

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

*Captivating stories full of Yiras Shamayim taken from Shmuessin that Reb Kalman Krohn z'tl gave in Adelpia Yeshiva*

### ***Reb Mendel and the Marranos Part I***

Mendel was a young genius who thirsted tremendously for Torah knowledge and was constantly on the lookout for *seforim* that he had never come across before. His brilliant mind retained everything he learned, and no matter how many *seforim* he devoured, he always pined for more.

Once, he was in a city far away from home when he heard that a local Jew named R' Michoel had a huge collection of *seforim*, including many rare volumes. Excitedly, young Mendel set out toward R' Michoel's home to ask permission to see the library and use the *seforim*.

Walking through the unfamiliar streets, Mendel scanned the homes he passed until he found the one he was looking for. The property, beautifully adorned with stunning flower beds, was surrounded by a decorative iron fence. Mendel swung the gate open and crossed the wide walkway, lined on both sides with well-kept shrubbery, in a few, brisk steps. He rapped on the polished oak front door and waited.

The owner of the house, R' Michoel himself, opened the door and, seeing the young bachur standing before him, greeted him with a warm, "Shalom aleichem!"

"Aleichem shalom," Mendel responded shyly. "I was wondering if it would be possible... perhaps... I heard you have a *seforim* library. Would you mind if I came inside and took a look at the *seforim*?"

"It would be my pleasure," R' Michoel replied. He took great pride in his vast collection and was gratified when *talmidei chachomim* stopped by to learn from his library or look for a rare volume.

He led his guest inside through the well-appointed sitting room and into the library. Mendel, singly focused on his Torah thoughts, did not even notice the luxury and opulence screaming out from every corner. Only the *seforim*, lining the shelves from floor to ceiling, interested him. Those were the true diamonds!

R' Michoel began to speak with his guest in learning, and he quickly discovered that Mendel was no ordinary bachur. His mind was like a sponge that soaked in knowledge and retained it, and despite his youth, he had a unique grasp on all areas of Shas.

Astounded by the young man's brilliance and impressed by his character, R' Michoel made him

a generous offer. “You are welcome to stay in my home for as long as you’d like.”

“Thank you,” Mendel said gratefully. “It would be an honor for me to stay in your home.”

“Let me show you where I keep my exceptionally rare and valuable *seforim*,” R’ Michoel said, leading Mendel to a small room off the library which was double locked. He withdrew a heavy keyring from his pocket and sifted through them until he found the ones he wanted. “I don’t usually show these to visitors, but you strike me as someone who would appreciate them.”

Unlocking both locks, he turned the handle and gestured for his guest to enter. “You are welcome to study these, too, but be careful, since they are rare and valuable.”

Mendel in the library was like a kid in a candy store. He could not contain his eagerness as he thanked his host and began taking volumes lovingly off the shelves. Soon, he was sitting at the desk in the library, surrounded by tomes, completely absorbed in his learning.

From time to time, R’ Michoel would come to the doorway to observe the young *masmid*. It gave him tremendous pleasure to see the young genius devouring the *seforim* in his library. The more R’ Michoel got to know his guest, the more impressed he became.

A few days passed, and Mendel was still learning with the same vigor and passion he had displayed upon initially viewing the library. Each new *sefer* he came across caused his eyes to light up with joy, and he would learn it carefully, cover to cover. From time to time, he would take his eyes out of the *sefer* to jot down some notes, but even then, he was completely absorbed in his little world of Torah, not noticing anything else.

R’ Michoel provided him with lodgings and meals, which Mendel thanked him profusely for, but in truth, he slept little and ate even less. He rarely left the library, spending all his time engrossed in learning, surrounded by *seforim*.

One morning, R’ Michoel left the house to attend to a business matter in the neighboring city, expected to return before nightfall. Before he left, he instructed his daughter, Esther, to serve the young scholar his evening meal. Ever the *masmid*, Mendel was liable to forget to eat if someone wasn’t on top of reminding him.

