

MARY NIXON-ROULET

# OUR LITTLE SPANISH COUSIN

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### **Preface**

Washed by the blue Mediterranean and kissed by the warm southern sun, the Iberian Peninsula lies at the southwestern corner of Europe. To this sunny land of Spain we owe much, for, from its hospitable shores, aided by her generous queen, Columbus sailed to discover that New World which is to-day our home. We should therefore be very friendly to the country which helped him, and American boys and girls should welcome the coming of Our Little Spanish Cousin.

## CHAPTER I. THE CHRISTENING

One of the first things which Fernando remembered was the christening of his little sister. He was five years old and had no other brother or sister to play with, for Pablo, his wonderful big brother, was away at the Naval School, and his older sister, Augustia, was at school in the convent.

When Fernando's nurse told him that he had a little sister he was delighted, and begged to see her; and when all his relatives on both sides of the house came to see the baby christened, he was still more pleased.

Fernando was a little Spanish boy, and in his country a great deal is thought of kinsfolk, for the Spanish are very warm-hearted and affectionate. So Fernando was glad to see all his aunts and uncles and cousins and all the friends who happened to be visiting them at the time.

Fernando's father, the Señor Don Juan de Guzman, was a courtly gentleman, and he bowed low over the ladies' hands, and said, "The house is yours, señora!" to each one; so, as boys generally copy their fathers, Fernando assured his little cousins that he "placed himself at their feet," and welcomed them just as politely as his father had the older folk.

What a wonderful time he had that day! First came the christening in the great Cathedral which towers above Granada, and in which lie buried the king and queen, Ferdinand and Isabella, in whose reign Columbus sailed away from Spain to discover America. The Cathedral was so grand that it always made Fernando feel very strange and quiet, and he thought it was shocking that the baby cried when the priest poured water on her and baptized her, Maria Dolores Concepcion Isabel Inez Juanita. This seems a long name for such a tiny little mite, but there was a reason for every single name, and not one could be left out. Nearly all Spanish children are named Maria, whether boys or girls, because the Spaniards are devoted to the Virgin Mary, and as the baby was born on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, she was called Concepcion. Isabel was for her aunt, and Inez was for her godmother, and Juanita for her father. Her name did not seem at all long to Fernando, for his name was Fernando Antonio Maria Alegria Francisco Ruy Guzman y Ximenez. Every one called him Fernando or Nando, and his long name had troubled him but once in all his gay little life. That time he had been naughty and had run away from his *aya*, the nurse who always watches little Spanish children like a faithful dog, and he had fallen into the deep ditch beside the great aloe hedge.

The aloes are stalwart plants with long leaves, wide-extending and saw-toothed, and they are often planted close together so as to make hedgerows through which cattle cannot pass. The leaves of the aloe are sometimes a yard long, and they are very useful. From them are made strong cords, and also the *alpagatas*, or sandals, which the peasants wear; and the fibres of the leaf are separated from the pulp and made into many things to wear. The central stem of the aloe grows sometimes twenty feet high, and it has a number of stems on the ends of which grow yellow flowers. The leaves are a bluish-green in colour, and look like long blue swords. The long hedgerows look very beautiful against the soft blue of the Spanish sky, but little Fernando did not see anything pretty in them as he lay at the bottom of the ditch, roaring lustily.

"Who's there?" demanded an American gentleman, who was travelling in Spain, as he came along on the other side of the hedge, and Fernando replied, "Fernando Antonio Maria Alegria Francisco Ruy Guzman y Ximenez!"

"If there's so many of you I should think you could help each other out," said the American, and when he finally extricated one small boy he laughed heartily, and said, as he took Fernando home:

"I should think a name like that would topple you over." After that Fernando always called Americans "the people who laugh."

After the baby was christened, they went home through the narrow streets of the quaint old town. All the horses wore bells, and, as they trotted along, the tinkle, tinkle sounded like sleighing-time in America. The reason for this is that in many places the streets are too narrow for two carriages to pass, and the bells give warning that a vehicle is coming, so that the one coming from the opposite direction may find a wide spot in the road, and there wait till the other carriage has passed.

