, Juan Sanchez de la Casa again went over the events of the previous day. A sad turn of events for not one, but two families. The San Miguel's loss of their daughter, their endless sorrow. Diego's family never to know his fate, poor Jews wondering to who knows where. *Ay di mi! Dear God, why have you chosen to punish them so?*

# Chapter 26

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**September 1496**

*Juan Sanchez de la Casa* beamed at the precocious three-year-old on his knee, whose maturity amazed him. *Diego de Jesus* rebaptized, *Diego Jesus de Cortes*, by the family who loved him as much as they did their natural born son *Hernan*. Eleven-year-old *Hernan* was the reason for the Corteses agreeing to take in the newborn *Diego*.

An only child, *Hernan* was wild and unruly. Señora *Eva Cortes* and her husband *Martine* hoped another child might have a calming influence on him. Unable to conceive again, *Martine* and *Eva* happily agreed to *Juan Sanchez's* request, to take in the poor orphan child.

Whether or not *Diego's* coming had the desired effect, there was no doubt *Hernan* loved the child. Always referring to him as his little brother, playing with him whenever he could.

Constantly showering him with kisses and hugs. *Diego* returned the love as well, overjoyed whenever *Hernan* was able to spend time with him.

*Martine Cortes de Monroy*, a retired captain of infantry with a distinguished ancestry, had grown up with Juan. Best of friends for years they were like brothers now.

"You spoil them, Juan, it is time for their siesta. Hernan, Diego, to bed, now!" Señora Cortes admonished her guest and children.

"Please, Mama, just a few minutes more, please *Tio*—Uncle Juan, one more story of your adventures in the New World," Hernan implored his uncle. As Diego mimicked his brother.

"No, no, *hijos*—boys, you must do as your mother asks. Off to bed with you. Tonight, if you behave, I might have one more story to tell."

Reluctantly leaving the adults to finish their dessert wine, the boys, protesting all the way to their room, began their siesta.

"So, Juan, what are your plans. Are you returning to the New World?" Martine Cortes asked.

"No, Martine, even if Colon is planning another voyage, which I doubt. I don't think I could make that difficult journey again. Furthermore you and *Señora Eva* will be happy to know, I have proposed marriage to the niece of *Carlos Mendez de Montoya*, *Señorita Francisca de Montoya*. She has accepted me, and plans for a wedding sometime next year are in the making."

"Bravo, Juan, it time you settled down, began a family."

"Which brings me to the reason for my visit. I was hoping, once my new bride and I had established our home, Diego would live with us."

Both Carlos and Eva becoming wary at Juan's words, visibly relaxed at his reply. "Unfortunately Francisca strongly disagreed. As I discussed it with her, I admit, she convinced me of her position. Now I must impose upon you and Señora Eva once more. Diego must remain here."

Martine Cortes, thoughtful for a long moment, glanced at Señora Eva, who nodded in agreement, as he began to speak. "Juan, when you brought Diego to us three years ago, we thought it would be for a short time. Just until Hernan had

calmed a bit. Now we both realize that he is like our own son, we would never give him up. So your concerns are groundless, Diego will remain here as a real part of our family. Hernan loves him as much as we do."

"Again I am indebted to both of you," Juan softly said. "But will you ever tell him who his parents were? How they perished, why he came to live with you?"

"If the need ever arises, yes, we would make known to him the reasons for his coming to live with us. The identity of his parents, their ultimate fates."

"You both have set my mind at ease, knowing Diego will always have a home with you is a great relief. Just one small request I would make of you regarding his upbringing. His father, Diego de San Gil, was a good man. I greatly mourn his loss. His mother, Elena de San Miguel, a noble woman who suffered alone at his birth. Is there some way their memories could be honored? Some simple ceremony you might perform with little Diego? The lighting of a candle, the chanting of a prayer?"

Señora Cortes smiled at Juan, taking his face in her hands, quietly nodded her approval. "You are a very good man, Juan. Martine and I will do as you ask, have no fears."

"Ah *bueno*—good, and may God grant you a place in heaven for the kindness you have shown to me and the boy. Now I think it is time for all of us to begin our siesta."

# Chapter 27

**Seville**

**October 1496**

Don Fernando de San Miguel

Donna Isabel's dreams had become more real every day. They were always the same. Elena would appear, a child in her arms, calling out to her mother for help. Donna Isabel, unable to reach her daughter, would awake with a start, shivering and sweaty, feelings of guilt filling her heart, she would begin to pray. But the words were not from any Catholic prayers she was familiar with. But Hebrew and Spanish prayers, she had learned many years ago as a child. When the "courtyard" was a very important part of her life. Realizing she was dreaming, and uttering words which could endanger her family, she would immediately stop. Leave her bed, go to the miniature nave and crucifix in her room, and begin reverently chanting proper catholic prayers.

The dreams had started almost three years ago, when she first learned of Elena's death. Tonight's dream was unlike the others.



Tonight she reached Elena, embraced her, took the baby in her arms, and felt the happiness of her grandchild. Then took her last breath, succumbing finally to her own broken heart.

Her funeral, sad and long, brought to Antonio almost unbearable sorrow. To Don Fernando along with the sorrow, a dejected, spiritless gloom flooded his heart along with the pain of his wife's death.

\* \* \*

*Anna de Segovia* kneeled in the confessional booth and poured her heart out to the priest listening to her confession. The death of Señora Isabel had brought unending sadness as well as guilt to Anna. For it was she who had cared for the señora the past six months, hearing her strange words, witnessing her odd actions. But most important of all, the final words she had uttered before dying: "*Cara mia nina—my darling daughter. You have let me hold my bastard grandchild at last. I forgive you, I will love him forever...forever.*"

Those words brought into focus for Anna, Señor Antonio's visitor, who no more than two months ago had left him in such a bitter mood. *Could it be that Señorita Elena had not died of a broken heart? Were the prayers I heard the Señora muttering...Jewish prayers?*

The priest's attention was riveted on the girl's revelations. The San Miguels were very influential, very close to Monsignor Abate. Was it worth risking the monsignor's wrath to bring him such news. And yet not to...could mean even worse punishment.

Numerous *Conversos* baptized since the Expulsion Edict had been imposed, were beginning fall back into their old ways. They were again beginning to visit "courtyards." Those who possessed knowledge of backsliding "New Christians" were required, on pain of excommunication, to reveal their information to church authorities. Catholic Spain again found

itself facing a “Jewish problem” it thought it had resolved. These events alerted the church—and revived the Inquisition!

Blessing Anna after she completed her confession, and telling her what her penitence would be, Father Alfonso admonished her not to reveal to anyone what she had told him. His fear of the *Inquistores* had been burned into his memory; having witnessed firsthand the various methods of “persuasion.”

\* \* \*

Monsignor Abate’s most cherished ambition, his long awaited dream, to be called “Bishop,” was almost a reality. Bishop Julio lay on his deathbed, the end very close. *I shall miss him. He taught me well. What would be a fitting way of honoring him?* the monsignor thought. *A shrine maybe...* his thoughts were interrupted by a knock on his door.

“Enter,” he called out.

Father Alfonso entered stood in front of Monsignor Abate’s writing table waiting for him to speak first.

“You may sit, Father, what is it you require of me?”

“I have no request of you, Monsignor. I learned just two days ago, some very interesting revelations regarding the San Miguel family. In particular, Donna Isabel, may she rest in peace.”

Hearing the San Miguel name brought the monsignor to complete attention. The agreement he had made with Don Fernando had worked out well. What little Bishop Julio had been told, he accepted without question. The renovation to the *Church of San Pedro* was being completed. The confessions well hidden had not been needed. The *Office of the Inquisitor* had shown no interest. What could this priest possibly have to tell him?

“Well speak up. What are these revelations?”

Father Alfonso, with great care and respect for Donna Isabel, related Anna de Segovia’s confession.

Monsignor Abate, intrigued and troubled at the same time, sat in deep thought. *Everything going so well. Now this priest...comes to me with this news.*

"That will be all, Father Alfonso," the monsignor angrily dismissed the priest.

Before taking his leave, Father Alfonso inquired as to Bishop Julio's condition. "It has not changed. He is close to the end." Then softening, added almost as an afterthought, "Thank you for your news, and your concern for the bishop. They will not go unrewarded."

*My greatest reward would be punishment of all those whose practice of the true faith is false, Father Alfonso thought as he left the monsignor's office. May the wrath of the Inquisition punish them all.*

# Chapter 28

Seville

January 1497

Gathered in the home of *Don Benveniste de Mena*, some of Seville's foremost citizens were terror stricken. Leading "New Christian" families—including the San Miguels—believed they had finally achieved a degree of safety in their arrangement with Monsignor Abate. But as Don Fernando continued to explain, they were in grave danger, not because of Donna Isabel's words, which Monsignor Abate had disclosed to him, but because of their confessions, and arrangement with the monsignor.

Now other events were causing great alarm. The authorities were on high alert. If knowledge of the arrangement was made known, all of the families would be facing the Inquisition.

Don Benveniste re-enforced what Don Fernando had just explained, regarding Donna Isabel. The greater danger facing them—what the servant girl heard was nothing more than the mumblings of a dying woman—easily explained as nothing more than a result of her feverish state. But more important was

the question: would Monsignor Abate reveal the arrangement?

Now, news of the plot by *Don Pedro de Susan*, and other New Christians, calling for an armed attack against church dignitaries. The scheme unfortunately foiled by Don Pedro's own daughter, the famed beauty, "*La Susana*," who inadvertently revealed the plans to her Christian lover, who immediately informed the papal authorities. Don Pedro and all those involved in the plot were arrested, tried, and convicted, their executions to take place within the next few months.

Inquisitional fever was now sweeping through the city of Seville. Teeming with informers, the number of executions increased so rapidly, that additional space for the *quemadero*—the burning place—had to be found.

These were the most important problems needing solution, Don Benveniste concluded.

"Then there is no hope of Monsignor Abate coming to our aid?" inquired Don Vidal.

"None, news of the plot, along with the servant girl's confession, caused the monsignor great anxiety. He has washed his hands of us. Those were his last words on the subject, when I spoke with him last week," Don Fernando sadly answered.

"Then we must make plans to leave as soon as possible. We have no other choice. No matter what we do or say, our motives, and *limpieza de sangre*—*purity of blood*, will always be questioned. There will be no mercy shown by the Inquisition, especially one headed by Torquemada himself," Don Benveniste abruptly declared.

All reluctantly agreed, except Don Fernando, who quietly declared his intention to remain in Seville. He saw no reason to forgo his life here, none. He could not be connected with the *La Susana Plot*. His wife's words were explained very easily. The dream was just that, a dream. He was a Christian and a *Grandee*. In spite of Monsignor Abate, he was confident no one would challenge him. But if he was forced to face the Inquisition, he was ready!

Antonio, frightened at his father's bravado, began to argue with him.

"I do not speak for you, Antonio. You may do as you wish. I am sure your decision will be one which does not bring shame to the San Miguel name."

Ignoring his father's ridicule but visibly relieved, Antonio began offering reasons why his father should leave with him.

"Do not argue with me, Antonio. I am staying. Pray to God that our decisions will lead us all to safe lives."

Antonio, knowing his father's unyielding ways, decided it would be useless to try and change his mind. His own considerable fear of the Inquisition left him in turmoil. Stay with his father or run with the others. A decision he would have to make very, very soon.

But whatever their choices or judgments, it would not matter. Unknown to all, their fates still rested in the hands of Monsignor Abate.

\* \* \*

*Converso Fernando de Rojas* baptized *Luis Jesus de San Abate*. The former *Monsignor Abate* lay in his filthy cell, racked with pain. Barely conscious, his mind wondering in and out of reality.

*So close, I had been so close to the dream.* Now all was in ruin. Lurching in a spasm of pain as he tried to move, *Monsignor Abate* recalled in one of his few lucid moments— was it just a week ago, that the Inquisitor General, Torquemada himself, had questioned him?

*I answered all his questions truthfully. I pleaded for mercy, what had I done? What sins had I committed? I revealed the confessions of the "Judaizing Grandees." The plan they embraced to live as Christians. How they tried to entice me with their sinful ways. By...by, rebuilding the church of San Pedro, by...so many other ways.*

His tortured mind recoiled, he screamed as he remembered the *potro*—*the rack*. The triangular frame to which he was bound

and stretched. The unbearable pain. Then mercifully he fainted.

When he regained consciousness he was ready to agree or do anything his torturers asked.

Within hours after Abate confessed, and corroborated Father Alfonso's denunciations, orders for the arrest of all the families involved with the former monsignor were issued.

One week later all of the families, except Don Fernando and Antonio, were apprehended at the Portuguese border.