Oblivious to the fact that R’ Michoel had left the house, Mendel continued learning, learning through some rare *seforim* with the enthusiasm of a young child. With his incredible memory, everything he learned was seared onto his brain to be retrieved in the future when he would not have access to R’ Michoel’s rare *seforim*.

In the evening, Esther came into the library with his supper and began chatting with him about how he liked her father’s library. This made Mendel extremely uncomfortable, since he had never conversed with a strange woman before. Stiffly, he responded to her queries with monosyllable answers.

Suddenly, he became aware that her father was not in the house. In fact, besides the two of them, there was no one home. As soon as he realized this, he stood up and bolted, abandoning his belongings, his untouched dinner tray, and the *seforim* still open on the table.

*Yichud!* his mind screamed as he ran out of the house. His face was a ghastly white, his entire body trembling. *Yichud! Danger! Danger!*

His mind didn’t even have time to tell his legs to run, his brain didn’t have time to ponder his next

steps. His legs moved first, not waiting for his head to catch up. On instinct, Mendel ran and ran and ran, away from the danger of *yichud* lurking in R' Michoel's home.

As he tore down the darkening road as fast as his legs could carry him, he saw a carriage traveling the opposite way down the road coming toward him. The carriage slowed and then halted as it approached Mendel.

"Mendel!" R' Michoel called down to his houseguest. "Where are you going?"

Mendel stopped short and looked around in desperation. "Uh... um... I have to go back to my family," he said, not sharing the reason why. "I just feel like I really need to be with them now."

"I don't understand," R' Michoel said, confused. "Why didn't you tell me earlier? You've been with us for a while, and we would have liked to give you a proper send-off."

"I'm sorry," Mendel said. "I would have loved to stay, but I really need to go back to my family."

"Please come back," R' Michoel begged. "What will people think of us, sending you out like that in the middle of the night? Did something happen?"

"No, no, nothing happened," Mendel reassured him nervously. "And you know me; I'm not so typical. I barely sleep, I do my own thing. People will understand that leaving in middle of the night is just another one of my idiosyncrasies."

"Mendel, you must come back," his host entreated. "We'll make you a proper send-off and then you'll leave. This is an embarrassment to our entire family!"

For a brief moment, Mendel thoughts turned to his tefillin, still on a shelf in the guest room in R' Michoel's home. He shook his head. He would have to get the tefillin back, but there was no way he was returning to a home where he could potentially face the danger of *yichud*. "I'm sorry, but I must go," he told his host apologetically. "I thank you greatly for your warm and generous hospitality."

R' Michoel did not understand, but realizing that Mendel's mind was made up, he didn't press him further. With a warm handshake, he parted from the young genius.

Mendel continued fleeing on foot throughout the night. He knew not, and cared not, where he was headed; focusing solely on widening the distance between himself and the *issur* of *yichud*.

He reached a small village just as dawn broke. Deciding that he was far away enough, Mendel went into the shul to daven and plan his next steps. He borrowed a pair of tefillin from a kindly Jew and joined the earliest minyan for Shacharis.

After davening, he asked around to find out exactly where he was and how far away he was from home. He learned that the quickest way home was by ship, and there was a harbor just a few miles away. He had no money to purchase a ship ticket, but he hoped that he would be able to barter labor for passage.

Indeed, after the entire morning, Mendel reached the harbor. There was a ship preparing to leave for a port right near his hometown, and he succeeded in landing a position as a janitor on the ship in exchange for free passage. He knew it would not be an easy job, but it would enable him to travel home, and that was what was important.

The first leg of the journey was uneventful. As the ship slid gracefully through the placid waters, Mendel swept and washed the floors and then retired to his room to review his learning by memory. All in all, his circumstances were not bad, and he looked forward to seeing his family a few days later.

Just a few miles out, beyond the picturesque blue sky and fluffy white clouds, a terrific storm was brewing. Howling winds and sinister waves collided under an ominous grey sky. And when the ship Mendel was on glided, unknowingly, into the tempest, the storm swallowed it up gleefully.