As the christening party went toward the home of Fernando, it passed a man driving two or three goats, and he stopped in front of a house, from a window of which was let down a string and a pail. Into this the man looked, and taking out a piece of money which lay in the bottom, he milked the pail full from one of the goats, and the owner pulled it up to her window again. It seems a strange way to get your morning's milk, but it is sure to be fresh and sweet, right from the goat, and there is no chance to put water in it, as milkmen sometimes do in America.

The houses Fernando passed were all painted in many soft colours, and they had charming little iron balconies, to some of which palm branches were fastened, blessed palms from the church at Holy Week, which the Spaniards believe will keep lightning from striking the house.

Fernando's house was much larger than the rest, for his father was a noble of one of the oldest families in Spain, whose ancestors had done many splendid things for the state in the olden times. The house had several balconies, from which hung down long sprays of blossoms, for every balcony railing was filled with flower-pots. There grew vines and flowers, nasturtiums, hyacinths, wallflowers, pinks and violets, their sweet scents filling the air.

When the christening party entered the house, the baby was borne off to the nursery, and Fernando, no longer a baby, but a big boy with a baby sister, was allowed to go with the rest to the *patio*, where breakfast was served.

The *patio* is one of the most charming things about the real Spanish houses. It is a court in the centre of the house, larger than an ordinary room, with a marble floor and a huge awning which protects from the sun, yet leaves the *patio* open to the fresh air and sweet scents of the sunny out-of-doors. All the family gather in the *patio*, and it is the favourite lounging-place for old and young. In the *patio* of the Señor Guzman's house were orange-trees and jasmine, and all colours of violets bloomed around the marble rim of the fountain, which was in the centre.

What a wonderful thing that christening feast was to Fernando! There was much laughing and talking, and such good things to eat!

When all were through eating, little Juanita's health was drunk, and her godfather proposed her health, and recited a poem he had composed in her honour.

"Queridita Ahijada!  
Plague alecielo qui tu vida  
Sea feliz y placentera  
Cual arroyo cristalino  
Qui atra viesa la pradera  
Su Padrino, Francesco."<sup>1</sup>

This very much delighted every one, and so with laughter and merriment the christening feast was over.

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<sup>1</sup> Please God, my little godchild, That your life as pure may be As the laughing brook which through the valley, Runneth ever limpidly. Your Godfather Francesco Wishes fervently."

## CHAPTER II. SCHOOL-DAYS

When Fernando was seven years old he began to go to school. Little Juanita cried bitterly, for she was devoted to the big brother who played such lovely games with her, and she did not like to think of his being away from her nearly all day. However, she was told that Fernando was a big boy now, and that before long she would be having a governess to teach her to read and embroider, so she stopped crying very quickly, for she was a sunny little child, and went to picking flowers in the garden quite contentedly.

How grown up Fernando felt! To be a real schoolboy! His school-days were all alike. He arose at half-past seven, when the church-bells were ringing for the daily service; he had a bath, said his prayers, and dressed himself very neatly, for he had first to be looked over by his *aya*, and then inspected by his mamma, to see if he could pass muster, and was clean and neat as a little Spanish gentleman should be. Mamma being satisfied with his appearance, he gave her his morning kiss, and greeted the rest of the family. Then followed breakfast, – a simple, wholesome meal of *semula*, or gruel and warm milk, with bread and honey and eggs.

After a run in the garden, the *ayo*, or preceptor, called to take him to school. Fernando skipped happily away to study until twelve o'clock, when dinner was served to the day boarders, a dinner of soup, vegetables, and dessert, with a little playtime afterward. Spanish boys do not take tea or coffee until they are grown up. At half-past four the boys are turned out of school, and then comes the delight of the day to Fernando. His *ayo* has disappeared, and in his stead has come Manuel, his own man, who tells such delightful stories of knights and warriors and the glories of Spain, and who thinks that all his little master does is perfect. Manuel knows all about the city, and he is willing to take Fernando any place he wishes to go, provided it is a fit place for a boy of rank. He knows just where the marionettes are playing, and if there is a gay crowd on the square, a trained bear or a funny little monkey, he will be sure to have heard about it, and take Fernando to see it. If there is no special excitement, Manuel takes him to the *paseo*, where all the boys of the town gather. Here they play in mimic battles and bull-fights, and Fernando enters into everything with delight, until Manuel thinks it is time for the señora, his mother, to pass by in the carriage. How delighted the little boy is to see her, and how his tongue rattles as he tells her all the events of the day, as he rides home with her through the long soft twilight of the soft Spanish night! How good his supper tastes, a simple little supper of chocolate, rich and dark, white bread and golden honey, with some little iced cakes, which dear old Dolores, the cook, has made for the little master. All the servants love Fernando dearly, for though he has a hot temper, and sometimes is very wilful, he is so loving that they do not mind his naughtiness. After supper Fernando says the rosary with his *aya*, goes over his lessons a little, and then tumbles into bed in a happy slumber.