Don Fernando, true to his word, did not change his ways. He remained at home, where the authorities arrested him three days later.

Antonio, still free, vacillating between staying with his father or following the rest to Portugal, was not at home when his father was arrested.

\* \* \*

Stirring from a deep sleep, a weak sun casting a dim light through the window, Antonio quickly came awake, as the door was roughly opened.

"*Ah, Dios, who is it?*" he called out.

"*Calma, Antonio, it is only me,*" Amelia Gomez replied out, as she entered the room.

"*Eh, bueno, any news?*"

"*No different than yesterday,*" she answered.

Getting out of bed, Antonio quickly made his way to the chamber pot. Relieved himself, washed and began dressing. As he dressed, he recalled the events that led to his current predicament. Just last week, leaving his old hiding place, he warily made his way to his home. Wondering, if his father was well, and, if his plans had possibly changed.

A commotion in the area of his house had caused him to pause. There for all to see was his father in chains, being arrested. Barely managing to escape himself, he fled. Seeking refuge in this hovel, the whore Amelia Gomez called home.

She had been one of his favorite pastimes. And lucky for him, he had always treated her well. She agreed to let him stay, on the condition that he would leave in a few days. He did not have to explain to Amelia why he needed her home as shelter. All of Seville was filled with news of the *Grandees*, accused by the Inquisition of being *Marranos*.

Guilt-ridden and full of remorse at his father's arrest, Antonio, yesterday, decided to end it all. To stop running. But giving himself up to Inquisition torture was not what he had in mind.

After changing, and preparing something to eat. Amelia began to berate Antonio for not leaving.

"Señor Antonio, when are you going to leave? All the neighborhoods are being searched. It is very dangerous for me, if they find you here...it will be very bad."

Antonio understood very well the danger Señorita Amelia was in and decided to do what must be done.

"Amelia, take the last of my money, go to the chemist. Ask him to make you an arsenic potion. Explain you are having a problem with rats."

"But, Señor, I do not have a problem with rats. A mouse or two, maybe. *Aye de mi!* Señor, you do not plan to—"

"Just do as I ask, Amelia, I will be gone by tonight."

With mixed feelings, Amelia took the money. Sad and relieved at the same time, said she would go to the chemist sometime this afternoon. Now she needed to rest. She had had a long busy night, and was very tired. Antonio agreed, climbed back into bed with her, feeling the warmth of her body once more.

\* \* \*

A wet drizzle that began in the afternoon, turned to a cold downpour by evening. Bringing a chill to the entire city.



Returning drenched from her trip to the chemist, the brew Antonio had asked for in hand, a tearful Amelia, again admonished him.

“Señor Antonio, what you are planning is wrong. Confess your sins. The church is merciful, what you are accused of will be forgiven.”

“Yes, the church will forgive me,” a melancholy Antonio declared. “After they have burned me at the stake! There is no mercy from the Inquisition. Torquemada would burn his own mother at a hint of Jewish blood.”

“But some priest could—”

“No, Amelia, there is no other way. I would be tortured, then burned alive. My corpse left to rot, I prefer my method.”

Realizing she would not change his mind, Amelia wrapped the potion well in some oiled cloth, and gave it to him. “May God forgive you, Antonio.”

“The only forgiveness I seek is from those that I have failed or disappointed.”

Assuring her that now that he was leaving she would be safe, Antonio thanked her for her help, kissed her gently, and left.

Wandering the city, wet and cold, with very few people about, he had no fear of the authorities. He continued to walk through old familiar places wet with rain. Recalling memories of better times.

Not sure where he would spend his last night on earth, Antonio continued wandering. Through the rain, he observed an old abandoned building with a large courtyard. Vague feelings of recognition assailed him. Continuing to walk, he spied a filthy garbage strewn alley. *Why not here. I deserve nothing better. I failed my family, myself, and anyone else I had ever known.*

Entering the alley, he removed from his coat the package Amelia had prepared. He unwrapped it, and stared at the vial it contained for a few minutes. Hesitating for only a few seconds, he swallowed the contents in one gulp.

As the poison coursed through his body, he began to feel its effects almost immediately. Leaning against the alley wall, memories of another, happier time, flooded his whole being.

*Elena...Momma*, he murmured. In a short while he collapsed in a heap. All life gone from him. Never knowing the alley he chose to take his life in was adjacent to the now deserted, *Cal de Seville*—the synagogue of Seville.

\* \* \*

Three months later Seville was again witness to an *auto-da-fé*. Countless heretics and apostates were to be *relaxed*. Burned alive at the stake. Those who were *reconciled* to the church, were granted the mercy of strangulation prior to lighting the fires. Their lifeless bodies left to be consumed by the flames. All sentences were carried out by the secular authorities, whose duty it was to perform the executions, on orders of the Church.

Don Fernando de San Miguel, condemned to *relaxation* after refusing reconciliation, spent his last days enduring inquisition torture. Unkempt and dirty, dressed in the *miter* and *sanbenito* of the condemned heretic, his hands tightly tied to his neck with a noose, he and others, were contemptuously paraded to the *quemadora*. Spat on and mocked by the large crowd, as they were led to the burning place. Don Miguel walked as if in a trance. He saw nor felt anything. The pain of torture, the humiliation of the *sanbenito* and *miter*, removed all thought from his mind. Once the *quemadora* was reached, the procession was halted.

More insults were hurled at the condemned, as the executioner bound each to a burning stake. Echoing through the *quemadora*, the many prayers recited by the countless bishops, priests, monks and nuns in attendance.

Being tied to the burning stake, jolted Don Fernando back to reality, again feeling the pain he had managed to hide from himself. As the fires were lit, and the heat of the flames began to consume him. Visions of his family: *Isabel, Elena, Antonio*,

SEPHARDIC FAREWELL

transcended Don Fernando's pain. Penetrated his mind, and within those visions another. Of a child, a boy—a grandson. At last finding peace, Don Fernando de San Miguel perished. Seeking forgiveness of *Adonai*, the words, of the *Shema* on his lips, and, in his heart.

# Chapter 29

**Constantinople**  
**April 1500**

Almost seven years after the *Cal de Seville* had settled in Constantinople. The Jews of Turkey were still a dissimilar community. Spread throughout the Ottoman Empire, separate congregations of *Romaniotes*, *Sephardim* and a small number of *Ashkenazim*, functioned within their own domain. Each with its own rabbi, rituals, schools, cemeteries, courts and tax assessors.

Even with all of its diversity, Jewish self-government functioned very well. And at all times enjoyed approval of the Turkish Sultanate. Although separated from the Muslim majority, the role of Sephardic Jews, in Ottoman medicine, the arts, and printing, grew at an astonishing rate.

With the help of the Soncinos, the Halavis were printing many books in Spanish, Portuguese, and Hebrew. The printing of Turkish materials was limited, since the use of Arabic script was forbidden to non-Muslims.

The Ottoman Empire under *Sultan Bayezid* provided for the Jews of *España*, sanctuary, and economic vitality. Allowing

Jewish enclaves within the empire to become the center of Jewish scholarship for most of the sixteenth century. The *Sephardim* would never forget all that the Sultans had done for them, not even in the distant future, when they would have to face a harsher reality.

Benjamin Ben-Halavi gently kissed his sleeping wife Regina, and hugged his newborn daughter to him. Thank God, he thought, this birth was easier for Regina than her first, three years ago, when their son Isaac was born. Benjamin's concerns then for Regina had caused him much suffering. He recalled his father teasing him about worrying so much, but David did not hide his own concerns very well.

Holding his second child in his arms, he felt an immense happiness. Memories of his father and family overwhelmed him. Isaac's *Brit Mila*, how proud and happy his father was. Life was continuing, the pain of past events almost forgotten. Only the sadness of Joshua—there had been no word of him for almost eight years—marred the small amount of happiness the family had managed. Then, too soon, David Ben-Halavi was gone, passing away peacefully with his family around him, his sorrows and worries left behind. His father's loss devastated Benjamin, but with Regina's help, along with the birth of his second child, he was beginning to overcome the deep sadness that had engulfed him.

His contemplation was interrupted by Mrs. Bejar's voice and that of the midwife, *Clara Zacut*, as they discussed last night's birth of the second Halavi child.

"*Dime, Clara*—tell me, Clara, the birth went well. Regina will be able to care for the baby tomorrow?"

"*Se querer el Dio*—God willing yes, Rebbeca. Regina is a healthy girl, the baby is fine, *y toda esta bueno*—everything is good. Although someone will have to help with Isaac."

"Did you hear, Benjamin, everything is good, the baby, Regina. I will take Isaac with me when he gets up. Let Regina rest today. *Y usted, como esta*—and how are you, Benjamin?"

"I am fine, Señora Bejar," Benjamin answered, as he handed the baby to her.

"Many thanks to you and Señora Zucut, for all your help."

"*De nada*—you're welcome, Benjamin," Señora Zucut answered, "I will return tomorrow, to see that everything is well."

"*Adios, Clara*," Señora Bejar called to her, as she gently rocked the baby.

"She is beautiful, Benjamin. She looks just like her *nona*—her grandmother. In seven days you will name her...Rachel, *si*?"

"No, she will be named Rebecca in honor of Regina's mother. If we have another girl, *se querer el Dio*, she will be named for my mother Rachel," Benjamin answered.

Stirring from her deep restful sleep, Regina slowly awoke, calling softly to Benjamin, "Benjamin, where is my daughter? Bring her to me. And where is Isaac?"

Answering Regina, Señora Bejar quickly placed the baby in her arms. "Isaac is asleep, I will take him with me when he wakes, today you rest."

"Thank you so much, Señora Bejar. I don't know what I would have done without your help."

"It is nothing, Regina, feed your baby now. I will make something for you to eat."

As soon as Señora Bejar left, Benjamin knelt beside his wife hugged and warmly kissed her, as well as his new daughter.

"You have made me very happy, Regina. The baby is well and healthy, how do you feel?"

"I am fine, Benjamin. Now I must feed my Rebecca."

As Regina adjusted her position to begin feeding, little Isaac, yawning and tired, rushed to her side, hugged her, and his father exclaiming, "I have a new sister just like you promised, Papa, and *Papu*—*Grandfather*, is happy also."

\* \* \*

Nissim Behar, dressing quietly, glanced at the sleeping young woman. Beautiful and Turkish; a *rayah* made the sex so much more exciting. *How I wish I could stay*, Nissim thought. Overlooking completely the danger of his actions, if revealed to the authorities. A *dhimmis* having carnal knowledge of a Turkish *rayah*, could mean death to both of them. But the more dangerous a love, the more exciting it seemed to him.

As if reading his mind the form on the bed shook the coverlet off, raised her head and spoke. "Nissim, if you leave me without saying goodbye, like you usually do, I will never see you again, and I mean it this time."

"*Afet*, my woman of bewitching beauty. That would truly break my heart."

"Then come and kiss me goodbye in a proper manner. So that I will know that you truly care."

Leaping to her side, Nissim took her in his arms and smothered her with kisses. Feeling again the lustful urges in his loins. Laughing, *Afet* tried to push him away. "No, no, Nissim my Jewish God of love, you must go. And I must be at the palace in a short while."

Nissim stopped, took her face in his hands, and looked into her eyes.

"When will I see you again, it must be soon."

"I don't know. You know how hard it is for me to prepare for *these visits*."

"Promise me it won't be too long."

"I cannot promise you anything, Nissim. I am just a poor harem girl, my life is not my own."

"Well you are not *gedik*—a girl in the Sultan's eye. A favorite of the Sultan."

"Nor will I ever be."

Taking her in his arms, Nissim kissed her fiercely, released her and softly replied, "I will always be here for you, *Afet*..." Hesitating, he almost revealed his true feelings. "But...now I have important business I must attend to."

Blowing kisses as he left, Nissim started out to his favorite coffeehouse, and his morning appointment.

As she dressed, Afet thought, *Why do I continue to see him? It is an impossible situation. He can never make me his wife. I will never be anything but a serving maid, to the Valide Sultan—the Sultan's mother.*

As a beautiful young girl, Afet at the age of ten, caught the eye of one of the Sultan's Vizier. Her family, poor and uneducated, willingly accepted the Vizier's offer. Afet entered the Sultan's harem, was taken to the *Topkapi Saray*, the Sultan's palace. There she was thrust into a layered harem life. Unable to cope with harem politics, Afet with all her beauty, could not rise above servant girl status.

Spending seven years of pure misery, in her lowly status, it wasn't until that fateful night one year ago, that she first became aware of Nissim Behar.