The atmosphere on board went from peaceful to frantic in a matter of moments. The ship was tossed about helplessly like a softball during a game of catch, and the sailors were powerless to do anything about it. The desperate passengers screamed and wailed as they tearfully wondered if they were destined to meet their ends in a watery grave deep within the ocean.

Mendel tried to block out the crashing winds and terrified screams around him, concentrating on the only avenue of salvation open to him: prayer. His cheeks were damp with tears as he prayed for his life and repented.

As the storm raged on and the ship continued rocking wildly in the waters, the passengers were instructed on what to do in the event that ship went under and they were struggling in the water. They were taught to grab hold of a floating piece of wood and to try to conserve as much energy as possible until help arrived. The passengers and crew held their breaths, waiting for the ship to capsize.

But it didn't capsize. To everyone's surprise and relief, after a harrowing two days of dangerous

turbulence and battling against a fierce gust many times as powerful as they were, the wind suddenly slowed and the sky cleared. The ship had made it, in one piece, with all the passengers on board.

They were, however, not out of trouble yet. The storm had blown the ship terribly off course, and the navigators were having a hard time getting their bearings. With supplies running low, they could only hope to reach land within a few days before they would begin to starve. Additionally, the ship was showing signs of strain as a result of their ordeal, and it would not last much longer before it fell apart.

About a week later, they sighted land. The passengers cheered as the coast came into view; first as a tiny speck in the distance, and then as they became closer, a harbor bustling with activity. The ship set anchor and the weary passengers disembarked, grateful to have solid land beneath their feet again.

None of the passengers had intended to travel to the country they had ended up in, but many chose to remain for a few days to rest up and recover before heading out into the sea again. Some purchased new tickets at the harbor and continued their journey immediately.

Mendel, however, was in a quandary. There were no Jews in the city where they'd docked, and he desired nothing more than to be with his family as soon as possible. However, the week-long journey from R' Michael's home to his hometown had already stretched out to three weeks, and it was already shortly before Pesach. There was no way he could risk setting out again and being stranded on the road for Pesach.

Not being with his family for Pesach was one issue; the bigger issue was that there were no Jews

around for miles. How could he, a lone bachur, make Pesach on his own in a foreign land hostile to *yiddishkeit*?

He suddenly remembered that, while in R' Michoel's home, he had studied a *sefer* on *minhagim* of various Jewish communities. Among other things, it discussed the customs of the Jews in the very country he had found himself in. Mendel's eyes lit up.

He'd read in the *sefer* that these countries hosted entire communities of hidden Jews, Marranos, who observed *yiddishkeit* in secret only. One of the customs of the Marranos, he'd read, was that they purchased large quantities of vegetables before Pesach. Matzah may have been difficult for them to obtain, but everyone eats vegetables, and so it was easy for them to stock up on these non-chametz necessities.

It was just two days to Pesach, and there was no time to waste. With a prayer on his lips, Mendel went to the local marketplace to observe the shoppers. He looked quite a sight; with muddy, worn clothing and a hat he had found in the garbage dump. He was hungry and tired, and his bones hurt more than they'd ever hurt before, but he knew he could not rest until he found a local Marrano who would be able to host him for Pesach.

The marketplace was humming with activity, and a weary Mendel found himself getting dizzy from the colorful sights and exotic smells. He walked past the vendors selling clothing, pots, and jewelry without a second glance. His eyes raked over the crowded square, searching for the vegetable stalls.

An old woman with a kerchief tied under her chin sat on an overturned barrel next to pails of

splashing fish. "Sir, sir!" she called to Mendel, trying to interest him in her product, but Mendel shook his head and moved on.

Two little boys chasing each other ran in circles around him as he crossed the square to the other side. To his relief, the vegetables were being sold there, on a row of stalls being manned by a few peasant women. Mendel moved silently to the side, behind the produce stalls, and began to observe the customers.

