

As Joaquin remained in the bushes, he studied the Morisco carefully. He no longer had the appearance of strength and power as when he had entered his home, for his shoulders now slumped forward, as if he were discouraged, and he began walking with a dismal expression toward the front gate. Joaquin saw that the Morisco had come with neither horse nor carriage, and instead, he looked like he had walked a long way to get here. Joaquin saw the Morisco glance at Yasu, pause, and finally walk over to him. When he began to speak, Joaquin was surprised that he was speaking in the language of a Berber. Joaquin did not understand the Berber language, but there were plenty of people in Spain who spoke it. Joaquin was even more surprised when Yasu replied to the Morisco in that same language. He had never heard Yasu speaking in any language other than Spanish. Now, Joaquin sensed that the Morisco was asking Yasu about his father, for Yasu kept shaking his head as if he didn't know the answer to his questions. When the Morisco seemed as if he was resigned to the idea that he would not get anywhere with Yasu, he finally turned and left. After the Morisco had closed the iron gates behind him, Joaquin looked around to see if anyone was around. By now, Yasu had walked away with his load of yard debris. So Joaquin made a mad dash toward the gates. Once he was out in the road, he saw the Morisco far ahead and ran to catch up with him, and by the time he finally reached the Morisco, he was out of breath.

"Señor? You were just at my home. Were you looking for someone?"

The Morisco paused.

"Do you know anyone by the name of Mateo Gonzalez?"

"Was he the man who lived in the Indies?"

"Why, yes. Do you know anything about him?"

"I believe he is my father, señor."

"You? You're Mateo's son?"

The stranger stopped suddenly and bent down to have a better look at Joaquin.

"Why, you are a spitting image of your father when he was your age."

"Why are you looking for him?"

"I'm his Papa. He is like a son to me."

"You? His father? So, you're my grandfather?"

“No, no, no. He was like a son to me. He was not really my son.”

“Could you tell me about my father? Nobody wants to talk about him. I want to know who my father is.”

The Morisco stared at Joaquin again.

“So, they are being secretive about your father with you, too.”

“How much do you know about him?”

“Come with me,” said the Morisco.

The Morisco took Joaquin by the hand, and together they ran across a wooded field where no one could find them, and they could be alone. Finally they came to a large fallen tree and sat upon it.

“I can tell you stories about your father, only exactly the way he told them to me, because that is the way I remember them—through his eyes.”

Before the Morisco said anything more, he extended his hand.

“My name is Abdullah.”

“I’m Joaquin. I’m eight years old. Abdullah, what is a Morisco?”

“Why do you ask?”

“That’s what Rodrigues called you. I thought it was your name.”

“I see. A Morisco is a Muslim who was converted to Christianity. At one time I was a Muslim, but I became a Christian when my people were forced to be baptized, or face death. I did it to save my wives and children, so we could remain in Spain, but my wives and children all left me for Morocco. They couldn’t forgive me for what I did, and called me an *infidel*. None of them would ever listen to my views, and they did not talk to me again. Now I am alone.”

Joaquin looked at Abdullah and saw great sadness in his eyes.

“Is there anything about my father that would make me be ashamed of him? Did he do anything terribly wrong?”

“There is nothing out of order about him that I know of, Joaquin.”

“Then why is my mother keeping him a secret from me?”