Helping as a serving maid at a state affair, Afet approached Nissim. As he reached for the glass of *raki* on her tray, their hands inadvertently touched. Looking into each other's eyes, their hands still touching, sent a rush of emotions racing through both of them.

The very next day, Afet, leaving the palace on the pretext of having to shop for the special figs and dates the Valide Sultan craved, secretly met Nissim that afternoon, in a small room above a coffeehouse, whose trusted owner Nissim knew well.

The passions aroused at the initial, and subsequent encounters, brought immense pleasure and joy to both. Feelings which grew stronger each time they were able to meet.

As the relationship grew, so did Afet's hopes that Nissim would eventually marry her. She thought Nissim's influence at the court, and with the Grand Vizier, would resolve the problem of Turk marrying Jew.

Although mention of marriage to Nissim caused a stony silence on his part, and feelings of frustration for her.



Quickly finishing dressing, Afet forced herself back to the present and the need to concentrate on her excuse for initially leaving the palace. Finding the shortest route back to the palace would be a problem. Today, being market day, she would have to hurry in order to return in time to perform her serving duties.

\* \* \*

The air, cool and invigorating, cleared Nissim's head. As he walked to the coffeehouse thinking he'd had a little too much *raki* last night. It was his way of hiding his true feelings for Afet; he loved her, and that was a problem. A problem he did not have time for now. The meeting with the Armenian spice merchant was very important. The means for shipping the cinnamon to Venice was due to arrive within days. Successful conclusion of the trade would mean a handsome profit for Behar & Co.

Reaching the coffeehouse, Nissim looked about for Mustufa Hassim, the spice merchant. Not seeing him, he entered the coffeehouse. Greeted by a waiter, he was shown to his usual cushion and table.

While waiting, Nissim decided to order coffee and Mustufa's favorite, *Kadayif Dolmasi*, a shredded baked pastry, filled with nuts and honey. Nissim looked about the coffeehouse, cushions and low tables filled every nook and corner. Almost all were filled at this time of day. Not seeing anyone familiar he slowly sipped his coffee.

As he waited, Nissim reviewed the best ways to bring the cinnamon arrangement to a profitable conclusion. The warehouse where the spice had been stored was some five leagues from where the galley was to dock. Additional transportation costs would have to be incurred. Unless...

The scent of Afet's perfume still lingering with him, forced his thoughts back to her. *What can I do? I love her. But if I take her as a wife, my family would disown me. The Turks and Christians I do*

*business with would no longer trust me. Mashallah, there is no solution. I must stop seeing her!*

Thoughts of his family brought to Nissim's mind stories his father, so many years ago, had related to him.

After being conquered by Muhammad II in 1456, by the reigning Sultan's father, Constantinople, was a devastated, desolated skeleton of a city. The population decimated by siege, and hunger.

Not wanting to allow the defeated Christians to regain their former power, Muhammad II issued a decree of *Surgun*. Which forcibly relocated to Constantinople, the *Romanoit* Jews located in other parts of the empire. Traumatic as the decree was, it was eased by the Sultan's assurance of security, to those being relocated.

Successful merchants and moneylenders, the Behars were forced to leave their business, and their comfortable home in *Monastir*, to make new lives for themselves in Constantinople.

Tales of his grandfather's and uncles' painful struggle to rebuild the success they had previously achieved were many. Unwavering in their faith, in themselves, their abilities, and their religion, they became more successful than they ever could have imagined.

Now the *Porte* itself and all the prestige and influence it provided was accessible to the Behar family. *But what good does it do me?*

"Nissim, Nissim."

The soft voice of Mustufa Hassim roused Nissim from his deep thoughts. Standing before him was a short rotund man wearing the dark blue hat of an Armenian Christian.

"Ah, Mustufa, forgive me. I did not hear or see you," Nissim said. Rising from his cushion, he greeted Mustufa in a proper Muslim way, hugging him and kissing both of his cheeks.

"Do not concern yourself, Nissim. Deep thinking is good for the soul. But such deep thinking could only mean a woman!"

*Was it so obvious?* Nissim thought. And quickly changed the subject.

“So, Mustafa, when exactly will the galley arrive and begin loading the cinnamon?”

“In one week, it will have to be loaded within five days, in order for it to set sail for Venice. There it will unload the cinnamon and take on the European cloth.”

They momentarily stopped their discussion as the waiter served the *Kadayif Dolmasi* and more coffee. Both men broke off pieces of the sweet Turkish pastry and began eating with great enjoyment. Business talk would not resume until both had finished, since Turkish hospitality frowned upon it. As they ate they spoke of the weather. The health of their families. The latest gossip of the Grand Vizier, and other mundane small talk.

After eating, they cleaned the sticky honey residue from their fingers with a scented moist cloth. And renewed their business talk.

“Everything is in order, Nissim. The only problem—which can be solved very quickly—is that of hiring a pilot for the return trip. Since the pilot going to Venice has decided not to return.”

Nissim, deep in thought, did not immediately answer. He simply stared at Mustafa, finally answering, “Then all the bills of lading are in order, the permits cleared, and taxes paid?”

Mustafa smiled at Nissim, shook his head slowly, and replied, “Nissim, you are not listening to me. Your mind is elsewhere.”

Nissim forced himself to concentrate. But his mind kept returning to Afet. He had known Mustafa for a long time, and considered him a friend. Briefly thought about telling him of Afet, but quickly changed his mind. Shaking his head, he quickly replied, “The problem of the pilot can be resolved easily enough, Mustafa.”

“Ah, welcome back, Nissim, I hope whatever is troubling you will be clarified by the time the galley arrives.”

“You can be sure of it, Mustufa.”

Finishing their business, they left the coffeehouse. Agreeing to meet again in two days, before the galley carrying the cinnamon was to arrive.

# Chapter 30

Constantinople  
June 1500

Regina and Benjamin Halavi looked at each other in dismay. Nissim Behar, sobbing softly, had just poured his heart out to them; he loved Afet, wanted to marry her, did not know what to do. He had been unable to bring himself to discuss the subject with anyone. Until this visit with the Halavis. Sensing their happiness, he just blurted out his feelings.

Benjamin started to speak, thought better of it, and just nodded his head in Regina's direction.

"Nissim, if you love her then you must speak to your father. Seek his blessing, marry her!"

"But the shame of my wanting to marry a *Turkish Rayah*. A servant girl. Someone not of my faith, or station. My father would disown me. I would be dead to him."

"Your father loves you, Nissim. If she converts surely he would accept her? The *Judges and Imams* do not object to her converting?" Benjamin asked.

Nissim thought awhile. Then shook his head before answering. "No her status is so low the *Imams* do not consider her a true Ottoman Turk," Nissim replied, as he gained control of himself. "Do you think my father would truly accept her if she converted?"

"I think he would. Has Afet agreed to convert?" Regina asked.

"She is willing to do anything I ask of her. So I suppose she would convert. But who would perform the conversion? The rabbi of my Cal is opposed to all conversions."

"Nissim, I think if you asked, our Rabbi Hachham would perform the conversion. If only for all that you and your family have done for the Cal of Seville," Benjamin quickly answered. "But he is obligated to examine the motives of possible converts. Try to dissuade them if he can. Ask too many questions of them," he sadly added.

Laughing quietly, Regina answered before Benjamin could continue. "Forgive me for laughing, Nissim. But the idea of you...overcome with emotion over a female. Is...somewhat amusing." Becoming serious, Regina continued. "I have never met Afet. But the way you have described her, and your feelings for her, I'm sure she has captured your heart. I am certain she would answer any questions the rabbi asked completely, and truthfully. Certainly with complete love for you, Nissim."

Nissim, taken aback somewhat, thought Regina was right. *What she and Benjamin are saying makes sense.* Nevertheless he still had to convince his father. Soothe the ruffled feathers of the *Romanoit cal's* rabbi. And make sure Afet was in agreement to it all.

Business problems that arose because of the mixed marriage were another matter. He was sure he would be able to solve them. At least it was a beginning of a solution, and that, of itself, brought a measure of relief to him.

Looking at Regina and Benjamin, he was filled with affection and admiration for them. As he was about to tell them how

much better he felt, how he truly appreciated and loved them, he was abruptly interrupted as the door to the house was thrown open, and a little voice shouted with enthusiasm.

"*Tio*—Uncle Nissim," Isaac yelled, running headlong into Nissim's arms, and planting a large kiss on his cheek. "Where have you been for so long, *Tio*. I missed you."

"Hello, little Isaac, I've missed you too," Nissim answered, as he hugged the boy to him.

Admiring the Halavi family, envying their happiness, Nissim resolved that he would do all that was necessary to make Afet his wife.

\* \* \*

*Haim Behar*, patriarch of the Behar family, disappointed and dejected, listened as his son, Nissim, explain his reasons for wanting to marry.

The Behar family, which included two younger brothers, Nissim's uncles, and an older sister, Nissim's aunt, *Tia Cori*, who had raised him after the death of his mother, was like a mother to him now. All of the Behar clan were adamantly against Nissim's proposed marriage. Haim was saddened his only son and child had just informed him that he was going to throw his life away.

Haim said nothing. Diplomat that he was, he showed no emotion. He just let Nissim continue, until he had related all of his plans.

"Am I to understand, Nissim," Haim calmly replied, "you are planning, not only to marry a *rayah*, but one who is nothing more than a Harem girl? How can she possibly be a proper wife? Make you happy? She has seen nothing of the world outside of the Harem."

Haim Behar, a widower, whose wife had died shortly after Nissim's birth, was bitterly disappointed, in Nissim's plans. His emotions mixed, Haim felt, on the one hand, it was time for

Nissim to marry. A grandson would make him very happy. On the other hand, very frustrated at his son's choice of a bride.

Adding to Haim's anxiety was his siblings' unanimous objection to the marriage. The consequences it would have on the family business and wealth, all of which they shared. His sister's disappointment was especially bitter. Since she had raised Nissim after the death of her sister-in-law.

"Papa, I know you are disappointed in the woman I have decided to make my wife. But I love her. I'm sure we will be happy together. The religious differences can be solved by her converting. She has agreed. The Halavis have assured me that the *Sephardic* rabbi, Rabbi Hacham, would perform the conversion."

His frustration increasing, Haim brusquely replied, "So now the *Sephardim* are assuming responsibility for the Greek synagogue's conversions?"

"Only because the *Cal of Monistir*, the 'Greek synagogue' as you have referred to it, refuses. Rabbi Amelak has rejected Afet's conversion. All arguments and reasons I have put forth he denies. He will not even speak to Afet."

Reference to Rabbi Amelak and the *Cal de Monistir* provoked Haim Behar. The *Cal de Monistir* was one of the oldest synagogues in Constantinople. Destroyed and rebuilt many times. It was one of the few synagogues to have originally been built during the *Byzantine* era. Set in its ways, and clinging to its ancient *Romanoit* ceremonies, it had become a stagnant relic. Rabbi Amelak's arrival did nothing to change its condition.

With the arrival of the *Sephardim*, the *Cal de Monistir*, seemed to have been reborn. The newcomers brought a revival of spirit. A new religious zeal. But, as is the case in most human endeavors, especially religious ones. Personalities began to clash, traditional differences arose, and the *Sephardim* began to leave. To form their own synagogues. With the flight of its newfound spiritual base, the *Cal de Monistir* reverted to its old



ways, its old ceremonies. And now again, was just a relic of what it had once been.

Highly regarded members of the synagogue, the Behars were overjoyed at its brief renewal. Now Haim was concerned at its renewed decline. Haim, as he listened to Nissim, sensed the seed of an idea taking shape.

If the synagogues could once again merge, differences smoothed over, traditional disagreements resolved, then a problem larger than Nissim's Turkish *rayah* might be solved.

"Nissim, I want you to arrange a meeting with myself, and Rabbis Hacham and Amelak. It's to take place the day after tomorrow. A solution to your marriage yearnings may be within reach. However you must pacify your aunt and uncles. And complete whatever else may be necessary."

Almost reading his father's mind regarding "whatever else" meant, Nissim said, "I have already spoken to *Ibrahim ben Saldin, Vizier of Balat*. He assures me the marriage is of no consequence to any of the *Pashas*, or the *Valide Sultan* herself. As long as the Jewish *Millet—community of Balat*—continues to pay their required taxes, a Jew desiring to marry a poor harem girl is of no concern to the *Porte*."

Smiling, Haim responded, "So you have really been thinking this through, Nissim?"

"Yes, Papa. Does this meeting with the rabbis mean I have your blessing?"

Hugging his son to him, Haim answered, "Only if you can convince them to put aside their differences!"

"With your help, I'm sure they will be convinced," Nissim laughingly replied.