There was a gentleman in a top hat who was spending a suspicious amount of time selecting carrots. Mendel watched him for a minute or two, wondering if he was a hidden Jew. The man finally selected two perfect-looking orange specimens, holding them up as though they were diamonds, and Mendel realized this was a dead lead. Two carrots would get the man nowhere on Pesach.

He turned his attention to the potato stall, where an aproned woman who appeared to be a housekeeper was filling a bag with potatoes. His eyes followed her to the cabbage stand. A single head of cabbage was added to her bag. She pulled out her wallet, ready to pay. He signed. Another false lead.

There was a genteel, aristocratic looking woman speaking to the onion vendor in low tones. Mendel watched as she paid for a crate of onions, which her servant hauled off to her carriage. She then moved on to the carrots, purchasing several large bundles. His pulse quickened.

Mendel didn't dare look at her face to see if she looked Jewish, but his antenna was up, and he observed her actions closely. She purchased two crates of potatoes, a full sack of beets, smaller

sack of walnuts, all of which was promptly loaded onto her carriage by her trusty servant.

Mendel was convinced. She must be a Marrano, he thought excitedly. Who else needs so many vegetables at once? His mind was made up, but he was unsure how to approach her. After all, he couldn't exactly introduce himself as a Jew. He pursed his lips, not sure how to proceed, and then decided to follow her.

Her servant finished loading the carriage and opened the passenger door with a flourish. Her steps slow and regal, the woman got in, closing the door behind her. The servant jumped up onto the driver's seat and settled himself. Mendel looked around for a more efficient means of following the carriage, but there was none. He would have to follow on foot.

The horses began to move, pulling the carriage slowly out of the marketplace as Mendel followed hastily behind. Mendel knew that once they exited the crowd square, it would begin to move much faster. He was a scholar, not a runner, and he could only hope he would manage to run fast enough not to lose the carriage.

To his surprise, the horses continued their leisurely trot even beyond the busy marketplace. At first, Mendel was grateful since it allowed him to follow the carriage at a comfortable speed, walking briskly behind it.

After about ten minutes, however, he began to grow nervous. Had the woman in the carriage noticed his scrutiny and seen him trailing her? Perhaps she had ordered her servant to drive the carriage slowly so that he would be able to follow it directly into her trap? Should he run off in the opposite direction before it was too late?

*To be continued...*

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # A77

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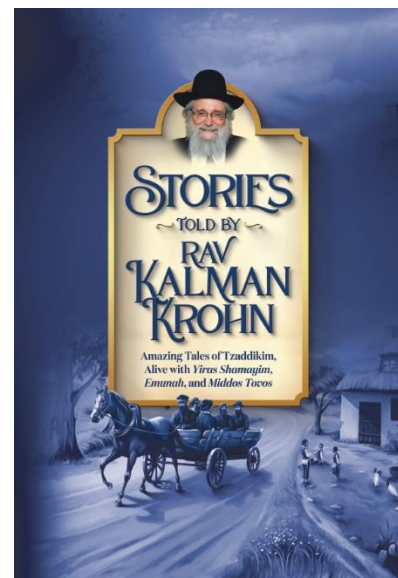
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## סיפורי צדיקים

*Captivating stories full of Yiras Shamayim taken from Shmuessin that Reb Kalman Krohn z'tl gave in Adelpia Yeshiva*

### ***Reb Mendel and the Marranos Part II***

*RECAP: Mendel, a young genius and talmid chacham, was on a ship that was blown off course by a storm and ended up in a foreign country on erev Pesach. He needed to find a seder, but the only practicing Jews in the city were Marranos, who hid their yiddishkeit. He went to the marketplace to try to identify a Jew based on the purchases they were making on erev Pesach.*

Senora Angelina Alvarez was in middle of paying the potato vendor when she had the sudden, uncomfortable sensation that someone was watching her. Looking up, she saw a young man in bedraggled clothing and a strange, smashed hat

staring at her. She ignored it, trying her best to seem indifferent to his scrutiny, but kept a close watch on him from the corner of her eye.

