

## THE WISE WOMAN OF CÓRDOBA – MEXICO

The wise woman had lived in Córdoba as long as anyone could remember. Even the oldest people remembered her from when they were children, but no one knew where she had come from. People feared her and called her *bruja*, but not to her face. In fact, she helped people who came to her asking for favors. She helped young girls to find a husband. She helped poor children who were hungry. She helped the poor miners find silver. To this day, when someone in Mexico asks for an impossible favor, the reply is often, "I'm not the wise woman of Córdoba!"

All the young men were in love with her because she was so beautiful. She never paid them any attention. People used to say she was married to the devil. Her magic was strong, and she appeared in different places at the same time. People said they saw her flying above their houses with sparks flying from her eyes.

One day a young girl who had lost her lover to another girl who had been helped by the *bruja* went to the priest. She told him terrible things about the wise woman of Córdoba, that she had stolen money from many people and was rich. The priest went to the *policia*, and they feared her so much that an army was sent to arrest her and take her to prison. Ten barrels of gold were found in her garden. The priest demanded that she be burned to death for her witchcraft, and the money given to the church.

The judge said she must be given a chance to confess her sins before being burned. So the priest went to her cell the night before the burning. The cell had a very tall ceiling and the priest stood staring at the far wall. There was an enormous ship drawn on the wall in perfect detail, with sails and ropes and cannon, and ten barrels of cargo on the deck. How real that ship looked!

The wise woman stood by the back wall with a piece of charcoal in her hand. She studied the priest with her strange black eyes. "Padre, what does this ship lack?"

"Nothing, cursed *bruja*. I see you are an artist also. It looks like a perfect ship, but that won't save you."

"Are you sure, Padre? This ship is not quite perfect. It needs someone to sail her." And with a laugh, she jumped into the ship and began to steer her. The padre stood frozen in amazement as the sails seemed to fill with wind and the ship began to travel across the wall. The mad laughter continued as the ship and its ten barrels slowly disappeared into the thick wall at the end of the room, leaving the padre alone in the cell. The barrels of gold were never seen again, nor was the wise woman of Córdoba. But the priest heard her mad laughter in his ears until his dying day.