# Chapter 31

**Constantinople  
September 1500**

Haim Behar, sipping hot Turkish coffee, silently observed both rabbis, each putting forth their many reasons, why the two synagogues should not join again. Concluding, no solution would be reached by the arguments he was hearing, Haim interrupted the discussion.

“You both have valid points, but you must consider the community, the congregants. Would they not be better served by two rabbis, who shared their knowledge, and interpretations of the Torah? Would that not relate a better understanding of our prayers?”

Rabbi Hacham, finishing his coffee, answered, “You are correct, Haim, but liturgical differences aside, most important to members of the community is actually being and feeling a part of that community.”

"And I agree," Rabbi Amelak replied. "But what kind of a community? We must be firm in our *Pesak Halakah*, our interpretations of the law. Especially regarding conversions!"

"What are your objections to the conversion of this woman?" Rabbi Hacham asked.

"She is nothing but a harem girl, a...a..." Unable to speak of anything sexual, Rabbi Amelak stuttered and stammered.

"She is just a servant. Her duties are serving maid to the *Valide Sultan*. Nothing more," Haim added.

Rabbi Hacham, becoming excited, continued, "It is not for us to judge her. We must only be sure her reasons for converting are real and honorable. The love of a man is a justifiable reason, and within our laws."

For the next three hours the debate went on. Each rabbi, making and conceding various points of Jewish law.

As the arguing concluded, both rabbis sought Haim's opinion. It was to be Haim Behar's greatest diplomatic victory. Using all of his artful skills with utmost competence, he managed to convince both rabbis that coming together again would benefit both the *Cal de Seville* and the *Cal de Monistir*.

\* \* \*

Nissim listened closely as his aunt, *Tia Cori*, enumerated her reasons for rejecting his choice of a bride. Her main concern was Afet's status. A serving maid; the fact that she was a *rayah* did not seem to matter. *Tia Cori* was like a mother to him, and hurting her was causing him infinite sadness.

*But I have no choice, he thought. I love Afet, that's all that matters. She has agreed to convert, and will do all that is asked of her. I have to make Tia Cori understand. And if I can convince her, then Tio Bohor, and Tio Sabetay would probably agree to the marriage.*

Although not the superb diplomat his father was, Nissim had grown up at his side, and he had learned well. Using his most persuasive and skillful arguments, he gently asked *Tia Cori* to

accept Afet. For his sake, because he truly loved her. He assured Cori, that she too would learn to love Afet once she got to know her.

Looking into Nissim's eyes, Tia Cori sensed the intense feelings of his words. How much he adored Afet. *I will not deny him what he truly wants.* She gently took Nissim's face in her hands, kissed both of his cheeks, softly whispered, "I will do what you ask, Nissim. Because...I love you. And will try to learn to love Afet as well."

Overjoyed, Nissim hugged his aunt, and whispered, "Thank you, Tia Cori, thank you!"

\* \* \*

The wedding took place on June 6, 1501. One month after Afet completed her conversion. It was a wedding ceremony unlike any the Greek or Sephardic communities had ever experienced. And it would it never be forgotten.

As Nissim broke the glass symbolizing the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, indicating the conclusion of the ceremony, Afet lifted her veil. And in perfect Hebrew, taught to her by Regina Halavi, began reciting to Nissim, the following:

*"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."*

After a prolonged silence, Nissim took Afet into his arms, placed a fervent kiss on her lips, and whispered, "And I will love you until time is no more."

Tia Cori, tears rolling down her cheeks, thought, *Never will I doubt my decision regarding Nissim's marriage. It was the right one!*

Both rabbis were too surprised and shocked to object. They merely exchanged shrugs, indicating that they too, thought the marriage was a good one.

# Chapter 32

**Constantinople**  
**April 1504**

Sitting at the Passover table, concluding the last of the festive meal, the *Haggadah*—the story of the exodus from Egypt of the Jewish people—having been read, the Halvavi family, along with their invited guests, enjoyed the last of the four cups of wine required by the Seder service.

Singing songs of the holiday, along with ballads of their former home, brought tears to the eyes of all. Even the youngest, who had never experienced life in *España*.

Before ending the festivities, Benjamin began reading the history of the Halavi journey from Seville to Constantinople, the tale that David Halavi had compiled, recounting the family's journey. Beginning the reading of this narrative, at the first Seder celebrated in Turkey, it had been his wish that the family continue the custom, and add to the chronicle as necessary.

Benjamin finished the reading, and concluded the service. The traditional greeting at the end of the *Seder* service is a wish for everyone to celebrate Passover—*Next Year in Jerusalem*. For

the *Sephardim* now living in Turkey, Spain was, and would be forever thought of as their home, the land of their birth. As time dimmed memories, life in *España* would be remembered as fuller, sweeter, happier, and more complete.

But life goes on. In the years that had passed since their arrival in Constantinople, Benjamin and Regina's family had grown to four children, two boys and two girls. The printing of many books continued. The family and business flourished. Their friendship with Nissim and Afet was strong, and both were considered family.

Life for the *Sephardim* in the Ottoman lands was good. Would remain so, for almost the next one hundred years. Future generations would remember these years, with the same nostalgia and longing that their parents, and grandparents had had for their years in Spain. The future appeared bright. But Messianic winds were beginning to blow. Apocalyptic conceptions beginning to form. For the Jews of Turkey these ideas would inspire the zeal of redemption, and the disappointment of a false Messiah.

# Chapter 33

**Cordoba**

**November 1501**

*Don Juan Sanchez de La Casa* paused in his writing to collect his thoughts. How was it possible that Christobal Colon's third voyage to the New World could end in such misfortune? The admiral sent home shackled, and in shame.

Unable to quell a revolt of the colonists in the new city of *Santa Domingo*, Colon was relieved of command by Ferdinand and Isabel. They then appointed *Francisco de Bobadilla* as royal commissioner. Upon his arrival in Santa Domingo, *Bobadilla* had Colon arrested and sent back to Spain.

Now Juan was writing a letter to their Majesties in Colon's defense, asking that he be released and returned to his former status.

As he continued to write, he considered himself very lucky. He had refused Colon's offer to accompany him on this third voyage. A voyage that ended in complete disaster.

His marriage to Francisca, on the other hand, was wonderful. She was a remarkable woman. His only regret, they had been unable to have any children. But that emptiness was softened by their relationship with *Diego Jesus de Cortes*. They both loved the boy very much, went to Medellin as often as they could. Diego in return adored them.

Completing the letter, he rose to stoke the fire, and add another log. The winter chill was causing pain in all of his joints.

As he was adjusting the fire, his wife Francisca entered the study, quietly asking, "Juan, have you finished your work?" as she gently kissed his forehead. "When do you think we will be leaving for Medellin?"

"Not for a few days, possibly a week, I still must complete my report for the medical guild."

Heating the wax seal which was embossed with his personal coat of arms, he sealed the letter to the King and Queen.

"There. I hope it does some good for Colon, he deserves better."

"Well I always thought he was strange. Voicing those peculiar remarks of his at the most inopportune times."

Laughing, Juan replied, "Yes that was one of his eccentricities. However, bear in mind, his discovery has made Spain a richer, greater nation."

Juan did not reveal his belief that the utterances were really part of Colon's secret Jewish past. Intensely hoping, if they were, as he believed, they would never be disclosed!

Francisca, silent for a long minute, suddenly said, "I miss Diego very much. I wish he would come and live with us for a while."

"Francisca, we have spoken of this many times," Juan softly said. "Diego is part of the Cortes family. Eva and Martine love him. He is happy there, and he adores Hernan."

"And exactly my reason for wanting him here. With Hernan studying at the university, Diego must be lonely. Surely a change of scenery would be good for him."



Agreeing she had a point, Juan added, "But you must agree to limit his stay with us. We will talk more on the way to Medellin. Now you must begin your packing if we are to leave next week."

Accepting the compromise offered by her husband, Donna Francisca kissed him on the cheek, and whispered, "*Gracias, mi amour*—thank you, my love," as she left him to begin her packing.

\* \* \*

*Diego Jesus de Cortes* sat at the window dejectedly looking at the rain. Disappointed because the rain prevented his recently acquired morning activity—riding his favorite horse *El Diablo*.

Diego, at nine years old, was big for his age. Dark haired with the blue eyes of his mother, and the quick intelligence of his father, he possessed a keen mind, and a healthy inquisitiveness.

He relied on his brother, Hernan, to answer all of the questions his natural curiosity evoked. Hernan always treated him as an equal.

Taking him into his confidence, Hernan explained, to the best of his ability, Diego's never-ending queries. Aware of Diego's origins, Hernan never alluded to them. He always treated Diego as a part of the family. Diego, in return, adored his brother. And no matter how much Hernan teased or jokingly ridiculed him, he never stopped loving, or respecting his brother.

Recalling how Hernan had tricked him into taking his first ride on a horse, Diego laughed out loud.

One sunny day just three months ago, while both were grooming the horses, Hernan told him to, "just sit on *El Diablo*," so that he and the horse could become acquainted. Then with Diego unaware, Hernan smacked the horse's backside. The horse reared, racing through the stable, and Diego was off on the ride of his life.

Holding on with all of his strength, and screaming at the top of his lungs, Diego terrified, flew through the stable area, and on

towards a stand of olive trees. Hernan, laughing, suddenly realized that he had made a terrible mistake. Mounting his horse, he spurred it on in the direction that Diego was heading. Yelling at the top of his lungs for him to hang on, riding as hard as he could, Hernan felt he would not be able to reach Diego in time.

Then miraculously, without really knowing how he did it, Diego managed to gain control of the horse, and slow it down just before reaching the grove of olive trees.

Galloping up, Hernan grabbed the reins of Diego's horse, and brought it to a stop.

"*Ay de mi*," Diego yelled, as he leaped off the horse and fell to his knees.

Hernan silently gave thanks that the boy had not been seriously hurt. He dismounted, and put his arms around Diego's shoulders.

"*Cabeza de burro*—donkey head. Why did you do that?" Diego shouted. Relieved, Hernan began laughing so hard, that tears came to his eyes. Seeing his brother's reaction, Diego began laughing as well.

"Now that you are a horseman, let's continue our ride," Hernan said, slapping his brother on the back.

Diego, with a large measure of trepidation, climbed back on the horse, and laughingly yelled to Hernan, "And you keep your hands off my horse's ass!"

From that day on, Diego constantly rode El Diablo along with his brother and father.

Now Hernan was off to university to study law, and Diego was bored. He missed Hernan. His father busy with the management of the hacienda, was not able to spend enough time with him.

Deciding he was getting hungry, Diego made his way to the kitchen to see if the afternoon meal was ready. He ran into his mother, Eva, who informed him of the meal status.

“Ah, *bueno*, there you are, Diego. It is time to eat, and I have some good news for you.”

“What, Mama, is Hernan coming home?”

“No, no, *hijo*, it is not Hernan. But *Tia Francisca* and *Tio Juan*. They are on their way to visit for a while, that should make you happy.”

Disappointed and elated at the same time Diego shouted, “When, Mama, when?”

\* \* \*

The *de la Casas* arriving in late afternoon, at the Cortes estate, after a week’s coach journey, dusty and tired, were warmly greeted by a very happy Cortes family. Diego, showering them with questions, had to be admonished to allow them to get some rest. There would be time enough tomorrow for all of his questions.

Francisca, very happy at seeing Diego, hugged him to her and whispered, “*A la mañana, hijo*, tomorrow we will visit, and talk.”

# Chapter 34

**Medellin, Extremadura  
December 1501**

Riding along with his Uncle Juan, and his father Martine, Diego was content. The air was cold and invigorating, while the heat of his horse under him made ride comfortably.

Talk of the coming *Navidad* holiday filled him with excitement. This year he would be old enough to light the *Hogueras*—the traditional bonfires. Lit to commemorate the winter solstice—the shortest day of the year, and the start of the *Navidad* festivities. Beginning in early December the holidays concluded in early January.

It also meant that Hernan would be coming home from university. Something Diego was anxiously looking forward to.

Martine had told him he received a message that Hernan was already on his way.

Juan and Martine were conversing intently as they rode. When Juan, pulling on his horse's bridle, suddenly stopped, exclaiming, "*Ay de mi, no!*"

Aware Diego was within earshot, Martine called to him, "Diego, time for you to return home. You have neglected your studies long enough."

"But, Papa..."

"No arguments, young man. You promised, a short ride, then you would study hard until the day before *Hogueras*."

"But, Papa, that's a week away I—"

"Diego..."

"*Si, Papa,*" Diego replied, halting and turning his horse in the direction of the hacienda.

"We will see you at the midday meal," Juan called out.