*He must be an informer!* This stomach-clenching thought jumped into her mind. Taking deep, calming breaths, she instructed Francisco to load up the carriage and moved on to the next stall. Even if the pauper was an informer, she was doing nothing wrong. He could observe her for as long as he wished but would not find anything to incriminate her with.

It was only when she had finished with all her purchases and climbed into the carriage for the trip home that she began to wonder if perhaps the man was not an informer, but a Jew in need of her assistance. After all, Pesach was rapidly approaching, and he might be in need of a *seder*. There was only one way to find out.

“Drive slowly, Francisco,” she instructed her servant. “I have a headache from all the commotion in the market.”

Obligingly, Francisco slowed the horses to a trot.

“Thank you,” Angelina said, turning to peer out the back window. Francisco, while devoted and loyal, was a full-fledged Christian and could not be trusted with her thoughts.

Indeed, as she had presumed, the strange young man from the marketplace was following her carriage on foot. *He’s not from the Inquisition, she realized. If he was, he would never follow me on foot, and certainly not in such an obvious manner.*

The Alvarez mansion was a five-minute drive from the marketplace by wagon, but the slow pace of Angelina’s carriage made the trip take almost twenty minutes. Francisco jumped down to open

the gates and then drove the carriage into the gated estate.

“Let me off here, Francisco,” she requested when they were just beyond the gate. “I need a little fresh air to sooth the ache in my head. Please drive around to the back and unload the purchases into the storeroom.”

“Are you sure you will be okay out here alone, Senora?” Francisco asked doubtfully.

Angelina nodded. “I’ll be fine. Run along now, Francisco. And please tell Manuela that you’re home with the produce.”

As soon as he was out of sight, Angelina turned back to the gate and unlocked it. Swinging open the heavy metal doors, she found herself face to face with the stranger who had been following her. Like her, he appeared startled.

Taking a deep breath, she took the risk. “*Shema yisrael*,” she whispered, just loud enough for the stranger to hear her. “*Hashem elokeinu Hashem echad*.”

A huge smile bloomed on the man’s face. “*Baruch shem k’vod maluchuso l’olam va’ed!*” he exclaimed. “My name is Mendel and I was on a ship that was caught in the recent storm. I need a place to stay for Pesach.”

“Follow me,” she said, putting a finger to her lips. “I will help you, but remember that I and my family are nothing but faithful Christians. Not all the servants are part of ours.”

“I understand,” Mendel said, the relief palpable in his voice. “Thank you.” He stepped over the threshold of the imposing gate, which she quickly closed and locked behind him.

The relief quickly evaporated from Mendel. There were icons and statues of the Christian faith

everywhere. He tried to avert his eyes as he trailed his benefactress, no simple feat considering how many there were. She led him up a staircase into the mansion and down a long, luxurious corridor, nodding to the many servants they passed.

“Wait here,” Angelina said to her guest, opening the door to a stately furnished sitting room and gesturing at the sofas and chairs lining the room. “I will call my husband.”

Mendel remained standing, feeling increasingly uncomfortable. This room, too, was generously decorated with symbols of foreign religion. He had escaped from the cardinal sin of *gilui arayos* only to encounter the equally severe sin of *avodah zarah!* How would he ever spend Pesach in such a place?

His thoughts were interrupted when a tall, well-dressed man strode into the room, his hand outstretched in greeting. “Welcome to my home,” he said warmly. “I’m Ricardo Alvarez. I hear you’ve been caught in a storm?”

Mendel nodded silently.

Ricardo lowered his voice and drew closer to Mendel. “*Shalom aleichem*,” he said, his voice barely audible. “We will be glad to host you for Pesach. Follow me.”

With a few brisk strides, he crossed the room and pulled a small lever out from behind a life-size painting. Mendel’s eyes opened in wonderment as the painting swung open. It was a cleverly hidden door.

He followed his host through the hidden door into a small room. As the door swung shut behind them, Ricardo bent down and lifted up a rug, revealing a trapdoor on the floor. He lifted it up and stepped aside to make room for his guest.



