

# ORIGINAL PASSOVER STORY

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they have either been massacred or have fled. Those who chose to remain have been baptized and converted to the Church.

My story concerns a very small number of these apparently converted Jews, or Marranos, as they were called, who, outwardly, had accepted Catholicism rather than death, but who, inwardly, had remained steadfast to the faith of their fathers.

And on this night of which my story tells, the moon was full in the heavens, for it was the night of the Paschal moon, the first Eve of Passover.

Come with me now to where my story really takes place; to the house of Don Salvadore Rodriguez, in the City of Vivero. The house is Moorish in architecture, but large, well-furnished, comfortable. Here, his ancestors had lived for hundreds of years.

Salvadore Rodriguez was successful man in the world of commerce. Vivero stood on the banks of the Rio de Vivero, which led to the Bay of Biscay, gateway to the trade routes of Europe and Asia. To Vivero, his argosies brought rare foods and spices for which there was always a ready and eager demand.

Salvadore Rodriguez was also a good man, well-known among his own People for his kindness and charitableness. Because of his profound knowledge, wisdom and learning, he was a sage among men, the recognized leader of the Marrano Jews of Vivero...

As we enter the Rodriguez home there is no one to be seen in the spacious front room, but hushed voices are heard in the cellar below. As we descend the stairway, through the trapdoor, we see, in the flickering candlelight, that a large table is being arranged for a Seder. Salvadore Rodriguez and his wife move around quietly as they go about their work of preparation.

And now, the guest begin to arrive. First is Don Manuel Pereires and his family. Then the Habibs, the Mendozas, the Raphaels, and finally, the Harraris. The head of each family bears a fig for the Seder tabel beneath his cape so that due honor might be given to the Festival: this one with wine; another with fruit; a third with oil.... And now, Salvadore Rodriguez and his wife have almost completed their preparation of the Seder Table, and stand together, making sure that everything is in readiness. Yes, the goblets have been filled with wine: wine that Donna Rodriguez has made herself, secretly, and specially for the Festival. There are the bitter herbs and the shank bone of a lamb. The roasted egg, the harosheth are all in their Corection

proper positions. The correct number of chairs surround the table and cushions have been provided for the men-folk. The hand-written Haggadahs, so carefully hidden for the past year, have been placed around the table. But that which makes the Passover different from all other Festivals is still not there. They must await the arrival of the unleavened breads! They were being baked in a newly-discovered crypt which the Marranos had found and from which place they were being distributed. The mission for bringing them had been entrusted to Phillipe, the son, and only other member of the Rodriguez household.

Within the cellar, they wait for him--anxiously. By this time, he should have returned. The minutes pass slowly. Why does he take so long? The nerve-wracking minutes lengthen into an hour. The same dread thought strikes at all their hearts. Something has gone wrong! Their eyes turn upward to where they hope to first hear his footstep. Their ears strain for the slightest possible sound... and then, suddenly, someone running in the street above--running desperately!

Below, only Donna Rodriguez speaks, her voice, filled with anguish: "It is Phillipe!"

But now in the distance and coming closer, the sounds of many footsteps-- and of steel! Soldiers! The scene above, though hidden from them, becomes all too clear to them. It is Phillipe whom they are hunting.

The tumult above them grows louder and louder, then passes and fades into the distance.

Minutes pass: minutes that wrack their very souls. And then, ever so quietly a familiar knock, and then a key being turned in the door above.... How glad they are to see him, this handsome, swarthy youth. How jubilant he is! Carefully, he brings forth the pieces of unleavened bread from beneath his cape. They are crude, ill-shapen, but they are unleavened! As they listen, he tells of his escape. The entire Vivero garrison has been called out. They are searching everywhere and everyone, if they have the slightest reason for suspicion, -- for they know it is the night of the Paschal Feast. He was returning home, when a group of soldiers, in the distance, saw him and came toward him. Making up his mind quickly, before they were close enough to recognize him, he turned and ran. He heard them, in hot pursuit, but at last, somehow, he had managed to escape them.

How thankful they were! Too well they knew the inevitable consequences of his capture, should it have been proven that the unleavened bread was, or had been, in his possession.

First, there would be the accusation of Judaising, then



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imprisonment until the Inquisition held its next Auto de Fe, with its bizarre processions, gay banners and hymnal singings. There would then follow the the trial by the Grand Inquisitor, with the verdict--Death!

But the se were people who lived in jeopardy every moment of their lives, and now that the immediate danger had seemed to have passed, they tried to put the incident out of their minds.

The unleavened bread is now placed upon the table, they have taken their seats and commence their service to the Glory of God.

Salvadore Rodriguez, at the head of the table, has pronounced the Kiddush, and Manrico Harrari, the youngest boy present has asked the Four Questions with the correct Sephardic intonation, when, without warning, the sound of soldiers returning. They were still searching for the prey that had eluded them. But this time they did not all pass by! Several still remained near the house. The clatter of the steel could be heard plainly.

The Service below is stopped. The same thought goes through all their minds as they recall Phillipe's words. Is this a search party? If so, they are lost! Even though they realize that darkness will give them no greater protection, the candles are extinguished immediately. During the next few seconds, which to them seem like an eternity, there is absolute silence around the table, as though each one is afraid that the slightest sound will betray their presence. This silence, which they can now almost feel, comes suddenly to a shattering end! There is a loud knock on the door above! It was all over! They were discovered!! To delay answering the knock would only heighten suspicion and it was impossible in a few moments to destroy all signs of the Paschal Feast and all the other Festival preparations that had been made. And now, there is another knock--and another! It was the Iron Fist! The summons of the Grand Inquisitor!! Each one knew what it meant. The same fate awaited them all.

Salvadore Rodriguez knew that he must now act very quickly. There was still one last possible hope. He must try to make them believe that he was alone in the house. After warning them all not to make the slightest sound, he lit a candle and climbed the stairs. Quietly, he closed the trap door and covered it with the usual, medium-sized, oriental rug. The shutters were down over the windows and he knew that he could not be seen from the

outside. He crossed the room and opened the door...

They stood there, in the doorway--three of them--their swords and armor gleaming in the brilliant moonlight. Salvadore rodriguez bowed his respects. They did not even look around the room as they entered, but fixed their gaze on h8m, immediately.

One of they spoke: "Are you alone?"

Before he could even reply there come the muffled sound of a frightened child crying in the darkness below. His heart sank within him. The last possible chance was gone.

The soldiers looked at one another, triumphantly. "Are there others down below?"

There was only one possible answer. "Yes." He uttered the word so quietly that he could hardly be heard.

"You will lead the way to them." Refusal was useless. Salvadore Rodriguez uncovered, and opened the trap door and descended the stairs--they followed! The flickering candle threw leaping, grotesque shadows around the room. They were still seated around the table. Not a thing had been moved. They would show no fear. They would remain steadfast to the end.

The three soldiers stood eyeing the table. The same one spoke again: "Is this the Passover Feast that you celebrate?"

(Continued Next Week)

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