Waving to his uncle and father, Diego headed for home, and his studies. As he approached the stables, Diego noticed a group of *braceros*—farmhands—talking excitedly. Riding up, he recognized *Manuel Montes*. A *bracero* who had worked for his father for as long as Diego could remember.

"*Que paso, Manuel*—what's going on, Manuel?" Diego called out to him.

"*Ah, buenos dias, Señor Diego*. It is the *Marranos*, the *Romero* family, they were *relaxed* today. The entire family burned at the stake!"

"Burned...? But...why, what did they do to be burned?" Diego asked. Astonished that a whole family, one that he had known, could be destroyed so horribly.

"They were secret Jews, false Christians. The Inquisition sentenced them all to death."

Feeling ill, Diego thanked the *bracero* for his news, and continued to the stables, where he dismounted and walked to the house. He met his mother and aunt as he entered the house.

"Diego, are you alright, you look sick?" his mother asked.

"Yes, you do not look well at all," Francisca echoed his mother.

Diego, confused and upset, could not bring his mind to focus on the fact that someone he had known practically all of his life

was dead. Her life taken in a most horrific way. Maria Romero, her mother, father and sister all gone.

And though the relationship with the Romero family had not been a close one, their deaths greatly affected Diego.

"Mama, why did it happen? Why were they burned?"

"Who, Diego? What are you talking about?" his mother and aunt asked.

"The Romero family, they were all burned today!"

"*Ah Dio*, who told you this?" his mother sternly replied.

"One of the *braceros*...Manuel. I don't feel well, Mama. I am going to lie down."

Following Diego to his room, Eva Cortes was furious. She and Martine had known of the Romero family misfortune. But could do nothing to help them. However, they desperately wanted to keep the news from Diego. Talk of *Marranos*, or secret Jews, was a subject that caused them deep regret. And one they hesitated to discuss with Diego.

Calling one of the maids, Eva told her to mix a tonic of herbs, and to make sure Diego drank it all. Gently kissing his cheek, Eva left him to rest.

Drinking the herbal tonic the maid brought, Diego began to feel sleepy. But his mind was racing. Images of the Romeros being burned to death raced through his mind. He could almost smell the burning flesh.

*Secret Jews! What could that mean? What was a Jew! Why burn them to death? I wish Hernan was here.* With his mind churning, the tonic finally took hold and he fell into a deep sleep.

Silently completing the midday meal without Diego. The usual mealtime chatter he normally provided, missing. The Corteses and *de la Casas* quietly sipped the last of their dessert wines. When Martine Cortes began to apologize for the day's events.

"Forgive me, Juan, Francisca. I should have informed you of the Romeros' situation. Their...passing was to have taken place,

after the *Navidad* festivities. But in matters of the church one can never be sure."

"Well, it is not us you should be concerned with. How will you explain to Diego, he was very upset?" Francisca asked.

Juan, saddened at the whole sorry affair, experienced again the utter despair he had felt at Diego's birth. The hopelessness of spirit, over differing beliefs. At the slaughter of one another over religious differences.

Now Diego had been exposed to the most appalling form of the madness. Juan's concerns centered on his wife, Francisca, and her motherly instinct, concerning Diego. These feelings could become the cause conflict between Eva Cortes, and herself. This he wanted to avoid at all costs.

"Francisca your anxiety for Diego is understandable, but unnecessary," Juan replied. "I'm sure Martine and Eva have thought about the possibility of Diego learning how our culture handles differing points of view. I believe they will be able to explain to him whatever has to be explained."

"But, Juan..."

"Diego will be fine, not to worry, *mi amigos*—my friends."

Martine quickly interrupted. "Now I think it is time for our siesta."

\* \* \*

Riding hard for the past two days, Hernan was assailed by mixed emotions and thoughts. Just a day and half from home, the duel, leaving the *University of Salamanca* under conditions far from ideal; but he had no other choice.

*That fool Torres insisted on fighting. I didn't know the woman was his betrothed. She flirted like a common puta.*

Now *Gilberto Torres* was seriously wounded. And he *Hernan*, unscathed, was close to being expelled from university. *Ay de mi, not a promising start to the Navidad festivities.*

In a about an hour he would reach the inn where he would spend the night. Then a quick day's ride tomorrow, and he would be home. And all the explanations that would be necessary!

One thing was certain, he was not returning to university, not because his studies of law were failing, or because of the duel, the New World had become his new passion. The riches just waiting there for anyone with the courage and strength to possess them. And he was ready to do anything to travel there. Anything!

\* \* \*

Not leaving his room, Diego was unable to rid himself of the despair he was experiencing. Eating little, he slept most of the day. Juan examined him thoroughly, and found nothing physically wrong. He surmised the shock of what he had heard was causing his depression, and suggested he be left alone, time would heal him.

Sipping the broth his aunt was spooning into his mouth, Diego was beginning to feel a little better, the sadness was dissipating, and his appetite was returning.

Diego tried to understand what was making him so sad. But the actual reasons eluded him. His knowledge of other religions was limited, church attendance was sporadic. Home schooled by his mother Eva, his only teacher. Not overly religious, his parents attended church only when necessary. Hernan almost never.

Diego knew his Catholicism well enough. But followed Hernan's example: skeptical acceptance. Now, he was in fact, questioning these religious convictions.

What terrible thing had the Romero family done, that made the religious authorities take their lives in such a horrible way? *If only Hernan were here he would explain it all!*

*"Diego, open your mouth, or I'll spill the soup."*



His aunt's voice roused him from his thoughts, and he quickly did as she asked.

"*Bueno*—good only a few more spoonfuls and you will be done. You should get out of bed, dress, ride your horse, you will feel..."

A commotion outside of the room drew their attention. Then the door flew open and in rushed Hernan. Flushed, sweaty and full of mud. He hugged them both to him and exclaimed, "*Hermanito*—little brother, what are you still doing in bed. Tia Francisca, don't baby him, make him get up."

Rustling Diego's hair and pinching his aunt's cheek, Hernan pulled the covers off Diego and started to drag him out of the bed.

"*Ah Dio!* Hernan, he has no clothes on!" Francisca yelled as she ran from the room.

Laughing for the first time in days, Diego ran to get his clothes. "Hernan, when did you get home?" he shouted as he quickly dressed himself.

"Just awhile ago, come have something to eat with me," Hernan said, as he ushered Diego out of the room.

Sitting at the large dining table, the whole family was beaming. "I told you he would get Diego out of bed," Martine exclaimed to Juan.

"You were right, Martine. Well done, Hernan. And how are you feeling now, Diego?"

"Much better, *Tio*, much, much better."

"Sit both of you, eat," Eva called out.

Doing as they were told, both boys sat, and began eating.

Hernan hungrily ate his food. This was the first decent food he had had in three days. While Diego gingerly pecked away at the *empanada*—*meat pie*, he decided to eat.

Pouring more wine for all, Martine said, "I knew Hernan would make you feel better, Diego. You do feel better, don't you?"

“Si, Papa...yes, I feel much better now that Hernan is home.”

“And what was all this about, little brother, sitting in your room for days? Not eating, worrying your mother and aunt to death?”

Before Diego could answer, Martine cautioned his older son. “Not now, Hernan, it would be best if we discussed Diego’s illness some other time. Don’t you agree, Juan?”

Shaking his head in agreement, Juan started to explain why. Thought better of it, and changed the subject by asking Hernan how his studies were going.

Hernan, reaching for few more *empanadas*, placed them on his plate, smiled and said, “I think it would be best if we also saved that discussion for another day.” Everyone laughed.

# Chapter 35

**Medellin, Extremadura  
December 1501**

Home for the past two weeks, Hernan deftly managed to convince his father that his future did indeed encompass the New World. With the help of his Uncle Juan, Hernan pleaded his case successfully. Plans for his leaving, at the earliest in six months, were being considered.

His duel and subsequent wounding of *Gilberto Torres*, was another matter. Although not illegal, dueling was frowned upon as a means of resolving disputes. Now his uncle's influence would have to be used to its utmost. Juan would write a letter to the *Alcalde Mayor of Medellin*, asking the mayor to intercede on Hernan's behalf, if the Torres family decided to pursue the matter.

Hernan himself was to personally deliver the letter. Ask the *Alcalde* to deliver his sincere apologies to *Gilberto*. Also Hernan promised both his father and uncle to curtail his womanizing.

Of all that was asked of him, Hernan knew the loss of female companionship would be the hardest to maintain.

Diego, excited at his brother's return, seemed over his melancholy. He participated in the *Hogueras*, and was eagerly looking forward to the rest of the *Navidad* festivities.

Riding to the town of *Medellin*, their horses slowly trotting along the well worn road, Hernan continued explaining to Diego his plans to travel to the New World. To New Spain. Across that vast ocean where an immense fortune awaited. He knew he could convince their father of this worthwhile endeavor. Much more important than university!

Diego, somewhat familiar with the New World, strived to understand why Hernan wanted to put himself in such danger. How much he would miss him. *Tio* Juan himself had been there. Both boys had enjoyed tales of *Indios*, exotic plants, the vast mysterious ocean, and other adventures that their uncle had related. But most important, for Diego, was his need to talk about the *Romeros*. *The reason for their deaths, who were the Jews!*

His parents refused to discuss the subject. His aunt and uncle seemed ill at ease when he broached the subject with them. He was sure Hernan would be able to answer all of his questions.

Waiting for his brother to finish, Diego finally blurted out, "Why did they burn the *Romeros*?"

"You mean the *Converso* pigs, they should have been dealt with a long time ago."

Surprised at Hernan's reply, Diego asked, "But why, Hernan, why!"

"Because they took false vows. They continued to practice their vile religion, while professing to be Christians. They did it only to save themselves from being expelled."

"I don't understand, Hernan, why were they being expelled? For what reason?"

He patiently explained to his brother the Expulsion Edict, when it took place, and how Jews who wanted to remain in Spain converted to Catholicism. Some took their vows seriously

and became good Christians. While others like the Romeros continued to practice their Jewish religion in secret. That was the reason for the Inquisition. To expose any false Christians.

As Hernan continued to speak, Diego noticed a hardening of his features. An anger he had never perceived in his brother before.

"Everyone suspected the Romeros. But chose to do nothing. Their wealth and influence protected them. Still the inquisition did its job well enough."

A worried and bewildered Diego listened, then asked, "But how did everyone know, Hernan. I never saw any of the Romeros performing odd rituals, or acting in unusual ways."

"You did not know what to look for, Diego. *Marranos* will not eat cheese with their meat, will not light a fire on their Sabbath. Pork will never touch their lips. Unleavened bread is eaten on their Passover. Anyone who acts in this manner, should be suspected."

"But, Hernan—"

"Enough, Diego. I grow weary talking of the Romeros. We must get to *Medillin* and deliver these letters to the *Alcalde Mayor*. Papa and *Tio* Juan will skin us alive if we don't. Stop your worrying, the filthy *Marranos* deserved whatever punishment they received."

Diego, quietly complying, stopped talking, as they continued to the *Alcalde Mayor's* office.

Arriving at their destination, they tied their horses to a nearby tree, and entered the mayor's office. There they delivered the letters to the *Alcalde's* effeminate secretary, *Señor Jose Martinez*, who wished them and their families a "*Feliz Navidad*." He also explained that the mayor would not be back until after the holidays. Hernan greatly relieved he would not have to apologize personally to the mayor, returned the greeting as he and Diego left the office.

Walking to their horses, they paused to allow an elegant coach go by. As it passed Hernan, was struck by the beauty of one of the passengers it carried.

“*Aye de mi,*” he cried. “Hurry, Diego, I have to catch up with the beauty that just went by.”

Mounting their horses they quickly caught up with the coach as it turned into the entry way of an inn a short distance from the mayor’s office. Waiting for the passengers to exit the coach, both boys were a bit disappointed when the first to do so was a handsome well dressed gentleman. Next came an older woman, obviously the duenna.

As *Magdalene Maria de Ortega* stepped out of the coach, Hernan’s heart skipped a beat.

Looking in his direction, as she walked to the inn on the arm of the gentleman, Hernan perceived rather than actually saw — she was beautiful, graceful, and everything he desired in a woman. Nudging Diego, Hernan, loudly exclaimed, “It’s time for a meal at the inn.”

Leaving the horses with the stable keeper they entered the inn. Found a table, and ordered some food.

Questioning the innkeeper about the people who had just entered, they were informed that the gentleman was *Don Tomas de Ortega*. A very important dignitary. Who was traveling to Cordoba with his daughter, and her duenna.

Hernan was familiar with the name. Señor de Ortega was the Revenue Collector for the *Medellin* area. Although he had never met him, he had heard stories of *Ortega’s* fairness and honesty.

