



### *The most magnificent Mosque*

The citizens of Cordoba lived in the most beautiful city in the world. They were extremely proud of the Great Mosque, which stood right in the middle of their city. Not only was the mosque wonderful, but it was surrounded by glorious gardens full of scented orange trees, sparkling fountains and flowers of every colour. The Cordobans used to sit in the garden and think they were in Paradise itself.

The only problem was three naughty boys: Rashid, who was a Muslim, Samuel who was Jewish, and Miguel who was Christian.

They ran in and out of the fountains, they jumped over the flowerbeds.

They used to hide in the gardens and throw ripe oranges at anyone they saw.

The gardeners Ibrahim and Yacoub tried to catch boys, but the three friends were too fast for them.

One day, the boys were dropping oranges on people as they came out of the mosque. A particularly rotten orange dropped at the feet of a man in grand clothes

“Oh no! cried Rashid. “It’s the Caliph himself. Run for it!”

The three boys tried to escape, but the Caliph’s soldiers grabbed them and brought them before the Caliph.

“Caught at last,” smiled Ibrahim the gardener, “and by the Caliph’s men!”

Yacoub rubbed his hands together. “They’re for it now. They’ll get ten lashes at least.”

“So, young masters, you would throw oranges at your Caliph, would you?”

“We didn’t know it was you, O Great One,” whispered Rashid.

“Have you done this before?” asked the Caliph sternly. All the three boys looked miserably at their feet and nodded.

“Every day, Your Magnificence,” cried the gardeners. “These three boys are the bane of our lives.”

“Well,” said the Caliph, trying hard not to smile, “I can see you will have to be severely punished. I sentence you to work in these gardens every day for three months...”

So the three boys spent three whole months planting and weeding and watering and trimming. Yacoub and Ibrahim worked them until they dropped.

After work, the three hot and tired friends would wander through the cool mosque.

“I never saw such a beautiful building,” whispered Miguel. “It is much more magnificent than our church.”

“Or my synagogue,” sighed Samuel. “Wondrous and fair indeed.”

“Truly our mosque is a house of God,” said Rachid.

As the three friends grew up, they saw less and less of each other.

Rashid studied medicine and became a famous doctor.

Samuel travelled far and wide trading in spices and silk. He kept a diary telling of his travels and wrote poetry of great beauty.

Miguel inherited his father’s farm. He became a great land-owner and was known for his kindness and the lively songs he sang.

The Caliph grew old and enemies began to attack Cordoba from every side. In the end, he was defeated in a great battle by the Christian king Fernando.

Miguel, who was now the most important man in Cordoba, went to greet his new king.

“Don Miguel,” cried the king, “take me to the Great Mosque, of which I have heard so much.”

“With pleasure, Sire,” said Miguel. “It is the pride and joy of all citizens of Cordoba – Muslim and Jew alike.”

The king looked at the mosque.

“It is indeed a most magnificent mosque,” said the king, and he sighed. “But this is to be a Christian city and we shall build a great cathedral on this site. The mosque must be pulled down.”

That night, Miguel invited Samuel and Rashid to dinner.

“My dear old friends, I have terrible news. The king plans to pull down our beloved mosque.”

“What about our wonderful gardens?” asked Samuel and Rashid.

“They too will go.”

“What can we do?” cried Rashid, burying his head in his hands.

“We three must go to the king,” said Samuel, “and tell him how precious the mosque is to everyone in Cordoba.”

The next day, the people of Cordoba packed into the town square to see the king.

“I am here to plead for our mosque on behalf of all the Christians of Cordoba,” cried Miguel.

Everyone cheered.

“I am here on behalf of the Jews of Cordoba,” said Samuel.

“Quite right!” shouted the crowd.

“And Sire, I speak for the Muslim citizens. Spare our mosque!” cried Rashid.

Everyone cheered even louder.

“Well, well,” said the king. “Three communities with one voice. I can see that I will have no friends if I pull down your mosque.”

He thought for a moment. Then he said, “I will build a church in a small part of the mosque, but the rest of the building and the gardens shall belong to all of you good people of Cordoba.”

Cheers echoed throughout the square.

So the Great Mosque was left for future generations to enjoy and wonder at. It is still there today, and millions of people visit it every year. Many sit in the gardens and enjoy the shady trees and sweet-scented blossom – and a few visitors say they have even seen the ghosts of three naughty boys running in and out of the fountains.

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