Mendel peered down. There was a narrow staircase that descended into what appeared to be a hallway, or perhaps a tunnel, deep in the ground. He looked questioningly at his host.

“Go ahead,” Ricardo said encouragingly. “Start heading down, and I’ll come after you.”

Mendel began descending the steep staircase as Ricardo lit a lantern and stepped down behind him. He carefully secured the trapdoor and then held out the lantern to light the way. As they went deeper and deeper below ground, it got colder and colder.

When they reached the bottom, Ricardo switched places with Mendel and led the way down the long tunnel. At some seemingly random point, he stopped and felt along the wall until he reached a loose brick. He removed the brick and pulled open another hidden door.

This door led to another tunnel, as narrow, dingy, and cold as the first. Mendel shivered as he continued following his host. As they walked, he suddenly began hearing faint sounds, sounds that grew louder as they drew nearer.

At last, they reached the end of the tunnel, and Ricardo pulled open the door with a flourish. “See what we have here,” he said proudly.

Stepping inside, Mendel found himself in a different world. The large room was a beehive of activity. People were scurrying around baking matzos. Erev Pesach matzos!

“Go wash your hands,” Ricardo instructed. “Everything is *Pesachdik* here.”

Mendel could not believe what he was seeing. He carefully washed up and joined the assembly line making the matzos. How grateful he was to be able to partake in this holy mitzvah!

“You must understand that we are in grave danger of being discovered,” Ricardo explained as he joined him at the table, kneading the dough for the matzah with deft fingers. “We are constantly being watched, and we therefore must put on a convincing display of our loyalty to Christianity. We have no choice but to display Christian icons all over our home, as painful as it is.”

“I understand,” Mendel said, rolling the next circle of dough. “But I would prefer to remain down here for the remainder of my stay, if that is okay with you.”

“As you wish,” his host said agreeably. “If you’d like, when we are done baking the matzah, I can take you to the *bais medrash*.”

Mendel nodded excitedly. “Yes, I would like that very much.”

A half hour later, they both took off their aprons and washed their hands. Ricardo led Mendel back into the tunnel. “We’ve built a network of tunnels under my property and that of a few neighboring landowners, all secret Jews,” he explained. “The *bais medrash* is this way.”

Another door materialized in the tunnel wall and they walked through it. “Here we go,” Ricardo announced, opening the door to a well-lit room.

The *bais medrash* was big and lit with many candles. It had a relatively high ceiling that made it feel airy despite being windowless and so many feet underground. There were tables and chairs, seforim, and an *aron kodesh*.

“We’ll be coming down here when Yom Tov begins for davening,” Ricardo told his guest. “Are you sure you’d like to remain here yourself?”

“I’m sure,” Mendel responded unhesitatingly. “Thank you so much for your hospitality.”

“My pleasure,” his host said. With a smile and a wave, he was gone, leaving Mendel alone.

Mendel began saying the parshah of korban Pesach, throwing himself into the spirit of *yom tov*. He could almost imagine himself in the familiar *bais medrash* of his shtetl, and the underground *bais medrash* suddenly felt more like home.

As *yom tov* approached, the *bais medrash* began to fill up with people, all of them hidden Jews who had come together to daven on the evening of Pesach. All in all, there were about twenty men in the minyan, an impressive figure for a Marrano community that lived in perpetual fear of discovery.

While the men davened, Angelina Alvarez and her daughters slowly sneaked down, one by one, into the underground tunnel. They could not afford to be seen by any of the many maids and servants who were under the family’s employ.

Diego, the rambunctious three-year-old, could not be trusted to hold his tongue, so his mother left him upstairs in the care of his governess, Celia. The governess, like always, would put him to sleep, none the wiser about the subterranean activities taking place at the time.

When davening was over, most of the participants in the minyan left through the tunnels to have the seder with their families. A few, including Mendel, remained to join the Alvarez family’s seder. Angelina lit the candles with tears in her eyes and then the seder began.