Learning who the father was, filled Hernan with elation. His father or uncle would certainly be able to arrange for Hernan to call on the daughter.

When their food arrived, Diego hungrily devoured his *tapas*, Hernan simply stared into space. Finishing his food, Diego asked his brother if he was going to eat.

“No, no, you can have my *tapas,*” Hernan answered, continuing to stare, saying nothing.

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"*Hermano*—brother, we have a three hour ride home, you should eat something," Diego chided his brother.

"I am not hungry, if you are finished, I'll pay and we can leave."

All the way back to the hacienda, Hernan could think of nothing but that *vision of loveliness he had seen*. His plans for traveling to the New World were put on hold—for the time being.

Diego, puzzled by his brother's silence, did not disturb him. He merely rode along silently, his own thoughts and emotions churning within him.

# Chapter 36

## Medellin, Extremadura New Year's Day 1502

Munching on a *churro*—a sweet, filled pastry, Diego sipped his hot chocolate, as his thoughts returned to what he had been told by Hernan. *I must learn more about Marranos, and secret Jews*, he thought, again beginning to feel depressed.

Hardly noticing his mother and aunt, as they swiftly moved about the kitchen directing the servants, preparing for the *Año Nuevo*—New Year's day meal.

Last night—*Nochevieja*—New Year's Eve, the whole family, along with the household servants, celebrated the ending of one year, and *Año Nuevo*—the beginning of a new one.

The evening had begun with a festive meal, along with drinking much *cava*—a pleasing sparkling wine. Followed by delicious desserts made with almonds and honey. The festivities continued through the night with many toasts made to the *Patron* and *Patrona*, their families, and guests. Wishes for a good, happy and prosperous new year echoed through the house till the early morning hours.



Unable to stay awake till midnight, Diego had fallen asleep at about eleven-thirty. Aunt Francisca, with the help of one the servants, got him to bed. And even with all the noise Diego managed to sleep all night.

Awaking early, he made his way to the kitchen. There he was greeted, "*Buenos, Año Nuevo,*" by the cook, as she served his *churro* and hot chocolate.

A short while later his mother and aunt emerged from their rooms. Cautioning Diego about eating too many *churros*, they then began issuing instructions to the cook, and the other servants.

Finishing his small breakfast, Diego left the kitchen and headed for a more tranquil space—his father's library. There he expected to find a book that would clarify, for him, what he had been told by Hernan regarding *Marranos*. And hopefully, the easing of his persistent troubled thoughts.

Entering the library, Diego looked at a number of books he did not fully understand. Continuing to peruse the many volumes available, he chanced on one called *The Zeal of Christ Against Unbelievers*.

Written in the fifteenth century by a converted Jew. It maintained that survival of Christianity required converting all non-believers to the true faith. It explained the Jewish-Christian link, and provided a comprehensive description of the Jewish faith. It also praised Jewish translators for allowing Arabic knowledge to be disseminated to the non-Arabic world, via their translations of Arabic scholarship. Although his grasp of what he was reading was marginal, he was beginning to get a sense of the religious differences he had encountered.

*Jews were not devils, or evil beings. Jesus himself had been born a Jew!*

Continuing to read and struggling to comprehend, Diego's study was interrupted by his mother's voice calling him to get ready for the *Año Nuevo* meal.

\* \* \*

Gathered at the holiday table, the Cortes and de La Casa families were enjoying the festive holiday meal. Everyone was eating with much pleasure and gusto, wine glasses were refilled many times. All, that is except Hernan.

Hernan, still intoxicated with *Maria de Ortega*, picked at his food, and said little. Impatient, almost unable to wait until the end of the *Navidad* holiday, Hernan was attempting, in his mind, to find a way of explaining to his father, his desire to begin courting *Maria de Ortega*. And most important, the best way to approach the Ortega family.

Diego, on the other hand, seemed to have overcome his affliction. Reading the books in the library had given him some relief. His appetite returned. He was laughing more, and seemed his old self.

As the main part of the meal was coming to an end, *Señor Cortes* tapped on a glass to get everyone's attention, and announced: "Time for the *Ceremonia de Los Angeles*—Ceremony of the Angels. Diego, come light the candles, and recite the Psalm."

This simple ceremony started after Diego had become part of the family, and was *Eva* and *Martine Cortes'* secret tribute to Diego's parents.

The ceremony consisted of the lighting of two candles, and the reciting of Psalm 23. All of which Diego performed. He was told he was honoring his guardian angels, and he accepted the ceremony without question. Hernan, if he thought the ceremony was strange, never mentioned it. His only response was to tease Diego about it. Diego, completing the ceremony, returned to his seat.

"Bravo, Diego," his Uncle Juan shouted.

"*Muy bueno*—very good, Diego," his father remarked, as he began to pour more wine for everyone.

"So, Hernan, why are you so quiet? Too much holiday for you?" his Aunt Francisca commented.

"No, *Tia*, I just have a lot on my mind, and I am a bit tired. So I think I'll take my siesta a little early," he answered, as he left the table.

Surprised at Hernan's early departure, both Martine and Francisca spoke almost at the same time.

"Eh, Diego, what's troubling your brother?" Martine's voice silenced Francisca.

Hesitating before answering, Diego quickly blurted out, "I think it's the beautiful *Señorita* we saw in Medellin. The daughter of *Don Tomas de Ortega*."

Hearing the Ortega name, Martine became alert.

"What do you mean, Diego?"

Explaining the chance meeting, the information they received from the innkeeper, Diego continued. "She was beautiful, Papa. Hernan could hardly speak after he saw her."

"A new infatuation of Hernan's? She sounds intriguing," Francisca asked, of no one in particular.

*Ay de mi. Of all the women in Medellin, why the Revenue Collector's daughter!* Martine thought.

The *de Ortega* name was a very old one. Although one with a *Converso* lineage.

Observing the look of panic in both Martine and Eva's faces, Juan gently asked, "Why do you look so concerned? Surely Hernan is old enough to decide if he wishes to pursue a particular female. From the sound of it, he seems really smitten. And what could be so wrong with the Revenue Collector's daughter?"

Glancing in Diego's direction, Martine carefully said, "Their *limpieza de sangre*—*purity of blood*, is questionable. Even though their descendants were baptized many years ago, it will always be an issue. Hernan cannot see this girl, nor form any kind of relationship." Again looking at Diego, he continued, "Forgive me, Juan, but I must discuss this with Hernan only."

Reaching for the wine decanter, Martine smiled and said, "Now, one more glass of wine before we take our siesta."

As he abruptly changed the subject, Eva and Francisca nodded their heads in agreement.

A fleeting sense of sadness washed over Diego as he made his way to his room. *Why does the talk of converted Jews make me feel this way?*

# Chapter 37

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**January 1502**

With the celebration of *Los Reyes Magos*—*Three Kings Day*, on January sixth, the *Navidad* merriment concluded. And on January seventh all of Spain returns to its established routines and looks forward to next year's festivities.

For Juan and Francisca, it meant the end of their visit to Medellin. And a return to their home in Cordoba, and their customary labors. Although with one important exception: Diego would accompany them.

Francisca, pointing out Diego's recent melancholy, used her most convincing arguments, and persuaded Martine and Eva that Diego would benefit from a visit with them. Martine quickly agreed. Eva, although reticent, finally agreed as well.

Diego himself viewed the visit with mixed emotions. Always enjoying visiting Cordoba, he did not want to leave Hernan.

After long talks with Martine and Hernan, both explained they had pressing problems that needed looking after, and for that reason would not be able to spend much time with him.

And finally, that they both felt the change would do him good.

Diego, still assailed by many doubts, and fears, finally consented to leave with his aunt and uncle.

Anxious to speak to his father regarding the *Ortegas*, Hernan impatiently waited for the holiday to end. As he continued to brood, the mere mention of the subject brought stony stares from his parents. Adding to his discomfort, bad weather delayed for a week the departure of the *de la Casas*.

Then with a mixture of sadness, love, and uneasiness, Hernan, and his parents bid Diego goodbye. On the fifteenth of January, he along with the *de la Casas* left for Cordoba. Eva and Martine explaining to Diego, that they would miss him, and promising to write.

As soon as the departing coach was out of sight. Martine asked Hernan to join him in the library. Eva, dreading the dispute she knew was to come, made her way to the kitchen.

Pouring some wine for Hernan and himself, Martine began to explain. "Hernan, there are two reasons why I would not discuss the *de Ortegas* with you. One, I did not want to create a scene in front of your aunt and uncle. And two, since the Romero family incident, Diego has been very upset."

Hernan, puzzled, asked, "I don't understand, Papa. What has Diego to do with the *Ortegas*, or the *Romeros*. And why would it upset him?"

Hesitating, as if to collect his thoughts, Martine continued, "Listen to me, Hernan, the *limpieza de sangre* of the *de Ortegas* is questionable. I forbid you to have anything to do with them."

Angered, at his father's words, Hernan felt his blood begin to boil, as he began to shout, "Papa...he is the collector of taxes. He could never have reached such an eminent position if he was a false Christian. But even if he is, I don't care. I want to begin courting the Ortega's daughter."

Trying to keep his voice as calm as possible, Martine replied, "I knew you would react this way, Hernan, that's why I waited

for *Tio* and *Tia* to leave. I am thankful that Diego is with them. Talk of *Conversos* is extremely upsetting for him. Why? I do not know. Maybe being an orphan has something to do with it. In any event, for you to fully understand my reasons for refusing your wish to court Ortega's daughter, you must understand how important *limpieza de sangre* is. A tainted ancestry will prevent you or your children from ever achieving any measure of success. The Ortega family converted many years ago. They have been faithful Catholics for the last one hundred years. Señor Ortega is a fine and honest gentleman. I'm sure his daughter is a fine lady. But that said, does not change their *limpieza de sangre*."

Stopping to again collect his thoughts, Martine sadly continued, "Why do you think he has never become revenue collector for a large city like Seville, or Madrid, intelligent as he is?"

Starting to speak, Hernan was silenced by his father.

"His *Converso* roots that's why! For you to associate with this family will only end in sadness and failure."

Hernan, listening, became angry and disappointed, yet he was fascinated as well. Diego's background had never been mentioned by his parents before. What could that mean?

But more important right now, he felt, was to convince his father. He was determined to begin courting Maria, no matter what!

Fighting his restless energy and anger. Hernan again began speaking, very quietly. "Papa, I know you are concerned for me, my future. But I am old enough to make my own decisions. I want to begin courting *Maria de Ortega* as soon as I can! All I ask is that you write a letter of introduction to Señor de Ortega, asking his permission for me to court his daughter. No member of the Ortega family has ever been brought before an *Inquisitional Court*. No accusations have ever been made against them. That for me, is evidence enough, that their Jewish roots

have been successfully severed. If the courtship ends in marriage, I will be very happy. If not, I will have had the opportunity of pursuing a beautiful *Señorita*."

With mounting passion, and a quivering voice, Martine replied, "Do not speak lightly of the Inquisition. There are many secret ways of detecting heretics. You did not witness the terrible punishment the Romeros suffered. Are you willing to risk the same fate?"

Hernan, beginning to become angry again, answered, "The Inquisition cannot harm me. My faith in the holy church is strong, and I'm sure it would never question the Ortegas' devotion."

Sensing Hernan's anger, and knowing how stubborn he could become, Martine decided he would try one final argument to dissuade him.

"Your plans for the New World, do you intend to abandon them. If you marry, your new bride may not find the New World very hospitable."

Hearing those words Hernan's confidence in himself was shattered. Desperately he sought some way to convince his father, and himself, that going to the New World, and having a new bride was still possible, as he stammered, "Father, I..."

"Answer me, Hernan. I have been making inquiries regarding passage to the New World. Should I discontinue these inquiries, while you pursue this *señorita*. Or should I give them up entirely?"

Hernan, searching for some way to explain, began haltingly to justify for Martine his need for both, when, in a burst of clarity, he had the compromise he was looking for.

"I realize, Papa, that both are not possible, *at this time*. But with your help, and the grace of God, I *shall* achieve all that I am striving for. Write the letter for me. If *Don Tomas* refuses my request, then I shall continue my life in the New World. But if he consents to my courting his daughter, and I am successful, I will marry, the New World will have to wait."



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Reluctantly, Martine, troubled, realized that what Hernan had proposed was the best he could have hoped for, and decided he would write to *Señor Tomas de Ortega*.

*"Muy bueno*—very good, Hernan, I will do as you ask. I hope you will not bring shame to the Cortes' name," he softly uttered as he hugged Hernan to him.

*"Gracias*—thank you, Papa. I will never do anything to dishonor the family," Hernan replied as he returned his father's embrace. All thoughts of Diego forgotten.

