

“We are guardians of a great treasure.
We are links in a precious chain.”

Papa paused, and Beatriz felt her heart pounding.
This sounded very exciting! Her papa looked
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“My daughter, we are Jews.”



In 1522, on the eve of her twelfth birthday,
Beatriz de Luna learns that her family has a
dangerous secret, and that she has a secret name.

This amazing true story tells how young Beatriz
grows to become ‘Doña Gracia’ Mendes Nasi,
a powerful and wealthy woman. As she travels
across Europe to keep her family safe, she learns
how to use her influence to save the lives and
protect the rights of other Jews.

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The Girl with the Secret Name

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The Travels of Doña Gracia Nasi



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A Special Celebration

Lisbon, 1522

It was late at night in the town of Lisbon, Portugal. At the ocean's edge, sailors unloaded crates filled with spices by the silver light of the moon. In this same light, Beatriz de Luna sat at her dressing table, brushing out her long, dark hair. She had just bathed and her hair smelled faintly of the herbs from her bathwater. She looked at herself in the mirror and grinned.

Finally, finally, finally! Tomorrow was her birthday. She would be twelve! No longer a little girl. Tomorrow, she would wear the most fashionable gown. So what if the high lace collar was itchy? Mama had bought a shining, jeweled headdress for her hair. She would be glamorous and beautiful! Just last Sunday, in church, she had told all her friends about the plans for her party.

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“Will there be custard tarts?” Christina asked.

“I don’t know,” Beatriz answered, “but we will surely have *pyramide de chocolate*. And we will have acrobats and jugglers to entertain us.”

“Oh, I cannot wait!” breathed Alicia. “It has been so long since our last party. What does your gown look like?”

“I’ll give you a hint: it’s the color of the ocean at noon,” Beatriz teased. “The rest you will have to wait and see for yourselves.”

The girls chattered excitedly but Beatriz paused when the priest walked in, turning his nose up as he passed her. Why did it always seem that he disliked her? she wondered.

“Good morning, Father,” she said politely, but he only stared at her with narrowed eyes. She was glad when he was at the front of the church and could not see her anymore.

Now, Beatriz looked at herself in the mirror again, turning her head this way and that. Did she look older, more mature? Did she look different now that she was about to be twelve?

“Good evening,” she said, solemnly nodding at her reflection. The face in the mirror nodded back.

“Stop talking to yourself, Beatriz,” her sister Brianda said. But Beatriz didn’t bother answering. No one was going to ruin her good mood! Certainly not her sister, who was still only ten. What a child!

She flicked the back of her hand at Brianda and

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paused to admire the beautiful gold link bracelet her grandmother had given her earlier that day.

“It’s so lovely!” Beatriz had said, “My first birthday gift!”

“I carried this with me all the way from our family home in Spain and today I give it to you,” her grandmother whispered and kissed Beatriz’s cheek. “Because now you will be a link in the chain.”

Whatever does that mean? Beatriz wondered, but she only smiled at her grandmother. “Thank you, Abuela!”

From the sound of deep breathing, Beatriz could tell that her sister had fallen asleep. She put down her brush and had just climbed into bed when her mother appeared at the door.

“Beatriz, are you asleep?” she asked.

“Not yet, Mama.”

“Then come with me, please, child. There’s something I’d like to show you in the cellar.”

In the cellar? But there is nothing to see in the cellar! This must be another birthday surprise! Beatriz thought excitedly. With a great effort, she stopped herself from skipping as she followed her mother down the hall. She would be twelve tomorrow and must act like it even if it was hard.

But when she came into the small, dark room and saw her father standing there, staring at her with serious eyes, she suddenly felt afraid.

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“Papa, why are you here?” she asked. “Is something wrong?”

“Hush, Beatriz,” Mama murmured and pushed her gently into a chair. “Sit quietly and let your father speak.”

Beatriz’s eyes moved again to her papa’s face and she felt a frightened, fluttery feeling in her stomach. Papa looked at the floor and cleared his throat.

“Beatriz,” he said solemnly, “your mama and I love you very much. You have always been special to us. But, my daughter, you are much more special than you know.”

“Thank you, Papa,” Beatriz said, blushing, but her mother shushed her again.

“Just listen,” she whispered.

“We, the De Luna family, are not what we seem,” Papa continued. “We carry a solemn secret.”

Beatriz couldn’t help herself, “What kind of secret, Papa?” she breathed.

“We are guardians of a great treasure. We are links in a precious chain,” Papa paused, and Beatriz felt her heart pounding. This sounded very exciting!

Her papa looked up and his dark eyes caught hers.

“My daughter, we are Jews.”