All his days are very much alike, for Spanish children are brought up very simply, and have little excitement, though they have many pleasures. There are little visits paid to aunts and cousins, visits remembered not too pleasantly by the pet dog and parrot of his aunt. The parrot was brought from Cuba by Uncle Enrico, the priest. The bird knows Fernando well, and scolds terribly in most unchurchly language every time he approaches the cage. The French poodle, too, does not greatly care for a visit from Fernando, for the boy cannot help teasing, and the fat, stupid dog, his Aunt Isabel's darling, does nothing but lie around on silken cushions and eat comfits. Fernando likes animals, and would never really hurt one, but there is something in the calm self-satisfaction of Beppino which stirs up all the mischief in him, and Aunt Isabel has been heard to exclaim: "Fernando will be my death! He is a dear boy, and if it came to choosing between him and Beppo, I am quite sure that I would take my nephew, but, thank Heaven, I have not to choose!"



Fernando's own dog was different. He found him one day close by the garden railing, a poor, ragged fellow, lean and hungry, with a lame foot, but a pair of pleading and wistful brown eyes, which, with all their misery, had yet a look of good-fellowship within them which appealed to Fernando's gay nature, as the pitiful plight of the little fellow appealed to his tender heart. The dog put a pink tongue through the railing and licked Fernando's hand, and that clinched the bargain. Henceforth the two were friends. Fernando persuaded Manuel to bathe and tie up the wounded foot, and feed the puppy. That was all the boy dared at first, but the next day he found the dog in the same place and fed him again. Every day after that the little tramp followed him to school, and when school was over his yellow-haired dogship awaited his benefactor. Manuel winked at the friendship, and allowed Mazo, as Fernando called him, to have many a good meal at the garden gate. Manuel was a great stickler for the proprieties, but he had been a boy once, and there were some things that Fernando's lady mother would not at all have comprehended, that good old Manuel understood perfectly. Mazo was far more interesting to Fernando than the thoroughbred, ladylike pets of his mother, and it was a sore subject with him that Mazo, who was so clever, who could whip the tramp dogs of any of his school friends, should be kept outside the house. His mother did not seem to realize that Mazo's fighting qualities were what made him valuable. One fatal day, when she had driven to the *paseo* a little earlier than usual, and had seen a fight between Mazo and another little dog, equally disreputable, she had cried out:

"Fernando, come away from that ferocious beast! He must be mad!" and she had seemed anything but reassured when Fernando had tried to calm her by saying:

"But, mamma, he is not mad; I know him well; he is the gentlest of beings, and he can whip any dog in the *paseo*," the pride of possession getting the better of prudence.

Thereafter Manuel was most careful of Mazo's appearance. He captured him and washed him, and let him sleep in a shed at night, and by degrees the little fellow lost his trampish appearance, and became a semi-respectable member of society, though still ready to follow Fernando like a shadow, to fight at his will, and to share with him an excursion into forbidden lands. It was really droll to see the different airs which Mazo could assume. He had ever an eye upon his audience, having early learned in the hard school of misfortune that his comfort depended not at all upon himself, but upon the humour of those about him. With the outside world his look was wary. With the family of his master he was apologetic. His brown eye seemed to say: "I place myself at your feet, most noble señors; I pray you excuse me for living." But with Fernando, while it was tempered with respect, his air was one of good-fellowship alone. Even the señora herself, the head of the house and authority in chief, as is the case in all Spanish households, came to regard Fernando's dog with a degree of friendliness, and finding this out, the servants treated him kindly, and Mazo decided that his lines had fallen in pleasant places. Upon this, however, he never presumed. He knew not how long it would last, but felt that he was upon good behaviour. He restrained his desire to chase Juanita's pet cat, and to bark when the parrot imitated his barking, though the restraint put upon himself must have been severe, for he made up for it when out with Manuel and Fernando. Then he was himself again, Mazo the tramp.