# Chapter 38

**Cordoba**

**February 1502**

The city of *Cordoba*, where Muslim, Jew, and Christian once lived in peace, was a symbol of the tolerance and understanding that at one time pervaded the Iberian Peninsula. Now only remnants of that auspicious era were to be encountered.

From the *Tower of Calahorra* to the *Mezquita-Cathedral*—the mosque rebuilt as a church—Diego was enthralled by it all. His days were filled with numerous visits to historic sites. Along with talks with Juan and Francisca, Diego was beginning to understand the history of Spain. And the effects of that history.

Today they were going to visit the *Alcazar de Los Reyes*. The castle which the King and Queen used as their summer home.

Making sure both Diego and Juan had dressed in warm clothing, Francisca donned her own coat as they all made their way to a waiting coach.

Riding along for a short while, as the coach was making its way through the *Zoco*, the street market. They passed a large building that was apparently undergoing some renovation, since it was surrounded by many scaffolds.

Looking out the window, Diego observed some workmen, struggling to remove a large six pointed star located at the roof of the building.

“What is that?” he cried.

Both Juan and Francisca looked at each other. Then Juan slowly nodded to her, as he began to explain.

“The building is an old synagogue. The *Cal de Cordoba*, I think it was called. The star is a Jewish symbol. Referred to as a ‘Star of David.’ The building is now being converted to a church.”

Pausing to see how Diego reacted to this information, Juan continued. “Once the Expulsion Edict was enforced, Jews that chose not to convert, left. Leaving their synagogues, schools, shops to be taken over by revenue collectors, in the King and Queen’s name. Many left with only the clothes on their backs.”

Shaking his head in dismay, Diego forlornly asked, “I don’t understand, Uncle, if the different faiths in Cordoba lived in peace years ago, why did it change? Why are we, only Christians, living here now? Where did the others go?”

Juan hesitated in order to formulate an answer Diego would understand but was interrupted as Francisca loudly began speaking, her frustrations concerning Diego causing her to speak without thinking.

“*Hijo*, the King and Queen have decreed it to be so! After so many years of battling the Moors, it was their wish—no their command—that all of *España* be Catholic. The choice given to non-believers was a just one; accept the true faith and remain, or reject it and leave. Those who chose to remain, were honor bound to truthfully follow the faith. Those who took their vows unfaithfully and would secretly return to their old ways, were to be punished severely.”

Stopping to catch her breath, Francisca continued. “That is why the Romeros received the punishment they justly deserved. Your father...”

Juan stunned at Francisca's outburst, hoarsely whispered to her, "Francisca, mind your tongue, do not speak of such things, remember..."

Quickly realizing her mistake, and the effect it would have on Diego. She began speaking in hushed tones. "Diego...Juan, forgive me I didn't mean to speak of...the...Romeros."

Taking Diego into her arms, she continued whispering apologies, as she kissed and embraced him.

The rest of the journey to the *Alcazar* continued in silence. All were lost in their own thoughts.

Returning home in the early evening—the rest of the day had gone fairly well. The visit to the Alcazar was interesting, and everyone seemed to have forgotten Francisca's flare-up. All were very tired after the day's outing, and Juan was in pain as well. His arthritis becoming more of a problem every day.

Preparing himself for bed, Diego began thinking about his aunt's emotional words. Whose father was she talking about? Remembering the old synagogue that was being turned into a church, sent chills down his spine, as well as an almost unbearable sadness. *I want to go home*, he thought. *I miss Hernan, Momma, Papa.*

Climbing into bed, trying to rid himself of the melancholy he was feeling, Diego fell into a fitful sleep. A sleep, with dreams filled of *quemadoras*, and burning synagogues.

Both the *de la Casas*, as well, spent a night of restless sleep.

\* \* \*

Hernan was troubled, he had asked Martine to write to Don Tomas three weeks ago. No reply had been received, no word at all. Martine tried to reassure Hernan, Don Tomas was a busy man, he had other pressing matters to attend to. He would surely reply once he found the time.

Hernan refused to accept this. Had made up his mind that if no word was received from Don Tomas by the end of February, he would confront him. He would elicit a reply, one way or the other.

Martine, with much arguing, tried to change Hernan's mind.

But was unsuccessful. Hernan was becoming more sullen as each day passed, without word from Don Tomas. It was into this dismal situation that Diego returned home, accompanied by the La Casas.

# Chapter 39

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**March 1502**

Martine and Eva were at their wits' end. Just yesterday, they and the *de la Casas* had almost persuaded Hernan not to confront Don Tomas. Suggesting that waiting for a reply, no matter how long it took, was the way of a gentleman. Hernan, angry and morose, after much debate, finally agreed, leaving, saying he would return sometime this evening.

Diego, upset at his brother's behavior—he had never seen Hernan behave so disrespectfully to his parents, his aunt and uncle—was glad to be home. Yet saddened at the unhappiness he was witnessing.

Juan and Francisca had not returned to Cordoba because of Juan's arthritis, which had worsened to the point where traveling would cause him too much pain.

Today though, his pain had lessened. And arrangements were being made for a coach to take him and Francisca back to Cordoba.

As Francisca began her packing, she was joined by Eva, who began helping. After a short while Eva began sobbing.

"*Ay de mi!* Hernan won't listen, he is so stubborn. If he insists on having his way I see nothing but misfortune."

"Eva, Eva, do not trouble yourself so. Hernan is Hernan. He does not think, he just acts. I'm sure Juan and Martine will be able to make him understand. He must wait for Señor Ortega's answer." Francisca tried comforting her.

"You are right, Francisca, but..." Interrupted by a servant before she could finish, Eva listened, as the servant explained that a message had been delivered from Señor De Ortega. *El Patron* had the message, and he asked that she join him in the library.

Quickly making their way to the library, both Eva and Francisca felt confident, that the news would make Hernan very happy.

Entering the library, both women noticed the somber mood of Martine and Juan.

"*Que paso, Martine*— what does Señor De Ortega write?" Eva asked.

Shaking his head as he began to answer, Martine softly said, "He forbids Hernan or anyone else from courting his daughter. She is betrothed to another. She marries in a year."

"*Ah, Dio.* Hernan will be heartbroken," Eva began. "I know he will do something reckless once he is told about her betrothal."

"It will be very difficult for him to accept this news," Juan agreed. "What if he was far away from here...what if he came back to Cordoba with us?"

Eva, realizing Juan's thought was an excellent idea, agreed, "Yes, Juan, if he is in Cordoba with you, I think—"

"No, Eva," Martine interrupted. "Juan, I appreciate your offer of help. However, Hernan must honor Señor De Ortega's decision, as he promised. I will now double my efforts to find

him passage to the New World. I think he will find much to occupy him—there.”

Eva reluctantly agreed. Her eager wish was to see Hernan married, and in Spain, not in some far-off strange land. But knowing her son and his temperament, she concurred.

Francisca, although sympathizing with both Martine and Eva, felt Diego was the one who would be suffering the most. She hesitated for a brief moment before speaking her mind.

“I think it would be best for Diego if he returned with us to Cordoba, just until Hernan accepts the situation.”

Diego who had been sitting in the library and quietly observing all that was happening, quickly spoke up.

“No, Tia, I will not leave Hernan, he will be sad and upset.”

“But, Diego...” Francisca began to answer.

Eva, speaking before Francisca could continue, said, “He is right, he should not leave. His home is *here* with his family. Even if there is disagreement. He must learn that a family’s love will protect him, no matter what.”

Seeing his mother’s sadness, and his aunt’s dismay, Diego ran to both, embraced them, and said, “Momma, *Tia*, I love you both very much, but I must stay, and be with Hernan.”

\* \* \*

Returning home that evening after consuming much wine, Hernan, indifferent, accepted Señor De Ortega’s answer. And quietly went to bed. Two days later the *de la Casas* left for Cordoba. Diego remained in Medellin.



# Chapter 40

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**July 1502**

Expecting the worst, Martine and Eva Cortes were happily surprised, when Hernan, after a week of brooding about, seemed to become his old self. Again riding, and talking with his father. Teasing Diego as he had in the past. He seemed to accept that *Maria de Ortega* was not to be part of his life.

Hernan looked forward to his journey to the New World—Martine had managed to book passage on one of the treasure ships returning to Santo Domingo sometime next June.

He spoke for hours of his coming adventure with whoever he happened to be with. It was now his all consuming passion.

Then one evening in a drunken stupor, the week after the Easter holiday, he ruined it all. And almost ended his life as well.

As *Semana Santa*—holy week, and the ceremony of the Easter holiday itself ended, Hernan along with his companions, released from the vows of the holiday, began drinking excessively.

Consuming large amounts of wine, and *aguardiente*—the wine based anise flavored “*firewater*,” they became extremely drunk, boisterous, and characteristic of men in this condition, began discussing women.

For Hernan the one woman uppermost in his mind was Maria de Ortega. Drunk and full of himself, Hernan decided that he should hear from Maria’s own lips why he was not allowed to court her.

Before anyone could stop him, he had mounted his horse and was headed for the Ortega hacienda. Riding at breakneck speed along the dusty road, dimly lit by the light of a crescent moon, guiding his horse instinctively, he had one thought in mind, Maria!

Arriving at the Ortega hacienda, he looked around, it appeared no one was about, the house itself seemed dark. Dismounting, Hernan was staggering about and began calling Maria’s name.

Then he thought he saw a dimly lit window close to the roof. In a drunken stupor he began climbing up the side of the house. About halfway up, approximately thirty feet from the ground, he lost his footing and fell. Striking his left leg on a low decorative wall, and shattering it.

Fate it seems, is kind to lovers and drunks. In Hernan’s case being a lover and a drunk simultaneously, almost certainly saved him from more serious injury.

Completely relaxed as he fell, he landed in some newly turned soil, soft enough to absorb most of the shock of hitting the ground. Had his leg not struck the wall, his only injuries might have been some scratches and bruises.

Luckily, knowing Hernan too well, his good friend *Jose de Ovando* decided to follow him, arriving just as the groundskeeper, in his nightshirt, pike in hand, was examining Hernan’s broken body.

Jose quickly identifying himself, and realizing Hernan’s injuries were serious, ordered the servant to fetch a cart and

together they managed to place Hernan into it. Tying his horse to the front of the cart, Jose, quickly as he could, made his way to the Cortes hacienda.

Now three months after the incident, Hernan was still in the process of healing. His chance to sail to the New World forfeited—for the time being.

Consumed with worry over Hernan's slow healing, Eva begged Martine to write to Juan de La Casa. Hoping Juan's medical knowledge would help Hernan, they implored him to come as soon as he could.

Not able to leave Cordoba because of business matters, and wanting Francisca to accompany him, Juan replied that he and Francisca would come as soon as they could.

Completing his business at the end of June, the *de la Casas* left Cordoba for Medellin the first week of July. Arriving at the Cortes hacienda late in the evening, very tired. The *de la Casas*, after a short visit with a very grateful Eva and Martine, retired to a much needed night of rest.

Early the next morning, before the morning meal, Juan entered Hernan's room, and began his examination.

Starting to scold Hernan, he thought better of it, and just remarked, "*Hombre*, I hope you have given up *aguardiente* for at least the next ten years."

Speaking very softly, Hernan answered, "You can be sure of that, *Tio*."

Continuing his examination, Juan felt Hernan's head; it was warm. His leg seemed to be healing properly, but the fever continued to return, and that worried him.

Juan had brought with him a new acidic compound he had been working with. Found in willow bark and wintergreen, these compounds seemed to help in reducing fevers. Deciding that if Hernan's fever did not subside, he would ask the Corteses if they thought he should try the new medicine.

Completing his examination of Hernan, he told him he would look in on him later. Instructing the servant caring for Hernan to

apply cool water to his body every few hours, Juan left to join the rest of the family.

Joining everyone in the dining room, Juan gratefully accepted the glass of warmed wine Martine offered.

“So what do you think, Juan?” Martine inquired.

“The bones of the leg seem to be healing properly. However, the fever concerns me. If it does not lessen...”

“What can we do? How can we help him?” Eva frantically interrupted.

“Keep him cool. Rub his body with cool water, alcohol, anything to lower the fever.”

“But, Juan, we have been doing just that, the fever keeps coming back. Isn’t there some kind of herb, or medicine that would help?” Martine hastily replied.

“I’ve been working with some new medicines, but not enough is known about them to conclude if they are safe. If Hernan’s fever does not subside, then with your permission, I will try the new compound.”

“Whatever you think is best, Juan, we trust you completely...” Eva haltingly answered. “Anything that you can do...to help Hernan.”