Although they had been forced to lay low with their Pesach purchases, they still managed to have matzah, *marror*, kosher meat and kosher wine. There were proper *haggadahs* for each person around the table, a *k’arah*, and even a silver *kos*

*shel* Eliyahu. Indeed, the underground seder was not lacking anything.

For the Marranos, who had so few opportunities to feel the joys of *yiddishkeit*, the Pesach seder was an especially meaningful time. They began with *kaddeish*, then *urchatz*, moving through the rituals of the seder with tremendous excitement and fervor. It was Pesach, the *yom tov* of freedom, and despite being captive by the necessity of secrecy, sitting at the seder, the Alvarez family and their guests felt free.

Upstairs, however, in the sprawling mansion, things were not going too well.

Celia was sitting on Diego’s bed, singing softly to him as she lulled him to sleep, when she noticed that his hair was pasted to his forehead and that his face was wan. Putting her hand to his forehead, she discovered it was hot to the touch.

She left the room in search of her mistress, but Senora Angelina was nowhere to be found. Neither, she quickly realized, was Senor Ricardo or any of the Alvarez children. “Where could they all be on this ordinary Tuesday?” she moaned aloud in frustration. “Just my luck that when Diego gets sick, no one is around.”

She hurried back to Diego’s room and was horrified to discover that in the short interim, the little boy’s condition appeared to have deteriorated. He was sweating profusely, his face a ghastly white, and somehow, Celia knew that Diego was dying.

She shot out of the room again and accosted the first servant she saw. “You!” she cried, her face almost equally as pale as her young charge. “Emergency! Get the doctor, now!”

The servant nodded and sped off back in the direction he had come from.

“And you!” Tears were streaming from Celia’s eyes now, and she wiped them away before addressing the next servant. “Get the priest! Run!”

Without waiting to see if he obeyed her instructions, the governess returned to the little boy’s bedside and placed a cold compress on his forehead. “My poor Diego,” she crooned softly. His illness had occurred so suddenly; she had not seen it coming. “You must have caught some sort of virus. Oh, my poor Diego...”

She sat with him for a few tense minutes that felt like eternity, stroking his little fingers and changing his compress. When the doctor and the priest arrived, together, she stood up in relief.

“It was so sudden,” she cried to the doctor, who put down his medical bag and bent down to examine the limp child. “From one moment to the next. Will he... will he live, doctor?”

The doctor didn’t respond right away, concentrating instead on the examination. He listened to Diego’s breathing and felt his pulse. When he stood up and washed his hands, his expression was grave. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “I’m sorry.”

“What, Doctor, what is it?” Celia begged. “Will he make it?”

The doctor looked at her for a long moment and shook his head. “There’s nothing I can do for him anymore. I’m afraid this is the end.”

The priest moved forward to say his prayers in the child’s final moments. “Everyone must leave the room,” he told the weeping governess. “I will say

some prayers so that his soul leaves the world pure and holy. Where are the boy’s parents?”

“I don’t know,” Celia said truthfully, dabbing at her eyes. “I can’t find them anywhere! Do you think he’ll die before they have a chance to say goodbye?”

The priest raised his hands heavenward. “I’m not the one who determines the moment of death,” he reminded her. “I would like to be alone with the boy until his soul leaves him. You can go back to the servants’ quarters. When your mistress comes back, I will explain everything to her.”

“Can’t I stay, Father?” the governess pleaded, her tearstained face turned toward Diego, who was still in the same, half-dead position on his bed.

“I’m afraid that’s impossible,” the priest said firmly. “You go back to your room and pray for Diego there. It’s not good for him if anyone else is here.”

Celia gave Diego’s little hand one more squeeze and then reluctantly left the room. The priest watched her go, waiting until she left the main wing of the mansion and the door clicked shut behind her.

The absence of Diego’s entire family on this very night was extremely suspicious to the priest. He was well aware that it was the first night of the Jewish Passover holiday. Could it be that the wealthy Ricardo Alvarez was a secret Jew?