## CHAPTER III.

### A VISIT TO A HACIENDA

One day in October, when the sun was shining in golden beauty, the señora said to her husband:

"I should like to go to the *hacienda* to-morrow, and take the children with me, for *la niña* has never seen the picking, and Fernando did not go last year or the year before."

"It will give me pleasure to escort you," said the Señor de Guzman, in the courtly manner which Spanish gentlemen use toward their wives. "At what hour will it please you to start?"

"As early as you can," she answered. "So that we may arrive there in plenty of time to see the picking before luncheon, and after a siesta, drive back in the pleasant part of the afternoon."

"We shall start at nine, then," said her husband, "and should arrive there by ten or a little after."

When Fernando returned from school and heard that he was to accompany his mother next day, he was nearly beside himself with joy.

"Juanita," he cried, "you have no idea how delightful it is at the fruit farm! I have not been there for two years, but I remember it well. All the oranges one can eat, and such raisins! You will much enjoy it, I am sure."

He was up bright and early next day, and impatient to start long before his mother was ready, and even his father was waiting before the señora made her appearance. She was a large woman, and very slow and graceful in her movements. No one had ever seen her hurried, and every one expected to wait for her, so that it was nearly half-past nine when they started. The coachman whipped up the horses, and away they went skimming over the rough stones. Fernando sat with Diego and Manuel on the front seat of the carriage, while Dolores sat beside the señora, holding Juanita on her lap. The señor rode upon his high-stepping Andalusian horse beside the carriage, and pointed out places of interest to the children as they drove along.

A gay young officer passed by them, young and slim, riding a handsome horse, and some soldiers were manœuvring on the Plaza. One poor fellow, once a gay soldier, but now with an empty sleeve, dressed in a faded army blouse and wearing a merit medal, was begging in the street, and the señor stopped to give him a piece of silver, for Spaniards are always generous and pitiful, and cannot resist a beggar. "He had served in Cuba," said the señor to his wife, and she sighed as she thought of the many lost to Spain and their dear ones in that useless war.

Fruit-venders passed along the street, and donkeys so laden with fruit and flowers that almost nothing could be seen of them but their slim little legs and their great waving ears. Water-carriers were there, carrying huge jars which looked like those used by the old Moors; and a travelling merchant, in gray garments, but with brightly dressed mules. It was not so bright a party that they passed later, for a peasant funeral passed by on its way to the cemetery. Four young men carried the bier, upon which was the body of a child, covered all but its face, which lay exposed to the sun.

"Take off your hat, son," said the señora. "Always do so to a passing funeral, for maybe yours will be the last salute the dead will receive on earth."

No sooner was the funeral passed than there came a straw and charcoal merchant, crying, "*Paja! Carbon! Cabrito!*" So many people in Granada have no way to warm themselves except by the *brazero*, in which charcoal is burnt, that there is great need for the charcoal man, and he drives a brisk trade.

Next they saw a priest on a sick call, for he bore the Blessed Sacrament. A crowd of ragged urchins stopped in their play to kneel as he passed, and Fernando and his father raised their hats.

By this time, the carriage had reached the outskirts of the city, and the road wound along the banks of the Darro, a rushing stream which gushes out of a deep mountain gorge, and passes through the town. Its banks are lined with quaint old houses, leaning far over the river, and Fernando saw women there, washing their linen in the water, and spreading their clothes on the stones to dry.

Outside of the town their way lay along the beautiful Vega, which stretches beyond Granada, in green and fertile loveliness, to the far-away hills. Crossed by two rivers, the Darro and Genil, the plain is dotted with whitewashed villas, nestling like birds in the soft green of the olive and orange trees. Sloping gradually to the mountains above, the Vega is green as emerald, and truly a fair sight beneath the turquoise sky, and the mother-of-pearl of the snowy mountains.

Fernando's father owned large estates upon the hillsides, and raised oranges and grapes. The last were used for raisins, the grapes from which the finest wine is made, the *Amontillado*, for which Spain is so famous, not reaching their greatest perfection in this part of the land.