Listening to the adults as they talked of ways to help heal Hernan, Diego was assailed by a fearful sadness. The thought of Hernan dying filled him with complete despair. A despair that brought prayers to his mind and lips. Not prayers he had learned in church, but simple ones from his heart. Prayers to a merciful God not to take Hernan’s life. Nor for that matter, for Hernan to leave for the New World – without him!

His thinking was interrupted as servants began serving the morning meal – *desayuno*.

Eating little, all appeared to have no appetite for the salted fish, hard boiled eggs, cheese, and various breads being served. Everyone seemed to be concentrating on their wine.

\* \* \*

Two weeks passed, and Hernan's condition remained the same. Although he was beginning to take small amounts of food, the fever continued.

Juan, again examining Hernan, decided that he no longer had any choice. He would try the new medicine immediately.

Mixing a small amount of the acidic powder with some water, he had Hernan swallow it.

"*Aye de mi*. What a horrible taste," Hernan complained, as he managed to get the mixture down with some difficulty.

"Horrible it might be, but it may cure the fever that has been plaguing you," Juan answered.

"I know, Uncle, thank you for all your help, but I feel very sleepy right now."

"*Bueno*—good, you could use the rest. I will return later when you have awakened."

Leaving Hernan's room, he returned to the patio, where the rest of the family was enjoying the warm July sunshine.

Observing Eva's look of concern, Juan immediately sat next to her and began consoling her.

"Eva, you must stop worrying, he is young and very strong. Once the fever is curbed he will make a rapid recovery, trust me!"

"I know you are right, Juan," a sobbing Eva Cortes cried. "But he has been sick for so long, it saddens me to see him so."

Diego, seeing his mother so sad, went to her, put his arms around her neck, and whispered, "Mama, don't be unhappy. I prayed, and I know my prayers will be answered. Hernan will recover...he will be alright."

"*Hijo mio*—my son, I pray with all my heart that God hears them."

Late that night, Hernan began sweating profusely, so much so, that by morning he was sopping wet. His fever had broken. It would not return. He would awaken feeling weak but hungry, and well on the road to recovery.

Juan de La Casa would never know, nor would he ever be recognized for it. The mixture he had given Hernan would in later years be developed and formulated as Aspirin, one of the world's first anti-inflammatory compounds.

# Chapter 41

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**March 1504**

Almost two years had passed since Hernan's brush with death. In those two years he managed to heal himself. And more important, he matured. No longer the brash youth, he now thought before he acted. Applying himself in positive ways, he helped his father manage the vineyards and mill. Acquired a knowledge of his own strengths and shortcomings. He became less impatient with others.

The incident at the Ortega hacienda had been graciously excused by the Ortega family. Since they had been away at the time, no serious dishonor to anyone had occurred. They even went so far as to convey get-well wishes to Hernan.

His rowdiness and womanizing curtailed. He looked forward to the only thing that really mattered now. The New World! The passion he felt for the New World, still burned in him. Still persisted in his longing to experience all the wonders and treasures this strange new land possessed.

Again able to convince his parents that his future lie in the New World. They, after much hand wringing and arguing, agreed to let him go. His father again booked passage for him on one of the treasure ships leaving for *Santo Domingo*, sometime in June.

Happy and content, Hernan looked forward to the quest he had so often dreamed of.

In contrast to Hernan's happiness, Diego was morose. Unhappy while Hernan was convalescing, he moped about while Hernan was getting better. Now that Hernan had completely recovered, he perked up somewhat. Although his parents and Hernan still felt something was deeply troubling him.

Diego thought he was unhappy because Hernan was leaving in a few months. Leaving for a land far away, totally inaccessible to himself. But if he closely examined his feelings, he knew the true reason for his despair. It was *Tia Francisca's* conversation with his uncle! A conversation that he inadvertently heard, while visiting in Cordoba.

Now he constantly refused to visit his aunt and uncle. He was not angry with them, just confused. What had they meant when they spoke of: *The Convent of Santa Maria de Los Ninos*. Diego's mother, Elena de San Miguel!

Sitting at the patio table, the cloudy cool, spring sunshine barely warming him, Diego again tried to make sense of what he had heard that evening so long ago in Cordoba.

His mother was Eva Cortes de Monroy, she had never, to his knowledge, ever resided in a convent. Who was Elena de San Miguel?

"*Hola, hombre*. What are you doing sitting like a little old woman in the sun," Hernan called out to Diego, interrupting his thoughts. "Papa wants me to go to the mill," Hernan continued. "He said it would do you good to come along, and I agree. Mama packed something for us to eat and drink, we'll picnic after."



"Hernan, has Mama ever lived in a convent?" Diego suddenly asked without thinking.

"Mama in a convent! What crazy talk is this? Come on, let's get the horses."

"But, Hernan..."

Lifting his brother from his seat by the scruff of his neck, a puzzled Hernan interrupted Diego, saying, "Let's get started, Diego. You're not making any sense. Mama has never lived in a convent."

Not wanting to irritate his brother, Diego silently followed him to the stables.

Saddling the horses, they began the short trip to the mill, following the narrow track which skirted the olive grove. The weather had gotten better, the sun warmer, the clouds decreasing.

The mill itself was about two miles away. It had been part of the Cortes hacienda for the last fifty years. Besides providing for the Corteses' flour needs, the mill also provided milling services for the two or three other local haciendas.

Riding at a leisurely pace enjoying the warming sun, both boys were silent. After about a half-hour, Hernan finally spoke.

"*Hermanito, que paso contigo?* — Little brother, what's going on with you? You mope around like a sick old dog, ask strange questions about Mama."

Diego, realizing he desperately needed to talk with someone, hesitatingly began to answer, then quickly decided. *Tell Hernan all, everything.*

"Hernan, I want to go with you. I don't want to be here all alone. And, and... was I born in Medellin, or somewhere else?"

Hernan felt something stir in him. And at the same time was saddened at his brother's unhappiness. But more important, hearing Diego mention something he had been aware of, but cautioned never to speak of. Hernan became alarmed and alert. He knew Diego had not been born into the family, but that was

all. Where had he come from? How, who were his birth parents? All these facts were unknown to Hernan.

He never really thought about Diego's background before. But now witnessing his brother's sadness, Hernan began thinking. *Maybe Diego should be told the truth.*

Deciding to wait until they had completed their errand to the mill, which gave him more time to think of what, if anything, to tell Diego, Hernan softly said, "We'll talk after we are finished at the mill. Then we'll picnic at the olive grove."

Diego, sadness beginning to overtake his whole being, just nodded his assent.

Quickly reaching the mill, Hernan found the *Head Bracero*. And after a short discussion, he concluded Martine's business.

Letting the horses rest for a short while, Hernan and Diego started back to the hacienda, silent, deep in their own thoughts.

Reaching the olive grove, Hernan indicated that they would stop, and have their picnic meal. Eating with good appetite, Hernan was enjoying his food. While at the same time considering how much he could reveal to Diego. *Maybe I should wait and talk with Papa before I say anything?*

Barely eating, Diego's thoughts were far from food. He was troubled. Fearful that he might have angered Hernan, and sorry he had ever spoken of the matter.

Hernan, finishing his food, decided getting Diego to talk, to speak of what was troubling him, might be his best approach.

Looking at him, he softly asked, "What makes you think that you were not born in Medellin?"

Hearing his brother speak the agonizing question that was torturing him, Diego's feelings exploded with emotion, and he began to weep.

Sobbing, Diego related what he had overheard in Cordoba, and poured his heart out. Who was *Elena de San Miguel*? What did she have to do with the *Convent of Santa Maria de Los Ninos*? Had he been born there. Did his aunt and uncle know something they were not telling him? *Mama, Papa, Quemadoras, Conversos.*

As all of his fears and anxieties poured from Diego. In a deluge of words and sobs, a torrent of emotion flooded his entire being. Emotion that affected Hernan in a way he had never felt before, a powerful impulse to protect, help, and ease Diego's pain.

"*Hermanito*—little brother," Hernan began softly. "There may be some truth in what you are thinking. But I, Mama, Papa have always..." Stopping to consider the consequences of what he was going to tell Diego. The affect it would have, Hernan decided he would reveal all that he knew. "You will always be my brother, Diego. And you must understand, Mama, Papa and I will always love you. No matter who your birth parents were. You will always be a part of the *familia*."

Explaining to Diego how Juan had brought him to Medellin as a baby, how happy this made Martine and Eva, Diego listened but said nothing, merely stared at Hernan.

Giving no indication he understood any of what he was being told, nor what Hernan had explained, Diego simply mounted his horse and headed for the hacienda.

Calling for him to wait, Hernan quickly gathered up the picnic remains, Mounted his horse and followed Diego home.

# Chapter 42

**Medellin, Extremadura**  
**June 1504**

For Ferdinand and Isabella, the “New World” or New Spain, as it was now called, was growing into a very prosperous venture. Gold, silver, sugar, Cacao, along with other commodities were being shipped to Spain in ever increasing amounts. Spain was clearly becoming the dominant power on the high seas.

The city of Seville, through which all this commerce with the new colonies passed, was bursting with expansion. New roads, new buildings, new docking facilities were springing up almost overnight. The colonies themselves expanding and growing at a rapid pace. Ladened treasure ships were arriving weekly, quickly unloaded, and just as quickly, returned to Santo Domingo to take on a new cargo.

Hernan, and Diego—at his insistence, were to be thrust into this bustling, exploding, hectic new intercourse.

The Cortes household was now tranquil. After months of arguing and confusion, the family resolved its difficulties,

acceding to Diego's wishes, hard as it was for Eva and Martine to accept, understanding was secured.

After learning he had not been born into the Cortes family, Diego had become sullen, avoiding almost all contact with Hernan, his mother and father. Learning what Hernan had disclosed to Diego—how he had come to the family—Eva and Martine were distraught.

Rebuking Hernan only caused more disagreement, more arguing. The uncertainty of whether Diego should be told all of his background caused additional anxiety. And additional arguing among Hernan, Eva and Martine.

In this tumultuous atmosphere, Diego, after much debate and discussion, insisted on two things: One, he would accompany Hernan to New Spain. Two, his parents would disclose all, regarding his birth parents.

Eva tearfully refused both. Martine, vacillating, agreed to tell Diego all he knew of his background. However, stubbornly refused to let him leave. Hernan, on the other hand, thought it would be best for Diego to accompany him.

As the arguing continued, the atmosphere became more resentful. Hernan, remorseful at instigating the affair, desperately searched for a means to bring about resolution. He wrote to his Uncle Juan, describing the situation, and what had occurred. He pleaded to Juan for help, and understanding.

Unable to travel since his arthritis had worsened, Juan, with Francisca's help, wrote a long impassioned letter to Eva and Martine. Explaining how important it was for Diego to know the truth regarding his past. The letter eloquently described the events of Elena and Diego's lives that ultimately led to their deaths. As he wrote, memories assailed Juan, and renewed the sorrow he had felt, as well.

The emotions and sadness revealed in Juan's writing touched Martine and Eva deeply. They both recognized, and accepted, that disclosing all, was a worthy endeavor, and a fitting way to honor the memory of Diego's parents.

Debating long and hard for ways to describe the past events, they all finally agreed it was best to let Diego read the letter for himself, and in this way bring closure for him, and peace to the rest of the family.

Now three months after the misery began, peace had been restored, the sadness remaining. Hernan and Diego were leaving for Seville. There they would board the treasure ship *Espiritu de San Jeronimo*, bound for *Hispaniola* on the island of *Santo Domingo*.

For Hernan this would be the journey of his life. His future would bring fame, adventure, and the riches he dreamed of. It would take some time, but it would come. Where Hernan would acquire all that he sought, Diego the orphan child, the one of sadness, would never attain the happiness, he so desperately pursued.

\* \* \*

November 7, 1504, five months after the Cortes brothers left for New Spain, a weary Christopher Columbus returned home. His fourth and final journey to the New World ending after nearly two years. Still uncertain whether he had discovered the route to the Indies he originally sought. He had not changed, he still whispered Hebrew psalms at odd times. Chanted ancient prayers, still thought of his long dead mother, and all that she had taught him. In two years he would be dead. His passing almost entirely without notice by the Spain he had so radically changed.

Over the next century, Spain would become one of the world's leading powers. Conquering many lands, while slaughtering or converting their inhabitants.

As for the Expulsion Edict, its employment was a complete success. Jews would never return to the Iberian Peninsula.

*SEPHARDIC FAREWELL*

However, had it never been issued, an intelligent, and humane people would not have been displaced. Lost forever to the Spanish monarchy. And, possibly, Spanish ascendancy might have lasted, much, much longer.