After ensuring that the entire main wing of the house was empty of servants, the priest began to do some snooping. If the Alvarazes were Jewish, there would be a secret trapdoor somewhere leading to their hideaway. And the priest was determined to find it.

He walked around the house, examining the walls carefully in search of a hidden door. In the sitting room, he hit the jackpot. There was a crack in the wall above a large painting, indicating that there might be a door behind the painting. He felt along the painting until he found a lever and pulled it. Bingo! A door slid soundlessly open.

The priest found himself inside a small room, no larger than a closet. He felt along the walls again for a loose brick or a crack, but found nothing. Catching sight of the rug on the floor, his eyes lit up. He lifted the rug and was delighted to find the clear outline of the trapdoor.

Minutes later, he was in the tunnel. He could hear the sounds of joyous singing and followed them, coming upon the door to the *bais medrash*. He pried the door open and stepped inside the room, the astonishing scene of a live Pesach seder unfolding before his eyes.

Ricardo, Mendel, and the other guests around the seder table were in the middle of a hearty rendition of *V'hi She'amda* when the sudden appearance of the priest shocked them into silence.

Ricardo, realizing they were in mortal danger, was the only one who didn't lose his cool. Swiftly, he announced in Hebrew that they would have to kill the priest before he had them all killed.

"Grab him so that he doesn't run away," he instructed two of the guests in Hebrew. "You, Mendel, will dress up in his clothes and walk out of the house so that all the servants will see the priest leave the house," he continued. "We can't risk anyone connecting the priest's disappearance to our family."

The priest, standing at the doorway in equal shock, didn't make a move at first, but when Ricardo finished addressing Mendel and withdrew his knife, ready to kill, he finally found his tongue again. "אל תירא עבדי 'עקב" (lit. do not fear, my servant, Yaakov)," the priest quoted, implying that the family had nothing to fear. "I, too, am a Jew. I am one of you!"

His announcement stunned the family. They looked at each other, not sure whether or not to believe him, but the priest opened his voluminous black robe and showed them that underneath, he was wearing a *kittel*. "I can't be here for long," he told them. "I was in middle of my own secret seder when I was called here because your son is dying."

Angelina jumped up from her seat as if stung by a bee. "Dying!" she gasped. "What do you mean?" She ran out of the room and through the tunnels to go to her precious little boy.

Ricardo, however, had more pressing concerns on his mind. "Before you go," he said to the priest, his tone tense. "How did you find the entrance to this tunnel? This means that my whole underground network is unsafe! If you could find us, surely the Inquisition would be able to do so as well!"

The priest gave a small smile. "Your door was well hidden," he assured the distraught man. "It's just that I, too, have these kinds of hidden doors, so I knew exactly what to look for. I really must be going now, and you do, too. Run up to see your son before it is too late!"

The guests around the seder began davening for the Diego's recovery as the priest accompanied his father up to his room. They found Angelina

already there, cradling the child in her arms as she whispered a silent prayer.

“He looks ill,” the worried mother told them when they entered the room. “not dying. What makes you think he’s dying?”

“His color returned!” the priest exclaimed. “You should have seen how he looked earlier when the doctor was here. This is a miracle!”

Diego opened his eyes. “Mother,” he said weakly.

“Can I have a drink?”

It was truly a miracle.

The priest hurried to inform the governess that his prayers had worked and the little boy had come back to life while the rest of the family slipped back downstairs to continue their seder.

When Pesach was over, Mendel continued his travels home, where he was reunited with his family. Though safely ensconced in his community, where he was able to practice Yiddishkeit openly, he never forgot the *mesiras nefesh* of the Marranos who had hosted him.

Mendel continued learning with tremendous diligence and later became the famed Chassidic rebbe Rav Mendel Rimimover, known far and wide for his brilliance and his piety. In addition to leading the Chasidic court of Riminov, he was well versed in the entire Torah, including kabbalah, and authored tens of *kesavim*.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*  
This story is taken from tape # A77

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