In an hour they reached the farm and drove down the long lane which led to the house. The *Hacienda* of Santa Eulalia was a large, low building, with a broad porch and a tangle of vines and roses climbing over it. Huge trees spread their arms over the roof, and from the balcony one could see groves of cypress-trees, pines, oaks, and poplars, beyond the fruit-trees, and, above all, the rose-coloured peaks of the Sierras. Upon the slope of the hill, as it fell away toward Granada, were the grape-vines, with huge clusters of grapes, purple, white, and red, weighing down the vines. There were, too, terraces where the raisins dried; and nearer the house were the drying-sheds, where an army of packers pressed the raisins under boards, and carefully sorted them before packing. The vineyards were beautiful, but even more so were the orange groves, and one who has seen a grove in full fruit never forgets the beautiful sight. The trees are deep green in colour, and full of leaves, many of them bearing at the same time flowers and green and ripe fruit.

The children were wild with delight, and ran about eager to see the picking and sorting of the fine fruit, for the oranges of Santa Eulalia were famous for size and quality. The trees grew rather low to the ground, and were covered with fruit which the pickers were gathering. Ladders were put up to the lower branches, and each picker carried a basket swung to his neck by a cord. He carefully picked the oranges, one at a time, and dropped them in his basket, and so expert were many of them that it seemed as if they had scarcely mounted the ladder before the basket was full. Many young girls were employed as pickers, and they were particularly skilful, vying with the men in their swiftness. Very gay were their voices, and merry jest and song enlivened the work, until it seemed as if it were not work but play. Fernando and Juanita hopped about like little rabbits, eating the fruit which rolled to the ground, for often the golden globes fell from the trees, as they were shaken by the picking.

When the baskets were filled, the oranges were carried to the sheds and left overnight to harden the skins a little, when each orange was wrapped in soft tissue-paper. For this are employed young boys and girls, and very expert they grow in the wrapping of the oranges, each one being properly wrapped with but a twist of the hand. The next thing is the packing, and the oranges are stored away in wooden boxes, and are ready to be shipped to market.

The children ate so many oranges that they scarcely wanted any of the luncheon prepared for them at the *hacienda*. There was an omelet with green peppers, a delicious salad, some fowl, and tiny round potato balls, all sprinkled over with chopped parsley, with a huge dish of oranges and grapes for dessert.

The señora insisted upon a little siesta after luncheon, but Fernando's eyes were so wide open that he could not close them as he swung to and fro in the great hammock between two orange-trees in front of the house. He was delighted when his father sat down beside him, in one of the big easy chairs, and said:

"You look to me like a boy who would like to hear a story."

"Indeed I would; please tell me one," said Fernando.

"Have you ever heard about the judges of Pedro the Cruel?"

"No, papa," said Fernando, all interest.

"A long time ago, there ruled over Andalusia a king named Pedro, and he was so disliked by his subjects, and did so many wicked things, that he was called Pedro the Cruel. He lived in the city of Sevilla, and though he was cruel, and often heartless, still he had a strong sense of justice, which

would not allow the common people to be badly treated. He found out one day that four of his judges had been cheating the people and taking bribes, and he determined to teach them a lesson. He went to his favourite gardens, those of the Alcazar, and sent for the judges to come to him there. It is a wonderful place even to-day, and then it must have been very beautiful. Huge banana-trees waved their rough green leaves above the tangled beauty of the flower-beds, where jasmine and violets and roses grew in profusion. In the midst was a fountain, and Don Pedro knelt beside it, smiling wickedly as he placed upon the perfumed waters, five oranges cut in halves, and placed flat-side down. The reflection was so perfect that any one would be deceived, and think they were whole oranges floating upon the water.

"How many oranges are there here?" asked the king, smiling genially, and the judges replied:

"Ten, may it please your Gracious Majesty."

"Nay, but it does not please my Gracious Majesty to have four fools for judges," he said. "Liars! Can you not see that there are but five?" and he raised two of the halves and held them together. "Know, oh, unjust judges," he said, sternly, "that the king's servants must see more than the surface of things if they are to conduct that portion of the realm which it is their business to attend to, and since you cannot tell a half from a whole, perchance that is the reason of the tales I hear of your ill-dealings with the property of some of my subjects!"

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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